My Life is in Your Hands...
A Baccalaureate Celebration

Purpose
This extended session provides concrete ideas for a communal celebration of graduation. The ideas in this session may be used with junior high and high school youth, young adults, parents, as well as the larger faith community.

Materials Needed
• Muslin fabric and felt for school banners
• Invitations
• Worship space
• Liturgical ministers
• CD player or musicians
• Worship aid (optional)
• Laptop computer and LCD projector for PowerPoint presentation (optional)

Prepare in Advance
1. Select Date for Event. Decide if you will host the liturgy as part of the general Sunday worship or at a separate date and time. Coordinate this with your pastor, parish staff, parish school (if applicable), and liturgy team.

2. Invite Graduates. Compile a list of those who are graduating from junior high or high school. If you are aware of any college graduations, these graduates could be included as well. Create an invitation to be mailed out at least 6 weeks prior to the liturgy. Graduation time is a very busy time for many families. Giving them ample notice may help families include the event as part of their familial celebrations of the occasion. If your event will be at the end of May or beginning of June, you may want to do a “search” in your parish for potential attendees. You can do this by simply putting a note in your parish bulletin sometime around February or March. Here is a sample bulletin notice:

[Name of parish] will be hosting a Baccalaureate Liturgy in honor of all those who will be graduating from junior high, high school, and college/university. Please contact the youth ministry office (or parish office) if you know of a graduate.
Once invitations have been sent, follow up with graduates about 2-3 weeks before event to confirm their attendance.

3. **Recruit liturgical ministers.**

*Readers:* Select two to four youth with strong speaking voices to serve as lectors, readers for the prayers of the faithful, and possibly a “welcome” to the assembly at the beginning of the liturgy, and/or a post-communion reflection by a graduate. Provide them with the text and schedule a rehearsal with readers for a few days before the liturgy.

*Banner Carriers:* Select a proper number of youth to carry in school banners as part of the procession; these can be students who are graduating from a particular school or junior high students who will be attending a particular school as a ninth grader.

*Note to Leader:* If only a couple of schools are represented in your community, invite one person to carry the banner while the graduates from that school walk behind it. In my parish community, we have graduates from 12-13 area high schools, so we have many banners. Ask banner carriers to arrive a half hour early to receive instruction for the placement of banners in the church (or worship space). Banners may be hung, placed in stands, or draped over the front pews, depending upon your worship space.

*Gift Bearers:* Select two or three youth to carry the gifts at the offertory.

4. **Make banners.** Make simple banners from muslin fabric with felt for lettering. Research the colors of the schools that will be represented. Cut a 60" (L) X 30" (W) piece of muslin fabric. Purchase felt in school colors as needed. Fold material in half lengthwise, creating a 30x30 area of working space. Stencil or trace block lettering for the name of the school on the front side of the fabric. Suggest alternating colors for each letter. See sample on Resource 4, “Making Banners.” Hot glue the felt letters to the banner. With fabric paint, stencil or trace a graduation cap, diploma, or other image in the center of the banner. Let dry for at least 48 hours prior to first use. Once finished, the banners are simply hung over a 36" thin wooden dowel so that they will be easy to carry in the procession.

5. **Prepare Liturgy.** If the liturgy is to be held separate from Sunday worship, begin your preparation by selecting a set of readings. Use Resource 5, “Selecting Readings” to help you in the selection of readings. If you are including the baccalaureate celebration within a Sunday mass, use the readings for that Sunday. Gather a small team of people to help prepare the liturgy. Prayerfully read the readings for the mass and invite the team to share reflections on the readings. Use these reflections to guide you in selecting hymns and preparing for other elements of the liturgy. To prepare the liturgy, consider using the process provided in the resource “Preparing Liturgy” which is found under “Journal Articles” in the Prayer and Worship section of Youth Ministry Access.

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7. **Create a worship aid** *(optional).* Create a special worship aid (program) for the liturgy. Include the order of worship, music, a reflection by a graduate, names of graduates and their school(s), prayer for graduates, etc. This may serve as a means to draw further attention to the celebration of graduation in the community, as well as provide a keepsake for participants.

8. **Create a PowerPoint presentation** *(optional).* This presentation, with its visual imagery, can be very touching and heartwarming in this event. Consider creating a presentation of baby pictures side by side with a senior picture or other current photo of the graduate. Place the name of the graduate next to the pictures on the slide. Set the presentation to a song that is graduation related, and present as a post-communion reflection. Song suggestions include: “Friends” by Michael W. Smith (*Change Your World*), “Who Am I” by Casting Crowns (*Casting Crowns*), “I Hope You Dance” by Lee Ann Womack (*I Hope You Dance*), “Hope Set High” by Amy Grant (*Heart in Motion*), “Go Light Your World” by Kathy Troccoli (*Sounds of Heaven*) or “My Life is in Your Hands” by Kathy Troccoli (*Spirit & Song*, OCP).

9. **Coordinate media.** Recruit help for cuing and playing of song(s) from CD. Recruit someone to run the PowerPoint presentation if including this option in the liturgy.

10. **Determine any other extra rituals that will be used** *(optional).*
    - If you include the “Passing on the Light Ritual” *(Resource 2)*, obtain supplies (thin taper candles with wax catchers, a copy of the blessing/ritual for the presider), inform other youth who will “receive the light” of the ritual, and provide instructions.
    - Consider inviting parents to create a “Personal Diploma” (see *Resource 3, “Personal Diploma”*).

11. **Plan a reception** *(optional).* Consider hosting a reception for graduates and their families after the liturgy. Extending the invitation to the community at large is your choice. If you choose to do this, consider asking for help from other parish organizations or groups for this effort. Serve light refreshments such as cake with punch and coffee.

**Event at a Glance (Sample schedule)**

- 5:30 pm  Graduates Arrive
- 6:00 pm  Liturgy
- 7:15 pm  Reception

**Graduates Arrive** (30 minutes early)

*Note to Leader*: Use this time to run through any last minute practicing; let graduates know where banners will be placed; show graduates and families to reserve seating in front sections.
Liturgy (about 60-75 minutes)
See Resource 1, “Sample Order of Worship,” to prepare a worship aid.

Reception (30-60 minutes)

This extended event was written by Jen Yearwood, Director of Campus Ministry, Loretto High School, Sacramento, California.
Sample Order of Worship

Baccalaureate Liturgy

[Date]
[Time]
[Location]
[Theme]

Introduction/Welcome ................................................................. [Graduate Name]

Procession of School Banners

Gathering Song
As the congregation sings, the Cross, Book of the Gospels, Presider, and Liturgical Ministers process in.

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Greeting & Sign of the Cross ............................................................ [Presider Name]

Kyrie/Gloria (sung)

Opening Prayer ............................................................ [Presider Name]

LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading .................................................................................[Name of Lector]
[Passage to be proclaimed]

Psalm Response (sung)

Second Reading .............................................................................[Name of Lector]
[Passage to be proclaimed]

Alleluia (sung)

Gospel ............................................................................................ [Name of Presider or Deacon]

Homily ...................................................................................... [Name of Presider or Deacon]

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Prayers of the Faithful ................................................................. [Name(s) of Graduate(s)]

LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Preparation of the Altar

Presentation of the Gifts ..................................................................................... Graduates

Holy, Holy (sung)
Memorial Acclamation (sung)
Amen (sung)

The Lord’s Prayer (recited or sung by all)

Lamb of God (sung)

Communion Song(s)       “[Name of Song(s)]”

Prayer after Communion ........................................................................[Name of Presider]

Post-Communion Reflection or Ritual
    Options:       Reflection by a Graduate
                    PowerPoint Presentation
                    Passing on the Light
                    General Blessing of Graduates

CONCLUDING RITES

Prayer/Final Blessing .....................................................................................[Name of Presider]

Sending Forth Song          “[Name of Song]”

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Passing on the Light: A Ritual Celebrating Graduation

Note: This works especially well within the context of a parish liturgical celebration.

After Communion, the Youth Minister (or other) is called forth to introduce the ritual.

Youth Minister:

“Jesus said, ‘You are the light of the world.’ As you prepare to graduate, you are called to shine your light brightly in the world around you. Each of you has shared a part of yourself with this community. As you go forward in faith into new endeavors in life, a part of who you are will remain with us always. In this ritual, “The Passing of the Light,” you are invited to pass the light onto those who will follow you. Those who will receive the light are challenged to accept it and to be open to new possibilities for growth and learning. Light is a powerful symbol of strength, hope, and guidance. As the light is passed on, the future becomes brighter and brighter.”

Invite the graduates to stand.

Presider:

“Graduates of the class of _________: You are a unique creation blessed by God and called to grow in love and to share your gifts with others. This community gathers to celebrate your accomplishments, to reflect on who you are for us, and to share our dreams and support for your future. May God continue to bless you and challenge you. May the light of Christ burn deeply within you, and may it guide you along life’s journey. May you grow more fully into the men and women that God wants you to be and that the world so desperately needs. We ask this blessing upon you today, in hope and expectation that God will continue the great things already begun in you. Amen.”

(Adapted from Family Rituals and Celebrations, John Roberto, editor. New Rochelle NY: Don Bosco Multimedia (Center for Ministry Development), 1992, p. 103. All rights reserved.)

Youth Minister:

“I invite the seventh graders to come forward and stand around the base of the sanctuary.” (Note: If this ritual is used with graduating seniors, invite all juniors, sophomores, and freshmen forward to receive the light.) “I invite our graduates to come forward one at a time and to take a taper candle and light it from the paschal candle (or other candle symbolizing the light of Christ), and to hand the candle to one of those who have been called forth.”
Allow a few minutes for this to take place. As candles are being lit and passed on, consider playing one or more of these songs: “Friends” by Michael W. Smith (Change Your World), “In the Light” by Michael John Poirier (Hello Lord), or “Go Light Your World” by Kathy Troccoli (Sounds of Heaven).

Once all candles have been passed on, the presider offers the following blessing:

Presider:

“Loving and ever-faithful God, we ask your blessing upon these young people (7th graders or freshmen, sophomores, juniors) who are recipients of the light. Give them the strength and courage to accept this light and to go forth boldly as faithful bearers of light. Help them to discern and develop the many wonderful gifts you have given them so that these gifts may be used to make their families, schools, communities, and world better places for all. As a community, we affirm their uniqueness and giftedness and offer our support as companions along life’s journey. May the light of these young people shine ever-brightly so as to dispel the darkness of violence, oppression, sorrow, and injustice. We ask this blessing upon them through Christ our Light and Lord. Amen.”
Personal Diploma

The notion of a personal diploma began as a complement to the institutional diploma received by graduates. In contrast to the somber lettering on parchment, this diploma may be elaborately decorated with a colorful and intricate border reflecting the interests and personality of the one for whom it is intended.

The text celebrates four years of high school (or college/university or two/three years of junior high or middle school)—including successes and failures, touching on such things as driving, dating, and working, as well as math, music, English literature, sports, special family times, etc.

Naturally, each graduate would receive a unique diploma with specific commemorative details.

Sample

To our son, ______________, on his graduation on this, the 5th day of June, 20__, we present this diploma in honor of four rich and sometimes arduous years at ______________ High School.

As you collect this diploma and move on to the next stage of your development, we, your loving and proud parents, remember the vivid moments of these important years ...

The text that follows would include references to milestones during the four years of high school and may include graphics or pictures. What comes through in such a personal diploma is the love, pride, and joy of the family for one of their own.

[Adapted from Family Rituals and Celebrations, John Roberto, editor. New Rochelle NY: Don Bosco Multimedia (Center for Ministry Development), 1992, pp. 102-103. All rights reserved.]
Making Banners

* Note: Lettering can be placed in any fashion...be creative! Use school colors for lettering.

PAINT PICTURE (OR OUTLINE) OF GRADUATION CAP AND/OR DIPLOMA HERE

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Selecting Readings for a Baccalaureate Liturgy

If you hosting a Baccalaureate liturgy outside of Sunday worship, consider the following sets of readings for your Baccalaureate Liturgy. Begin by selecting a Gospel, and then use the readings that accompany that Gospel in a Sunday liturgy. If you are including the baccalaureate within the Sunday liturgy, use the readings for that Sunday.

Sets of Readings:

1. Matthew 5:13-16 — *Salt and Light*  
   Lectionary #71  
   *First Reading: Is 58:7-10*  
   *Psalm: 146, 6-7, 8-9, 9-10*  
   *Second Reading: 1 Cor 2:1-5*

2. Matthew 5:1-12 — *The Beatitudes*  
   Lectionary #74  
   *First Reading: Zep 2:3, 3:12-13*  
   *Psalm 112: 4-5, 6-7, 8-9*  
   *Second Reading: 1 Cor 1:26-31*

3. Matthew 6:24-34 — *Do Not Worry About Tomorrow*  
   Lectionary #83  
   *First Reading: Is 49:14-15*  
   *Psalm 62: 2-3, 6-7, 8-9*  
   *Second Reading: 1 Cor 4:1-5*

4. John 10:1-10 — *The Good Shepherd*  
   Lectionary #50  
   *First Reading: Acts 2:14a, 36-41*  
   *Psalm 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6*  
   *Second Reading: 1 Pt 2:20b-25*

5. John 14:1-12 — *Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life*  
   Lectionary #53  
   *First Reading: Acts 6:1-7*  
   *Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19*  
   *Second Reading: 1 Pt 2:4-9*

   Lectionary #111  
   *First Reading: 2 Kgs 4:42-44*  
   *Psalm 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18*  
   *Second Reading: Eph 4:1-6*