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Hello Prairie Central,



Photo credit: illustratedministry.com

Over the last few days, my social media feed has been filled with first day of school pics–children and teens posing with big smoles, new clothes, and colorful backpacks.

When I served in a local church, one of my favorite traditions was our annual back-to-school Sunday, when we offered a "blessing of the backpacks." From the tiniest preschooler to the veteran teacher, from the shy middle-schooler to the long-time paraprofessional, these good people would process up to the Altar full of hope for a new year of learning. "God's got your back!" we said to each one, giving them a tag to attach to their backpack or bag.



Photo Credit: Rev. Melissa Meyers, Batavia UMC

I see our Prairie Central Churches offering the same kind of blessing, not only in worship, but at Farmer's Markets and Community Festivals, taking the good news way beyond the sanctuary with stickers and backpack tags that share words of good news: "You are Loved." "God's got your back!" "Eres Importante." I've seen church hallways stacked high with donated backpacks and school supplies, ready to be shared with local neighborhood kids, or with neighbors further away, in more economically vulnerable communities.

Our scriptures offer us such rich resources for times of transition and change, when anxiety and excitement can go hand in hand. Psalm 121, a psalm of pilgrimage, begins with the line most of us know by heart, in the old yet familiar King James Version: "I lift mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help?"

When our youngest child was starting middle school, she taught me a "word" to describe what she was feeling. "Mom," she said to me, "I'm nervousited!" She was both nervous and excited, at the same time. "I get it," I replied. Then I looked down at her backpack tag, given to her a few days before at church, and read it out loud. "God's got your back!" I realized, in that moment, that those words were a paraphrase, middle-school version, of the last line of Psalm 121: The Lord will watch over your coming in and you going forth, from this time and forevermore." As she boarded the bus, I took out my phone and captured the moment. "God's got your back!" I whispered quietly to myself, trusting that this was true



I thank God for you, Prairie Central, and all the ways you are connecting with your communities, sharing the love of Jesus. I thank God for a Christian tradition that teaches us, through scripture, to trust God on every journey. I thank God for the powerful witness we can share through a simple act of blessing.

Rev. Wendy Hardin Hermann
Prairie Central District Superintendent