

Dear teachers,

We hope this resource will be of use to you. The idea behind it was to help you to provide an opportunity for 1st YRs to gather and meet other students, teachers and staff in a way that is fun and light-hearted. The transition to first year can be stressful at the best of times and at the moment it is even more challenging as everyone has to wear masks and keep their social distance as well. We've tried to keep the process as simple as possible which allows you to put your own stamp on it so that it reflects your school ethos and makes it more interesting and relatable for your students.

Some preparation will need to be done in advance of the event. Firstly distribute the "First Year, so far" handout to all 1st YR students, asking them to fill it in privately and return to it to you well before the ceremony. Encourage them to be honest and tell them that they don't have to put their names on the handout. When you have collected all the completed handouts spend a little time going over them and preparing a response to their answers. You will also have to prepare the quiz questions and answers in advance and perhaps decorate a space for the Welcoming Ceremony.

This resource was put together by Fr Chris O'Donnell for use in his local secondary school and he has generously passed it on to us to share. If you do end up using this resource please get in touch with us and let us know how it went. Chris has also said to remind you that local Churches could provide a good venue in which to run the event as it might enable you to have larger groups of student assembled. The Parish Priest might also be able to join you which would be a nice link for students from primary school.

Thank you,

Aoife Walsh (Youth Ministry) & *Dermot Cowhey* (Diocesan Advisor to Secondary Schools)

First Year School Integration Activity / Welcoming Ceremony - Teacher Outline

1. Get to Know Your School Quiz

Gather the students and divide them into teams. The first thing that they should do in their team is introduce themselves to each other by sharing their name, where they are from and what their favourite pastime is and why. In their groups they will then answer questions about the school. You can use the "Get to Know Your School" Handout provided and the blank template can be used for your own questions. This will really help to make the quiz more relevant, fun and engaging for students. Remember to have the answers prepared in advance!

You could have a guess the teacher bonus section based on teacher's baby photos, or it could be related to a fact about a particular teacher, for example, which teacher has played county hurling/football/camogie or plays in a band or which teacher is a past-pupil of the school? This could also be a good opportunity to introduce them to the ethos of the school and if there is a Saint associated with the school you could ask a question about them. The idea is to make this a fun, light-hearted exercise that helps to inform first years as well as getting to know the school, the staff and each other better. After taking up the quiz sheets, give the correct answers and respond in a light hearted way to some of their answers, especially if there are any funny ones!

2. Responding to "First Year, so far"

Having gone through the handouts you should have a response prepared which deals with some of the more pressing issues raised. It would be good to have a few teachers ready to respond to specific concerns as a variety of voices will be good and students will hopefully get the sense that lots of people care about them. Feel free to invite students to ask questions. You could finish this section by showing a motivational video. This link may be of use or you might have one that you would prefer. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_gKrbWFjNc

3. Welcoming Ceremony

Please feel free to adapt the ceremony below to suit the needs and ethos of your school.

First Year Welcoming Ceremony

Opening Music – Invite students to become still and quiet as they listen to the opening music. (It could be good to use a piece of nice instrumental music at the start to settle students)

Opening Prayer – We gather today in the midst of what continues to be a challenging time for everyone. We pray that the year ahead will become for us a time of learning and growth, for us as individuals and for our school and parish communities. We pray that you will be with us Lord as we strive to work together to support, care for and encourage one another.

Scripture Reading (from the Gospel according to Mark). That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

Scripture Reflection – It can be hard to adapt to change and it can be hard to have faith in the midst of a storm. However faith means having the ability to trust even when we don’t know what the outcome will be. The African impala can jump to a height of over 10 feet and cover a distance of greater than 30 feet. Yet these magnificent creatures can be kept in an enclosure in any zoo with a 3-foot wall. The reason for this is that these animals will not jump, if they cannot see where their feet will fall. This can be true for people as well. We can find it hard to have faith, in ourselves, in our own abilities and in those around us. The important thing to remember is that God always has faith in us and God is always there with us in the midst of whatever storm we may be facing.

Prayers of the Faithful

- We are not all in the same boat, but we are all in the same storm. We pray for those who are continuing to work on the front lines and for all those who are working towards finding a vaccine. Lord Hear Us
- We pray that this year will be a year we will always remember, not because of the challenges we face but because it was the year when we started secondary school, discovered new subjects and hobbies and made life-long friends. Lord Hear Us
- We pray for all the students, teachers and staff of our school. May the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit inspire us all with confidence, energy and enthusiasm as we begin a new school year together. Lord Hear Us
- We pray for all those who are sick, those with COVID and those who are struggling with other illnesses and diseases. May the Lord grant them healing and comfort. Lord Hear Us
- We pray for all those who have died. We remember especially our loved ones who we have lost. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed through your mercy Lord, rest in peace, Amen. Lord Hear Us

We ask Lord that you hear all our prayers today, especially the ones we have whispered to you in our hearts as together we pray Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...

Reflection – My Prayer for You (To be read by a teacher)

I want to teach my students how to live this life on earth, to face its struggles and its strife and improve their worth. Not just the lesson in a book or how the rivers flow, but how to choose the proper path wherever they may go. To understand eternal truth and choose right over wrong, and recognise the beauty of a flower or a song. For if I help the world to grow in wisdom and in grace, then I shall feel that I have won, and I have filled my place. And so I ask your guidance God, that I may do my part, for character and confidence and happiness of heart. Amen.

Closing Prayer – Dear God, we thank you for this time spent together. We pray that we will continue our journey together with a greater sense of unity, purpose and faith. Amen

Closing Music – It might be good to end with something uplifting that students will know. (High Hopes, Kodaly / Brave, Sara Bareilles / Fight Song, Rachel Platten / Count on Me, Bruno Mars)