BACK TO SCHOOL BLESSING FOR CHILDREN & TEACHERS
AKA. HEDGEHOG BLESSING
By Kara K. Root

(Prior to the blessing,
anoint children and teachers with the sign of the cross, "*Name*, You are a Beloved Child of God")

Children and Teachers –
God made the sun and the moon, the night and the day, the oceans and the land, the sky and the animals; God made the hedgehog and God made you.

So to send you back to school this year, we are giving you a special 'Hedgehog Blessing.'

Beloved Children of God:
As hedgehogs roam far and wide and investigate the world, may you have room to discover and grow, may you be filled with curiosity and wonder, may your body move, your heart thrill and your mind explore.

For Discovery, Curiosity, Wonder, Movement and Exploration, we pray.
God, bless these beloved ones.

As hedgehogs are the most deeply hibernating creature on the planet, and have no problem curling up for a nap anytime throughout their waking days, may you take many breathers and breaks when you need them: brain breaks and mask breaks and friend breaks and screen breaks. And may you know when to let go and relax, and when you are tired, may you find deep rest.

For Rest, Breaks, breathers and relaxation, we pray.
God, bless these beloved ones.

As hedgehogs are very vocal with their grunts and snuffles and squeals, so may you speak up and speak out. Share your joys and your sadnesses, your worries and your celebrations. May you make new friends and listen to their grunts and snuffles and squeals too, because we are all in this together.

For speaking out and for listening, we pray.
God, bless these beloved ones.

As hedgehogs' quills offer protection but do not sting or injure, may your heart and mind and body be guarded this year. And may you work out conflict in ways that bring peace instead of harm, because in Jesus Christ, we all belong to each other.

For guarded heart and minds, we pray.
For working out conflict without harm, we pray.
God, bless these beloved ones.

The hedgehog was for ancient peoples a symbol of resurrection, or life after death, because God made the hedgehog immune to snake venom. So, like the hedgehog you too are protected; mean or poisonous words cannot destroy you, and mistakes and struggles do not define you. Who you are in your deepest self is already completely known and loved by God: You are a beloved child of God, Jesus holds you secure.
As the ancient Greeks used to say, "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog one important thing" – so may you remember this one important thing, and I invite everyone to repeat it after me now: God loves me, now and always.
All: **God loves me now and always.**

For Protection and understanding, we pray
To know the one important thing: "God loves me, now and always," we pray,
God, bless these beloved ones.

As hedgehogs curl into a ball, may you too let yourself feel your feelings. If you are sad or angry, scared or worried, God will join you there and hold you in it. And as hedgehogs enjoy being held, and not forced to come out of their ball but allowed to uncurl when they are ready, may you trust that you are held in God's love, and it's ok to just rest there, and not to move on to action too quickly.

To feel all their feelings, we pray
To trust God is holding them in love, we pray
God, bless these beloved ones.

As hedgehogs lose their baby spines and grow adult ones, first of all, many of you will lose your baby teeth and grow adult teeth, which we will celebrate with you as milestones of growing up. But also, all of get to let go of the ways we use to protect ourselves that no longer serve us, and grow new, brave ways to stay both connected to God and other people and true to ourselves.

For milestones of growth we pray
To let go of what no longer serves them, we pray
To stay true to themselves,
and connected to others,
we pray,
God bless these beloved ones.

God made hedgehogs with a strange ritual. When they discover a new scent in their environment – some kind of plant or object they don't recognize - they will lick and bite it, and make froth in their mouths that they paint onto their spines with their tongues. This is called "anointing" and helps them adapt to their surroundings. You have been anointed today as a beloved child of God. So like the hedgehogs, may that make you brave to be in whatever places you are this year, may you have courage to face new and different things. May you be resilient (which means that you get better and better at recovering when hard things happen), and may you be adaptable (which means you get good at adjusting to changes).

For courage, resilience and adaptability we pray,
God bless these beloved ones.

As hedgehogs are clever and resourceful, such as knocking a grape off a vine and rolling over onto it to stab the grape onto its quills and carry it off, so may you find

creative, joyful and imaginative ways to navigate challenges, and to find and hang onto the sweetness in this year to carry with you and share with others.

That they may be clever, resourceful, imaginative and joyful, we pray.
That they may taste life's sweetness and share it with others, we pray.
God bless these beloved ones.

God of the whole universe and of the hedgehog too,
bless these children and teachers with all these things, and in all these ways, as they begin a new school year.
Amen.

TAG tied to the Hedgehog:
Discovery, Curiosity, Wonder, Movement, Exploration.
Rest, Breaks, breathers and relaxation.
Speaking out and listening.
Guarded heart and mind.
Resolve conflict without harm.
Know one important thing: "God loves me, now and always."
Protection and Understanding.
Feel your feelings: scared, glad, sad, worried, calm, afraid.
Let go of what no longer serves you.
True to yourself.
Connected to others.
Brave.
Resilient.
Adaptable.
Clever.
Resourceful.
Imaginative.
Sharing.
Joyful.

Blessing written for the children and teachers of Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church, September 5, 2021. Each child and teacher received a stuffed hedgehog for their backpack.
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