

LEARNING for LIFE



Notebook Section Sequence

- Section 1:** Introduction and Purpose
- Section 2:** Bible Studies and Devotionals
- Section 3:** Worship Resources
- Section 4:** Spiritual Gifts
- Section 5:** Multicultural Education
- Section 6:** Workshops
- Section 7:** Evaluation Tools
- Section 8:** Best Practices and Outcomes



OFFICE FOR EDUCATION AND FAITH DEVELOPMENT
REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

Section 1

LEARNING for LIFE

Introduction and Purpose

Learning for Life

What's It All About?

Learning for Life is an invitation for all RCA congregations and members to a renewed commitment to lifelong learning, guided by the question, "What does it mean to follow Jesus as a disciple in this day and at this time?"

The reason behind such an invitation is simple: we in the church have been given a remarkable gift, the gift of faith. In using this gift and in sharing it with others, we can energize all of our members to share the good news of Jesus Christ and live out their callings. We do this through a lifelong ministry of Christian education and discipleship: learning the faith, growing in faith, and sharing the faith.

This notebook contains a series of sections intended to help you:

- Identify important areas of ministry in which teaching and learning are essential;
- Provide specific learning opportunities, especially for those in leadership;
- Offer support, encouragement, and nurture for those who provide educational leadership for your congregation;

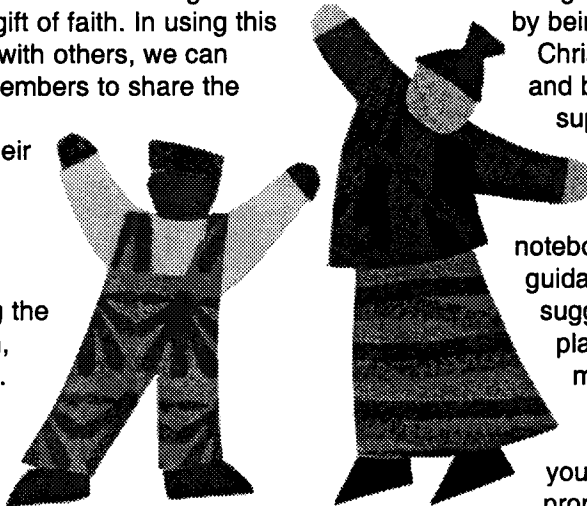
- Move toward emphasizing Christian education and discipleship at every stage of life in your congregation.

In baptism, we make this vow as a congregation: "to love, encourage, and support these brothers and sisters by teaching the gospel of God's love, by being an example of Christian faith and character, and by giving the strong support of God's family in fellowship, prayer, and service."

Look through this notebook carefully—its guidance, resources, and suggestions can help you plan and customize a ministry of education and discipleship for your congregation that allows you to live out that baptismal promise—to teach the gospel of God's love to persons of all ages. Join this lifelong journey of faith.

The gifts he gave were that some would be... pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13





The Biblical Foundations for Learning for Life

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign upon your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us.

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

Psalms 78:1-4

The gifts he gave were that some would be ...pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every

ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:16-20



Learning for Life: Educational Leadership in Congregational Life

by Charles Allen Wiessner and Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner

This is a time for celebration!

What does it mean to celebrate?

To celebrate is to say that this thing is special—take note!
To celebrate is to take a moment to step back and to appreciate.
In celebrating we take time to recognize the meaning of something
and to recapture and proclaim the importance of it in our lives.

This is a moment of standing on the threshold:

In celebrating we look backwards,
to recognize and honor what has happened; smiling back on the past.
And we look forward,
in anticipation of what is to come; greeting the mystery of the future.
The time in-between the two is set aside as celebration time.

A time set aside for a special purpose:

Remembering and recognizing,
Recapturing and recommitting.
Proclaiming, "This is important to us! This has value for us!"

To celebrate is to take a moment to pause and to be fully aware.
It is a time to realize that this special thing should be part of our every day.

To celebrate means to reaffirm our commitments:

Living in recognition of our gifts and our calling,
and this treasure with which we have been entrusted.





This truly is a time of celebration; a time, after much hoping, planning, and preparation, a time to celebrate Learning for Life!

Celebration denotes a specialness or uniqueness to our focus. However, in celebrating even a birthday or anniversary, we are celebrating something that is important to us every day. This celebration is no different. In celebrating Learning for Life we underline a commitment essential to our everyday work in the church.

What does it mean, this “Learning for Life”? It is a rich tapestry whose varied designs show up as different images to different eyes. But whatever you see, certainly it is this:

- Faith becomes the center of our lives. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 depicts how belief in God becomes the center of life. This passage is the *Shema*, the center of life and faith for individual Jews and for the Hebrew nation. Learning for life should be the core of our existence—as individuals, as congregations, and as a denomination.
- Faith needs to be passed on. Faith-forming enables individuals to help shape the faith of their families and others whom they encounter. It is living out the Great Commission proclaimed in Matthew 28:16-20.
- What we learn in church is the essence of life and what we need to truly live. This learning leads to the abundant life Jesus describes.
- Learning is the way we are supposed to live. The purposes for our life and our actions and ethics grow out of our learning in the church.
- Learning is for the future, not just for the present. It prepares us for eternal life in Christ. “Life” also implies that learning should occur over an entire life span, from the very youngest to the very oldest members of a congregation. Learning does not stop when we are confirmed, when we



become adults, or when we retire.
• Learning is for all of God’s people; learning is for life.

In the following pages, we look at three parts of what this celebration of Learning for Life might mean for you and for your congregation. First, we look at our calling as educators. Next, we affirm educational ministry in the church, celebrating its central role in the work of ministry. Finally, we explore challenges and visions for the future. We also provide optional questions for story reflection at the end of this overview. We hope these questions will stimulate further thought and growth around Learning for Life.

The Call

Many of us were children when we first heard the story of Moses and the burning bush. Like Moses, we were probably attracted to the amazing sight of a bush that was burning but didn’t burn up. As we grew more theologically sophisticated, we learned that the most important part of the story was God’s self-revelation to Moses—the revelation captured by the divine name *Yahweh*.

Somewhere between a child’s attraction to fire and a sophisticate’s attention to theology, there is the story of Moses’ call—a call that comes similarly to professional educators, pastors, and educational leaders in various congregational programs. If you are reading this notebook, you are probably someone who has been charged with the educational ministry of the church—someone who has been called.

There are times when we think of what we do in Christian education as a job. Even if we are simply volunteers, we might pride ourselves on how well we do our job. With training and skills we can address the requirements of our jobs, and while Moses tried to deny it, he was well equipped for his job. He was raised in the house of Pharaoh. Moses knew the language and the court customs, he knew many of the people, and he had evident skills to apply to the task at hand. But the job of leading the people of God could not be accomplished without the call of God. The call of God turns a task and

a job into a vocation and calling. It is the fire of God that transforms us into instruments of God's will.

The first task God assigned Moses was to assemble the leaders and share with them God's plan to save them. The second step was to communicate this message to all the people of God. This same call shapes our identity and forms what we do. As educators, we live the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-9: to tell God's plan of salvation to all members of the community.

Jesus gave us this same directive through his own words and actions: to teach and to make disciples. Jesus welcomed and blessed children, taught crowds of followers, and disciplined leaders. Jesus also commissioned believers to continue sharing his teachings to the ends of the earth. This is one reason the Reformed Church in America is celebrating Learning for Life. As individuals, congregations, and as a denomination we are being called to honor and recognize:

- the life-giving nature of the message with which we have been entrusted;
- the importance of the ministry of education in our congregations; and
- the value of the educators who facilitate it in individual congregations and in the denomination as a whole.

The call to teach and to make disciples affects, and infects, all that we do in our lives, for our *whole life long*. Learning for Life is an attempt to bring to the forefront this wonderful calling from God that we have as a denomination, as congregations, and as leaders of congregations. The task of education and discipleship is not just a job we have from time to time. Sharing God's plan of salvation is the essence of our calling. We can't become what God called us to be without taking the educational task of the church seriously.

Our calling extends to all areas of church life, from our worship to our education. It shapes our servant ministries and our fellowship as much as it shapes our Sunday school classes. Education takes place through all aspects of church life—in classrooms during specified educational programs, yes, but also in consistory

meetings, at soup kitchens, and during coffee hour.

Some learners are beginners, attracted by the fire that doesn't consume. We need to start where they are. Other learners are ready to understand *Yahweh*, the Lord who saves them and lives in relationship with them. They too need to find places to learn and grow within the church. Still others, like Moses in Deuteronomy, are looking back on their lives, making meaning, discovering new ways of living their life in Christ as retirees or even preparing for new life in Christ. Our calling as leaders in congregations is to provide a multitude of places and spaces where people can experience their own burning bush and meet God in new ways. That is the challenge God sets before us.

The Affirmation

In our first congregation, frequently we visited a lovely elderly member named Ruth. During our first visit, she shared with us her childhood goal of becoming a Sunday school teacher. She achieved that goal. During the Sunday school's heyday in the late 1950s, she even became a superintendent of the junior department, fulfilling a lifelong dream through the educational ministry of the church. The glow on her face as she shared this story is probably the closest thing we'll see to the face of an angel until we get to heaven.

The story about Ruth may strike you as being sweet, but a little out of date. Truthfully, the church's educational work is even more important today than it was a generation ago. In the 1950s, most public school classes started with prayer and Scripture readings. There was a general agreement that society and Christian faith supported and upheld one another. Today, society and Christian faith often stand on opposite sides regarding values and issues. Congregations and families can't take for granted that ideas they want taught will be learned in society. Thus, the church's ministry of education is more important today than ever.

Another pressing factor in the need for education throughout the church relates to the many new people attracted to the



Christian faith who were not brought up within the Christian faith. The language of the church, our stories and experiences—much of that is brand new to many people. Think of the impact this has on worship when the minister makes an allusion to Zacchaeus and half the people have no idea who Zacchaeus was. Consistory is impacted when people have no idea what a deacon is supposed to do, much less how a deacon differs from an elder. And it is hard for people to share their faith with others until they begin to grasp and articulate these things for themselves.

Because education is such an important ministry of the congregation, it must permeate everything that takes place in the church. Limiting education to special classes will never fully meet the educational needs of the church. We must envision and consciously work at an educational approach to each committee and each ministry of the church. Each aspect of our church life should be informed by education and serve the function of educating its participants.

Because of the importance of education, we also need to pay attention to training educators. Congregations can make sure that each teacher, each small group leader, each committee chair, and each ministry facilitator is equipped and resourced to fulfill his or her important role. We need a whole generation of people who, like Ruth, think it an important goal in life to grow up to be an educator in the congregation.

The Challenge

We began our formal educational ministries in the Reformed Church as summer staff at Cran-Hill Ranch, an RCA camp for young people in northern Michigan. We taught through small group Bible studies and discussions. But we also taught while working in the Barn Store, on horseback, during canoe trips, and in tents in the middle of the night.

Literally, we lived our educational ministries through the words of Deuteronomy 6:6-7: “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them

while you are at home and while you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.” The challenge for all of us is to create and respond to moments when God’s word and purpose intersects with the lives of those we teach; to experience the reality of God’s loving presence in everyday life. As teachers, isn’t that the job description for all of us?

Fulfilling this directive is the challenge of Learning for Life. There is no one vision for what Learning for Life will look like in a congregation. It is up to each congregation to determine how to live its ministry so that education is a dimension of every aspect of its life every day.

Congregation by congregation, person by person, we are called to create an educational ministry that is faithful to our calling and responsive to our contexts and the opportunities they present. The resources in Learning for Life can be used in a wide range of ways to discover its meaning and application for your congregation, for each individual and group in your congregation, and for those outside your congregation whom you are trying to impact.

Although it is often human nature to balk at being told what to do, sometimes it is easier when someone spells out steps to follow or gives us specific directions. Learning for Life is not that kind of resource. Learning for Life is intended to challenge you to recognize the central role of education in each aspect of your church’s ministry, and to encourage you to live out this challenge in your own unique and faithful ways. Learning can take place in individuals, in groups, and on the congregational level when we are conscious of being learning communities, and when we seek to become learning congregations.

Another challenge of Learning for Life is to embrace the unique opportunities presented by your context—the setting of your ministry. There is no one way to educate. Our contexts become more diverse and complicated each day and our educational ministries need to be connected and relevant to different communities without being compromised by them.

The Reformed Church has a long history of valuing and creating opportunities for

education. As a group of believers we have been gifted for and called to educational ministry. Our history is a foundation upon which we can build new and creative ways of doing our educational ministries. "Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

Story Questions for Further Reflection

During celebrations, it is common for those gathered to tell stories. Psalm 78 admonishes us to tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might and the wonders that he has

done. Stories help us remember what has taken place in the past. However, they can also give us new understanding of the past and insight into the future. The following optional questions are for story reflection. These questions are designed to be used by educators, pastors, educational committees, and other groups within the church—by all those within the congregation whose calling and commitment is to guide educational ministry. This time of celebration is a time when we can begin to view our work in new ways. These questions can be used by individuals through journal writing, or by a group for individual and collective reflection.



1. Recall the story of your calling. How has God called you to the ministry of teaching and learning?
2. Tell a story that characterizes your teaching practice, or the teaching ministry of your congregation, with children, with youth, or with adults.
3. Who are the people and what are the experiences that influence the way you teach or the way you view teaching and learning?
4. What teaching experiences from your past do you need to hold onto? What teaching experiences do you need to let go of or change?
5. Recall a favorite learning experience. What made it a good one for you? How did it influence your future teaching or how you viewed education?
6. Recall a difficult learning experience. What made it particularly challenging? How did it influence your future teaching or how you viewed education?
7. Tell a story about an experience in the church when you learned something important in a setting that was not a traditional classroom.
8. Relay an experience that identifies your growing edge as an educator or planner of educational opportunities. In what new directions do you feel God may be calling or leading you?
9. What people and educational activities do you need to celebrate as part of your Learning for Life?



How to Use This Notebook

Specific Steps for Implementation

What do you do with a notebook of materials more than a hundred pages long? Where do you begin? How do you proceed?

Learning for Life is intended to help you build a strong foundation for the Christian educational ministries of your church, and to emphasize a commitment to learning in every part of your congregation's ministry and mission. That's different than offering you a curriculum—a package of materials you use to carry out a specific program. Learning for Life is for the whole life of your congregation: an emphasis that affects and infects all you do.

That's why a key element in the success of Learning for Life is an ongoing emphasis on lifelong learning for every member of the congregation. How do we learn together as a consistory, as a Christian education committee, as adult small groups, as a youth fellowship, as a men's prayer breakfast, as children's Sunday school, or as a worshipping community? What might it mean for each one of those experiences to be a place where we learn intentionally the faith for our lives? How would we do that?

Learning for Life lays the groundwork for becoming a learning congregation. Here are some practical steps to help you make it successful.

Getting Started

The first step in pursuing Learning for Life is simply becoming familiar with what's in the notebook. It's a pretty big book to sit down and read through, although you could try that. You might consider making copies, if you wish, or purchasing additional notebooks through the RCA Distribution Center, in order to put this material, or parts of it, into the hands of trusted education colleagues. It doesn't matter whether these people are church staff or volunteers; what matters is that understanding Learning for Life and its possibilities happens in your congregation.

Getting Others on Board

Learning for Life is not just a program, it's a way of living, a commitment of the whole self—and the whole congregation. That means it will be most effective in a congregation when it's not only an initiative of the education committee, but an effort the whole church can embrace and share. That means bringing Learning for Life to the consistory and talking through the possible impact it can have on the mission and ministry of the whole church. Invite the consistory to be part of the planning process.

There are two Bible studies in Section 2 of the notebook that may be especially helpful in exploring the call to discipleship we receive as Christians. "Growing Disciples" is a comprehensive, six-session study that explores in depth the question, "What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?" "So That We Can Know" is directed specifically toward a leadership group like the consistory. Its goals are clearly stated and can be accomplished in a one-hour, single-session study or as opening devotions at four separate meetings. The consistory may need to take formal action to endorse the use of Learning for Life in your congregation, or to appropriate funding if resources are not available in any standing budgets. Remember: the funding question may have to wait until after more specific plans are in place.

Forming a Planning Group

Who needs to serve on yet another committee? Probably not you. But you also don't need to—and don't want to—shoulder this burden alone. Bring together a diverse group from your congregation for this planning task. Here are two suggestions:

- Identify one or two people to implement certain components of this resource. One or two persons could take the Bible study components, for

example, and devise a means by which everyone in the congregation could receive the opportunity to participate. Another individual or small group could engage the education committee in a process of evaluation; similarly, another small group could plan how one or more of the enrichment workshops could be utilized. In this way, Learning for Life can become a reality without the challenge of matching calendars or creating space for large group meetings.

- **Form an intergenerational task force** to implement Learning for Life, possibly by setting up different subcommittees. Why intergenerational? Older elementary children, teens, collegians, young marrieds, parents of teens, empty-nest couples, and senior adults will present different and healthy perspectives to your task force. Persons who serve on different ministries within the church and the pastor (or one of the pastors) will also be helpful. Hint: when recruiting, let potential members know that their commitment does have an end. Write a paragraph about the expectations and time commitment involved. Decide in advance how often you will meet.

The task force will likely begin by forming a vision for how to initiate and live out a Learning for Life focus in your congregation. Remember: doing everything all at once is not the best way to proceed. This is learning, for life. All of life. There's no prize for who gets done first.

Other hints for the formation and life of this planning group:

- **Pray for guidance.** Sometimes, we're so full of our own plans and ideas, we forget to pause and listen closely for the guidance of the Spirit. Perhaps a small group of people in your church will make this their prayer focus.
- **Open the doors.** The more key people involved in the decision making, the easier it will be to instill enthusiasm in the congregation.

- **Be true to yourself.** There is great wisdom in your congregation; be creative in using it. Let the plans for Learning for Life be your congregation's plans, fitting your particular context for ministry.
- **Slow down and focus.** A coordinated effort, even if you wait a year, is better than a few scattered activities right away.

Note: The Learning for Life emphasis will be supported denominationally by a *Church Herald*-based media campaign from July 2001 to June 2002. You may want to make a similar emphasis in your church in order to take advantage of this kind of media exposure.

Building the Vision and Plan

Are you ready to start Learning for Life? Probably not. Like any important initiative, whether it's a new outreach program to the community, a food pantry, or an addition to the building, having the idea is only the first step. A well-developed vision and plan is next.

Building a vision for Learning for Life is a group effort; one person can't do it alone. It requires the gifts and creativity of a variety of God's people. And it should fit into the overall mission and vision of your congregation.

You should start by grounding yourself in Scripture. If a biblical understanding of discipleship is what your church needs, use the "Growing Disciples" Bible study in Section 2. If you want to tie your efforts to a broader vision of mission and ministry, use the study in Section 6, "Vision and Biblical Faith," which leads you through the RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision. Either way, the message you state is clear: what we do is grounded in the calling of God. Now you can move on to a specific plan for Learning for Life. Here's a strategy for your group to follow:

- **Begin at the end.** Imagine it's three years from now. Learning for Life is an ongoing commitment of your whole church (not just the education committee!). What does that look like? Brainstorm a list of actions that make a



picture of your congregation as a group of lifelong learners. It may include:

- Two-thirds of members involved in a small group Bible study;
- More teachers for Sunday school than needed;
- Learning regularly named as valuable for the congregation;
- A stronger sense of learning at home;
- Meetings now feel like worship and praise instead of drudgery and decisions;
- Church growth both spiritually and numerically;
- Members are giving more of their time and their money, both to the congregation and to the community.

Take time to list as many possible outcomes as you can come up with. Be creative and a little bit wild. What might God be calling your church to do?

Be (about) number one. You can't do everything, so prioritize. Look at that list and, as a group, identify what might be most important for your congregation. It might be involving more people in study, or community ministry and outreach, or worship, or family commitments. It might be strengthening the education program in order to provide the foundation to accomplish more specific goals. Work together to decide what's number one on your list.

On your mark, get set, go. It's time to name the actions and plans that will help you accomplish the goal (or goals) you've established for yourself. Each section of the notebook has specific suggestions. Here are some broader examples in specific areas that might stimulate your own thinking.

1. Communication

How will you publicize a Learning for Life emphasis in your congregation? What things can be done one time, to last all year? What publicity should be updated weekly? Monthly? How can you utilize bulletin boards, church bulletins, church newsletters, and

fliers? Some examples:

- Kids Bulletin Board: Take Polaroid® or digital pictures of preschoolers, older kids, and teens in action—doing things in ministry—and update every two weeks.
- Have preschoolers draw pictures of what they do in Sunday school.
- Have elementary kids write a paragraph and illustrate the topic “My Most Special Sunday School Teacher.”
- All-age kids can draw pictures of “Why I like Sunday school.”
- Easels in your narthex/foyer with current pictures of all varieties of educational settings (children, youth and adults) in your congregation actively engaged in ministry. Update every two weeks. Make the heading “Learning for Life” and set this in a prominent spot to greet people as they arrive.
- Newspaper releases and free advertising. Advertise Learning for Life monthly in your local paper—let the community know that something is happening this year! Use the personal experience ads from the *Church Herald* as the basis for advertising in your local paper, or as a bulletin insert or addition to your church newsletter. In short, share the good news.
- A “Rally Day” to help get things started.

2. Monthly Pulpit Interviews

Prayerfully select key individuals to be interviewed either by the pastor or a key lay person during worship:

- Parents of a preschooler seeing their child grow spiritually through the children's ministry.
- One or two children (5th-6th grade) who have thoroughly enjoyed some aspect of the educational ministry, perhaps camp.
- Leading citizen in the community who grew up in the church to share how his or her Sunday school experience has influenced his or her leadership skills.
- Missionary supported by the church sharing importance of education in his

or her faith journey as well as at the mission station.

- One or two teens who have had a life-changing experience at camp or on a mission trip.
- Consistory member overseeing educational ministries—why he or she is excited to serve in this capacity.
- Senior adult who has participated in a Christian education setting all of his or her life and is still excited about it.
- Youth sponsor speaking about the challenges and rewards of ministry.
- A “son” or “daughter” of the church who has chosen a professional ministry career because of the church’s educational ministry.

These are some examples of a broader strategy through which the commitment of lifelong learning can be lived out. Look through the resources in this notebook and find what fits your church. Ask how you might have a training day for teachers, or include Learning for Life in your regular worship by using the resources provided, or make a new commitment to be a multicultural congregation. The resources are here to help you. Formulate your plan. Monitor it during the year and beyond, adapting when necessary. Continue to encourage innovation and creative thinking. Watch for how a

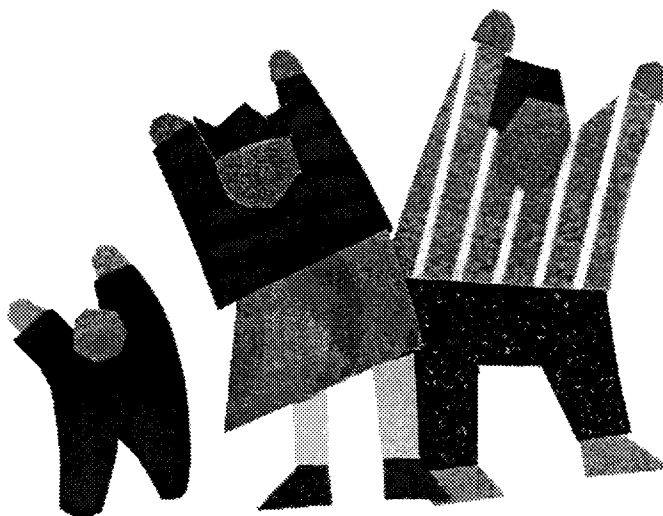
commitment to learning might generate new ideas in other places of ministry, and rejoice about that. Partner with other congregations.

In the end, your own members are the best people to decide what’s right for your church. Trust your own judgments, guided by the leading of the Holy Spirit. And it can’t be said enough: undergird the process with prayer.

There are hundreds of ways to live out a commitment to Learning for Life. The RCA’s Office for Christian Education is ready to help. Call them at 1-800-968-3943, or visit them on the Internet at www.rca.org.

The gifts he gave were that some would be ...pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13





Where to Begin: Foundations of Christian Education

How important is Christian education for the church today? How do we understand our call to be disciples and make disciples? Who are the key teachers of the church? These six resources will give you a firm foundation on which to build your Christian education library—and your Christian education program. All of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center. To order, call 1-800-968-7221 or visit orders@rca.org.

Basics of Christian Education

by Karen B. Tye

Tye believes that at least six basic areas should be given attention when leaders are planning for and building an educational program in the church and devotes a chapter to each: concept, purpose, context, content, participants, and process and method. Assessment, evaluation, and hindrances are also addressed in succeeding chapters. Each chapter concludes with questions and exercises for reflection. (Published by Chalice Press)

#3650202296 \$16.99^{US}/24.65^{CDN}

Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent

by Thomas Groome

Written with ecumenical sensitivity, this groundbreaking work reweaves old and new wisdom into fresh possibilities for education. Groome's emphasis on values includes appreciating the dignity of all people; fostering moral decision-making; working for justice and compassion; respecting one another and nature; drawing on the wisdom of our many traditions; and forming the whole person. (Published by Thomas More)

#3650003836 \$29.95^{US}/43.45^{CDN}

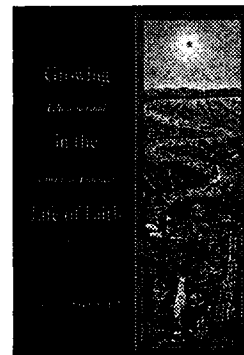
Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices

by Craig Dykstra

Dykstra persuasively contends that the Reformed Christian community, in its own traditions, offers a wealth of wisdom about satisfying spiritual hunger and the desire to know God deeply—wisdom that offers coherent, thoughtful guidance in such diverse settings as congregational life, families, youth groups, and higher education. In a refreshing final section, Dykstra tells stories about the kind of Christian education that allows faith to come alive. (Published by Geneva Press)

#3650500331 \$18.95^{US}/27.50^{CDN}

ISBN 0-664-50033-1



The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership

by Thomas R. Hawkins

Hawkins proposes a fresh and highly practical model for congregational leadership, providing practical strategies for understanding the relationship between leadership, learning, and ministry. (Published by Westminster John Knox Press)

#1600256996 \$15.95^{US}/23.15^{CDN}

The Nuts and Bolts of Christian Education: Practical Wisdom for Teachers and Leaders

by Delia Halverson

Offering practical suggestions for organizing the day-to-day details of the teaching ministry, this book includes ideas for evaluation, budgets, classrooms, leading meetings, rally days, stewardship, care of volunteers, and nurturing one's own spiritual growth. (Published by Abingdon Press)

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Will Our Children Have Faith? (Revised Edition)

by John H. Westerhoff, III

Originally written in 1976, this classic critique of Christian education explores the family, the church family, the school, and the church school. This revised edition includes a new foreword, chapter updates, and an afterword that incorporates Westerhoff's thinking—and rethinking—about Christian education issues since the book was originally published. (Published by Morehouse)

#3650018367 \$14.95^{US}/21.70^{CDN}

ISBN 0-8192-1836-7



Section 2

LEARNING for LIFE



**Bible Studies
and Devotionals**

Bible Studies and Devotionals

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

It is where we begin and where we return week after week, month after month: the words of Scripture. Words that nourish, words that challenge, words that guide our lives and our teaching.

Sola scriptura, Scripture alone taught our church forebears. No longer was the Word only available through a particular few; rather, it was to be used by the whole people of God. Soon Bibles were being printed in the language of the people, and words that were once almost private property were being written on the doorposts and hearts of all God's people. The words mean nothing if we do not open the Word: we must open our minds and hearts to what is printed between its covers, to the wisdom in its pages. And so doing, we risk our very lives. For in what we read, there is change and challenge and growth.

This section will help you build a biblical foundation for a ministry of education and discipleship. It reminds us of where we begin and where we stand as educators: on the Word of God. Here's what's included:

“Growing Disciples: A Six-Session Bible Study on Luke and Acts”

Content: This in-depth study of discipleship from a New Testament perspective is based on Jesus' interaction with his first disciples. The goal is to discover how our own relationship with Jesus can grow in depth and practice as we follow him.

How to Use: Your education committee may want to be the first group to engage this study. It can also be used for adult Bible study classes, a Sunday evening Bible teaching service or, with some modification, as part of a retreat on discipleship.

Tip: Each session is timed at sixty to ninety minutes. If you have less than sixty minutes available, don't try to discuss every question; choose those that seem most important to your group.

Presenter: John F. Bradosky is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregation in Huntington Beach, California.

The ELCA is a partner denomination with the RCA through the *Formula of Agreement*.

“So That We Can Know: A Bible Study for Leaders”

Content: Why do we have Christian education? Why do we study the Word of God? This single-session study provides the biblical groundwork for a ministry of education and discipleship, not as an option or add-on, but as an integral part of the life of faith.

How to Use: Does your consistory incorporate Bible study into its meetings? The youth leadership team? Small groups of educational leaders? This study would be appropriate and helpful for all those groups.

Tip: Don't have a sixty-minute time block in your meeting schedule for Bible study? Be flexible. Break up this study into four fifteen-





minute devotional sessions, for example. But always consider how worship, prayer, and Scripture can be a part of your meetings.

Presenter: Michael Vandenberg is pastor of Christ Community Church, an RCA congregation in St. Albert, Alberta, and the representative of the Regional Synod of Canada on the RCA's Council for Christian Education.

“The Word for the Week”

Content: How do you encourage your teachers and other education leaders to be regularly in the Word and in prayer, but also simply encourage them in their own faith? These weekly bookmarks, each with a Scripture, prayer, and teaching tip, will encourage a spirit of support and affirmation.

How to Use: The bookmarks are presented two to a sheet; you can copy them

onto a heavyweight paper (twenty-four pound or greater) and trim with a paper cutter. If you wish, you can laminate the finished bookmarks or add a ribbon.

Tip: Personally handing a bookmark to a teacher provides you with an opportunity to touch base with them each week and express your appreciation for the work they do. If your teachers rotate, mail the bookmark to those not teaching that week. You may also want to make extras; some teachers may want to give a bookmark to a friend or neighbor as an outreach tool.

Presenter: The bookmarks were written by Christian educators across the Reformed Church in America and compiled by Nancy McNiven, minister for witness and education for the Regional Synod of Albany and its representative to the Council for Christian Education.



Growing Disciples Discipleship in the New Testament

by the Rev. John F. Bradosky,
Pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Huntington Beach, California

Introduction

“What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?”

This study will seek to base an answer to this question on the way Jesus interacted with his first disciples. We will focus on Jesus’ interaction with his disciples as it is revealed by the physician, Luke, in the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles. In these sessions we will look at both the way the disciples first came to follow and how they grew in their relationship with Jesus.

The purpose of this study is to go beyond simply understanding Jesus’ ministry with his earliest followers. The goal is to look at our own discipleship in light of Jesus’ relationship with his first disciples. Further, we want to discover how that relationship can grow in depth and practice as we follow Jesus. An added value of this study is that it may help you also look at, evaluate and perhaps even change the way new disciples enter and are nurtured toward discipleship and membership in your congregation.

The call to discipleship is an invitation to journey with Jesus. This journey involves many steps. As disciples follow, they move from a childlike relationship with Jesus to a deeper commitment of faith and practice. Like a toddler’s first tentative steps, the disciples’ walk is not always predictable or necessarily in one direction. Some steps move the disciple forward, some backward, and some may not seem like directional steps at all. While there is a sense of progression to this journey called discipleship, it is important not to get stuck in “step language.”

The six sessions of this study invite you to a deeper walk with Jesus through an examination of six key components of discipleship—Followers, Learners, Ministers, Living Examples, Witnesses, and Leaders. As we work through this study, we will want to recognize the progression that leads to

deeper levels of commitment. At the same time, we want to affirm the winsome work of the Holy Spirit, who always seems to surprise us delightfully by inviting people into the journey at different places along the way. As you move through this study, you will be invited to open yourself to the power of the Spirit, working through the Word, to move you along your journey toward maturity in your relationship to Jesus as his disciple.

This study does not present a “canned” program. Rather, it is designed to help you see Jesus’ direction for every disciple—and for you. It is meant to help congregations develop new strategies that will help all members move toward becoming faithful disciples and leaders in the church of Jesus Christ. As we move on this journey, we have to be willing to sometimes lose our balance, sometimes take steps that are less than perfect. We may even fall along the way. But as we journey together, as we grow by the power of the Spirit, we will be more able to become what Jesus is calling us to be—*disciples*. We are “little Christs,” as Luther saw it; those who are willing to “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Goals for This Course

Through this course and by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will:

Engage the Word (especially in Luke and Acts) as it reveals how Jesus’ followers moved from being new partners to becoming mature disciples.

Hear and respond to Jesus’ invitation to follow and to move into a commitment of growth in discipleship.





Consider the implications of the invitation to strengthen the discipleship ministry of your congregation as it reaches out to and includes new believers.

Key Assumptions

Making disciples is the central mission of the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus' final instruction and command in the Gospel of Matthew is "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Every other ministry we attempt depends on our faithfulness in fulfilling this first command.

The Gospels tell the story of Jesus "making" disciples. Through his interaction with the first disciples, he gave us the model for how people are invited to become disciples and grow in their discipleship.

The way Jesus brought his followers into mature discipleship has several key components. Those six key components are: Followers, Learners, Ministers, Living Examples, Witnesses, and Leaders.

As we understand how Jesus called and led his first disciples, we can follow that journey to renew our own discipleship and use it as a model for how people are invited to grow in discipleship within our own faith communities. The goal of this study is to move us to action, Jesus has called us to "go and make disciples." The call is urgent. Jesus invites you to move forward toward maturity in your life as a disciple so that you can be all that Jesus meant you to be. As you live out your discipleship and as you work with others in your congregation, you can continue to invite others into the joyful journey of a growing relationship with Jesus.

Notes to the Leader

As leader, you play an important role in this study. You will plan the

sessions, make sure resources are available to participants, guide the discussion in order to cover the material, encourage participation by all, help summarize learning, and help carry through on any possible actions that may arise from your study. You do not need to be a pastor or a church professional to lead this study—but some previous experience in leading small group studies will be helpful.

Audience

The course is meant to help congregational leaders and members come together to study Scripture in order to grow in their own discipleship and to look at how people grow in discipleship in your congregation. Any group of youth and/or adults in the congregation would benefit from this study. The most productive study, however, might be done by those who have responsibility for discipleship in your congregation—consistory members, education and/or evangelism committee members, and others.

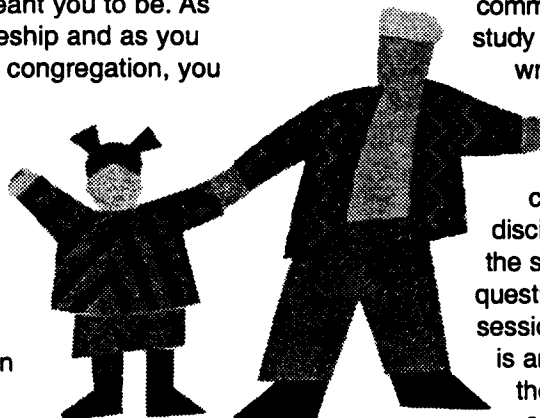
Preparation

Be sure to make a copy of this guide for each participant. Make these available before your first session and encourage all to read through the guide ahead of time to enrich your discussion.

You might assign one person to lead opening and closing prayers or worship.

You might assign a session to individual participants (or participants working in pairs). Encourage participants to become as familiar as possible with the material they have been assigned. They might do additional research

on the ideas in the session, using commentaries or other study resources. They might write or summarize their discoveries in their own words, interview people in the congregation about the discipleship issues raised in the session, write discussion questions relating to the session, or bring someone who is an "expert" in the area that the session covers in your class session.



Invite the pastor, congregational leaders, or others who could enrich your discussion, especially during specific sessions.

The Session Plan

This course is designed to be done in six consecutive sessions of sixty to ninety minutes each. If you are working with sixty minutes or less, you will find more material in each session than you can cover. Choose those items that seem most important for your discussion during your class session. Encourage participants to read over, think through, and discuss with others the remaining materials between the sessions.

Don't try to discuss every question. Choose those that seem important for your group. Don't press for "right" answers. Encourage all to express their insights and understanding.

Return often to the focus of the session, the key component of discipleship. Help participants come to better insight about how they are living out that discipleship component in their own lives.

Keep the tone of the study encouraging. The purpose of the study is not to shame people into acting more like a disciple or to make them feel guilty over failed attempts in the past. Through this study, participants should be encouraged to open themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit and to rededicate themselves to living as a disciple in ways that connect with their own lives. Not everyone will come to the same understandings, make the same commitments, or carry through in the same way. Our task is to encourage one another in our discipleship journey.

Each session follows this pattern:

Focus

The key theme for the session.

Prayer

Use the prayer suggestions or other petitions from the group. Take turns leading the prayers for each session.

Opening Discussion

The questions in this section will help start

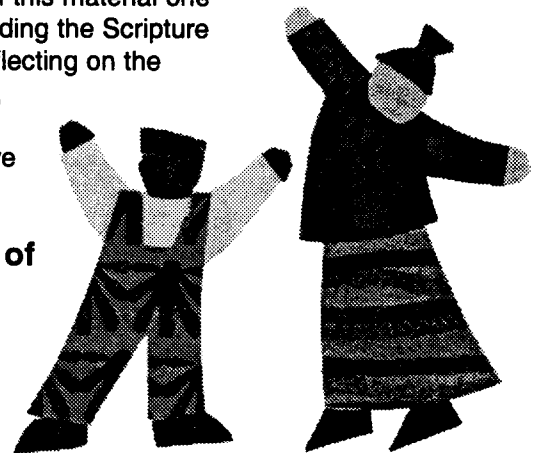
a conversation and move participants into the focus of the session. If you have more than six to eight participants, you may want to break into smaller groups to reflect on the questions. If time is short, you may want to select only one or two of the questions, or you may want to develop a question that is even more appropriate for your setting.

Searching Scripture

In this section you will find a way to study the Scripture passages at the heart of the lesson. Move through this material one section at a time, reading the Scripture texts, reading and reflecting on the material in this guide, and talking about the questions as you have time.

Key Component of Discipleship

By naming and defining each component, participants will be able to evaluate their own journeys as disciples. You might also use the definition to evaluate the way your congregation provides opportunities and encouragement for each person to grow as a disciple.



Moving toward Action

This section invites the question, "So what?" What difference does it make to know and understand this material? What needs to change in my own life? How will our study group change as a result of this discovery? What needs to change in our corporate ministry as a congregation to insure our ability to "make disciples" and lead others into this dynamic, life-transforming process?

Closing

Pray each week for the Holy Spirit to bring clarity of understanding to the process of discipleship. Pray for participants as individuals, the study group, and your congregation. Pray for courage and strength to make the needed changes that become obvious as a result of the study.



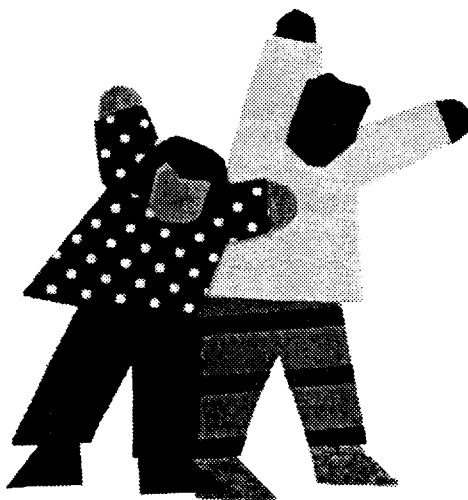
Prepare for the Next Session

Each week participants will be asked to read biblical material for the next session. They will also be asked to reflect on a carefully chosen quote by Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*.*

When the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate humanity from all human dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which affects the conscience. . .

But does this mean that we ignore the seriousness of his commands? Far from it. We can only achieve perfect liberty and enjoy fellowship with Jesus when his command, his call to absolute discipleship, is appreciated in its entirety (The Cost of Discipleship, Introduction, p. 37).

Note: Some of Bonhoeffer's quotes selected for this study have been altered to be more gender inclusive.



Session One—The Invited Become Followers

Focus

At its heart, discipleship is a series of relationships. The first relationship is the disciple's relationship with Jesus. The second focus is the relationship between disciples. The final relationship that must be included in any New Testament study of discipleship is the relationship of the disciples to others. Each relationship begins the same way: with an invitation and a response.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as we consider how you began a relationship with your first disciples, help us to remember how our relationship with you began. We thank you for counting us worthy to be your disciples today, and for placing us in this fellowship of disciples in this congregation and especially with those with whom we will share this study. We ask

that your Holy Spirit would be at work opening our hearts and minds so that we might understand clearly how you make disciples and continue to make disciples today. May your Word bring us new insight and renewal. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Opening Discussion

Talk about one or more of the following:

- What is your definition of "disciple"? What does the word mean to you right now?
- What does it mean to you to say that discipleship is, at heart, a relationship?
- Talk about your style of forming relationships: Are you a person who offers the first word or one who waits until another person comes to you?
- How do you handle rejection when you try to approach someone to begin a relationship and they do not respond?

Searching Scripture

Read Luke 5:5-11 and 27-29 aloud.

1. Jesus had been preaching to the crowds, but the process of discipleship begins with a focus on an individual. In the first case, the focus was on Peter, and in the second example it was Matthew. What is the significance of the fact that in each case Jesus makes the approach, rather than the other way around?
2. In his calling of Peter, Jesus first issues a command: "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." How do you think Peter received that command? Why do you think he did what Jesus commanded? In what way was this Peter's first step in becoming a disciple?
3. Peter expresses his sense of being overwhelmed by Jesus' attention and care. But Jesus prevents Peter's retreat with an even greater invitation. "Don't be afraid, from now on you will be catching people." What did Jesus mean by that invitation? What was the result of that invitation for Peter?
4. Jesus called Matthew (Levi), a hated Roman tax collector. Though he was ostracized by fellow Jews, he had received power and authority from the Romans. He had financial security and protection. Why is Matthew an unlikely candidate for an invitation?
5. Again, Jesus approaches. "Follow me," he says. What do you think Matthew might have thought as Jesus invited him? What did Matthew do?
6. Jesus did not call his disciples to come and merely observe, nor did he abandon them once a relationship was begun. He called them to walk and stay with him. Based on your study so far, what does it mean to be called and to live as a disciple?
7. The setting for the calling of the first disciples is one that develops over the first four



chapters in the Gospel of Luke. As you examine those chapters for next week, you will discover again the amazing things that occurred prior to Jesus calling his first followers. Watch for the following patterns as you read.

Jesus' model for calling disciples includes:

- Focusing on individuals.
- Approaching them directly.
- Conversation that is sensitive to their needs.
- Invitation or offer to follow.
- Opportunity for obedient response.
- Response of amazement and wonder that invites others into the journey.

What does this pattern say about Jesus and his disciples? What does it say about your call to be a disciple?

Key Component of Discipleship

Discipleship begins with Jesus calling us into a relationship with him, inviting us to be his disciples, and challenging us to respond with an act of obedience.

Jesus has offered this invitation—not to agree with an idea or set of teachings, not to join an institution or organization. Jesus invites disciples to himself. There is only one thing that attracts people—the one who issues the call—Jesus. Therefore, the call of Jesus is first and foremost an exclusive attachment to Jesus. How do we as individuals and as a congregation offer that call?

The call to discipleship is a call to a relationship with the living Christ. The call is freely given and the response is an act of faith. Faith is described in these texts as a matter of taking, by the power of the Spirit, the first steps of obedience in following Jesus. The response is the evidence of faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "Unless a definite step is demanded, the call vanishes into thin air and if people imagine that they can follow Jesus without taking this step, they are deluding themselves like fanatics." Faith is inseparable from obedience. Whenever the call is made and the response is one of obedience, the Spirit has worked. What does the close connection between faith and obedience reveal about your faith life? What does it mean for the way the invitation is offered to others through you and through your congregation? What does it mean to you to live the "obedience of faith"?

Moving toward Action

Do or discuss one or more of the following:

- Tell how you received the call from Jesus. What did that call have to do with your baptism? Your confirmation promise?

What was personal about the call?

- How do you show obedience to Jesus in your life? How can others tell you are following Jesus now?
- How do we offer invitations to other people to meet Jesus?
- Talk about the difference between inviting people to join an institution and the invitation to a relationship with Jesus.
- How are new disciples called, invited, supported, and assisted in their relationship with Jesus and on their journey as disciples in your congregation? What might be done to make that invitation and support more effective?

Closing This Session

Those who are hearing Jesus' call to follow him for the first time might make a commitment to respond to that call through prayer and by continuing to study the Word. Members of the group might pray for and lay hands on those making this commitment and promise to be with them throughout the study. Others could share and pray for help with things in their lives that need to change as they move toward mature discipleship.

Preparing for the Next Session

Read Luke chapters 1-8. Think about the effect created by Jesus' presence, teaching, and action. Ask for volunteers to be responsible for the opening and closing prayers for the next session.

The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciples is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 57).

Session Two—Followers Become Learners

Focus

Disciples mature through basic training—a time for learning the essentials. Jesus is an available and transparent leader. Before disciples can know who they are they need to know who Jesus is. Only then are they equipped to understand his mission, purpose, methods, and expectations.

Prayer

Pray for wisdom and insight, an openness to learning, growing, and being renewed in your relationship with Jesus. Pray for a new sense of personal identity as a disciple of Jesus. Pray for caring attitudes among those who are studying this material together. Pray for your congregation, that others would be

open to becoming a congregation committed to a discipleship model for ministry.

Opening Discussion

Describe your most fulfilling experience in working on a team. How would you describe your relationship with the leader?

- What do you count on a leader to do?
- How important are the accomplishments of a leader in determining your level of commitment to a cause?
- What are the benefits of a close, personal relationship with a leader? What can be the downside of that relationship?

Searching Scripture

Read Luke 9:18-20 aloud.

1. The disciples were at hand as Jesus taught the large crowd that had been following him. They had just experienced the feeding of the five thousand with the five loaves and two fish they watched him bless. What do you think the crowds were talking about after the feeding? What might they have been saying about Jesus?
2. After a time of prayer, Jesus asks the disciples a leading question: "Who do the crowds say that I am?" What are their answers?
3. Jesus asks, "But what about you? Who do you say that I am?" Why is that the single most important question a disciple of Jesus can answer? How would you answer that question? Where would your answer come from?
4. We will look at what the Word reveals concerning the identify of Jesus. (You might divide into smaller discovery teams to share the exploration of these fourteen biblical references.) The question to be answered, after investigating each text, is: "What does this tell us about who Jesus is?" Write your responses and share them with the group.

Luke 1:30-33	Announcement of his birth (<i>Who is he?</i>)
Luke 2:8-12	Proclamation to the shepherds (<i>Who is he?</i>)
Luke 3:21-22	A voice at his baptism (<i>Who is he?</i>)
Luke 4:13	Confronting evil (<i>Who is he able to face and resist?</i>)
Luke 4:17-21	A prophecy (<i>Who does Jesus claim to be?</i>)
Luke 4:34-37	A word from the demons (<i>Who do they say he is?</i>)
Luke 5:18-26	He has power to heal and forgive (<i>Who can do that?</i>)
Luke 6:5	He is Lord of the Sabbath (<i>Who is he?</i>)
Luke 6:20-49	The teaching about the kingdom (<i>What is life like in the kingdom of God?</i>)
Luke 7:11-17	His Word brings life to the dead (<i>Who is he?</i>)
Luke 7:40-50	<i>What does Jesus say about forgiveness and faith?</i>
Luke 8:4-15	<i>How are we to live a productive life?</i>
Luke 8:21	<i>What does Jesus expect of those who are close to him?</i>
Luke 8:22-25	<i>Who is able to stop the winds and the waves?</i>



Key Component of Discipleship

Disciples learn the basics.

1. The disciples begin to learn, through experience and explanation, who Jesus is and the nature of his mission—a mission that includes every disciple. Jesus deepened the relationship with his disciples by revealing to them the truth of his identity. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. He is “God with us.” How has your understanding of who Jesus is deepened over time? What is the significance of being able to say that Jesus is God’s Messiah?

2. All who follow Jesus as a disciple need to learn the basics. Only by knowing who Jesus is can we accept his power and his authority. Once we know and accept who Jesus is, we can grow in our ability to trust and follow him. What does our need to know Jesus and his power have to do with our need to study the Word? How do you as an individual and we as a congregation engage in “basic training”? What could be strengthened or revitalized personally?; corporately?

3. The basics of discipleship offer us a new view of reality. Through the process of learning and observing, disciples begin to glimpse what Jesus was revealing: the kingdom of God. What does that new reality have to do with our lives right now?

4. In accepting this new view of life, we are also leaving something else behind. It is the way we used to view life. This is the beginning of the process of exchanging one view of reality for another. It should come as no surprise that such a change will also include changes in behavior, attitude, habits, self-understanding, motives, etc. What are some of those changes as you experience them?

5. Luther expressed the basics in this way: “Christ Alone,” “Word Alone,” “Faith Alone,” and “Grace Alone.” What do those phrases mean to you? Why are they important as we seek to know who Jesus is and who we are as disciples?

Moving toward Action

Talk about one or more of the following:

- What implications do the basics of discipleship have for your life and the life of your congregation?

- How confident can you be about your basic training? Did you miss some of the fundamentals? What? How can you “catch up”?

- How well are members of our congregation trained in the basics of discipleship? What classes do we offer to review the basics?

- What opportunities for learning do we offer? What groups are being served? Which are being missed? How can we provide more opportunities to learn?

- What kind of learning opportunities do we offer for those new to the congregation or those new to the faith? What might they be looking for? What more could we do?

Closing This Session

Thank God for calling you to be Jesus’ disciples. Give thanks for the opportunity this study offers to grow and be strengthened in your faith. Invite those who have come to new insights to share them. Let those who may be struggling or who have some confusion ask for support and openness to the teaching and guidance of the Spirit. Pray for the Spirit’s strength to carry through on the changes you think Jesus is inviting you to consider for your congregation as you invite and teach new disciples.

Preparing for the Next Session

Read chapters 9-10 in the Gospel of Luke. Make a list of all the ministries which you are aware of that are currently underway in your congregation. Ask for volunteers to lead the prayers for the next session.

The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus), . . . out of the realm of the finite (which is in truth infinite) into the real of infinite possibilities (which is the one liberating reality) (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 58).

Session Three—Learners Become Ministers

Focus

The disciples were given basic training by knowing Jesus and understanding his mission. The vision of the kingdom of God Jesus presented, and Jesus' teaching about the nature of that kingdom, became real and tangible for the disciples as they observed his ministry. Then Jesus sent the disciples out to do exactly what he was doing. The process is the same for Jesus' present-day disciples.

Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit to be present and to open your hearts and minds so you can receive new insights and understandings. Encourage each other to give the Holy Spirit access to your will so you will also be open to new ways of acting, doing, and speaking. Give thanks for each of the ministries of your congregation. Give thanks for the people

involved in offering those ministries and those who are served. Ask for guidance to strengthen existing ministries and for opportunities to begin new ministries that will reach even more people.

Opening Discussion

Talk about the following:

- Tell about a time when you participated in a service project or helping experience. What did you do? How were you mentored? Who did it help? Why was it meaningful for you?
- What authority or power did you have to accomplish your goal? How did you receive that authority? Did you know the people you were helping?
- How important is it for you to make a difference in this world? When you see people in need what happens to your heart? What happens to your relationships with the people with whom you are working?

Searching Scripture

Read Luke 9:1-6 and Luke 10:1-20 aloud.

1. Jesus had been modeling ministry for the disciples. At first they were passive observers. Yet they were not observing from a distance. They were close enough to see and hear Jesus' method and the results as he preached, taught, healed, and performed miracles. The revealing of his power was for the purpose of giving it away. What do you think caused the disciples to stay with Jesus over the years of his ministry?
2. Jesus calls his disciples together and then gives them power to heal, to drive out demons, and to preach. What were the disciples to do with the power or authority Jesus gave them?
3. They are given specific instructions for this mission. The one giving the power and authority also sets the boundaries. What are the boundaries? Why are they helpful?
4. Having all they needed, the disciples responded obediently. They went out and preached and healed. As they did so, they experienced the power of Jesus they had observed in him. Now they were touching the lives of people with his power. Through them, people heard about the kingdom of God and began to experience God's reign in Jesus. How do you think the disciples were received?
5. The disciples stayed together, but moved from place to place just as Jesus had directed them. Why was their report back to Jesus a cause for celebration?
6. In Luke 10:1-20, Jesus increases the number of disciples who are on the mission. What was that mission? How was Jesus a model for that mission? Why do the seventy-two return filled with joy?
7. Notice that Jesus' model for empowering people for ministry includes:
 - Giving people power, authority, and promise
 - Sending them with a purpose
 - Setting boundaries for the mission



As they carry out the mission, the disciples:

- Experience the power of Jesus through them to others
- Stay together
- Report and celebrate the results

What does that model say about the way we are to carry out mission both individually and as a congregation?

Key Component of Discipleship

Jesus sends his disciples out to do ministry in his name. The power and authority of Jesus they observed is now given to them.

1. Another change occurs in the life of the disciples as they make the transition from observing Jesus and his ministry to participating in that ministry. Certainly their experiences and learning helped them mature in their faith in Jesus. Beyond that, they also grew in their relationships with one another. What evidence of that growing relationship do you see?

2. The disciples also grow in their relationships with those outside their group. Though it would have been easy to remain insiders and observers, Jesus sends them out to interact with others. They are called to become doers of the Word and not hearers only. Had Jesus asked if they thought they were ready for this next step, how do you think they would have responded? It was by following obediently that they learned the greatest lessons. What does that truth say about our growth as disciples?

3. The power of Jesus for healing, renewing, and changing lives is available to every disciple today. It is to be used for the same purpose—to reach others with the gospel: to heal lives, to change circumstances, and to overcome evil. Jesus brings the Spirit into the life of every disciple. What is the purpose of that indwelling Spirit? How does the Spirit ready us for the mission?

4. Today, the need for healing and proclamation is just as great as it was when Jesus sent out those first disciples. Ministry with power happens when we are sent out to address the needs of others. If Jesus were standing here today, where would he be sending you and your congregation to preach, teach, and heal?

Moving toward Action

Do or discuss one or more of the following:

- In what ministries have you observed the power of Jesus at work in your congregation or in the larger Christian community?
- How many ministries in your congregation are designed to reach out to others? What percentage of your congregation is actively involved in those ministries? How many are still in the stands, watching?
- How do we heal and proclaim today? Who are the people in your community who need healing and need to hear the gospel of Jesus? What are their hurts and illnesses?
- How do you begin new ministries? How can people be encouraged to move from watching from the stands to action? How can they be empowered, given authority, trained, sent, and encouraged, and then report and celebrate the results?
- Design a team of disciples and a method to address the concerns of a group of people in your community who need your care. Who could you put on the team? How does Jesus equip you for that ministry? What gifts does he give?

Closing This Session

Those who may have been on the sidelines are invited to take action. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has been prompting you to get involved in a particular ministry. Pray for those who choose to be involved in ministry. Pray for new ministries designed to reach new people with the love of Jesus and the good news of his gospel. Pray for obedient hearts among the members of your congregation and a willingness to respond to Jesus' call to go and do ministry in his name. Pray for a vision of ministry among your leadership that affirms the growth and development of new ministries for the purpose of reaching new people. Give

thanks for all you have received from Jesus during this study.

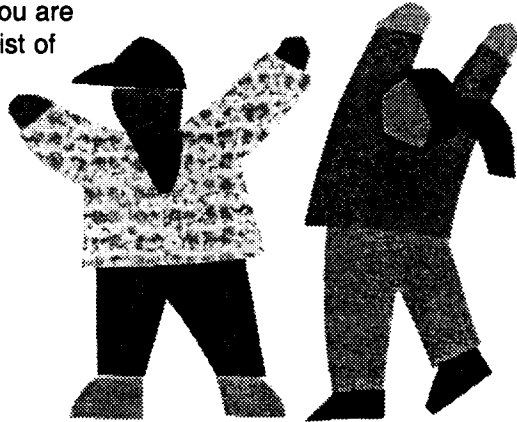
Preparing for the Next Session

Reread chapters 9-10, and read chapters 11-14 in the Gospel of Luke. Think about what you find most challenging in the Scripture passages you are reading and make a list of those challenges. Think about the most important role models in your life.

Come prepared to identify them and discuss why they have had such a positive impact on your life.

The idea of a situation in which faith is possible is only a way of stating the facts of a case in which the following two propositions hold good and are equally true: only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.

(The Cost of Discipleship, p. 63)





Session Four—Ministers Become Living Examples

Focus

Disciples who have experienced the power of Jesus at work through them for the sake of others are challenged to accept that same power to make needed changes in their own lives. These personal changes flow from a relationship with Jesus that continues to deepen and grow more intimate. Disciples are challenged to integrate their relationship to Jesus into every aspect of their lives—a commitment that involves dedication to new faith practices.

Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit to open your hearts and minds to insight and wisdom. Pray for changed wills and new behaviors that give expression to a growing commitment to Jesus. Pray for the relationship with Jesus to be renewed and deepened. Give thanks for spiritually mature people in your congregation. Ask the Spirit to teach you through the example of their visible commitment and lifestyle.

Searching Scripture

Read Luke 9:18-26 and 46-62 aloud.

1. Only by knowing Jesus intimately, understanding who he is, observing the power of his love to transform lives, and allowing his love to flow through our lives in ministry to others are we prepared for the rest of the story. Jesus tells his disciples first what he will experience: suffering, rejection, death, and then resurrection. The obvious question is, if that is what is in store for him, what should his disciples expect? What does it mean to you to “bear a cross”? How does “bearing the cross” fit with today’s expectations of the “good life”?
2. Jesus invited his followers to be bold in their proclamation of who he is. As they followed him, they were introduced into the kingdom of God. Jesus taught them about the nature and characteristics of that kingdom. The question was, were they ready to live in the greater reality of that kingdom? The world view of this kingdom of God is dramatically different from our own. How is Jesus’ definition of “greatness” different? How is competition handled in the kingdom? What do those differences mean to us as we seek to live in Jesus’ kingdom?
3. Choose other portions of this session’s reading that also demonstrate the more difficult and demanding aspects of being a disciple. How is living in the kingdom different from living in the world?
4. What does it mean to say that who we are as disciples is demonstrated by how we live? How do these texts demonstrate that truth? What does it mean for you to live as a “visible” disciple of Jesus? In what way can that be a cross? In what way is it a privilege?

Opening Discussion

Talk about one or more of the following:

- Tell about a project you took part in that grew as it was being completed—one change led to additional changes. What was the project and what were the results?
- Tell about a project you began and realized that the project had quickly exceeded your expertise. What did you do then? Did you call in the experts to finish it for you, or find some other way to increase your skill?
- Name those who are or have been important examples or role models for your life? Why do you respect them and desire to follow their example? What qualities do they possess?
- What was the most challenging thing you have ever been asked to do as a disciple of Jesus? How did you deal with that challenge?
- Is there a difference between the way Jesus challenged his followers and the way we challenge disciples today? How would you describe that difference?

Key Component of Discipleship

The disciples become living examples and role models as they grow in their relationship with Jesus.

1. Jesus challenges his disciples with a new view of reality called the kingdom of God. The invitation is to live in the reality of his kingdom now. As disciples accept the deeper demands of this call, their lives are completely transformed and become integrated into a wholeness that is possible only through Jesus. This freedom is only through obedience to Jesus and all his commands. Such a transformed life becomes a model for others. What does the transformed life mean to you? In what way have you been a model for others? How have others been a model for you?

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "To be conformed to the image of Christ is not an ideal to be striven after. It is not as though we had to imitate him as well as we could. We cannot transform ourselves into his image; it is rather the form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19), and to be manifested in us. Christ's work in us is not finished until he has perfected his own form in us. We must be assimilated to the form of Christ in its entirety, at the form of Christ incarnate, crucified, and glorified" (*Cost of Discipleship*, p. 301). How can an intentional focus on transformation best happen in your congregation? What do small groups and the study of the Word have to do with that transformation?

3. There are seven major "faith practices" that are a part of the call to discipleship. They are important to look at here because they are essential lifestyle practices of the transformed disciple.

Pray. This is the foundation for transformation because it is the way to a close and growing relationship with Jesus.

Study. Immersion in the Word opens the disciple to the work of the Spirit through the Word—a work that offers direction and challenge for the disciple's way.

Worship. Every disciple seeks to be nurtured through regular encounters with God. Worship happens both within the community of faith and in one's private devotional life.

Invite. Disciples live out their commitment

to give away what they have received from Jesus by inviting others to come, follow, learn, and become involved in ministry.

Encourage. Disciples care for one another by offering spiritual encouragement to others.

Serve. As disciples follow Jesus, they are forced out into the world to address the hurts of others with the power of God's love and compassion.

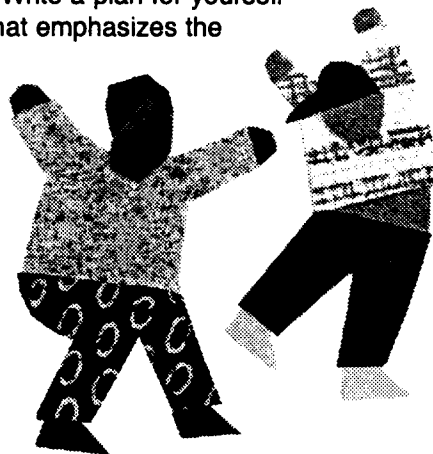
Give. Disciples give the gifts they have received. As we give for the sake of Jesus and his kingdom, we learn to give up one reality and embrace the reality of the kingdom. Disciples at this point can distinguish the difference between the worldview that Jesus offers and their own western, materialistic, individualistic, rational worldview with all its self-seeking values, and more intentionally embrace the one Jesus offers.

How are these practices evident in your life? How have they shaped you? How have they opened you to the work of the Spirit? How can you rededicate yourself to a lifestyle and worldview that comes from your relationship to Jesus?

Moving toward Action

Do or discuss one or more of the following:

- Identify those in your congregation who demonstrate their discipleship in the practices mentioned above. How can you make use of these spiritually mature disciples as mentors and teachers?
- Write a plan for yourself that emphasizes the





spiritual disciplines: prayer, study, worship, service, giving, inviting, and encouraging. Share your plan with others.

- List your barriers to living the life of a disciple. Share the list with one or two others. Talk about where you can find support and assistance.
- Describe the major differences between our cultural worldview and a biblical or kingdom worldview? How does that difference most affect you?
- Describe your own experience with “cross bearing” and “self denial.” In what ways has your experience with these transformed you as you have followed Jesus? How has this experience been a witness to others?
- What kind of discipleship training and support do you or could you offer in your congregation? Who would lead it and who would be willing to participate? How might you be a part of that learning and growth?



Closing This Session

Pray for the spiritual growth of your congregation. Let the Holy Spirit give you a vision for what life might be like in your congregation with the majority of your people reaching this level of spiritual maturity. Sense both the excitement and the challenges of this part of Jesus’ plan of discipleship. Pray that Jesus will prepare the hearts of people in your congregation to accept this challenge.

Preparing for the Next Session

Read Luke chapter 15 through Acts chapter 2. In these chapters, look for Jesus’ passionate concern for those who do not know him or his love. Think about the most important good news we have as Christians to share. Briefly write down your understanding of that good news. Try to find ways to share that good news with others. Bring your written statements to the next session to share.

The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship, we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. When Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die. But if we lose our lives in his service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives again in the fellowship of the cross with Christ (The Cost of Discipleship, pp. 89, 91).

Session Five—Living Examples Become Witnesses

Focus

Disciples who are living transformed lives are equipped to be powerful witnesses. They reach out to others in their community and support the outreach of the church to the world. Disciples of Jesus understand that Jesus had a heart for reaching out to those who have not been touched, healed, or transformed by the power of his love and salvation.

Prayer

Join in a prayer in which all take a part. Participants might give thanks for one way in which they have grown as disciples. They might also ask for the one thing they believe they need most for continued growth as a disciple. Take time to remember unreached people in your own family, among your friends, and in your neighborhood, city, state, nation, and world. Be bold enough to ask the

Spirit for a heart transplant: ask that Jesus' heart for reaching people would be planted in yours.

Opening Discussion

Talk about one or more of the following:

- Share your written statements about the good news of Jesus. What does each add? How can your statements be used to witness?
- What is a witness? In the New Testament, the word translated as witness is *martyros*. What does witnessing have to do with being a martyr? Is it easier to be a witness today than it was in biblical times? Why or why not?
- How do you build a relationship with another person? What steps can you identify? What does relationship-building have to do with witnessing?

Searching Scripture

Read Luke 24:44-49 and Acts 1:8, 2:1-6, 22-47.

1. Tell about some examples of Jesus' passionate concern for reaching people—people like the disciples, those who were ill, others. The indication of Jesus' most passionate concern for reaching people is his death on the cross. Why is that death the most profound statement of the value Jesus places on each person's life?
2. Every person is of infinite worth and value. Jesus' death marks that value, and his resurrection marks his unswerving purpose to reach the world. Nothing is able to stop his passion to reach every person in the world, nothing in life and nothing in death. What does it mean to you to say that Jesus has offered himself for you? What good news does that give you to tell?
3. Jesus' instructions to the first disciples occurred after the resurrection. Notice the process he recommends. The disciples were to begin right where they were. Then they were to move into more difficult surroundings. He calls them to move farther and farther away from their starting point. The ultimate goal is clear. They are to reach the entire world. How might Jesus give that command to us today?
4. However, the disciples are not to make the first move until they have received more power. Jesus instructs them to stay together in the city until the one he promised to send, the Holy Spirit, has come. In the first chapter of Acts (the continuation of the Gospel of Luke), Jesus repeats his instructions just prior to his ascension. What did the disciples need before they would be ready to witness? How did Pentecost equip them for that mission?
5. Once the people heard, they began to ask an important question, "What does this mean?" The disciples witnessed; they told the truth about Jesus. By the power of the Spirit, the people responded. They were ready to take the next step. Read Acts 2:37-41 again. What does Peter's response mean for our witnessing? How is that response different from "inviting people to church"? What does it mean to be "ready" to witness in this way?



6. Peter's sermon is effective because it answers key questions: Who is Jesus? What has he done? Why do you need what only he can give? How can people receive what he offers? What can we learn about effective witness from Peter's approach?
7. God's free gift of salvation is already complete and offered to all. The steps in that offering were clearly marked by the disciples: Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Then receive the second gift—the Holy Spirit. In this way the disciples followed Jesus' example. They gave away what they had just received. Again, what can we learn about sharing the gospel from the example of the disciples?
8. The disciples held onto the new followers by taking them to the next step. They began to teach them. They included them in fellowship events so they could model the lifestyle and values of disciples. They kept them close enough so they could observe the power of Jesus at work through his disciples as they loved and cared for people. The disciples prayed for them. What does their example mean for how we do evangelism in our congregation?

Key Components of Discipleship

Disciples are committed to local and world evangelization.

1. Each disciple has a personal testimony to offer as a result of knowing and following Jesus. Each disciple has a story to tell of his/her relationship with Jesus. Each story is similar and unique at the same time. Each one is a witness to the love Jesus offered. Each disciple's life is a witness to the difference that relationship with Jesus has made. What is your story to tell? How can you share your story?

2. Now or at home, take time to put into words the experience of knowing Jesus and what it means to follow him. Think through or write out a personal way to share the gospel—a way that includes the essential ingredients of the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. Then seek to spend some time with nonbelievers. Look for ways to tell your story. Bring your experiences back to the next session with you.

3. Evangelism is based on developing a relationship with a person in the name of Jesus. Those who witness don't simply offer an idea about Jesus and then leave hearers alone. An ongoing relationship helps to insure that the new believer becomes a mature disciple, capable of evangelizing others. How can your congregation be more effective in reaching others and staying with them as they grow in their faith?

4. Local evangelism is important, but it is also to be coupled with the rest of Jesus' command. Jesus' concern was for every person in the entire

world. The mission he gave us was to reach the world. How do you and your congregation reach the world? What more can you do to make that outreach effective?

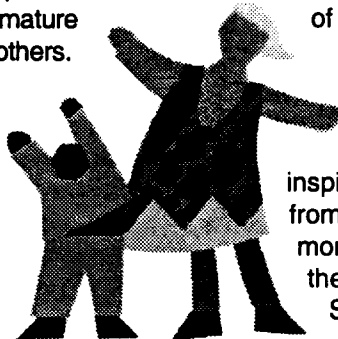
Moving toward Action

Do or discuss one or more of the following:

- Tell about an experience when you talked openly with someone about your faith. What was the result of that sharing? What did you learn?
- What training in evangelism have you received? What was helpful about that training? How can training be offered to more members of your congregation?
- Do you know any missionaries currently serving in other countries? Share some stories of those missionaries.
- What are the next steps you need to take as a disciple to become a more effective witness? How can you work together to take those steps? What are the next steps your congregation needs to take to become more effective in witnessing? How can you be a part of those steps?

Closing This Session

Offer thanks for specific learnings that seem to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Ask for gifts from the Spirit that you need to be more effective evangelists. Pray for the congregation and ask the Holy Spirit to ignite a flame in the heart of each person for reaching those



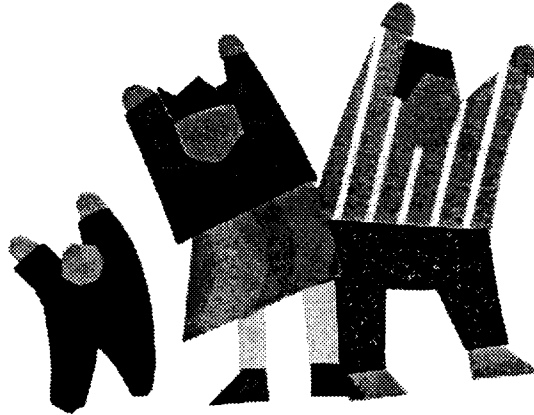
who have not heard or have not come to follow Jesus. Ask for the conviction and the strength to accomplish that mission in the name of Jesus.

Preparing for the Next Session

Read from Acts 3 through to the end of the book of Acts. Examine these chapters with a focus on the disciples and what they were doing. How would you describe their actions?

Behold I send you...It is in the strict sense of the word, a mission. With this the Lord promises them his abiding presence, even when they find themselves as sheep among wolves, defenseless, powerless, sore pressed, and beset with great danger.

Nothing can happen to them without Jesus knowing it (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 214).





Session Six—Disciples Become Leaders

Focus

Jesus' goal in training his first followers as disciples became clear following his death, resurrection, and ascension, and the Pentecost events. The disciples had been trained to be the leaders of his church. Their mission was to train and equip others for leadership in the church. This is God's method for reaching the world—disciples as leaders train other leaders who, in turn, carry on the mission.

Prayer

After a quiet time to focus on your hopes and needs, take turns offering words of thanksgiving as you begin. Pray once more for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to open hearts and minds so that all will be ready to learn and grow. Pray for hearts open to be redirected into living as disciples—as leaders bearing the responsibility and the challenge to lead others.

Searching Scripture

Read Acts 6:1-15 aloud.

1. Even without the physical presence of Jesus, the disciples continued to function as if he were present. They had become leaders and were prepared for this task because of the training Jesus had provided. They were leading by their example even as Jesus had led them by his example. Share some examples from your reading of the ways in which the disciples continued to do what they had learned from Jesus: preach, teach, and heal.
2. The disciples were forced to handle new problems, like what to do with three thousand new believers. They were forced to solve problems and deal with hostile governments and many complaints from their own community of disciples. They devised a plan to deal with the problem of the distribution of food. What did the plan show about their priorities?
3. The disciples sought specific qualities in those who would be leaders. The others accepted the plan and offered a list of candidates. The first disciples prayed and laid hands on those chosen to empower them for this work. What can we learn from this example about selecting leaders?
4. These disciples deal with persecution, adversity, change, and an expanding church by equipping and sending others. This same group of disciples sent Paul on the first missionary journey. What does their example mean for us as we deal with problems? As we seek and train leaders? What outcome can we expect?

Opening Discussion

Talk about one or more of the following:

- Tell about a time when you were asked to lead. How would you describe that experience? What was the outcome? What did you learn about yourself?

About leadership?

- Describe the qualities of a leader you would be willing to follow. What do those qualities mean for us as leaders?

- List some of the dangers to consider when you accept any leadership role. What kind of help can overcome these dangers or barriers?

- Some people say we have a "leadership crisis" in the church today. Agree? Disagree? Why? What might be some solutions?

Key Components of Discipleship

God's plan, according to the model we have received from Jesus, is that disciples are trained to lead his church. The call to discipleship is a call to leadership.

1. What has happened in the church? Why haven't we produced servant leaders who are making a difference in the world? George Barna, in his book *The Second Coming of the Church*, lists five thought-provoking reasons:

- First, millions of Christians view transformation in Christ as a one-time solution to a "crisis" rather than a lifelong process. Jesus has become one more quick fix for our problems.
- Second, and perhaps as a consequence, many believers stop "growing in their faith." Instead of measuring our life against God's standards, we compare ourselves to others and take consolation in being a little better than the next person.
- Third, many Christians have developed a distorted understanding of what constitutes purposeful or successful living. When asked to describe the ends they live for, the top items most American Christians reported were good health, a successful career, a comfortable lifestyle, and a functional family. The average Christian assumes that when we are happy, God is happy.
- Fourth, a large majority of Christians contend that the true meaning of our earthly existence is simply to enjoy life and reap as much fulfillment as we can from our daily pursuits. God provides blessings for the purpose of making us happy. Only a few Christians would say that we are blessed so we can be a blessing to others.
- Finally, Christians are not prepared to fight the good fight of faith. We find greater purpose in living by trying to avoid all struggle. We are products of a culture that values achievement and comfort over sacrifice and suffering. When hardships come we seek deliverance rather than looking for ways to serve others who are

immersed in even more difficult situations (p. 123-124).

What evidence of these conclusions have you seen?

2. One of the images Jesus used in training his disciples was that of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd cares for the sheep and is willing to risk it all for their sake. *What does it mean to you to see Jesus as the Good Shepherd? What does it mean to be called into that kind of servant leadership?*

3. There are several characteristics of the servant leader that come from the early church. Servant leaders are:

Called. We are servants first. It is the one who has authority over us that has called us to do this work. The calling is not to position or title, but to put the best interest of another ahead of self.

Caring. Disciples listen and understand. The purpose of such listening is not to criticize, judge, and condemn. We listen in a way that offers acceptance so that we can get close enough to demonstrate the love of Jesus.

Compassionate. Disciples are willing to put themselves in the place of another person. The goal is to care enough to help them find hope, gain wisdom, and receive a new life-giving vision.

Compelling. Disciples can translate needs into goals in a way that demonstrates Jesus' authority. Some people will follow a person, but they will not be transformed until they are convinced, persuaded, and compelled to embrace a new direction for themselves.

According to these characteristics, what is the difference between the way the church defines leaders and the way the world defines them? Why the difference? What difference do the right kind of leaders make in the church? In the world?

4. Without Spirit-filled and directed leaders (both lay leaders and professionals), the church cannot succeed. *Why? Why is*



leadership so critical? What can we do to find and nurture effective and in-spirited leaders? How can we continue to grow leaders?

Moving toward Action

Do or discuss one or more of the following:

- How do we individually and as a congregation care for our existing leaders? How can we equip and support them more effectively?
- How can we be open to receive new leaders? How can we continue to bring in, train, and support new leaders?
- List the opportunities for leadership in your congregation. How can you do a better job of getting the right people into positions of leadership? You might use a "spiritual gifts" inventory as a first step.
- Write an answer to these questions: Am I praying daily for our leaders? Do I see the way that the Spirit is calling me to become a leader? How can I move toward that calling?
- Write a plan for your own growth as a disciple and as a leader in the congregation. What will you do in the areas of prayer, study, worship, witnessing, encouraging, serving, and giving as a way to move toward your goal? What will the promises of Jesus and the guidance of the Spirit have to do with your plan? Share your plan with others, if you are willing. Consider ritually offering your plans to God as part of the offering during a public worship service of your congregation.

Closing This Session

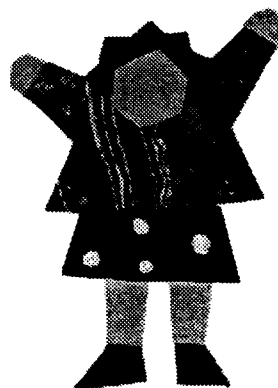
Reflect on some of the ways you have been changed or challenged as a result of this study. Offer petitions of thanksgiving for that growth. Pray for wisdom and strength to begin to make changes in the way ministry happens in your congregation so that it can be even more effective in making disciples. Pray for openness in your congregation to receive these ideas and for conviction to work toward that end.

Preparing for the Next Session

The end of this study simply represents another beginning: an ongoing commitment to grow in faith and faith practice. Covenant to continue together as a small group or look for ways to become involved in other small groups or studies in your congregation. Review the resources at the end of this section to discover possibilities for ongoing study and growth.

The only person who has the right to say that he or she is justified by grace alone is the person who has left all to follow Christ; such a person knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace (The Cost of Discipleship, p. 55).

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So That We Can Know: A Bible Study on God's Call to Lifelong Learning

by the Rev. Michael Vandenberg
Pastor of Christ Community Church (RCA) in St. Albert, Alberta

Some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-12

Introduction

It seems that in our current age we have lost the desire to learn. To seek personal gain that involves learning or education—that we can do. To consider programs of learning that will result in higher pay, better rewards, advancement of position, etc.—we can fill those classrooms. But to learn for the sake of learning—that seems to be the lost art.

If that is true, we have lost a key theme of Scripture. The Bible calls us to study, to show ourselves approved before God. It advocates knowledge of the world around us, in all its varied aspects. It invites youth and adults to come to know not only the physical world, but also the world of history, philosophy, and faith, even science. To be a student of the Bible is to become a student of life.

This is one of the main reasons that the church was the first source for education in society. Our own denomination has an illustrious history of education: building colleges, seminaries, even some of the first elementary and secondary schools in North America. These were established with the idea that learning should take place all of our lives; that the God that we serve wants us to know him and his creation.

One of the great thinkers of the modern church was John Calvin. "Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives," he wrote. Just as we keep our bodies in sound physical condition, so we are encouraged to stay spiritually fit. Learning God's Word, developing spiritual disciplines, avoiding lax educational behaviors—these

are as essential to our health and well-being as eating the right food, avoiding bad habits, and getting plenty of exercise. Just as the preaching of the Word brings us into the presence of God, so the teaching of God's Word brings that presence within us.

Goals and Purposes

This Bible study is intended for use at consistory meetings, meetings of your education committees or youth committees, or wherever leaders in the congregation gather. The study can be done in one 45-60 minute session or, in its four sections, as shorter, opening devotions for a series of monthly or regular meetings.

This study is not meant to be a comprehensive study of a ministry of Christian education; rather, let it be a starting point in your church's effort to take seriously its role in the education and discipleship of its members. Allow it to lead you into a deeper understanding of God's calling to teach and learn.

Process for Teaching

Each of the four sections of the study is built around a short reading and appropriate biblical texts, with a series of study and discussion questions provided. Approach each section by reading aloud both the Bible passage and the short text. Then proceed to the set of discussion questions. There are a variety of questions and settings for those questions, too many for even an hour-long study. Use what seems most appropriate for your context and group.



As you go through this study, please note and preserve any suggestions that arise from your discussions. Those remarks, though seemingly random today, can be the seeds for future ministry.

Materials Needed

Please have Bibles, newspaper or

overhead transparencies, markers, and a supply of different colored post-it notes available and ready to use. In addition, each participant should have pen and paper to record answers to certain questions.

The sessions are laid out so that each one can be easily copied and distributed to all participants.

Additional Biblical Themes for Study

You may want to continue your study of biblical themes related to education beyond the four sections of this study. Here are some key texts and themes that you could use for further study:

Church's Preaching and Teaching: Ephesians 4:12

Enlighten the Mind: Luke 1:17; Malachi 4:5-6

God Revealed in His Teachings: Psalm 42:2

Teaching: Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11

Leadership: Romans 12

Teaching the Law: 2 Corinthians 4:6

Teaching the Word of God: the Heidelberg Catechism, questions 19, 21, 65, 91



Section One—Our Call to Education

A Biblical Passage

1 Peter 2:9-10

A Short Reading

In her book, *Equipping the Saints*, Sara Covin Juengst cites that a call to ministry is one shared by all believers, both in the Old Testament and in the New. She writes, "The Old Testament makes clear that God's call extended to the entire community of the

chosen people. Being called was a part of the covenant relationship. To be an Israelite meant to be subject to that call...God called, and the people responded to that call not out of duty, but out of a sense of unity and belonging. They were called to be God's people...in the New Testament, the reality is twofold: 1) all Christians are called into ministry by virtue of their baptisms, and 2) the work of the kingdom is everyone's task."

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be God's chosen people? Is it significant that this is phrased always in the plural, that is, that we are chosen in community with others? Ask for ideas and responses to those questions; record, but do not discuss heavily, those responses.
2. The biblical witness, Juengst states, is that each person has received unique gifts and abilities from God, along with the expectation that those gifts will be utilized in the community of faith. We call this ministry. This exercise helps people look at their own gifts as ministry:
 - With a partner, describe the things you like to do. What are the things you do well?
 - When both have shared, have each person tell the other things he or she feels the other does well.
 - Write down two or three ways that the skills, talents, and interests you and your partner have observed in you could be used in the context of the church community in some form of ministry. Share this with your partner; give one another suggestions.
3. As members and leaders within the church, we have each taken vows before the congregation, in baptism and profession of faith, to "seek God's guidance...as you provide with Christian love and nurture through prayers and encouragement, your teaching and affection." Spend a few moments asking how you are living that community-based affirmation as "God's own people."
 - On paper, write down the names of three people in your congregation that you pray for regularly. If that is not a regular practice, write down how you might do that in the coming month, and who those people will be.
 - On paper, write the name of one person that you will contact in the next month to encourage his or her faith walk.

Closing

Spend a few minutes in prayer. Ask for the Spirit's leadership as you follow God's call to be teachers of the faith.



Section Two—Faith Formation

A Biblical Passage

Psalm 71:14-19

A Short Reading

In Max DePree's book, *Leadership Is an Art*, he relays the following story from Dr. Carl Frost:

Electricity had just been brought into the village where he and his family were living. Each family got a single light in its hut—a real sign of progress. The trouble was that at night, though

they had nothing to read and many of them did not know how to read, the families would sit in their huts in awe of this wonderful symbol of technology. The light-bulb-watching began to replace the customary nighttime gatherings by the tribal fire, where the tribal storytellers, the elders, would pass along the history of the tribe. The tribe was losing its history in the light of a few electric bulbs.

Discussion Questions

1. Scripture tells us of God's working in the world, and then instructs us to "tell of God's righteous acts" even to old age. In every culture, telling the story of that culture is essential to its survival. Does your congregation tell its stories to the next generations and to the community?
 - List the names of three people in your congregation who are faith-tellers.
 - Write down three ways your congregation tells its faith stories.
 - Share your answers with the group.
2. What are the key stories of your congregation? Historically? Educationally? Evangelistically? Personally? Find a partner and tell two important stories of your church.
3. How do leaders in your congregation pass on the faith history and faith building stories of the congregation to those within the congregation and those outside? (Perhaps each question could be assigned to a small group.)
 - How do leaders in your church share their faith with new members?
 - What ministry is in place to insure that new Christians hear the faith of your congregation?
 - List three ways young people in your church experience the faith of mature Christians.
4. Does your church spend too much time "watching light bulbs" instead of sharing its stories around the fire of the Holy Spirit?
 - List two things that distract your church from passing on your faith.
 - What two things could your church do that you don't do now to help build strong faith?

Closing

Spend a few minutes in prayer. Ask for the Spirit's leadership as you follow God's call to be teachers of the faith.

Section Three—The Church's Role in Teaching

A Biblical Passage

Acts 2:42-47

A Short Reading

John Calvin, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, calls the church and its leaders to impart the faith of Christ to its members. In Book 4, chapter 1, part 5 he writes:

For, among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the

mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them... For, although God's power is not bound to outward means, he has nonetheless bound us to this ordinary manner of teaching... In order, then, that pure simplicity of faith may flourish among us, let us not be reluctant to use this exercise of religion which God, by ordaining it, has shown us to be necessary and highly approved.

Discussion Questions

1. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). Both the witness of Scripture and theologians like Calvin make a strong case that teaching of God's Word is not an option for the church, but a necessity.
 - If new people came into your congregation, how would they see that teaching God's Word is important? How does your congregation value the teaching ministry?
 - List two programs of your church that minister to each of the following age groups: K-6, junior and senior high, 18-30's, 30-50's, 50+ (suggestion: put each age group on a separate sheet of newsprint hung around the room).
 - On post-it notes, list as many ways as you can that faith could be taught or shared in each of these groups. Place your post-its on the appropriate sheets.

2. Calvin also states that we do not rely on our own ingenuity to teach, but on the empowering of God's Holy Spirit.
 - Give an example of one time when you have felt God's leading as you taught another. Share this with a partner.
 - Does a leadership role (elder, deacon, teacher, etc.) help or hinder your ability to teach the faith?

3. What two specific things could we do, that we are not doing now, to strengthen the commitment to the teaching ministry of this church? (Note: Listing ten or twenty items is fine, but the point of this exercise is to focus specifically on one or two action steps that could be implemented in the near future. Save the long-term brainstorm exercise, with lots of possibilities and directions, for another time.)

Closing

Spend a few minutes in prayer. Ask for the Spirit's leadership as you follow God's call to be teachers of the faith.



Section Four—Spiritual Disciplines of Faith Formation

A Biblical Passage

Reread Acts 2:42.

A Short Reading

Educator Parker Palmer, in his book *To Know as We Are Known*, points to three disciplines that have been used by the

church since its beginning to educate for spiritual formation. He says that all three help believers maintain “contact with love’s reality in the midst of misleading appearances: they are, the study of sacred texts, the practice of prayer and contemplation, and the gathered life of the community.”

Discussion Questions

1. In Acts, the early church devoted itself to the spiritual disciplines of teaching, fellowship, prayer, and worship. How does your church emphasize those disciplines?
 - What are the spiritual traditions of your congregation? Have each person write down three. When they are done, compile them on a master list.
 - In which discipline is your church the strongest? In which is it weakest? How might this affect the life and witness of your congregation?
2. Palmer says that prayer and contemplation move us beyond our spiritual traditions into our “living source of all spiritual life.”
 - Share (in groups of two or three) ways you see prayer and reflection can bring spiritual traditions to life.
 - Can you recall a time when God took one of your “spiritual traditions” and through an event in your life, made it alive for you?
3. How are spiritual disciplines modeled in the leadership groups in which you participate in your congregation? Are prayers meaningful and open, or stale and perfunctory? Is there a regular time of teaching? Of worship? Of fellowship and personal nurture? Or do those meetings look like any other group in the community faced with decisions to make? Talk about your meetings, and name two specific ways you could build spiritual disciplines into your meeting life.

Closing

Spend a few minutes in prayer. Ask for the Spirit’s leadership as you follow God’s call to be teachers of the faith.

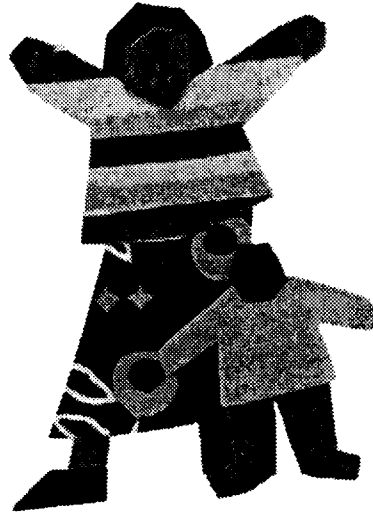
The Word for the Week

The bookmarks on the following pages are intended to encourage your teachers and other education leaders. Each includes a Scripture, a prayer, and a teaching tip.

The bookmarks are numbered consecutively; if you intend to use them in order, be aware that the series is designed to begin in September. Some of the bookmarks include seasonal references to Advent and the new year.

Don't let that limit your use of the bookmarks, however. You can omit the ones with seasonal references and reorder the remaining bookmarks in any way you wish.

See page 2 of this section for instructions on producing the bookmarks and tips on using them.





LEARNING for LIFE

Jeff Japinga
RCA Minister for Education
and Faith Development
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Scripture: Micah 6:8

“God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Prayer: Be pleased, O God, with the simple gifts I bring. I place them in your care, that in my life and my work, you will be glorified and your Spirit welcomed. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Once each month, pray through your entire class list (or a list of colleagues at work or friends in your bowling league). As you say the name of each person, name also one way in which you see God’s likeness in that person. And don’t forget yourself, for we all are made in God’s image.



1

LEARNING for LIFE

Kate McNamara
Director of
Children’s Ministry
Twin Falls Reformed Church
Twins Falls, Idaho

Scripture: Lamentations 3:22-23

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Prayer: Lord, help me not to be consumed by everyday occurrences or problems. Help me to remember that your faithfulness is great and your mercy is greater! Thank you for your love and faithfulness. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Take time to affirm your teachers. Little things, big things—what you do matters less than simply doing it. You will be surprised at how much more they will want to give to your ministry!



2



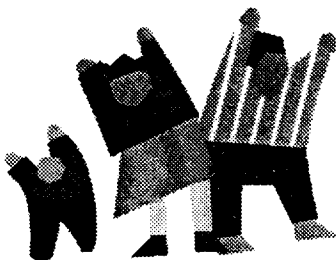
Gracia Class
Director of Education
Zion Reformed Church
Grandville, Michigan

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:2

"And what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well."

Prayer: Make me able to teach others about your goodness and mercy. As you are ever faithful to me, help me be an example of faithfulness to others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Always have the video tape cued in advance so that when you press "play," you know what the first word spoken will be.

**3**

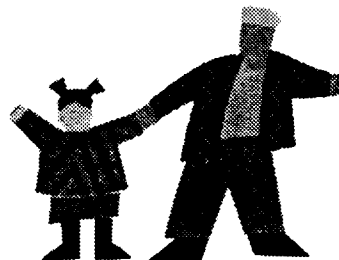
Donald Carragher
Teacher
New Paltz Reformed Church
New Paltz, New York

Scripture: Ruth 1:18

"When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her."

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the times when you honored me by letting me be a mentor to another. I'm sorry for the times I did not see your plan and pushed someone away. You blessed me with faithful teachers in my youth; open my eyes to see those you would have me likewise train. Amen.

Teaching Tip: I teach by what I say, do, think, and feel. I teach by what I omit, skip, ignore, and forget. And they notice each one, every time.

**4**



LEARNING for LIFE

**Cindy Ollivier, Sandy Navas,
and Carol Kripple
Teachers
Ocean Community Church
Manahawkin, New Jersey**

Scripture: Psalms 40:10

"I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as your faithfulness to us is never ending, in our role as teachers, help us to remember that the Christian example we set teaches as much as the lessons we prepare. Amen.

Teaching Tip: We have the opportunity to teach through the words and actions we use as much as the materials we choose. Take time to listen to student's thoughts, dreams, and worries, and not just to teach the "planned lesson." This type of Christian caring will teach the children the ways of the Bible by doing, not just by telling.



5

LEARNING for LIFE

**Ella Campbell
Secretary for the Council
for Pacific and
Asian American Ministries
New York City**

Scripture: Proverbs 25:28

"Like a city breached, without walls, is one who lacks self-control."

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, you are our refuge and strength. What a comfort it is that you are utterly dependable to stand by me when I am weak. Be the fortress of my life, giving protection, insight, wisdom, and perspective so that I might be able to teach those you have given into my care. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Teaching Tip: In a plastic shoebox-size container (with lid), place the "tools" of a teacher, ready to use anytime you have an activity or meeting. Include any of the following: various colored magic markers, masking tape, transparent tape, scissors, name tags, crayons, pens, pencils, stapler, index cards, string, yarn, etc.



6



Jane Schuyler
RCA Resource Specialist
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:5-9

"You must take every effort to support...your knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness" (v. 5a and 6).

Prayer: Great and loving God, you promised to be with me through the waters and the fire. Help my eyes to stay focused on you as I seek to have Christ walk through my feet, work through my hands, and love through my heart. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Today would not be the day to lose control in the educational setting! One of the best antidotes to loss of control is preplanning and preparedness. Whatever task is ahead—a church school lesson, committee meeting, special midweek event, report writing—begin early to break it down into manageable steps. Then, as the deadline approaches, you'll be well.



7



Sandee Clark
Certified Associate
in Ministry
Fort Plain, New York

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:3-10

"For if these things [goodness, knowledge, self-control, endurance, godliness, mutual affection, love] are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8).

Prayer: Dear Lord, my awesome God, thank you for this time that I may come to you. On this day my prayer is for the Holy Spirit to guide me, as I face this world that seems so inconsistent with your way. Do not let the temptations of each hour and each day, become my ambition, but let each moment be an act of self-control. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Slowly count to ten. Silently pray. Softly speak.



8



LEARNING for LIFE

Jim Rozeboom
Minister for Christian
Discipleship
Synod of the Great Lakes
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Scripture: John 5:30

"I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just because I seek to do not my will but the will of him who sent me."

Prayer: Jesus, we look at you and see how you continued to do the will of your Father, even in the face of your own death. Thank you that you have promised to give us self-control during those times when we want to do our own thing instead of following your desire for our life. Amen.

Teaching Tip: (For middle school, high school, adults) For deeper insights, use reflection questions like these: Think about the times when you did not exercise self-control. How did you feel? In what one area of your life do you now need to grow the fruit of your spirit in self-control?



9

LEARNING for LIFE

Jerene Pagliarulo, Elder
Grace Christian Church
Staten Island, New York

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-12

"For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have" (v.12).

Prayer: Sovereign Lord, in your economy of grace those who give of their time and possessions are even more blessed than those who receive. Help me to give willingly, with sincere love, rejoicing in all that you have given me. Amen.

Teaching Tip: An exciting ice breaker to use when a new class or group for adults is starting: ask each person to share one fun or unusual thing about him or herself (i.e., a hobby, a special experience) that the others in the group are not likely to know.



10



Michael Vandenberg
Pastor
Christ Community Church
St. Albert, Alberta

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:11-19
“Tell those who would be rich...to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous” (v. 18, *The Message*).

Prayer: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, creator and giver of all life, you have blessed us with every good gift, even life itself. Grant to us the privilege of reflecting your generosity to those around us, that they may see the loving work of a generous God. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Try to find evidence of a specific trait raised by the day’s Scripture lesson in each of your students and let each of them know what it is you see. This is a good and honest means of building your students’ self-esteem.



11



Carol Doney
Sunday School
Superintendent/Teacher
Kiskatom Reformed Church
Catskill, New York

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 9:10-15
“You will be enriched in every way for your generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us” (v.11).

Prayer: In this season of thanksgiving, we celebrate the bounty of your creation, O God. Help me to remember that all of my gifts are from you and the gift of generosity is one of the sweetest blessings. Help us all to use that gift generously and with gratitude to you. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Try teaching Bible verses by using sign language. Focus on a few main words or ideas at a time. This helps children think about, understand, and remember both the words and the meaning of the passage.



12



LEARNING for LIFE

Nancy L. Turner
Director of Youth Enrichment
Community Reformed
Church of Colonie
Colonie, New York

Scripture: Titus 3:1-8

"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior" (v. 5b-6).

Prayer: You are a generous God, giving us hope through your grace, for eternal life. Help us to devote ourselves to do what is right and beneficial to others. Let us put our trust in your goodness and be devoted to doing good, and by so doing, may the greatest blessing of all be ours. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Pray this prayer every night this week, as a way to reflect back on those things for which we are thankful and ahead to Advent and the birth of our Lord.



13

LEARNING for LIFE

Ellen Vellenga
Adult Education Ministries
Second Reformed Church
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Scripture: John 15:10, 11; John 16:20-24

"Ask and you will receive, so that your joy will be complete" (v. 24).

Prayer: Holy creator God, as I enter this joyous Advent season, help me to ask honestly and humbly for the gift that will nourish my soul. May the precious infant Jesus be born again in me so that my joy will be complete. May God's Holy Spirit dwell in me richly so that your joy may be deeply rooted in me: the joy that no one can take from me. Amen.

Teaching Tip: This week, take time to listen to "The Magnificat," by J. S. Bach. In letting it fill you with the wonder of the season, you will be able to fill others.



14

**LEARNING
for
LIFE**

**La Junta Daniels
Director of Youth
Christ Community Church
Dallas, Texas**

Scripture: John 15:7-17
"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (v. 11).

Prayer: Gracious God, show me today how I can let go of my own preoccupations so I can be fully present to the people you bring into my life. Amen.

Teaching tip: A meaningful ending to your meeting time with children: have everyone present put their hands together in a praying posture. The facilitator of the gathering places his or her hands over the child's hands next to her and says, "May the love of God go with you; go in peace." Then the one having received the blessing turns to the next person and repeats the blessing, and so on, until all have received the benediction. The personal touch and eye contact can help communicate God's love to all we meet.



15

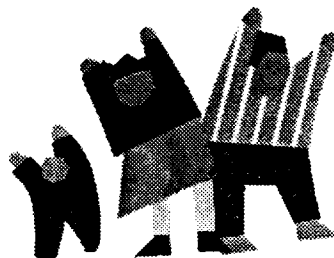
**LEARNING
for
LIFE**

**Clara A. Moore Woodson
Synod Area Minister
Synod of New York
Brooklyn, New York**

Scripture: John 16:20-22
"So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (v. 22).

Prayer: Almighty God, as the days of Advent unfold, I am filled with joy as I glory in the true meaning of the season. Let me not forget that joy is not without sorrow, and never without the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Share a time with your class when you experienced joy and sorrow and how the sorrow made your joy complete. Invite one or two students to share an experience of joy and sorrow when it was made complete with joy. Sharing how God is working in your life can be a powerful experience of God's grace in the classroom.



16



LEARNING for LIFE

Jill Schliesman
Christian Discipleship
Consultant
Synod of Mid-America
Chicago, Illinois

Scripture: Psalm 100 (NIV)
"Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth" (v.1).

Prayer: Dear Lord, you are worthy of my praise! Thank you for creating me and for giving me your grace. Please help my focus this week to be on the glory of Christ's birth. Use me to spread the true message of Christmas to those whose lives I touch this week. Help me to shine with the joy of knowing our Savior has come! Amen.

Teaching Tip:

Field Trips with Youth

1. Assign each youth a number before boarding the bus. Always have them count off by number and keep a master list of numbers so that you can identify someone who's missing.
2. Give all youth a small piece of paper with your cell phone number on it. Have them stick it in their shoe before they leave. If a youth gets separated from the group, they can contact you. When you return from the trip, those youth who give you back the slip will receive a piece of candy.



17

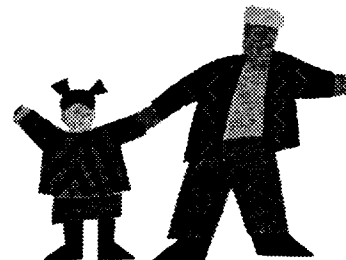
LEARNING for LIFE

Patricia Kraay
Bible Study Leader
Faith Reformed Church
Zeeland, Michigan

Scripture: Proverbs 15:30
"The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the body."

Prayer: Dear Jesus, may your Holy Spirit work through me as I begin the new year. Help me to bring a spirit of joy and cheerfulness to the students I meet and minister to throughout the year. Thank you for being with me each day of this past year. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Make eye contact with your students. Give each student a sincere smile and encouraging word. Proverbs 15:30 says your cheerful look will bring joy to your students' hearts! It is just as likely to bring joy to your heart as well.



18



**Jerry Villanueva, Elder
Palm Canyon Community
Church
Moreno Valley, California**

Scripture: Titus 3:1-2

"Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that your words would remind us of what you want and need for us to do—the responsibility we have as believers to teach your children, in your ways, not ours. Use me Father; here am I, use me. To God be the glory! Amen.

Teaching Tip: Always plan more activities than you may use in the allotted teaching time. Never get caught with a classroom of students and no plan.

**19**

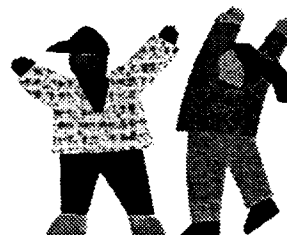
**Oliver Patterson
Professor of Education
Member, Council for
Christian Education
New York City**

Scripture: Galatians 6:8-10 (NIV)

"Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (v. 10).

Prayer: Dear Lord, I know that kindness and gentleness are fruits of the Holy Spirit. Free me from the stereotypes and prejudices of the world and my own self-centeredness, so that the Holy Spirit within me will be released to do good to all. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Give each of the children a personal compliment and ask them how it made him or her feel. Have each child compliment another. Too many children receive only negative comments as they are compared to other children and societal standards of achievement and physical appearance.

**20**



LEARNING for LIFE

**Edward Schreur, Pastor
Faith Reformed Church
Brookings, South Dakota**

Scripture: Philippians 4:5
“Let your gentleness be known to everyone.”

Prayer: God of all things new, thank you for the gift of gentleness in an aggressive world. Bless those who look after the weak among us in order that your grace may always abound. Amen.

Teaching Tip: At the conclusion of a high school confirmation class, ask students to write three sentences about something they learned today. The exercise helps students “own” the day’s lesson.



21

LEARNING for LIFE

**Nancy McNiven
Minister for Social
Witness and Education
Synod of Albany
Schenectady, New York**

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-30
“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you will find rest for your souls” (v. 29).

Prayer: Dear Lord, you have promised that I do not have to carry any concerns alone. Help me to yoke myself to you. May I experience a gentleness of spirit that will guide me through the challenges I face this week, and give me peace. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Why not start each class session or Bible study by lighting a candle that reminds us that Jesus is the light of the world? Follow that with the Scripture of the week and prayer. It settles young children and prepares participants to worship God.



22



Shirley Smith
Christian Education
Consultant
Synod of New York
Long Island City, New York

Scripture: Colossians 3:12
"As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience."

Prayer: Lord, through your Son, Jesus Christ, grant me the spirit of kindness. Let love and kindness help me to do your will on earth, especially to the oppressed, widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor among us. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Decorate your church school area with plants or pictures of nature, as a reminder that God created the universe. If you live in the north, as I do, this also provides a reminder of hope and new life that will come in the spring.

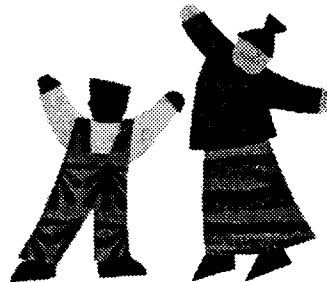
**23**

Deb Yurk
Minister of Education
Trinity Reformed Church
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:5-8 (NIV)
"If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 8).

Prayer: God, sometimes I get so wrapped up in my own personal agenda that I may step on a few toes or forget the purpose behind the process. Give me opportunities to demonstrate kindness along the way so that others may know you. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Use the small group model for ministry in midweek/vacation Bible school settings with kids. Make sure that prayer, worship, service, fellowship and "care" are part of each group's agenda.

**24**



LEARNING LIFE

Audrey Fisher
Youth Ministries Leader
First Reformed Church
of Glenville
Amsterdam, New York

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-13 (NIV)
"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Prayer: Dear Lord, we want to remember that as your chosen people we are called to show compassion and kindness to others rather than hold a grudge. Thank you for forgiving us so that we may in turn forgive those who wrong us. Amen.

Teaching Tip: One of my students suggested a "brags and drags time" at the beginning of each meeting. The youth are encouraged to talk about something good that happened to them and something not so good since our last meeting. It is a great way of sharing a little bit about our personal lives.



25

LEARNING LIFE

Jeri Lueders
Christian Education
Coordinator
Synod of the Heartland
Orange City, Iowa

Scripture: Job 10:12 (NIV)
"You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit."

Prayer: Father, thank you for the assurance that even my life is from you. I am amazed by your kindness and your continued care for me. Help me to show that kindness to my students and coworkers in education ministry. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Catch a student in an act of kindness and identify it for the rest of the class.



26



**Steve Thomas, Pastor
Williamson Reformed Church
Williamson New York**

Scripture: 2 Timothy 2:24-25
“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness.”

Prayer: God of grace and compassion, instill in us your gifts of kindness, gentleness, and patience. Let these gifts be used to bring others into your loving arms. Let us always be moved to reach out to not only the lovable, but the unlovable as well.

By the power of Jesus the Christ, let it be. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Listen to God’s voice before using your own by always beginning your lesson preparations with a few minutes of prayer and silence.

**27**

**Karen Schakel
Retired Christian Educator
Holland, Michigan**

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-7 (NIV)
“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (v. 2).

Prayer: Almighty God, heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children and youth. Give us gentleness of spirit, patient wisdom, and calm strength as we guide and nurture them, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Teaching Tip: The best way to teach is through our actions. The old axiom is true: actions speak louder than words. So, if you want your students to know that God wants us to be gentle and patient with one another, model patience in the way you interact with your students.

**28**



LEARNING for LIFE

Scot Bale
Executive Director
Cran-Hill Ranch
Rodney, Michigan

Scripture: Psalm 40:1-3

"I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry" (v.1).

Prayer: Dear Lord, I must admit, I am not a very patient person. Help me to realize that in a society that prides itself in dispensing instant gratification, you are not an "instant" God—and you accomplish things in your time frame, not mine. Teach me O Lord, to wait not only for answers, but for you. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Have students remain completely silent for one minute. Afterward, ask them questions such as: Was this difficult? What did you think about? What was it like? Do it again for two minutes (depending on their ages) and ask them to imagine God "inclining" toward them. Ask them similar questions: What did they imagine? How does it make them feel knowing that the Lord strives to hear us?



29

LEARNING for LIFE

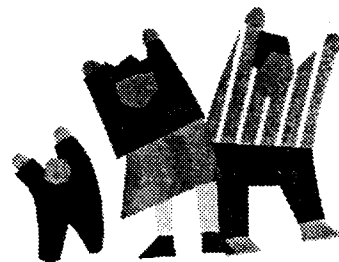
Lynn Taylor
Christian Education
Consultant
Synod of the Far West
Laguna Hills, California

Scripture: Colossians 1:11 (NIV)

"Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience."

Prayer: Dear Lord, may I have patience all this day with my family, friends, fellow parishioners, and workers. In this I need your help, God. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Project to earn money for local charities: Have each participant fill a decorated flower pot with pennies or other coins. After the collection is over, use the pots to plant flowers that can be given as gifts.



30

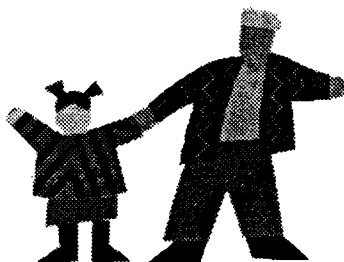
**LEARNING
LIFE**

**George Brown Jr.
G.W. and Edie Haworth
Professor of Christian
Education and Associate Dean
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan**

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:1b-2
"I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching."

Prayer: Lord, when the clock drives me to cover the lesson content quickly before the end of the class session, slow me down. Turn my attention from the pressures of time and refocus my energies around responding to the learners and listening for your Spirit's direction. Amen.

Teaching Tip: After asking the class a question, if no one answers immediately, the teacher will often rush in to fill a perceived awkward silence by giving the answer. Cultivate the fruit of patience in yourself and in your learners by silently counting to fifteen after asking a question. This brief period of silence will provide an interlude for thinking about an appropriate response or finding the correct answer.



31

**LEARNING
LIFE**

**Pat Eenigenburg
Director of Children's
Ministries
Second Reformed Church
Kalamazoo, Michigan**

Scripture: John 15:9-12 (NIV)
"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (v. 12).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your love and example. Please help us to love you so much that we can't help but love others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Teaching Tip: My junior highers and I have a bulletin board headed by the caption "God's Word Hidden in My Heart" as the focal point of our semicircle. Each week we add a sheet of paper containing an enlarged copy of the memory verse. If we can recite it, we get to write our name on it (a proven incentive). If not, it still remains front and center.



32



LEARNING for LIFE

Sam Glionna
Youth/Music Director and
Youth Group Leader
Bethany Reformed Church
St. Petersburg, Florida

Scripture: Matthew 5:43-44

"You have heard that it was said,
'You shall love your neighbor and
hate your enemy.' But I say to you,
Love your enemies and pray for
those who persecute you."

Prayer: Dear Lord, it's easy to love
those who love us, and even then we
sometimes fall short. Help me show
true Christian love to all I come into
contact with this week, even those
who appear to be difficult. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Use this bookmark
format with your middle school Bible
class. They helped me write this.



33

LEARNING for LIFE

Kent Busman, Director
Fowler Camp and Retreat
Center
Synod of Albany Staff
Schenectady, New York

Scripture: Jonah 4:10-11

"Then the Lord said, 'You are
concerned about the bush, for which
you did not labor and which you did
not grow; it came into being in a
night and perished in a night. And
should I not be concerned about
Nineveh, that great city, in which
there are more than a hundred and
twenty thousand persons who do
not know their right hand from their
left, and also many animals.'"

Prayer: God forgive us for making
you in our image and thinking that
you might only love the people we
love. Amen.

Teaching Tip: To facilitate
discussion or involvement, have
your students sit so that everyone
can have eye contact with each
other.



34



Judy Spurrell
Vice President of Consistory
St. Thomas Reformed Church
U.S. Virgin Islands

Scripture: Romans 5:3-5
"Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to place our trust in you, so that we can experience your joy, peace, and love. As we work together in a troubled world, help us to feel your presence through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Have the church school participants offer a simple prayer to open the session. Each participant could take one session and open with prayer.

**35**

Chris Rynberk
Education Liaison
Regional Synod of Canada
Welland, Ontario

Scripture: John 14:27
"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Prayer: I thank you, Jesus, for your gift of peace that you offer me daily. I pray for your peace to dwell within me—total well-being and inner rest of spirit, in fellowship with you always. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Try to begin your lesson with a unique or unusual incident, anecdote, or catch phrase to stimulate interest and attentiveness. This is called the "hook" to get listeners focused on your topic. Relate your "hook" to your lesson by asking for involvement from your audience.

**36**



LEARNING LIFE

Sara Donkersloot
Teacher
Faith Reformed Church
Zeeland, Michigan

Scripture: Isaiah 26:2-4

“Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace—in peace because they trust in you” (v. 3).

Prayer: I praise you for being the God of peace. Grant me your peace this week, no matter what circumstances I face. Keep my mind and heart focused on you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Teach your students this acronym of peace:

P ut
E verything
A utomatically in
C hrist’s
E verlasting care



37

LEARNING LIFE

Wenda Fore
Teaching Consultant
Synod of the Great Lakes
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Scripture: John 14:27

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.”

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, when fear and anxiety grip us, help us to claim the promises of your Word and feel surrounded by the peace that only you can give. In your precious name we pray. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Always plan ahead. Read the Scripture portion of your lesson as your devotions on Sunday afternoon. (Yes, when you have finished teaching one Sunday, begin to prepare for the next.) This allows you to live with the passage throughout the week, gain insights from the portion of Scripture, and be able to build in real-life stories you may experience throughout the week that relate to your lesson.



38



LEARNING
LIFE

Arthur O. Van Eck
Executive Coordinator
CERCA
(Christian Educators, RCA)
Fife Lake, Michigan

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:10-11
"Let them seek peace and pursue it"
(v.11b).

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your gift of peace. But help us remember that there are times when we need not only to pray for it and seek it, but to pursue it. Open our hearts to include not only our own peace and that of those who are close to us, but peace for those persons and places where there is only strife. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Use questions, especially "who, why, how, when" questions, and not just those which can be answered with a "yes" or "no."



39



LEARNING
LIFE

Eloise Van Heest
Retired Christian Educator
Holland, Michigan

Scripture: Colossians 3:12
"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience."

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, remembering your kindness to your people through the ages and your kindness to me day by day, help me to relate to all I meet with compassion and humility. Let me not forget that I am chosen and loved by you. Thank you. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Kindness with learning/teaching companions is expressed in helpful actions, encouraging words, and loving smiles. Anxious to accomplish what is planned, we need to remember that our gentleness and patience with others is the best expression of kindness.



40



LEARNING for LIFE

Amanda Garrett
Director of Children's
Ministry
New Life Community Church
Artesia, California

Scripture: Proverbs 3:3-4 (NIV)
"Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and of people."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I see your faithfulness all around me and have experienced it through salvation. Grant me courage to be faithful to you in all I do this week and lead me to opportunities to share your faithfulness with others. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Learn the Apostles' Creed in one month as a congregation. Make magnets of the creed for families to take home. Assign a portion of the creed to each of the three weeks. Each Sunday include a family devotion and explanation of the next portion of the creed in the bulletin. During each service recite the Apostles' Creed together, encouraging everyone to recite as much as possible from memory.



41

LEARNING for LIFE

Jill Ver Steeg, Chaplain
Hope College
Holland, Michigan

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4-9
"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (v. 5).

Prayer: Gracious God, it is you and you alone whom we love, serve, and worship. We bless you for who you are. Help us this day to love you with all of ourselves: our heart, our soul, and our strength. May we commit to you our head, our heart, our hands, and our feet to glorify you and to further your kingdom, through Christ your Son. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Before you step into the classroom, commit to the Lord your head, your heart, your hands, and your feet. Unpack your bags before the Lord, clearing any distractions that keep you from loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might.



42

**LEARNING
for
LIFE**

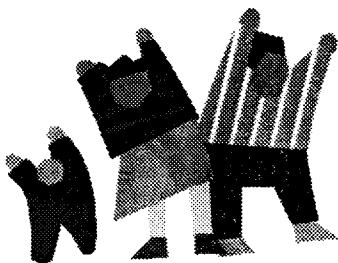
Jane Konitz
Retired Church Educator
Wappingers Falls, New York

Scripture: Matthew 19:13-14 (NIV)
 "Then the little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'"

Prayer: For the gift of children from whose lips come sounds and words of joy and praise, I give you thanks this day. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Do you know this song? Say or sing it with someone today:

Jesus loves me!
This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong
For they are weak and
He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me, for
The Bible tells me so!



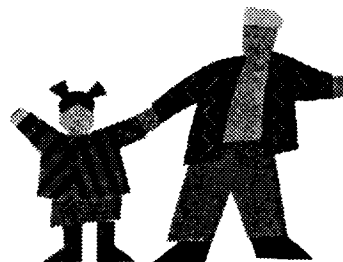
**LEARNING
for
LIFE**

Willa Brown
RCA Associate for
Children's Ministry
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Scripture: Philippians 4:6-7
 "Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Prayer: Dear Lord, my schedule is full this week—there is so much to do and not enough time to do it all. You have told us not to worry and to bring our requests to you. Help me set priorities so that I will accomplish the important things that need to be done. Amen.

Teaching Tip: Don't wait till Saturday night or Sunday morning to prepare for teaching a class. Instead, try the twenty-minute plan. Each day spend twenty minutes on some aspect of preparation: read and study the Scripture passage, read the lesson plan and check the supply list, gather the supplies, memorize the story, set up your classroom, etc. Before class on Sunday morning you'll only have to do a last-minute check.





Where to Begin: Reading and Studying the Bible

We are biblical people, formed and guided by the Word of God from our very first days. An intentional practice of biblical study and engagement for all ages is an important part of a vital Christian education program. There are many resources to help your congregation read and study the Bible; here are a few of the best. All of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center. To order, call 1-800-968-7221 or visit orders@rca.org.

For Children

LiFE Plus, Year 2, Grades 3 & 4: A Child's Walk through the Bible

This thirteen-session resource presents an overview of the Bible and provides a sequence and description of key events of salvation history.

#9400103240 \$62.95^{US}/91.30^{CDN}

For Youth

Fast Lane Bible Studies

(Published by Faith and Life Press, publishers for the General Conference Mennonite Church and Brethren Press)

This series addresses the tough biblical and social issues facing junior high youth in a way that is fun for them and easy for you. Every study offers:

- Hands-on activities
- Bible focus in every lesson
- User friendly, single-book format
- Reproducible student materials
- "Life to Bible to Life" teaching method
- Flexible, step-by-step lesson plans
- Options for different learning styles and interests

Order one book per class. Some of the titles include: *Online with the Holy Spirit* (five sessions); *Get Real: God and Media* (five sessions); *Awesome God* (five sessions); *What Gives? Using God's Money* (six sessions); *Living the Beatitudes* (eight sessions); and *Living without Violence* (five sessions).



Generation Why Bible Studies

(Published by Faith & Life Press and Brethren Press)

Bible studies for senior high youth that make a difference in their lives! Short units and active sessions can be used in youth group, Sunday school, Bible study, or retreat settings. Each unit includes an extender session and requires no student pieces. Order one book per class. More than thirty five- and six-session studies available, including: *Close Encounters: New Testament Personalities*; *Moneytalk: Living Generously*; *Holy Hogwash: What the Bible Never Said*; *The Place Just Right: Biblical Teachings on Simplicity*, and *Reconcilable Differences: Biblical Insights for Repairing Relationships*.

Great Bible Studies for Youth!
by Keith Stulp

(Copublished by CRC Publications, Youth Unlimited, and Reformed Church Press)

These reproducible handouts and disk have been field-tested and are used by Young Life, student-led groups, youth groups, and church school classes. Each study includes a brief introduction, questions for warm-up and discussion, a Bible passage, and a closing. Books include *32 Great Bible Studies for Youth*, *29 More Great Bible Studies for Youth*, and *31 More Great Bible Studies for Youth*.

Book of reproducible handouts
#8600130620 \$15.95^{US}/23.15^{CDN}

Disk
#8600130623 \$15.95^{US}/23.15^{CDN}

For Adults

Turning Points: The Dangerous, Liberating, Holy, Transforming, Everyday Stories of People Engaging the Bible

A twenty-seven-minute video tells the stories of lives changed through reading the Bible—congregations re-energized, students challenged, families renewed—and offers viewers the same possibility of transformation. An eighty-page resource book provides the tools a congregation needs to launch a focus on the Bible.

Video/book set
#1000101997 \$29.95^{US}/43.45^{CDN}

Resource book
#1000151997 \$8.95^{US}/13.00^{CDN}

The Year of the Bible
by James E. Davison

This one-year Bible-reading program offers a sweeping introduction to biblical themes and concepts. The leader's guide provides step-by-step instructions, samples of letters, announcements, and weekly bulletin questions. (Published by Bridge Resources, PCUSA)

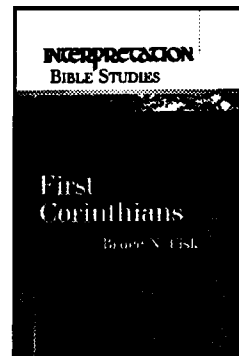
Leader's guide
#3800195511 \$19.95^{US}/28.95^{CDN}

Participant's book
#3800195512 \$5.95^{US}/8.65^{CDN}

Interpretation Bible Studies

Created in the tradition of the acclaimed Interpretation commentary series, these Bible studies provide significant engagement with biblical texts, showing how the Bible addresses issues of living faithfully today. The series features maps, illustrations, definitions of key terms, biblical backgrounds, and questions for reflection or discussion. Each booklet has ten units and contains a helpful leader's guide. Current studies include *Isaiah*, *Acts*, *First Corinthians*, *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Psalms*, *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Romans*, and *Revelation*. (Published by Geneva Press)

\$9.95^{US}/14.45^{CDN}



The Kerygma Program

Two key components of every Kerygma course are:

Resource Book. Anchored in solid scholarship and designed to be “reader friendly.” Each participant purchases a Resource Book for home preparation.

Leader's Guide. Based on the best of current educational methods, these “leader friendly” materials offer clear guidelines for creative, participatory class sessions.

Kerygma's Foundational courses are longer and more comprehensive, whereas the Electives are shorter and highlight a topic, theme, or book. While most of the courses are designed for intermediate and advanced study, the seven-session basic study *Your Bible: The Study Begins* may also be used with youth.

1

2

3

Section 3

LEARNING for LIFE



**Worship
Resources**

Worship Resources

Worship

*Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty!
 Just and true are your ways, King of the nations!
 Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?
 For you alone are holy.
 All nations will come and worship before you,
 for your judgments have been revealed.*

Revelation 15:3-4

Each week the church gathers to meet God in Word and sacrament and is sent again into the world to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Worship is at the core of our being as Christians and the core of our practice as congregations. But worship is not dependent on time or place, the formality of its content, or the style of its music. It has to do with an attitude of reverence to God and genuine expressions of love, thanksgiving, and devotion.

Too often, however, a congregation's ministry of worship and its Christian education ministry are experienced as separate functions of the church. Including the educational ministry of the church in an intentional way in public worship and devotions is an important witness to the power of teaching and learning. It also becomes an invitation of welcome to those not currently involved in this ministry. This section is intended to provide resources to help you lift up the educational ministry of the church in the context of our worship of God, both corporately and individually. It includes:

“Discipleship Worship Service” **A complete worship service liturgy centered on the educational ministry of the church.**

Content: The liturgy follows the Reformed understanding of worship—approach to God, Word of God, and response to God—and includes suggested songs and prayers for a wide range of worship styles, Scripture texts, and sermon helps.

How to Use: This service could be used in September as a kickoff to the church program year, in January or February as a mid-year encouragement to both teachers and students, or in May, in celebration for all that the educational ministry of the church has meant.

Tip: Be sure to speak with your pastor or worship committee early on to discuss possible ways to work this service for the educational ministry of the church into your worship schedule.

Preparer: The service was written by the Rev. Ron Rienstra, an RCA pastor in Michigan and a member of the editorial committee of *Reformed Worship* magazine.

“Prayers, Liturgies, and Devotions for the Whole Year”

Content: Does your congregation publicly pray for your summer vacation Bible school? Do you commission your teachers, provide Lenten devotions for your young people, or celebrate your ministry at the end of the year? This section includes prayers, liturgies, and other helps for all these activities and more.

How to Use: The prayers and liturgies can become part of regular worship services; a suggested use is noted on each separate entry. The devotions can be duplicated and distributed during appropriate times of the year.

Tip: Emphasizing the Christian education ministry during public worship is an important affirmation to both students and teachers.

Preparer: These prayers and other materials were prepared by James and Kathleen Hart-Brumm, both RCA pastors from New York.



Discipleship Worship Service

by the Rev. Ronald Rienstra

Teach these commandments to your children.
—Deuteronomy 11:19

This service is intended as a celebration of what God is doing in the educational and discipling ministries of the church. The service concentrates on the lives of young people and especially encourages their participation—for which advance preparation (especially musical) may be helpful. Consider using young people as leaders throughout the service in every appropriate way and at every appropriate place. The service also lifts up to God in praise and prayer all those who strive both to teach and to learn every day, and what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Prayers and music—both old and new and familiar and foreign—are used throughout the service so that we might learn from Christians from other areas and eras.

The following abbreviations tell where to find songs used in the service.

- GC *Gather Comprehensive* (GIA Publications, Chicago, IL)
- P&W *Songs for Praise & Worship* (Word)
- MSfP&W *More Songs for Praise & Worship* (2000, Word Music Group)
- SANC *Sing! A New Creation* (forthcoming hymnal supplement from RCA/CRC Publications)
- PsH *Psalter Hymnal* (CRC Publications)
- RIL *Rejoice in the Lord* (Eerdmans)
- SfL *Songs for Life* (CRC Publications)
- CH *Celebration Hymnal* (Word)

The Approach to God

Prayer for bulletin:

My God,
 I pray that I may so know you and love you
 that I may rejoice in you.
 And if I may not do so fully in this life,
 Let me learn steadily
 until the day when I come to that fullness...
 let me receive
 That which you have promised through your truth,
 that my joy may be full.

—St. Anselm, 1033-1109

or

Therefore in all things be “quick to listen and slow to speak” (James 1:19)
lest the remark of Solomon be fulfilled in you:

“If you see someone too ready of speech,
know that a fool has more hope than that one” (Prov. 29:20).

And never dare to teach someone what you have not practiced yourself.

—John Cassian, 360-435





Call to Worship

For a call to worship, consider: 1 John 4:7-8:

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God;
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God,
for God is love.*

This text highlights one of Jesus' most important commandments, and one of our most critical learning tasks: knowing God. In coming to know God as love, we strive to love one another. This could lead into a song about God as love or knowing God such as:

"Knowing You/All I Once Held Dear," by Graham Kendrick (#30, MSFP&W)
"God Is Love," Chepponis; (#629, GC)
"Love Divine, All Love's Excelling" (#464, RIL)

Another call to worship might be taken from Psalm 96:1-2:

*O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
(It may be read by a leader or spoken antiphonally by a leader and the congregation.)*

For a world-music flavored opening (with youth leading on guitars and Latin percussion), use with "Cantad al Señor" (Brazilian folk tune, SANC).



Another option would be to use Psalm 100:

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.
Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.
For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

This could be spoken as a choral reading and then combined with the well-known song "I Will Enter His Gates" (Leona Von Brethorst, SANC) as a child-led call to worship. This song leads seamlessly into any of the praise hymns below.

Other opening songs:

"Gather Us In," by Marty Haugen, SANC. A wonderfully uplifting song that mentions our being gathered, both young and old. Be sure to proceed with a prayer explicitly addressing God as the one who gathers us in.
"Come, All You People," African folk tune, SANC. An infectious, rhythmic song from Africa; easy for a youth choir to learn and teach to the congregation.
"Firm Foundation," by Gordon & Harvill, #9, MSFP&W
"Lord Most High," by Gary Sadler, SANC
"You Are My All in All," by Dennis Jernigan, #220, P&W
"I Will Sing, I Will Sing a Song Unto the Lord," by Max Dyer, #8, SfL
"Let All Things Now Living," #453, PsH
"All Creatures of Our God and King," #4, RIL
"Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven," #144, RIL
"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," #145, RIL
"Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above," #146, RIL
"Holy God, We Praise Your Name," #619, RIL
"How Firm a Foundation," #172, RIL
"All People That on Earth Do Dwell (Old 100th)," #120, RIL



Opening Prayer (to be said in unison or prayed on behalf of the congregation):

Great God of wonder and truth, hear our prayer,
for we want to be better students of your will and ways.
Expand our capacity for love that it might be wider and more durable.
Stretch our imaginations to envision greater possibilities for trusting you.
Draw out our hopes that they might not be hidden away.
Educate our spirits to seek serenity and strive toward service.
Grant us the devotion to be disciples, the discipline to be devoted.
In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Penitence

For a call to confession, use Mathew 11:28-30:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Let us ask God to forgive us.

Have a child assist with the invitation to confession by signing this as it is read. (You can sign almost any part of a service, thereby adding a wonderfully visual and kinesthetic element to worship. For an online American Sign Language dictionary, visit <http://dww.deafworldweb.org/asl/>.)

A worship leader could invite confession by reminding the congregation that one of the other things we need to learn, again and again, is who we are. We're sinners. We're lost, least, last, losers. We need God. A prayer of confession follows (silent, spoken, sung, or any combination thereof) and then a word of assurance (Jer. 31:33-34, see below), which points out not only who we are, but whose we are: we belong to God. We are God's people, God's forgiven people.

Prayer of Confession (spoken either in unison or on the congregation's behalf):

Gracious God, you give us the gift of faith,
and then call us to follow you,
to obey your word,
to love your people.

You invite us to learn from you and then to teach what we have learned.

We confess that we often regard faith with indifference.

We fail to apply ourselves to learning its scope,
and we feel smug about what we do know.

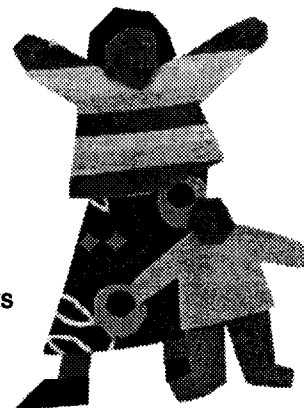
We are reluctant teachers,
mediocre mentors,
indifferent disciples.

Turn us toward wisdom, and accepting its humility.

Give us hearts eager to know you, to love you,
and to share our knowledge with others.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Don't underestimate the use of silence in a prayer of confession to invite the congregation to search their own hearts and bring the details of their sins before God.



Many young people know and can lead the congregation in singing the following songs:
 “Create in Me,” Anon., SANC

“Purify My Heart/Refiner’s Fire,” Brian Doerkson, SANC

A “kyrie” (which means “Lord, have mercy”) is a wonderful way to add depth to a prayer of confession. Two beautiful folk kyries are the Russian Orthodox kyrie, and the Ghanian kyrie, both found in SANC.

“Lord God, Your Love” (#503, RIL) is a beautiful and comprehensive prayer of confession.

“I Will Put My Law” (Children’s song by June F. Armstrong, #39 Sfl) is a good song to use in the penitential section. You may sing verse one before the assurance of pardon, and verse two afterward.

Assurance of Pardon—Jeremiah 31:33-34:

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

A worship leader might provide a word of grace by reminding the congregation that while we can try hard to learn how to love and how to obey, we’re slow on the uptake. And what’s more, as a famous preacher once said, our problem isn’t instruction, it’s iniquity. It’s not schooling, it’s sin. Praise God then, that God unilaterally gives us a new covenant (see Jer. 31:33-34, above) that only requires us to sign on the dotted line, to assent to God’s gracious “yes!”

Law

A leader might introduce the summary of the law by saying, “As God’s forgiven and well-loved people, hear how we can respond to God’s love.” Continue with one of the following:

Summary of the Law—Matthew 22:37-39:

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
 and with all your soul,
 and with all your mind.”*

This is the greatest and first commandment.

And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The Ten Commandments for Young People:

1. You may not love anyone or anything more than you love God.
2. You may not worship, or put more importance on, any person or thing other than God. You must worship only the Lord, not your parents, not a friend, not a movie star or a sports hero, not a car or boat or skateboard—nothing.
3. You may not swear. Use God’s holy name only in a loving way, never to express anger or frustration.
4. One day of your week should be set aside for rest and the worship of God. Work six days of the week only. You need a special day set aside to relax, to enjoy God’s world, and to meet with other Christians.
5. Be respectful to your parents. Love them, and the Lord will reward you with a long life.
6. You may not hate other people; don’t ever think of hurting someone else in any way.
7. Keep your thoughts and actions pure. Sex is a gift from God to married couples.
8. You may not take and keep anything that doesn’t belong to you.
9. You may not tell lies, especially when that lie will hurt someone else.
10. You may not be jealous of what others have. You may not be jealous of your friend’s new toy or clothes or the big house your neighbor lives in. Be satisfied with what you have.

Children's Time and Prayer

Call the children forward and have them sit at the feet of the pastor or worship leader. Then teach them some standard liturgical responses (e.g., "The Lord be with you/And also with you.") The last response or perhaps the only one would be "The Word of the Lord/Thanks be to God." Encourage them to express their thanks enthusiastically.

A worship leader might introduce the reading of Scripture by explaining the Greek word *mathetes*, which means disciple. To be a disciple meant to learn at the feet of the teacher and to imitate the teacher in everything. So when we open the Bible to read it, we are figuratively sitting at Jesus' feet to learn from him, and then we are to go and try to do what he says. Bringing the children to sit up front at the feet of the worship leader during Scripture reading is a good visual reinforcement of this message.

Some Songs of Illumination:

- "Thy Word," by Michael W. Smith, SANC
- "Open Our Eyes, Lord," by Robert Cull, SANC*
- "Be Still and Know That I Am God," #225, SfL*
- "I Love to Tell the Story," #444, CH
- "Teach Me, O Lord, Your Way of Truth," #276 PsH

*These songs are especially effective in American Sign Language.

Scripture Lessons

Have young people do all the Scripture readings. (Make sure they practice.) If only two of the passages are used, they may be read by a mentor and his or her student from the congregation. Highlighted sections may be omitted.

Old Testament Lesson—Deuteronomy 11:18-25:

You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 20 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. 22 Diligently observe this entire commandment that I am commanding you, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and mightier than yourselves. 24 Every place on which you set foot shall be yours; your territory shall extend from the wilderness to Lebanon and from the river, the river Euphrates, to the Western Sea. 25 No one will be able to stand against you; the Lord your God will put the fear and dread of you on all the land on which you set foot, as he promised you.

Gospel Lesson—Matthew 28:16-20 (The Great Commission):

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.



Epistle Lesson—Eph. 4:17; 21-25:

17 Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. 19 They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 That is not the way you learned Christ! 21 For surely you have heard about him and were taught in him [Christ], as truth is in Jesus. 22 You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. 25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.

Psalm—Psalm 1, 19, or 34 or one of many appropriate sections from Psalm 119

Psalm 119:33-40 adapted as a choral reading for two or more voices:

All: Teach me, O Lord,
V1: the way of your statutes,
V2: and I will observe it to the end.
All: Give me understanding,
V1 (3): that I may keep your law
V2 (4): and observe it with my whole heart.
All: Lead me
V1: in the path of your commandments,
V2: for I delight in it.
All: Turn my heart
V1 (3): to your decrees,
V2 (4): and not to selfish gain.
All: Turn my eyes
V1: from looking at vanities;
All: give me life
V2: in your ways.
V1 (3): Confirm to your servant your promise,
V2 (4): which is for those who fear you.
All: Turn away
V1: the disgrace that I dread,
V2: for your ordinances are good.
V1 (3): See, I have longed for your precepts;
V2 (4): in your righteousness
All: give me life.



Sermon

Pastors looking for sermon illustrations often scour the newspapers, watch TV, read fiction, and even surf sites on the Web made for just this purpose. A pastor may wish this week to give those avenues a rest and instead give the sermon texts and themes to the youth of the congregation and solicit from them stories—stories that illuminate the dynamic of the texts, stories that speak of instruction and wisdom, stories that speak of mentoring and discipleship. Stories—not insights into the text or song suggestions (though those may be helpful)—but narratives of the sort that begin, “One day in October, about two years ago, a friend of mine and I went ice-fishing.” There are few better ways for youth to feel they are an important part of the church, that their voices are heard and their lives valued, than to hear their own stories woven into the word as it’s proclaimed from the pulpit.

Old Testament

The famous passage from Deuteronomy duplicated above (p. 7) articulates the primary theme of that book: obedience to God's law. A sermon on this passage might well deal with the importance of the law not only being on our doorposts and on our foreheads (an explanation of Jewish phylacteries might be in order), but that it dwell in our "heart and soul" and that it be lived out. That is how we best teach it to our children. Not so much by memorization, but by imitation. By speaking of it, by living it, by walking in God's ways and holding fast to him.

Gospel

The Great Commission is seen, properly, as a call to evangelize—to baptize others, to initiate them into the kingdom of God. But there is more to the commission than that, and more to initiation than the act of baptism. Jesus commands his disciples not just to get more people in the club, but to make disciples, "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." We fulfill this component of the Great Commission when we engage in the educational and discipling ministries of the church. A sermon based on this passage should include giving God thanks for all that the congregation is already doing in these areas. Good sermons are both prophetic and pastoral, challenging and encouraging.

Epistle

This epistle lesson resonates with language, images, and themes of education. Jesus didn't just speak the truth, he *is* the Truth. Truth is *in* Jesus. New life is in Jesus, a new life we were taught that includes putting away the old life and putting on a new one, patterned after his true righteousness and holiness. And part of that new life is speaking truth to each other, teaching others, in humility, what we have learned.

Psalm

Any Psalm selection is appropriate, expressing delight in God's law and an eagerness to learn how to live a God-pleasing life.

We Respond to the Word

Creed

A fitting response to a sermon on making disciples is to speak together what we believe together, what we have learned from the Christians of centuries past regarding the truth. Speaking the Apostles' Creed together is a fine way to accomplish this.

Another option is to sing a credal song, such as "I Believe in Jesus," by Marc Nelson (#7, MSfP&W), or "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High," by Rick Founds (SANC), pointing out its credal content, or the commonly sung version of the Nicene Creed (#520, PsH).

The Nicene Creed can also be done as a choral reading with members of the congregation, both young and old. (See following page. Lines in bold are for all, other lines are parceled out according to the number present.)



I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible
and invisible.

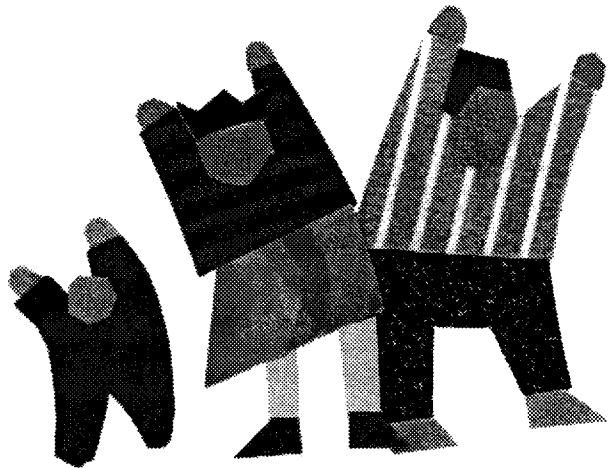
And in one Lord Jesus Christ
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of the Father before all worlds;
God of God,
Light of Light,
very God of very God;
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made.

Who, for us
and for our salvation,
came down from heaven,
and was incarnate
by the Holy Spirit
of the virgin Mary,
and was made human;
and was crucified also for us
under Pontius Pilate;

He suffered
and was buried;
and the third day
he rose again,
according to the Scriptures;
and ascended into heaven,
and sits on the right hand of the Father;
and he shall come again,
with glory,
to judge the living and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the Lord and Giver of Life;
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified;
who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe
in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
I acknowledge one baptism
for the remission of sins;
and I look
for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.



Peace

Have children—even very young children—come forward after the sermon and receive the “peace of Christ” from the pastor. Then have them pass that peace to the rest of the congregation by saying, “God’s peace.”

Prayers of the People

Prayer:

O God, for life-lessons learned, we give you thanks. For the perception of possibilities, we express our gratitude. We come to you in prayer as students of the Spirit and attenders to your Word.

You have given a wondrous gift in creating us able to become wiser in your ways. It is the gift of discipleship that you have placed in our keeping. As we have opened it, it has opened us as well.

For the growth in faith that we have experienced, for opportunities that have allowed our spirits to stretch and reach, we thank you. We acknowledge that our learning has not been the result of easy insights and ready adaptations. Often it has come at a cost—at the expense of strained sensibilities, compressed egos, burst preconceptions, restructured values.

We praise you for those gifted in teaching. We remember teachers who have guided us, challenged us, cajoled us, and supported us. Through them, our basic learning has come to fruition and our course of future learning has taken shape. We pray that our hopes—the imaginings of our hearts and minds—will not remain vague or dreamlike. Instead, by your grace, let our hopes take on definition and form. As lifelong learners, may we practice hopefulness as a vocation and turn hope into practice and mastery. We offer our prayer in the name of Christ, whose disciples we are, today and always. Amen.

Almost every church currently has, or has recently had, an education class or unit on some aspect of prayer. Lift up the educational ministries of your congregation by encouraging individuals who have participated in such classes to lead the congregation in prayer.

If your congregation shares requests during prayer time, consider using a child to carry the microphone from person to person. The more young people who are involved in the service, the more valued they feel, and the more we are able to appreciate the inclusion of their gifts.

It’s especially meaningful when the prayers of the people are offered by a young person, or by a group of people who, in their ages and genders and so on, represent the congregation.

Organize a prayer around the following structure:

1. Pray first for those who are explicitly charged with teaching the congregation what it means to follow Jesus and obey his Word—for pastors, elders, and Sunday school teachers.
2. Then pray for all those who teach by example what it means to be a disciple, especially for mentors, parents, grandparents, older brothers and sisters, etc.
3. Pray next for all those who learn (that’s everybody); those who learn by listening, those who learn by seeing, those who learn by doing. Ask for God to teach us the lessons each of us most needs to learn.
4. Finally, pray for your congregation’s community, nation, and the world, emphasizing those who look to us to learn about who Christ is and those who teach us what it means to be compassionate, peacemakers, etc.

You may also wish to make your congregational prayer a “bidding” prayer, led by a youth. Follow the organizational pattern listed above and after each section have the leader say, “Lord, in your mercy,” to which the congregation responds, “Hear our prayer.” You may teach this response in a “Children’s Time” (see above).

A bidding prayer often works well with a sung response or refrain. A good choice is “Let us Pray to the Lord” (#51, LIFE), another is “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying,” by Ken Medema (#625, PsH).



Offering

An obvious way to make use of youth and to lift up educational ministries is to have young people take up the collection. Another way to do the same thing in a more symbolically rich way is not to have a collection taken, but to have the offering presented by the youth. Have the youngest member possible of each family bring that family's gift and place it in the offering basket in the front.

Take up an offering explicitly for educational ministries—for the young people's service project, for their spring break mission trip, for new curriculum materials, etc.

The offering of musical gifts by young people is one of the best ways a congregation can embrace its youth. Musical groups are wonderful tools for mentoring. At exactly the age when they are discovering who they are and yearning to belong, to be needed, it is powerful for a congregation to lift them up—to need them and the musical gifts they offer. Make the most not only of the budding guitarists, but also flutists, percussionists, cellists, etc.

Concluding Songs

"In the Secret/I Want to Know You," by Andy Park, #38, MSfP&W

"Step By Step," Beaker, SANC

"Here I Am, Lord," by Dan Schutte, SANC

"Thuma Mina," South African Folk, SANC

"Be Thou My Vision," #67, RIL

"He Leadeth Me," #161, RIL

"May the Mind," #291, Ps

Blessing

It's wonderful to conclude a service with a sung blessing. Two excellent ones are "Go, My Children," by Jaroslav Vajda, SANC and "My Friends, May You Grow in Grace," by Timothy James Meany, SANC.

Charge:

Engage daily in Christian education.

Take note of the Creator's love.

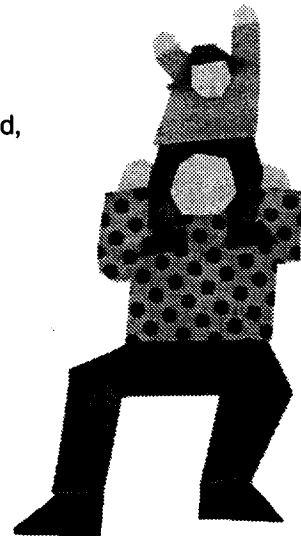
Study Christ's style of service. Practice prayer.

Apply yourselves to the great test of living by faith.

And always, be led by the guidance of God.

Benediction:

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
remain with you always. Alleluia! Amen.



Prayers, Liturgies, and Devotions for the Whole Year

by the Revs. James and Kathleen Hart-Brumm

June: Prayers for the Congregation's VBS Ministry

Preparations for the congregation's vacation Bible school (VBS) ministry should be bathed in prayer for several weeks in advance. On the Sunday before the program begins, the following liturgy may be used immediately before the Prayers of the People. The congregation may sing the current VBS theme song, and then the pastor or another worship leader may say:

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry
to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and
to love and to serve those with whom they live and work.
We are ambassadors for Christ,
who reconciles and makes whole.
We are salt of the earth;
we are the light of the world.

This week our salt takes the form of glue and scissors and construction paper, cookies and juice, and our light shines in songs and games and stories about faithful people of God . . .
(*mention more specifically which stories will be covered in the VBS curriculum*). . . as our congregation hosts vacation Bible school for our community.

Invite the teachers, leaders, and helpers to stand, calling on them one by one or as a group. Then invite those students who will be attending VBS and their parents who are present in worship to stand as a group.

Let us ask for the blessing of the Lord.

Gracious God, who pitched your tent among us as a living Word that we might be saved,
we give you thanks for this season of tents and picnics,
of relaxed schedules and freedom to try new things.
We give you thanks for this opportunity to make your Word alive among us
in vacation Bible school.
Even as your Word brings order and life and light to our world,
we ask you to bless the Word and the life and the light
that these teachers and students are going to share.
Even as your Spirit brooded over chaos to birth creativity,
we ask you to work in the chaotic moments and the joy and the noise that is to come.
Touch the hearts of each person who will be here.
Work through us to bring a blessing to those who are here for the first time,
who have never been touched by our ministry before.
Open all of these minds and hearts,
that the coming week/weeks may build up your new creation here.

The prayers continue as usual.



On the Sunday after VBS concludes, invite the children who have been to VBS to come forward before the Prayers of the People (It might be good to arrange for VBS students to sing a song or make some other sort of presentation in worship to help ensure that a group of them are present.) The pastor or another worship leader will ask them to list things they are thankful for and VBS activities they especially enjoyed and then lead the following or a similar prayer.

Let us pray.

God of grace and laughter, who blessed David when he danced before the Ark of the Covenant, we thank you for all of the play and laughter and joy we enjoyed at Bible school.

We especially thank you for *(list all those things the children mentioned)*.

Help us to carry the joy and the lessons and the light we shared in our hearts through the year.

Help all of us to be teachers and learners all the year through, in the name of Christ, our great Teacher, Brother, and Friend.

The prayers continue.



July: Prayers for Teacher and Student Recruitment

During the summer many Christian education programs continue to recruit teachers for the coming school year. Prayer should be a crucial component in that recruiting drive. The congregation should also keep in prayer those who will be students in the program, including those who may not yet be identified. The following may be included in the Prayers of the People.

God, who gave us a story to pass from one to another,
 who knows what is in our hearts even before we do:
 you already know who among us is being called forth for teaching ministry.
 Touch the hearts of those of us whose gifts will be needed as teachers.
 Help them to find their voices to share your good news
 with imagination and energy.
 Open the eyes of those who are recruiting,
 that they may discover the talents in us that we might not even recognize.
 Be also with those who are going to be students in our Sunday school.
 Prepare their ears to hear your Word.
 Prepare their minds to grow in knowledge and understanding of you.
 Prepare their hands and feet for the activities ahead of them.
 Even as we gather together rooms and books and materials for classes,
 show us how to best gather together the students and teachers
 who will truly build your school.

The prayers may continue.

In addition to keeping the preparations for the fall education program in prayer on Sunday mornings, the congregation should be encouraged to pray for this work throughout the week. One way to do this is by printing a "Prayer Coupon" like the one below in your newsletter or worship bulletin.

Build Our Sunday School with Your Prayers!

Clip out the coupon below and put it into your wallet or pocket or attach it to your refrigerator. Every time you see it, take just a few moments to say a short prayer for those who will be teaching and studying in our Christian Education program this fall.

Sunday School Prayer Coupon

Take a moment to say one of these prayers:

- Creator Spirit, blow into the hearts of those who will be teaching this fall.
- Nurturing God, comfort and uplift those who will be studying your Word.
- Jesus our Lord, call forth teachers and students for your Christian Education program; help us to hear whether you are calling us to teach this year.



August: Opening Devotions for Teachers

This devotional is to be used at the outset of the school year for teachers at any level of the Sunday school. A gathering meeting to organize your staff is well begun with a reminder of who has called us to this task, what we are about, and why we teach.

"We will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a decree in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and rise up and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Psalm 78:4-7).

God has entrusted us with this profound work: to teach God's ways and proclaim the truth of the gospel. We gather here in immediate preparation for that work, though we have been prepared for it throughout our lives. Let us pray the words of Psalm 25 together:

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.
Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

God has led us in truth and taught us godly ways. Since our baptism we have been prepared for the ministry of the gospel, and we here have recognized our special calling to be teachers. Let us then take for our example the author of Deuteronomy, when he says "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; let the earth hear the words of my mouth. May my teaching drop like the rain, my speech condense like the dew; like gentle rain on grass, like showers on new growth. For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God!" (Deuteronomy 32:1-3).

We look forward to the season ahead of us, full of students, books, pencils, and paper. It is easy to become mired in the details of preparation and interaction. Let us not forget, though, that this is a calling from God, not a job to get done. Let us make our teaching like the dew. Let us allow our students to bless us, even as we seek to impart to them the wisdom and knowledge of God. Let us allow the Spirit of Christ to fill us with strength when things become difficult or



inconvenient. Let us pray for one another, that our ministry here may bring glory to God and salvation to the souls with whom we come in contact.

A period of silence or of vocal prayer may ensue, depending on the custom or preference of your group. When the prayers conclude, the following benediction is said. It may be done as a general benediction or said to each individual in turn. If you are going to bless each teacher individually, explain how you intend to do it, and whether they ought to move, stand, kneel, sit, etc. If the pastor or an elder of the church is present, he or she may join the convener of the group in laying hands on each teacher and saying this benediction:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:16-17).





September: Commissioning of Christian Educators to Their Ministry in the Church

The presiding minister and/or the Christian education director shall lead this liturgy. He/She/They may begin after the offerings have been brought forward and before the prayer of dedication.

Beloved in the Lord,

we have come to commission teachers to the education ministry + singers to the ministry of music of Christ's holy church.

Christ alone is the source of all Christian ministry, through the ages calling men and women to service.

Water may be poured into the font at this time.

By the Holy Spirit all who believe and are baptized receive a ministry to witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and to love and to serve those with whom they live and work.

We are ambassadors for Christ who reconciles and makes whole.

We are salt of the earth; we are the light of the world.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

or

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, but to each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1, 7, 11-12).

or

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of the One who called you out of darkness into God's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

(List names) have answered God's call to teach in our Sunday school/Christian education program during this coming year. I invite them to come forward during the last verse of the hymn, that together we may affirm their ministries and ask God for grace.

and I have answered God's call to make music to His name.

God has given gifts to all
James Hart Brumm, 2000

IRWIN, 77 77 77
Iteke Prins, 1992

God has giv-en gifts to all, tools to an-swer Christ's own call:
God gives some the power to teach, minds to op-en, hearts to reach
We, God's cho-sen gift-ed clan, must ful-fill our Ma-ker's plan:

serv-ing, lov-ing, conq-ring Death. Borne up - on the Spir-it's breath,
with Good News, a - maz-ing grace, skills to fash-ion and em-brace
help these friends who come to serve; be, with them, the mus-cle, nerve,

our small tal-ents are un-furled, op-ened to re-deem the world.
lives of wisdom, faith, and truth and the en-er - gy of youth.
bone, and sin-ew of the Son, in the Spir-it, built as one.

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The Vows

The leaders will address the teachers.

Leader: At the celebration of baptism, we pledge to nurture one another in the faith. You, as teachers, carry a particular joy and responsibility. Do you believe in your heart you are called by Christ's church, and therefore by Christ, to this teaching ministry?

Teachers: **Yes, truly, with all my heart.**

Leader: Do you promise, by the grace of God, to give yourself/selves to this calling, with diligence, energy, and love, and to be guided by the Spirit and the Word of God?

Teachers: **I will, and I ask God to help me.**

The leader/s will address the congregation.

Leader: Christians, let us acknowledge the gifts and calling of your sisters and brothers.

Congregation: **We receive you as a servant/servants of Christ; we pledge to support you in your service. We will encourage you with works and prayers. We will consider ourselves coworkers with you in the service of Christ.**

The Charge

Servants of Christ, accept the service with which you have been entrusted.

Do not neglect the gift that is in you.

Present yourselves to God as approved workers,
ever faithful to the Spirit of God.

Remember always that Jesus called you as friends as well as servants.

Attend to prayer, for without God you can do nothing.

Let us pray.

O God, giver of all good gifts,
we commend ourselves and our brothers and sisters
to your constant love and guidance.

Fill them with grace and grant them
the strength and peace of your Spirit.

Conclude with the following or another prayer of dedication, then resume the normal order of worship.

Leader: By your mercies, O God,

Teachers: **We present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable through Jesus Christ.**

October: Prayers for RCA College Sunday and All College Students

Each year, the Reformed Church in America celebrates the ministry of its three affiliated colleges—Hope College in Holland, Michigan; Central College in Pella, Iowa; and Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa—on RCA College Sunday. This litany gives the congregation the opportunity to pray for the work of its three colleges, as well as remembering those students from its congregation attending other colleges. This is an especially important part of public worship, since students away at college remain a part of the congregation even while absent most of the time.

Leader: We offer our prayers, O God, for three places of learning and transformation in the life of the Reformed Church and its young people—Hope, Central, and Northwestern Colleges.

Response: **May they be places of learning that reflect your wisdom and love for your world, O God.**

Leader: We pray for and ask a special measure of your blessing upon Bruce Murphy, president of Northwestern College; David Roe, president of Central College; and James Bultman, president of Hope College.

Response: **May they be leaders who seek your wisdom and guidance, O God.**

Leader: We pray for the spiritual life of the three schools: for their commitment to education in a Christian context, for their commitment to the spiritual nurture and growth of each of their students, and for the chapel programs and those who lead them.

Response: **May the spiritual life on these campuses reflect your wisdom and love for your world, O God.**

Leader: We pray for the faculty and staff of each of the schools—professors and financial administrators and dormitory staff—that in everything they do, in and out of the classroom, their lives may be a witness to a life of faith. Grant them a measure of your wisdom and strength.

Response: **May all who would lead and nurture and guide our young people receive your wisdom and love, O God.**

Leader: For these three colleges—Central, Hope, and Northwestern—we give you thanks, O God. Strengthen their missions to serve you through the teaching of our young people, so that those on their campuses may be renewed in mind, body, and spirit, according to your will.

Bless also, O God, all those from our fellowship attending college, whether close by or far away. (*You may name those persons here.*) Stand before them with wisdom and guidance; stand beside them with comfort and companionship; stand behind them with support and encouragement, that they may sense your love in every part of their lives. And help us to be their encouragers as well, even from afar.

Response: **Bless all those who study at college, O God, with your wisdom and guidance. Amen.**



November: A Model for Prayers and Devotions in Adult Classes

Gathering times of prayer and worship are as important for adult classes as they are for children and youth. The following models demonstrate a few ways that class members can construct a prayer or brief opening devotion.

A **collect** (KAH-lekt) is an ancient form of prayer meant to collect the thoughts of the members of a group and focus them on God. It consists of four parts:

1. An address to God, and a description of God's attributes or actions. ("O God, who . . .")
2. A request.
3. A reason for the request. ("so that we may . . .")
4. An ascription to Christ and a doxology.

Sample: Great Creator of the cosmos,
 who called forth light from darkness and breathed life into us;
 awaken in our hearts and imaginations the creativity
 that is part of your image in us,
 that our discussions might lead us to new ministries of hope and possibility;
 through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
 one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Another method of prayer can be **focused meditation**. Encourage the group to sit comfortably and silently, and have everyone relax each part of their body, beginning at the head and working their way down to the feet. Then have them focus on a phrase, repeated quietly while they exhale, such as "I belong to God" or "Jesus, remember me."

Rather than have them repeat a phrase, you might have them listen in silence to a piece of instrumental music, focusing entirely on the music, imagining that Jesus is sitting next to them while they listen. Then give them a few minutes of silence for prayer, listening to what God has to say to them.

A simple, short **song** that doesn't require accompaniment can be a good way to lead into prayer. Several refrains from Taizé and the Iona communities, as well as several praise choruses, can be used to lead into prayer or to frame the prayer (singing before and after praying). The following songs can be found in the new hymnal supplement *Sing! A New Creation*, available in the summer of 2001 from the RCA Distribution Center:

- "From Varied Hills of Daily Cares"
- "Come into God's Presence Singing 'Alleluia'"
- "Come All You People"
- "Open Our Eyes, Lord"
- "Send Out Your Light, Lord"
- "Santo, Santo, Santo"
- "Glorias," by John L. Bell and Pablo Sosa
- "Come, Holy Spirit"

Several of the **psalm settings** in *Sing! A New Creation* can also be useful in opening devotions.

If it is appropriate to have a **Bible study** as part of the devotions, you might consider an abbreviated form of the African Bible study method. Explain to the group what will happen before you begin. Have one person read the passage, and then let everyone spend two to four minutes in silence. After that, ask one or two people to mention a word or phrase that particularly spoke to them; ask one or two others to put themselves in the story—what might they be feeling? then ask one or two others what they thought God was telling them through the passage today.

A good option for closing prayer is a **share and prayer circle**. Gather your group in a circle, holding hands. Remind everyone that Jesus hears us when we pray, and ask for thanksgivings, then concerns. As each is mentioned, give the class a one-line prayer to say (i.e., when someone is thankful for the trip they have just taken, invite everyone to say “Praise God for safe travel”; when someone mentions an aunt in the hospital, invite the group to say “God grant healing to Tillie”). Allow for silences; give everyone a chance to share, but don’t be insistent. Then conclude with the Lord’s Prayer.

When the group is more comfortable with extemporaneous prayer, you can invite everyone to share their joys and concerns at once in the circle. Then invite everyone to pray, aloud or silently, as they feel led, and invite one particular person to close by praying aloud. Again, allow for silences, and for the Spirit to lead the prayer where it will go.





December: Advent Wreath Lighting for Sunday School

The season of Advent is the beginning of the church's year as well as the season of preparation for Christmas. Its liturgical colors are purple or blue, except for the third Sunday, or "Gaudete Sunday," which is traditionally the "day of joy," whose color is pink. To mark the Sundays in Advent, often a wreath with three purple or blue candles and one pink candle is used. On the first Sunday of Advent, the candle opposite the pink one is lit, and on following Sundays, one more is lit around the circle. The pink candle is, obviously, for the third Sunday. In the center there may be a larger white taper or pillar, which is lit with the others on Christmas eve and the following twelve days of Christmas. It is struck once Epiphany arrives. The lighting may be done by liturgists, by Sunday school classes, by families, or by representatives from different groups in the church.

The following short ritual is an example of words that may be used during the beginning portion of the liturgy. It may be followed by the opening hymn chosen for the day, or by a song written for the lighting of the wreath such as "The Prophets Came to Israel," by Bert Witvoet, found in *Songs for LiFE*, CRC Publications, number 128, or Natalie Sleeth's anthem "Light One Candle," found in *Sunday Songbook*, published by Hinshaw Music, HMB-102. These songs lend themselves to being sung piecemeal; sing just the first stanza on the first Sunday, the first and second on the second Sunday, the first through third on the third Sunday, and so on. By the time Christmas arrives, the whole song may be sung. Remember to procure permission from the publisher to print the words, or music, or both in your bulletins.

The Lighting of the Advent Wreath, First Sunday of Advent

The Advent wreath helps us recollect
the miracle of God's becoming human for our sake.

The wreath is a circle,
causing us to remember the eternity of God's love
for us and for all humanity.

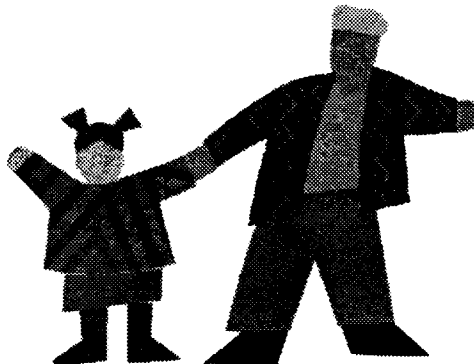
It is decked with green boughs,
causing us to remember the newness of life
we have in Christ Jesus.

The first candle reminds us
of the prophets' hope for God's salvation to come,
as Isaiah prophesied:

"The Lord himself will give you a sign.

Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son,
and shall name him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

So let us sing as we celebrate the coming of God to the world.



The Lighting of the Advent Wreath, Second Sunday of Advent

The Advent wreath helps us recollect
the miracle of God's becoming human for our sake.

The wreath is a circle,
causing us to remember the eternity of God's love
for us and for all humanity.

It is decked with green boughs,
causing us to remember the newness of life
we have in Christ Jesus.

The first candle reminds us
of the prophets' hope for God's salvation to come.

The second candle reminds us
of Jesus' humility in coming to earth and being born in a stall, as Luke records:

"This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth
and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12).

So let us sing as we celebrate the coming of God to the world.

The Lighting of the Advent Wreath, Third Sunday of Advent

The Advent wreath helps us recollect
the miracle of God's becoming human for our sake.

The wreath is a circle,
causing us to remember the eternity of God's love
for us and for all humanity.

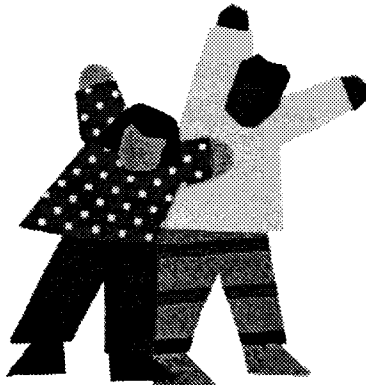
It is decked with green boughs,
causing us to remember the newness of life
we have in Christ Jesus.

The first candle reminds us
of the prophets' hope for God's salvation to come.

The second candle reminds us
of Jesus' humility in coming to earth and being born in a stall.

The third candle reminds us
of the joy of the shepherds as they heard the good news of Jesus' arrival,
for "The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as
it had been told them" (Luke 2:20).

So let us sing as we celebrate the coming of God to the world.





The Lighting of the Advent Wreath, Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Advent wreath helps us recollect
the miracle of God's becoming human for our sake.

The wreath is a circle,
causing us to remember the eternity of God's love
for us and for all humanity.

It is decked with green boughs,
causing us to remember the newness of life
we have in Christ Jesus.

The first candle reminds us
of the prophets' hope for God's salvation to come.

The second candle reminds us
of Jesus' humility in coming to earth and being born in a stall.

The third candle reminds us
of the joy of the shepherds as they heard the good news of Jesus' arrival.

The fourth candle reminds us
of the angels' song of peace for all the earth, as we find in Luke's gospel:
"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host,
praising God and saying,

'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'" (Luke 2:13-14).

So let us sing as we celebrate the coming of God to the world.

The Lighting of the Advent Wreath, Christmas Eve

The Advent wreath helps us recollect
the miracle of God's becoming human for our sake.

The wreath is a circle,
causing us to remember the eternity of God's love
for us and for all humanity.

It is decked with green boughs,
causing us to remember the newness of life
we have in Christ Jesus.

The first candle reminds us
of the prophets' hope for God's salvation to come.

The second candle reminds us
of Jesus' humility in coming to earth and being born in a stall.

The third candle reminds us
of the joy of the shepherds as they heard the good news of Jesus' arrival.

The fourth candle reminds us
of the angels' song of peace for all the earth.

The Christ candle reminds us
that Jesus is the light of the world,
come into our darkness to enlighten us

and give us the life of God
which we share with others,
as he says in John's gospel:

"I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life"
(John 8:12).

So let us sing as we celebrate the coming of God to the world.

January: A Litany of Light

Use this litany during worship to pray for the people in your Sunday school or as part of your opening devotions for the month of January. Permission is granted as needed to reprint music and lyrics as needed. The refrain's text is the first line of Psalm 27.

O God, who is sight to the blind,
we pray for those among us
whose eyes are clouded,
who are blind in soul or mind.
Be for them and for us the sight of truth.

Refrain:

Kathleen Hart Brumm

All instances except last, Last time

The Lord is my light and my sal - va - tion. Of whom shall I be a - fraid? fraid?

O God, who is light in the darkness,
we pray for those among us
whose ignorance puts them in danger.
Be for them and for us protection in the dark.
(Refrain)

O God, who is the bright morning star,
we pray for those among us
in whom the dawn light of your Word has broken,
and who strive to live by it and teach it to others.
Be for them and for us a sure defense and the promise of a new day.
(Refrain)

O God, who is wisdom for humanity,
we pray for those among us
who are searching for your truth
and who strive to learn your ways.
Be for them and for us the author and finisher of our faith.
(Refrain)

O God, who is salvation to the lost,
we pray for those among us who have never found your way,
or who, having found it, have strayed from your path.
Be for them and for us the beacon that guides safely home.
(Refrain)

Remind us, O God,
to turn to you in all the times of our lives.
Grant us patience to wait for you,
courage to be strong in your might.
Make our minds and hearts willing to learn from you,
to be conformed to your will for your work.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.
(Refrain)



February: Lenten Devotions for Children

Week One: Wednesday's Ashes

Have some ashes in a small bowl on hand. Allow children to see, smell, and perhaps touch them. Ask "How would it feel to have ashes all over your skin? Would you feel dirty, or itchy, or uncomfortable? What would you look like? Could you get away from the ashes if you didn't wash or bathe?"

Read Daniel 9:2b-5: *I, Daniel... turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, "Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances."*

Ask "Why did people in Daniel's day wear burlap and ashes?" The constant discomfort may have served as a reminder to turn away from their old, sinful ways. Ash Wednesday's ashes recall for us this custom of repenting from something done wrong. We begin the season of Lent with ashes because they remind us that we are not perfect, that we get things wrong, and that God wants us to continually turn to him for grace to combat our failings. God heard Daniel's sincere prayer, and God will hear ours, too.

Week Two: Why Are We Waiting?

Last week we saw that Daniel prayed and asked God for forgiveness. God heard his prayer. But God doesn't always answer right away. God's people in the time of the prophet Isaiah had to wait a long time before they received a favorable answer from God. This prompted Isaiah to say: *I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him* (Isaiah 8:17).

It is sometimes very hard to wait. Have you ever had to wait for something? How does it feel to have to delay getting what you want? Can you ever make someone hurry up? Isaiah said that God was hiding from the house of Jacob. Could God's people in Isaiah's time make God hurry up? Can we make God hurry

up? Sometimes God asks us to wait, even if it is difficult for us to do so. While Lent is a time for turning around, it is also a time of waiting for God to show us which way to go.

Week Three: Why Do We Have to Wait?

Ask for one child to come and wear an opaque blindfold. Turn the child around a few times, then immediately ask him or her to walk a straight line. (Make sure your floor is without steps, or that you prevent them from falling down stairs.) Note the result. Ask another volunteer to do the same thing, but instead of walking immediately, wait for the dizziness to subside. Note the result.

Waiting, as we have talked about, is sometimes very hard to do. Nonetheless, it can be very important, because if we don't wait, we won't be able to do what we are asked to do, or we will do it poorly. We have to practice being patient when we do not get what we want right away. Patience and endurance do not usually come easily, but they bring their own rewards. So Paul was able to write to his Roman friends: *We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us* (Romans 5:3-5).

Week Four: Is It Worth the Wait?

Ask the children, if they are willing to get something from you, whether they will hold their hand out to receive it from you. Ask them to keep their hand out until you give them what you are going to give them. Once everyone who wants to has their hands out, continue with the rest of the talk, reminding them occasionally to keep their hands out.

We are now at the middle of Lent, and our waiting for Easter is half over. Ask "Are you sick of waiting yet? Does it seem like a long time? How about waiting for me to give you something? Are your arms getting tired? How do you know whether the thing you are

waiting for is worth the wait? Can you know that before you receive it? How do you know that what I will put there is worth your waiting for it? Do you hope I will put something good or something bad in your hand?"

God wants to give us something, too, and that is life in what he calls "the kingdom of heaven": the place where God rules everything. Matthew tells us that *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it* (Matthew 13:44-46).

It takes a long time to find something of great value. It also takes a long time to sell everything you own in order to acquire that special thing. In the time before we discover and acquire it, we are waiting, even if we are working toward it. We wait for the kingdom of God that began at Easter the same way, just like you have waited for me to give you this. (Place a small trinket or piece of Easter candy in each child's palm.) We trust God that what we are waiting for is the treasure in the field or the pearl of great value, something even greater than we can ever imagine.

Week Five: Waiting for the Gifts of Easter

We have been talking during most of this season about the task of waiting. We saw that Daniel, Isaiah, the Israelites, and the people who bought the field and the pearl had to wait, even as some of us waited last week to get something put into our hands. There is also another group of people who waited. These people were Jesus' disciples, who gathered together to pray after Jesus died. They waited because they were not sure what to do when Jesus was killed. What do you think you would do if your teacher went away and did not come back to your classroom? How do you think you would feel the day that happened? What if there were no substitute to take your teacher's place? Would you still meet with your classmates?

Jesus' disciples decided that they would do better if they all stayed together, and so

on the night of the third day after Jesus died, they were all in one room. Some of their friends had just come back from a trip, and they had met Jesus on the road. Luke records, *That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. While they were talking, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you"* (Luke 24:33-36).

When we gather together like the first disciples did, Jesus appears among us, too. Ask "How do we know Jesus is with us? What evidence is there? How can we recognize him?" Jesus promised that he would always be with us, even when we are not in church. God goes with us wherever we go, even if it seems like we have to wait to see him.

Week Six: Sunday's Palms

Have a few branches of palms with you. Ask "What are these things good for? Why do we have them today and not any other Sunday? What will you do with them when you take them home?"

People in Jesus' time and society waved them in front of important people, sometimes to cool them off with the breeze they would make. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem the week before his Passion, the people there waved him on with palm branches and cloth, like we wave flags and have ticker-tape during parades. Not only does it look nice, but it also shows honor to the people who are being paraded.

Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey, like a military hero. The crowd shouted, "Hosanna," meaning "Save us!" Some people wanted him to conquer the Roman rulers who were governing Palestine. But Jesus had other plans. He was not going to save the people from Rome, but from a much greater enemy. And he would save not only those people, but many others who never even saw Jerusalem.

We have palms today to remember that Jesus came to Jerusalem to die. The church will use the palm branches that are left when today's worship is over to make the ashes for next year's Ash Wednesday. They remind us that earthly glory fades and that we, too, will eventually need to turn once again to God.



March: Interactive Vignettes for Sundays in Lent or Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday Gatherings

Cast: Six people over sixteen years of age: three women, three men
Lois (a servant)
Philip in the cenacle
Peter in the garden
Publio (a soldier) in the throne room
Veronica on the road
Mary at the cross

Have each of the characters at their stations before the visitors begin the activity. Costumes for the characters are helpful; even a hat or insignia will work, but they are not strictly necessary. Each of the characters may read or memorize verbatim the following scripts, ad-lib based on the character, or do some of each.

These vignettes may be used individually in the order given, one for each week of Lent. If this is done, following the first week, it may be helpful to remind visitors of what happened the week before. Alternatively, some or all may be used as an initial activity at a pre-Easter "Easter Party" or as children's church for Maundy Thursday or Good Friday.

If they are used all at once with a small group, the progression from the Last Supper to Golgotha may take place in the order listed. With larger numbers, for the sake of crowd control, smaller groups may start with the first, and go in order, or visitors may go to any of the stations in the order they choose. In this case, characters should wait until a group has assembled to begin their monologues. For large groups, it may be of help to give a two-minute signal two minutes before the end of one section and a second signal for a one-minute preparation time before the next presentation begins. A dress rehearsal will help in the timing of the signals and ensure that everything needed is at hand and ready. Visitors to each station are to be encouraged and invited to participate, but with a light hand. Groups of children will do well to have a familiar adult accompany them on their journey.

Station One: Cenacle—room with a large table set for supper

Lois (a servant) will need:

- A number of chairs
- Three basins—one for clean water, one for washing, one for used water
- A few towels to dry visitors' feet

Philip will need:

- A jar of honey (don't give honey to children under two years of age)
- Matzo bread (enough for all participants)

Station Two: Garden of Gethsemane—outdoor garden or indoor set with flowers/plants

Peter will need:

- A blossom to give to each visitor, either live or paper

Station Three: Pilate's Throne Room—one central big chair draped in purple cloth

Publio (soldier) will need:

- Dried rosebush canes, with the thorns still on them

Station Four: The Road to Golgotha—an outside path, sidewalk, lane, corridor, or an aisle

Veronica will need:

- Small stones (enough for all participants)

Station Five: Golgotha's Peak

Needed:

- Large nails (enough for all participants)
- 4x6 boards
- Hammer

The Script

Station One

Lois: Welcome! Thank you for coming to be the guest of my master. One of the first things you must do, being good guests, is have your feet washed. This may seem a little silly to you, since you have shoes on most of the time, and your feet don't get too dirty. We didn't always wear shoes, however, and only very rich people had shoes that covered their whole foot. So when our guests finally had walked all the way to the cenacle and were ready to sit down to supper, their feet were pretty dirty and tired and some of them had blisters and cuts from the stones in the streets.

Getting your feet washed feels really nice. We do it because it helps guests feel welcome and relaxed, not to mention cutting down on the amount of dirt inside the dining room. Since I was the lowest servant of the house, I got stuck with the job of washing our guests' feet. I was supposed to wet their feet and rub them with a cloth to get the dirt off, then rinse and dry them. Sometimes it was a child who toted the basin of clean water around to the guests. This time, though, I didn't have to do it! Jesus himself took up the basin and the towel. He said he did it to help his friends remember that if they want to be great leaders, they must serve the people around them, even doing the humblest jobs. This was a very big surprise to most of us. Now, if you like, I will wash your feet the way we used to do for our guests. (*The servant seats the person who will have his or her feet washed, removes his or her shoes, washes the person's feet, and puts shoes back on.*) If you are a Christian, Jesus wants you to remember to serve others the way he served his disciples.

Philip: Hi. My name is Philip and I am one of Jesus' apostles. This place we're standing in is called the cenacle. We call it the cenacle because of "cena," the Latin word for dinner. You might wonder why we have this special word for this rather ordinary dining room. It's because it was here that Jesus and we, his disciples, shared his last supper. It was a holiday meal, like the ones you might eat to celebrate Christmas or Easter, or even your birthday. It was a special meal for us, too, one we ate during the season of Passover. Along with foods that we ate every day, we had special foods, things we didn't eat every day. (Philip might ask the visitors what special foods they have at holiday times.) Some of the special foods we eat at Passover are horseradish and honey and a kind of bread (*Philip offers some matzo and honey to whoever would like a taste. While they are eating, he continues.*) The bread is called matzo. Matzo is like saltine crackers, except bigger and without the salt.

The meal we had together was a complicated affair, full of things we did the same way every year. These things are called rituals, since they help us connect with God and we never change the way we do them. The head of the family, or the leader of the group, is the boss. He is the one who signals us what and when to eat and drink. It is the same every year, usually. But this meal was unique because Jesus did something he had never done before. We were used to his taking the matzo and breaking it, and we were accustomed to his taking a cup of wine and passing it around the table. As I said, that is what the head of the household is supposed to do. But this time, he said that the bread that he was breaking was his own body, and the cup which he passed around had in it his own blood. He asked us to remember him every time we shared bread and a cup. It seemed pretty odd to us, but because we loved him, we all took our portion of what he handed out. It made us feel close to him. After he died and came back from the dead, we remembered what he said to us, and we shared the bread and cup in his name. It still makes us feel close to him.



Station Two

Peter: Isn't this a lovely place? I used to like it a lot. But it isn't as happy a place as it used to be since this is where James, John, and I were when Jesus was taken away from us. We had just finished supper, and Jesus invited us three outside to get a bit of air. We left the others to finish off the leftovers and clean up, and followed Jesus to this garden. He asked us to wait up with him, but then he went off by himself a few paces, over there. We three knew enough to leave him alone when he did this. We did try to stay awake while he was over there by himself, praying. We really did try. But you know how hard it is to be both quiet and not fall asleep when you are very tired, don't you? The sweet smell of the flowers and the lullaby of the wind in the trees were too much for us. Jesus wanted us to wait up with him, but we didn't want to interrupt his praying by making noise, and if you can't talk to stay awake, well...we fell asleep.

Jesus came over in a little while and asked us again if we could stay up with him. We were a little groggy, but we promised again that we would. Then he left us again to pray more and again we fell asleep. It might have been funny if Jesus hadn't seemed so sad and worried. I wanted to keep watch, I really did. I listened to a little bit of his prayer, when he asked his Father if the cup that was coming might pass from him. I didn't know then what he was talking about, but when he returned a third time and told us that his hour had come, I knew that something was going to happen, and it didn't look good.

Then Judas, who had left us while supper was still going on, appeared out of nowhere. He walked right up to Jesus and kissed him on the cheek. Suddenly there were soldiers with swords and knives; they grabbed Jesus and forced him to go with them. I was so scared that I snatched someone's saber and slashed the ear off of some poor soul. Jesus told me to put the sword away. He picked up the fellow's ear and put it right back on. He was going with these people peacefully, and he didn't want anyone to get hurt. I want you to take one of these flowers to remember that Jesus gives peace. (*Peter distributes the blossoms to the visitors.*) After he healed the cut, they led him away, and I didn't even get to say goodbye.

Station Three

Publio: Attention! You are now in the presence of the throne of Pilate the Great, ruler of all of Palestine. While you are in the royal throne room you will keep silent and not speak unless you are spoken to! Understood? What sort of trouble are you knaves in that you should wish to appear before our glorious and equitable ruler? What is your petition, that you should present your smarmy selves to his awesome majesty to plead your cause? Do you dare stand in this magnificent place merely to inquire about a common prisoner named Jesus?

Well, since it seems that indeed, you do, I will comment on what I know. He was dragged here early, very early, one Friday morning. He was a mess, let me tell you. Blood on his hands, his knees smudged with mud, dog-tired; he looked as if he were up late partying with friends. Accused of a few things, he was, claiming he was God, or at least a king, and inciting riots in the streets. An unsavory character, that one. We had to throttle him a few times to try to get him to talk to Pilate. He wouldn't say a word in his own defense. Not one word. They exchanged some nonsense about truth, but I had no interest in knowing the details. Pilate soon wearied of the questioning, and sent the prisoner out to be whipped.

We did as we were ordered. In fact, we did it one better, and put a crown on the man's head, since he claimed to be king. It didn't hurt us that it was a crown made of sharp thorns. (*Publio passes the rose canes around, encouraging the visitors to touch the*

thorns and feel how sharp they are.) After we had made fun of him, we brought him back to Pilate. Pilate had a hard time deciding what to do next, so he went to that window over there and asked the crowd that had gathered what they wanted done with this scoundrel. All I heard was “Crucify him!” So Pilate asked for a basin, washed his hands of the whole affair, and sent the victim off to be executed on a cross. Maybe if Jesus had defended himself, he’d still be alive.

Station Four

Veronica: Do you know where this road leads? You may think it goes to (*insert the name of the place to which it really does lead*), but I know it as the path to the hill of skulls. It’s a creepy name for a creepy place, the place where Rome gets rid of all of its local enemies. In our language we call it Golgotha, or, if you’re from Rome, Calvary. We usually avoid this place; it’s outside the city walls, and it sometimes smells pretty bad. The soldiers are not too concerned about the bodies of the people they crucify, you know. One day I was here with a few of my friends, coming back home. We noticed a big crowd standing among the pebbles, lining the path on both sides. We wondered what was going on, so we stopped. We saw lots of women crying their eyes out, some soldiers carelessly cracking their whips and yelling at some poor guy, Simon of Cyrene I’m told, hauling a beam uphill. The man behind him looked like he would be Rome’s latest victim. Hecklers in the crowd had thrown stones like these at him. (*Veronica shows her visitors the collection of stones.*) His face was so bruised and sweaty that he could hardly see. There was a band circling his forehead that punctured his skin, and his face looked awful. Wrestling through the crowd, I took out my towel and bent down to wipe his face, trying to clear his vision.

He surprised us all when he paused, heaved himself up to look straight at the group of women, and told them “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.” Usually, when men take this road they are sinking in self-pity, or complaining about the injustice of their sentence. What condition must he think we are in if he, so close to death, can pity us? It makes me wonder. I would like each of you to take one of these stones, and remember Jesus’ journey to Golgotha, and his care and compassion for the people he met on his way.

Station Five

Mary: This is the last place I saw my friend Jesus alive before Joseph of Arimathea put him in his tomb. We women who were close to Jesus had been told by some of the disciples that Jesus had been captured and taken to the authorities. We were afraid that this would happen. Even though Jesus had only meant good, there were some folks who just didn’t understand what it was he was talking about. They became afraid of him. They probably thought they were doing the world a favor by crucifying him. I didn’t know then that they did do the world a favor. I was too sad and fearful to notice.

The soldiers were cruel when they put people to death. A cross was the worst way they knew to get rid of someone. After forcing their captive to carry the wood up the hill, sometimes they would tie the culprit to the crossbeam and hoist them up. That happened if they weren’t in too much of a hurry to have them go, or if they weren’t supposed to suffer too much. In Jesus’ case, though, they must have thought he was the worst kind of criminal, because they used nails and a hammer to keep him up there. (*Mary demonstrates hitting a nail into the 4x6 board.*) Imagine what that might feel like if it went through your wrist or ankle. Jesus suffered a lot because it hurt so much. He did this for us, so that we would not have to suffer. Jesus cares enough about each of us to go through all this pain so that we can be reconciled, reunited with God. One of these nails is for each of you. (*Mary gives each visitor a nail.*) When you see it, remember that Jesus loves you, really truly loves you—enough to die for you.



April: Commissioning Disciples

The liturgy for commissioning disciples (see next page) may be used for those whom our Lord calls to ministries of service, whether volunteering for a work camp, serving in a soup kitchen or distributing groceries at a food pantry. It may be used at any time of the year, but is especially appropriate in the Easter season. It may be led by the pastor, but may be more effective if the leaders' part is done by one of the deacons currently serving. The liturgy might best be placed at the offertory, after the plates have been presented and before the offertory prayer is said.

The ministries of service are ways by which we recognize who we are before God, and who God wants to be for us. Listen to these words from John's Gospel:

The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God (John 1:9-12).

The gospel of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ, is indeed good news for us. In hearing and believing, we are given power to become children of God. Yet, in Mark's Gospel, this great revelation was almost hushed up by fear. Listen to these words from Mark's account of the resurrection:

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid (Mark 16:2-8).

In spite of their fear, the women did tell and did spread the news of Jesus' resurrection and the gift of new life. Our gathering here is evidence that they were neither silent nor selfish with this good news. The Spirit of God now calls some of our number to spread the gospel through ministries of mercy and compassion. Will those who are to be commissioned for (insert the name[s] of the project[s]) please come forward.

Note: You can also use the *Order for Recognition of Ministries in a Congregation*, produced by the Commission on Worship and available through the RCA Distribution Center, 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org.

Commissioning Disciples Liturgy

Leader: You stand before us as those who are willing to respond to Paul's question: "How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:13-14).

Follow the example of your sisters and brothers in the faith, and go and tell those whom you meet of the love of God in Jesus Christ, for the Spirit of God has called you to this ministry. Will you carry out your call to the best of your ability, as the Holy Spirit gives you power to do so?

Servants: **We will.**

Leader: Will you, by your words and deeds, proclaim the gospel of Christ to those whom you will serve?

Servants: **We will.**

Leader: Will you allow this congregation to give the support you will need, will you lean on us for material support in times of duress, and inform us about your work so that we may share this ministry with you?

Servants: **We will.**

Leader: Will the congregation please stand? Will you send these apostles into the world to spread the gospel of Christ?

Congregation: **We, your sisters and brothers in Christ, partners with you in the gospel, pledge you our support by prayer, attention, and financial gifts. Show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3).**

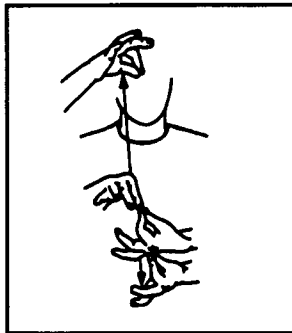
Leader: Let us pray.
 Lord Jesus, you said to your disciples "Peace be with you.
 As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21).
 Give these, your apostles, your peace
 as they seek to carry out the ministry which you have entrusted to them.
 Sustain them in your Word and uphold them for the tasks to they are to do, so
 that at the last, you may say to them,
 "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master"
 (Matt. 25:21).
 By your mercies, O God,

Congregation: **We present ourselves as living sacrifices,
 holy and acceptable through Jesus Christ, our Lord.**

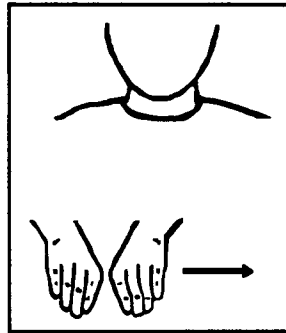


May: A Brief Interactive Devotional for the Day of Pentecost

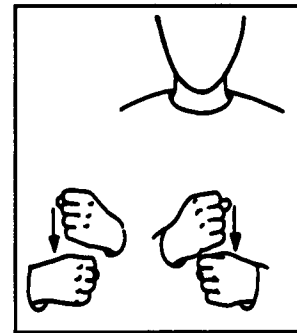
Use the short piece on the following page as a beginning devotion at the start of Sunday school or as the children's message during worship. First, teach the participants (everyone still young enough to join in—which may include some adults, as well!) to sign three words: Spirit, move, and create. Use American Sign Language (ASL) sign as described, or make up motions of your own. Be sure to speak slowly and allow enough pauses so participants have time to hear and react to the words.



"Spirit": Tips of thumb and forefinger touch, right hand moves up as if pulling a filament.



"Move": Fingertips touch, both hands move from right to left of the body.



"Create": Both hands form fists with the thumb outside, tap left on top of right, then right on top of left.

Pentecost Devotional

At the beginning of the world, God's Holy Spirit
moved over the waters of chaos
and creation was born.

Creation of the stars of light,
creation of the earth and planets,
creation of plants and animals and people,
all of these the Holy Spirit moved.
Creation was good.

But Creation fell.

The Holy Spirit of God
grieved for creation,

for creation moved away from God.

The Holy Spirit called a people to be God's own.

The Holy Spirit inspired prophets.

The Holy Spirit moved people
to come closer to the God of all creation.

But still creation moved,
away and away.

The Holy Spirit was in Jesus.

Jesus showed God's love for the creation.

Jesus moved people's hearts to come closer to God.

But Jesus only had one body,
and could not move from place to place
to be everywhere at once.

So Jesus sent the Holy Spirit again
on the day of Pentecost.

Pentecost is the day when creation
became a new creation.

When the Holy Spirit descended from God,
creation began to move back to God.

The creation we live in
is the creation that began again
on the day of Pentecost.

We help move creation back to God
by the power of the Holy Spirit in us.

The Holy Spirit moves us
to live by God's word,
to make our creations imitate God's creation.

And that creation is good.

So let us move from this place
and help the Holy Spirit
move creation back to God.



June: Prayers for Graduates

Near the end of the school year, it is good to recognize those people in the congregation who have completed a stage in their education, and especially those who will be going on to a new and unknown step in their lives. This act of recognition and prayer should take place at the time of the congregational prayers.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Over the past few weeks, members of our congregation have completed important stages of their educational lives:

[Names of individuals and the stage of education they have completed in nursery, elementary, middle, or high school or college.]

This is the season for us to congratulate them for the good work they have done, to give thanks for God's guiding presence with them and the teachers they have been given, and to ask for grace as they prepare for a new phase in their lives.

Invite graduating high school students and their parents to come forward, and have the parents lay hands on their children.

Let us pray.

Eternal God, who knew us in our mother's womb and watches over us all of our days,
we give you thanks for the progress these sisters and brothers have made.

We thank you for their teachers and their classmates,
for the knowledge they have gained and the maturity they have achieved,
for friendships nurtured, joys experienced, and lessons shared.

Nurturing God, who called Abram and Sarai on a journey with no set destination
and gave them a new identity and a new calling,
guide and uphold these disciples as they go into unknown places.

Watch over them and protect them as they meet new teachers, make new friends,
and face new challenges.

Help them to always remember that nothing is impossible with you.

Bless especially these young men and women who are going to schools or jobs far away.
Even as your Son has promised to be with us always,
help them to always know that we are also present with them
in prayer and spirit,
strengthen them for the rigors of a new life on their own,
protect them from danger and distress,
and comfort them with the warmth and peace of your Spirit.

If there are graduates who have recently returned from college, this prayer may be said:

We praise and thank you, O God, for the love and care you have shown to these who have been parted from us for a time.

They left us as barely more than children, and they return to us as young adults.
Let the new journey they are now beginning be taken side by side with you.

If there are graduates who have been part of the congregation while in college, they may be invited forward with the elders, who may lay hands on them. This prayer may be said:

God, whose Son stretched out his arms to draw us all into one family with you,
we thank you for these friends who became brothers and sisters
among us for a time,
and we ask you to watch over them as they leave our fellowship.
Help them to keep us in their hearts even as we keep them in ours.
Keep them as the apple of your eye, hide them in the shelter of your wings,
and let your goodness and loving kindness walk with them
all the days of their lives.





Where to Begin: Worshiping the Lord

We worship God in spirit and in truth, the Scriptures tell us—a unified purpose often marked by a remarkable diversity in styles. The following resources focus on the principles and foundations that undergird our expressions of worship. They are educational in nature, Reformed in their understandings, and directed at leaders and learners of all ages. All of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center. To order, call 1-800-968-7221 or visit orders@rca.org.

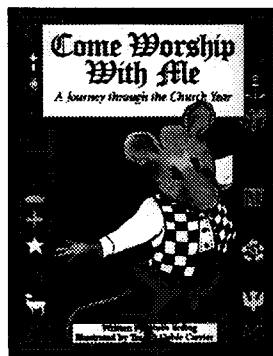
For Children

A Child Shall Lead: Children in Worship, A Sourcebook for Christian Educators, Musicians, and Clergy
edited by John D. Witvliet

The four major sections of this book include a vision for the role of children in Christian congregations and communities, strategies for teaching children about worship, ideas for planning worship services that involve children more fully, and a series of reference materials. (Published by Choristers Guild and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship)
#1800460090 \$29.95^{US}/43.45^{CDN}
ISBN 1-929187-13-0

Come Unto Me: Rethinking the Sacraments for Children
by Elizabeth Francis Caldwell

Come Unto Me addresses the realities of congregational and familial practices of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. Caldwell provides models for integrating education and worship in the lives of church members. (Published by United Church Press)
#1000011192 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}



Come Worship with Me: A Journey through the Church Year
by Ruth L. Boling

Colorful, friendly church mice tell the story of the holidays and seasons of the church in this hardcover book. They trace the journey of the church year from Advent through Christmas, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, and beyond. In a special closing section, clear and easy-to-understand explanations are given for many Christian symbols. (Published by Geneva Press)
#1800500455 \$19.95^{US}/28.95^{CDN}
ISBN 0-664-50045-5

For Youth

All That We Are: An Arts and Worship Workbook
by Aimee Wallis Buchanan, Bill Buchanan, and Jodi B. Martin

This book is for adults who work with youth, for youth, and for all people who wish to explore arts in worship and ministry. It includes new methods of Bible study, a fresh approach to proclaiming God's Word, ways to write a drama, methods for creating liturgical movement, and alternate forms of personal worship time. (Published by Bridge Resources)
#2900095547 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}

Awesome Youth Sundays
by Martha Johnson

This book is for youth advisors, pastors, choir leaders, and worship planning committees who want to turn youth-led worship services into inspiring and dynamic worship events. (Published by Bridge Resources)
#2900095510 \$15.95^{US}/23.15^{CDN}



For Adults

Liturgy and Life: A Reformed Understanding of Worship

Christian worship in the Reformed tradition has three basic elements: the Approach to God, the Word of God, and the Response to God. This video explores the meaning of each component, emphasizing its importance and demonstrating creative, enthusiastic worship in a wide variety of styles. The extensive leader's guide contains suggestions for using the video in one or four sessions with adults and older youth. The kit includes the *Meaning of Mystery* video and study guide along with *Understanding Worship in the RCA*. Useful with new members, study groups, worship committees, consistories, and those preparing to make profession of faith.

Video

#6600801996 \$29.95^{US}/43.45^{CDN}

Kit

#6600802996 \$49.95^{US}/72.45^{CDN}

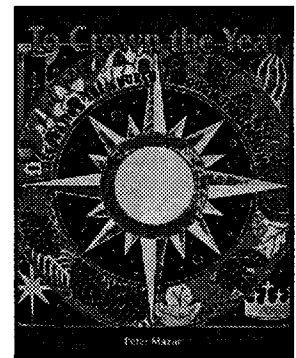
The video is available for loan through TRAVARCA, 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org.

Meeting God in the Bible: Sixty Devotions for Groups
by Donald L. Griggs

Contains fifteen different models to actively engage groups in devotional prayer activities. Each of the sixty devotions relates to a specific Scripture, and is keyed to a session of *The Bible in Depth*. The devotions are also appropriate for use with other studies.
#3700503001 \$19.95^{US}/28.95^{CDN}

To Crown the Year: Decorating the Church through the Seasons
by Peter Mazar

This book offers practical advice about adorning the church's house for all the seasons of the year, including ordinary time. Learn how to identify quality and appropriateness in ideas and designs. (Published by Liturgy Training Publications)
#6600540418 \$19.00^{US}/27.55^{CDN}
ISBN 1-56854-041-8



Praising God through the Lively Arts
by Linda M. Goens

This book offers worship leaders ready-to-use ideas for adding drama, individual and choral Scripture readings, clowning, storytelling, and liturgical dance and movement to a Sunday morning worship service. Goens provides short dramas, sketches, and skits, each tied to a Scripture text and appropriate for different ages and abilities. Also included are three complete seasonal services and a Scripture index. (Published by Abingdon Press)

#6000031133 \$15.00^{US}/21.75^{CDN}

ISBN 0-687-03113-3

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Section 4

LEARNING for LIFE



**Spiritual
Gifts**

Spiritual Gifts

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7,12

That's finally the answer, isn't it? To do that which God has gifted us to do, and for which we have been promised the guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit. But if that is the answer, how often, in a world so easily guided and measured by wealth, status, and power, do we forget to ask the right question: Where, O God, have you gifted me for ministry? How might I be your disciple today?

Sometimes we need that reminder, to free us from the tyranny of the day's "oughts." Sometimes we need that reminder, to open us to the promises that God has made to us, to help us to name, claim, and use our God-given gifts. No matter the reason, the biblical promise is certain: that each has been given spiritual gifts from God for the building up of the body. To live and to serve by using those gifts is to tap into the boundless meaning and purpose of God's leading through the Holy Spirit.

"Every Christian—Called by God, Gifted for Ministry"

Content: Is the identification and use of spiritual gifts a new way of thinking for you? This article introduces a congregational ministry based on spiritual gifts, and a new resource you can use with your whole congregation.

How to Use: An understanding of spiritual gifts can form the core of a whole-church ministry, not simply Christian education. Use this introduction to interest a consistory or program leadership group in an in-depth look at spiritual gifts.

Tip: This is an introduction to a larger resource. Make sure you look for the information on how you can obtain basic resources about spiritual gifts, including spiritual gift inventories for both adults and youth.

Presenter: Carol Mutch served as president of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America during the year 2000-2001. She convened a task force on spiritual gifts, which led to the formation of this resource. She is an elder at Wyckoff Reformed Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey.

Church Herald Article: "Not Just Filling Slots"

Content: Understanding spiritual gifts means understanding and embracing this principle: recruiting volunteers requires more than a church directory, and keeping them requires more than a guilt trip.

How to Use: This *Church Herald* article is an excellent discussion starter, especially as a lead-in to the workshop by George Brown, "Cultivating Gifts." (See Section 6 in this notebook).

Tip: Have you ever considered the *Church Herald* as an adult curriculum? Many of the articles lend themselves to active discussion, and your members are already receiving the magazine.

Presenter: The Rev. John Padgett is calling minister for Fair Haven Ministries in Jenison, Michigan.

"Cultivating Gifts"

Content: See the "Workshops" section of this notebook (Section 6) for this resource on how to recruit and nurture volunteers through attention to their spiritual gifts.



Every Christian—Called By God, Gifted for Ministry

by Carol Mutch
President, General Synod 2000-2001

*Let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned,
to which God called you.
1 Corinthians 7:17*

Last year, the Reformed Church in America came together at a gathering called Mission 2000 “to discern the Spirit and engage the world.” There, amidst a diversity of ministry experiences and an intentional listening for the guidance of the Spirit, participants produced a Pentecost Letter—a testimony to the potential and future of ministry in the Reformed Church.

“This Pentecost weekend,” the letter said in part, “we threw open the windows of our minds and hearts.” And one of the challenges we faced, one of the callings we clearly heard, was “to identify spiritual gifts and passions so that every person can name their place in ministry.”

Carol Mutch, a Reformed Church elder and the president of General Synod 2000-01, took up these words as a calling and mandate for her time of service. She convened a group of pastors and laypersons to consider the possibilities of spiritual gift-based ministry in all of our churches, and led the effort to create materials about spiritual gifts for every congregation in the RCA.

The packet of materials on spiritual gifts, Every Christian—Called By God, Gifted for Ministry, will be available to all churches. It points to the enormous potential for ministry when people discover their God-given gifts. The introduction is included in this Learning for Life notebook. Here’s a brief outline of what’s included in the packet:

- *Reflections on how your own passions and interests can support and point to your spiritual gifts.*
- *Two spiritual gift inventories, one for adults and another for youth, that help persons identify their spiritual gifts.*
- *A Bible study that incorporates use of the gift inventories into a comprehensive, four-week program.*
- *A weekend retreat on spiritual gifts, including use of the gift inventories.*
- *An annotated bibliography of resources and materials on spiritual gifts.*
- *A people resource list, with phone numbers and email addresses of experienced persons in spiritual gift-based ministry.*

—Jeff Japinga, Minister for Education and Faith Development

Introduction

You are holding in your hands a most wonderful invitation: an invitation for every member of your congregation to discover and celebrate the deep and profound gifts that God has placed uniquely within each one of them.

The biblical witness is clear: God has given every Christian at least two vitally important gifts for daily living. The first is the gift of faith in Jesus Christ, his work of redemption, and thus forgiveness of sin. It is not a gift we have asked for nor earned; it is solely of God, out of God's unending love and care for us. So also is the second gift—of one or more special abilities—to be used for the purpose of ministry and the growth of Christ's kingdom. These special abilities are called spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts, and ministry based on spiritual gifts, are about ways in which Christians can discover their own true selves, made in the image of God and gifted by God. Discovering your spiritual gifts is not some trendy gimmick. Rather, it truly is an invitation, to journey deeper toward that faith-filled place where God has called us all to be.

The Source and Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

As the church of the New Testament was being formed and nurtured, it was also exploring a new and remarkable understanding: that God had blessed not simply the priests or other leaders of the church, but every believer, with unique abilities intended for the building up of the community of faith and for the enabling of Christ's message to be most effectively conveyed.

It was a new and radical concept of which Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus. In Ephesians 4, we read: "Each of us has received a special gift in proportion to what Christ has given...[God] did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ" (TEV). Become mature in your faith and spiritual growth, Paul continued.

Special gifts, or spiritual gifts, are not simply our natural abilities or talents (there is that aspect to us as well, but it's a different part of us). They are special, unique gifts given to believers by God through the Holy Spirit to empower them for the ministries of the church and the call of God in their lives. We do not choose these gifts—God does.

These spiritual gifts are powerful attributes of our individual being, yet intended for use beyond our own personal well-being. In 1 Corinthians 12, we are told that the Spirit gives different gifts to each person so that together we can most effectively be the church.

God has, in fact, bound us all together as many parts of Christ's body; every part is vital to the health of the whole body. The Bible states unequivocally that every believer has at least one spiritual gift; many believers have been given several. It is not a matter of wondering if you are gifted—it is a matter of accepting the fact that you *are* gifted. There are no greater or lesser gifts; the complete ministry that God intended is only fully accomplished when each believer contributes the unique part that God has designed in him or her.

We have the assurance that with the gift God also grants us the energy, hope, and ability to fully utilize it. Our main responsibility is to bring a willing heart and a listening and obedient spirit, and God will supply the rest. In Romans 12:6 we are assured that "we are to use our different gifts in accordance with the grace that God has given us." As with all the gifts God has given us, our greatest expression of thanks is to use wisely and fully what he has so graciously bestowed on us. First Peter 4:10-11 reminds us that in doing so, we honor God.

Discovering Our Spiritual Gifts

All are gifted, for the unity of the church and the building up of the body of Christ. This much is clear. But how does that work? How do we know what our gifts are, and how do we use those gifts?



There are many ways by which the people of God can understand God's design for them in the church. Resources on spiritual gifts number in the hundreds; what's right for you depends on your church and your experience with spiritual gifts. A group of RCA ministers and laypersons have created a unique packet of materials intended as an introduction to a study and exploration of spiritual gifts and a beginning point for congregations who wish to explore a gifts-based ministry. It's organized in a simple, straightforward method, summarized by the acronym **BEGIN**: Bible study first, then Examine yourself, finally Get **IN**volved.

Bible Study

Much like the parable of the sower in Matthew 13 and Luke 8, the seeds of spiritual-gift ministry will thrive in good soil. A conscious commitment to the biblical foundation of this understanding of ministry will help prepare that soil in your congregation.

That means, first of all, a commitment to Bible study. A basic four-week study that begins with the key texts in Scripture about spiritual gifts is included. It introduces spiritual gifts and tells how they can be discovered and used. If you need a more extensive biblical foundation than that provided by this study, seek out the excellent six-session Bible study on discipleship included in the Bible study section of this notebook.

Also valuable in preparing the soil of hearts for the seeds of Christ would be a series of sermons on the subject, a consistory in prayer for God's leading, and individuals who have a heart for seeing every Christian in fulfilling ministry and connected to God's leading.

Examine Yourself

Spiritual gifts don't mean much until you know what your spiritual gifts are. Two spiritual gift inventories—one for adults and one for youth—make up the next major component of the packet. The inventories are simply questions to ask yourself, in a group or individually. When your answers are entered on the accompanying scoring grid,

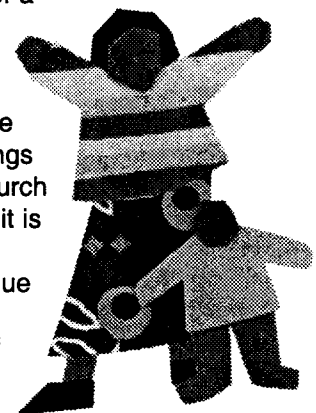
they provide insight into how God has gifted you. The inventory is easy to take and easy to score, but difficult to ignore. It's the next step.

Also included in the packet is the outline of a twenty-four-hour retreat, with designated time for study and gifts identification, if that style best fits your congregation. There is also a supplementary document on the role of passions and personality types as they relate to the use of spiritual gifts; while no tests for personality are included with the packet, it is important to be aware of that relationship as well.

Get Involved

Finally, there's the application of what you've learned. Coming to faith in Jesus Christ was for most of us a life-changing experience; so also can be the discovery of our spiritual gifts. Once that discovery has been made, it will be crucially important for the church to then provide its people with the structure, encouragement, and incentive to live out their calling. How can the congregation fan the flickers of new insight and ministry in its people? How can the church welcome their ideas, believe in them, provide means to help their vision happen, and cheer them on their way? That's the challenge, and reward, of discovering spiritual gifts. The final pages of the inventory suggest a means by which adults and youth can act on what they learn through the ministries of the church—and also at home, on the job, and in the community.

Remember, these are spiritual gifts, for the building up of Christ's kingdom. The primary purpose of a spiritual gifts assessment is not simply to find people who can be slotted into openings in your current church structure. Rather, it is to identify and celebrate the unique gifts God has planted in each of us, and to ask



how God is calling us to use our gifts to make a difference in the mission and ministry to which God has called our church. Be warned: this might shake things up a bit.

Called By God, Gifted for Ministry

Sitting in the pews of churches across America are literally millions of Christ-ones who are God's gift to a hurting nation...Ninety-eight percent of America's Christ-ones are not ordained ministers, but their callings to ministry are just as important as the pastor's calling.

—from *Calling*, by Tillapaugh/Hurst

Discovering one's spiritual gifts through assessment will be not only an affirming experience for believers, but also a freeing one. When we understand where our gift strengths lie and blend that awareness with our passion and personality, we are empowered to say "no" to requests that do not fit our God-given gifts, in order to be able to say "yes" to areas that enliven and enrich our lives as well as the life of the church. We go from being burnt out to being fired up; from "you must" to "I want to!"

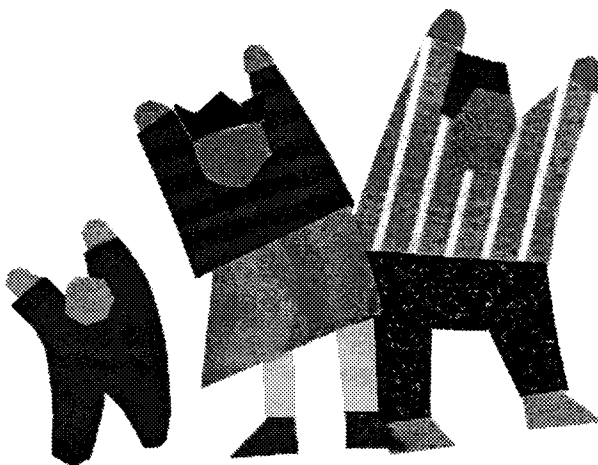
We are best led by example, therefore, the best possible leadership for

this endeavor is the laity. This is a time for the church leaders and especially elders, who are charged with the spiritual oversight of the congregation, to be in earnest prayer and discernment, asking God to lift up to their awareness a person in their fellowship of believers who believes passionately that everyone is called to ministry, and who can introduce, shepherd, and encourage others by walking alongside people as they begin to identify and to utilize their gifts.

Please rest assured that no one need venture out alone in this endeavor. There are many people in the larger church actively engaged in spiritual gifts work in their own local congregations who would be happy to answer questions and to mentor and encourage you. Additional resources, both print and people, are included in the packet to help you along in your journey.

The spiritual gifts are just that—gifts from God for his people. God be with you as you open the present and discover the ways God has blessed you to be a blessing!

If your church has not received a copy of the packet materials, and you would like to receive one, please contact the RCA Distribution Center at 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org.





Not Just Filling Slots

by the Rev. John Padgett

Recruiting volunteers requires more than a church directory, and keeping them requires more than a guilt trip.

Recruiting laypeople for leadership positions and as workers in the church is an ongoing task. At a time when both husband and wife often work outside of the home; when there's a felt need for more family time; and when many other groups in society demand an individual's time, the needs of the church for workers—particularly for leadership roles that involve a greater time commitment—also have increased.

Recruiting church volunteers is a growing challenge. Churches also find that, at times, those recruited will do great for several months but then, as the newness wears off,

give less of themselves and their time to the position. Eventually they ask to be relieved of the responsibility or just quit, and the recruiting process begins all over again.

Usually this problem is not a lack of desire on the part of laypeople, but rather a mismatching of positions with individuals recruited. Church leaders sometimes forget in the rush to fill positions that the right person is needed for the right position. In order to be fulfilled, each person needs two things: a place and a purpose. All people need to feel that they are a part of a larger whole, that they fit in and have a place. Individuals also need to feel important, that they have a role and a purpose.

For successful recruiting to happen, there are six things recruiters need to do.

- 1. Know the position you are filling.**

Understand who you are looking for and what you want them to do. Don't think of it as trying to fill a slot but rather think about what needs to be done and why this particular position is important to the body of Christ. This is true whether it involves serving on consistory, teaching Sunday school, leading an evangelism calling team, participating in a caring ministry, or being part of a group for seniors. Understand what you are after and share this with the person you are seeking to recruit.

- 2. Find the right person for the position.**

God has gifted each of us differently, and it is important for each one to understand how God has created and gifted him or her as an individual. Knowing areas of giftedness is vital in finding a good fit in any position. If the person has the talent for the job, he or she will be more comfortable and will feel more fulfilled in doing it.

Several spiritual gift assessments are available—or you can create your own—to provide insight so that a person can better understand the areas in which God has gifted them.

- 3. Share an understanding of the church's mission and goals.**

Every congregation is different and anyone in a leadership position needs to understand the congregation's vision and goals. It's important to communicate to a potential volunteer how a particular position fits into these goals and how it is important to the overall functioning of the congregation. No one wants to do a job with no meaning.

4. Specify the length of service.

Too often after several years of service we hear, "I've done my part; let someone else take over now." Often the person is burned out. The frustration of having no good way out produces anger and the quality of work suffers. Recruiting should never be open-ended. While it would be nice if once the position were filled recruiters wouldn't have to worry about it for a long time, realistically that is seldom the case. While some jobs have naturally specific time limits, an annual time for review is beneficial for long-term or continuing commitments. With an annual review, the recruiter can be sure that unless something severe happens the position will be covered for a given time. The layworker will know that there will come a time when he or she can feel free to stay or leave without feeling guilty for doing so.

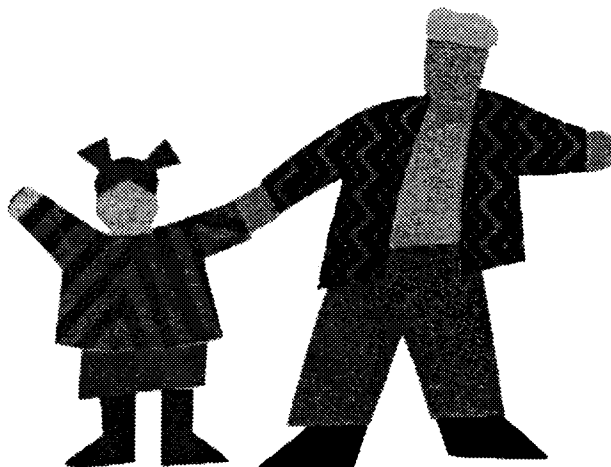
5. Nurture and help them grow.

Couple the annual review with shorter quarterly reviews in which support can be given, questions answered, direction given, and future plans discussed. In this way, both of you will not only know what is going on but can make any necessary changes before a situation becomes a problem. Quarterly reviews can be a great help if they are also used to nurture and help the layworker to grow not just as a leader but also as a person. Be concerned about volunteers as people. Pray for them and with them about their families, their work outside the church, and issues they face in their lives. Pray also for those to whom they minister. In other words, model ministry for them and encourage them to lead in the same way.

6. Empower them.

Give them the authority to do what you ask them to do. Nothing will help them develop and grow as much as knowing that you care for them and trust them. You will be amazed at the difference it will make in layworkers, in the life of your congregation, and in you.

This article originally appeared in the February 1998 issue of the Church Herald. It is reprinted here by permission.

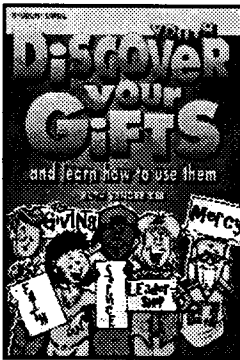




Where to Begin: Resources for Spiritual Gifts

There are any number of resources on spiritual gifts and gift-based ministry, including testing inventories that help persons identify their spiritual gifts. Finding the right resource is more than a matter of simply looking until you find “the best.” Many are user-friendly and theologically sound; what is “the best” for you will depend in part on your own congregation’s personality and needs and on your own evaluation process. The resources that follow are all proven as excellent means by which to introduce and incorporate spiritual gifts into your ministry. All of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center. To order, call 1-800-968-7221 or visit orders@rca.org.

For Youth



Discover Your Gifts: And Learn How to Use Them (Youth Version) by Ruth Vander Zee

Designed for junior high and high school students, this course includes six sessions that introduce the concept of spiritual gifts and help teens identify “working gifts” (gifts they’re using now) and “waiting gifts” (gifts they are developing but haven’t used yet). (Published by CRC Publications)

Student Book

#8600120400 \$3.95^{US}/5.75^{CDN}

ISBN 1-56212-366-1

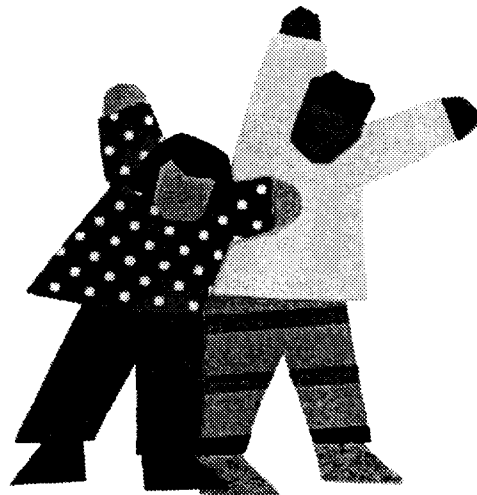
Leader’s Guide

#8600120405 \$7.95^{US}/11.55^{CDN}

ISBN 1-56212-365-3

Go for Broke: Using the Gifts God Gave You by Pam Peters-Pries

Using passages from both the Old and New Testaments, this study asks, with youth, “Does God have a plan for my life?” It explores the nature of Christian calling, helps youth identify their gifts, and encourages them to risk all they have for the sake of God’s love. (5 sessions)
#2760002853 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}



For Adults

Discover Your Gifts: And Learn How to Use Them

by Alvin J. Vander Griend

The newly revised edition of *Discover Your Gifts* can help your congregation fit together as the body of Christ is intended to. This seven-session course helps church members identify their unique gifts and use them for the benefit of others. (Published by CRC Publications)

Leader's guide

Offers teaching helps as well as suggestions for choosing a leadership team.

#8600216555 \$12.45^{US}/18.05^{CDN}

ISBN 1-56212-182-0

Student manual

Each person (including the leader) will need a copy of this manual for completing homework assignments.

#8600216550 \$6.95^{US}/10.10^{CDN}

ISBN 1-56212-183-9

Spiritual Gift Discovery Questionnaire

Intended for use with the *Discover Your Gifts* course, not as a stand-alone resource. (One questionnaire is included in each student manual.)

#8600216556 \$0.75^{US}/1.10^{CDN}

Network

by Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels

Blended with the video course, these books teach participants to discover their God-given passion, gifts, and personal style. The participant's guide contains all the notes and assessments participants need to identify the three elements of their unique Servant Profile. The practical consultant's guide helps identify key indicators to effectively direct participants into meaningful places of ministry. (Published by Zondervan)

Participant's guide

#4000412315 \$10.99^{US}/15.95^{CDN}

Consultant's guide

#4000412218 \$19.99^{US}/29.00^{CDN}

Leader's guide

#4000412412 \$29.99^{US}/43.50^{CDN}

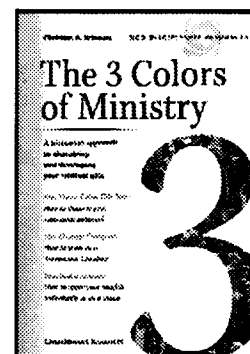
NOTE: The video course is available for loan through TRAVARCA, 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org.

The Three Colors of Ministry: A Trinitarian Approach to Identifying and Developing Your Spiritual Gifts

by Christian A. Schwarz

The book presents a holistic approach to identifying and developing your spiritual gifts. Based on the three dimensions of God's nature, it emphasizes the critical importance of using your gifts in an authentically trinitarian way. It shows you where you most need to focus your energies in order to bring this kind of balance to your Christian service. (Published by ChurchSmart Resources)

#4000638161 \$10.00^{US}/14.50^{CDN}





Section 5

LEARNING for LIFE

A dark blue silhouette of a person climbing a ladder, positioned between the words 'LEARNING' and 'LIFE'.

**Multicultural
Education**

MultiCultural Education

*The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it.*
Psalm 24:1

The whole world has come to our doorstep. Learning to live well in the diverse culture of North America is no longer an option, but a necessity.

It's also a command. For the Bible tells us that God's image resides in all those persons whom God has created, and God's love extends across the face of the whole earth—red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in God's sight. And the Gospels show us a Savior who models the inclusiveness of God's love. Jesus crossed cultural barriers to minister to the Samaritan woman at the well; invited little children to come to him; embraced those with disabilities; and brought his teachings about God and salvation to all people, not simply a chosen few.

As Christ's disciples, it is our responsibility—and our joy—to embrace the diversity God has created. That doesn't mean simply glossing over our differences and pretending we are all alike simply because we all belong to God's family. Learning to accept each other, to respect and celebrate our differences, is part of God's plan for the diverse peoples God created. That's what multicultural education is all about. It is not an easy path to follow, nor will it happen quickly. It requires honesty (about the past and the future), humility, and accepting the fact that embracing diversity is important for all of us to do.

This section is but a brief beginning, the first steps on a long journey. It is a place to start and a place from which to point to the direction we should be going. It is not complete; in the future, we hope to provide additional information and practical steps that will help people more fully embrace the whole of God's wonderful creation. Here's what's included right now:

“Christian Education and the Multicultural Community”

Content: This paper calls the church to be the multicultural community it was created to be—and points out the challenges we will face in answering that call of God.

How to Use: Your education committee will want to be the first group to study this paper. It can also be used for an adult study class or with other leadership groups in the church. For it is the whole church that must commit itself to multiculturalism.

Tip: Don't simply hand out the paper and ask persons to read it. Schedule some time to discuss both its contents and potential implications for your congregation.

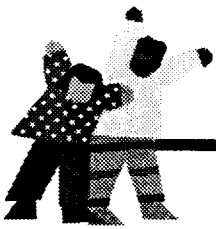
Presenter: Oliver Patterson is a professor of education at the City College of New York, a member of the Reformed Church in America's Council for Christian Education, and a member of First Reformed Church in Jamaica, New York.

Church Herald Article—“Growing Together in Christ”

Content: The journey of embracing all God's creation—and allowing yourself to be embraced—begins with a single step. This is the story of two congregations, one white, the other African-American, who took that step and were forever changed.

How to Use: Does your congregation





need a jumpstart in its thinking about multicultural education? In a small group or with your education committee, this article can be an impetus to your own imagination.

Tip: Use the advice of the article itself: take one step at a time. Pledge to be more aware and intentional about these issues than you were six months ago. Check your progress every six months.

Presenters: Susan Donnelly is a member of Wyckoff Reformed Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey. Sheila Holmes is interim pastor of Northside Community Chapel in Paterson, New Jersey.

“Where to Begin: Steps on the Journey”

Content: This list of resources presents direct, practical, biblically-based ways to help children and adults begin to embrace the diversity of God’s world.

How to Use: Each individual resource will provide specific and complete instructions for use. Read and follow them carefully, and your experience will be a good one.

Tip: No new resources or studies are included in this section of Learning for Life for a reason: sometimes it’s better not to produce your own material, but to utilize the excellent resources already out there from quality sources. That’s not just true for notebooks; it’s also true for many aspects of your education program.



Christian Education and the Multicultural Community: Toward a Postracist Society

by Oliver Patterson, Ed.D., Professor of Education
The City College, City University of New York
Visiting Professor, New York University

There is little doubt that the racial/ethnic composition of the United States is rapidly changing. In the year 1900 the white European proportion of the population was 87 percent; in 1980 it was 83 percent; in 2000 it was 72 percent. The U.S. Census estimates that in 2050 the proportion of whites in the population will be only 53 percent. Our children will live and work in a society in which their classmates, neighbors, and colleagues will be equally divided between whites and people of color. For example, I currently teach a course in which 25 percent of the students are African-American, European-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic American. The United Nations is right in front of me, and if it is not your present context, it will soon be (U.S. Department of Education, 1988).

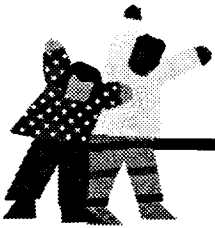
Perhaps more than the challenge of the rainbow of colors to be encountered will be the challenge faced by people from very different histories, worldviews, languages, dialects, and cultures. Moreover, during this current surge of people from Latin America, Africa, and Asia, American society continues to face issues of racism, discrimination, and bigotry against African-Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics, particularly those from Mexico and Puerto Rico. We as a society have not worked out issues of institutional racism against people of color who have been here before there was a republic—mainly because we have not dealt with our individual racist notions that become expressed institutionally.

As new people move into communities, the communities will change. The changes could be haphazard and filled with misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and even violence, or the changes could permit all to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves for the better. I

need not mention the recent incidences of ethnic cleansing in virtually all continents during the 1990s. However, at the same time one must mention South Africa where prayer and the human desire for reconciliation continues to lead to individual and institutional transformation. South Africa may be one of the few nations to seriously consider the advice Paul gives in 1 Thessalonians 5:11-15:

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

Despite Paul's sage advice, from even a cursory reading of the newspapers in this land today, racism clearly continues to be a disease eating at the roots of our society. I spoke at a Reformed church in New Jersey two years ago, and as I was leaving, a friend said, "Remember DWB." He explained that DWB stood for "Driving While Black." A New Jersey State investigation conducted in the year 2001 confirmed the racism alluded to when it was found that 89 percent of the drivers stopped on the New Jersey Turnpike were black during that time period. The differential funding of inner-city "minority" schools, and wide differences in achievement between and among whites,



blacks, native Americans, and Hispanics, clearly indicate institutional problems with schooling (Delpit, 1995).

The problem is multilayered: How do we prepare our children and ourselves to live in a multicultural and multiracial world that is largely freed from institutional racism? The word *prepare* in the above sentence clearly suggests an educational process. The statement of human purpose is explicit: *to live in a multicultural world freed from racism.*

Education has the potential to be one of the key engines that greatly reduces racism and prepares us for a multicultural society. Bailyn (1960) maintains that historically four educational “agents” prepare people for society: family, church, school, and apprenticeship. Moran (1998) contends that the purpose of education is the reshaping of life in relation to human purpose. For example, the above statement calls for the reshaping of our beliefs and practices. The human purpose is to build a multicultural society freed from racism.

Harris (1998) maintains that the two purposes of Christian education are: “to worship God through liturgical prayer, and to engage in works that serve justice—the traditions of *leiturgia* and *diakonia*.”

Clearly, if the church is to serve justice, it should be at the forefront of instituting practices that will cure the disease of racism among its members so as to prepare them to live in a community that is multiracial and multicultural. I intentionally say the *church*, meaning the entire church, and not solely Christian education for children.

Harris and Moran (1998, p. 22) maintain that Christian education becomes the curriculum of the church as the work of the church is expressed through *koinonia* (community and communion), *diakonia* (service and outreach), *kerygma* (proclaiming the word of God), and *didache* (teaching and learning).

I wish to reemphasize that Christian education is the curriculum of the church—the entire church. In this paper I have focused on the goal of achieving a

multicultural society freed from racism. At this point let me deal with an example that does not concern racism or different cultures. Many churches have the goal of ridding the community of hunger. The process of developing a church hunger curriculum begins to develop when the members of the church come together to discuss issues of hunger (*koinonia*), the pastor preaches against hunger (*kerygma*), members establish a soup kitchen (*diakonia*), and groups actively study and discuss strategies, policies, and legislation needed to reduce the number of folks who are hungry (*didache*).

Has your church begun the process of developing a Christian education curriculum for the church that promotes a multicultural society freed from racism?

1. Who is beginning the discussion. Sunday school? Consistory? Elders? Deacons?
2. Has the pastor included issues of racism and multicultural society in the sermons or at formal and informal gatherings? Elders? Sunday School educators?
3. Are there groups actively engaged in cross-cultural, multicultural, and/or antiracism experiences?
4. Is there a selection and study of literate knowledge around issues of racism and multicultural inclusion?
5. Has the selection of curriculum materials been influenced by its racial and cultural inclusiveness?

An excellent resource in this area, though it deals with public education, is *Cultural Diversity and Education*, by James Banks. I cannot emphasize enough that this is a process. Just begin with small steps. You might invite the choir of a Taiwanese church to sing at your church. You might celebrate Martin Luther King Day with the predominantly white churches in your classis. The key is not to let it become the curriculum of one unit of the church. Let it become the curriculum of the church.

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Growing Together in Christ

by Susan Donnelly and Sheila Holmes

When two New Jersey congregations—one urban, one suburban—made a grassroots commitment to an interracial Bible study, a door was opened to new programs and a joint mission.

The Beginning

Susan: Of late I've come across lots of stories about people who've rediscovered their spirituality outside of the structures of organized religion. The opposite happened to me. I re-encountered the living God in church. In my former congregation, I enjoyed involvement in many aspects of church life. But the time came when I began to ask why I was doing these things. It started to look like much of what I was doing was for me and for my own. Was this Christianity? Instead of facing up to my dilemma, I dropped out.

I entered a spiritual desert. I was indifferent, stuck in that awful place Jesus called lukewarm. After about three years of this, the Spirit came to my rescue by afflicting me with a sort of a restless ache that had to do with my community. My family and I live in Wyckoff, an upscale white suburb in northern New Jersey. It takes about the same time to drive the length of our town as it takes to drive from Wyckoff to Paterson, which is urban, low-income, and almost all minority. Wyckoff and Paterson might as well be different countries. I started to imagine what Jesus would say about this, what Jesus would say to me.

Shortly after joining Wyckoff Reformed Church, I approached the Mission Committee. It agreed to sponsor an effort to bring together white Christians from Wyckoff and black Christians from Paterson. We then approached the consistory of Northside Community Chapel, a Christian Reformed congregation in Paterson. At the meeting I was afraid we might be rejected outright, but we were welcomed warmly, if cautiously. It was decided we would attempt to create a Christian community via a Bible study that would meet every other month. We also established an operating principle: that we would do things with each other, not for each other.

Sheila: The union of Northside Community Chapel Christian Reformed Church and Wyckoff Reformed Church in Bible study is a work of God's providence. I wasn't part of the initial meeting between our consistory and members of Wyckoff. I heard about it from my pastor, who was very involved in social justice. He was enthusiastic and hopeful that this fellowship could build relationships and break down walls of racial discrimination. I don't remember having strong feelings about getting together, except that as a staff member I felt I should be there. Talking to other members revealed a mix of emotions; some said they would go out of loyalty to the pastor, others because Wyckoff is a rich church and a relationship could bring money for a special project. I wanted to see something real for a change.

In my twenty-five years at Northside I have seen a lot of white people come in and out of our community to do mission work. They always have something for us and don't see us as being able to give anything to them. They come to share the gospel their way as if we don't share the same Jesus Christ. Since they have the money, it is insinuated that we in the city will allow them to be "helpful" in their own way. We in turn put on our smiles and our best behavior and act like everything is going well.

Something is wrong with this picture. If we truly are all in Christ, we must shed Christian masks and act like Christians. I don't need foreigners coming in to do mission work to save the city. I need brothers and sisters who want to be part of a church that learns what it is to truly love and care for one another. As a growing Christian, I came to the Bible study looking for God's answer, knowing I could not harbor an attitude of closed-mindedness.

The Fellowship

Susan: We held the first Northside Chapel/Wyckoff Reformed Bible study on June 6, 1993. We ate and talked, and then studied the Word together. There wasn't much preparation because I didn't know how to prepare for something like this. I prayed a lot but was still scared it would flop. With racial estrangements so old and so deep, how could we even make conversation, let alone come together as friends?

It didn't flop. We felt neither awkward nor uncomfortable. That first day I met people from Northside who immediately touched my heart and spoke to my soul. I knew I had to have more of this.

We began to meet regularly every other month, alternating church basements. When we met at Northside Chapel, they cooked for us. Our senior pastor, the Rev. Robert Gram, led the time of Bible study and prayer. When Northside came to Wyckoff, we cooked and the Rev. Stanley Vander Klay, pastor at Northside, led us. Since October 1996, when Rev. Vander Klay accepted a call to another church, Sheila Holmes, Northside's interim pastor, has served as our biblical shepherd.

As long as we kept praying, invoking God's guidance and blessing, our little group kept meeting. We grew spiritually and in our personal commitment to each other before we began to grow in numbers. I was lucky in that I had joined Wyckoff Reformed at about the same time that we began the fellowship with Northside; my friendships with folks in both congregations grew simultaneously. My husband and four children came to Bible study and got hooked as fast as I had.

I discovered that we suburban folks just don't know what we're missing when we isolate ourselves from a church like this. The depth of religious commitment, the love, and the spirit that I found at this small urban congregation were just what I needed to help restore my own flagging commitment. The hymns, the hugs, the food, group prayer, holding hands—it's wonderful to have Christian friends from different places.

Sheila: Between ten and fifteen members of Northside attended the first Bible study at Wyckoff Reformed. It seemed at first that the majority of the people at Wyckoff were older. It was a time of fellowship in which people were friendly and willing to get to know each other. There was some good discussion within the group. It was the beginning of some relationships and there was a feeling that we should continue to do this. After the first meeting I heard some people talking about doing a project within Paterson, which made me question how real it was. But later I heard we would do this together for each other's churches.

The fellowship continued to grow outside of the Bible study. Wyckoff put on a talent show in which Northside members were invited to participate, and the proceeds went to Northside Summer Day Camp. Members of Wyckoff have come to Northside to be part of our prayer vigil.

Some members of Wyckoff and Northside are involved together in Habitat for Humanity, and relationships have grown there also. Northside has been encouraged by Wyckoff to get involved in the Stephen Ministry program, which now has five dedicated members learning how to be caregivers. We have had joint services with pulpit exchanges for the last two years, in which more members from each congregation can experience fellowship and Christian relationships. These and other activities have increased our relationship with one another in Christ. We are growing to be real Christians.

Members of Northside look forward to the fellowship with Wyckoff, and it seems each time there is someone new from each church. That means the word is being spread that there is something here worthy of time and energy. God is teaching his people how to be reconciled with one another as we are reconciled with him.



The Rationale

Sheila: The question among Christians today, especially in the inner city, is, "Will there ever be reconciliation between black and white?" When we look at the mentality of today's society, there can be no reconciliation. But there is a greater mandate from God for Christians to be reconciled. The most important question then becomes, "As children of God can we be reconciled?" This starts when individuals understand how they have been reconciled with God and then take the first steps to being reconciled with one another.

Our relationship is a process that has to keep on being intentional, sensitive, open, and loving. As we get to know one another better, we not only start to bear one another's burdens and pray for one another, but also we start to share those hidden secrets and feelings. We move from being friends to being brothers and sisters. Without this process people stop growing in Christ. When we as individuals are ready to address the truth with one another of our own and society's role in racism and freely accept one another regardless of the color of our skin, then we can be brothers and sisters in Christ.

The barriers of racism not only affect our time of Bible study and worship together, but also affect our manner of voting, work environments, economics, how we raise our children, and how we relate to our relatives and friends. There will be times of persecution, struggles, and suffering. Are we as Christians willing to take this risk for the gospel, to show society what Christianity is really all about? Northside and Wyckoff have only begun to scratch the surface, but with the grace of God we will grow in depth and in strength.

Susan: We are all aware of the tragic legacy of slavery. As whites, all too often we are unaware of how pernicious and relentless racism is. We forget how recently it's been that the most flagrantly racist laws have been changed, and that changing laws doesn't change hearts. But can we really call ourselves Christians if we continue to live, raise families, and worship while cut off from our fellow Christians in the black community?

The fact that I might never have committed an outwardly racist act does not get me off the hook. My ancestors and my own family have benefited from being white. We don't have more money, wider lawns, and lower infant mortality because we're smarter or prettier or more mature Christians. I wonder sometimes about the feasibility of achieving real reconciliation as Christians in the face of such disparity in resources.

The poor among us are not the ones dragging us down, either morally or economically. There is no such thing as a "trickle-up effect." Consumerism, materialism, and selfish individualism are eroding our moral fabric from the top down. Our urban brothers and sisters are truly suffering. As the body of Christ, we must recognize this suffering. We might need to hurt, too. And we must act together, as one body.



The Future

Sheila: Our Bible study continues to grow. The Rev. Vander Klay has accepted a call to another church, and Northside Chapel is in a transition stage. More people are assuming leadership positions. Wyckoff and Northside have begun working together on a food program. We will also continue to grow together through Bible study and fellowship, bringing more members of our congregations together.

My hope is that we can get past the discussion of racial reconciliation and just live it. That would mean each one of us being vulnerable to one another and working through each situation as God gives us direction. God has been at work in us from the beginning, and he will see us through to completion if we are willing to keep on growing.

Susan: Last February, in celebration of Black History Month, Northside Chapel and Wyckoff Reformed had their second pulpit exchange. On successive Sundays, we exchanged preachers and choirs. Sheila was the first African-American woman to preach in our 190-year-old church. Sheila changed hearts. More people in our larger

congregation are showing an interest in what we are doing, and more opportunities are coming our way for us to work together and to fellowship together. We shared communion and breakfast together during Lent, attended the RCA's urban missions conference in April, and held joint Bible school last summer. We consider the possibility of going on the road at some point to perhaps inspire other urban/suburban church teams.

Perhaps most exciting is the Northside Food Pantry, which opened its doors exactly four years after our first Bible study. This is our first joint venture in mission. We will now be working side by side to serve those who need us.

Genuine racial reconciliation is possible, but possibly only within the church. I know for sure that racial reconciliation can be an integral part of a faith journey.

This article originally appeared in the November 1997 issue of the Church Herald, the denominational publication of the Reformed Church in America, and is reprinted with permission.

Improving Race/Church Relations

In an effort to bridge racial and socio-economic barriers, members of Homewood Reformed Church in Homewood, Illinois, have developed a partnership with members of New Life Baptist Church, a 150-member African-American congregation in Chicago Heights, Illinois. The partnership began several years ago after the pastor at New Life spoke at Homewood Reformed and sparked members' interest in the work that the Baptist church was doing in nearby Chicago Heights.

Now, the two churches share activities such as a renewal service, pulpit exchanges, joint Promise Keepers events, one-on-one tutoring, and a children's Bible school that attracted 120 youth. "It's more than just financial support," said the Rev David Izenbart, pastor of Homewood Reformed. "We have really benefited from the relationships. [This arrangement] has helped break down racial walls in our own church. We have been blessed by their worship services. They've helped us enjoy the freedom of worship."



Leaving Bias Behind

Kari Kempema

We all have biases. Here are some ways to see past them.

In talking with a friend recently, I learned that her church is in danger of becoming extinct due to the small number of people who make up the congregation. Most of those people are older adults, with very few families or young people to ensure a future.

A second small congregation put forth an offer to merge, making one larger congregation with a brighter future.

The answer to this proposal was an unequivocal no. The reason: "they" are not of the same racial or ethnic group as the congregation of the failing church.

Many people from racial and ethnic backgrounds other than the white majority have been on the receiving end of prejudice and discrimination from individuals who call themselves Christians. Stories of congregations making members feel uncomfortable based on skin color, dress, and occupation are abundant.

John wrote, "Whoever says, 'I am the light,' while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness" (1 John 2:9). This darkness can be lifted; maybe these ideas will challenge and help you.

- Recognize there is more diversity within groups of people than between groups of people. Think of a group to which you belong. Are you clones of one another? The more you look for it, the more you will see differences.
- Look at individuals without automatically classifying each as part of a group because of appearance. Take time to know the person as a person.
- Realize that much of prejudice is unconscious but not instinctual. It is taught from early childhood by our families, friends, and society. If prejudice is taught, it can also be untaught.
- Question every stereotype, idea, and image you have about another group. Many of our prejudices can be proven false when examined.
- There is power in prayer. Pray for God to open your mind and your heart to knowledge. Pray that you may be opened to new ideas and that habit will not force the door closed. Pray for whatever you need in order to make progress in this task.
- Visit a church that is predominately made up of another race or ethnic group. Be open to the experience. Do not judge the church based on anything but its commitment and its devotion to God.
- Visit a library or bookstore. Ask the librarian to guide you to the section on race and ethnicity. Many bookstores have a fine selection of materials on diversity. Magazines targeting other races or ethnicities can also be helpful.
- Volunteer with an agency or organization whose primary consumers are of a different race or ethnic group. Personal interaction is the most educating of all.

These suggestions are only a beginning. There may be ways you find are more applicable to you. This process involves risk and opening oneself up to new, and possibly frightening, experiences. It is an evolving process that requires conscious thinking and effort to lift the darkness.

Kari Kempema is a member of First Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Where to Begin: Steps on the Journey

There are hundreds of good resources for dismantling racism and embracing multiculturalism as a part of God's good creation. Your task is not to know them all immediately, but to use just one or two to make a difference in where you are. Here are some direct, practical, biblically-based ways you can help young people and adults embrace the diversity of God's world. All of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center. To order, call 1-800-968-7221 or visit orders@rca.org.

For All Ages

Halle, Halle: We Sing the World Round, Songs from the World Church for Children, Youth, and Congregation
compiled and written by C. Michael Hawn

This resource includes sections for gathering songs; praise and adoration; psalm settings; prayer and petition; Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany; Palm Sunday, Easter, and Pentecost; Communion; and Benediction. The Teacher's Edition provides a brief introductory background, notes on performance practice, and suggestions for use within an ecumenical liturgical context for each song. (Choristers Guild)

Singer's edition

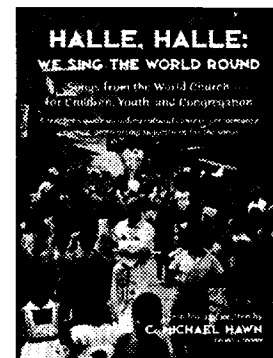
#6400187165 \$5.95^{US}/8.65^{CDN}

Teacher's edition

#6400187157 \$19.95^{US}/28.95^{CDN}

CD

#6400187173 \$8.95^{US}/13.00^{CDN}



For Children

Hand in Hand: Helping Children Celebrate Diversity

by Ella Campbell, Nickolas Miles, Oliver Patterson, Gladys Rivera, Charles Wiessner, and Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner

This unique course for children in grades three through six offers a wide array of learning activities: art, cross-cultural dialogue, drama, music, off-site options, computer exploration, Bible stories, and culture-based stories. Use *Hand in Hand* as a stand-alone course or as a resource book to add a multicultural dimension to any classroom. Can also be adapted for vacation Bible school. *Hand in Hand* contains five sessions that can easily be expanded to more. You can choose from two session formats: forty-five minutes or ninety to one-hundred-twenty minutes. The course includes a sixty-minute audiocassette of multicultural songs and stories. Sessions focus on: living in harmony in God's world, recognizing and affirming diversity, dealing with disagreements, committing to unity, and celebrating diversity and community.

#2400116000 \$31.95^{US}/46.35^{CDN}

ISBN 1-56212-260-6

Audiocassette

#2400116002 \$9.95^{US}/14.45^{CDN}



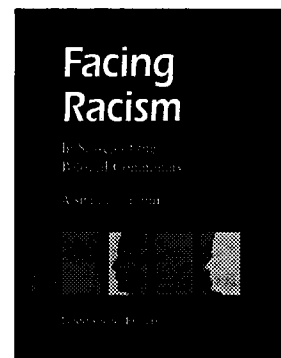
Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and the Early Grades

This book profiles seven exemplary classrooms in which teachers are helping young children build inclusive, equitable, caring communities across differences that too often divide. The research-based commentary, suggestions for activities, and comprehensive resource list are excellent supplementary ideas for leaders using multicultural curricula like *Hand in Hand: Helping Children Celebrate Diversity*. A fifty-eight-minute video (available for loan through TRAVARCA) profiles five classrooms. (Published by the Teaching Tolerance Project)
#2400060329 \$2.75^{US}/4.00^{CDN}

For Youth

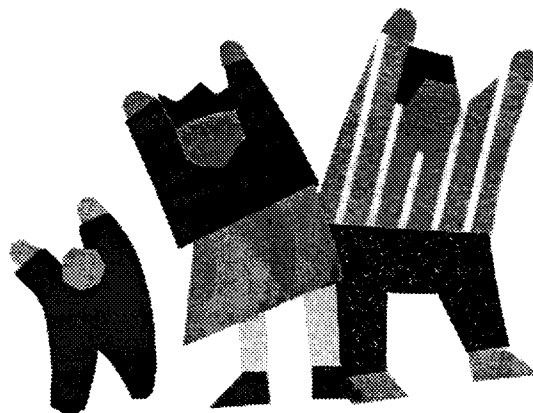
Facing Racism: In Search of the Beloved Community by Lonna Lee

This five-session curriculum (each one hour) combines community-building exercises, an introduction to biblical text, and creative learning activities for exploring key concepts. Throughout the study, youth are encouraged to apply what they are learning in their own churches, schools, and communities. (Published by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program)
#3600098002 \$1.25^{US}/1.85^{CDN}



Who's In? Who's Out? A Look at Jonah and Ruth by Steve Clapp

Studies from Jonah and Ruth on prejudice and diversity in God's family. Part of the Generation Why series of Bible studies. (5 sessions)
#2760002578 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}



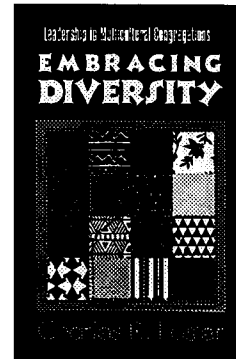
For Adults

Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations by Charles R. Foster

Explore a variety of approaches congregations have taken to embrace differences; identify leadership issues diversity creates in congregations; and discover programmatic suggestions drawn from the experience of multicultural congregations. (Published by the Alban Institute)

#8600162047 \$13.25^{US}/19.20^{CDN}

ISBN 1-56699-181-1



Even the Stones Will Cry Out for Justice: An Adult Forum on Institutionalized Racism

Designed for congregations who want to reach out to and embrace people of all races, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds. Providing biblical illustrations, questions, vignettes, and discussion topics, this book contains everything leaders need to conduct a three- or five-session Bible study or a one-day retreat. (Published by Augsburg Fortress)

#4800107617 \$4.95^{US}/7.20^{CDN}

No Hate Allowed: A Resource for Congregations for Action Against Racial Hate Crimes

This resource offers theological reflections; a litany and Bible study; stories about how people are affected by racial violence; an action section, including how to prevent racial hate crimes and how to move from debate to dialogue; and a resource listing organizations, publications, and people to contact for further education and networking. (Published by Augsburg Fortress)

#4800697007 \$6.25^{US}/9.10^{CDN}

Police / Community Dialogue by Una Ratmeyer

This three-session study guide helps Christians come to grips with the seriousness of the situation between police and people of color, and suggests specific activities that will facilitate effective and positive dialogue between law enforcement officers and minority communities.

RCA congregations

#4800101999 No Charge

Non-RCA congregations

#4800102999 \$5.95^{US}/8.65^{CDN}





Section 6

LEARNING for LIFE



Workshops

Workshops

Workshops for Leaders and Teachers

With many such parables [Jesus] spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Mark 4:33

He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them.

Mark 10:1

They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was going to happen to him.

Mark 10:32

How can church leaders cultivate a commitment to learning in their congregations? How can they equip God's people for individual and congregational learning? First, by being learners themselves—by modeling a commitment to continually learning, growing, and changing. And second, by being a teacher of teachers—by providing the knowledge and support that allows a wide range of persons to be teachers of the faith for a congregation. Offering times of enrichment and nurture, using these workshops or many other possibilities, will help your educational ministry develop people, not just plans.

The Jesus we meet in the Gospels is a teacher of the people, yes, but he is especially a teacher of the disciples. In story after story, we read of Jesus calling the disciples apart from the crowd and teaching them. For Jesus, the power of his teaching was not simply in the content of his words, but in the careful and intentional way he nurtured those lessons in the hearts and minds of his closest companions.

This section is dedicated to helping you become a teacher for your teachers and other educational leaders: to feed and equip them for the task of teaching, and to celebrate with them and nurture in them the gifts God has given them. Your goal: to provide your teachers and leaders with new knowledge and new confidence in their work, and to build the strength and quality of your education program. Here's what's included:

“You Are the Message”

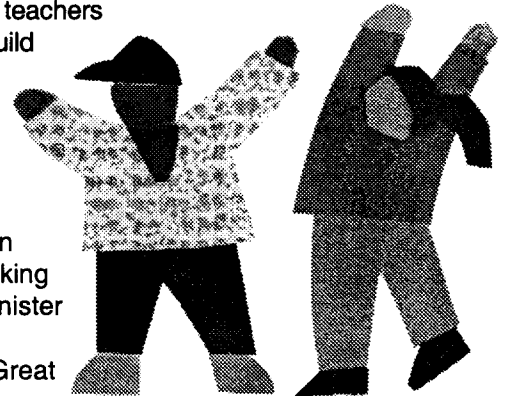
Content: A one- to three-hour workshop lifting up teachers, their gifts, and the importance of simply being present with students as a key element of teaching.

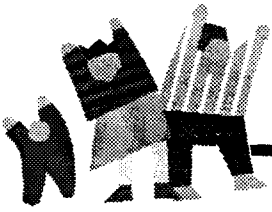
How to Use: This basic, foundational workshop is intended to build the confidence of every teacher. It could be done as part of a kickoff retreat for the Christian education program or as a mid-year refresher.

Tip: Whether using this workshop, the weekly devotional bookmarks in Section 2, or some other method, affirming and nurturing

teachers is job one for an education leader.

Presenter: Jim Rozeboom has served in education his entire working life, most recently as minister for discipleship with the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes, before his retirement in the summer of 2001. Jim was recognized as RCA Educator of the Year by Christian Educators of the Reformed Church in America in 2001.





“Vision and Biblical Faith”

Content: The Reformed Church’s Statement of Mission and Vision is the denomination’s guiding statement for the new millennium. This workshop, in the form of an opening devotion, challenges you to name your vision for the educational ministry of your church.

How to Use: This is a focusing workshop. Use it with an education committee, or convene a series of small groups of teachers, with their feedback going to the education committee or consistory.

Tip: If you don’t know where your education program is headed, it will never get there. This is one means by which to envision God’s future for the education ministry of your congregation.

Presenter: The RCA’s Office of the General Secretary and the Office for Christian Education collaborated on this study.

“Multiple Intelligences”

Content: Multiple intelligences is an important new finding in educational research. It can inform both preparation and teaching styles, and help teachers meet the diverse student needs of the average classroom.

How to Use: Even if the concept is new to you as a leader, the workshop material is presented in a way that you can become a teacher to teachers, and all can become learners. This is an advanced workshop, however, and should not be the first one you lead with teachers.

Tip: Use this workshop with experienced teachers. Perhaps it could be the cornerstone of an evening for “Master Teachers,” coupled with dinner or an elegant dessert.

Presenter: George Brown Jr. is the G.W. and Edie Haworth Professor of Christian Education at Western Theological Seminary, an RCA seminary in Holland, Michigan.

“Cultivating Gifts for Ministry”

Content: Is the recruiting of teachers and leaders a challenge for you? This workshop is intended to refocus your thinking away from recruitment and toward an understanding of gift-based ministry—and the difference it can make in your education program.

How to Use: This might be a good workshop to do with a group of neighboring congregations, since it’s intended for leaders of education programs and not for every teacher. Schedule it as a Saturday morning community teacher enrichment event, as a gift from your congregation.

Tip: Be sure to check Section 4 of this notebook for more information on ministry by spiritual gifts. The RCA Distribution Center also offers excellent resources in this area.

Presenter: George Brown Jr. is the G.W. and Edie Haworth Professor of Christian Education at Western Theological Seminary, an RCA seminary in Holland, Michigan.



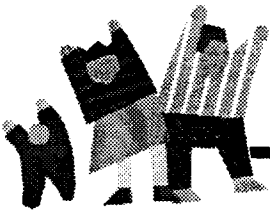
You Are the Message

by Jim Rozeboom

General Information for Workshop Preparation

1. Use a large room with participants seated at tables arranged in a semicircle. Determine where the overhead projector should be set up as well as the screen, as they will be used extensively in many of the sessions.
2. If the room size is limiting, explore using other rooms for small group work and activity centers.
3. Large pictures of children or children and adults together will add to the atmosphere of the workshop room.
4. Have all materials, equipment, and plans in readiness before the first participant arrives.
5. Remember to have a set of handouts/worksheets for each expected participant, along with overhead pens and extra blank transparencies.
6. Keep the workshop low-key so that persons are helped to feel comfortable about themselves, each other, and their tasks as teachers.
7. Encourage persons to express themselves freely and creatively by being open to what they offer.
8. Respond to persons after they have said or done something in such a way that they receive positive reinforcement.
9. Be sensitive to the physical comfort of the participants—check ventilation, eliminate glare, and accommodate their need for movement.
10. Always check to see if instructions given are clear. If a particular set of instructions seems complicated to you, copy them onto newsprint or a transparency before the workshop so that participants can refer to them.
11. Check with small groups to see if they are encountering any problems.
12. Expect that the experience will be a good one for you and the participants.





You Are the Message

Teacher Training
(One-half-hour to three-hour session)

Purpose of the Session

- To affirm each teacher in his/her calling to be God's instrument of good news to those whom they teach.
- To help each teacher realize what an important influence they are in the lives of their students.
- To demonstrate one way each teacher learned some major concepts of the gospel, i.e., love, acceptance, or forgiveness.
- To reemphasize the reality of, "Who I am teaches more than what I say."
- To help teachers understand how they, along with their students, are on a journey of becoming the person God wants them to become.
- To celebrate the fact that God changes lives through them.

Objectives of the Session

- To recall a modeling teacher in their past.
- To look at themselves in light of being a model of truth.
- To see how being a model of truth is being God's incarnational love.
- To evaluate their own modeling behavior by determining their modeling strengths, which can be affirmed, and looking at their modeling weaknesses, which can be improved upon.
- To look at themselves in relationship to Christ's model for sharing his message of love.
- To celebrate the next adventure in their lives in the community of a caring Christian fellowship.

Setting, Equipment, and Materials

Setting

Chairs should be placed in a circle.

If more than twenty teachers are present, they need to divide into two equal circles.

Equipment

(Each teacher should have a name tag for the teacher trainer's benefit, and/or for the benefit of the group.)

- Name tags.
- Large newsprint on stand.
- Markers for newsprint.
- Pens or pencils for each person.
- Something to write on, i.e., a magazine or clipboard for each participant.

Handout Materials

Agenda for the day

Handout 1: "Experiencing Christ's Love"

Handout 2: "Modeling Self-Evaluation"

Handout 3: "Rejoicing and Reforming"

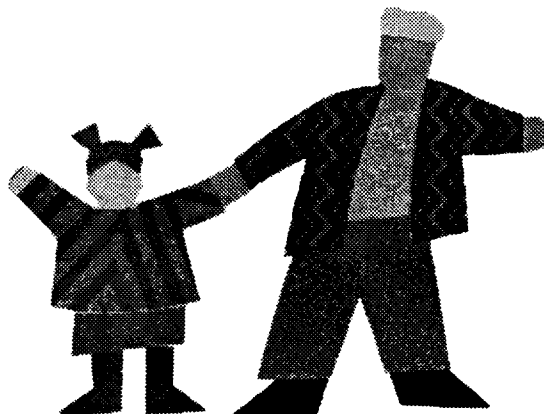
Handout 4: "Discovering Adventure"

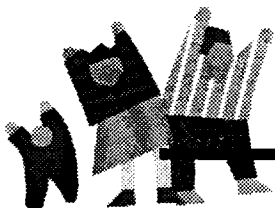
Handout 5: "Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV)"

Handout 6: "1 Corinthians 13:1-7 and Me"

Handout 7: "If Jesus Were My Teacher"

Suggestion: If only a half-hour is available, use the "Introduction to Session" through "Recalling a Modeling Teacher in Our Past." "If Jesus Were My Teacher" could be read at the close of the workshop. If one hour is available, do "Introduction to Session" through "Rejoicing and Reforming." If two or more hours are available, do the entire session, including "Discovering Adventure."





The Session

- 1 min. **Introduction to Session**
Glad to be here.
Glad you are here.
Valuable time together.
God will work in our lives.
- 1 min. **Prayer**
Thank God for his goodness.
Praise him for Jesus Christ.
Thank God that we can serve him in this way.
Ask for God's presence to be in your workshop.
- 3 min. **Self Introduction (Teacher Trainer)**
Share some of your journey.
State a few of your qualifications for leading the teacher training workshop.
Tell why you are glad to be a part of this experience.
- 2 min. **Pass Out Agenda**
State purpose and objectives.
- 2 min. **Optional: To help create an atmosphere of relaxation, tell a humorous story dealing with Christian education.**
- 3 min. **Your Observations on the Sunday School Teacher**
It's one of the most important positions in the Christian fellowship, the church of Jesus Christ.
Teachers are in a position:
 - to mold, guide, inform, and challenge.
 - to talk not only about Christ's message of love, forgiveness, acceptance, grace, redemption, and sanctification, but to demonstrate these concepts with your students.
 - to make these words come alive.
 - to help students experience Christ's love, forgiveness, acceptance, freedom, joy, and peace.
 - to help your students establish a love relationship with Jesus, not just to learn about Christ but to begin to know him as a real, live person.
- Thought: Christianity is more caught than it is taught.**
- 3 min. **Building Community**
In order to share this relationship and these attributes of Christ we as teachers need to experience *koinonia*, a Christian fellowship, a Christian community. We need to experience love, forgiveness, acceptance, openness, affirmation, and joy. If we experience this kind of fellowship, we can pass it on. We cannot pass on what we do not have.
- In other words, students need to see the Christian life in action; otherwise, the gulf between what we say as Christians and how we live is too great.

Therefore, let us spend some time building a supportive community, and sharing our stories, so that we can begin to know each other as Christian people who are on a journey—becoming the persons God wants us to become.

20 min. **Introductions**

Name.

Tell us something about yourself by sharing one thing that is on you or in your billfold or purse that says something about you, i.e., picture of children, credit card, ring, schedule book, etc. (If group is twenty or fewer, do it in one group. If group is more than twenty, either do it in groups of four or in two equal groups.)

Discover how important we are. Demonstrate this.

30 min. **Recalling a Modeling Teacher in Our Past**
 (“Experiencing Christ’s Love”—Handout #1)

Think back to a Sunday School teacher in your past whom you remember, someone you remember as special because they related to you in a particular way.

First: Give *only* a physical description of that person, i.e., tall, short, had a warm smile, etc.

Second: Tell what this teacher did that made him or her so memorable in your life. (Teacher trainer will model each step with an example from his or her past experience.)
 List the responses on newsprint by beginning with a verb phrase:

Examples: (Name) _____ listened to me. (Name) _____ gave me time.

Then, after recording ten to fifteen responses (or as many as you have time for), write “Jesus” before each phrase.

Question: Do these look like accurate descriptions of the incarnational love of Christ?

What was the message learned from this teacher?

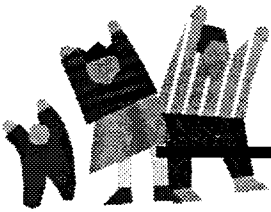
- God loves me.
- Christ cares about me.
- Jesus takes time for me.

Our students are going to learn something of God’s attributes through us and develop a relationship with Christ through who we are. This truth, this reality, is not going to come from the information we impart as much as it is going to be experienced through us as Christ’s incarnational (walking) love.

Wow! That’s exciting! These lessons will be remembered for life!

5 min. **God Uses Each Teacher to Model His Message of Love**
 (“Modeling Self-Evaluation”—Handout #2)

For your own personal evaluation on how you are modeling Christ’s love, complete the “Modeling Self-Evaluation.”



15 min. **God Desires to Help Us Grow in His Love**
("Rejoicing and Reforming"—Handout #3)

Check your own evaluation and let it be an item for prayer, as you let God rejoice with you and ask God to help to strengthen you where you can improve your modeling.

30 to 40 min. **Discover Adventure in Your Own Life**
("Discovering Adventure"—Handout #4)

Review: We have looked at ourselves as part of a Christian community. We have recalled how important a Sunday school teacher has been in our faith development. We have looked at ourselves in light of who we are and who we want to become.

Now we have an opportunity to be a part of the Christian community as we step out and discover adventure in our own lives by stepping out in faith—even as we ask our students to take their steps of faith. Students must know that we, teachers and students, are all on a journey to become the people God intends us to become; we are only at different places in our journeys. Therefore, we now have an opportunity to zero in on our own growing edge. Where do we need to exercise faith in a living Christ?—realizing that most of what we do merely takes a mind and hard work, not faith.

Reflection: A time to be alone with God.
Read Matthew 14:22-33 (Handout #5).

As you read aloud, ask each person to close their eyes as they feel, listen to, and experience what is happening in this biblical event.

Pass out Handout #4—"Discovering Adventure."

- Ask each person to go by themselves and reread the Matthew passage.
- Then ask them to reflect on the passage by using the questions as a guide for their thinking.
- Give 15-20 minutes to be alone, then call people to return.
- Direct each person to find another person to share their discoveries. Also, invite each couple to pray for one another and encourage them to make an agreement to check in with each other in three months to support one another in their "step out of the boat." (Allow 10-15 minutes for sharing with the other person.)

10 min. **A Closing Thought—What Really Matters**
("1 Corinthians 13:1-7 and Me"—Handout #6 and/or "If Jesus Were My Teacher"—Handout #7)

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.

- Think about people who you have loved.
- Think about people who have loved you.
- Think about how you still desire to grow in love.

5 to 7 min. **After-Glow**
Read "If Jesus Were My Teacher."

5 to 10 min. **Circle of Prayer**
Hold hands.
(Optional: Pray for person on your right.)

Encourage directed spontaneous prayers of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication (ACTS).

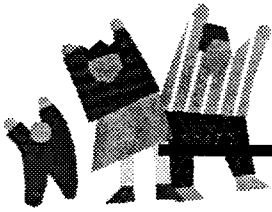
End with a **word of thanks** to the teachers for coming.

Experiencing Christ's Love

Think back to a Sunday school teacher who made a deep impression on you.

- Describe that person physically:

- What did this teacher do that made him or her so memorable in your life?

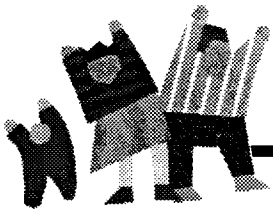


Modeling Self-Evaluation

Rate yourself from 1 (Yes, without a doubt) to 6 (No, definitely not) on each of the following statements.

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I seek opportunities outside of class to spend time with my students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. I invite my students into my home on a regular basis. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. I view my commitment to my class as a long-term ministry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. I can honestly say that I really know each of my students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. I look forward to being with my students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. Students seek to spend time with me outside of class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. I am honest about my feelings in front of my students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. I responsibly share my hurts or problems with my students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. I responsibly share my joys or happiness with my students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. I take students with me wherever and whenever possible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 11. I allow my students to see me when I am not at my best. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 12. I admit to my students when I am wrong. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 13. I act in a consistent manner toward my students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 14. I practice what I want my students to practice. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 15. I freely allow my students to question my behavior and attitudes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. I make my classroom as pleasant as possible. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 17. I explain to my students the rationale behind behavior expectations I have for them. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 18. I make every effort to set the example of a Christ-like life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 19. I pray often for my students by name. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 20. I am careful to match the truth of my words with the truth of my actions. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 21. I am well prepared each time I teach my students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 22. I let my students know that they are my teachers also. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 23. I share, appropriately, with my students, the struggles I often have in following Christ. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 24. I try to be fun to be with. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 25. I am sure my students know I love Christ. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |



Rejoicing and Reforming

*...in light of reflecting on the ways
in which I relate to my students.*

The three strongest qualities I possess as a teacher/model are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

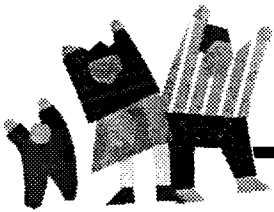
The three weakest qualities I need/want to work on are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Write a short prayer thanking God for the strengths he has given you as well as asking him to give you the desire and ability to work on those behaviors that Christ would like you to model.

Dear God,

Love,



Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV)

"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

"During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

"But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'

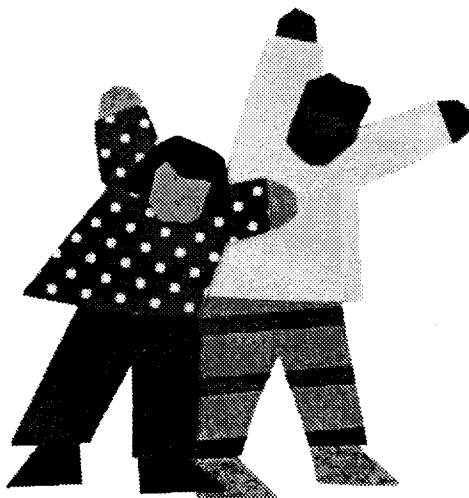
"'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'

"'Come,' he said.

"Then Peter got down out of the boat and walked on the water to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

"Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'Why did you doubt?'

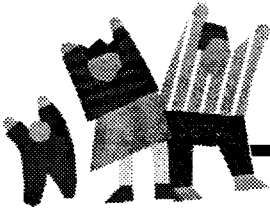
"And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"



1 Corinthians 13:1-7 and Me

"I may be able to speak the languages of men and even of angels, but if I have not love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching (and teaching); I may have all the faith needed to move mountains—but if I have not love, I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned—but if I have not love, it does me no good."

_____ is patient, _____ is kind, _____ is not
conceited, and _____ is not proud: _____ is not
ill-mannered, or _____ is not selfish, or _____
is not irritable; _____ does not keep a record of wrongs;
_____ is not happy with evil, but _____ is happy
with the truth. _____ never gives up. _____
faith, hope, and patience never fail.



If Jesus Were My Teacher

by Jim Kok

If Jesus were my teacher he would know me—I'm sure of that.

He'd know my name very well
and how old I am
and when my birthday is.
He'd know what I like
and what I dislike...
my hobbies, my habits, my hang-ups.

And that's a wonderful thing—to be known by someone.
It's a rare and wonderful thing—to be really known.

Not only would Jesus know me, but he would notice me.
He'd notice my new shirts and shoes,
my missing teeth and bandaged fingers...
My trembling chin and the tear streaks
on my dirty face.
And he would let me know very clearly that he noticed.
Not only would it not escape his perception...
I'd know that he noticed.

He would hear me, too. Really hear me. He would be more concerned with what I mean than what I say, with what I'm thinking rather than the accuracy of my words. He would understand why I said what I did. It would make sense to him and I'd never feel "wrong." Always he'd be affirming me even when I was mistaken, knowing the way I was thinking and what I was thinking about.

If Jesus were my teacher he would value me more than accuracy. I would be more important than anything else. More than...

stories, texts, songs and offerings,
and even more than the furniture.

And I would know that I was the most valuable part of everything we did.

If Jesus were my teacher, he would pay as much attention to what I feel as to what I think. Clearly and unmistakably he would let me know that he knew what I was feeling...and that he cared.

When my friend moved away, he'd say to me, "It hurts to lose a close friend."

And I'd realize the lousy, empty feeling in my stomach was loneliness, and knowing that, it would feel a little better...

and some of it would go away
when I sensed he was carrying it with me.

For he would reach inside me and carefully draw out the grief...I didn't even know was there, and he'd make it better. And when I came to class one day bouncing with joy and excitement over the birth of my baby sister...

he'd set aside the lesson for forty minutes
 as we celebrated together
 all it means
 to be a brother...
 God's gift of life...
 the excitement and wonder
 this event had brought.

Then briefly we'd get back to work. In a few short minutes we'd learned the lesson twice as fast, twice as well.

Yes, he'd know me, notice me, hear me,
 value me, pay attention to me
 and to what I feel,
 but also—this is just a little different...
 he'd listen to me.

When our class rushed in clamoring and shouting and I stopped to say

“My Grandma died last night,”

he would hear and care, not absently remark,

“That's nice, now take your seat,”

but kneel beside me and put his arms around me...healing me in ten seconds, more than I ever knew was possible. And then we would talk about it with the others...

everything else suddenly unimportant.

He'd be unafraid to talk of death, so willing to speak of it honestly without smoothing it over...making it nice when it really isn't.

And wonder of wonders, there would even be tears in his eyes.

Another thing he would do, I'm sure, is entrust me with his feelings too...sharing from his life...

joys, excitement...

hurts, fears, and disappointments...

appropriately presented,

as gifts from him to us...

And from this mutuality would develop a relationship I could never forget. For I was allowed into his life...

and I knew him as a person,
 not as a teacher.

One so like me...yet so different. So like me and still so different I would aspire to be like him far more than if he merely came from “on high” and taught me what was right and true.

He would respect me! Already at age four or six, eight, ten, or twelve—he'd respect me.

Strange, bizarre, and heretical as my growing mind might be, he'd never say...

“You don't really think that way,” or

“You'll change your mind when you're older.”

Know the saving, satisfying, nourishing power of respect, he would never be worried or threatened by my divergent thinking. Accepting my unacceptable ideas he'd win me to himself forever, and my heart would tell my mind to wonder less and follow him.

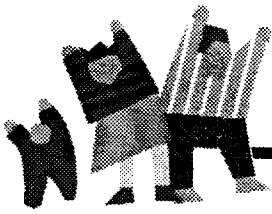
He'd treat me in a way that

honored my relationship with God.

I never get the feeling from him that big

people are closer to God...

than kids are.



And you know what else? You might think this silly...but if Jesus were my teacher I'd like him because he would touch me.

His hands would hold mine
his arms around me...
fingers run through my hair.
He'd squeeze my arm or pat my cheek
from time to time...

When all else, through passing time, had faded, I believe, more than anything else, I'd remember his touch...indelibly present where it had been.

I'd like Jesus for my teacher because he wouldn't have ideas about me based on what my brother was like or how excellent my sister is or who my parents happened to be. He'd treat me like I was just me; created out of a special mold from which no one else was cast—and it was an excellent one. For all its differences, apparent blemishes, weaknesses, and shortcomings, he would treat me as just myself, expecting good from me...and I would become what he expected...

Now this may sound strange to say of Jesus, the great teacher, our Lord, but I think at times I taught him something, although I was only five or seven or nine. I felt like he was learning something from me...that I was his teacher too...I had something he didn't have or know ...experiences and insights and perceptions, emotions he was fascinated with, thoughts he was intrigued by.

I even thought he grew a little from knowing me.

And stranger still
(and even heretical, perhaps)
He didn't seem to have to know
everything.
Could it be?

That he even said that he was wrong a time or
two . . . that in his haste he'd overlooked
my written work or jumped to a conclusion
about what I'd said.

Ah, yes, he'd also plan his lesson well, keep order, make sure we learned the facts and maintain an attractive classroom. He'd be, at times, frighteningly stern and discipline us, too—all the things an ordinary teacher does. But I'd never forget him. I'd never stop growing in love of him and what he was because of all those special things he'd been to me. And about those extraordinary qualities...I'd come to see...I could (as he taught) be that way too. I, too, can be a Christ-like teacher.

*(Originally presented orally to teacher trainers of the
Christian Reformed Education Department)*

Vision and Biblical Faith

Preface

In June 1997 the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America approved and embraced a new mission and vision statement intended to guide the church in ministry into the twenty-first century. The statement, as the culmination of nearly three years of work by the General Synod Council, calls on the whole of the Reformed Church to focus its task on equipping congregations to do ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

The General Synod also asked pastors, congregations, and classes to “prayerfully reflect” on the statement and then seek action according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This brief, four-session devotional and reflection guide is intended to help unleash the possibility of new visions and ideas for ministry in your own particular area.

Goal of This Guide

The goal of this devotional and reflection guide is simple and straightforward:

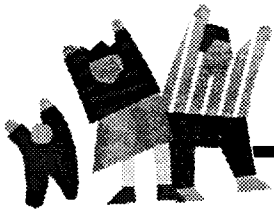
to provide consistories and other leadership groups a means for reflection and discussion on the RCA’s Mission and Vision Statement as a catalyst to discerning the leading of God’s Spirit in their own areas of ministry.

Format of This Guide

The format is equally straightforward:

- **Self-contained.** The format involves four 30-minute sessions, based on the content of the mission/vision statements.
- **Flexible.** This material is intended for an opening devotion/reflection time during a monthly meeting or as one two-hour session during a consistory retreat or other focused time of study.
- **Interactive.** Key learnings from each session will arise from the participants as they grapple with the implications of this church-wide vision for ministry in their particular settings.
- **Expandable.** The questions and suggested activities are intended to be a starting point for further creative reflection.





Reformed Church in America

Our Mission

The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry—a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing—following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

The Vision

Imagine...

Layty and pastors unleashed, hungry for ministry; congregations mission-minded and inviting, authentic and healing, growing and multiplying, alert to the opportunities around them.

Imagine...

Classes and synods as communities of nurture and vision—accountable, responsible, sustained by prayer, alive to the Spirit.

Imagine...

A denomination, locally oriented, globally connected, that prays in many languages and beholds the face of Christ in every face; a denomination renewed and renewing, raising up leaders, always directing its resources toward the front lines of ministry.

Imagine...

Hurts being healed, the lost being found, the hungry being fed, peace healing brokenness, hope replacing despair, lives transformed by the love of Jesus Christ.

Imagine...

The Reformed Church in America, engaging the world.

Living Out the Vision

This vision will be lived out...

By congregations focused for ministry—creative, confident, healing, and radically attentive to the world outside their doors.

By consistories selected more for ministry than for management, attuned to the Spirit, eager and equipped to serve.

By ministers of Word and sacrament open to dream, prepared to lead, willing to risk.

By classes that are empowering and proactive, living in communion, each accountable to all, and all to Christ.

By synods and staff that funnel resources to the local church and keep us connected to the larger church.

By all the people of the RCA, a network of relationships, a fellowship that celebrates its gifts and confesses its failures, and where the ministries of all are valued and cherished.

To live out this vision by consistories, classes, synods, and staff, our decision-making will be transformed by a pervasive climate of worship, discernment, and biblical reflection. We will no longer do business as usual, nor our usual business.

Copies of the study guide and video, *Vision and Biblical Faith: A Devotional Guide to the RCA Statement of Mission and Vision*, are available free from the RCA Distribution Center, 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org.

20 Workshops for Leaders and Teachers

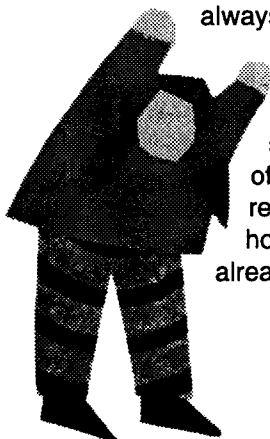
Foundation for This Guide

In the introduction to a book on devotions for groups (*Meeting God in the Bible*), Donald Griggs reflects on his own experience when he writes:

I served as chair for a Worship and Education Task Group of the First Presbyterian Church of Livermore, California. At the first meeting of that task group, it became clear that we had serious disagreement about the purpose and task of the group. I am convinced that because we began each meeting with some form of praying, reading the Bible, and faith-sharing activity, we were not only able to reach consensus, but we became a small group of persons who were committed as much to one another as to the task in which we were engaged.

This guide is built on that premise: that in actively seeking the presence of the Holy Spirit through prayer and Scripture, and in sharing together the means by which God has moved us in ministry, we become a people following Christ in mission. Scripture, prayer, and personal reflection can be powerful parts of the spiritual nurture of both individuals and groups. You'll most often find that participants feel more ready to focus on the agenda after an intentional experience of meeting God and God's Word at the beginning of the meeting.

The sessions are intended to last thirty minutes. That may be more or less than your group is used to taking for a period of devotions. While you are always welcome to add to the outline of this guide, try not to take shortcuts. Allow space for the working of the Spirit and for rejoicing in the stories of how the Holy Spirit has already worked.



Overview of Each Devotional's Contents

Four devotional sessions are included in this guide; each is structured to be used as a thirty-minute devotional for a meeting of a consistory or other leadership group. The sessions could also be used together as a two-hour block of time in a retreat setting, if that is a more helpful format.

Devotional One looks at the nature of vision: what in general this thing called vision is, where it comes from, and how it impacts our call to ministry. Devotional Two uses the two-sentence mission statement of the Reformed Church as the basis for discussion and reflection. Devotional Three moves on to the content of the vision statement, while Devotional Four uses the section on living out the vision as the beginning point for discussion.

Each devotional is divided into four sections:

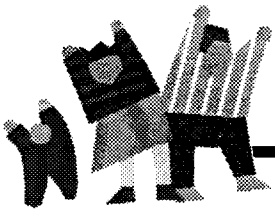
- 1) Gathering in God's Name, a time of prayer and calling forth the presence of God;
- 2) Hearing God's Call, through the word of Scripture and of the Scripture-based Statement of Mission and Vision;
- 3) Responding to God's Call, a time of asking ourselves how we might live out what we understand God is calling us to do; and
- 4) Going Forward in God's Call, a time to help close our reflections and begin our service.

Each section lists an approximate number of minutes you should allot to it if you want to stay within the thirty-minute time segment.

A Note to Leaders

The value of any time of reflection and prayer will depend in part on the commitment of its leader. Reading Scripture together, praying together, and sharing one's faith must be seen as a high priority and of value for the spiritual nurture of the participants. You must share this commitment.

The guide is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all product, but as a model you can use and adapt.



- **Know your group.** If singing a hymn together is not your style, perhaps you can just read the words, either in unison or in a line-by-line, responsive style. Be sensitive to the potential of differing styles of worship and faith expressions among the group. There must be basic levels of both comfort and trust among the group for members to effectively share the workings of God in their lives.
- **Wear a watch.** Especially if this is a new style for your group, the anxiety level of members will rise if the timing of the study goes unchecked. Encourage members to be brief when asked to be brief, and to focus on the task.
- **Count heads.** You may have to adjust some of these suggestions if your group is smaller than six or larger than eighteen (the average range for most groups, including consistories). Remember: larger groups will take longer to accomplish certain activities.
- **Plan carefully.** If the study asks for a reading of Scripture, ask in advance the person whom you would like to read. Do the same with prayer and other kinds of activities. In short, model quality and sensitivity.
- **Involve everyone.** The study has been designed for small groups so everyone can get a chance to speak, whether they are usually quick or reluctant to participate. It is important that this be the work of the people and not just the leader.
- **Be biblical people.** At least one biblical reference is given in each part. You may want to add others or to encourage participants to add passages they have found to be illuminating on a particular issue.
- **Pray always.** Ask God to be present. Again and again. And again.



Devotional One: The Nature of Vision

Gathering in God's Name (8 minutes)

After gathering and welcoming the group, begin your time by focusing on God and what God has in store for your group today. Some possible means are suggested here:

- Sing a familiar hymn, such as “We Gather Together to Ask the Lord’s Blessing” or “Bind Us Together.” Or, speak the hymn, either in unison or responsively.
- Invite each member to spend a minute or two silently reflecting on how he or she saw God at work today; then ask a few members (there won’t be time for all) to briefly share their reflections with the whole group.
- Offer a short prayer of thanksgiving and intercession, based on the brief reflections of the group.

Hearing God's Call (10 minutes)

Invite the preselected Scripture reader to read Numbers 13:1 to 14:10 aloud to the group. You may want to encourage the members of the group to close their eyes during the reading and to allow what they are hearing to surround them and become part of who they are.

Following the reading, lead a focused conversation with the entire group, encouraging members to respond briefly (in one or two sentences) to one of the following questions:

- What is vision? Where does it come from? What are its characteristics?
- Where do you look for vision? How have you discerned it in the past, or have you not?

You may want to record the answers of the group on newsprint or in some other form.

Responding to God's Call (12 minutes)

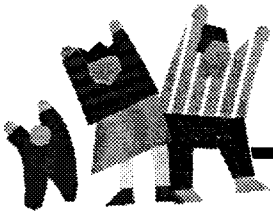
In the Scripture account, God gives the vision of the promised land to the Israelites. God also asks that we respond to a vision placed before us. The Israelites did that by identifying both the vision and the obstacles to the vision; in short, they set God’s vision in their current context. Invite members of the group to break into smaller gatherings of two or three to reflect on the following questions:

- How is God opening the “land of Canaan” to this congregation?
- What “giants in the land” may have to be overcome?
- How do we remember God helping us to overcome in the past?

Encourage each group to write on newsprint some key words/phrases/concepts that emerged in their discussion and which may illumine the whole group. If you wish to take five to ten extra minutes, the entire group could be invited back to hear reports from each of the smaller groups. Otherwise, simply have each smaller group post its results.

Going Forward in God's Call

Invite a member of the group (again, in advance, if possible) to pray on behalf of the group. Pray that God will give a vision of ministry for your church, or clarify and strengthen the vision you have already discerned—and that God will give your congregation the strength and will to carry out that vision.



Devotional Two: Our Mission

Gathering in God's Name (5 minutes)

Invite everyone to enter into God's presence with a brief opening prayer and then by joining in singing, "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love." Again, a unison or responsive reading is also appropriate, but this simple hymn may be a place to try singing together if that is not a part of your tradition. Then invite the selected Scripture reader to read Psalm 111 as a reminder of God's continuing goodness and salvation in the world.

Hearing God's Call (15 minutes)

Have a member of the group read the two sentences that make up the mission statement ("Our Mission") for the Reformed Church in America. Allow a minute or two for silent reflection on the statement following the reading.

In groups of two or three, reflect on the mission statement using these questions:

- What excites you about this statement?
- What in this statement seems to be a new or different way of looking at ministry?

Encourage the groups (before they begin) to write on a piece of newsprint words or phrases that will remind them of their answers. After about five to seven minutes in these small groups, invite the members back together to share their insights with the entire group.

Responding to God's Call (10 minutes)

Prewrite the mission statement so it can be placed before the entire group. Use a chalkboard, newsprint, an overhead, or the PowerPoint® program of your computer. Ask the members of the group to identify what they see as the three key words or phrases in the mission statement. Then invite the whole group to respond to the following questions:

- Which of these words or phrases describe our congregation? Which words describe what we live out especially well?
- Which of these words or phrases would be a new challenge to our congregation? What might they be calling us to consider?

Going Forward in God's Call

Close your time with spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving, with the leader offering the closing prayer. A suggestion: "Lead us forward, O God, in the confidence of your calling. Send us the Spirit, continuing the story you began with the Israelites of old and working in us today. Amen."



Devotional Three: The Vision

Gathering in God's Name (5 minutes)

Open the meeting by asking in prayer for the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit. For each person present, say the following, "Come, Holy Spirit, be present with _____." (Here again, you may have to be flexible, depending on the size of the group. For a large group, you could select a half dozen names at random, or simply the name of the group itself.) While still in prayer, ask the selected Scripture reader to read Galatians 5:22-26. Encourage members to voice their own one-word or one-sentence prayers for local, church, and world needs. Conclude with the Lord's Prayer.

Hearing God's Call (15 minutes)

Invite one member of the group (again, asked in advance) to read aloud the "vision" section of the Statement of Mission and Vision. The person should read slowly, with a tone and voice that invites listeners into its hope and sense of ministry. You may want to encourage the other members to close their eyes as the section is being read. When the reader is finished, allow the silence to linger for a minute or two.

Invite the group to break up into four smaller groups. (These small groups can be self-selected or can be assigned by having the group count off in fours.) Assign a different one of the "imagine..." statements to each of the four groups, with these questions:

- What are the key words or ideas for ministry in the statement we read?
- How do the key words of the statement connect to the ministry needs we identified for this congregation? Can this statement help us focus on those areas of need?

Responding to God's Call (10 minutes)

Following the discussion, invite members back to the total group to reflect briefly on their small group discussions, especially the final question. Have someone record words or phrases that will help the group recall what was reported. You'll want to save these, both for posting during the next devotional time and also for reflecting in the future as you examine new areas of ministry.

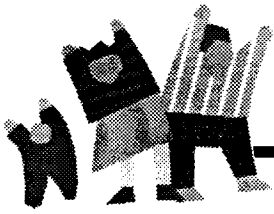
While there will likely not be time for the group during this brief period to answer the following question, you may want to raise it for them. It's a wondering question, much like the children might be asked to ponder in a Children and Worship session: I wonder—what two or three new areas of ministry has the Spirit called us to consider today?

Going Forward in God's Call

Close this session by inviting the members of the group to voice one-word prayer responses to the following lead-ins:

- God, we joyfully serve you in these areas...
- Christ, journey with us into these new callings...
- Spirit, help us keep wondering and learning about...

The leader may close each prayer with "Lord, gift us with wisdom."



Devotional Four: Living Out the Vision

(Preparatory note: It is important for this final session to have the group seated in a way that allows each member to see all the others. It would be best to arrange the chairs in that manner prior to the beginning of your time together.)

Gathering in God's Name (5 minutes)

Invite the members to begin this session by silently focusing their hearts and minds on God and what God might have in store for your group today. Bring their attention back to the whole group with the following prayer:

"Gracious God, we seek your presence and strength. Accept our prayers; still the disquiet in our hearts; fill our longings with the wonder and grace of your Spirit. May the work we do today bring glory to you and to your kingdom. We pray this in the name of Jesus, in whom we live and breathe and have our being. Amen."

Hearing God's Call (10 minutes)

Invite the selected Scripture reader to read 1 Corinthians 12:1-13. Following the reading, invite the group to participate in the following exercise:

Have the group pair in twos. Have each member of the pair complete the following sentence about the other person: "I appreciate _____ for offering the gift of _____ to the ministry of this congregation." Following each statement, the person speaking should say: "Use, O God, the gifts of this, your servant. Amen."

Invite a member of the group to read the final section of the Statement of Mission and Vision, titled "Living Out the Vision." Again, encourage the other members to close their eyes as the section is being read. When the reader is finished, allow the silence to linger for a minute or two.

Responding to God's Call (10 minutes)

Invite the whole group to think aloud about how such a living out of this vision might be done in your own setting. (You may want to have posted the recordings of the small group reflections on ministry needs that you did in the previous session.) Focus on that first statement regarding congregations by asking, "How might this congregation be more creative...more confident...more healing...more attentive to the world?" Feel free to encourage the members to be creative themselves. This is not a time to sweat the details but to "vision" new ministry.

Going Forward in God's Call

Be sure to remind the rest of the members that their faith journeys may not be in the same place as others, but that each journey will be respected and supported as together they minister in the days and years ahead.

For the closing time, gather in a circle. As the leader, read Isaiah 6:1-8. Invite the members to hold hands as a sign of their unity in Christ. You can close in a number of ways:

- Invite the prayers of members as the Spirit leads them.
- Sing a familiar and favorite hymn (perhaps an Easter hymn if this study is being used around that time).
- Use the litany on page 27. (If you do this, you may want to have a copy reproduced for each member of the group.)

Close your time together with the doxology.

A Litany of God's Calling

I heard the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

HERE AM I! SEND ME.

God calls congregations to be focused for ministry—creative, confident, healing, and radically attentive to the world outside their doors. The Lord asks, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

HERE WE ARE! SEND US.

God calls elders and deacons to be ready for ministry, attuned to the Spirit, eager and equipped to serve. "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

HERE WE ARE! SEND US.

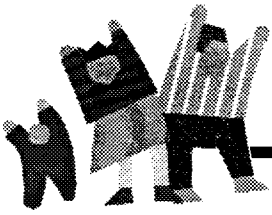
God calls pastors to be open to dream, prepared to lead, willing to risk. "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

HERE WE ARE! SEND US.

God calls all the people of the Reformed Church in America to be a people who celebrate their gifts, confess their failures, and value and cherish the ministries of all. "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

HERE WE ARE! SEND US.





A Final Note to Leaders

This four-part guide to the Statement of Mission and Vision is intended to begin or reinforce in your own congregation the challenging process of visioning new ministries, led and empowered by God through the Holy Spirit. We hope this guide has helped your church to do that.

But the formidable challenge of discerning God's vision for your ministry is but the beginning. The strategies for implementing the vision still need designing. It's a process that can take time. There may be some false starts or dead ends. Don't be discouraged. Keep at it. It's a journey well worth the energy you'll invest.

What is the best way to continue a process of vision and mission? There simply isn't one best way. Certainly, there are qualities of a good mission and vision statement: it must be stated clearly and understandably; it must be foundational; and it must involve the entire congregation in some way, not just the consistory or a few key leaders.

If you need help in identifying a process of continued visioning for ministry in your local congregation, contact the Office of Congregational Services, 1-800-968-3943. In Section 7 of this notebook, there is a process for preparing a mission statement and for evaluating current ministries and resources.

Finally, continue to look outward, through the lens of the Spirit, for the ministries God is placing before you.



Multiple Intelligences for Christian Religious Education

by George Brown Jr.
 G. W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of Christian Education and Associate Dean
 Western Theological Seminary
 Holland, Michigan

Purpose

To introduce workshop participants to Howard Gardner's seven intelligences and their application for Christian religious education.

Objectives

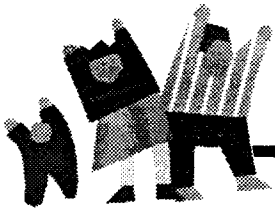
As a result of this workshop, participants should be able to:

- Name and describe Howard Gardner's seven intelligences.
- Identify appropriate resources.
- List two or three examples of teaching methods/learning activities for each intelligence.
- Apply the seven intelligences in teaching a lesson on the Lord's Prayer.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of teaching with the seven intelligences.
- Introduce the seven intelligences to church school teachers and equip them to use the seven intelligences in their teaching.

Outline for a One-Hour-and-Fifteen-Minute Workshop

Gathering Time	5 Minutes
Introducing the Seven Multiple Intelligences	15 Minutes
Exploring Multiple Intelligences for the Church School Classroom	
Presenting the Task	10 Minutes
Working in Pairs or Small Groups	25 Minutes
Using the Seven Intelligences in Teaching the Lord's Prayer (approximately 2 minutes for each pair or small group report)	15 Minutes
Summarizing Main Points and Offering a Closing Prayer	5 Minutes

This workshop was originally designed and conducted for an RCA Christian educators meeting at the Fellowship Conference Center in Liberty Corner, New Jersey, on July 11, 1997.



Materials and Resources List

You should have the following materials and resources for this workshop:

1. Copies of the **printed 3x5 card** for each participant for the gathering activity.
2. An overhead projector and **Resource 1** as a transparency or handout.
3. One section of **Resource 2** for each pair or workgroup.
4. Copies of **Handout No. 1** and **Handout No. 2** for each participant.
5. Copies of the annotated bibliography **Handout No. 3** to distribute to each participant at the conclusion of the workshop.
6. A **tape player** and **audio-cassette of the Lord's Prayer**.

Design for a One-Hour-and-Fifteen-Minute MI Workshop

Preparing the Workshop Space

If possible, visit the room where the workshop will be held. Contemplate the workshop space. Imagine the flow of the workshop design in relation to this space. Standing at the front of the room, follow the directions for the workshop and ask: How will the workshop activities work in this room? Are there any special features (such as round tables or tack strips for displaying sheets of newsprint) that can be used to enhance the implementation of the workshop design? What limitations will the room impose on implementing the workshop design? If you can't visit the room until the day of the workshop, ask for a floor plan and description of the room.

Check the room for bulletin boards, writing surfaces, furnishings, audio-visual (AV) equipment, and electrical outlets. If you will be using an overhead projector, will the location of the electrical outlet require use of an extension cord? (Be sure to have an adapter handy if the overhead projector has a three-pronged plug that needs to fit into an electrical outlet with only two openings!)

The arrangement of the workshop space will depend on the number of participants. Seating participants at round tables not only provides a work surface, but also provides a natural way to divide a larger group into smaller workgroups. Set up a table to display copies of Gardner's books and other resources listed on Handout No. 3. Arrange to have a chalkboard or whiteboard, newsprint pad and easel, or overhead projector in the room where the workshop is to be held. Check whiteboard or

transparency markers to be sure they haven't dried out, or make sure a sufficient supply of dustless chalk is available if a chalkboard is to be used.

Gathering Time

As workshop participants arrive, hand out **3 x 5 cards** bearing printed descriptions of Howard Gardner's seven intelligences. Instruct each participant to use the cards to gather autographs of other participants who match the description of one of the seven intelligences. When it is time to begin the workshop, signal the end of the gathering activity and invite the participants to be seated.

Introducing the Seven Multiple Intelligences

Take ten to fifteen minutes to introduce the purpose of the workshop and describe the seven intelligences. State the purpose of the workshop and use the 3 x 5 cards from the gathering activity as a way of introducing Gardner's seven intelligences. Use **Resource 1** (with the symbols representing the seven multiple intelligences) found with this workshop design as an overhead transparency or handout to help participants visualize the seven intelligences as they are introduced and discussed. (Figure 4.1—the MI Pizza diagram—from Thomas Armstrong's *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* could be used instead.) Julia Jasmine's *Teaching with Multiple Intelligences* (1996) provides a concise survey of Gardner's work for teachers and could be used to develop a brief presentation. The descriptions found on

Handout No. 1 may serve as your personal quick reference as you lead this part of the workshop.

Using the Seven Intelligences to Teach the Lord's Prayer

Take about ten minutes to assign the task of planning to teach the Lord's Prayer using the seven intelligences as a way of helping participants deepen and apply their understanding of multiple intelligences. Introduce the task by playing an **audio-cassette of the Lord's Prayer** being sung. Distribute **Handout No. 1** with the printed descriptions of the seven intelligences and point out how the singing of the Lord's Prayer is an example of learning through musical intelligence.

Next divide workshop participants into six or seven pairs or workgroups, depending on the number of participants in attendance. Assign each pair or workgroup one of the seven intelligences and ask them to teach the Lord's Prayer using teaching and learning activities that are related to that particular intelligence. Give each pair or workgroup one section of **Resource 2**. (Since music was used as an example in introducing the task, it could be omitted from the assignments.)

Allow each workgroup twenty-five minutes to develop a plan for teaching the Lord's Prayer using the intelligence assigned to them. Distribute a handout of teaching strategy ideas and resources to each group (Allow about twenty-five minutes for this task.)

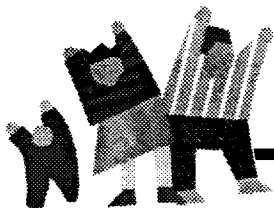
Then give each pair or workgroup about two to three minutes to share their work with the whole group. As each group presents their report, add information about that particular intelligence as appropriate and give participants an opportunity to ask questions or make additional suggestions for teaching with that intelligence.

Summarizing Main Points and Offering a Closing Prayer

Take five minutes to summarize the main points about multiple intelligences. Distribute **Handout No. 2** to summarize ways multiple intelligences can be used in the church school classroom. Then close with a prayer that expresses gratitude for the wonderful diversity of human intelligences and seeks wisdom for using them in the church's teaching ministry. Give participants an annotated bibliography (**Handout No. 3**) as they leave.

3 x 5 card: Print on card stock paper or laser printer postcards.

- _____ Hum the opening bars of Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony."
- _____ Diagram how a simple motor works.
- _____ Recite four (4) lines of poetry.
- _____ Feel completely comfortable playing this game.
- _____ Describe a dream you had during the last two weeks.
- _____ Can complete this sequence and explain it.
31, 37, 25, 31, 19, _____, _____.
- _____ Stand on one leg and count to twenty (20).



Alternative Workshop Designs

An hour and fifteen minutes is hardly sufficient time to equip church school teachers to use multiple intelligences in the church's teaching ministry. Here are suggestions for expanding the hour-and-fifteen-minute workshop design:

A Two-Hour Workshop

Add an opportunity for workshop participants to complete a questionnaire designed to help them identify which of the seven intelligences is their particular strength. The MI Inventory for the Teacher found on page 8 of Deirdré Korff Wilken's *Multiple Intelligences Activities (Grades K-4)* is one self-reporting instrument that can be used for this purpose. This could be used in place of the 3x5 card mixer suggested for the gathering activity or in conjunction with the introduction segment.

Provide more time for presentations by the pairs or workgroups. Have each pair or workgroup teach the whole group the Lord's Prayer using the intelligence they were assigned.

A Three-Hour Workshop

Play a portion of the audiocassette from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development featuring Howard Gardner (*Viewpoints, 1995*).

Set up a book display table that features copies of:

- Thomas Armstrong's *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*
- Barbara Bruce's *Seven Ways of Teaching the Bible to Children*
- Howard Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, and *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*

Encourage workshop participants to browse during a break or to borrow the books as resources for their assignment.

Close by encouraging participants to review the workshop and identify how the seven intelligences were used by the workshop leader. Which intelligences were used? What other activities might have been used in conjunction with a particular intelligence? How might other intelligences have been used?

A Three-Session Workshop or Day-Long Retreat

These could be modules of a day-long retreat, or hour-long evening sessions held once a week over a three-week period. The first module or session would focus only on introducing participants to Gardner's seven intelligences and helping them discern which of these intelligences matches their teaching style. The second module or session would be a time for working with one of the intelligences in small groups or pairs. The pairs or small groups would share their work in the third module or session, which would conclude with reflection on the way the seven intelligences were used in the workshop/retreat and a review of main ideas and key insights.

References

Armstrong, Thomas. *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1994.

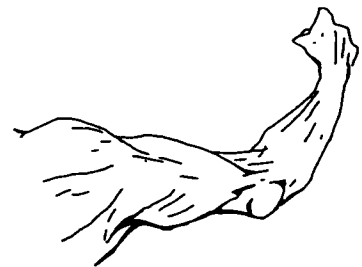
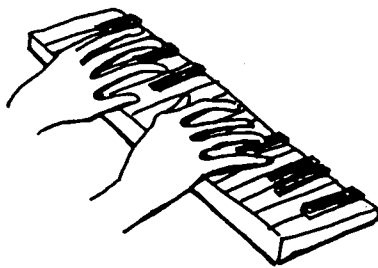
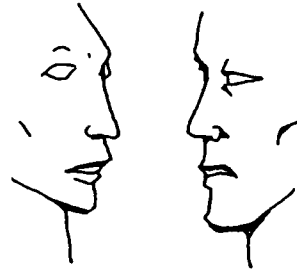
Bruce, Barbara. *Seven Ways of Teaching the Bible to Children*. Foreword by Leonard Sweet. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Tenth Anniversary Edition. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

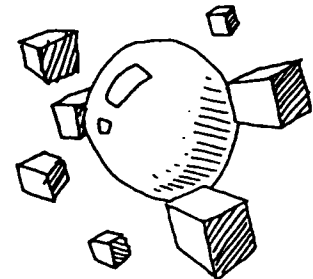
_____. *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Jasmine, Julia. *Teaching with Multiple Intelligences*. Professional's Guide Series. Huntington Beach, CA: Teacher Created Materials, Inc., 1996.

Wilkins, Deirdré Korff. *Multiple Intelligences Activities (Grades K-4)*. Huntington Beach, CA: Teacher Created Materials, Inc., 1996.



RDM
ABENRUG
FRND
SCO



Multiple Intelligences in the Church School Classroom

Teaching/Learning Activities and Resources
by George Brown Jr.

Instructions for the Workshop Leader:

Cut each page in half so that each workshop participant, pair, or small group will have one of Howard Gardner's seven intelligences. They will need to have this information for their assigned task of teaching the Lord's Prayer using one of the seven intelligences. Covering the half-page descriptions of teaching/learning activities and resources with clear contact paper will make them more durable and easier to handle.

Linguistic Intelligence

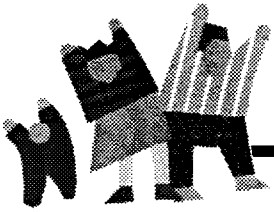


Activities

lecturing
discussing
storytelling
tape recording
creative writing
reading

Resources

lecture
large and small groups
stories
audio-tapes
writing center
books, magazines, Bible



Logical-Mathematical Intelligence



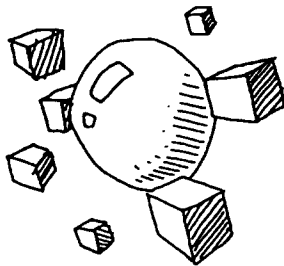
Activities

classifying and categorizing
asking Socratic questions
solving problems

Resources

objects, information
logic problems
exploration center

Spatial Intelligence



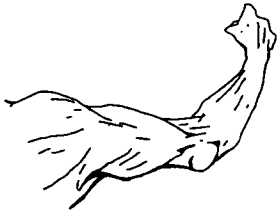
Activities

visualizing
drawing pictures or symbols
painting murals/creating collages
watching/making videos, slides,
movies
visiting/observing displays
and exhibits

Resources

posters, pictures, charts, maps
drawing/art center
wall mural/gallery
video-cassettes, slides,
movies
displays and exhibits

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence



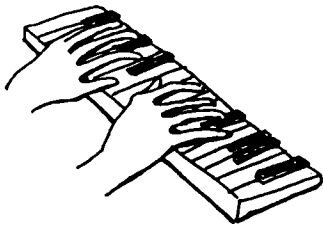
Activities

drama
role-playing
playing physical games
molding clay figures/objects
making crafts, constructing models
signing

Resources

plays/drama center
role plays
physical games
art center
craft center

Musical Intelligence

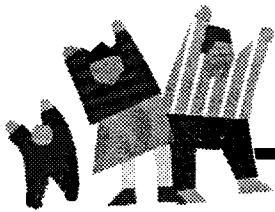


Activities

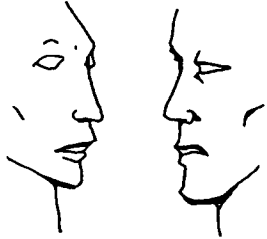
singing, chanting, rapping
listening to audio-tapes, CD's,
recordings
aiding memory with music
creating an atmosphere with music

Resources

hymnbooks, songbooks
listening center
CD's, audio-cassettes
boom box



Interpersonal Intelligence



Activities

sharing with a peer
learning from a mentor
working cooperatively in
a small group
playing instructional board games
using simulation exercises

Resources

peers and mentors
small groups, group projects
instructional games
simulations

Intrapersonal Intelligence



Activities

reflecting
praying, meditating, contemplating
learning individually
journal writing

Resources

quiet space
prayer chapel
resource center, study guide
spiritual journal

Seven Ways of Knowing and Learning

by George Brown Jr.

G. W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of Christian Education and Associate Dean
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan

LINGUISTIC INTELLIGENCE



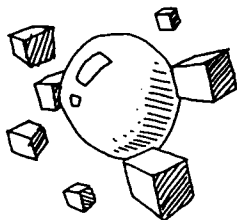
People who communicate effectively through writing and speaking exhibit what Howard Gardner (1983,1993) calls linguistic intelligence. Because this intelligence involves words—spoken and written, heard and read—it could be called verbal intelligence. Everyone who speaks and listens possesses this intelligence to some degree, but some (especially poets, novelists, and orators) are more verbally gifted than others. Learners with this intelligence have a special capacity for expressing their thoughts and feelings with words. They enjoy reading and learn through oral presentations such as lectures, debates, and discussions. Great preachers and evangelists appear to be especially gifted with linguistic intelligence.

LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL INTELLIGENCE

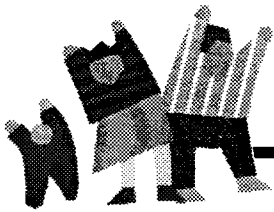


As words are at the heart of linguistic intelligence, so thinking lies at the heart of logical-mathematical intelligence. People with this intelligence are not only good at solving math problems; they also excel at chess and other games that require strategizing. Learners with logical-mathematical intelligence are good at classifying and categorizing information, and seeing patterns and relationships. They enjoy solving problems through the use of critical thinking and logic. While some religious educators tend to overlook the value of this intelligence for matters of faith, it should be noted that religious thinkers like Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin made significant theological contributions to the church through logic and analytical reasoning.

SPATIAL INTELLIGENCE

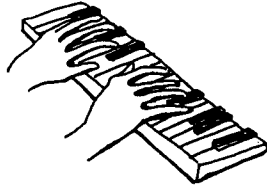


The saying, "One picture is worth a thousand words," is particularly true for people who have a high degree of spatial intelligence. They think in pictures rather than words and learn better by seeing than by hearing. The church is indebted to artists and sculptors who have rendered biblical truths on canvas and in stone, and to architects who have given physical shape to the human yearning for transcendence and beauty.



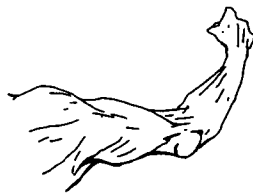
MUSICAL INTELLIGENCE

Handout 1 (p. 2 Of 2)



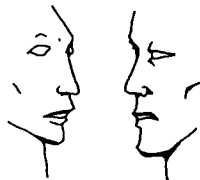
People who hum, whistle, or sing while doing another activity may be expressing musical intelligence. When this behavior occurs in the church school classroom, it may be viewed as a discipline problem. However, it is quite possible that the learner is only expressing musical intelligence. Persons with special ability in music or rhythm sing well and may play a musical instrument. They respond to environmental sounds as well as musical sounds. Maria Harris' ability to weave music into her teaching and workshop leading suggests that musical intelligence is one of her gifts.

BODILY-KINESTHETIC INTELLIGENCE



This intelligence centers in the human body, and involves bone and muscle, coordination, and the sense of touch. People with bodily-kinesthetic intelligence have a special capacity to know through bodily movement and physical contact. They learn best by moving around, touching, doing, and acting. Learners with this intelligence enjoy hands-on museums and demonstrations. They excel in athletic activities and enjoy participating in sports. In the church, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence can be seen at times of worship when liturgical dancers grace the chancel, giving physical expression to the human spirit's yearning for God.

INTERPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE



This is the first of two personal intelligences in Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Interpersonal intelligence is the more outward of the two. Persons having a high degree of this intelligence are good at reading body language, in sensing the moods and motivations of others. Learners with this intelligence would rather work on a project or task in a group than work alone. Learners with this intelligence respond well to cooperative learning methods.

INTRAPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE



The second of Gardner's two personal intelligences is inward. Being aware of one's own inner feelings and being secure with the knowledge of one's vulnerabilities as well as one's assets are aspects of intrapersonal intelligence. Persons with intrapersonal intelligence are independent learners who often express strong opinions. Opportunity for self-directed learning is especially appropriate for learners with intrapersonal intelligence. The Dutch priest Henri J.M. Nouwen typified someone with intrapersonal intelligence.

Howard Gardner describes the seven intelligences in *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983, 1993). For another helpful description of the seven intelligences, see *Multiple Intelligences Activities (Grades 5-8)*, by Julia Jasmine (Huntington Beach, CA: Teacher Created Materials, Inc., 1996), pages 4-5.



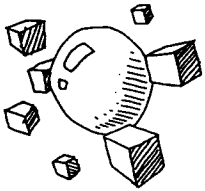
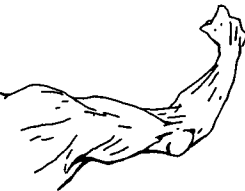
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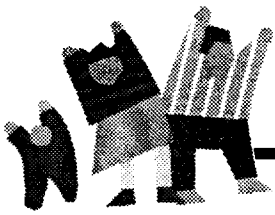
Graphics by Jeff Brown ©1997

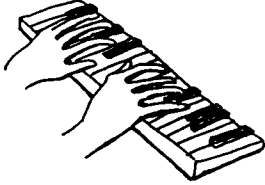
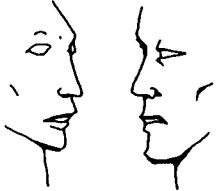

Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences in Christian Education

by George Brown Jr.

G. W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of Christian Education and Associate Dean
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan

INTELLIGENCE	DESCRIPTION	SAMPLE ACTIVITIES
<p>LINGUISTIC (VERBAL)</p> 	<p>Can use words—written or spoken—to express thoughts and feelings effectively. Enjoys writing and reading.</p>	<p>Lecturing Discussing Storytelling Creative writing Reading</p>
<p>LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL</p> 	<p>Is skillful in problem solving, analysis, and categorization. Enjoys using critical thinking and logic to solve problems.</p>	<p>Classifying and categorizing Asking Socratic questions Solving problems</p>
<p>SPATIAL</p> 	<p>Is able to think better with pictures than with words. Appreciates charts and diagrams.</p>	<p>Drawing pictures or symbols Painting murals and creating collages Watching/making videos and movies Visiting/observing displays and exhibits</p>
<p>BODILY-KINESTHETIC</p> 	<p>Uses touch and movement in knowing and learning. Prefers learning that is active.</p>	<p>Acting/drama Role-playing Molding clay objects or figures Making crafts, constructing models Signing</p>



<p>MUSICAL</p> 	<p>Able to know and learn through the use of rhythm and sound. Enjoys singing or playing a musical instrument.</p>	<p>Singing, chanting, rapping Aiding memory with music Creating an atmosphere with music Listening to audio-tapes, CDs, recordings</p>
<p>INTERPERSONAL</p> 	<p>Able to use relational skills for knowing and learning. Prefers working with others.</p>	<p>Sharing with a peer Working cooperatively in a small group Using simulation exercises and instructional games Playing instructional board games</p>
<p>INTRAPERSONAL</p> 	<p>Able to use self-understanding for knowing and learning. Prefers working alone.</p>	<p>Reflecting on experience Meditating, praying, contemplating Writing in a journal Self-directed learning</p>

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Multiple Intelligences for Religious Educators

A Select, Annotated Bibliography

Compiled by George Brown Jr.
G. W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of Christian Education and Associate Dean
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan

Basic Resources

Armstrong, Thomas. *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1994.

Armstrong provides teachers with an introduction to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and offers practical suggestions for applying Gardner's insights in classroom teaching. Assessment, classroom environment, classroom management, curriculum development, and teaching strategies are among the topics covered. This is one of two books Armstrong has written about multiple intelligences.

Bruce, Barbara. *Seven Ways of Teaching the Bible to Children*. Foreword by Leonard Sweet. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

In this resource for church school teachers, an experienced director of Christian education seeks to apply the research on multiple intelligences to the church school classroom. Bruce draws on fifteen years of experience as a Christian educator to provide teachers a basic introduction to Gardner's theory of "multiple intelligences," twenty-five Bible lessons which incorporate the seven different kinds of intelligence, a two-hour training workshop, and thirteen reproducible resources and handouts.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Tenth Anniversary Edition. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

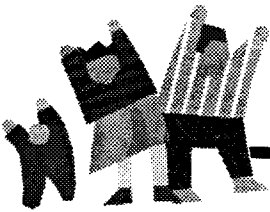
Gardner may be best known for this book, which was first published in 1983. Here Gardner presents his theory of seven intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

_____. *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

Gardner relates his theory of multiple intelligences to schooling and some of the current issues around the reform of public education. He begins by offering a view of the young child as a "natural learner," moves on to discuss the kinds of difficulties schooling poses for learners, and ends with his own proposals for reforming public schools.

Thomas Hatch, "Getting Specific About Multiple Intelligences." *Educational Leadership* Vol. 54, No. 6 (March, 1997), 26-29.

Hatch, a research associate for Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, cautions against labeling learners according to a particular strength or intelligence. He calls educators to take into account not only a child's strengths, interests, and development, but also "the opportunities and resources available to that child." Hatch challenges teachers to question their assumptions about a particular child's strengths, and "to respond to that child as an individual" (page 29).



Tobias, Cynthia Ulrich. *The Way They Learn*. Colorado Springs, CO: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994.

Writing for parents, Cynthia Ulrich Tobias introduces practical information about learning styles from the work of Anthony Gregorc, Kenneth and Rita Dunn, Herman Witkin, and Howard Gardner. Howard Gardner's seven intelligences are presented in Chapter Ten, "How Many Ways Can We Be Smart?". There are clear, concise descriptions of each intelligence and helpful examples drawn from life.

Additional Resources

As Howard Gardner's theory becomes more widely known, a number of educators have sought to develop resources to assist teachers in using Gardner's findings in the classroom. These include:

Jasmine, Julia. *Multiple Intelligences Activities (Grades 5-8)*. Huntington Beach, CA: Teacher Created Materials, Inc., 1996.

While similar to an activity book for kindergarten through grade four, also published by Teacher Created Materials, the author's introduction to the seven intelligences is not as extensive. The second part of the book offers four ways to use the seven intelligences in teaching and assessment: infusion, center-based, project-based, and as a separate subject. The forms and activity sheets found in this book and the companion volume for kindergarten through grade four may be reproduced for classroom use.

Lazear, David. *Seven Ways of Teaching: The Artistry of Teaching with Multiple Intelligences*. Foreword by Dee Dickinson. Arlington Heights, IL: IRI/Skylight Training and Publishing, Inc., 1991.

Dickinson traces the history of Gardner's work and identifies schools where his theory is being applied. In addition to practical suggestions for using multiple intelligences to teach various subjects, Lazear identifies three kinds of teaching (teaching for, teaching with, and teaching about) and presents four stages of teaching with multiple intelligences: 1) awakening, 2) amplifying, 3) teaching for/with, and 4) transfer.

Wilkins, Dierdré Korff. *Multiple Intelligences Activities (Grades K-4)*. Huntington Beach, CA: Teacher Created Materials, Inc., 1996.

This 8 1/2 x 11 format activity book provides teachers with a basic introduction to the seven intelligences. Each intelligence is the focus of a three-part section which consists of resources for the teacher (including a description of the intelligence, a form letter informing parents about that intelligence as a focus in the classroom, lesson planning, etc.), activities for accessing a particular intelligence through the other six intelligences, and activity sheets.

In addition to two activity books, Teacher Created Materials, Inc. (PO Box 1040, Huntington Beach, CA 92647) also publishes Julia Jasmine's *Teaching with Multiple Intelligences* (1996), a book in their Professional's Guide Series for teachers.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1250 North Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314) has produced a 40-minute audio cassette ("On Multiple Intelligences and Education with Howard Gardner," Viewpoints, 1995), three 20- to 36-minute video cassettes ("The Multiple Intelligences Series," 1996), and a CD-ROM, *Exploring Our Multiple Intelligences CD-ROM* (in both Windows and Macintosh versions, 1997). The CD-ROM covers an eighth intelligence Gardner recently added to his list.

Handout 3 (p. 3 of 3)

Gardner has extended his work on multiple intelligences into the fields of human creativity and leadership. Those interested in these subjects may wish to continue their reading in:

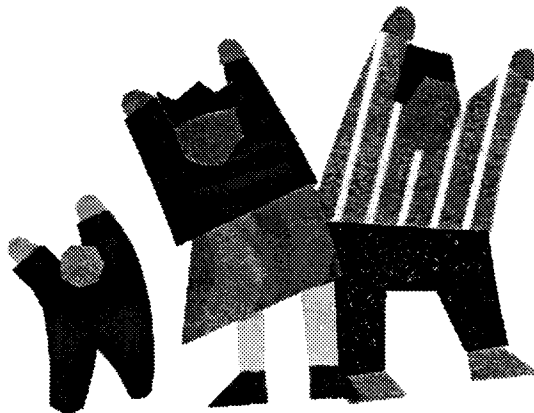
Gardner, Howard. *Creating Minds: An Anatomy of Creativity Seen through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Ghandi*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

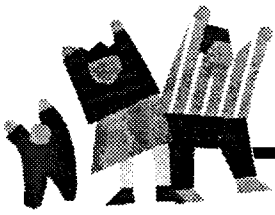
In *Creating Minds*, Gardner uses his theory as an interpretive frame for examining the lives of seven creative figures: Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Martha Graham, and Ghandi. Each individual provides an illustration of the relationship between creativity and one of the seven intelligences.

_____. *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.

In *Leading Minds*, Gardner extends the cognitive approach used in *Creating Minds* to the field of leadership. He examines the lives of Margaret Mead, Robert Oppenheimer, Robert Maynard Hutchins, Alfred P. Sloan Jr., George C. Marshall, Pope John XXIII, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King Jr., Margaret Thatcher, Jean Monnet, and Mahatma Ghandi. The lens he uses is that of cognitive science.

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Cultivating Gifts for Ministry

Compiled by George Brown Jr.
G. W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of Christian Education and Associate Dean
Western Theological Seminary
Holland, Michigan

Introduction

Discover a spiritual gifts approach that challenges assumptions and offers pastors, church educators, and congregational leaders a new way of thinking about teacher and leader “recruitment.” In many churches, pastors and religious educators use what might be called a “filling the slots” approach to staffing Sunday school and other Christian education programs. This workshop offers an alternative—a spiritual gifts approach that assists church members in discerning their gifts and exploring how best to use their gifts in the service of Christ and Christ’s people. “Cultivating Gifts for Ministry” is a workshop designed for pastors, Christian educators, and congregational leaders.

Workshop Contents

- Workshop outline
- Master copies of handouts
 - Handout 1, Outline for note-taking
 - Handout 2, Bibliography
- Lecture 4, “Reframing How We Equip Laypersons for Teaching and Leadership”
- Lecture 5, “Filling Institutional Slots or Calling Forth Gifts?”

Purpose

To equip participants with relevant research, practical tools, and useful resources for discerning church members’ spiritual gifts and for inviting them to offer these gifts for ministry.

Objectives

As a result of this workshop, congregational leaders, church educators, and pastors should be able to:

- Challenge assumptions and explore new ways of thinking about “volunteers” and “recruitment.”
- Identify resources and strategies for discerning spiritual gifts and inviting members of the congregation to offer these gifts in service to Christ and Christ’s church.
- Develop and implement a systemic approach to the identification and cultivation of gifts for ministry.

Intended Audience

This workshop is primarily designed for pastors, Christian educators, and others who bear responsibility for finding leaders and teachers for the church's various ministries. In many congregations, pastors, Christian educators, and other church leaders use a "filling the slots" approach to staffing Christian education and other ministries. The results are often frustrating, both for those "recruiting" volunteers and for those who are recruited to serve.

Materials and Resources List

- Copies of Handouts 1 and 2 for each workshop participant.
- Bibles or copies of four New Testament biblical texts (see p. 49) for each workshop participant.
- Writing paper and pencils for participants.
- "Calling Forth Gifts for Ministry"—a 272 KB slide presentation in Microsoft PowerPoint® format—has been developed for use with this workshop. A free copy is available upon request. Send a 3.5" floppy diskette (IBM format) and a self-addressed, stamped mailer to:

Dr. George Brown Jr.
 Western Theological Seminary
 101 East Thirteenth Street
 Holland, MI 49423-3622

Room Arrangement and Equipment

Tables for Workshop Participants

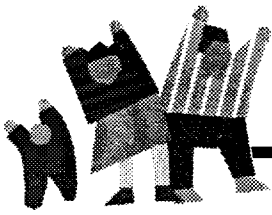
Participants will be asked to do some writing during the workshop, so tables will be very useful. Seating participants at tables helps create small groups, which facilitate discussion and sharing. In groups of eight to twelve or larger, tables for four to six participants should be arranged facing the workshop leader. If available, round tables are preferable to rectangular, banquet-style tables.

Display Table for Resources

Workshop participants usually appreciate the opportunity to examine recommended resources. Place resources listed in Handout 2 (bibliography) on a table placed near the entrance to the room. If space is limited, have these resources placed on the tables where the participants will be seated.

Optional Equipment

If the PowerPoint® presentation "Calling Forth Gifts for Ministry" is to be used, a laptop computer with Microsoft PowerPoint® 97 or higher and a projector and screen (or VCR monitor with adapter) will be needed. A projection stand or AV cart for use by the workshop leader will facilitate the leader's use of this equipment.



WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Leader Preparation

Read Lecture 4, “Reframing How We Equip Laypersons for Teaching and Leadership,” and Lecture 5, “Filling Institutional Slots or Calling Forth Gifts?” These lectures from a seminary course on equipping laity for teaching and leadership in the church will provide you with the instructional content for this workshop. The outline of a PowerPoint® presentation, “Calling Forth Gifts for Ministry,” will provide you with an outline of the workshop content. Familiarize yourself with these resources as you prepare to lead the workshop.

Before the Workshop Begins

Allow yourself sufficient time to set up a display of resources and place a copy of Handout 1 at each participant’s place before the workshop begins. Writing paper and a pencil at each place signals participants that this workshop calls for their engagement and active participation.

The Gathering

Participants seldom arrive at the same time. Some will come early and take time to browse at the display table or talk with other participants. Others may straggle in a few minutes after the announced starting time. Consider the ten to fifteen minutes before the announced starting time and the first five to ten minutes of the workshop as “The Gathering Time,” when a community of learners or participants is beginning to be formed.

Inviting participants to think about the activities in which they are presently engaged can be a productive use of this gathering time. As participants arrive, ask them to fold a sheet of paper in half lengthwise and to list the activities in which they are engaged. These should be only those activities in which they have freely chosen to participate and for which they are not paid. Examples include being a member of the PTA, serving on a school board or other community service, helping prepare or serve meals at a soup kitchen, tutoring school children, teaching Sunday school, singing in the church choir, etc. The activities need not be restricted to the church. If participants have been more active in such activities in the past than they are currently, allow them to include previous activities.

The Opening

When it appears that all the participants have arrived, begin the workshop with a prayer.

Use the quote about teacher recruitment from John Larsen (See Slide 2 of the PowerPoint® presentation, “Calling Forth Gifts for Ministry”) to focus attention on the central purpose of the workshop. Invite workshop participants to respond to Larsen’s statement. Participants typically identify with the sentiments Larsen expresses.

Focusing on spiritual gifts is one way to address the difficulty of recruiting teachers and leaders. Direct participants’ attention to Question 55 of the Heidelberg Catechism. (See Slide 3 of the PowerPoint® presentation, “Calling Forth Gifts for Ministry.”) Question and Answer 55 seek to explain the meaning of the phrase “the communion of saints” in the Apostles’ Creed.

Highlight key points in the two-part answer to Question 55 of the catechism.

Part One:

We are recipients of Christ’s gifts.

We share in one fellowship.

Part Two:

We are *obligated* to use our spiritual gifts freely and with joy.

Spiritual gifts we have received in Christ are for the *benefit* and *welfare* of others.

Drawing on the material found in Lecture 4, "Reframing How We Equip Laypersons for Teaching and Leadership," and Lecture 5, "Filling Institutional Slots or Calling Forth Gifts?", offer a brief presentation outlining five shifts:

- The shift from recruitment to *vocation*.
- The shift from work to *ministry*.
- The shift from volunteer to *minister*.
- The shift from the individual to *systems*.
- The shift from filling slots to *gift discernment*.

Exploring Spiritual Gifts

Ask participants, "What is a spiritual gift?" Give them time to reflect on their answer to the question. If participants are seated at separate tables, ask participants to share their answer with those seated at their table. (If they are not seated in table groupings, ask participants to turn to their neighbor and share their answers with each other.) After allowing time for sharing answers, invite participants to share their answers with the whole group. Write responses on chalkboard, whiteboard, or newsprint for all to see. One definition of spiritual gift has three key points:

- 1) it is a significant ability,
- 2) it is given by the Holy Spirit, and
- 3) it is given for service to Christ and the reign of God.

Distribute sheets with selected New Testament texts, or ask participants to look up the passages in Bibles provided for them. Assign one text or passage to each table group for study and reflection:

- Romans 12:1-8
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4:7-16
- 1 Peter 4:10-11 (This passage could be combined with the passage from Romans 12.)

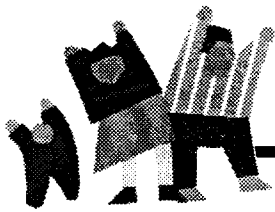
After participants have had sufficient time to read and discuss their assigned passage, invite comments. Responses may be written on chalkboard, whiteboard, or newsprint for all to see.

Discerning Spiritual Gifts

Direct participants' attention to the sheets that they filled out during the gathering time. On the other half of their sheet, have them write down what special ability, skill, knowledge, or experience they bring to each particular activity. Invite them to reflect on their lists and to look for connections between their activities and spiritual gifts. Let them share their reflections in their table groupings or with one or two people seated near them.

What do they notice? Again, it will be helpful to record their responses on chalkboard, whiteboard, or newsprint. This way the entire group can see common themes or patterns in the responses.

Invite participants to think about what they believe to be their spiritual gifts. Ask, "How did you discover your spiritual gift?" Answers may include, "Someone told me that I had the gift of



caring.” “I noticed that people tend to come to me with their problems and I am usually able to help them find a solution.” “I took a test that identified teaching as my spiritual gift.”

Summarize the responses for the group.

Give a brief overview of five ways to discern spiritual gifts. Lecture 4, “Reframing How We Equip Laypersons for Teaching and Leadership,” will provide some background information for this presentation, but for convenience sake here are five ways:

- Observation
- Interest inventories
- Spiritual gifts assessment instruments
- Spiritual gifts class
- Discernment team

A presentation on these five methods should include the following points:

The first method relies upon people’s visible behavior. Interest inventories rely more upon the person’s subjective assessment. Spiritual gifts assessment instruments are usually carefully constructed questionnaires designed to eliminate some of the personal bias or subjectivity associated with interest inventories, but these too rely upon the person’s self-reporting. When spiritual gift assessment inventories are used in conjunction with a class or a discernment process that involves the perspectives of others, they can be very helpful tools. Both a spiritual gifts class and discernment team add the elements of community, support, and objectivity to one’s own perceptions and self-knowledge.

Invite participants’ reflections on the presentation. Lead a discussion with the whole group, or allow participants to discuss their responses in small groups around tables or with one or two people seated nearest to them. Summarize key points in the discussion to bring this part of the workshop to a close.

Taking Action

A true workshop involves rolling up our sleeves and pitching in to solve a problem or create a program. If there is time, engage workshop participants in brainstorming ways to implement a gifts discernment process in the congregation. How might they create a congregational “culture of expectation” that values spiritual gifts and encourages members to use their gifts for the well-being of the whole church (Cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 55)? What are the congregation’s ministry needs? What spiritual gifts are needed in each ministry area? How might a discernment team identify members with particular spiritual gifts? Finding answers to these questions will give participants a sense of accomplishment.

The Closing

A brief worship service, perhaps built around one of the New Testament passages studied in the workshop, is one appropriate way to conclude the workshop. The participants might create a short litany and recite it responsively as a closing prayer.

Cultivating Gifts for Ministry

“When you recruit laity to help others you are inviting them to continue Christ’s work. It is a call to ministry.”

Stanley J. Menking,
Helping Laity Help Others
(Westminster)

Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 55

“What do you understand by the ‘communion of saints’?”

“First, that believers one and all, as partakers of the Lord Christ, and all his treasures and gifts, shall share in one fellowship. Second, that each one ought to know that he is obliged to use his gifts freely and with joy for the benefit and welfare of other members.”

A Different Perspective on “Volunteer Recruitment”

Discerning Spiritual Gifts

What do you consider your spiritual gifts to be? How are you using those gifts in service to Christ and Christ’s people?

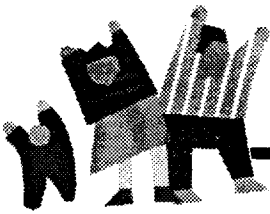
- Interest Inventories
- Observation
- Spiritual Gifts Assessment Tools
- Spiritual Gifts Class
- Discernment Team

“...it seems that the gift movement has been co-opted by the granular individualism of Western culture and is used as one more way to achieve personal fulfillment. We need a systems approach to gifts as well.”

R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins,
The Equipping Pastor (Alban Institute, 1993), p. 35

“Such gift identity exercises are best done in groups of Christian companions, not necessarily people who know us well, but those who can help us be honest and realistic about our gifts. They can help us name the gifts we do have, acknowledge those we do not have, then suggest ways to use our gifts.”

Patricia N. Page, *All God’s People Are Ministers* (Augsburg, 1993), p. 84



Calling Forth Gifts for Christian Service

Workshop Handout 1 (p. 2 of 2)

How does the congregation you serve help members identify their spiritual gifts?

- **Create a Culture of Expectation**

“Awareness of spiritual gifts can transform the nomination process.”

Brian Kelley Bauknight,
Body Building

- **Assess Ministry Needs**

- **Review the Congregation’s Membership**

- **Call Forth Spiritual Gifts for Christian Service**

- **Commission a “Coordinator of Spiritual Gifts”**

“Time and talent sheets have helped officially reject people’s gifts every year.”

Marlene Wilson, *How to Mobilize*

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Cultivating Gifts for Ministry

Bibliography

General Works

Bauknight, Brian Kelley. *Body Building: Creating a Ministry Team through Spiritual Gifts*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

The author presents a gifts-oriented approach to ministry that he has used for developing lay leaders to fill staff positions.

Johnson, Douglas W. *Empowering Lay Volunteers*. Creative Leadership Series, edited by Lyle Schaller. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991.

Written from the perspective of empowerment, this volume replaces an earlier book on volunteers by Johnson. Johnson's description of a "coordinator of volunteers" (Chapter IV) is one of the helpful topics which distinguishes this book from his earlier book in this series.

Page, Patricia N. *All God's People Are Ministers: Equipping Church Members for Ministry*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993.

In Chapter 7, "Engaging All God's People in Ministry," Page discusses three ways churches have organized for ministry: the structured organization model, the living cell model, and the base community model.

Ratcliff, Donald and Neff, Blake J. *The Complete Guide to Religious Education Volunteers*. With chapters by Harold William Burgess and James Michael Lee. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1993.

Religious education is the special focus of this guide. Four chapters are devoted to recruiting religious education volunteers.

Senter, Mark III. *Recruiting Volunteers in the Church*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990.

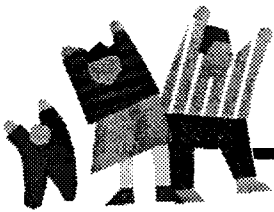
A helpful handbook written from an evangelical perspective. Recruitment is the focus of several chapters.

Smith, Donald P. *Congregations Alive*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981.

Chapter 6, "Using the Gifts God Has Given," is particularly relevant to the focus of this workshop.

Stevens, R. Paul, and Collins, Phil. *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership*. Bethesda, MD: An Alban Institute Publication, 1993.

Believing that the gifts movement has been influenced by the "granular individualism" of North American society, the authors argue for a biblical and systemic perspective which highlights the relational character of spiritual gifts.



Resources

The following print resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center, 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org.

Vander Griend, Alvin J. *Discover Your Gifts and Learn How to Use Them*. Leader's Guide. Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1996.

A revised, updated version of *Discover Your Gifts* (1980, 1983), the Leader's Guide for the seven-session course contains detailed lesson plans and masters for fourteen overhead transparencies. It is designed for use with a Student Manual and a "Spiritual Gift Discovery Questionnaire."

Vander Griend, Alvin J. *Discover Your Gifts and Learn How to Use Them*. Student Manual. Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1996.

This Student Manual contains: seven study sessions; five assessment forms, the Spiritual Gift Discovery Questionnaire (which may also be purchased separately); a Ministry Resumé form; and individual studies for each of twenty-one spiritual gifts.

Vander Zee, Ruth. *Discover Your Gifts and Learn How to Use Them*. Youth Leader's Guide. Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1996.

The Youth Leader's Guide provides instructions for leading this six session course. The course can be used in Sunday school, youth group, and retreat settings, as well as in Christian day schools.

Vander Zee, Ruth. *Discover Your Gifts and Learn How to Use Them*. Youth Student Book. Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1996.

The Student Book for junior and senior high youth is printed in a workbook format. Session 4 consists of a spiritual gifts questionnaire designed to assist youth in discovering their spiritual gifts.

Internet Resources

Here are URL's for spiritual gift inventories. All spiritual gift inventories are not equal. Review Internet resources in particular with a critical eye.

<http://www.elca.org/eteam/assessment/OpenSpiritGifts.htm>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) offers this interactive spiritual gifts inventory. A drawback of this particular instrument is that it does not include the more "controversial gifts," but focuses on service-oriented spiritual gifts.

<http://lead.wilmington.org/news.htm>

LEAD offers a spiritual gifts inventory and related resources, but at a cost.

<http://www.cforc.com/sgifts.cgi>

Here is still another on-line, interactive spiritual gifts inventory you might wish to consider.

<http://www.htc.net/~shanks/stpaul/gifts1.htm>

Some congregations have developed spiritual gifts inventories. This type of spiritual gifts inventory may not be as well designed or developed as those created by other larger institutions or organizations.

<http://www.schreiberumc.org/opportunities/spiritualgifts.htm>

Here is another inventory developed in a congregational setting (United Methodist, in this instance).

Related Research

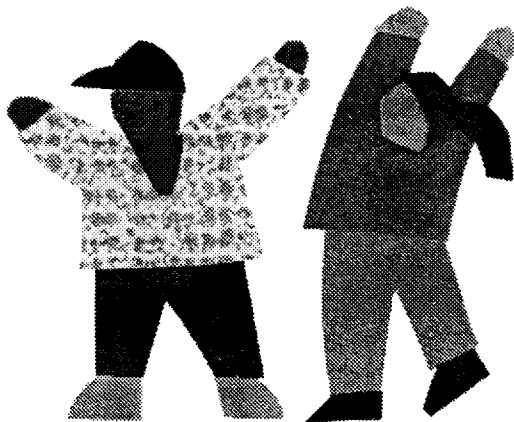
Coles, Robert. *The Call of Service: A Witness to Idealism*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

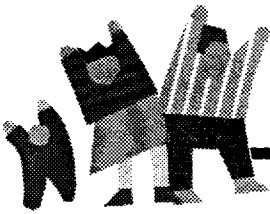
Coles, a child psychiatrist teaching at Harvard University, draws on years of experience with student and other volunteers in exploring kinds of service, satisfactions, and hazards, and discusses idealism in both older and younger volunteers.

Ilisley, Paul J. *Enhancing the Volunteer Experience: New Insights on Strengthening Volunteer Participation, Learning, and Commitment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990 (Out of print).

Ilisley's suggestions for enhancing volunteers' experience are based on research with 180 people in 34 organizations.

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Lecture 4

Reframing How We Equip Laypersons for Teaching and Leadership

by George Brown Jr.

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

An emphasis on spiritual gifts is helping reframe the church's approach to equipping for teaching and leadership. Rather than finding warm bodies to fill "slots" in a church's programs, attention is being redirected to identifying members' spiritual gifts and matching them with ministry needs. "Spiritual gifts are major building blocks for the creation of a strong congregation," writes Brian Kelley Bauknight (Bauknight, 1996; p. 24).

Bauknight argues that discerning the spiritual gifts of others is "the most important skill for an ordained church leader" (Bauknight, 1996; p. 32). He writes:

Much of the energy of spiritual gift development is akin to the work of a symphony or choral conductor. Each member of the body has a talent to offer. However, the director combines the best in each individual. Together they create beautiful music (Bauknight, 1996; p. 23).

There are a number of definitions of spiritual gifts. One comes from a spiritual gifts workbook published by Home Missions of the Christian Reformed Church:

A spiritual gift is a significant ability given to each believer by the Holy Spirit, who thus equips and moves members of the church to serve in special ways for Christ and his kingdom (*Discover Your Gifts: Workbook*, 1983; p. 8).

This definition helpfully identifies the Holy Spirit as the source of spiritual gifts and service as the purpose of spiritual gifts. The definition also puts spiritual gifts in a kingdom context. One weakness of this definition is its singular character—a spiritual gift is a significant ability given to each believer. This may suggest that each member receives just one spiritual gift, while it is more often the reality that members receive a constellation of gifts, some of which may be developed and dominant, while others may be emerging or latent. Still other spiritual gifts may be "retired," in the sense that the congregation's need for that gift is being met by other members or that the person is at a point in the life cycle where another gift has emerged to take the place of the previously dominant gift.

The systems approach to spiritual gifts discussed by Paul Stevens and Phil Collins (Stevens and Collins, 1993) adds to this initial understanding of spiritual gifts by highlighting the communal or relational character of spiritual gifts. For Stevens and Collins, spiritual gifts are not possessions of an individual, but a "phenomenon of systemic life." Their understanding of spiritual gifts stands in contrast to what they call the "granular individualism" of Western culture (Stevens and Collins, 1993; p. 35). They write, "Gifts are ways in which people express their personhood in love in concrete relationships" (Stevens and Collins, 1993; p. 35).

Bauknight also describes spiritual gifts in relation to personhood: "spiritual gifts

manifest themselves through our personhood in unique ways” (Bauknight, 1996; 22). He lists leadership, care, teaching, and prayer as “traditional gifts” (Bauknight, 1996; Chapter 3). In addition to these traditional spiritual gifts, Bauknight lists five “emerging gifts”: 1) giving, 2) volunteer service, 3) group leadership, 4) family ministries, and 5) discipleship (Bauknight, 1996; Chapter 4). These might be better called “non-traditional” or “contemporary gifts” to avoid a possible confusion with spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament which may have been latent and are just now coming to the fore—i.e., “emerging”—in a person’s life.

Bauknight believes that “Some spiritual gifts may come from God’s blessing upon natural talents and skills. Others seem to be direct gifts with no prior indication” (Bauknight, 1996; p. 23).

Lesslie Newbigin notes the importance of recognizing the diversity of gifts within the congregation. In spite of the witness of the Pauline literature of the New Testament, the predominant expectation is for uniformity of discipleship. Newbigin observed,

Only when a congregation can accept and rejoice in the diversity of gifts, and when members can rejoice in gifts which have been given, can the whole body function as Christ’s royal priesthood in the world (Newbigin, 1989; p. 231).

One way of implementing a spiritual gifts

approach to equipping lay people for ministry begins with the typical new-members class of a church. Those who complete the class for new members would move immediately into another class. This sequel to the new member class would focus on spiritual gifts. Here new members would learn about spiritual gifts and take one or more spiritual gifts inventories.

Taking more than one spiritual gifts inventory will help to correct any flaws or weaknesses in a given instrument and provide multiple perspectives from which to draw insight and self-understanding. But as Bauknight and Stevens and Collins all note, it is important that the taking of such inventories be part of a process that includes feedback from others. The affirmations and challenges of others help test the validity of the results of any spiritual gifts inventory.

The pastor, religious educator, or other staff person would meet individually with new members at the conclusion of the spiritual gifts class in order to explore their understanding of their spiritual gifts and ways they might use these gifts in service to Christ and Christ’s people.

A period of exploration, which could include observing various ministries or some initial participation in a ministry, would allow new members to deepen their understanding of their spiritual gifts and to test the “fit” between their spiritual gifts and the particular needs and demands of a given ministry. A time of exploration is a critical part of the discernment process.

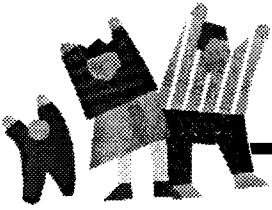
References

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Lecture 5

Filling Institutional Slots or Calling Forth Gifts?

by George Brown Jr.

Church consultant Lyle Schaller once observed that congregations tend to follow one of two approaches in “enlisting volunteers” (Schaller, “Where Have All Our Volunteers Gone?” *The Parish Paper*, 1982):

The more common is to seek out among the members individuals who appear to possess that combination of gifts, skills, time, experience, maturity, inclination, and dedication necessary to fill a specific volunteer position. “Would you be willing to teach the fifth and sixth grade Sunday school class?” “Would you serve as a counselor with the youth fellowship?” “Would you be willing to chair the finance committee next year?” In each case the primary emphasis is on filling an empty slot in that congregation’s organizational or program structure.

The other approach is to emphasize the individual’s needs rather than the needs of the institution or congregation.

The two approaches identified by Schaller correspond to two models of the church described by Patricia Page (1993). The first model is the “slot model” or “structured organization model.” “In such congregations,” writes Page, “mission is defined by what has always been done and by what has always been assumed to be God’s will.” She continues:

The various jobs in the church are defined in terms of this stated mission (Sunday school teachers, church council members, maintenance persons, etc.), and then “warm bodies” are sought to fill these slots. The model of mission defines the kinds of gifts that are needed (Page, 1993; p. 86).

Notice that the emphasis in this model of church is on the needs of the congregation.

Page calls the second model of the church the “living cell model.” “People are brought together on the basis of their gifts, commitments, and present ministries” (Page, 1993; p. 86). In this model of the church:

The mission of the congregation is defined by the gifts of this gathering of God’s people. It is God who gives the gifts and God who intends that they all be used for God’s mission. In using God’s gifts, we come to understand God’s mission (Page, 1993; p. 87).

Observing the individualistic character in much of the contemporary emphasis on spiritual gifts, Paul Stevens and Phil Collins see the spiritual gifts approach as a “personal fulfillment” model because the focus is on the individual’s sense of fulfillment rather than the institution’s needs (Collins and Stevens, 1993; p. 35).

The “base community model” is the third model of church (Page, 1993; p. 87). Small group Bible study is the primary focus of the base community:

Group members are challenged on the basis of their Bible study to look at present conditions. They ask what situations, problems, and crises are impinging on their lives in the congregation, community, neighborhood, town, city, or nation. Then they reflect on what the Bible says to them about what they can do in each situation. Just as their reflection is based on their experience, they then are challenged to act on the basis of their reflection (Page, 1993; p. 87).

This model might be called a “discernment model.” This approach attends to both institutional and individual needs. The “discernment model” reflects the “systems” model advocated by Stevens and Collins (1993). In this approach, both individual and institutional needs are viewed from the perspective of the reign of God.

Schaller writes about how congregations “enlist volunteers.” Douglas Johnson writes about “recruiting volunteers” (Johnson, 1978, 1991). The social sciences have influenced much of this literature. These and other authors draw on the insights of sociology and organizational development in understanding the calling forth of gifts for ministry.

The social sciences view the church as a voluntary organization, and as such congregations share much in common with other voluntary organizations. The secular literature on volunteers—represented in this course by Paul Ilseley’s *Enhancing the Volunteer Experience* (1990)—provides pastors and religious educators with helpful insights into the motivation of volunteers and emphasizes the importance of learning.

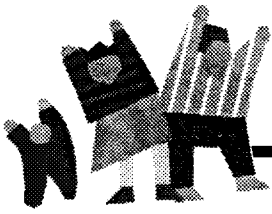
At the same time, there are significant drawbacks to a social sciences understanding. For one thing, while the church may be a social reality, it is also a spiritual reality. Paul Dietterich of the Center for Parish Development contrasts two images of the church that reflect these two understandings:

A voluntary church is an association of self-selecting, like-minded individuals who make a commitment to participate with one another in the accomplishment of particular goals.

A mission church is a theological community, a community of people who understand themselves called by God to discern and participate in God’s mission. This mission, inaugurated by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to reconcile all humanity and to heal the whole of creation (Dietterich, 1997).

Pastors and religious educators should read the literature on voluntary organizations and volunteers with a critical eye toward the unquestioned assumptions and underlying values that come with the social sciences.

In the current North American context, “recruiting” and “enlisting” are words associated with military service. They carry with them certain connotations that may not be most appropriate to a religious or spiritual context. Words have the capacity to shape our reality. Care needs to be exercised in the language we use. “Calling forth gifts” is an attempt to move from “recruiting volunteers” to a vocabulary more appropriate to the church context.



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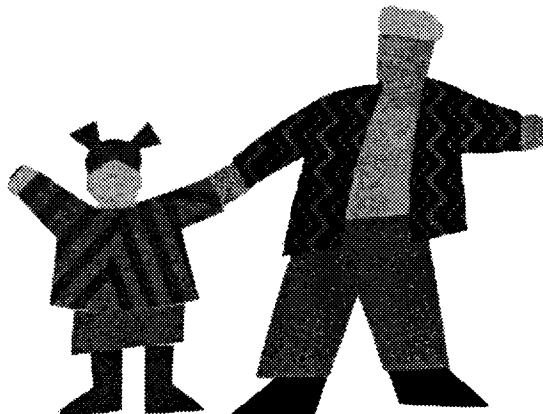
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Schaller, Lyle. "Where Have All Our Volunteers Gone?" *The Parish Paper* (1982).

Stevens, R. Paul and Collins, Phil. *The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership*. Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993.



Where to Begin: Equipping Others for Ministry

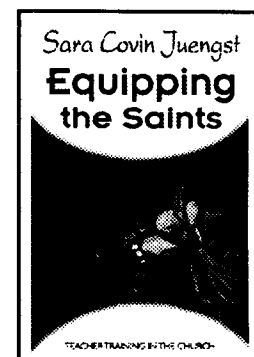
Leadership means pointing the way to a new tomorrow, and sometimes leading people there. It also means equipping folks to go there and into new uncharted territories without you. These resources will help you in your role as leader and equipper of others, so that those persons may become leaders themselves. All of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center/TRAVARCA. To order, call 1-800-968-7221 or visit orders@rca.org.

For Teacher Training

Equipping the Saints: Teacher Training in the Church by Sara Covin Juengst

Juengst provides an innovative, nine-month teacher-training course that covers biblical background, basic Christian beliefs, and effective teaching techniques. Each segment contains thirteen sessions of interactive study, with lesson plans for each class session. (Published by Westminster John Knox Press)

#3650075420 \$16.95^{US}/24.60^{CDN}



Leading Adult Learners: A Handbook for All Christian Groups by Delia Halverson

Halverson provides directions for starting a new adult class, keeping an existing group strong, and healing an ailing one. She offers practical help in determining which topics to study, the best teaching styles for particular age groups, teacher and leader training, publicity, as well as numerous survey questionnaires to help determine class format and study preferences. (Published by Abingdon Press)

#1600002230 \$14.00^{US}/20.30^{CDN}

32 Ways to Become a Great Sunday School Teacher: Self-Directed Studies for Church Teachers by Delia Halverson

Teachers learn how faith develops, the ages and stages of learning, ways to enrich their prayer lives, and various teaching styles. Designed for use by individuals, the book contains study topics that are grouped into four courses of study. Depending on their experience and skill level, teachers use one of the four course outlines to design an individual training sequence by selecting various study topics for each course. (Published by Abingdon Press)

#3650017874 \$15.00^{US}/21.75^{CDN}

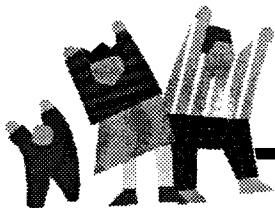
For Teaching Children (Video)

Reach for the Moon: The Samantha Abeel Story

Samantha, her mother, and her writing teacher tell how they confronted the challenges of Samantha's learning disabilities. Borrow from TRAVARCA.

Teaching Children in the Small Membership Church

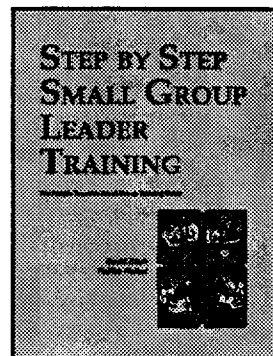
This video features Myrtle E. Felkner providing keys to effective teaching and learning with children. Borrow from TRAVARCA.



For Small Groups

The People Together: The Next Generation of Small Group Ministries Series

This series is helpful for developing and multiplying small group ministries. It is a principle-based approach rather than a model-based blueprint. Use the Leader's, Manager's, and Training Guides to launch a new small group ministry or strengthen an existing program. The guides include specific principles and proven methods of small group ministry design, start-up, management, and evaluation. The series identifies four distinct types of small groups. Special manuals for each of these groups have been developed to assist leaders prepare for the unique aspects they will encounter in the group. (Published by Church Innovations)

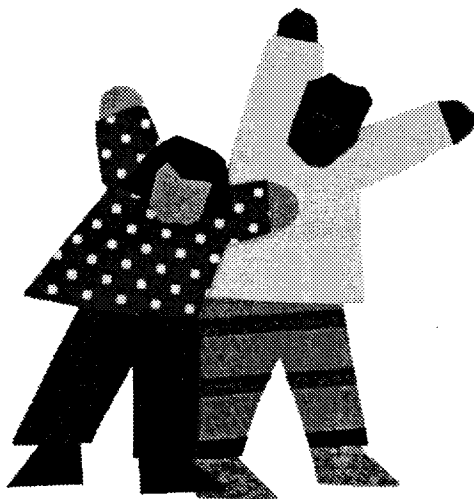


So You've Been Asked to Lead a Small Group

This practical pamphlet helps prepare church members for leadership. Keep a supply on hand to answer volunteers' questions and to use in training sessions. (Published by CRC Publications)

#8600410111 \$1.25^{US}/1.80^{CDN} each

Ten or more of one pamphlet \$0.95^{US}/1.40^{CDN} each



Section 7

LEARNING for LIFE

A dark blue silhouette of a person climbing a ladder, positioned over the 'L' in 'LIFE'.

**Evaluation
Tools**

Evaluation Tools

For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. These are the things you must insist on and teach...Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1 Timothy 4:10-11,16

Growth in faith—to see Christ more clearly, love Christ more dearly, to follow Christ more nearly—isn't that what we all want in our Christian walk? We participate in Christian education because we believe that there is more God has to teach us through Scripture and experience. Congregations emphasize Christian education so that people are better equipped to live as Christ's disciples and bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Learning stops only when we stop asking. Asking people to participate in their own learning and growth; asking hard questions of ourselves, of others, and of God; asking God to reveal his will to us for our lives. A part of asking God for knowledge is evaluating our Christian education program—its goals and outcomes, and the resources though which those goals are met. Are we doing what God is calling us to do in this place and at this time in our life as a congregation?

This comprehensive evaluation resource will help you determine that. It was produced by Jane Schuyler, resource specialist for the RCA Distribution Center, and Jill Schliesman, Christian education consultant for the Regional Synod of Mid-America.

“A Vision for Education”

Content: Have you named what your congregation is called to be and to do in Christian education? Do you have goals? A mission statement? This exercise guides you through key questions in evaluating the mission and vision of your educational ministry.

How to Use: This work is best done with an education committee or leadership group. Don't exclude teachers or other members of the congregation; be sure to look for ways to gather information broadly.

Tip: Whether or not you use this exercise, think “outside the box.” A visioning process is not simply producing a vision statement; the very process itself shows a commitment to continuous learning and transformation. Ask how you can involve a wide range of people.

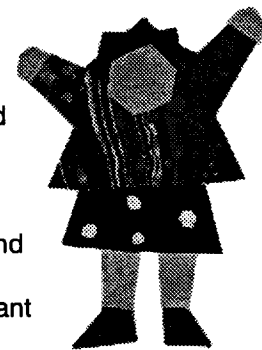
“Let's Evaluate the Curriculum”

Content: No curriculum will answer all your needs or solve all your problems. But selecting the right curriculum for your education program will pay huge dividends for years to come. This is a comprehensive tool for evaluating core curriculum that you

can use over and over again.

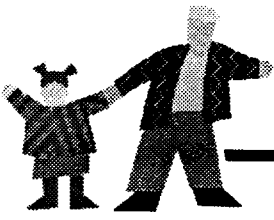
How to Use: The instructions that accompany the evaluation tool are clear and straightforward. By following them, you will have accomplished two goals: providing a helpful evaluation and showing one more piece of evidence that learning is important in your congregation.

Tip: Gather a diverse committee from your congregation: teachers and students; education committee and consistory members; young and old and middle-aged people. Learning congregations use these opportunities to listen to a wide variety of voices.



“Which Resource for Us?”

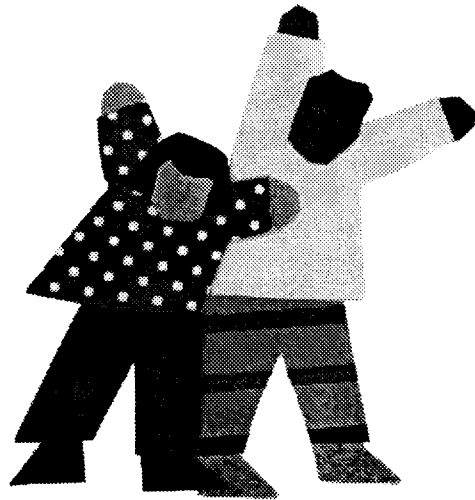
Content: Have you looked through the 212-page *RCA Resources for Ministry* catalog lately? Wandered through your local bookstore and counted the titles? It would take months. How you sort through all those resources to find what's right for you is the subject of this section.



How to Use: This section provides key questions and guidelines plus a simple evaluation form that you can use for any resource. By providing the evaluation guidelines as background, and then having each reviewer fill out the short form, you'll have an objective means by which to review any resource or compare the quality of competing resources.

Tip: Always keep the mission statement for your education program in front of you. Narrowing the field of resources will be a whole lot easier if you keep reminding yourself of the goals you wish to accomplish.

Jesus did not just instruct isolated, individual learners. He created a learning community that could think, grow, and minister together. By periodically and intentionally evaluating your education program and goals, you stand with the disciples as continual learners, always asking where God might be leading you next.



A Vision for Education

Every so often all Christian education programs need to be thoroughly reviewed and evaluated. Perhaps it's time for you to ask, What's happening to the people of God in our congregation?

At the beginning of an evaluation process, be clear about your congregation's Christian education vision. If it has not been previously written, consider following the process described below to establish understandable purposes and goals for your congregation's educational ministry. A clear mission and vision statement helps your congregation clarify its programs, utilize its leaders/teachers effectively, and provide direction for spiritual maturity.

What's Our Vision?

Naming your congregation's vision for education and the goals you hope to achieve is an important step. Make this the focus of an entire education committee meeting or retreat. Begin the session by distributing copies of the RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision (see Section 6) and your congregation's vision statement as the basis for evaluating your educational vision, or use this simple process. Read through the mission statement together. Take some time to listen for the Holy Spirit's leading by having the group consider the questions on the next page. Responses to these questions can be written on the question sheet. Distribute the sheet to each person, or on white index cards if you prefer to ask each question individually.

Allow some time for each person to share with the whole group what she or he has written. Finally, on a sheet (or many sheets) of newsprint, invite people to write five statements that they feel must be included in an educational vision statement. Come to a group consensus on no more than five. You may ask volunteers with strong writing skills to take the ideas of the group, including the responses to the questions above, and draft a vision statement, to be circulated among others for

comments. Eventually, you may want the consistory to adopt the statement. Post your vision statement for all to see, and use it to evaluate all that you do in your educational programs. By having a vision statement, a congregation can avoid being pressured into using a curriculum that is attractive or inexpensive but doesn't match the stated educational values of the congregation.

How Did We Do?

Periodically, your education committee may want to conduct personal interviews and use a survey questionnaire to determine if the goals are being met. Push pause on the remote and check out what is happening in the various educational ministries. Are they accomplishing your congregation's stated goals and objectives? What's working well? What needs to be changed?

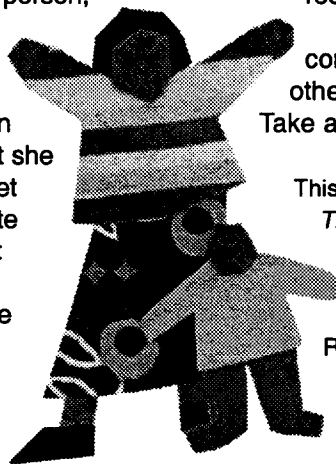
Consider gathering a variety of congregational voices into small groups and ask them the "Key Questions." Invite them to talk among themselves. A group recorder summarizes all the responses for evaluation purposes.

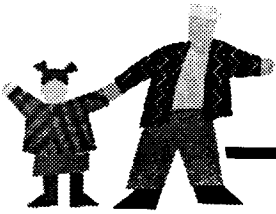
On occasion, an outside observer provides valuable insight. Your congregation may want to invite a local certified Christian educator to assist in the evaluation process. Contact your regional synod or the RCA Office for Christian Education and Faith Development for recommended individuals.

Once the evaluation process is complete, share the outcome with others and begin the implementation. Take action and move forward.

This process was adapted from:
The Roots of Who We Are, by Rodger Nishioka. Copyright Bridge Resources, 1997, Louisville, Kentucky. Available through the RCA Distribution Center.
Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations for Healthy Growth by Doug Fields.

Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, Grand Rapids, MI. Available through the RCA Distribution Center.





Key Questions to Ask in Preparing an Educational Vision Statement

1. As a result of our educational program, what do we hope will happen?
2. For you, what's one essential purpose of education in our congregation?
3. What dreams do you have for our congregation?
4. When you imagine our educational ministry in the next five years, what does it look like?
5. What is God calling our congregation to be and do?
6. How can the educational ministry enhance that calling?
7. Consider and/or list the dynamics of our congregation's cultural context.



Let's Evaluate the Curriculum!

Many churches believe that somewhere out there is the perfect curriculum that is going to answer all of their educational needs. Teachers will be able to open their books on a Saturday night and easily prepare for wonderful learning experiences. Students will be eager to learn and well behaved. Unfortunately, no curriculum exists that can accomplish this. Curriculum materials are tools used to help us share our faith stories with others.

In reality, our learning experiences depend on a wide variety of factors that add up.

These include:

- The leader's willingness to share his/her faith stories.
- The physical aspects of the room.
- The learning styles of the participants.
- The teaching styles and skills of the leader.
- The time frame given for teaching.
- The relationship between the leader and the participants.

The selection of a curriculum that fits with your church's vision is an important task. The curriculum you choose will influence how the people of your church experience God and live out their faith. The curriculum you choose will mold your Christian education program. The curriculum evaluation guide included in this notebook is intended to help you evaluate and select curriculum that fits with your church's Christian education vision and program.

While this might feel like a big commitment, remember: the results will pay off for years to come. The materials you choose are not just resources to be used; they are also your invitation for people to grow with God and with each other.

How to Evaluate Curriculum Resources for Your Congregation

Office for Education and Faith Development
Reformed Church in America

1. Pray

Take time to pray for discernment and for God's help in deciding who should serve on a curriculum evaluation team.

2. Select a Team

Call together eight or ten people who care about Christian education. Include teachers, the director/coordinator of Christian education, minister(s), learners, parents, and others who represent the whole congregation. Seek people representing varied perspectives and experiences.

3. Pray and Study Scripture for God's Guidance

As a team, take time for prayer and discernment throughout the entire planning process. Ask for God's help in making good decisions for your congregation. After praying together, read these selections from Scripture:

Habakkuk 2:1-3

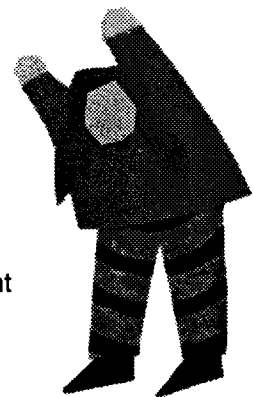
What does this passage have to say about vision?

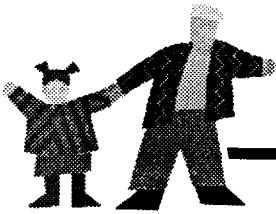
Hebrews 12:1-2

The word "curriculum" is Latin for "race course." Church curriculum is a course of events, relationships, discoveries, and transformations that congregations experience along faith's journey.

4. Identify Your Values and Priorities—Clarifying Educational Vision

Naming your congregation's vision for education and the goals you hope to achieve is the first step in selecting any





resource. If your church has not already written a vision statement for your church as well as your Christian education program, make this a focus of an entire meeting before you go on. See the previous section entitled “How Are We Doing?” for instructions. Post the vision statement for all to see, and use it to evaluate all that you do in your education program. By having a vision statement, a congregation can avoid being pressured to use a curriculum that is attractive or inexpensive but doesn’t match the stated educational goals of the congregation.

5. Order Curriculum Samples

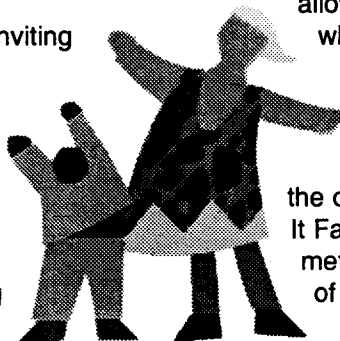
Contact the RCA Distribution Center at 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org. Select three to five curriculum materials for evaluation. At least one should be a curriculum recommended by the denomination and used by churches similar to yours. If you don’t know what the possibilities are, ask clarifying questions when you call.

6. Evaluate Curriculum

The use of the check sheet that follows this section helps determine whether the theological, educational, and practical approach of a curriculum meets the values and priorities of your congregation. Using the check sheet, answer the three questions: Is it faithful? Is it friendly? Is it fitting?

Is It Faithful? Is it true to the best you know of the Bible, theology, educational method, and human development? Faithful to our Reformed tradition of excellence in education? Will it help people grow in faith?

Is It Friendly? Is it inviting to both learners and teachers? Familiar enough that you could easily imagine teaching with it? Fresh enough to be fun to use? In emphasizing



the teacher friendliness of the materials, has the subject matter been compromised or have different learning styles been ignored?

Is It Fitting? Does it adapt easily to your needs—for space, resources, time? Does it suit the needs and abilities of your people?

Each reviewer will need at least one evaluation check sheet for each curriculum being reviewed. Read at least one complete unit of each grade level to evaluate the sessions for the variety of approaches, supplies, and media used in presenting lessons and activities. Be sure to look carefully at teaching helps, background information, objectives, and overviews of both the course and units. Use the 5-1 rating scale for each item. Write notes on anything you may be wondering about in the “Comments” column.

Become familiar with the check sheet before beginning to evaluate. Discussing what the various statements mean will help the reviewers to make more consistent ratings; for example, as reviewers, note not only the explicit (intended learning; what is taught) contents of the curriculum, but also the implicit (unintended learning; sometimes what is caught) and null (what’s left out or not taught).

Consider having a “subject specialist” evaluate all pieces using one or more sections of the check sheet. For example, a pastor may evaluate the curriculum with regard to theological and biblical considerations; an experienced educator may review the sections on educational and developmental concerns; and a group of teachers can review the content. If time allows, field-test the resources with persons who will actually use them.

To score: total each section and divide by the number of statements; this gives an average score for each section. Combine main averages to find the overall curriculum rating. The section, “Is It Faithful?” is double-weighted in this method of scoring, reflecting the importance of a curriculum that honors the church’s

commitment to Scripture and sound educational methods. For your convenience, a scoring tally sheet is included.

Share and discuss the ratings. One reminder: the curriculum with the highest overall score may not automatically be the best choice. A curriculum that is excellent in several areas most important to you, but weak in less important areas, still may be the best choice despite a lower overall score.

What about cost? Curriculum is costly and you need to decide what you can afford. But always ask, "Can we afford, in any way you look at cost, to spend money on a curriculum that isn't faithful, friendly, and fitting?"

For additional assistance with your curriculum evaluation process, contact the Resource Helpline 1-800-968-7221 or resourcehelp@rca.org, or your regional synod education consultant.

7. Order Your Selected Curriculum

Make sure all the materials arrive prior to teacher training.

8. Make Plans for Leader/Teacher Training

Create a plan to introduce the curriculum to teachers. Help the teachers/leaders become familiar with the use of the curriculum. What are all the pieces of the resources? How are they to be used together? What, if any, additional resources or equipment are needed to use it? If you need help, contact your regional synod education consultant.

9. Continue Evaluating and Communicating

After the curriculum has been implemented for several months, evaluate it again. At a teacher meeting, discuss how it is going. Is more training needed? Use the evaluation forms that many curricula include in their materials. Communicate your feedback, positive and negative, to the publishers so that they can improve the materials. All curriculum should be evaluated every three to five years.

This method for evaluating curriculum is adapted from:

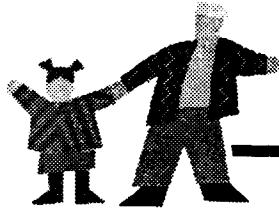
John C. Purdy, "Before You Choose... Questions to Ask About Curriculum," *Alert* magazine, May 1988.

Turning Points: The Dangerous, Liberating, Holy, Transforming, Everyday Stories of People Engaging the Bible, Reformed Church Press, 1997. Available through the RCA Distribution Center.

Pat Channer, Jan Noller, Kathleen Waugh, *Help! We Need to Organize the Education Program: A Handbook for Education Committees and Congregations*, Witherspoon Press, 1998. Available through the RCA Distribution Center.



CURRICULUM EVALUATION CHECK SHEET



Curriculum _____ Grade Level _____ Copyright _____
 Per Student Cost _____ Per Teacher Cost _____ Additional Resource Cost _____
 Evaluator _____ Today's Date _____

To score: Total each section and divide the total by the number of statements. This gives an average score for each section. Combine section averages for each of the main questions; combine main averages to find the overall curriculum rating.

RATING SCALE

Excellent 5 4 3 2 1 Poor

COMMENTS

IS IT FAITHFUL?

THEOLOGICALLY

1. Grounded in Reformed faith & theology 5 4 3 2 1
2. Supports the congregation's & the RCA's understanding of faith & mission 5 4 3 2 1
3. Teaches Reformed view of sacraments
 e.g., Baptism: "Baptism is the sign and seal of God's promises to this covenant people. In baptism God promises, by grace alone, to forgive our sins; to adopt us into the body of Christ, the Church; to send the Holy Spirit daily to renew and cleanse us; and to resurrect us to eternal life" (RCA Liturgy, 1994);
 Lord's Supper: "is a feast of remembrance, of communion, and of hope" (RCA Liturgy 1987). 5 4 3 2 1

4. Develops trust and belief in God 5 4 3 2 1
5. Encourages a personal faith in Jesus Christ and nurtures a continuing commitment to Christ in all areas of life. 5 4 3 2 1

THEOLOGICAL SCORE _____

BIBLICALLY

6. Sessions are biblically based 5 4 3 2 1
7. Bible is used by students & teachers; students learn how to use Bible 5 4 3 2 1



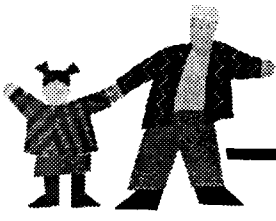


COMMENTS

RATING SCALE

5 Excellent 4 3 2 1 Poor

8. Suggests ways to apply Bible & faith to daily life	5	4	3	2	1	Poor
9. Relates Bible & faith to social issues	5	4	3	2	1	
10. Presents biblical characters as real people	5	4	3	2	1	
11. Language for God is biblical & varied	5	4	3	2	1	
12. Bible stories are accurate; stories are consistent with Scripture	5	4	3	2	1	
13. Art work is consistent with Scripture	5	4	3	2	1	
14. Appropriate stories/parts of Scripture are covered (examine what will be taught and in what order)	5	4	3	2	1	
15. Includes Bible study/enrichment for teacher	5	4	3	2	1	
16. Note Bible version	5	4	3	2	1	
BIBLICAL SCORE_____						
EDUCATIONALLY						
17. Comprehensive objectives for the whole curriculum. Clear objectives for each session	5	4	3	2	1	
18. One key concept in each lesson that is clearly stated	5	4	3	2	1	
19. All learning components relate to key concept (story, music, activities, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1	
20. Encourages theological/biblical reflection on life experiences	5	4	3	2	1	
21. Promotes moral and ethical decision-making	5	4	3	2	1	
22. Learning experiences are active	5	4	3	2	1	
23. Encourages independent thinking and questioning	5	4	3	2	1	
24. Service opportunities integrated into sessions	5	4	3	2	1	



	RATING SCALE					COMMENTS
	5	4	3	2	1	
	Excellent				Poor	
25. Activities & crafts are varied, engaging, appropriate, & creative		4	3	2	1	
26. Teaching activities teach to all individuals with a consistent variety of learning styles	5	4	3	2	1	
27. Activities are not competitive	5	4	3	2	1	
28. Reflects current educational theory	5	4	3	2	1	
EDUCATIONAL SCORE_____						
DEVELOPMENTALLY						
29. Objectives and materials are age/grade developmentally appropriate for the age and grade of learners	5	4	3	2	1	
30. Scripture/story use appropriate to age level	5	4	3	2	1	
31. Reading level appropriate to age level	5	4	3	2	1	
DEVELOPMENTAL SCORE_____						
FAITHFUL AVERAGE_____						
IS IT FRIENDLY?						
TO STUDENTS/LEARNERS						
32. Attractive artwork, layout, use of color invites student interest and attention	5	4	3	2	1	
33. Illustrations & photos reflect current life	5	4	3	2	1	
STUDENTS SCORE_____						
TO TEACHERS/LEADERS						
34. Teachers' manuals easy to use, well organized with concise outlines of content	5	4	3	2	1	
35. Helpful background material	5	4	3	2	1	
36. Additional suggestions for films, videos, books, activities, etc.	5	4	3	2	1	



COMMENTS

RATING SCALE
 5 Excellent 4 3 2 1 Poor

- 37. Reasonable expectations, e.g., preparation time, skills & knowledge
- 38. Ideas for creating welcoming environment
- 39. Includes worship & prayer suggestions
- 40. Develops teachers' skills
- 41. Provides opportunities for teacher training and support (training designs, video, Internet, on-site)
- 42. Teachers' materials (kit, etc.). Includes a variety of resources to enhance lessons

TEACHERS SCORE _____

TO PARENTS

- 43. Suggestions for parent communications
- 44. Encourages faith conversations at home

PARENTS SCORE _____

IN GENERAL

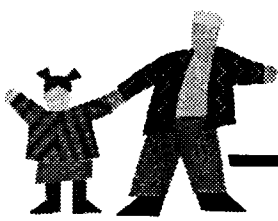
- 45. High quality of materials, including take-homes
- 46. Recommended by those we know & trust

GENERAL SCORE _____

FRIENDLY AVERAGE _____

IS IT FITTING?

- 47. Relates to festivals and seasons of the Christian church year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost
- 48. Models healthy family relationships in a variety of family structures, e.g., single parent, grandparent, etc.



	RATING SCALE					COMMENTS
	Excellent	5	4	3	2	
49. Diverse life situations used in examples, e.g., rural, urban, other cultures						
50. Activities are ethnically and racially sensitive		5	4	3	2	1
51. Both text and illustrations reflect a variety of racial/ethnic groups, males & females, socioeconomic groups, cultures, disabilities, & ages		5	4	3	2	1
52. Strengthens understanding of other Christians		5	4	3	2	1
53. Music suggestions enrich worship		5	4	3	2	1
54. Right amount of material for sessions		5	4	3	2	1
55. Flexible enough for situation		5	4	3	2	1
56. Realistic with space and resources		5	4	3	2	1
57. Assists in enhancing congregation's vision for education		5	4	3	2	1
VALUE						
58. Value relative to cost		5	4	3	2	1
59. Supplemental materials affordable		5	4	3	2	1
60. Affordable for us		5	4	3	2	1
61. Some resources can be reused		5	4	3	2	1

FITTING SCORE _____



Scoring Tally Sheet

Enter the average score for each section in the spaces below:

Faithful

Theological Score (Questions 1-5) _____

Biblical Score (Questions 6-16) _____

Educational Score (Questions 17-28) _____

Developmental Score (Questions 29-31) _____

Total _____

(Add theological, biblical, educational, and developmental scores/divide by 31 for average)

Faithful Average _____

Faithful Average (times 2) _____

Friendly

Students Score (Questions 32-33) _____

Teachers Score (Questions 34-42) _____

Parents Score (Questions 43-44) _____

General Score (Questions 45-46) _____

Total _____

(Add student, teacher, parent, and general score/divide by 14 for average)

Friendly Average _____

Fitting Total (Questions 47-61)

(Divide fitting total by 14 for average)

Fitting Average _____

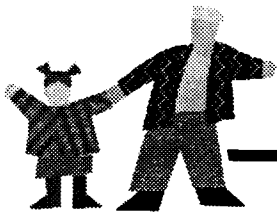
Overall Curriculum Rating _____

(Add averages of Faithful [times 2], Friendly, and Fitting. Divide by 4 for overall rating)

Are there additional questions/clarifications about this curriculum that you need addressed?

Do you recommend this curriculum? Yes _____ No _____

Name: _____



Which Resource for Us?

There are thousands of resources that can enrich your congregation's Christian education ministry. The choices can be overwhelming. Where do you start? Here are several suggestions:



1. Look at your *RCA Resources for Ministry* catalog. Every church should have this catalog. Its resources have been carefully reviewed and selected

for inclusion on the basis of quality and Reformed faith values. Also, be sure to look at TRAVARCA, the video and DVD loan program available to your congregation. If you do not have these catalogs, contact 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org to order. Contact the Resource Helpline for additional assistance at 1-800-968-7221 or resourcehelp@rca.org.

2. Contact your denominational and/or regional synod Christian Education or Youth Consultant. Check the catalog or the *RCA Plan Calendar* for the appropriate telephone number and email address. Or simply call the RCA Office for Christian Education, 1-800-968-3943; someone there will help you find the best person to answer your question.

3. Visit the RCA website: www.rca.org.

The following guidelines are designed to stimulate reflection and help you select the best resource for your educational setting. When reviewing a resource, use an evaluation form with a rating scale like the one on page 16. This form enables reviewers to compare one resource with another and one person's view with that of another.

Biblical and Theological Dimensions

The most important criteria for a resource is scriptural integrity. In evaluating any resource, ask if the Bible is affirmed as the foundational authority for individual and communal faith and conduct; if the resource is consistent with Reformed theology and doctrine; if biblical persons are presented realistically, as the Bible actually presents them. Also take note of the beliefs expressed in the resource. Are they consistent with the Reformed understanding of faith expressed in your church; for example, does it support our understanding of baptism or the Lord's Supper? Or is it biased to another point of view?

Goals and Objectives

Any resource should be consistent with your congregation's mission, ministry, and purpose. Also make sure the resource you're considering fits with the structure of your congregation's education program.

Content

With so many resources available, you can demand quality in content and format. That means eye appeal, certainly; a resource that doesn't look very good isn't going to be as interesting to use. But beyond how a resource looks, pay attention also to its language—is it understandable and engaging? And to its fairness and balance, especially if you're looking for resources on what might be a controversial subject. Finally, are the instructions for use clear (or, if it's a video, is there a good study guide)? If you're a leader, that's important!

Educational Approach and Format

You don't need to be a trained teacher to ask good questions about appropriate and helpful educational approach, technique, and format. In fact, if any resource isn't user-friendly for you, it probably isn't going to work well. Also, look for qualities like a variety of teaching and learning styles. Determine whether the resource is

interesting, and if it fits the class that will be using it; a resource directed toward high schoolers may be very good, but probably won't work nearly as well with other age groups. Ask yourself if it is something that will encourage people to learn more, not discourage them.

Inclusivity

Explore the content and the artwork of the resource for sensitivity to people and cultures. What does it say about various people through its treatment of genders, age groups, abilities, family compositions, occupations, ethnicities and nationalities, stereotypes, and diversity? (A look at the section on multicultural education in this notebook can help you with some of the important issues here.) Is information about other groups presented accurately and in a nonjudgmental manner?

Other Issues

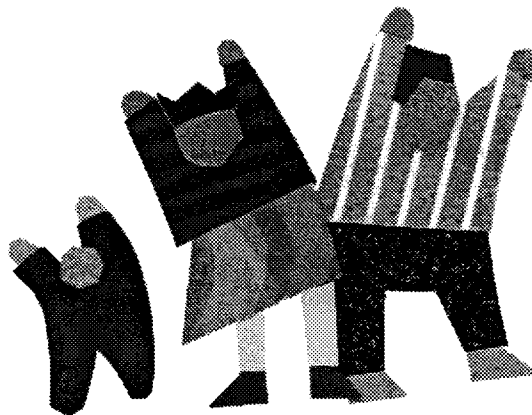
You have to have the right to use a resource. Especially with video, make sure it's okay to use for public performance. You can't just make a copy of a resource and use it; that violates copyright laws. Also look for versatility—can you use this resource in Sunday school, and also on a retreat?

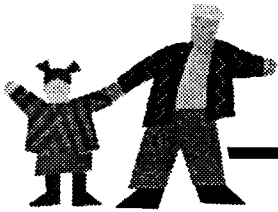
Stewardship

Don't forget these questions: How much does the resource cost? Will we be able to afford to use it? Or the opposite: Can we afford to spend money on a resource that is not consistent with our goals and objectives, that isn't biblical, or isn't sound in content and educational theory?

There's a simple, straightforward Resource Evaluation Form on the following page, with evaluation categories based on the above information. It's easy to use, and can provide you with a wealth of helpful information as you choose the best resources for your congregation. As always, if you have questions or need further information, you can call the RCA Resource Helpline, 1-800-968-7221.

This process is based on the evaluation process used in the resource *Turning Points: The Dangerous, Liberating, Holy, Transforming, Everyday Stories of People Engaging the Bible*, by Jane Schuyler, Reformed Church in America, Reformed Church Press, 1997.





Resource Evaluation Form

Resource Title _____

Publisher/Producer _____

Copyright Date _____ Cost _____

Intended Audience _____

Subject _____

Reviewer _____ Today's Date _____

Rating

Circle the number that most accurately rates the resource.

4 = Excellent; 3 = Good; 2 = Fair; 1 = Poor

4	3	2	1	Biblical and theological dimensions
4	3	2	1	Goals and objectives
4	3	2	1	Content
4	3	2	1	Educational approach and format
4	3	2	1	Use of resource
4	3	2	1	Inclusivity
4	3	2	1	Performance rights/copyright
4	3	2	1	Visual and technical qualities
4	3	2	1	Stewardship

Additional comments (use back of sheet if necessary)

Recommendation

Should we purchase this resource? _____ Yes _____ No

Where to Begin: Evaluation Resources You Can Use

To measure of the successes and needs of your education program or curriculum is but the first step; acting on what you've learned is what makes an evaluation process worthwhile. These resources will help you build on the learnings you've acquired in your evaluation of the education programs of your church, as well as providing some additional means for evaluating specific programs. All of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center. To order contact 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org.

Basics of Christian Education

by Karen B. Tye

Tye believes that at least six basic areas should be given attention when leaders are planning for and building an educational program in the church. Devoting a chapter to each, they include concept, purpose, context, content, participants, and process and method. Two issues are also addressed in succeeding chapters: assessment and evaluation and hindrances. Each chapter concludes with questions and exercises for reflection. (Published by Chalice Press)

#3650202296 \$16.99^{US}/24.65^{CDN}

Basics of Teaching for Christians: Preparation, Instruction, Evaluation

by Robert W. Pazmino

This book helps educators regain focus in their teaching by offering a concise guide to the essential elements of their craft: preparation, instruction, and evaluation. According to Pazmino, two elements—diligence and playfulness—must be present in every phase of the teaching process. (Published by Baker Book House)

#3650021731 \$12.99^{US}/18.85^{CDN}

Computers, Kids, and Christian Education: How to Use Computers in Your Christian Education Program (Second Edition)

by Neil MacQueen

Discover how and why to use computers in your Christian education programs. This manual, written for the novice in technology, discusses the value of using computers for instruction in churches, how computers complement other teaching methods, hardware selection, software selection, and connecting with the Internet. (Published by Augsburg Fortress)

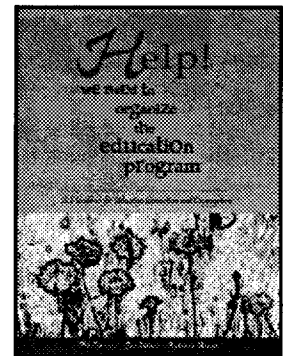
#1600036386 \$14.99^{US}/21.75^{CDN}

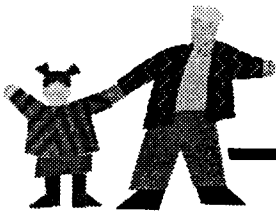
Help! We Need to Organize the Education Program: A Handbook for Education Committees and Congregations

by Pat Channer, Jan Noller, and Kathleen Waugh

Included are "five major tasks" of organizing and running a successful Christian education program, as well as helpful sections on environment and equipment and supplies. Appendices include sample budgets, a guide for selecting curriculum, and a list of materials essential for preschool interest centers. (Published by Bridge Resources, PCUSA)

#3650097600 \$7.95^{US}/11.65^{CDN}





The Roots of Who We Are
by Rodger Nishioka

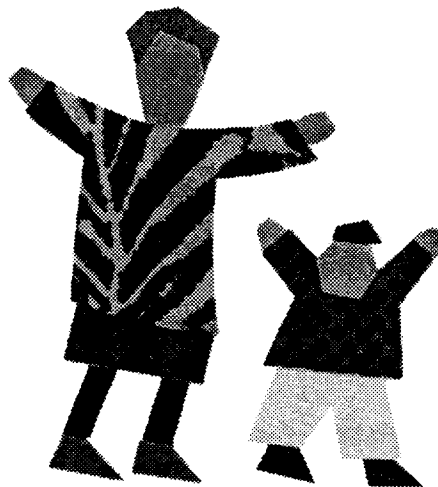
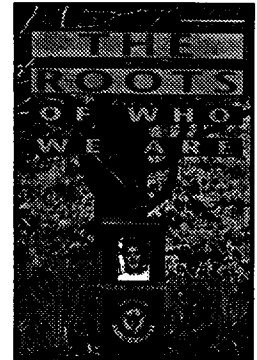
This book explores what youth ministry means in a Presbyterian and Reformed context. It equips youth leaders with the five purposes essential to any youth ministry and discusses the role of evangelism and the Bible as it relates to the Reformed Church.

#2740095530 \$10.95^{US}/15.90^{CDN}

Studying Congregations: A New Handbook
edited by Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll,
Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney

Using a comprehensive systems approach to congregations, this volume enables readers to analyze the ministries, stories, and processes that are at work in congregations. (Published by Abingdon Press)

#1600006511 \$20.00^{US}/29.00^{CDN}



Section 8

LEARNING for LIFE



**Best Practices
and Outcomes**

Best Practices and Outcomes

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Acts 2:44-45

It has been the way of the church since its very first days—living as a community, sharing its resources, and holding up each other on journeys of faith. And in that spirit, the writer of Acts records, day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. That spirit has not changed over nearly two thousand years. The church still calls itself a community of faith; we still claim this commitment—to hold each other up in love and support—in our common journey of faith in Jesus Christ.

D.T. Niles, a theologian and missionary, has often described the Christian faith simply as “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.” That’s what this Best Practices section is all about—educators from across the church telling other educators what teaching tools, in their context, have been effective. Not every idea will be right for you; we find ourselves in markedly different contexts of ministry, and we use different methods and resources because of it.

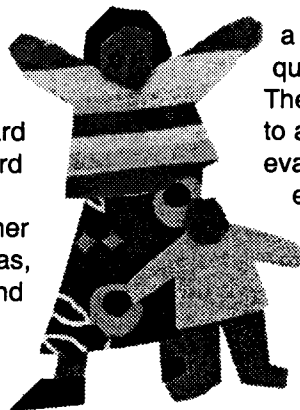
There is more than one size here, more than one color, more than one style. And there are also empty spaces for you to submit your own Best Practice for a later notebook supplement. It is one way we as educators can support each other in our common ministry. To God be the glory!

Best Practices

Content: Good ideas really do come in all shapes and sizes. That’s the principle behind these individual best practices: to let you learn directly from those persons doing educational ministry.

How to Use: Each best practice has a contact name with phone, fax, or email information. If the idea could be effective in your place of ministry, contact the originator of the idea directly for more information.

Tip: Review these best practices with one eye toward usability and the other toward prayer. Whether in this notebook or in the many other places you acquire new ideas, make it a practice to stop and pray for the ministry or the writer before moving on to any other idea or activity.



Writer: These best practices come from across the Reformed Church in America. They were compiled by the RCA’s Office for Christian Education.

Alert! At the end of Best Practices is a form for you to submit with your best practice. New Best Practices will be made available on an ongoing basis.

Desired Learning Outcomes

Content: An educator’s forum was held a few years ago to wrestle with the question, “What should Christians know?” Their report, presented by groups according to age, forms a helpful foundation for evaluating and focusing your Christian education program.

How to Use: The report stresses that these are desired learning outcomes: the hopes, expectations, and ideals of educators. Use them as such, not as a factual test for your program or participants, but as a discussion starter



for a Christian education committee, teachers, or a consistory meeting.

Tip: Let this report help you, not discourage you. If our Christian faith is a journey unto life's end, so a Christian education program is an ongoing process.

Allow yourself grace.

Presenter: This report came out of a gathering sponsored by the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes in 1997.



“Staying Connected”

Content: Curriculum is important; careful planning is essential; evaluation is necessary. Forgotten anything? How about the

heart: the well-being of the people who participate in your Christian education program, and your own spiritual care.

How to Use: These are ninety-five very specific ways to affirm and support teachers and other Christian education participants. Try two to start, then two more, then two more...

Tip: Don't try all ninety-five by next Tuesday. You'll drive yourself—and your teachers—crazy.

Presenter: These tips were compiled by Deb Swanson, a Christian educator at Resurrection Reformed Church in Flint, Michigan, uniquely for this notebook, using the insights of educators across the RCA.

A Best Practice: A Christian Education Celebration Based on the Shema

Many churches plan a celebration to mark the start-up of Christian education ministries in the fall. Our plan incorporated the use of the Shema—the summary of the faith used in Old Testament times, and found in Deuteronomy 6:4-7—in an intergenerational experience of worship and celebration.

Goals

To learn the Shema and its significance then and now; to help families intentionally think about God; to encourage parents in their role of teaching the faith to their children.

How It Works

During the summer, our Christian education council claimed the Shema as our theme for the coming ministry year. Through newspaper articles and bulletin announcements, we promoted this theme, especially calling parents to consider how they could be more intentional in helping to shape the faith of their child/children, culminating in a fall kick-off celebration and worship. Here's a brief summary of what we did:

We built the worship service around the use of the Shema, including a newly-written call to worship; a new song based on the Shema (we used, "Love the Lord Your God," by Jean and Jim Strathdee); use of the *mezuzah*, the small box the Israelites fixed to their doorposts; and a covenanting liturgy for teachers and leaders. The sermon that morning was also based on the Shema passage in Deuteronomy.

We shared a brunch together following worship. This was both a teaching and fun time, with crafts (like a salvation bracelet, where each colored bead represented a different aspect of faith), a skit, a display of resources from the local Christian bookstore, and an environmentally-friendly balloon launch (yes, it's possible!).

What It Accomplishes

This day was a highlight in the life of our congregation and its people. What people expressed was not only that we had worshiped, but we had also covenanted with each other in a way that all ages could appreciate and understand. Throughout the year, we were able to build on these practices. It modeled an important scriptural truth in both word and deed: that to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind does not just happen. It is an intentional choice one makes every day!

Resources

The most important resource we needed was commitment. This took hours and hours of planning and preparation by members of our education council. It was worth every minute.

Who to Contact:

Barbara Boss
Church of the Living Christ
P.O. Box 125
Fremont, MI 49412
Phone: 1-231-924-4670
Email: bboss@ncats.net



A Best Practice: A Colloquy on Christian Education

Colloquy, a fancy word for “conversation,” it is more than just that. It was the title of the monthly Christian education magazine that John Westerhoff edited in the seventies. *Colloquy*, the magazine, was a forum for discussion of critical issues in Christian education. In the mid-1980s, Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, initiated year-end colloquies on Christian education. These were rich conversations focused on Christian education.

Goal

To stimulate discussion about the congregation’s various education ministries.

How It Works

Early in April, the minister of Christian education sent a letter to several leaders and teachers in Central’s Christian education program, inviting them to come and share their experience of ministry during the past program year. A circle of chairs was arranged in a large classroom. In addition to those teachers and leaders who had been invited to speak about their ministry experience, elders and Christian education council members took their place in the circle. Each invited participant was asked to speak about their ministry for about five minutes. Some presentations simply described a program or event; others emphasized a particular issue or highlighted a frustration or joy. Following a break, an outside consultant—usually a Christian educator from another congregation—took the floor, commenting on what had been said. There were affirmations, questions, and challenges. After the consultant finished sharing observations, all those present were given the opportunity to join in the conversation. The colloquy ended after about two hours.

What It Accomplishes

The colloquies assessed programs, celebrated successes, affirmed and supported teachers and leaders, identified issues and problems that needed to be addressed, and generally raised awareness of the church’s teaching ministry. Participants left with a sense of excitement and enthusiasm. Council leaders left with an emerging sense of the next year’s agenda.

Resources

A good colloquy needs participants who can share the story of their ministry, a comfortable setting for conversation, refreshments, a convener or moderator, and an outside consultant. The outside consultant is essential to the success of a Christian education colloquy; he or she will listen carefully, ask thoughtful questions, offer fresh insights, and evoke commitments.

What It Costs

Costs for a Christian education colloquy are modest: an honorarium for the outside consultant, refreshments, stationery, and postage. Colleagues willing to serve as a consultant for each other’s congregation might decline an honorarium, and church members with the gift of hospitality could provide the refreshments as a service to the church. A mailing and any other publicity can be covered by the office supplies budget of the church.

Who to Contact:

George Brown Jr.
G.W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of
Christian Education & Associate Dean
Western Theological Seminary
101 East Thirteenth Street
Holland, MI 49423-3622
Phone: 1-616-392-8555
Email: georgeb@westernsem.org

A Best Practice: A Mid-Week Youth Club

A week at Christian camp can have a tremendous impact on the life of a child or teen. Relationships develop and deepen by studying, singing, worshiping, eating, and playing during extended time together. Faith is shared and nurtured. This is what we hoped to do for our young people when we began a mid-week youth experience eight years ago, when we adopted the LOGOS Program at Second Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Goal

To develop faith and discipleship through Christian relationships.

How It Works

We chose the LOGOS program—a structured gathering with four key components: teaching the Bible in classes for grades one through twelve; enhancing worship skills through choir, handbells, and drama; enjoying recreation in a non-competitive setting; and breaking of bread together through dinner and conversation as table-families. Parents of the youth are expected to participate in some way and to pay minimal fees. Additionally, adults are needed to work.

We learned about LOGOS by sending a number of interested adults to a LOGOS leadership training school. They came back convicted that children, especially teens, desperately need to know they are children of God and to experience God's love and affirmation through the church. For our congregation, LOGOS seemed to be a wonderful way to do that. We shared our concerns with our consistory, our congregation, and our families and enlisted their support. We prayed. Then, we launched the program with amazing results!

What It Accomplishes

By spending three hours together for twenty-four weeks every year, we find we are better able to nurture in young people a faith relationship with Jesus Christ and relationships among peers and between the generations. We are able to affirm the worth and uniqueness of each one and use the gifts of both youth and adults. We all grow! Our sense of family grows! And our family grows as our young people bring friends!

Resources

The LOGOS system works in any size congregation and building, but prayer and people are essential! All kinds of gifts of time, money, and energy, from setting tables to teaching to playing games, are called forth.

What It Costs

The LOGOS Leadership Training School, a three-day event, costs about \$300 per person, depending on the size of the group. Scholarships are available. We ask that families pay for the cost of meals, the curriculum and supplies, music, recreational equipment, and an optional national LOGOS Mission Membership. We currently charge \$70 for the first child, \$65 for the second, and \$60 for each additional child for the whole year. We provide assistance if needed.

Who to Contact:

Pat Eenigenburg
Second Reformed Church
2323 Stadium Drive
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
Phone: 1-616-382-6600
Email: eenigenburg@hotmail.com



A Best Practice: Growing Time for Ages Four through Nine Years of Age

During a time of discernment in the early 1990s, our church made a decision to focus our teaching of the Bible around a single story each week. Previously, children had been dismissed during the morning worship for Children and Worship, where they learned a Bible story based on the church year. The children then received a whole new story during the Sunday school hour. We decided the children should learn one Bible story and theme per morning, and the Sunday school hour would be used as a response to the Children and Worship story. We called this Growing Time.

Goals

To emphasize the importance of children in education, the life of the Christian community, and to help children learn the Bible through one well-told story a Sunday, and experience the biblical story through all the senses.

How It Works

Children participate in their regular Children and Worship program during adult worship, which comes first in our schedule. Following Children and Worship, the children begin a rotation that we call Growing Time. Using a center approach, the children interact with and respond to the same story they heard in Children and Worship by going to a music center, an art expression center, or a faith reflections center, which can include a drama or an activity that illustrates the biblical story for that morning. The children's educator writes the material for each of the centers and levels, and volunteers staff each of the centers. At the end of the morning, children in each Growing Time center are given a take-home sheet

called "Worship Windows," which explains what the children did in Children and Worship and their projects for Growing Time.

What It Accomplishes

Our children love this format of worship and education because it engages them in a number of ways that keep them interested. In a mobile society with short-term commitments, our volunteers like the program because their involvement is on a monthly basis rather than for a whole year. We also rotate parents for Children and Worship each week so that parents become involved in the children's worship experience.

Resources

The success of the program depends on a capable director who can design the Growing Time material and has the organizational skills to carry out the educational hour. A paid religious educator or a team of volunteers is necessary to design the curriculum and implement the materials each week. Formal training in the Children and Worship model is also essential for the success of this style of education.

What It Costs

While we do not cover the traditional church school curriculums, there are still costs associated with providing a quality education experience.

Who to Contact:

Joyce Fry, Director of Children's Ministry
Third Reformed Church
2060 Michigan NE
Grand Rapids MI 49503
Phone: 1-616-458-3089
Fax: 1-616-458-3120

A Best Practice: Colorbration, An Intergenerational Celebration of Unity and Diversity

“Colorbration” is a congregational event that may be held in a two- to three- hour period, celebrating the diversity and unity of the church using a variety of activities appropriate for intergenerational groups.

Goals

To build community; to increase awareness of individual differences and the value of cooperation; to celebrate all parts of the body of Christ; to encourage families to participate in learning together; to experience 1 Corinthians 12 in a new way.

How It Works

Schedule this intergenerational event in a versatile meeting area, preferably a park with a shelter or a retreat center. We begin with a simple meal; families bring a picnic lunch to enjoy together. In keeping with the title “Colorbration,” all activities are built around color. Groups are formed with nametags of various colors. Family members may be together or separated; older children often like to be with their friends. Groups are scheduled through several activities, learning-center style, including games with a colorful parachute, blowing giant soap bubbles, making quilt blocks to illustrate familiar Bible stories, or using small geometric shapes cut from colorful fabric glued onto felt squares. The quilt became the key activity. After the event volunteers assembled the quilt by gluing the felt blocks to a white sheet. A vine border was added by gluing green felt leaves, one per participant, on which each had written his or her name with fabric paint. The quilt was hung in the front of the sanctuary for several weeks following the event. The evening closed with a time of worship built around the

theme, “The Vine and the Branches,” using John 15:1-17 and 1 Corinthians 12. Each group prepared part of the service—music, Scripture presented as drama, prayer and closing celebration. (We used *Colors of the Rainbow* from Group Publishers, where each participant is given a colorful streamer to wave at the appropriate time in a contemporary translation of 1 Corinthians 12.)

What It Accomplishes

The event brought an increased sense of community and expanded awareness of other church members’ gifts and personalities. The quilt still hangs in the church years later, reminding members of their connectedness regardless of age and abilities. Teenage children still look for their five-year-old handwritten names and identify the quilt blocks they helped prepare.

Resources

You’ll need a creative and energetic leadership team of four to eight persons, a meeting place, and materials for the activities. Lawn chairs can be provided by the participants.

What It Costs

The cost is primarily in time. Most other materials can be collected or borrowed from members.

Who to Contact:

Jerilyn Lueders, Education Coordinator
Synod of the Heartland
612 8th St. SE
Orange City, IA 51041
Phone: 1-712-737-2028
Email: jlueders@nwidt.com



A Best Practice: Prayer Postures

This is a Sunday morning “Children’s Moment” (a children’s sermon) for the whole season of Lent.

Goals

To provide a serial worship experience for children throughout the whole season of Lent; to teach the disciplines of silence, devotion, and prayer in an age-appropriate way.

How It Works

Our Children’s Moments generally incorporate many values of Children and Worship. We try to use pictures, stories, and symbols from the Bible and from the worship tradition. We avoid the usual object lessons. Our tone is comparatively low-key and reserved, almost “matter of fact.” We do not ask very many questions, but speak deliberately, directly, and warmly, in an atmosphere of safety and calm security. We assume that children are able and want to worship as much as adults do. This series of movements is about prayer.

Week 1: Let me show you how we make our legs quiet. *Pastor kneels.* I would like you all to kneel like I am and make your legs quiet. Let’s see how long we can be quiet. *Lead them in quietness for a good thirty seconds.* Let’s pray. *Then pray that God would bless them this Lent.*

Week 2: Let’s make our legs quiet. *All kneel.* Now let me show you how to make our hands quiet. *Pastor folds hands.* I would like you all to make your hands quiet just like me. Let’s see how long we can be quiet. *A generous silence, enough to slightly stretch them.* Let’s pray.

Week 3: Let’s make our legs quiet. Let’s make our hands quiet. Now let’s make our heads quiet. *Pastor bows his head.* This is

how I make my head quiet. I want you all to make your heads quiet. Let’s see how long we can be quiet. *A slightly longer silence.* Let’s pray.

Week 4: Let’s make our legs quiet. Let’s make our hands quiet. Let’s make our heads quiet. Now let’s make our minds quiet. This is the hardest thing, to make our minds quiet. Our minds are quiet when we sleep, so to make our minds quiet we close our eyes. Let’s close our eyes and see how long we can be quiet. *Silence.* Let’s pray.

Week 5: Let’s do all four ways to make our bodies quiet. Let’s make our legs quiet. Let’s make our hands quiet. Let’s make our heads quiet. Let’s make our minds quiet. We want to be quiet so we can pray. Let’s see how long we can be quiet. *Silence.* Let’s pray.

Palm Sunday: Stand up with me. Breathe softly along with me. Now let’s raise our hands up in the air. Stick them straight up. Our hands are not being quiet. Sometimes our praying is not quiet praying. I’m going to pray a loud prayer. Hosanna! Say it with me, shout it, Hosanna! That’s a prayer. Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

What It Accomplishes

This proved extremely popular, and the children responded readily.

Who to Contact:

Daniel Meeter, Senior Pastor, or
Kathleen Schellenberg, Children’s
Ministry Director
Central Reformed Church
10 College Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI, 49503
Phone: 1-616-456-1336
Email: kschellenberg@i2k.com

A Best Practice: PromiseLand Discovery*

PromiseLand Discovery is a comprehensive eight-year “theology for kids,” for children ages three to eleven (preschool through fifth grade) that provides a safe, nurturing, age-appropriate, lively environment where children interact with Scripture to discover who God is (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the nature of his character, and what it means to follow him in the streets, classrooms, sports fields, and family rooms of their lives.

Goals

To engage children as participants in age-appropriate weekly worship; to provide high quality four-dimensional learning experiences that engage and challenge kids mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually; to help children discover the person and character of God, what the Bible is, and how to use it, the major themes of Scripture, and what it means to live in relationship with Jesus Christ; to encourage, train, and support parents as the primary spiritual teachers of their children.

How It Works

PromiseLand is a children’s education curriculum we’ve developed in our congregation. It is held forty-four Sundays a year, concurrent with “adult” worship. It is organized around one theological theme per year, beginning in September, and divided into four- to-six-week series. Although the series, as well as individual lessons, build on each other, we also take care that each Sunday offers a “stand-alone” message for the sake of our many guests and every-other-week children. The PromiseLand morning begins with twenty-five minutes of “warm-up” centers, which allow kids to enter and engage at whatever level is comfortable to them, followed by twenty-five minutes of worship (singing, prayer, Scripture reading by the children, story or idea presentation), and leading into twenty-five minutes of “discovery,” or message time, which is always an experiential learning event. The time ends with ten to fifteen minutes reserved for processing our experience, a last song, and a closing prayer. “PromiseLand: Bring It Home” parent pages

and a website page gives parents background on the weekly lessons and ideas for Scripture reading, activities, and family discussion.

What It Accomplishes

Not least—children love coming to PromiseLand. It is their biblical community. They read the Scripture, run the sound equipment, take care of the overheads, help younger children, and participate with their whole selves. Many of our families started coming to church after their children had come as guests to PromiseLand. God is known as intimately associated with all the 24/7 aspects of a child’s world.

Resources

Bibles: we use the NIV Adventure Bible, but any edition works; supplementary ideas for crafts, games, activities (RCA Distribution Center has tons); we use lots of recyclables and donated toys and sports equipment; music (we use CDs, live music would be better if you have the talent); the usual array of markers, masking tape, and glue, etc.

What It Costs

We budget \$0.25 per child per week; it can be done for much less (or much more). The biggest investment is commitment of a handful of adults willing to plan and execute the program. We use two consistent “presenters” and a staff of adult/high school helpers who agree to serve nine weeks per year in rotation, in a ratio of one adult per five expected kids.

Who to Contact:

Phyllis Mussman, Director of Youth Ministry
 Monocacy Valley Church
 45-I Waverley Dr.
 Frederick MD 21702
 Phone: 1-301-696-1605
 Email: pcmussman@aol,
 mvc@mvcnow.org or via www.mvcnow.org

**Beyond the commitment to sound scriptural teaching and outreach to unchurched families, there is no similarity to the PromiseLand of Willow Creek Community Church.*



A Best Practice: Choices Unit for Senior High Youth

At Ponds Reformed Church, we began the September program year for our high school youth group with an emphasis on choices and decision-making.

Goals

To encourage students to address some of the significant choices which await them as they enter adulthood; to encourage students to allow their Christian faith to inform these decisions; to provide mentors/models within the church family who have made important choices.

How It Works

The opening event was introduced as "Choices Night" and included a scavenger hunt, a meal, a skit, and worship. For the scavenger hunt, the group was divided into teams; each team was sent to the homes of three church members. Those visited had been contacted ahead of time and were asked to talk to the youth about a significant choice they had faced at some point in their lives. Before leaving, the teams also had to ask the host to choose to give them either one item from his/her cupboard or refrigerator to supply for part of a meal, or one thing that could be used as a prop for a skit. The teams came back to the church, where they had potluck consisting of whatever people had chosen to give them—it was an eclectic but fun supper! After supper, we assigned teams to create a skit about choices, using the props given to them. Next, each team shared the stories they had heard in their interviews, and the group discussed the implications of each choice. Finally, the group gathered for worship, including appropriate music and Scripture passages about good and bad choices that biblical characters had made.

The following weeks, the youth group's regular meeting included either:

- An in-depth Bible study about choices;
- A visit from a church member who shared his/her story about a life choice (more in-depth than the scavenger hunt interviews);
- A video from TRAVARCA relating to the topic.

What It Accomplishes

Perhaps the greatest benefit for the youth was the intergenerational interaction with people in the church whose stories they may not have known. It widened their vision of what a Christian life can look like. It helped them to see that significant choices should not be made impulsively, and showed them that the Bible is full of people who were asked to make choices, not all of which were admirable. It encouraged them to look to God, and deepened their realization that all choices fall under the grace of God. It reassured them that God not only blesses our positive choices, but is ready to forgive and redeem the destructive ones. The adult presenters also benefited by getting to know the youth through the sharing of their stories.

What It Costs

Rental of video.

Who to Contact:

Marilyn Paarlberg, D.C.E.
Ponds Reformed Church
341 Ramapo Valley Road
Oakland NJ 07436
Phone: 1-201-337-6744
Fax: 1-201-337-7255

A Best Practice: Honoring Staff

Here's something we did to honor our faculty and staff of the Sunday school when the Rev. Dr. Wilbur Washington was pastor of First Reformed Church of Jamaica, New York.

Goal

To give recognition and honor to Sunday school staff.

How It Works

Early in July there is a terrific concert of religious music held in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. We would pack our folk into the church van and head to that seaside resort city. The concert is held in an open arena that allows the ocean breeze to cool the July air. There is one massive choir, a combination of choirs from dozens of churches in the region. We would get there early to stroll along the Atlantic Ocean and to get a bite to eat. The music was multicultural: hymns, spirituals, and gospel. Of course, we took loads of photographs, which we displayed on the church bulletin board.

What It Accomplishes

Recognition of teachers can be done extravagantly or simply, at great cost or with

little expenditure. We gained far more than we ever paid for the Ocean Grove experience. Most churches who do this feel the same way.

What It Costs

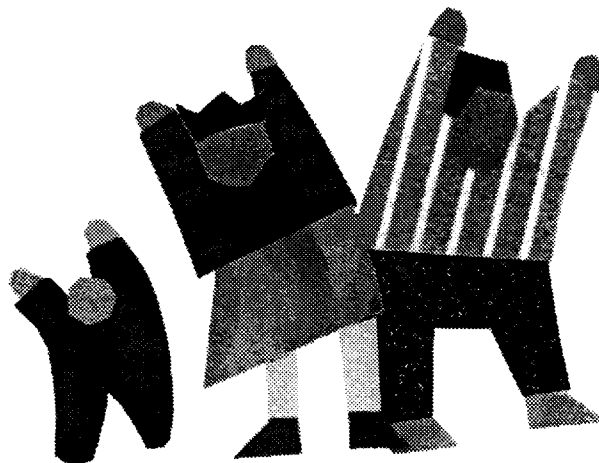
Even today, people's eyes light up when we talk about the concerts at Ocean Grove. The music was wonderful, of course, and a delight to experience. But just as important, both at the time and still in our memories, was the fellowship and the realization that our skills, gifts, and commitments were valued by our community of faith.

Resources

A willingness to think creatively and act accordingly.

Who to Contact:

Oliver Patterson
 Council for Christian Education
 215-25 Hollis Ave.
 Queens Village NY 11429
 Phone: 1-718-465-7153
 Email: gopj@aol.com





A Best Practice: Face Life!

Face Life! is a fine arts day camp that began with a dream to provide a place for kids to experiment with the arts and express their faith. The acronym, which originally stood for Fun At Camp Experiencing LIFE, has taken on a new meaning, Fine Arts Can Enrich LIFE.

Goals

To encourage children and youth to explore the arts and express their faith; to integrate biblical stories and faith foundations with the fine arts; to create a community outreach.

How It Works

Planning for the camp begins with choosing the theme and Bible stories to be shared by storytellers and woven into all the camp activities. Enthusiastic adults who have a passion for the arts, working with kids, and sharing their faith provide leadership. We invite youth in grades two through twelve from our community and several area churches to participate. The three-day camp offers experiences with storytelling, drama, sacred dance, handbells, Orff instruments, clowning, art, creative writing, instrumental ensembles, and singing. The first day of camp includes a pool party and picnic supper. Face Life! concludes with an evening worship celebration and ice cream social for friends and family of the participants. This

provides an opportunity to share some of the activities of the camp and offer our expressions of praise to God.

What It Accomplishes

Equipping young people with experiences in the arts and allowing the freedom to explore and create has provided a bridge to our local community and led our faith community into richer, more creative worship.

Resources

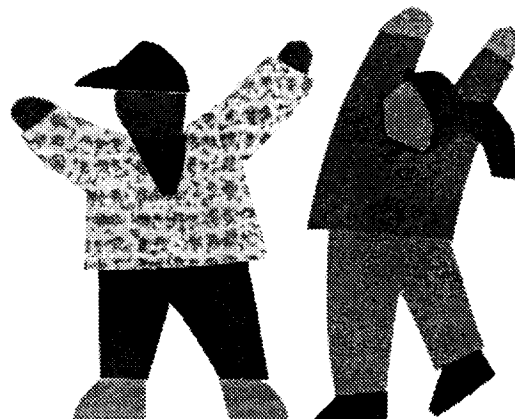
A team of twenty-five adults works together to plan and provide leadership for the camp. The church building, grounds, and staff are dedicated to use for Face Life! during the three days of the camp.

What It Costs

The major expenses are food, pool rental, music, and art supplies. A registration fee of \$20 per person covers part of the cost. The music expenses are built into the church music budget.

Who to Contact:

Patty Pratt, Director of Music Ministries
Resurrection Reformed Church
5225 Calkins Road
Flint, MI 48532
Phone: 1-810-732-4150
Email: resrefpatty@ameritech.net



A Best Practice: The Divine Drama

The Divine Drama is a flexible, intermediate-level course about the Bible, faith, and discipleship. The first fifteen units, "The Biblical Narrative," provide an insightful tour of the biblical narrative from creation to Christ. The second fifteen units, "Our Narrative," explore basic Christian teachings—the Trinity, prayer, stewardship, and the church—that emerge from the narrative.

Goals

To present the content of the Bible in a creative, engaging manner; to see and study Scripture in its entirety, not just as individual stories or verses.

How It Works

The program is published by Crossways International and consists of two sections. "The Biblical Narrative" (Old Testament) leads people through the threads and themes of the Bible's storyline. It shows Jesus to be the "grand finale" of Scripture. In "Our Narrative" (New Testament), units sixteen to thirty, the Master invites us to sit at his feet so that he may teach us who he is and what it means to live in his presence. We began with a publicity campaign and sign-up, since student materials must be ordered. A small-group setting was desired, and the course was limited to twelve participants. The first fall, "The Biblical Narrative" was offered for Sunday evenings, followed by a spring weekday morning course offered to attract a different audience. The second fall, this was repeated with "Our Narrative." "The Big Picture," a four-week fast-track study was offered Sunday mornings at adult Christian education.

What It Accomplishes

Our congregation's Year of the Bible program revealed a need to understand more deeply the Bible story. Participants found this study and discussion revealed the story and helped in applying the Bible's lessons to our daily lives.

Resources

The study leader trained at a seminar in preparation for teaching this course. There are student manuals for participants.

What It Costs

Leader training is \$245. There are additional costs for the course materials. There is also the cost of personal commitment: fifteen weeks to attend the hour-and-a-half course, plus time devoted to Bible reading and homework.

Who to Contact:

Debbie Pratt
Director of Christian Education
Lynnwood Reformed Church
3714 Carman Road
Schenectady, NY 12303
Phone: 1-518-356-4327
Email: dce@wsg.net





A Best Practice: The *Church Herald* Forum

The *Church Herald* Forum is an adult Christian education class in which participants read selected articles at home, then discuss those articles together on Sunday morning during the Christian education hour.

Goals

To read quality articles in the *Church Herald*; to discuss those articles together; to grow to new levels of faith development; to deepen our identity as members of the Reformed Church in America; to recognize and accept the diversity that exists in the Reformed Church in America.

How It Works

Participants in the *Church Herald* Forum select an article to read for discussion for the next week. Each person reads the article at home, makes comments in the margins of the magazine, and considers Bible passages and theological concepts that relate to the issue. The forum leader prepares a list of discussion questions. Forum topics are listed in the worship bulletin each Sunday. Some topics draw one-time participants; many others make this their regular class. Participants sit in a circle for forum sessions. Each session includes time for prayer.

What It Accomplishes

The forum provided an alternative church school class that compliments a traditional Bible study. It provided an opportunity to discuss a wide range of topics, including forgiveness, evangelism, and worship styles. Participants experienced new thoughts about God and grew in faith. The forum also increased readership of the *Church Herald*. Participants learned about the Reformed Church in America and her colleges, seminaries, and agencies.

Resources

You'll need Bibles, a comfortable room with seating for adults in a circle, and a committed facilitator.

What It Costs

There is no additional cost for a congregation in the RCA for this program.

Who to Contact:

Edward H. Schreur, Pastor
Faith Reformed Church
1330 Main Avenue South
Brookings, South Dakota 57006
Phone: 1-605-692-9049



A Best Practice: The Discovery Class

The Discovery Class is a ten-week course held once a year for young people in third through sixth grade. In this class we give children the necessary tools to make worship an enjoyable experience and enable children to become active participants in worship. Other topics in the class include baptism, communion, and salvation.

Goals

To assist children in understanding worship and becoming “active” worshippers; to help children understand the attributes of God; to give children the opportunity to hear and respond to the good news of salvation; to give an understanding of the Lord’s Supper, and the opportunity to begin receiving it by meeting with the church elders; to become Jesus’ followers.

How It Works

A letter is sent to parents of third through sixth graders. The letter outlines the class and asks parents to attend a meeting. At the meeting we emphasize that worship is a family experience and that parents need to be involved in what we are teaching their children—we want to partner with them. In fact, the parents are required to be at the classes when we discuss baptism, communion, and salvation.

Notebooks and papers are given to each child at the first class; they are encouraged to take notes on each sermon in the subsequent weeks. They spend a few minutes of the following class discussing the sermon. On the last night of the class, the kids are given the opportunity to meet with their parents and church elders to talk about their salvation. On the following Sunday, the kids graduate from the class. (Graduation is based on their completion of the class, not on their decision to follow Christ.) The children wear a white flower and sit together

in worship. Our pastor honors them publicly and presents them with their very own Bible. The parents are asked to join their children on the platform and lay their hands on their children as we pray for them. The congregation applauds them (literally, with a standing ovation) for their commitment to worship and learning more about our God.

What It Accomplishes

Our children have a greater sense of personal and corporate worship. Our congregation is more aware of the young people worshiping around them. We want our children to feel that our church is their church, not their parent’s church. As a result of this class, we have seen children dedicate or rededicate their lives to Christ. Many children have been baptized and publicly professed their faith for the first time.

Resources

You’ll need a teacher who has a passion for young people and their God journey! We wrote a lot of our own curriculum because this class is based on how our church worships. We used many outside resources to enhance the class.

What It Costs

The costs include Bibles and flowers for each of the graduates, and notebooks and pens for each student.

Who to Contact:

Dana Schultz
 Director of Children’s Ministries
 The Springs Community Church
 1860 Dublin Blvd Suite A
 Colorado Springs CO 80918
 Phone: 1-719-590-1705
 Fax: 1-719-590-1767
 Email: scc@iex.net



A Best Practice: Can You Picture This?

While touring the Museum of Art in Birmingham, Alabama, we wandered into a small gallery called "My Mosaic." The display lined up neatly framed photographs of young teens who had taken a photo of something important in their life and written a brief description of why the object pictured was important. Most of the teens were Jewish. They spoke of why their Jewish roots were important to them. Some wrote about and had photographed Jewish holidays, as well as family pets or persons important to them. The exhibit compelled our attention; we stopped to read most of the captions under the photos, pondering and celebrating life with the young authors.

Goal

To encourage sharing of faith expression within the faith community, to create an inviting display of our faith to our community and world.

How It Works

The exhibit inspired us to take the concept to our congregation. Any number of groups in the church—new members, confirmands, catechumenate participants, youth group, Sunday school class, board of elders—could be given a question or topic to develop, such as: What does it mean that you're a Christian? Where have you seen God at work in your life or world lately? How do you see grace or covenant or faith-in-action in the world? Added to the photo would be a paragraph that shares the identity of the author and a paragraph explaining the photograph.

We offer this advice from our experience at the museum:

- Be sure the finished work is personal. Let it tell something about the author. Be sure the person's photo (done creatively, in his or her own setting) is included. Let the person compose his or her own biography.
- Display the work well. Each picture in the art gallery was contained in an aluminum frame. Each photograph was 5 x 7 in size, and black and white. The yellow display wall was a nicely lighted area with track lights above the display.

What It Accomplishes

An exercise like this invites us to look for the impact of faith in daily life, often revealing God's presence in places we might not expect.

Resources

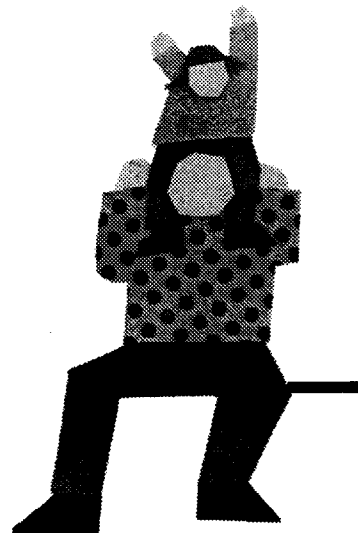
Picture frames and display materials.

What It Costs

Frames and display materials are the only costs.

Who to Contact:

Larry Schuyler
Coordinator, Holland Classis, RCA
513 E 8th St
Holland MI 49423
Phone: 1-616-748-8488



A Best Practice: Making Disciples—A New Approach to Confirmation

Making Disciples by William Willimon is a lay-enacted process of leading youth through confirmation. A young person is mentored by an older Christian guide as they both attempt to live as Christians. Christianity is more than just a “head trip,” it is a way of life together. We want our youth to know and follow Jesus. This flexible, adaptable and active program allows our youth to come to know Jesus not simply know *about* Jesus.

Goals

To make disciples—people who grow to resemble disciples of Jesus in their lifestyle, beliefs and values—the goal of confirmation; to engage the total person in the process; to learn to be disciples by watching others.

How It Works

Youth of any age—twelve to nineteen—are paired with an older mentor. The two of them work through a workbook for about three months, based on the Gospel of Luke. (We usually do this from early January through Lent.) It means meeting together for about one hour each week. Some areas of study include: the Bible, worship, the sacraments, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, death, and resurrection. The two study the Gospel of Luke, worship with other congregations, and create banners and bookmarks. In our congregation, the pastor and educator meet with mentors for one hour before the process begins. After one hour with the mentors, parents and confirmands join us. Parents, confirmands, and mentors set up best meeting times and places and the journey begins. At the end of the process, usually the Saturday before Palm Sunday, the confirmands, mentors, pastor, and educator gather again for about three hours. We cover specifics of the Reformed faith and share banners, etc. (The banners hang in our conference center for

one year.) On this day the youth also write a statement of faith to be read at the elders meeting. These statements of faith are also printed in the bulletin on Maundy Thursday when they are confirmed. The night of confirmation is a significant event. Each child when their parents and mentor share in communion together as the child is confirmed. The mentor offers a blessing to the confirmand.

What It Accomplishes

This process has eliminated the traditional classroom setting of confirmation. The relationships between mentor and youth become longlasting. The adults involved have been surprised by the blessings received during this experience—and by how much they learned from the kids. The individual attention helps to identify those who are not ready to be confirmed. It also allows for a broadly graded program—a twenty-year-old and her twelve-year-old sister are both involved in this program.

Resources

We used *Making Disciples: A New Approach to Confirmation* from Logos Productions, Inc. A mentor’s guide and video are available for mentors, a confirmands guide for each confirmand, and a coordinator’s guide for the educator. We also purchased a commentary on Luke for each mentor and made sure everyone had a personal Bible.

Who to Contact

Deb Swanson, Associate in Ministry
 Resurrection Reformed Church
 5225 Calkins Rd
 Flint, MI 48532
 Phone: 1-810-732-4150
 Email: resrefdeb@amertiech.net



A Best Practice: VeggieTown After-School Program

VeggieTown is a program that teaches and demonstrates Christian values in everyday life for children and youth of the congregation, youth of other congregations, and unchurched youth of the community through the wacky and delightful characters of the VeggieTales animated series.

Goals

To reach others outside of our congregation with the love of Christ; to teach and demonstrate Christian values in everyday life in a memorable way; to involve adults with children and youth of our congregation and our community.

How It Works

Three separate programs for children three years old through middle school meet at the same time—Wednesdays from 3:00-4:30—from October through March. Children who do not have transportation are picked up by members of the congregation. Each week the children and youth visit a “VeggieTown workplace,” such as a courthouse or pet shop. Each workplace teaches two values. For example, the pet shop teaches love and responsibility. One value is taught each week, and the third week is a review session. The children learn a memory verse each session. They receive a small prize if they can recite it the next week. The third week someone from the community who works in that field comes in to speak of those values in his or her work. (The pet shop owner brought in snakes, ferrets, and bunnies.) In the third week, the children also do a quality craft. A newsletter is sent home each week.

The three programs of VeggieTown are: VeggieTown (kindergarten through fifth grade); VeggieTots: (three- and four-year-olds); and VeggieTeens: (middle schoolers).

Resources

The VeggieTown kit is from Big Idea. Snacks are donated along with some crafts, the rest are purchased. Two teachers were needed for VeggieTots. One person served as mayor and onsite coordinator of VeggieTown. Five teachers taught VeggieTown classes. One snack helper is needed each week. One person is recreation director, leading the kids in games. One person is craft coordinator. Our children and youth ministries director serves as leader of VeggieTeens and was helped by one sponsor.

What It Costs

Time: The congregation made three “VeggieTown,” wooden figures of characters and workplaces. The figures are hinged so they may be moved. This took a lot of time and effort, but it was worth it both for the outcome and for the sake of involving the congregation. On Tuesday afternoon people set them up, and on Wednesday evening they take them down. We purchased the curriculum from Big Idea Productions.

Who to Contact:

Karrie Seagren
Hope Reformed Church
612 Ontario Ave.
Sheboygan, WI 53081
Phone: 1-920-452-5648
Fax: 1-920-459-9415
Email: hoperc@excel.net

A Best Practice: What Are All These Things Doing in the Church!

"What Are All These Things Doing in the Church?" is a Lenten program I've created to heighten awareness in the congregation for what Christ experienced during Holy Week. It involves nineteen symbols of events that took place in Jesus' life from Palm Sunday to Easter Morning. A booklet contains an explanation of each symbol and the Scripture passage from which it is drawn to encourage further study by the congregation.

Goals

To provide a visible symbol for many of the events that took place in Jesus' life during Holy Week; to create curiosity about what all these things (symbols) are doing in the church; to foster congregational involvement in the events of Holy Week.

How It Works

The nineteen symbols are placed in the sanctuary on Ash Wednesday and left up until after Easter. The booklets containing the explanation are placed in the pews. The symbols included are: a palm branch; a jar of ointment, symbolizing Mary's anointing of Jesus; a money bag and thirty pieces of silver, symbolizing Judas' money; a pitcher and basin, symbolizing Jesus washing the disciples' feet; a cup and bread, reminding us of the Lord's Supper; a sword, reminding us of impetuous Peter; a picture of a cock, for Peter's denial; a rope, symbolizing how Christ was bound; a whip and blindfold, reminding us of Jesus' suffering and humiliation; a crown of thorns, placed on top of cross; a cross (the one we use here is the one that was used for the RCA Festival of Evangelism in 1972); a wooden mallet and railroad nails; a sign with INRI, placed on the

cross to symbolize Pilate's decree; a ladder (not a biblical symbol, but many Christian paintings of the crucifixion show a ladder); a spear and a sponge, symbolizing the response of the soldiers to Jesus' cry, "I thirst"; a tunic and dice, symbolizing how the soldier gambled for Jesus' coat; a torn curtain, symbolizing the temple curtain torn in two; and linen grave clothes, symbolizing Christ's resurrection.

Each Sunday during Lent a group of symbols are highlighted by their inclusion into the liturgy: call to worship, prayer of confession, Lenten children's readings, children sermon, etc. A sermon series can also be built around the symbols.

What It Accomplishes

Our congregation's awareness of all that took place during Holy Week has been enriched. People now discuss what each symbol means and how it strengthens their own spiritual walk.

Resources

Collecting all the necessary symbols or reasonable facsimiles takes time and some money. I found a lot of items at garage sales. The spear and the sword were the most costly items.

Who to Contact:

Daryl A. Vetter
 Pastor of Congregational Life and Outreach
 Lakeland Reformed Church
 10442 Sprinkle Road
 Vicksburg, MI 49097
 Phone: 1-616-649-1703
 Email: D.Vetter8960@Juno.com



A Best Practice

Introduction

Goals:

How It Works:

**Submit your own
Best Practice**

What It Accomplishes:

Resources Needed:

What It Costs:

Who to Contact:

Name

Title

Church

Address

Phone

Email

Send your Best Practice to:
Jeff Japinga
Office for Education and Faith Development
Reformed Church in America
4500 60th St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49512

Desired Learning Outcomes

Introduction

What do Christians need to know? This is a question pastors, church educators, teachers, parents, consistories, and Christian education committees are asking. The answer to this question can help congregations evaluate their current Christian education program, select new curriculum materials for the Sunday school, and set goals for teaching adults, children, and youth.

What should Christians know? The search for an answer led the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes to convene a forum on Desired Learning Outcomes. The forum was designed to help participants identify what should be taught and learned at each age level, from adults to children. The forum brought together pastors, church educators, and youth workers from across the synod.

The forum was held in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on May 20, 1997. More than twenty pastors, church educators, and youth workers met to wrestle with the question. When it became apparent that the task could not be completed in a single day, additional work was assigned, and a second forum was scheduled for September 2, 1997. George Brown, professor of Christian education and associate dean at Western Theological Seminary, served as a consultant for both forums and edited the final draft of the desired learning outcomes.

This is not the first time the church has wrestled with the question, "What should Christians know?" An earlier answer can be found in the content of Christian catechisms. Like other catechisms of the day, the Heidelberg Catechism covered four subjects: the Apostles' Creed, the Sacraments, the Law of God, and the Lord's Prayer. Christians were expected to know these four things.

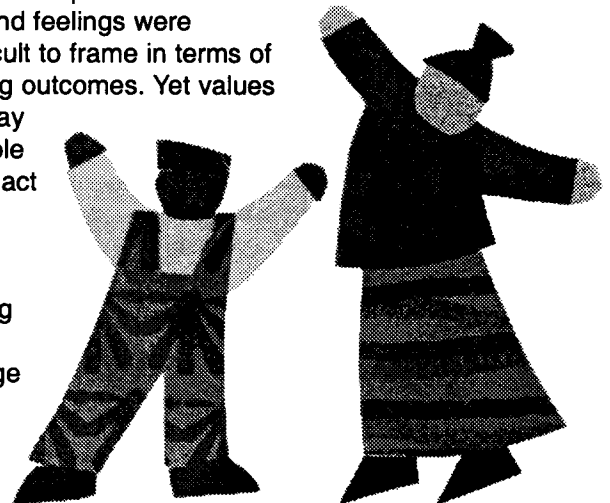
The desired learning outcomes identified by forum participants is a contemporary attempt to answer the question, "What do Christians need to know?"

In this form the question emphasizes knowing as an important quality. But sometimes an emphasis on the cognitive dimension of learning has resulted in the accumulation of information without leading to action that is Christian. While knowledge is certainly important, so are feelings, values, and actions.

Recognizing that concentrating on what Christians should know has often resulted in the acquisition of information rather than the formation or transformation of Christians, forum participants broadened the question to include feelings, values, and actions, as well as knowledge—that is, "What should adults value, feel, know, and be able to do as a result of their education as Christians by the time they reach middle adulthood?"

Expressed in this way the question reflects the reality that not all learners will achieve the same level of knowledge or action, nor will they necessarily share the exact same feelings or values. These are desired learning outcomes; they represent the hopes, expectations, and ideals of Christian educators.

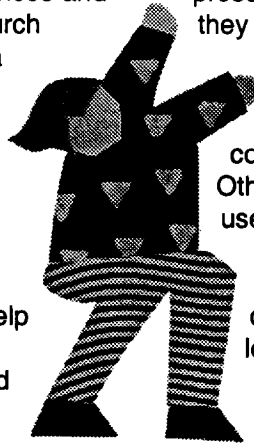
Answering these questions was not easy. Values and feelings were especially difficult to frame in terms of desired learning outcomes. Yet values and feelings play an important role in decisions to act in one way or another. Organizing the desired learning outcomes according to age group and grade level was also challenging.





Remember that these desired learning outcomes grew out of the experiences and wisdom of a group of pastors, church educators, and youth workers in a particular time and place. The process of developing the desired learning outcomes was dialogical and collaborative. The results reflect a consensus after different opinions were expressed and explored.

This report is only a guide to help you determine your own desired learning outcomes. You are invited



to think about the desired learning outcomes presented in this report and consider how they might be used to shape and guide

Christian education in your congregation. Some of the desired learning outcomes may not fit your congregation's assessment of needs.

Other desired learning outcomes may not use the language most comfortable for or familiar to your congregation. When this happens, it is important for congregations to write their own desired learning outcome.

Desired Learning Outcomes for Adult Christians

By late adulthood, Christians should value

- The Bible as God's inspired Word.
- The Bible as authoritative for faith and life.
- Salvation and eternal life.
- Membership in Christ's body, the church.
- Peace, justice, and the integrity of creation.
- The importance of Sabbath rest for personal well-being and social harmony.
- The kingdom or reign of God.

By late adulthood, Christians should feel

- Safe and secure in their experience of God's providential care and provision for their salvation in Christ.
- Gratitude and praise for God's blessings.
- A desire to forgive others and to experience forgiveness.
- A basic allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and to Christ's body, the church.
- Responsible for the wise stewardship of earth's resources.
- An obligation to proclaim the gospel.

By late adulthood, Christians should know

- The basic story of the Bible, including major events, key people, and important places, and their significance.
- The core beliefs of the Christian faith, such as sin, providence, salvation in Christ, and major themes of the Reformed tradition, such as the sovereignty of God, "Scripture alone," "justification by faith," and "saved by grace."
- The main chapters in the history of the church and in the history of the Reformed Church in America.
- The basic structure of the Heidelberg Catechism and its major themes.
- The general structure of governance of the Reformed Church in America.

By late adulthood, Christians should be able to

- Use basic interpretative principles in reading and studying the Bible.
- Reflect theologically on personal and social issues, contemporary events, and their own life.
- Evaluate their actions in light of Christian values.
- Use their material resources and spiritual gifts in the ministry of Christ's church and for the welfare of God's world.
- Worship God personally and communally using the rich resources of the church's liturgy, hymns, Scripture, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines.
- Share their faith meaningfully and in appropriate ways with others, especially those seeking saving faith in Christ.



Desired Learning Outcomes for Grades 9-12

By the 12th grade, youth should value

- The Bible as God's Word.
- The Bible as a trustworthy guide for faith and life.
- A close relationship with God.
- Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- The church as a people called to mission.
- The diversity of gifts and expressions of faith.

By the 12th grade, youth should feel

- Trust in Christ as God's Son and in God's sovereign power and providential care.
- An obligation to offer their spiritual gifts in service to Christ and the church.
- Valued as important and responsible members of the church.
- Compassion for the oppressed and marginalized in society.
- A sense of responsibility for the welfare of creation.
- Called to witness to the Christian faith in daily life.

By the 12th grade, youth should know

- The meaning of key words of the Christian faith, such as creation, sin, salvation, providence, and incarnation.
- Essential Old and New Testament passages, such as the "suffering servant" texts of Isaiah and the account of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.
- The church as a community seeking to live faithfully in response to God's Word.
- Key events in the history of the church, such as the legalization of the Christian faith by the Roman Emperor, the Council of Nicea, the posting of Luther's ninety-five theses, and the formation of the World Council of Churches.
- The central events in the history of the Reformed Church in America.
- The story of the congregation in which they are members.

By the 12th grade, youth should be able to

- Interpret Scripture using basic resources and interpretive principles and methods.
- Locate important biblical texts, such as the Ten Commandments, Sermon on the Mount, the Great Commission, and the Lord's Prayer.
- Discuss their understanding of the Apostles' Creed.
- Express orally and/or in written form their understanding of Christian faith.
- Recite from memory the answers to Questions 1 and 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism.
- Make ethical decisions based on Christian principles.
- Enjoy healthy relationships with peers.
- Compare and contrast Christian faith with other faith traditions.
- Recognize similarities and differences between the Reformed tradition and other Christian traditions.
- Serve as a liturgist in worship.

Desired Learning Outcomes for Grades 6-8

By the 8th grade, youth should value

- The Bible as God's Word.
- Participation in worship.
- The importance of serving the needs of others.
- Their body as a temple of God's Spirit.

By the 8th grade, youth should feel

- Accepted as valued members of the church.
- A deepening relationship with God through Christ.
- A deepening sense of God's presence in worship, especially in the Lord's Supper.
- Greater responsibility as members of the church (from being cared for to caring for others, from participating in worship to helping lead worship).

By the 8th grade, youth should know

- The basic time line of the Bible story.
- The Apostles' Creed.
- The main points of Jesus' teachings and major events in his life.
- What it means to be Protestant.
- Key events and people in the history of the Reformed Church in America and their own congregation.

By the 8th grade, youth should be able to

- List and locate the books of the Old and New Testaments.
- Help with a service or mission project of the youth group or congregation.
- Participate on occasion as worship leaders.
- Confess their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.
- Evaluate personal and social issues in light of Jesus' teachings.



Desired Learning Outcomes for Grades 3-5

By the 5th grade children should value

- The Bible as God's holy Word for Christians and the church.
- The Bible as the story of God working in our world.
- The church as the community of God's people.
- Themselves and all others as children of God.
- God as creator of the world.
- Jesus as God's Son who offers love and forgiveness.
- The Holy Spirit as God's presence.

By the 5th grade children should feel

- Awe and wonder for God and God's creation.
- Secure in being loved and valued by God and God's people.
- Compassion for others.
- Joy and gratitude for God's Word and working in the world.
- Called and challenged by God.

By the 5th grade children should know

- Key stories of the Bible: God as creator and working in the world (Genesis, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and the Ten Commandments, David, Isaiah); Jesus as God's Son (birth, teachings such as the Lord's Prayer and parables, miracles, death, resurrection and ascension, second coming); the Holy Spirit (Pentecost, Acts, Paul's journeys).
- The story of the church, its people, work, and mission.
- What it means to be Reformed.
- The story of their own congregation.
- The meaning of the different parts of the order of worship.

By the 5th grade children should be able to

- Help care for God's world.
- Forgive and ask forgiveness.
- Believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- Live as God wants them to live.
- Spend time in prayer, listening to God, and praying for others.
- Live out being members of the church by giving of themselves, contributing their unique gifts, and participating in worship and service projects.
- Describe the meaning of the sacraments.
- Read and respond to the Bible, applying it to their lives and sharing the story of God's love with others.

Desired Learning Outcomes for Kindergarten – Grade 2

By the 2nd grade, children should value

- The Bible as the church's special book that tells the story of God's love.
- Belonging to the church.
- Worship as a way of praising God.
- The earth as God's creation.
- Others as loved by God and precious in God's sight.

By the 2nd grade, children should feel

- Loved by God and the people of the church.
- At home and safe in the church.
- Thankful for all God's gifts to them.
- Wonder and joy in their abilities.
- Forgiveness and a desire to forgive.
- Compassion for others.

By the 2nd grade, children should know

- A core of Old and New Testament stories.
- What it means to be a Christian.
- The church is a people—God's people—and not merely a building or a place.
- The different parts of the order of worship (i.e., call to worship, hymns, offering, prayer of confession, etc.).
- Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments that Christians celebrate.

By the 2nd grade, children should be able to

- Actively participate in worship by singing hymns, hearing Scripture, praying, and bringing an offering.
- Pray the Lord's Prayer from memory.
- Participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with understanding and joy.
- Observe the sacrament of baptism with understanding.
- Read and retell familiar childhood Bible stories from the Old and New Testaments.
- Pray for others.
- Do acts of kindness for others.



Desired Learning Outcomes for Preschool Children

By the age of five, children should value

- The Bible as a special book read and loved by Christians.
- The Bible as a special book that tells of God's love and shows Christians how to live.
- The church as a family of God's people.
- Being part of the church family.

By the age of five, children should feel

- Reverence for the Bible.
- Love for God and others.
- Welcomed and loved by the church family.
- The church is a safe and happy place to be.
- Thankful for God's gifts to them.

By the age of five, children should know

- God made the world and them also.
- Jesus is their friend.
- Old Testament stories about key figures like Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, and David; and New Testament stories about Jesus and leaders in the church.
- What it means to be a follower of Jesus.
- Prayer is speaking with God.
- God wants them to love him and others.
- Worship is how Christians praise God.

By the age of five, children should be able to

- Say a simple prayer in their own words.
- Express care for the environment by picking up their toys and putting things away carefully in their room.
- Show simple acts of kindness to others.

Suggested Curriculum Content

The Bible

- Introduction
- Old Testament
- New Testament
- Apocrypha
- Interpretation
- Geography
- Translations

The Church

Theology

- Doctrine of God
 - Christology
 - Holy Spirit
 - Trinity
- Doctrine of the church
- Doctrine of salvation
- The ecumenical creeds
- Reformed theology
- Heidelberg Catechism
- Canons of the Synod of Dort
- The Belgic Confession
- Our Song of Hope

Church History

- Early church
- Medieval church
- Reformation church
- Modern church
- History of the Reformed Church in America
- History of one's own congregation

The Christian Life

Christian Ethics

- Personal character/values
- Making ethical decisions
- Social ethics
- Bio-medical ethics
- The care and integrity of creation

Christian Mission

- Biblical foundations
- Theology of mission
- History of Christian world mission
- Evangelism
- Social witness
- Reformed Church missions

Worship

- Biblical foundations
- Theology of worship
- Reformed worship

Reformed Church in America

- Reformed church government
- Standards of unity

Ecumenism and Interfaith relationships



Staying Connected to God and to One Another

Ninety-Five Threads to Weaving a Relational Ministry

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes, “Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can weave a world for themselves. The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts—the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.” So it makes sense that those who recruit and train teachers for the teaching ministry of the church pay attention to the heart of the teacher. It makes sense that we become intentional about connecting people, affirming their call to ministry, and strengthening their walk with Jesus Christ. We can provide superior skill-building techniques and the best curriculum, but if we aren’t building relationships with our teachers, with our students, and with God, the tapestry we are creating is not as beautiful and not as strong as God intends it to be. It is through affirmation and a clear

sense of making a difference that people respond with greater energy and passion.

“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:36-39).

There are three commands in this Scripture passage: *Love the Lord your God, love your neighbor, love yourself.* Following are ninety-five ideas—gathered from many educators—for loving God, encouraging and loving teachers, and loving yourself. Our ultimate hope is that learners, teachers, and leaders will know and love God and serve him with a deep commitment forever. We are all the body of Christ, on this journey *together* and *together* we need to sense the love and awe of our creator and appreciate the uniqueness with which each of us is made.

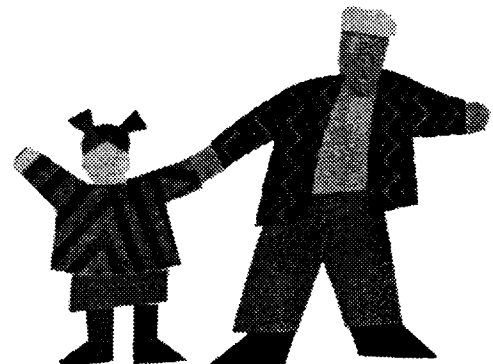
Love God

1. Worship.
2. Pray.
3. Journal.
4. Read the Bible.
5. Find a spiritual director.
6. Take time for sabbath rest.

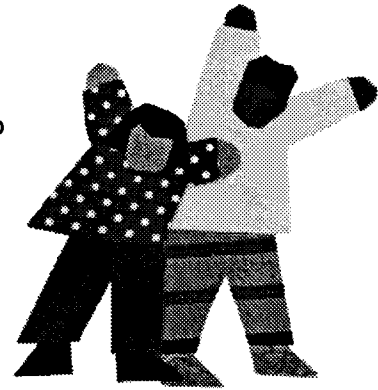


Love Neighbor

7. Have a “team jersey” made for your ministry team, sign your name—pass it around with a note of thanks to a team member, have them sign it and pass it on to another team member with a note of thanks at your next meeting.
8. Play together—have an out-of-box experience—high tea at a tea café, concert in a park, visit a zoo together.



9. Encourage learning—pay for a class.
10. Provide good resources and an excellent library.
11. Listen.
12. Touch—with a hug.
13. Humor—Make it fun! Write down funny stories to share at meetings.
14. Have leaders commit your ministry mission statement to memory.
15. Have them commit to attend next enrichment event.
16. Bake a loaf of bread for each volunteer (or give them a coupon to a neighborhood bakery); attach a note thanking them for sharing the Bread of Life with others.
17. Give them a candleholder and candle with a note thanking them for sharing the Light of the World.
18. Evaluate the year together.
19. Commission the leaders to ministry on Christian Education Sunday.
20. Send a personal thank-you note on a regular basis.
21. Take pictures of classes, make 5 x 7's, frame them, and give them to the teachers.
22. Provide a mentor for a new teacher.
23. Provide postcard notes for parents to send to their child's teacher.
24. Study *The Courage to Teach*, by Parker Palmer, together.
25. Make a calendar for each teacher of pictures or creations from their classes.
26. Plan ahead—make schedules and curriculum available early.
27. Match people well—with tasks and age groups.
28. Train, train, train!
29. Be open to change.
30. Show the clip from *Mr. Holland's Opus* when Mr. Holland teaches the young boy how to play the drums. Give each teacher a drumstick for helping students to find the beat.
31. Cast a clear vision—people want to know that what they do matters.
32. Spend time with them.
33. Meet together at least quarterly.
34. Be less task-focused and more relationship-focused: people over principle.
35. Have a hospitality cart: serve teachers coffee and juice on Sunday mornings.
36. Have parents adopt a teacher for a year/month.
37. Good gossip and public praise: spread great stories about the teachers and the ministry.
38. Reports—videotape stories from students—show the clips at next meeting or appreciation breakfast.
39. Send a note of thanks to spouses and families of teachers.
40. Provide a Sunday brunch.
41. Begin an email newsletter to the teachers.
42. Provide special parking once a year.
43. Retreat together at a bed and breakfast with devotions and training in the morning.
44. Greet by name each volunteer every Sunday.
45. Ask "How can I help?"
46. Give autograph bears to be signed by kids.
47. Give a baseball cap with ministry logo.
48. Play the song "His Banner Over Me Is Love," by Cheri Keaggy, at a special night of desserts and devotions.
49. Assign parents as "encourager of the month."
50. Host an Oscars night for teachers.
51. Be available!
52. Make Wednesdays "Take a Teacher to Lunch" days.
53. Host a biannual fun night.





54. Value the students.
55. Communicate with parents.
56. Use teams to teach.
57. Buy a Valentine cookie with “thank you” written on it for each teacher.
58. Plan a calendar of “a thank you a month” ideas—and do it!
59. Have the youth group baby-sit while teachers go Christmas shopping.
60. Make special bookmarks.
61. Provide hot chocolate and cookies on a cold Sunday morning.
62. Take the families on a hayride.
63. Give fresh flowers to each volunteer or the “teacher of the month.”
64. Host a breakfast.
65. Provide clear ministry descriptions.
66. Host an appreciation tea, show the Ray Boltz *Thank You* video or read “Jesus Hands,” from *Love, Learning, and Laughter*, by Melinda Mahand (Life Way Church Resources).
67. Send encouragement sing-a-grams.
68. Think big—people live up to high expectations.
69. Plan a festive, fall kickoff party for teachers and spouses.
70. Boomerang training: have those who attend seminars share that learning with others.
71. Brownbag training: provide training at a workplace or in a park or the food court in the mall.
72. Let someone follow you around as you teach and ask questions of each other after class.
73. Form a book club and read and discuss three or four books a year.
74. Create a volunteer notebook that describes the ministry, expectations, and age group.
75. Provide a quiet place and time for prayer before Sunday morning classes begin.
76. Organize a free car wash for cars of volunteers.
77. Give a balloon bouquet.
78. Provide prayer partners.
79. Give encouraging stories from Max Lucado or Oswald Chambers or the Chicken Soup books.
80. Let the kids plan a party for the teachers.
81. Have the kids write notes to teachers.
82. Place homemade cookies in each room.
83. Have a massage therapist give backrubs at a meeting.
84. Decorate a plastic light switch with Micah 7:9.
85. Place fresh flowers in teachers’ rooms.
86. Give a gift certificate to TCBY or Baskin-Robbins.
87. Host a barbecue with special music and steaks on the grill.

Love Self

88. Take time with your family.
89. Join a fellowship or accountability group.
90. Keep a box of encouraging notes you have received, read them often.
91. Say “no” to a request, so you have time to say “yes” to something you really love.
92. Protect your time—take your day off!
93. Save energy for your family.
94. Educate yourself—take a workshop or training seminar.
95. Read something just for fun!



Where to Begin: Even More Best Practices

The Spirit of the Lord moves among us, and inspires us to creative and faithful ministries of education and discipleship. The resources that follow name hundreds of good ideas, tested and proven in real settings of ministry. Not all will be right for you; use wisdom and discernment to match these ideas to your congregation's vision for education and discipleship ministries. All of these resources are available from the RCA Distribution Center. To order, call 1-800-968-7221 or visit orders@rca.org.

For All Ages

Prescription for a Healthy Church: Ministry Ideas to Nurture Whole People by Jolene L. and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

Backed with extensive research from the Search Institute, this workbook helps you identify solid, practical ways to have a lasting impact on children, youth, and families. The book includes ministry diagnostic tools, real-life stories from churches that are making a difference, and reproducible worksheets and charts. (Published by Group Publishing)

#3650022154 \$17.99^{US}/26.10^{CDN}

For Children

The Church Cares for Children: A Handbook for Childcare in the Church by Mary Fowlkes

This spiral-bound book is a comprehensive guide for planning and administering weekday programs for childcare in churches and serves as a helpful tool for planning church school classes. Included in the book are ideas for learning centers, information on how children develop and grow, charts on appropriate and inappropriate teaching practices with young children, activities for celebrations and holidays, and much more. Eleven appendices include such topics as health and safety issues, discipline, guidelines for using music and the Bible with young children, and policy statements on childcare. (Published by Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]

#1600054006 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}

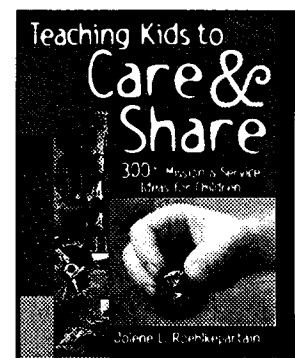
Teaching Kids to Care and Share: 300+ Mission and Service Ideas for Children

by Jolene L. Roehlkepartain

This book features 325 lively, age-appropriate projects and activities that involve three- to five-year-olds, six- to nine-year-olds, and ten- to twelve-year-olds in service to one another, their churches and local communities, and the world. It includes reproducible pages as well as a Scripture and topic index. (Published by Abingdon Press)

#2600084288 \$13.00^{US}/18.85^{CDN}

ISBN 0-687-08428-8





Things to Make and Do Series: Creative Activities for Children's Ministry by Martha Bettis Gee

Books in this exciting new series are perfect supplemental resources any time adults and children are looking for something special to do. Along with patterns, each book has detailed, easy-to-understand instructions. Activities are indexed by age groups and by name. (Published by Bridge Resources)

Things to Make and Do for Advent and Christmas

#2710095520 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}

Things to Make and Do for Lent and Easter

#2710095521 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}

Things to Make and Do for Pentecost

#2710095522 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}

Things to Make and Do Anytime

#2710095523 \$12.95^{US}/18.80^{CDN}

For Youth

Growing a Group by Lynn Turnage

In this book, Turnage offers her "Top 10" games/activities and the whys for using them with youth. She also includes her choice of "mop" activities—activities that may sound fun and effective but whose end results are not appropriate for group building.

#2740095534 \$10.95^{US}/15.90^{CDN}

Holidays, Holy Days, and Other Big Days for Youth: Ideas for Youth Ministry by Todd Outcalt

This book provides 100 ways to celebrate the holidays and special occasions that roll around each year. Ideas include talks, activities, object lessons, games, worship ideas, skits, and devotions to celebrate such times as Advent/Christmas, Lent/Easter, Pentecost, birthdays, Groundhog's Day, graduations, and obtaining a driver's license! (Published by Abingdon Press)

#3000082048 \$13.00^{US}/18.85^{CDN}

No More Us and Them: 100 Ways to Bring Your Youth and Church Together

With these 100 ideas, there's non-stop action for involving teens in intergenerational activities, service opportunities, ministry possibilities, church builders, and family events. Whether creating a church brochure or evaluating a vacation Bible school program, teens feel important and stay involved with their church. (Published by Group)

#2740020755 \$14.99^{US}/21.75^{CDN}

ISBN 0-7644-2092-5

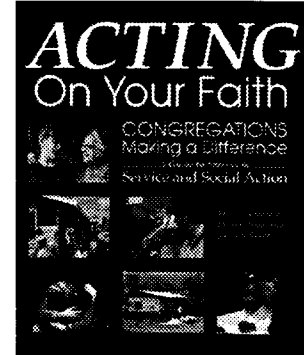


For Adults

***Acting on Your Faith—Congregations Making a Difference:
A Guide to Success in Service and Social Action***
by Victor N. Claman

This book is a wonderful blend of success stories, insights, and “how to” guidance. In seventy stories and 250 photos, you will meet congregations successfully involved in a wide variety of service, social action, and advocacy. (Published by Insights Inc., Boston)

#1600070100 \$25.00^{US}/36.25^{CDN}

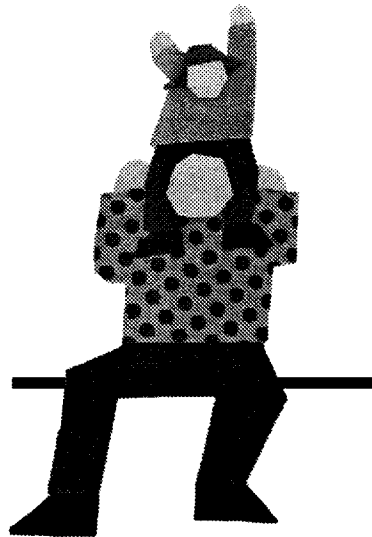


***Excellent Protestant Congregations:
The Guide to Best Places and Practices***
by Paul Wilkes

Wilkes profiles nine dynamic geographically and denominationally diverse congregations that have the ability to create a vibrant community of worship, Christian formation, and outreach. The geographic listing of over 300 excellent Protestant congregations and an index guiding readers to specific topics, such as stewardship, bereavement, and how to reach Gen Xers, make this book an invaluable resource for church life. (Published by Westminster John Knox Press)

\$18.95^{US}/27.50^{CDN}

ISBN 0-664-22329-X







RCA Educator

SPRING 2001

LEARNING FOR LIFE

By Jeff Japinga

Director of Congregational Services
Minister for Education and Faith Development

Have you heard the one about...

About what? About cloning or tech stocks or mutant viruses or satellites that tell us how to get home. About learning styles and brain-based education. How does it all work? What does it all mean?

I don't know; I suspect I never will. Every day I fall further and further behind the knowledge curve; every day new knowledge outstrips my capacity and my time to absorb it. Maybe knowledge alone was never enough (once I passed fifteen, when I thought I knew it all); in this age of information saturation, surely, one can never simply know enough.

That's why we need something more than just what we know, something that stirs our souls deep within us and gives us a place to stand amidst the whirlwind of the culture around us. And why, amidst that whirlwind, I suspect we share this same belief: that the ministry of Christian education, whether for children, youth, or adults, is perfectly positioned to make a significant impact on this ever-changing world of ours as we seek to grow religious knowledge into a living faith and a life as disciples of Jesus Christ.

I believe, for example:

- that we can prepare children and adults for an active faith that engages the world, not only by teaching what the Bible says, but by encouraging learners, adults and

children alike, to ask what this knowledge might have on the world around them;

- that we can encourage adults to learn and seek knowledge not just as individuals, but as communities which seek to evaluate moral applications of that knowledge;
- that we can model an education program that engages both mind and heart, that emphasizes knowledge and relationship, and that provides us with a firm foundation on which to stand.

These beliefs form the foundation for *Learning for Life*, a new initiative from the RCA's Office for Christian Education and the Council for Christian Education, a cooperative venture of denominational and regional educators.

What is *Learning for Life*?

Maybe the first question is, what isn't it? It isn't a curriculum, a one-size-fits-all program you simply plug into the wall. It's not a magic pill that will instantly revive a flagging education program.

Here's what it is: an invitation -- to you and to your congregation -- to build a renewed commitment to the activities that form our faith and help us live it, day in and day out, every day of our lives. It is an invitation to a life of discipleship -- and a means to live that life fully.

This is how we've stated our goal in the *Learning for Life* initiative:

To invite and encourage individuals and congregations to a renewed commitment to faith-forming

LEARNING FOR LIFE

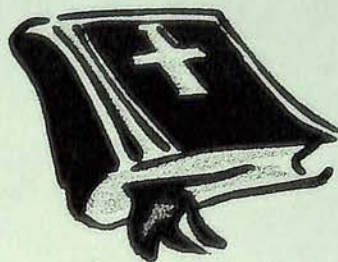
*activities, guided by the question:
What does it mean to follow Jesus
as a disciple in this day and at
this time?*

Learning for Life is built on these major components:

- a comprehensive congregational notebook, providing guidance, resources, and directions for how to build a commitment to learning and faith in your setting, not just this year, but for decades to come.
- media support, both at the denominational and local levels, focusing on real people and real ways to follow Jesus as a disciple, in the form of monthly ads in *The Church Herald*, beginning in July and continuing for a year, with the ability to reproduce those ads in your bulletin or church newsletter.
- additional resources posted on the RCA website, and periodic mailings and updates throughout the coming year.
- training and equipping events sponsored by regional synods, often in cooperation with CERCA and/or the denomination.

There is no higher calling in the church than to know God and to make God known -- to teach the faith, both to longtime Christians and to people hearing about Christ for the first time. *Learning for Life* is an invitation to a life-long commitment to be disciples and teachers of the faith, in your classrooms and in the community.

I hope Christian educators across the denomination will take this opportunity to join together in making learning for life a part of their journey of faith, into the heart of discipleship.



LEARNING FOR LIFE NOTEBOOK CONTENTS

The *Learning for Life* resource notebook comes packed with practical information and resources to help congregations teach and disciple people in their churches and communities. Here's what is included:

Introduction. Learn how to use and promote *Learning for Life*.

Bible Studies and Devotionals. Inspire teachers and leaders with Bible studies and devotionals by and for teachers.

Enrichment Workshops. Equip and empower teachers and leaders.

Evaluation Tools. Evaluate educational goals and programs.

Worship Helps. Make education a regular part of your worship experience.

Best Practices. Implement new educational programs and ideas.

Multi-Cultural Awareness and Education. Learn how to address multiculturalism.

Spiritual Gifts. Discover how identifying spiritual gifts helps in recruiting teachers.

95 Ways to a Strong Relational Ministry. Strengthen your teaching ministry with these quick and easy ideas.

Print and Video Resources. Find out what's new for your educational needs.

BANNER YEAR FOR CERCA ATTENDEES AT APCE

*By Karen Schakel
Holland, Mich.*

Thirty-two CERCA members attended the APCE conference in Birmingham, Alabama, early in February. That's a record number for CERCA, even though it's a small number compared to the total of nearly one thousand in attendance.

The following CERCA members attended APCE: Barb Boss, Amy Brigham, George Brown, Willa Brown, Sandee Clark, Karen Cross, Pat Eenigenburg, Wenda Fore, Mary Huisman, Jennifer Jackson, Jeff Japinga, Carol Knipple, Jane Konitz, Delores Koopmans, Peter Koopmans, Geania Lasda, Jerilyn Lueders, Nancy McNiven, Sandy Navas, Cindy Olliver, Jim Rozeboom, Karen Schakel, Jane Schuyler, Larry Schuyler, Deb Swanson, Dorothy Vander Werf, Arthur Van Eck, Eloise Van Heest, Ellen Vellenga, Arlene Waldorf, Colleen Wiessner, and Clara Woodson. They represented Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and North Carolina.

Seven of these were also workshop leaders at APCE: Barb Boss, Deb Swanson, Willa Brown, Jeff Japinga, Jane Schuyler, Karen Cross, and Clara Woodson. Three of the attendees were volunteer educators who were sent by their church in New Jersey -- an idea for other churches! We had a great time getting to know each other at a dinner for just us at a restaurant serving down-home Southern that was sleuthed out by Jeff's able assistant, Sue Ellis. (Thank you, Sue!)

The theme of the conference -- "Living Into God's Gift of Community" -- and the city and its history had a large impact on all of us. (See the article next article by Pat Eenigenburg.) Other highlights of the conference included the keynote speaker, Rev. Eugenia Gamble; outstanding workshops ("Multiple Intelligences for Teaching Adults"

led by Don Griggs and "Generations" led by Forrest Palmer gave me lots to think about); denominational and resource updates; celebration of CERCA's twentieth anniversary; recognition of Jim Rozeboom, our Educator of the Year; and "Three Men on Strings," after-dinner entertainment that had us all laughing so hard our sides ached.

Come join us next year in TORONTO to learn about new things in education, to be inspired, to meet other educators, and to have some fun! See you there!

APCE, BIRMINGHAM, AND CIVIL RIGHTS

*By Pat Eenigenburg
President of CERCA
Kalamazoo, Mich.*

What follows is from a program that Ellen Vellenga and I presented at a St. Valentine's Dinner on February 14, 2001, for our Wednesday night LOGOS groups.

Happy Valentine's Day. Since this is a day we talk about love, Mrs. Vellenga and I thought it would be a perfect time to tell you about a very special project we brought back from Birmingham, Alabama. We were there for a conference with one thousand other Christian educators a few weeks ago.

In LOGOS we consider everyone a child of God. Our only rule is that we treat everyone as a child of God. We have respect for every person, even ourselves, because we know God loves us and adopted us into his family.

However, having respect for all people is not easy. In fact, the opposite has been true in our nation's history. By law and custom African Americans have often been considered inferior and subject to abuse, particularly in the South. They could not vote. They were segregated into rundown, overcrowded schools. They could not live in certain neighborhoods. They had the worst jobs at the lowest pay. They had to stay in the back of the bus even when all the seats were filled there. They weren't allowed to sit and eat in

restaurants or use bathrooms at gas stations or stay in motels. They even had to drink at different water fountains. We were reminded of this at the Civil Rights Institute, which we visited while in Birmingham.

Then in the late 1950s and early 1960s things began to change. Blacks and sympathetic white people rose up and began to demand equal rights and freedoms. There were marches and demonstrations. There were voter registrations. There were new laws made in Washington, D.C., that were enforced by U.S. marshals and soldiers. Martin Luther King Jr. became one of the national spokespersons for this movement. I remember watching this on TV and talking about it in church and school when I was in high school in Detroit.

Birmingham was one of the focal points of the racial unrest. The 16th Street Baptist Church was the site of many meetings and the starting point of many marches. Unfortunately this enflamed the hatred and anger of prejudiced whites. They wanted to scare the blacks into submission and silence. At that time there were so many bombings in homes and churches that Birmingham became known as "Bombingham." But the struggle continued.

One particular bombing shocked the nation and the world. One Sunday morning as people were gathered for Sunday School, and young people were changing into choir robes, a bomb went off that blew a huge hole in the side of 16th Street Baptist Church, broke all the windows, injured many, and killed four girls. People of good will responded with sympathy, encouragement, and gifts. The people of Wales donated a stained glass window depicting a dying Christ.

During the years since the bombings, the people of Birmingham have worked hard to face their history and promote respect for all people.

This is the Birmingham Pledge:

- *I believe that every person has worth as an individual.*

- *I believe that every person is entitled to dignity and respect, regardless of race or color.*
- *I believe that every thought and every act of racial prejudice is harmful; if it is my thought or act, then it is harmful to me as well as to others.*
- *Therefore, from this day forward I will strive daily to eliminate racial prejudice from my thoughts and actions.*
- *I will discourage racial prejudice by others at every opportunity.*
- *I will treat all people with dignity and respect; and I will strive daily to honor this pledge, knowing that the world will be a better place because of my effort.*

(To learn how you can join others in signing this pledge, contact Pat Eenigenburg at eenigenburg@hotmail.com.)

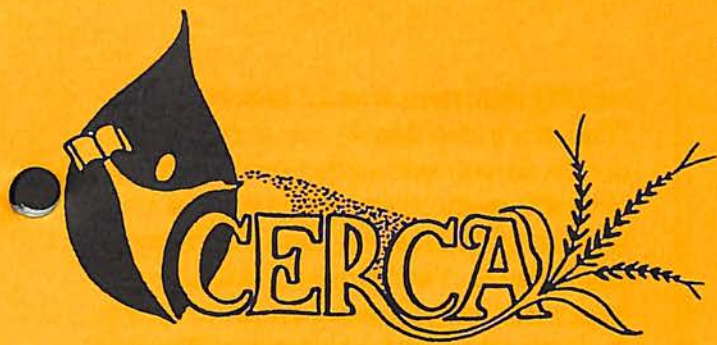
A DEVOTIONAL FOR EDUCATORS

THE LESSON

By Jean Otto
South Haven, Mich

As the robin hopped around my backyard she cocked her head, listened, and pulled up a worm. Then, without eating it, she chirped and repeated the process. When I noticed a fledgling nearby I realized a lesson was taking place. The baby waited in anticipation, then hungrily gobbled up the morsel. Next the adult chirped and pulled up the worm halfway. Now the baby had to finish pulling before he could enjoy his meal. This was harder. Often, he missed and the worm escaped. Frustrated, he squawked at the parent and danced around unhappily. But the lesson continued and soon the young robin was cocking his head, listening, and procuring his own food.

Learning can be exciting, stimulating, and intriguing. It can be monotonous, repetitious, and frustrating. But it is essential. As educators we know all about *teaching*, but how often do we take time to become



20TH ANNIVERSARY

VULNERABLE AND VITAL AT AGE TWENTY: A Brief History of CERCA

By George Brown Jr.

*G.W. and Eddie Haworth Professor of Christian
Education & Associate Dean
Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Mich.*

Christian educators from across the Reformed Church in America (RCA) gathered in Holland, Michigan, in October 1980. They had come together for "Educating for a Faith-full Journey," an event sponsored jointly by the RCA and Western Seminary, to hear John H. Westerhoff. During a plenary session these educators discussed the need for a professional Christian educators' organization. Participants recommended the formation of a task force to develop such an organization. In March of the following year, representatives met in Newark, New Jersey, to draft bylaws for what became Christian Educators Reformed Church in America (CERCA). By September, CERCA had twenty-nine members. The bylaws were adopted in October 1982 at a second denomination-wide event for Christian educators.

CERCA was created with a two-fold purpose in mind: (1) to promote and strengthen the church's education ministries and (2) to support and encourage RCA Christian educators, youth workers, and ministers of Word and sacrament who are engaged in the church's teaching ministry at congregational, regional, and denominational levels.

CERCA began as a small, voluntary organization for professional Christian educators and youth workers. From the beginning it was a grass roots movement. Now, two decades later, CERCA's size and voluntary

character reflect the organization's vulnerability and its vitality.

Because of its relatively small membership base (fifty-four members in 2001), CERCA has operated with limited financial resources for most of its twenty-year existence. CERCA is funded primarily through modest membership dues, with additional financial support coming from the RCA Office for Education and Faith Development and regional synods. Occasional individual gifts have also been received to help with travel assistance for CERCA-sponsored educator events and specific projects. Operating with limited financial resources meant that after the third RCA educator's event in 1984, such gatherings have become regional rather than denominational events.

Geography is another source of CERCA's vulnerability. Because CERCA members are spread across North America, it is not very easy to get the majority of the membership together in one place at any one time. Geography, together with budget constraints, has forced the fifteen-member executive committee to conduct much of its business by conference call and email, with once-a-year face-to-face meetings held in conjunction with the annual conference of the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators (APCE).

1999 marked a significant movement in CERCA's history. The Executive Committee created the position of Executive Coordinator and invited the Reverend Dr. Arthur O. Van Eck to carry out the responsibilities of that role. Having once served as the RCA's Minister for Christian Education, Art brought valuable denominational and ecumenical experience to this position. Recently retired from his work with the New Revised Standard Version of

CERCA HISTORY

the Bible for the National Council of Churches, he has had the time to give to CERCA.

CERCA's vitality can be seen in its contributions to the church's education ministries.

Competence and Certification

CERCA was born shortly after the RCA launched a process for certifying ministers of Christian education, directors of Christian education, and associates in Christian education. While the certification program of the late seventies proved to be flawed and ineffective, CERCA members assisted in revising the RCA's process for certifying Christian educators and worked hard in urging Christian educators and youth workers to become certified ministers of Christian education or associate in ministry. CERCA continues to be a vital advocate for competence in Christian education and youth ministry through certification.

Advocacy and Support

CERCA supports its members through regional and denominational events and the publication of the *RCA Educator*. In 2000, the executive committee established an educators' advocacy task force. The task force took up the work of a regional group of CERCA members convened by Deborah Swanson. The regional group had done some significant advocacy work, creating a bookmark reminding the church of core values for the teaching ministry, encouraging classes to overture General Synod regarding the status of associates in ministry, and brainstorming ways to support and encourage church educators and youth workers.

Recognition and Affirmation

CERCA recognizes and celebrates potential and achievement. CERCA created awards that affirm and celebrate excellence in Christian education at both RCA seminaries. Each year the faculties of New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Western Theological Seminary recommend a graduating senior to receive the CERCA Award in Christian Education. Beginning in 1982, CERCA has recognized outstanding contributions to the church's teaching

ministry by naming seven of its members "Educator of the Year."

Twenty years after the organization's birth, it is worth observing that the first recipient of the Educator of the Year award was Arthur O. Van Eck. It was Art who empowered RCA Christian educators by facilitating the first denomination-wide event in 1980, and who, through his office, supported and encouraged the creation of CERCA. In 1999, it was that same Arthur O. Van Eck who accepted the executive committee's invitation to become CERCA's first Executive Coordinator.

The vision for CERCA grew out of a gathering of Christian educators who had come to explore what it meant to be "Educating for a Faithful Journey." For twenty years, those educators and others who share their vision have continued on a faithful journey toward excellence in Christian education and youth ministry.

CERCA's past twenty years may be characterized by a focus on the education and enrichment of its members. Now, as CERCA moves into the future, the focus needs to shift to a more prophetic role. The establishment of the advocacy task force in 2000 already points us in this direction.

WHAT CERCA HAS MEANT TO ME

Through the past years, many of our educators have experienced the support and encouragement that the CERCA organization brings to their ministry. We'd like to share what a few educators have expressed to us about their experience with CERCA.

CERCA to me means being connected -- connected to other RCA educators throughout the denomination. Sometimes we in the West feel like we're doing ministry on our own, but CERCA keeps us connected. I appreciate CERCA being part of APCE so that we can participate in that annual conference. I always bring home great resources to enrich my ministry!

Lynn Taylor, Tustin, Calif.

CERCA has provided me a network of support people, people who walk the same Christian walk that I do. Together we meet to share ideas, resources, and the love of our Lord. CERCA members understand my sincere desire to bring Christ to every member of my church, my community, and the world beyond. They understand that I am not simply a glorified Sunday School Superintendent. They know me for the servant of God I am. They respect the gifts that God has bestowed upon me, and love me for who I am.

Desiree Albizu, Hudson, N.Y.

CERCA has been a source of great support and encouragement for me as an educator. I have made wonderful friendships and educational networks through my CERCA involvement. It also helped inspire me to obtain my certification as an educator.

*Mike Vanden Berg, St. Albert,
Alberta, Canada*

CERCA means friends, friends who support, resource, encourage, inspire me in my faith journey as an educator in the local church.

Dorothy Vander Werf, Glen Rock, N.J.

During the fifteen years I worked for the National Council of Churches, I had minimum contact with RCA educators. CERCA was like coming home for me as it constituted a network that kept me in touch with RCA colleagues, programs, and resources. It was my home page! In these two plus years during which I have served as CERCA's Executive Coordinator, CERCA has put me in touch with the energy and commitment being given through educators to the RCA. That keeps me energized.

Bud Van Eck, Fife Lake, Mich.

Through CERCA I experience recognition that Christian Education is my profession and my calling, and that I live both in the RCA. Through CERCA and APCE I developed my educational leadership and experience the joy of being mentored and of mentoring other educators across the denomination.

Colleen Weissner, Raleigh, N.C.

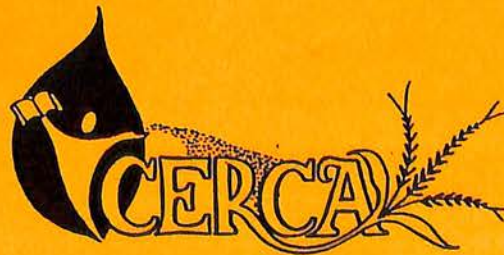
WE CELEBRATE CERCA!

*By Eloise Van Heest
Past President APCE
Past President CERCA
Holland, Mich.*

Christian Educators Reformed Church in America (CERCA) is twenty years old in this year 2001! The tenth anniversary celebration was held in San Francisco, California, and the fifteenth celebration was in Chicago, Illinois. The twentieth anniversary observance began in January in Birmingham, Alabama in connection with the Association of Presbyterian Educators (APCE) annual event, as the previous celebrations had been. Thirty-two RCA educators attended the conference and the specific RCA gatherings.

At this twentieth celebration, Jim Rozeboom, Minister for Christian Discipleship in the Synod of the Great Lakes, was named the CERCA Educator of the Year. This award is presented to someone who has been a member of CERCA for five years, active in Christian education for ten years, and made distinguished achievements in Christian education and who is breaking into new frontiers in Christian education. Our sincere congratulations go to Jim for his overall contributions in the field of Christian education.

Another highlight of the celebration at the APCE event was the special recognition given to RCA'ers who are Certified Educators of the RCA. Of the sixty-five Associates in Ministry and Certified Ministers of Christian Education, sixteen were in attendance to receive the certificate of recognition from Jeff Japinga, Minister for Education and Faith Development. Those not present at the conference received their certificate by mail.



REGIONAL EVENTS PLANNED DURING 20TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

During the coming year, celebration events will take place throughout the denomination, some in conjunction with Synod events or APCE regional conferences.

EASTERN REGION: CERCA members will meet with the APCE Northeast Region on May 8-10 at an event led by Marva Dawn. On October 13 there will be an RCA regional meeting with the focus on education. In the spring of 2002, a practical event for church educators will take place.

GENERAL SYNOD: The CERCA dinner is scheduled for Tuesday, June 12, at 5:00 PM. The program will consist of Year for Education "Learning for Life" highlights by Jeff Japinga and Bud Van Eck, with an opportunity for idea sharing and questions concerning education ministry in the churches. This will be followed by the motivational workshop, "You are the Message," at 7:00 PM presented by Bud Van Eck.

SYNOD OF ALBANY: An event is scheduled for September 29-30 led by Bud Van Eck.

MIDWEST MICHIGAN: A conference entitled "Practicing our Faith with 20/20 Vision" on October 15-16 at Western Seminary in Holland, Michigan, will feature Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass as presenters, with the Barkers from Northwestern College offering dramatic sketches. An opening banquet will be held at Hope College.

RCA CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS ATTEND APCE CONFERENCE IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA - JAN. 31-FEB. 3, 2001



Thirty-two RCA educators attended the annual APCE Conference and the specific RCA gatherings. Pictured left to right are: **Back Row** - Jim Rozeboom, Larry Schuyler, Jeff Japinga. **Middle Row** - Jeri Lueders, Karen Schakel, Eloise Van Heest, Mary Huisman, Pat Eenigenburg, Deb Swanson, Willa Brown, Bud Van Eck, Peter Koopmans, Jennifer Jackson, Sandee Clark, Delores Koopmans, Wenda Fore, Jane Schuyler, Colleen Weissner, Ellen Vellenga, Dorothy Vander Werf, Arlene Waldorf. **Front Row** - George Brown, Barb Boss, Jane Konitz, Nancy McNiven. Others attending were Amy Brigham, Karen Cross, Carol Knipple, Geania Lasda, Sandy Navas, Cindy Olliver, and Clara Woodson.

learners? Quality time spent in God's Word can refresh and stimulate. Lively discussions and sharing insights may awaken new perspectives. Educators must be willing, eager students!

"Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (Prov. 9:9-10)

PRAYER: Holy Spirit, encourage us to be learners as well as teachers.

RCA EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR IS NAMED

At CERCA's Twentieth Anniversary celebration during the APCE Conference, James Rozeboom, minister for Christian discipleship, Synod of the Great Lakes, was named RCA Educator of the Year.

Jim's interest in education began when he taught a Sunday School class while a student at Central High School in Kalamazoo, Michigan. While working toward a teaching degree at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, he counseled at Camp Blodgett, a camp for economically disadvantaged children.

After receiving his degree and teaching certificate, he taught at Meji Gakuin High School in Tokyo, Japan, for three years as a short-term missionary for the Reformed Church in America. On his trip home in 1964 he traveled around the world visiting many RCA ministries before returning to Grand Rapids to teach.

Jim earned a Master's Degree in guidance and counseling at Western Michigan University, and studied for two years at New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey. He graduated in 1969 from Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, with a specialty in pastoral theology.

Jim's ministry has included pastoral counseling at Annville Institute in Kentucky, an education position at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, and minister of Christian education at Fairview Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

He was president of the board of directors of Camp Geneva in Holland, Michigan, which affirmed his commitment to the camping ministry as an educational arm of the church. In 1981 he accepted the position of executive director of Laurel Pines Camp and Conference Center in Redlands, California, and later became director of education and outreach at Trinity Episcopal Church in Redlands. In 1986 Jim was called to become minister of Christian discipleship for the Synod of the Great Lakes.

During his nearly fifteen years serving the Synod of the Great Lakes, Jim has initiated a summer camp for economically disadvantaged children and teens, fostered the building of eight homes in Appalachia as part of youth work camp ministry, and orchestrated numerous retreats, workshops, and conferences for educators, youth leaders, pastors, and laity. Jim also developed ministry teams in education, spirituality, church life, senior adults, camp and conference ministries, youth, and diaconal ministries.

Permeating Jim's thirty-four years in educational ministry has been his consistent philosophy of living out the priesthood of all believers, making committees into communities, seizing teachable moments, providing an accepting learning atmosphere, and helping persons to experience "joy in the Lord as they grow in Christ to be the Church in the world." His theme echoes John 10:10 in which Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Jim and his wife, Mary, have two married daughters and a granddaughter.

Congratulations, Jim, RCA Educator of the Year!

CERCA PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Following is a portion of the report given by George Brown Jr. at the APCE Conference in February 2001.

As CERCA looks to the future, there are several challenges that will need to be addressed.

- **Challenge of continuity.** Some provision has been made for continuity by the creation of the position of Executive Coordinator in 1999, but the issue of leadership succession must be addressed if CERCA is to effectively carry out its states purpose. The executive committee will need to attend to the creation and cultivation of a leadership pool for the nomination and election of officers and executive committee members.
- **Challenge of cohesion.** Although CERCA is a small membership voluntary organization, its membership is spread across North America making face-to-face meetings (such as this one at APCE) difficult to achieve on anything but an annual basis. CERCA relies primarily on regional gatherings and the *RCA Educator* to create and sustain organizational cohesiveness.
- **Challenge of completion.** In rereading past minutes, there are initiatives that were adopted but never implemented or only initiated and not completed. Some of CERCA's inability to carry out some of its decisions is related to the challenge of continuity and to the voluntary nature of the organization.
- **Challenge of cash.** CERCA is not in a position to offer much financial assistance to help executive committee members pay for the expenses of attending the yearly APCE/CERCA meetings. Much of what CERCA accomplishes is due to the voluntary nature of the organization -- its

members contribute generously of their time and energy and even their wealth. CERCA depends on membership dues and voluntary contributions from the RCA and regional synods for income. At some point, CERCA will need to build an endowment to help provide for some of its financial needs.

On the eve of CERCA's twentieth anniversary, we can look back with satisfaction at the things we have been able to accomplish together. Just this past year, CERCA made a significant difference in the direction Christian education in the RCA was heading. CERCA's past twenty years may be characterized by a focus on the education and enrichment of its members. Now, as CERCA moves into the future the focus needs to shift to a more prophetic role. The establishment of the advocacy task force already points us in this direction. CERCA needs to be bi-focal -- with one lens directed toward the needs of its membership, and the other lens directed toward the church's need for leadership in Christian education. This is CERCA's calling as we look to the next twenty years.

*George Brown Jr., CERCA President
APCE Conference, Jan. 31, 2001*

CERCA A VITAL, ENERGIZING ORGANIZATION!

We encourage you to join CERCA. If the person who is working in Christian education or youth ministry in your church is not a member of CERCA, she or he is strongly encouraged to contact the treasurer, Delores Koopmans at 3501 W 3000 S Rd., Kankakee, IL 60901 or by e-mail: dkoopmans@juno.com for more information.

JOIN CERCA TODAY!

LOOKING AHEAD IN THE SUMMER ISSUE

CERCA's Top Ten Accomplishments during the past year, and visions for CERCA.

TOP FIVE RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS

By Jane Schuyler
Resource Specialist

RCA Distribution Center and TRAVARCA

As you prepare for fall, consider adding one of the following to your summer reading list: *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* by Thomas Groome.

Written with ecumenical sensitivity, this groundbreaking work reweaves old and new wisdom into fresh possibilities for education wherever it takes place. Groome's emphasis upon values includes appreciating the dignity of all people, fostering moral decision-making, working for justice and compassion, respecting one another and nature, drawing on the wisdom of our many traditions, and forming the whole person.

#3650003836 \$29.95US/43.45CDN

The Nuts and Bolts of Christian Education: Practical Wisdom for Teachers and Leaders

by Delia Halverson. Offering practical suggestions for organizing the day-to-day details of the teaching ministry, this book includes ideas for evaluation, budgets, classrooms, leading meetings, rally days, stewardship, care of volunteers, and nurturing one's own spiritual growth. #3650071160 \$16.00US/23.20CDN

Strategic Youth Ministry by Eugene C.

Roehlkepartain, Margaret R. Hinchey, I. Shelby Andress, and Jennifer Griffin-Wiesner. Based on a major Search Institute study, this book focuses on the practical ways you can strengthen your youth ministry in thirty-four areas that were found to be key in nurturing faith in adolescents. This is a book that you will continually dip into to get help for various areas of interest.

#2740021891 \$16.99US/24.65CDN

Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices by Craig Dykstra. Dykstra persuasively makes the case that the Reformed Christian community, in its own traditions, has a wealth of wisdom about satisfying spiritual hunger and the desire to know God deeply --wisdom that offers coherent, thoughtful guidance in such diverse settings as congregational life, families, youth groups, and higher education. In a refreshing final section, Dykstra tells stories about the kind of Christian

education that allows faith to come alive.
#3650500331 \$18.95US/27.50CDN

Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey:

Nurturing a Life of Faith by Catherine Stonehouse. This book shows how the spiritual life of a child develops and how caring parents and teachers can enhance this development. The book concludes with guidelines for designing children's ministries. #10000058074 \$16.99US/24.65 CDN

To obtain copies of these resources, contact Jane Schuyler at 1-800-968-7221 or orders@rca.org

READERS RESPOND

"How do you show appreciation to those who serve in the educational ministry in your church?"

Share your ideas so we can share them with all of our readers in our next issue. E-mail your response to *RCA Educator* editor Wenda Fore at wenda@iserv.net by June 15, 2001.

CERCA EVENT AT GENERAL SYNOD

A CERCA dinner is scheduled for Tuesday, June 12, at 5:00-6:45 p.m. at General Synod. The program will be a presentation of the highlights of the Year for Education *Learning for Life* made by Jeff Japinga and Bud Van Eck. There will be an opportunity to share ideas and to ask questions concerning educational ministries in the churches. Bud Van Eck will lead the motivational workshop "You Are the Message" at 7:00 p.m. for those who have the evening free. Invitations will be sent to local volunteer and professional education and youth workers. For more information, please contact Jerilyn Lueders at jlueders@heartlandsynod.org.



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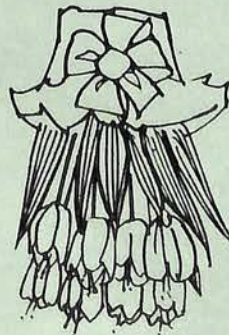
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Deb Swanson, APCE Representative

Jim Rozeboom, Member at Large, Youth Ministry Representative

George Brown, Member at Large, Past President, Seminary Representative

Focus: Learning for Life - Page 1-2
APCE - Page 3-4
Educator of the Year - Page 5
President's Report - Page 6
Resources - Page 7



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