

FOUNDATION PAPER

The following statement represents the theological foundation for Episcopal Children's Curriculum, a project of Virginia Theological Seminary, through its Center for the Ministry of Teaching, in collaboration with Morehouse Publishing. Adopted January 1990.

The aim of Christian education in Episcopal Church parishes and congregations is to assist every member in living out the covenant made in Holy Baptism (BCP, p. 304). Hence, the common ministry of teachers and learners focuses on matters of both faith and practice:

- Faith in God who made heaven and earth, in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and in the Holy Spirit who is Lord and giver of life.
- Practice of worship and prayer, of repentance and obedience, of loving service to all persons, and of active pursuit of God's justice and peace in the world.

The content of our faith and practice is continually reexamined and corrected as we search Holy Scripture and the preserved tradition of the Church. All Christians have access to these sources and are invited to discover for themselves not only the record of God's action in former times but also God's living presence in our contemporary world; in that sense, every member of the Church is engaged in theological reflection.

In every generation we consider afresh what it means to speak of the one God who created everything, who is still at work in Christ to "make all things new," and who is revealed in power and glory by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

To have a growing faith in the triune God is to be open to the "new" that is always breaking into every dimension of our existence. Teachers of children, youth, and adults in the Church play a vital role in helping learners to approach all of life with an attitude of openness in order to

discover and proclaim God's presence in relation to every event and movement. Our roles as teachers and learners require critical, discriminative thinking; Christian education's aim is to assist all members of the Church to discern the signs and spirits of the age and to bring sound theological judgment to bear upon what we observe and experience.

The educative efforts of a congregation thus seek to nurture the gift of faith and to encourage all members in a life of obedience to God's will. Such nurture and encouragement take the forms of ongoing participation and explanation:

- We participate in worship with the prime intention of honoring God as transcendent. We acknowledge our sinfulness and confess our need of forgiveness. We give thanks for the good news of the gospel—that in Christ we receive pardon for all our offenses and are made worthy to stand before God.

In the liturgical life of the Church we are confronted again and again with the story of God's creative and saving action in the world, revealed supremely in the life and work of Jesus Christ, our risen and ascended Lord. By continual participation in the prayers and rites of the Church, we are engrafted further into its holy fellowship and formed as the living Church—glorifying God in the company of apostles and saints who have gone before us, and with all our brothers and sisters in Christ at home and throughout the world.

Participation in the Church's common life of worship is absolutely primary for effective Christian education. But so also is participation in Christ's ministry to individuals in need and to the structures of society when they produce oppression, discrimination, and misery rather than health and wholeness for all of God's people. Thus we respond in our daily life and work to the saving gospel proclaimed by the Church, and to the challenge to take part in carrying out the Church's mission throughout the world.

- At the same time, we engage in a constant process of explaining to ourselves and others where we came from, who we are as baptized persons gathered at the Lord's Table, and what we are called to be and to do in this present time.

We strive for greater knowledge of, and the ability to share:

- the whole story of God’s revelation as we receive it from Holy Scripture;
- the lively and continuing tradition of the Church’s history and heritage;
- and the practices that are morally and ethically appropriate among contemporary followers of Jesus Christ.

The Bible, Christian theology, church history, and current issues in the world are to be faithfully explored in our struggle to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and to discover the will of God for our time.

There can be no substitute for serious efforts to teach and learn the Biblical narrative and the story of the Church in all their fullness.

The Church’s ministry of teaching is an urgent endeavor undertaken by God’s faithful people who renounce sin and evil, who turn to Christ as Savior, and who put their whole trust in the grace and love of God, living together as redeemed sinners in the community of the thankful.

Our common life in the Church is not only the locus but also the vehicle of Christian education. Knowing that the Church is called to be a sign to the world of the reign of God that is to come, we engage in our work as teachers and learners so that we may become a people known to bear one another’s burdens and to offer comfort and aid to all who suffer and are in need.

We seek also to foster well-informed and active membership in visible structures of the congregations and dioceses, as they pursue concrete acts of witness and mission to the world. We work together with our neighbors who are engaged in many kinds of work as they seek to serve the common good of humanity and to work for peace and justice.

Immersion in the Church’s faith and practice through regular participation and repeated explanation becomes, therefore, the foundation for Episcopalians’ work of Christian education.

The educative task in a parish or mission is a joint effort of clergy, parents, sponsors, and others in the congregation. We cannot rely solely on organized classes for the instruction and nurture of individuals. With the help and support of the whole congregation, parents—by word and example, prayers and witness—seek to bring up their children in the Christian faith and way of life.

It is incumbent on a congregation to provide opportunities for children, youth, and adults to study and learn with their peers. Well-planned congregational structures for Christian education contribute much to the Church’s vitality. Parishes that foster strong ministries of teaching for all their members are most likely to grow and to take on meaningful activities of Christian mission. The work of evangelization—reaching out to persons who are not yet baptized or confirmed in the Church—is best undertaken in parishes with strong programs of Christian education. Christian education is biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, spiritual, and ethical in content and character. But we do not teach in a setting extracted from the contemporary scene; we are set down in the world’s midst and must learn its language systems in order to communicate and interpret our faith within it. The insights and wisdom of every available discipline devoted to the pursuit of truth about our human situation offer valuable resources for our endeavor.

Members of a congregation, as it gathers for worship and study, bring with them the ways of speaking that are common to their everyday encounters. Teachers in the Church are aware that they must provide bridges between the Word of God (known to us in Jesus Christ, the Bible, and the Church) and the everyday life of learners. Persons who teach are involved in a continual back-and-forth movement between the peculiar language of God’s people and the pervasive languages of contemporary society. Toward that end, they are well served by knowledge gained from the social sciences in such areas as these:

- Research and information on patterns of human growth and stages of development that affect how we learn at each age level.

- Theories of group process and behavior that affect the climate of any formal effort to educate persons or to maintain institutions.

- Styles of pedagogy and models for teaching offered as options in schools and classrooms.

- Methods of objective evaluation of the progress of individuals and groups in an educational setting.

- Forms of media used in human communication, with assessment of their relative strengths and weaknesses.

At the very least, the following requisites for a steady program of teaching and learning in the Church will include:

* Committed and prayerful teachers who are dedicated to giving their very best talents and efforts to the enterprise.

* A community of people constantly concerned and willing to support and aid the Church's ministry of teaching.

* Appropriately designed materials for both teachers and pupils who study the Bible, the Church's story, and the full range of customs and practices of the Anglican and Episcopal traditions in particular.

* Conscious effort on the part of editors, writers, and teachers to relate subject matter to contemporary life issues, in ways appropriate to each age level, with special emphasis on the fostering of individuals' ability to make moral and ethical decisions that reflect their Christian faith.

* Ongoing discussion among teachers (in teams and small groups) concerning the nature of effective Christian education and their own roles.

Effective curriculum resources for Christian education in the Episcopal Church will include the following:

1. Teachers' background material for their personal enrichment as they prepare to teach from the Bible, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and other sources for interpreting the Church's faith and practice.
2. Helpful discussions of the age-level characteristics of learners.
3. Specific suggestions for teaching procedures.
4. Attractive materials to be shared with learners (such as texts and take-home items).

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