

# Prayer for Education

## Materials Needed

- Copy of *Education in Afghanistan: Changing Minds*
- paper and pen for each person
- bible

**Leader:** In our prayer today we remember children around the world, especially girls, who cannot go to school unless their communities commit to making education a priority for them.

**Reader 1:** *Education in Afghanistan: Changing Minds*

**Leader:** I invite each of you to write a short prayer for children in the world who want to receive an education and find barriers to going to school.

*After everyone has finished writing a prayer, invite each person to read aloud their prayer.*

**Reader 2:** *Luke 13:1-9*

**Leader:** Just as the owner of the fig tree in Luke’s Gospel tended and cared for it until it bore fruit, it often takes a great deal of patience, hard work and compassionate care to foster change in societies. Even in Afghanistan, which continues to struggle with conflict, hope is beginning to bud on once barren branches. As Catholic Relief Services makes resources available, communities are finding that they can support children who were once restricted from going to school.

Such a response reflects Catholic social teaching regarding community and participation: that people are not only sacred, but also social. How we participate in our family and community, from our daily actions to our policy decisions, affects each and every person. Empowering neighbors to do what they do best – support one another – is a key component of CRS’ work to help entire communities rise from poverty.

## Closing Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for the gift an education. We ask you to bless children around the world you want to go to school. Help them and their communities find opportunities to receive an education so that they have a better future. And help us be part of their journey out of poverty as members of the global community.

# Education in Afghanistan: Changing Minds

By Amena F. and Fae

"Why are you going to school? Education is useless for a girl." Forty-five-year old Bibi Gul wasn't happy that her young daughter, Nisa, had chosen to attend school. It meant the 9-year-old was busy most of the time doing her homework.

One of many illiterate women in the Herat region of Afghanistan, Bibi was never interested in education for herself or her children. "The day the CRS education team came to start a class in our village, my husband enrolled Nisa without telling me," she says. "When I found out about the matter, I argued with him and told him that I didn't like my children to go to school. But my husband told me parents are responsible for the education of their children and must help them to be raised up in a proper way."

Before the Catholic Relief Services program began, there were no schools at all in many remote Afghan villages. Those that existed were few and far between. CRS created community-based schools held in village buildings or tents, training local people to be teachers and providing books, blackboards and more. Working with village elders, CRS made sure to get community buy-in and to respect local traditions when founding the schools.

Even when public schools are available, parents often don't want their daughters to walk long distances unaccompanied to reach them. By bringing schools close to home—and, in certain communities, creating classes specifically for girls—CRS ensured that thousands of girls would be able to learn.

Nine-year-old Nisa wanted to go to school so much that she cried, asking her mother to allow it. She promised to help with household chores. Reluctantly, Bibi watched as her daughter went to the classes.

Nisa was especially happy when a tin box of storybooks arrived. CRS provides the schools we support with "libraries in a box" so that students can take home books to read. "After this, every day I would bring a storybook and I would read it for my sisters and brothers," remembers Nisa. But her mother still wasn't happy about her studies.

One day she brought home a new book. "Read it for us," her father said. The book was "Respect Your Mothers." Nisa had brought this book home to show her mother the benefit of education. As she was reading it, her elder brother told her mother, "Education is very good. If my brother was not illiterate he wouldn't need to go to Iran to work as a laborer to make his money. If I was educated, I wouldn't be forced to work gathering firewood. I would have the ability to do more."

As she listened, Bibi Gul had a change of heart.

"Founding libraries is a great step taken by CRS and it encourages the students to learn better and study more," Bibi told her husband. "I used to think that education is not good, but now I know it is useful for everyone."

*Amena F. and Fae R. (full names withheld to protect identities) work for Catholic Relief Services in Afghanistan.*