

Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

CALLED BY JESUS **Leader's Guide**



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BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

TEACHING YOUTH IN EPISCOPAL CHURCHES

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 (*The Book of Common Prayer*, page 304). Hence, the common ministry of leaders and youth 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 re-examined and corrected as we search Holy Scripture and the preserved tradition of the Church.

In the words of the Baptismal Covenant, we promise to “continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305). Holy Eucharist, the central act of worship for Christians, unites us with Jesus Christ our Lord. Again and again, as we partake of this sacrament, we remember and celebrate the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

We are called to follow Jesus, the Son of God, who lived among us as teacher, preacher, and healer. Through his powerful example, Christians have come to understand that the act of teaching is fundamental to our faith.

Teaching Is a Ministry

All Christians are teachers. Our daily lives bear witness to what we believe and treasure. Youth and leaders in the church are poised to share a singular experience that goes beyond the facts and activities of the moment. The aim of Christian education 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 task in a parish or mission is a joint effort of clergy, parents, leaders, and others in the congregation. We cannot rely solely on organized classes for the instruction and nurturing of individuals. With the help and support of the whole congregation, by word and example, by prayers and witness, we seek to bring up young people in the Christian faith and way of life.

Guidelines for Youth

The teenage years can be a time of special opportunities for encountering the invigorating challenge and abiding hope of the Christian gospel. Adolescents are continuing their journeys as full members of the Church, capable of taking part in all aspects of its governance and mission in the world. Within the Baptismal Covenant, this means worshiping and learning in the Christian community, resisting evil, proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ, seeking to serve Christ in all persons, striving for justice and peace, and respecting the dignity of all human beings.

The scriptural teachings of our faith should be affirmed in programs for adolescents. Faith fosters a personal relationship with God and enriches every human relationship. Youth need the Church's encouragement to think

critically and independently as they mature in faith.

The ongoing process of faith formation takes on particular relevance for adolescents who are coming up against questions of personal identity and life choices. That is why churches need to focus on welcoming and including young persons in every possible way.

Gifts of Youth. Adolescence is a time of questioning, debating, and searching. The faith of young Christians thrives when they are enabled to use their own talents and abilities in pursuit of the Church's mission, working with their peers alongside experienced adults.

Among the gifts adolescents bring are spontaneity, ebullience, vision, creative energies, and the ability to challenge existing structures and habits of the institution. As their convictions find focus and voice, earnest young Christians provide windows into God's presence and sometimes offer surprising perspectives for viewing the nature of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Counter Culture. An increasingly diverse, secular society tends to foster discrete groups with a variety of life styles. There are ever-changing forms of music, art, dress, language, and behavior. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to the societal influences of media presentations, advertising, and marketing. They manifest and live in what is popularly termed "youth culture."

The Christian faith, at its best, has always been a counter culture with a corrective and saving message for all who seek purpose and meaning in their lives. Christian educators strive to be fully informed about where youth are "coming from" in order to explore with mutual respect the claims of God in Christ.

Christian education can help youth to identify the tugging forces in their world. Many teenagers search for strength to handle difficult issues of theology, family life, relationships with friends, peace and justice, and ethics. The challenge is to find appropriate and respectful ways to interact with the vernacular of young people. If, in our ministry with adolescents, we try too hard to speak the language of youth culture, we run the risk of failing to share plainly the Church's good news.

Distinctiveness. Rapid physical, emotional, and intellectual changes occur during the teenage years. Sexual maturation proceeds rapidly. Social awkwardness and self-consciousness are often apparent. The role and timing of developmental changes may vary greatly among boys and girls throughout adolescence.

The challenge of ministry with youth is to meet the specific needs of youth with varied and appealing programs. Education for adolescents necessarily takes on a different look and style from programs for younger learners. An appropriate balance is necessary between active involvement of youth and lecture and instruction.

Continuity. It is desirable that people who work with youth have a mutually developed sense of purpose. Formal, integrated programs of teaching and learning, using suitable curricular resources, are needed.

At the same time, it is essential to maintain a sense of continuity in Christian education for the entire congregation as one people of God. At all age levels, we have a common need to know who we are as Episcopalians in the worldwide body of Christ.

Flexibility. Episcopal congregations schedule teaching and learning in different ways and at different times. Realistic assessment of the time demands on youth is essential in planning programs for adolescents. It is important to take into account young persons' commitments within their families and the wider community.

The principle of flexibility is particularly appropriate for developing study materials for use in the Church's ministry with adolescents. Especially desirable are themes study that can be adjusted to varying lengths of time, with modules designed to be arranged in a variety of sequences.

Groupings. Experience in general education suggests a workable approach for grouping adolescents: *Younger Youth* (ages 12-14, Junior High or Middle School grades) and *Older Youth* (ages 15-18, Senior High grades). In congregations where multiple groups are not feasible, a single youth group is best supported by flexible resources, adaptable to a range of developmental levels and interests.

UNDERSTANDING YOUNGER YOUTH

Who are the younger youth we teach? The key to understanding this age group lies in a heart-felt, enduring respect for youth as individuals. Such respect, accompanied by knowledge of the differences among us, shapes all our efforts as teachers.

Look closely at any group of young people, and it is readily apparent that on physical characteristics alone, there is considerable diversity within the group. Reflect further on the impact of different social and ethnic backgrounds, economic circumstances, schooling opportunities, skills and interests, and it becomes quite clear that narrow descriptions do not reflect the dizzying array of social and cultural diversity present among youth of the same chronological age. To teach youth as individuals requires that we first see them as individuals. We can turn to important sources of information:

- **Developmental theory** offers insights for the teaching task. Customarily, educators have looked primarily to such theories for help in understanding the growth and development of children. Younger youth are well past the early stages of development, however, and no single developmental viewpoint appears to be adequate by itself to provide a comprehensive basis for planning instruction.
- **Literature** is another source. Stories of youth enable adults to reconnect with adolescents and to experience, vicariously, radically different life-shaping situations.
- **Experiences** of teachers themselves can contribute much reliable information, including memories of their own journeys as young people.

Taken in combination, these three sources—theory, literature, and experience—contribute to a distinctive multi-dimensional perspective on the lives and learning of young people. This blend of insights will be especially helpful for teachers in church school settings.

Theory—A Source of Information

Developmental theories help us to see the expected, sequential patterns of

change from birth through maturity. All theories of development hold that increasing maturity brings a general increase in the complexity of behavior. Children move away from self-centeredness toward more social autonomy. Regardless of whether a theory uses ages or stages, the emphasis is on general expectations. No theory can completely predict the behavior of an individual.

Most of the mainstream theories were formulated without particular regard for the effect of gender. Today, we are living (and teaching) amidst a greater sensitivity to issues of developmental differences between girls and boys. (See Carol Gilligan's book, *In a Different Voice*, for an enlightening discussion on this topic.)

Thinking. We owe much to the Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, for underscoring the fact that the ability to think and form ideas changes as one matures and develops. Using cognitive stages, which may be loosely associated with ages, he defined the ways of knowing that move from sensing to concrete knowing to abstract thinking. According to Piaget, younger youth have just begun to use increasingly complex mental operations and are no longer constricted by what they can see. They can think about situations from more than one point of view, handle several ideas at once, and can move back and forth in relation to a particular idea. Around age eleven, the most advanced level of cognitive functioning may be reached. At this point, youth (and presumably, all adults) can imagine possibilities, reason abstractly, and think across time—past, present and future. All individuals move back and forth in these stages when new and unfamiliar concepts are encountered.

A note of caution: Cognitive theories do not specify *what* content students should be thinking about. And, perhaps more critically, Piaget's stages of knowing do not uniformly apply to youth from different social-cultural environments. Many observers feel that variations in life experience can dramatically alter the ages at which various types of cognitive functioning are likely to emerge.

Social context. During the adolescent years, youth increase and consolidate previous developmental gains in the context of an enlarging social group—family, friends, and community. Personal interests dictate much of what they are most likely to do. Parental supervision is giving way to self-supervision and independence.

Erik Erikson's work postulates a view of development that interweaves the powerful impact of social context with ongoing biological maturation. According to Erikson, at each of eight stages in life a major psychosocial crisis must be resolved in order for development to proceed. In Stage V, the teenage years, the dominant developmental crisis revolves around identity versus role-confusion. It is a period of confusion, searching, and experimenting with a variety of roles for future choices. A sense of loyalty for different groups often causes conflict within an individual.

Work by Lawrence Kohlberg, related to moral development, has melded ideas from both social and cognitive theory. With maturation, experience, and expanding strategies for thinking, youth and adults approach and resolve moral dilemmas in more complex ways.

Each of these theorists gives us a broader insight into the complicated interactive processes of development. While none of them specifically addresses the growth of religious thought, their work has underscored recent efforts to depict faith development for children and adults.

Literature—A Source of Understanding

Literature helps to expand our awareness of the wide variety of experiences of adolescents. Whatever the circumstances of our own youth, literature offers a credible opportunity to “walk in someone else’s moccasins.” Teachers of younger youth will be enriched by reading some of the novels about the struggles of young people.

Contemporary writers such as Madeleine L’Engle, and Cynthia Voigt introduce us to a modern generation of youth with complex issues, fantasies, struggles, and challenges which reflect still another generation’s efforts to deal with the universal themes. David Elkind and Michael Warren have written prophetically about the stressful and hurried lives of youth today.

Experience—A Source of Connection

The teen-age years are for most people traumatic. Very few individuals would wish to relive their teen years.

Ask yourself: In seventh grade, who were your friends? Your neighbors? Your favorite teachers? In the eighth grade? Ninth grade? How did you spend your time outside of school? Lastly, how many times have you said to a young person, “When I was your age, I”

Our own youth—with all the glories and all the miseries—generally becomes a subjective yardstick for measuring the events in the lives of our students. On a rational level, we know that students today have vastly different experiences at school, in the community, and with friends. The textures of their daily environments, both physical and economic, are critically different. Space missions are routine, and viewers literally watch in real-time as wars are televised.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of adolescents remain virtually unchanged across the years. Successes, failures, feelings, doubts, joys, and struggles remain a vital part of students’ daily lives. Universal themes are evident in the questions youth ask and the answers they seek: “Who am I? Whose am I? Why am I here? What should I do? Where am I going?” It is essential to acknowledge that these themes exist. They were part of our own youth and now become a powerful link with today’s students.

Faith in the Classroom

Faith is a gift from God.

We are people of faith.

These two premises underlie all that we say and do in church school classrooms. It is faith that gives church school its unique mission. We do not teach faith. We can surely hope that our work as teachers will nurture faith in the hearts and minds of our students.

Structure of faith

Teachers can interpret the actions and responses of their students better by knowing that faith is personal, always changing and growing. A widely-discussed model of faith development uses a pyramid framework of ages and stages to illuminate modal characteristics of faith across the life cycle.

According to James Fowler, younger youth are literalists (Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith), looking primarily beyond the family to other spheres. Faith provides a basis for identity.

In contrast, John Westerhoff uses the image of concentric rings to portray how faith grows and matures within the web of relationships in a faith community. In his model, the faith of adolescents is one of belonging to a

faith community (affiliative faith) yet moving beyond to question the faith of our parents (searching faith). The title of Westerhoff's book, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (1976), still resonates among leaders in Christian education.

Who are Youth?

Volumes have been written on adolescent development. The purpose here is to give leaders of this program some key pointers about the characteristics of younger youth to enable leaders to become effective teachers. This is not an exhaustive list and must be generalized. It is, however, important to be aware of these qualities and needs.

Characteristics of younger youth:

- **They like to have fun.** Fun is not the opposite of learning nor should fun be seen as something to be avoided. On the contrary, people learn best when they are having a good time. When youth are having a good time, they often make a lot of noise. Don't be afraid of a little commotion if most of the group are on task. Encourage your teens to have fun in your class and see how much they will learn.
- **Seek identity.** Younger youth are in an energetic process of seeking who they are, while at the same time, fearing that they may find out. Two key words for the wise leader are: accept and affirm. Accept each person as he or she is; look for qualities in each that you like. Don't try to change them. Affirm the skills, talents, questions, concerns and uniqueness of each person in an intentional way.
- **Like-making choices.** Many adults believe that younger youth should not be allowed to make decisions for themselves because they are too immature. Some people teach without seeking input or options from those they are teaching. Youth make decisions all the time. Our gift to them to help them to develop their abilities to make good decisions and to treat them as capable human beings.
- **Need to be heard.** One of the best tools you can provide for younger youth are opportunities to speak out and be heard, and to listen to others in the group with respect. It is important to set the example not by what you say but by what you do. Your ability to listen to youth and respond to their ideas and comments will be a model for their own listening skills. Being heard for even a moment can be a powerful experience.
- **Seek approval.** Approval from peers and adults is essential at this age. This need for attention and approval can lead to various expressions of behavior. Some youth will be over-achievers, trying to please by standing out above the rest. Others will seek attention by how they dress, or by the language they use. The skilled leader looks for ways to offer appropriate approval, acceptance, and affirmation while still providing guidelines, boundaries, and expectations.
- **Want to be valued and significant.** How you treat the younger youth in your class is much more important than what you teach. If youth feel important and significant, they are more likely to learn something from the class. It is also crucial to pay attention to how the

teens treat each other. The atmosphere of the classroom can enliven or poison the whole experience. Encouraging youth to behave in respectful ways to adults and to one another may be the most important lesson you can teach. Many youth in today's church school classes come from different schools, belong to different clubs and organizations, inside and outside of their schools. Building a successful group that reaches out in hospitality to newcomers and those on the fringes is one of the main goals of working with younger youth. It is also the message of the gospel.

- **More interested in who's there than what is taught.** The friendships that already exist and the friendships that develop are often the motivating factor for attendance and learning. The skilled teacher supports and encourages these relationship while trying to avoid cliques that exclude others. A key word here is inclusiveness.
- **Growing and changing.** Everything about this time in the lives of younger youth calls them to growth in mind, body and spirit. The hunger to grow (often subconscious) is a great ingredient for learning. Youth want to know more about the things that affect their lives. This includes God and knowing Jesus Christ. However, they also change constantly which makes them unpredictable. Accept these deep down longings and ever-changing attitudes as gifts.
- **Looking for a faith of their own.** Younger youth are seeking their own opinions, values, and faith. Their identity comes from becoming their own person. Youth often reject much of their parent's faith. This is an important sign that new values and a stronger faith are being formed. Embrace the searching process and affirm the importance of the ability to question, doubt and think. Your response to their doubts will encourage or discourage their journeys to spiritual knowledge. Their questions will ultimately lead to faith.

WHO ARE LEADERS?

Leaders of youth are more than teachers. To foster effective teaching and learning among its adolescent members, the Church needs adult leaders who are grounded in their own faith and identity as Christians. Effective leaders are excited about growing and learning and enjoy working with youth in a team relationship. They have high energy, genuine enthusiasm, and a passionate interest in youth.

Because church leaders are expected to have a unique relationship with youth, the teacher/student relationship does not work well on Sunday morning with younger youth. Teens have been in that role all week and want something different. While it is important to share knowledge, it is more important to develop a group that can share their faith. Here are some characteristics commonly found in effective youth leaders.

- **Rooted in their faith and committed to Jesus Christ.** Who leaders are speaks loudly to teens. This doesn't mean that leaders have to be biblical scholars or perfect Christians. It also doesn't mean they no longer have any doubts or are at the end of their own spiritual

journey. Good leaders have a strong relationship with God and are comfortable with their faith.

- **Is Willing to be a part of a team.** Helping a young person to grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord is an overwhelming task. It is essential for leaders to understand that they do not have sole responsibility for this task. Wise leaders know that they are not only part of a teaching team but also part of a network of people in the church who care about and support young people.
- **Is fun and enjoys being with young people.** A key phrase to help leaders is “relax and enjoy.” Effective leaders know how to have fun and to share joy with young people without giving up expectations of them. Leaders must find their own balance of fun and seriousness. Affirming joy and excitement with the group, however, is essential for the leaders' full participation.
- **More concerned about people than facts.** The ECY provides an excellent base of information to learn more about God, scripture and the Church. The sessions incorporate this learning with the issues that effect young people's lives. Effective leaders are aware of issues that are unique to their groups and look for ways to include these ideas in their presentations. When leaders give priority to what youth are thinking and feeling, the content follows.
- **Has a long-term commitment to the group.** Good leaders are committed and consistent. There will be ups and downs, and successes and failures. Some weeks the youth may be impossible to reach, but the steadfastness of faith and commitment to the class will make a real difference in the long run. Focus on the overall success of the program and not on any one moment, hour, or week.

Building the Team

The *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* is designed to be used with a team approach. Having more than one leader allows young people to have a variety of models of Christian faith. Young people relate to different adults in unique ways. This range of relationships and friendships is important. Also, the team approach allows for mutual support of the adult leaders.

Sometimes an adult leader will see an issue raised by a youth as a challenge to authority. Another leader may have a different perception of what is causing the conflict and be able to step in to maintain the relationships. It is also essential for reasons of safety and protection to have teams of adults working together at all times. Finally, each person has different gifts. When each of the gifts are given together they far exceed the gifts of one individual.

The best way to function well as a team is to spend a block of time together before the year begins. It is ideal to have eight to ten hours for this purpose. The team may decide to meet several times or go on retreat somewhere for this purpose. The team should decide which setting works best for them.

Suggested activities to help the team plan their strategies are outlined below:

- **Begin with social time** together, including sharing basic facts about each other.
- **Share faith stories.** A simple way to do this is to ask people to make a chart from birth to the present showing the highlights and low moments of their faith journey. Allow time for everyone to finish before sharing so each person can listen to each presentation.
- **Make a list of each person's gifts** and identify the gifts, talents or interests that he or she would like to contribute to the class.
- **Working Together.** Discuss how the team will work together including roles, tasks, and schedules. Be sure to include in your discussion how young people will be used as leaders in this program (see section on youth as leaders).
- **Review the curriculum materials** together and discuss the best ways for the team to use them.
- **Planning.** Draw up a plan for the year with clear responsibilities for each team member.
- **Leaders need information and training.** Any effective leadership program begins with the sharing of information and the training of skills. This is no less true for Christian leaders. The ECY offers materials to provide a strong base of information about scripture, theology and the Church.
- **Teamwork does not mean just rotating Sundays.** A true team requires blending-together time, talents, skills and gifts. The team should discuss and clarify the ways they will work together before beginning. The team should feel both energized and excited as they initiate this venture.

Youth as Leaders

Young people are able to assume responsibility for their own learning. As leaders they help to plan and to carry out programs. It is imperative that adolescents develop a sense of real ownership and personal investment in the Church's life and mission. They need assurance that their decisions and contributions are respected and valued.

A basic premise of this curriculum is to not only teach students but also raise up Christian leaders. Many young people have outstanding leadership qualities. These qualities can be used to develop an exciting program of learning and growth. Often adult leaders overlook or ignore the leadership capabilities of younger youth who have so much to offer. Do not make this mistake. The following list will help you to recognize, build, and utilize the youth leadership of the group.

- **Sharing Information.** In order for youth to participate effectively in planning for and leading a group, they must have the basic information available to leaders and be able to make choices of their own.
- **Training usually involves practice.** Allowing the teens to try out

new ideas, theologies and skills in a safe environment is a great way to train them for leadership roles. Giving them opportunities to lead the group is a way to practice the gifts and talents that God has given them.

- **Young people are not “blank slates.”** The youth in the group come with a richness of ideas, thoughts, opinions, and experiences. They are not empty, inexperienced human beings just waiting to receive facts and gems of wisdom. They have as much to teach as they have to learn. Often they are so used to being treated like “blank slates” that they are reluctant to share all that they have to offer. When they trust that their experiences and opinions are valued, a whole new world of information, learning and sharing will open up. Encourage this process, and be patient if it takes some time for it to develop.
- **People deserve input into decisions that affect their lives.** Youth in your program deserve to have input into their learning process. Often adult leaders plan the sessions with little or no involvement from those they are trying to reach. This often leads to apathetic learning. Also, the adults miss the benefit of the wisdom and understanding of the youth about their needs, desires and insights. Although the process will be different in each situation, be intentional about learning from the youth both before beginning and then during the sessions.
- **Young people should be responsible for their own learning.** One way to value the participants in the group is to allow them to take responsibility for their learning. This means agreeing ahead of time what will be learned and how the learning will be carried out. A contract or covenant should be established with the group, and the adult leader should hold people accountable to what they have agreed. It will take time to develop the trust for this to happen, but the benefit is enormous.
- **Leadership skills apply to all facets of life.** If adult leaders are successful at lifting up youth leaders, the skills developed will affect other areas of the youth's lives. Youth group members will find themselves involved in leadership roles in their schools, families, churches and other organizations. They will have discovered tools that will last them the rest of their lives. These skills along with their Christian faith will make an impact on all with whom they come in contact.
- **Forming a youth leadership team.** Although a youth leadership team will have many variations depending on each situation, it is recommended that one is formed. This may be as simple as gathering a few young people ahead of time to review the materials and make suggestions on how best to use this curriculum. A team of youth that meet with the adult team regularly and share in planning for the sessions can be developed. Certain sessions or projects could be given to a small group of youth to let them “run with it.” It is important that the adult leaders build in some time to plan the role of young people as leaders of this curriculum.

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THE EPISCOPAL CURRICULUM FOR YOUTH

The Curriculum uses a cumulative framework of twelve modules to be used over a period of years. Designed for Younger Youth who may be in Middle School or Junior High, it provides choices for leaders and youth to compose their own unique sequence of lessons. Three of the modules focus on Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures), three on the New Testament, and three on Contemporary Times. Within each stream are the archetypes of **Call, Covenant, and Community**. In addition three modules are on the basics of *Sacraments, The Episcopal Church Year, and Spiritual Life*.

A Tool for Teachers

The aim of the *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* (ECY) is to sustain and strengthen the ministry of teaching in the Episcopal Church. The curriculum's focus on classroom-based efforts does not deny the importance of youth groups, confirmation classes, retreats or other patterns of Christian education in a local congregation. It does reflect an intentional decision to

affirm the act of teaching and spotlight the respective roles of teachers and learners.

The curriculum is a tool for teachers. It serves as a resource to help teachers formulate answers to three pivotal questions:

- **What do I teach?** The curriculum offers a series of modules on twelve different topics. Leaders using the materials are expected to pursue actively an adult-level understanding of the content of the session outlines, taking seriously their own roles as learners.
- **Whom do I teach?** Leaders are challenged anew to adapt to both the developmental characteristics of the group as well as the particular interests of each individual. The ECY addresses issues of developmental differences from two important perspectives. Content is developmentally appropriate, using Scripture as a basis for exploring issues with younger youth. Within each session provisions are made in activity suggestions for varying degrees of skill and learning styles among students.
- **How do I teach?** The curriculum was written for leaders by clergy and laity who work with youth. Options and guidelines are included to help leaders make adjustments to fit local circumstances. Embedded in the kaleidoscope of optional activity suggestions given for every session are practical comments and specific tips for guiding the process of learning.

It is hoped that leaders who use the ECY will be nurtured, inspired, and enriched personally as they prepare to teach and learn and as they reflect on their efforts.

Teachers will find that the session outlines in this guide provide support and structure for the inexperienced and both challenge and flexibility for the more confident. It is highly recommended that every leader have ready access to a Bible (NRSV), *The Book of Common Prayer*, and *The Hymnal 1982*. Each session includes the following:

- **Objective** statement, to state the concepts along with objectives.
- **Background for Leaders and Personal Views**, to provide factual background and personal inspiration.
- **Tips on the Topic**, to offer useful information about working with this age group.
- **Weavings**, to prompt thinking about how this session fits into the year, vocabulary, and current events.
- **Look For**, to provide thoughts on follow-through of the session.

USING THE CURRICULUM

Planning Class Sessions

Planning sets the stage for teaching and learning. In preparation for meeting with students, teachers need to *select* a set of activities, and then put these activities into an *order* for each class meeting. The session outlines of the Episcopal Curriculum for Youth offer three sets of activity categories that can be used to compose a class session. These are:

Teacher Supports—six sections directed at helping teachers prepare.

Essential Activities—Coming Together, Engaging, and Going Forth are the three core experiences for each session.

Optional Activities—a variety of different suggestions of activities, which teachers may choose to do in a given session. *No teacher or class is expected to use every optional activity in any session outline. The stress is on choice.*

The session categories function as the building blocks for planning. There is no single, “right” way to plan a class session. Teachers can construct an activity/time schedule for each class session that fits the time available, builds on their own skills, and meets the needs and interests of youth.

Teachers facilitate classroom activities through interactive planning with youth. Teens will be able to exercise leadership roles in choosing and implementing what they wish to explore. Students' interests will strongly affect the direction of theme exploration and conversation.

Teachers understand their students. Students deserve attention, affirming experiences, and reasonable challenges. To nurture and guide the faith journey of another person demands a personal relationship. Bonds of trust, respect, and affection grow where caring and understanding prevail.

Teachers are interpreters. Students can expect honest answers to their questions—including the response, “I don't know.” In classroom situations, what students talk about, question, explore, and wonder about reflects their teachers' ability to mediate and interpret faith and heritage. Often the simplest of questions can evoke profound discussion.

Youth can be intensely interested in wrestling with “real-world” ethical issues. As teachers and students engage in conversations of faith, they are sharing feelings and values, as well as words and facts. In a very real sense, teachers expose their beliefs when they engage in conversation with youth.

The Learning Environment

The setting where the group meets is crucial to the success of the program. In short, the less like a classroom it is, the more you will be able to facilitate learning, sharing, and growth. Pay attention to the environment you are providing, as this will make a great impact on the learning process.

Consider three possibilities to create the desired environment.

- **The youth room.** One good alternative is a room at the church designated for young people and arranged with comfortable chairs, couches, etc. This provides a comfortable and inviting atmosphere.
- **Meeting in a home.** Holding meetings at someone's home who lives nearby the church can be a great asset. This provides a casual, comfortable setting that usually enhances the process. This may provide some logistical problems for younger youth but it is well worth investigating. Also, people may be more open to making their homes available if it is done on a rotating basis. Don't rule out this possibility without carefully considering it.

- **Gathering in a restaurant.** A restaurant can provide a wonderful opportunity for a meal, fellowship, and learning. Often young people who wouldn't come to the church will feel comfortable in this setting. Of course, this will raise some financial considerations, but these are not insurmountable. You could also consider meeting at a restaurant on an occasional basis as a way of promoting outreach and for celebration.

A Final Word

Remember that this is a process of helping young people grow in their knowledge and love of the Lord. There will be ups and downs, successes and failures, joys and frustrations. Often you will never know the impact you have made on a young person's life. So much happens intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually at this time in their lives that they themselves are not aware of the people who have had a direct impact. Share the love of Christ with your young people. Remember that God has called us not to be successful but to be faithful. Thanks be to God.

CALLED BY JESUS

The content of this module focuses on New Testament and Call. Titled *Called by Jesus*, each session examines the lives of people in the early Church and their relationship with God and Jesus Christ. Each individual's relationship with God is engaged, challenged, and nurtured by their encounter with the Son of God, Jesus. Youth today are also seeking a relationship with God through Christ, even if they are not willing to admit it. They often experience doubts and questions that need to be listened to and worked through. Seeing themselves as Christians in a relationship with God and called by Jesus to live out the promises of the Baptismal Covenant is the hoped for outcome of this course of study.

The Episcopal Curriculum for Youth provides materials for both leaders and youth.

For Teachers

- **Leader's Guide** (this volume)

Contains 9 sessions of material. The sessions are:

Jesus: God's Son

Peter: Recognizing Christ

Philip & Nathanael: Following Christ.

Woman at the Well: Welcoming Outsiders

Mary Magdalene: Staying True

Nicodemus: Learning From Jesus

Mary, Martha, & Lazarus: Life Out of Death

Thomas: Searching for Jesus

Stephen: Called to Be Different

- **Poster Pack**

Offers 6 large sheets of color posters or black-and-white resource posters. Intended for use as a classroom resource.

The Guide and Packet are undated and can be reused. We recommend that congregations have one Leader's Guide for each

teacher along with one Poster Pack for each group of youth.

For Students

- **Session Leaflets** (student leaflets—one for each session)
In attractive, colorful format, each leaflet includes:
Scripture
Commentary and prayer by youth
Illustrations
Voices: thoughts from various authors, politicians, theologians, and others on the session topic
Prayers and words to remember
Bible reflections to read during the week

- **Bibles and Prayerbooks**
Special editions of the Holy Bible and *The Book of Common Prayer* have been created for the *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth*. It is recommended that each youth have their own copy of these important books of our faith.

- **Additional Gear**
Backpacks, patches, bookmarks, and bookplates are also available to give youth a sense of belonging and common purpose.

Teaching Resources

Bowman, Locke E., Jr. *Teaching for Christian hearts, souls, and minds*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990.

Farnham, Suzanne G., et. al. *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community*. Harrisburg: Morehouse, 1991.

Little, Sara. *To set one's heart: Belief and teaching in the Church*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983.

Harris, Maria. *Teaching and religious imagination*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

Kujawa, Sheryl A. and Sibley, Lois. *Resource Book for Ministry with Youth and Young Adults in the Episcopal Church*. New York: Episcopal Church Center, 1995.

Music Resources

Gather, Volume 1 and Volume 2. GIA Publications, Inc. 7404 South Mason Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60638, 1994.

Baptist Hymnal. Nashville: Convention Press, 1975.

Glory and Praise, Vol. 2. Phoenix: North American Liturgy Resources, 1982.

Glory and Praise, Vol. 3. Phoenix: North American Liturgy Resources, 1982.

Lift Every Voice and Sing II. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1993

Songs for Celebration. Church Hymnal Series IV. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1980.

Jesus: God's Son

Called by Jesus

Objective

This session focuses on the baptism of Jesus as he comes to an understanding of his call. Youth will be able to tell the story of Jesus' baptism and explain the significance of this event.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. A key name is John the Baptist; the key place is the Jordan River; the key event is the baptism of Jesus and the voice of God declaring Jesus to be his beloved son. For spiritual preparation, think about the role of humility in your life and the meaning of baptism.

Commentary

The baptism of Jesus appears in all four gospels in some form, though each account varies in the details. Both *Matthew* and *Luke* follow the story originating in the *Gospel of Mark*. However, only *Mark* and *Matthew* name John as the one who baptizes Jesus.

This narrative poses several questions. First, who is Jesus? What is Jesus' relationship to John? Both Jesus and John formed a movement and were accompanied by a group of followers. At that time, people were confused about which leader was greater.

John himself claimed that he was preparing the way for a person who would be mightier than him. As part of that preparation John called the people to own up to their sins. John baptized converts who answered his prophetic call to repentance and forgiveness of sins.

When Jesus arrives at the Jordan River to be baptized by John, John realizes that Jesus is the person he has been waiting for. John recognizes Jesus as one without sin, saying that Jesus should be the one baptizing. Jesus points out that his baptism by John is appropriate to fulfill "righteousness," that which is meant to be according to God's plan.

Baptism takes on a whole new meaning: it is not to cleanse Jesus' sin, but to identify him as God's son who brings God's kingdom on earth. The story of Jesus' baptism describes a rite of passage in Jesus' life, marking the beginning of Jesus' formal ministry. The event is described as it unfolds through Jesus' eyes.

After Jesus is baptized, he sees the sky open up and the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit in the form of dove, coming down upon him. And he hears God's voice announcing his kinship and favor.

Personal Views

When Jesus approached John at the Jordan, John was surprised and probably embarrassed. Have you ever dreamed of meeting someone all your life? Here was the one for whom John had spent his entire ministry preparing the way. And he wanted John to baptize him! How would you react if the person you wanted to meet asked you to do something for him or her?

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—*The Child's Life of Christ*
 - **Key Verse**—*And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*
Matthew 3:17
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Philip Schaff, Henry David Thoreau, Ernest Renan, Inscription on a castle wall in Scotland
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—The Baptism of our Lord (BCP, p. 214)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Matthew 3:13-17

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Be sensitive to youth who may not have been baptized. Emphasize the love that Jesus has for all people.
- When you mention familiar characters in the Bible such as John the Baptist, don't assume that everyone knows who they are. Always provide background information when new people are introduced.
- **Discussion Starter:** How would you feel if Jesus approached you today and asked you to do something for him?

Jesus' humble response to John and his subsequent baptism provides a model for us. Throughout scripture, Jesus is portrayed as humble and obedient to God's will. In this story, Jesus indicates that this baptism is necessary. He refuses the superior position. Because of his humility and obedience something spectacular takes place. The sky opens, and the Holy Spirit appears. God's voice is heard!

Jesus began his formal ministry with baptism by water and the Spirit. Every time we participate in a baptism, each of us witnesses something spectacular. Through this act, we are prepared for ministry, and each of us is proclaimed and marked as Christ's own beloved by water and the Spirit. Imagine the feelings of awe and wonder those at Jesus' baptism must have felt. Do you experience the same feelings at baptisms in your church?

Read over the service of baptism in *The Book of Common Prayer* beginning on p. 299. Imagine God's voice at your own baptism. What does God say to you?

Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in these your servants the covenant you made with them at their Baptism. Send them forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before them; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Service of Holy Baptism
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 309

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

In a prominent place in the room, hang Resource Poster No. 1 showing the baptism of Jesus. At four places around the room, place a Bible opened to one of the gospel passages about Jesus' baptism: *Matthew 3:13-17*, *Mark 1:9-11*, *Luke 3:21-22*, and *John 1:29-34*.

As youth arrive, assign them randomly to one of the four stations. Ask them to read the account of Jesus' baptism in their assigned passage.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Matthew 3:13-17* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, thank you for baptism. It is very special. I pray that in my world I will be able to see you and hear your voice telling me that I belong to you and that you are pleased.

Julian, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Matthew, chapter 3, verses 13 through 17.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

With a marker, divide a large piece of poster board in half lengthwise and horizontally to create four quadrants. Then draw a circle in the center of the board around the point where the four quadrants meet. Cut the four quadrants apart and label each quadrant with the name of one of the four gospels: *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*.

Give each of the groups from the Coming Together activity the quadrant that corresponds to the gospel they read. Invite them to illustrate the baptism story from the gospel, leaving the area in the circle blank.

Bring the groups back together to compare the baptism stories.

- How was your baptism like Jesus' baptism? How was it different?
- How does baptism relate you to Jesus? To others in your church? To people in this group?
- How is the Spirit a part of baptism?

Put the poster board back together and look at it for a moment in silence. Compare the four drawings. Which symbols did the different groups use? What do they have in common? Write descriptions of similarities in the circle where the four quadrants meet.

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **Imaging baptism:** Write about or draw pictures of your own baptism. Use your imagination from stories you have heard from family or godparents or from other baptisms you have witnessed. If you have not been baptized, illustrate a possible future baptism.
- **Improvisation:** Identify key elements in the gospel accounts of baptism, such as the dove, water, sky, Jesus, John. Recreate the story by taking on the roles of these elements.
- **Spirit and water:** Make a new creation with the Spirit and water. In a basin of water, put several drops of different colored, oil-based paints. Carefully pass a piece of white paper slightly below the surface of the water to catch the colors. Lay the marbled paper flat on newsprint to dry. How are oil and water used in our baptisms?

Games

- **Symbols of Grace:** Identify the major characters in the account such as Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Holy Spirit. Divide youth into teams, then select one character. The object of the game is for each team to write down as many different symbols for each character within a time limit. To help the teams, bring resources such as religious art books, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and Bibles. At the end of a few minutes, list the symbols. Look for creativity as well as quantity.
- **Water Balloon Toss:** Stand in a circle and toss a balloon half filled with water from person to person. Make the circle larger at intervals. See how long you can keep the game going before the balloon breaks.

Media

Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch the scene from *Awakenings* where the patient, played by Robert De Niro, comes out of a catatonic state. Or show the scene from *The Miracle Worker* at the water pump when Helen Keller understands the concept of language for the first time.
- **Print:** Find pictures in magazines that show water or that symbolize spirit. Create a collage that brings the symbols together.

WEAVINGS

- This session may be scheduled in January on the first Sunday after the Epiphany when the baptism of Jesus is celebrated.
- The symbol of the dove is first used in the Bible in *Genesis* when Noah sends the bird to look for a sign of dry land. The psalmists refer to a dove several times, once in *Psalms* 74 as a symbol of Israel. There are also references to doves in the books of the prophets and in the Apocrypha. Today we associate the symbol of a dove with peace and hope—two ideas that could be ascribed to the Holy Spirit.
- Water is significant and sacred for many religions around the world. Because water is necessary for life, it is revered and cherished. In our own faith, it is a symbol associated with being born anew through the sacrament of baptism. Think about the importance of water in your life throughout the day.

RESOURCE POSTER

- The Baptism of Jesus (No. 1)

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of Bible and Church activities. The music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Read or sing "When Jesus went to Jordan's stream" (*The Hymnal* 1982, 139).
- Sing "Wade in the Water" (*Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, 143).
- Listen to Handel's *Water Music*. Why was it named that? What does it make you think of?
- Put on white-noise tapes with sounds of the ocean or of water flowing. Are the sounds relaxing? Do the sounds reflect the comfort of the Holy Spirit?

Service

- **Ministry:** Read the Baptismal Covenant on p. 304-305 in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Look at the five questions on ministry in the covenant. Find a group project that meets the criteria in the answers to the ministry questions.

Sharing

- **Decorate:** Use the drawings or the marbled paper made for the Expressions activities to decorate the entry to the church on a Sunday when a baptism will occur.

Study

- **Catechism:** Study the section on Holy Baptism in the Catechism beginning on p. 858 of *The Book of Common Prayer*.
- **Water symbols:** Using a concordance, find other places in the Bible where water is used in a story or as a symbol. Where is the first reference? The scripture references in the Reflections section of the Session Leaflet also illustrate different ways water is used in the Bible.
- **Cousins:** Read about John the Baptist's birth and kinship to Jesus in *Luke 1:39-80*. Who was John's mother? How was she related to Mary, the mother of Jesus?

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Without Christ life is as the twilight with dark night ahead; with Christ it is the dawn of morning with the light and warmth of full day ahead.

—Philip Schaff

It is only by forgetting yourself that you draw near to God.

—Henry David Thoreau

The whole of history is incomprehensible without [Jesus].

—Ernest Renan

When Jesus comes, the shadows depart.

—On a castle wall in Scotland

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 214 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

The Baptism of our Lord
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 214

Leader: *Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to tell the story of the baptism of Jesus? Can they list important people and symbols in the story? Are they able to compare their own baptisms with the baptism of Jesus?

Peter: Recognizing Christ Called by Jesus

Objective

This session focuses on the apostle Peter and his answer to Jesus' question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Youth will be able to discuss the meaning of Peter's declaration, also known as Peter's confession, that Jesus is the Son of God.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the questions posed by Jesus and the significance of Peter's response. Key names are Peter and Jeremiah; the key place is Caesarea Philippi; the key event is the confession of Peter. For spiritual preparation, think about the answer you would give Jesus if he appeared before you today.

Commentary

The story about Jesus questioning his disciples about how others perceive him is found in *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*. It is also known as Peter's confession. Jesus had been preaching and healing throughout the countryside, and many people were clamoring to see him. Just before this event in *Matthew*, Jesus had fed the 4,000 who had gathered to see him near the Sea of Galilee.

When Jesus comes into Caesarea Philippi he asks his disciples who the people thought he was. They answer with the names of the various prophets and others from scripture. Jeremiah is mentioned because Jeremiah, rejected in his own day, had announced the coming of a messiah who would also be cast aside. Then Jesus asks a second question. He narrows the focus

by asking quite pointedly who the disciples believe he is. Peter responds, "You are the Christ the son of the living God!" This strong declaration of belief is called Peter's confession. With these words Peter confesses his faith and his belief that Jesus is not only the Messiah, but God's own son.

Peter's words mean that Jesus is much more than a healer, a preacher, or one of the prophets. He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the one for whom everyone has been waiting.

Jesus blesses Peter for his answer. Peter's understanding of Jesus' identity and confession, however, was not merely a manifestation of Peter's own understanding. It was also a sign of spiritual revelation which is a gift from God.

Jesus goes on to say that Peter is "the rock" on which he will build the Church. This saying is a play on words using a Greek word for Peter, "petros," and pairing it with the Greek word for rock, "petra."

Peter is traditionally thought of as the founder of the Christian Church, the "keeper of the keys" to the kingdom of heaven, the one in whom Jesus invests great authority. So great is this authority that it will be binding in heaven, and not even death will destroy it.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*
Matthew 16:16
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Paul W. Harrison, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Graham Greene
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Confession of Saint Peter (BCP, p. 238)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. . . ."

Matthew 16:13-18

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- At this point in their lives, many youth cannot identify their "solid" qualities. Many even feel adrift. Be ready to point out characteristics you have noticed about each person.
- Work in groups when doing verbal exercises to enable youth with learning disabilities to participate without being put on the spot.
- **Discussion Starter:** If Jesus asked you who he was, what would you say?

Personal Views

"Who do people say that I am?" is not such a hard question. The disciples had many answers—a prophet, John the Baptist, even Jeremiah. It is easy to give the popular answer that doesn't require much thinking.

But then Jesus asked a much harder question. (Jesus always seems to ask the hard questions!) He looked right at the disciples and asked them who they believed he was. Although Peter was quick to answer, this was not the popular view. This answer did not come so easily: the disciples had to dig a little deeper. They had to sift through their experiences and listen to God's voice from inside themselves. They had to take a stand.

When Peter makes his statement, he looks deep in his heart and there he finds Jesus. Peter may have amazed himself with his own words. By speaking from his heart, Peter has found the answer to a great mystery.

It is hard to get beyond easy answers and find the truth of things. But when we dig a little deeper, we often hit God's truth. On that foundation, we can build our faith.

Who do you say Jesus is? Do your words and actions support this? Can the young people you work with see your faith in your actions?

Eternal Father, you gave to your incarnate Son the holy name of Jesus to be the sign of our salvation: Plant in every heart, we pray, the love of him who is the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

The Holy Name
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 213

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Collect several rocks with interesting shapes, sizes, and colors. As youth arrive, ask them to choose a rock that symbolizes something solid about themselves—their character or personality.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Matthew 16:13-18* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, I hope that I can see past what others say about you to find the real you like Simon Peter did. And I hope that in time I will have a solid foundation based on your teachings.

Eli, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from Matthew, chapter 16, verses 13 through 18.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the youth to share the reasons they chose their rocks during the Coming Together exercise.

- What are qualities that are "solid"?
- Do other people see these qualities in you? Why?
- Why do you think Jesus identified Peter with a rock?

Divide into groups, depending on the size of the class. Ask each group to come up with as many names for Jesus as they can. Be sure each group has at least one Bible and prayer book for reference. Also bring in a Bible dictionary or concordance if they are available. Make a list of various names for Jesus along with their meaning. For example Immanuel means "God is with us," while Messiah means "anointed one."

Compile the lists and make a matching game with the words for Jesus and their meanings. See how

quickly the youth can match the right meanings with the names.

- How does Jesus embody the names that have been given to him?
- Are there other words that could be used as names for Jesus?

Pile up the rocks that the youth selected in the Coming Together activity at the front of the room or in the center of the group. During the closing prayer, ask God to use the strengths each person has to help others.

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **Who do you say that I am?** Pair up and ask this question of one another. Each partner answers with five one-word answers. Write a poem or draw a picture about the five words your partner has given. How did you feel about the words your partner said? Do those words really describe you? Which five words would you use to describe yourself?
- **Rock art:** Collect pieces of slate or other flat, smooth rocks, or use the rocks from the Coming Together activity. Choose a rock, and decorate it with paint, colored markers, glitter, or other objects such as buttons, seeds, smaller stones, or pictures from magazines. Rocks can be sealed with clear nail polish or varnish.

Games

- **How well do you know me?** Ask youth to think of little known facts they would like to share about

themselves and write the facts on a slip of paper or index card. For example: favorite color, favorite food, unusual talent, or pet. Collect the responses and read them to the group. Guess the identity of the person by asking questions.

Media

Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch the 1987 version of *Rumpelstiltskin* with Amy Irving about the spinner of gold whose rescuer demands her first-born child. Only the secret of his name can save her. What is the importance of a name?
- **Print:** Bring in a copy of *Faces of Jesus* or art books that show a variety of pictures of Jesus from different places and times. How do artists see Jesus? How do the artists' portrayals change how you see Jesus?

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of Bible and Church activities. The music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Sing "You are the Christ, O Lord" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 254) as a two- or four-part canon. This is the hymn for the feast day of the Confession of Saint Peter.
- Sing together "I Got a Name" (*The Tune Book Songs*, 190).

WEAVINGS

- The Confession of Saint Peter is on January 18. Refer to this as part of the discussion.
- At times in the New Testament, Peter seems to be anything but a rock. He struggles with his faith, often stumbling. He loves Jesus, but later denies him. He often speaks rashly and acts impetuously. Peter is a reminder that Jesus came to save the weak and the sinful. However, through the Holy Spirit, Peter is transformed into a leader, laying the foundation for the new Christian Church.
- Leaders in our churches today often disappoint us. We expect them to be above the pettiness we sometimes get caught in. Sometimes it is easier to forgive the television evangelist who makes a mistake than the clergy and lay leaders of our own churches. Pray today for the leaders in your church. Ask God for the grace to love them as they are.
- Confession has come to mean the telling of a sin or hidden secret. Think about the meaning of confession as a declaration of faith.

RESOURCE POSTER

- "I Am" Window (No. 2)

- Listen to *The Witness* CD (not the soundtrack of the film by the same name).
- Listen to “The Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah*. How many words are used for Jesus?

Service

- **Names and images:** Brainstorm names and images that depict Jesus. Design a picture using these words and symbols. Photocopy the image on paper that can be made into note cards. Sell the cards to raise money for an outreach project in your church.

Sharing

- **Matching:** Make multiple copies of the matching game from the Engaging activity. Pass them out at an adult forum or coffee hour. How well do they know the names of Jesus?
- **Gardening:** Build a rock garden or terrarium for the parish. Ask gardeners in your church to help you plan the garden or terrarium.

Study

- **I am:** Use a Bible concordance to find the “I am” passages in the *Gospel of John* and other places in the Bible. How many different images can you find in these passages? Compare the list you made with Resource Poster No. 2 of a stained glass window. Can you match your list with the symbols in the window?

- **Catechism:** Study the “God the Son” section of the Catechism in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 849-850. What does it say about Jesus? What is most meaningful?
- **Peter:** Read about Peter’s role in the early Christian church in Jerusalem in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Did he live up to the name Jesus gave him?

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Wherever God rules over the human heart as King, there is the kingdom of God established.
—Paul W. Harrison

I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I mark’d Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
—Alfred Lord Tennyson

If we had not been taught how to interpret the story of the Passion, would we have been able to say from their actions alone whether it was the jealous Judas or the cowardly Peter who loved Christ?
—Graham Greene

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 238 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*
Almighty Father, who inspired Simon Peter, first among the apostles, to confess Jesus as Messiah and Son of the living God: Keep your Church steadfast upon the rock of this faith, so that in unity and peace we may proclaim the one truth and follow the one Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Confession of Saint Peter
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 238

Leader: *Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.*
People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to discuss the meaning of Peter’s confession? Can they say what that confession was? Are they able to explain the significance of Peter’s declaration?

Philip & Nathanael: Following Christ Called by Jesus

Objective

This session highlights the sharing of the good news with friends. Youth will be able to relate Nathanael's call to be a disciple first by Philip then by Jesus.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the meeting of the two friends and Nathanael's later confrontation with Jesus. Key people are Philip, Nathanael, and Jacob; key places are Nazareth, Galilee, and Bethsaida; the key event is the apostles' call by Jesus to discipleship. For spiritual preparation, think about the way you respond to good news that seems unbelievable.

Commentary

Little is known about the apostles Philip and Nathanael. The story of Philip and Nathanael is only contained in the *Gospel of John*. In that story, Philip is portrayed as someone who loved his friend enough to share an unbelievable message, while Nathanael is characterized as resolute in his devotion to God.

Although Nathanael is only mentioned in the *Gospel of Matthew*, Philip appears in the list of apostles in the other gospels, and in *Acts* when he baptizes an Ethiopian eunuch (*Acts 8:27-40*). Because Nathanael's name is not included in the list of the apostles in the other gospels, many scholars believe he was also known as Bartholomew.

In the passage in *John*, Jesus' ministry takes him to Galilee. There he finds Philip who is from Bethsaida, also the home of Andrew and Peter. After being called by Jesus,

Philip seeks his skeptical friend Nathanael to share the good news. Excitedly, he tells his friend that he has found the long-awaited Messiah.

Upon learning that Jesus grew up in a nearby village, Nathanael scoffs, saying, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" He asks his friend the question because the message Philip brings is not easy to believe. Later, others would use the same rationale to discredit Jesus because of his ordinary background.

Philip challenges Nathanael to come and see Jesus for himself. Before Nathanael even confronts Jesus, Jesus perceives his true nature and declares, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." Jesus affirms Nathanael because he is honest and open and willing to investigate Philip's claims despite his own skepticism.

When Nathanael meets Jesus he is surprised when Jesus knows him and is able to tell of his past actions. Nathanael's faith is awakened, and he calls Jesus Rabbi (or teacher) and the Son of God.

Jesus then asks Nathanael if he believed because Jesus was able to look into his past. Using a story about Jacob's dream that would have been familiar to Nathanael, Jesus proclaims that even greater things are in store. Instead of a dream, Jesus said, "you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (*John 1:51b*)

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—*The Child's Life of Christ*
 - **Key Verse**—*Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."*
John 1:45
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Shakespeare, Philip of Valois, Mary B. C. Slade, Marian Wright Edelman
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Third Sunday after the Epiphany (BCP, p. 215)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

John 1:43-49

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Some youth may have experienced a time when a friend did not share important news. Be ready to listen to their stories, but keep focused.
- Some youth may have difficulty seeing Jesus in their lives because of a troubled home life or difficulties at school.
- **Discussion Starter:** What would you do if your best friend told you Jesus was at the mall?

Personal Views

The scripture for this session tells the story of two friends, one of whom was obviously a skeptic. However, Philip was willing to face Nathanael's ridicule because the news he had to share was so compelling. How do you respond when someone asks you to join in? Do you respond positively and with eagerness like Philip? Or are you more cautious like Nathanael?

Daily we are bombarded by fantastic "opportunities" that may only waste our time, money, and emotions. Often we are quick to be skeptical when confronted with any new claim. But Philip pushes his friend to look a little further and asks Nathanael to just come and see. Have you ever been persuaded by a friend to try something new? Are you glad you did?

When Nathanael finally consents to meet this man that Philip believes to be the Messiah, Jesus is able to see into his heart. Instead of rebuking him for his skepticism, Jesus seems to approve of this discerning individual.

Are you surrounded by competing priorities? What claims your time, money or emotions? How could you use a discerning heart to discover the road Jesus is calling you to follow? How can you come and see?

Most loving Father, whose will it is for us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing but the loss of you, and to cast all our care on you who care for us: Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which you have manifested to us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 216-217

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Write at the top of a chalkboard or large sheet of paper: Come and See. Below the heading, write on one side: Something good I shared with a friend. On the other side, write: Something good a friend shared with me. Place markers nearby.

As youth arrive ask them to briefly write something on each side of the board or paper.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *John 1:43-49* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God,

Thank you for events and people around me that help me to see Jesus. Help me to be curious about life and check things out. Be patient with me and have sense of humor because I can be stubborn, too!
Amen.

Eli, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from John, chapter 1, verses 43 through 49.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the youth to tell about the good things they have shared with friends.

- Did sharing good things make you better friends?
 - Did the good thing you shared change the way you see things?
- Tell the story of Philip and Nathanael, emphasizing that Philip's good news changed the whole course of Nathanael's life.

Spread out different kinds of magazines, including ones for teens. Individually or in groups, find pictures that show places where Jesus can be found. Tear out the pictures and add them to the paper with the Coming Together responses.

Talk about the places we find Jesus in our world.

- Are there any places that you frequent that are not included?
- Are there places where Jesus is not found?
- Are there places in our lives we don't look for Jesus? Where?
- If you had been Nathanael, would you have believed Philip?
- Would you have gone with Philip? Why?
- Have you ever had a chance, like Philip, to bring someone to meet Jesus? What did you do?

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **What Jesus knows:** Give each youth a small paper sack. On the outside, write down the things you want Jesus to know about you. Turn the sack inside out and write down things you wouldn't want Jesus to know about you. Turn the sack back to the original side. Read the Collect for Purity on p. 355 of *The Book of Common Prayer*. Identify one thing written on the inside of the bag and tell Jesus about it by writing him a letter.
- **Jesus is here:** Make a collage using the pictures found during the Engaging exercise that show where Jesus is. Find or draw new pictures representing places that were missing.

Games

- **Come and see:** Play a game of sardines, a version of hide-and-seek. Assign one person to be

Philip, who is waiting for everyone to come and see him or her. Give "Philip" time to hide, then have everyone else begin the search. When someone finds "Philip," that person joins him in the hiding place. Continue the game until everyone is squeezed into the hiding place.

Media

Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch the scene from *Gandhi* in which the man known as the "Great Soul" walks to the sea to make salt. What is the good news Gandhi is trying to share?
- **Print:** Look through the yellow pages of several phone books to find places where you expect to find Jesus. Next look for places where you think Jesus is unlikely to go. Can Jesus be in both types of places?

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of Bible and church activities. The music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Read or sing "Blessed feasts of blessed martyrs" (*The Hymnal* 1982, 238).

WEAVINGS

- The feast day for the apostles Philip and James is May 1.
- A skeptic is defined as one who questions the validity or authenticity of someone claiming knowledge. It also refers to a person who maintains a doubting attitude. Most of us have been skeptics or at least skeptical at some time in our lives. The story of Philip and Nathanael shows us that skepticism is not bad.
- At state fairs and carnivals, there are often sideshows that barkers invite us to come and see. They promise amazing sights beyond belief. At other times, in less obvious ways, we are invited to come and see or do something that may or may not be good for us. It is difficult to discern which things we should come and see. Ask God to help you listen and look for Jesus in all that you do.

- Sing together “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” (*Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, 136). The tune is an Indian folk melody, and the words are ascribed to an Indian prince in Assam.
- Listen to “Come to the Feast” by Michael Card.

Service

- **Looking for Jesus:** Visit one of the places from the Print exercise the group identified as a place Jesus would be unlikely to go. How can you bring Jesus’ loving healing presence to a new place? How can you find Jesus in people you meet in one of these places?

Sharing

- **Share good news:** Invite a friend to church on Sunday morning or to a youth group meeting. Help them to be a part of the group.
- **Usher them in:** Spend time as ushers, inviting people into God’s house and making them feel welcome. Talk about the experience afterward and decide if you want to usher on a regular basis.

Study

- **Lesser feasts:** Look up Philip in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. Why is he celebrated with Saint James? Why is Nathanael not included in the feast days? Is there an answer? Write a collect about the story in *John 1:43-49* for Philip and Nathanael.

- **Invitations:** Look through *The Hymnal 1982* or *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* for a hymn in which Jesus is offering an invitation. Where or to what is Jesus inviting us?
- **Bartholomew:** Many scholars think that Nathanael may have been referred to as Bartholomew in *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*. Using a concordance, find all the references in the New Testament to Philip, Nathanael, and Bartholomew.

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

In following him, I follow but myself.
—Shakespeare

He who loves me, let him follow me.
—Philip of Valois

Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway glow;
We will follow the steps of Jesus where’er they go.
—Mary B. C. Slade

Help me to dedicate each hour of each day to You—my constant, never-failing companion and guide.
—Marian Wright Edelman

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 215 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.
Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Third Sunday after the Epiphany
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 215

Leader: *Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to tell the story of Philip’s visit to Nathanael? Can they describe Nathanael’s response and his meeting with Jesus? Are they able to describe places where Jesus can be found? Can they connect this story to their own responsibility for telling others the good news of Jesus?

Woman at the Well: Welcoming Outsiders Called by Jesus

Objective

The focus of this session is an unlikely convert who proclaims the good news to outsiders like herself. Youth will be able to discuss the implications of the story of the woman at the well in regard to outsiders and the gospel message.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary sets the scene for Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Key terms are Jews and Samaritans; the key people are Jesus and the unnamed woman at the well. For spiritual preparation, think about people in your community who may be outsiders and how you can welcome them with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Commentary

In *John 4*, Jesus meets a nameless woman from Samaria. Samaritans in Jesus's day were looked down upon and even despised; all relations with them, even casual, were prohibited by Jewish law. Jesus's encounter and his initiation of a conversation with a Samaritan woman is an example of how he reached out to those who were considered outcasts by the rest of society.

In first century Palestine, people were usually divided into one of two categories: Jews, the chosen people of God; and non-Jews, or Gentiles. But the woman at the well was part of a third group, the Samaritans. Much to the frustration of Jews, Samaritans claimed to be the true descendants of Jacob, demanding for themselves the status and privileges of Jews. Over the years,

hostilities between Samaritans and Jews grew until eventually contacts between them were prohibited. The story of the good Samaritan in the *Gospel of Luke* was powerful in Jesus' day because the term "good Samaritan" was a contradiction in terms.

Jesus had already stepped over the rules of society by speaking to a Samaritan. He goes further to ignore cultural and religious taboos that prohibited rabbis from speaking to women in public. Moreover, when Jesus asked the woman to draw water from the well for him and offered to drink from the same cup, he violated Jewish laws of purity that prohibited Jews from sharing the same eating and drinking utensils with Samaritans. It would have been scandalous for a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman to be having the conversation shared in this story.

Even more scandalous, however, is the content of the conversation. In the beginning, she encounters Jesus as a stranger, then gives him a title of respect, then recognizes him as a prophet, and finally leaves wondering if he is the long-awaited Messiah. The person who hears and then carries the good news of Jesus is the most unlikely candidate for the task.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—*The Child's Life of Christ*
 - **Key Verse**—*The Samaritan woman said to [Jesus], "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"*
John 4:9a
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Rousseau, Richard Cecil, Thomas Wolfe, William Hazlitt
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For the Unity of the Church (BCP, p. 818)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

John 4:7-14

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Many youth feel like outsiders in different areas of their lives. Be open to issues youth raise about how others treat them, including people in the church.
- Be sensitive to a person in the group the others may treat as an outsider. This may be a good time to help them confront ways we push people to the outside.
- **Discussion Starter:** Do you act in ways or wear things that make you an outsider in some people's eyes, but at the same time identify you as part of a group?

Personal Views

The story of the woman at the well reminds us that God's love can be brought to the most unlikely people and groups imaginable. In the person of Jesus Christ, God continually calls us to transcend our own political, geographical, and racial lines to understand ourselves in new ways.

Paul, in his letter to the *Galatians*, reminds us that "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (*Galatians* 3:28)." In this story Jesus brings his love and message of salvation to the a person at the very fringe of society.

During the week, think about the outcasts in your own community. Are there any "Samaritan women" for whom it would be scandalous for Christians to reach out and welcome? If you were with Jesus today, where would he find the woman at the well?

Think about your own understanding of Jesus. When the woman of Samaria encounters Jesus, she does not understand at first who he is and what he is offering her. Her understanding grows from seeing him as a stranger, to addressing him with respect, to naming him prophet, to finally wrestling with the idea of Jesus as Messiah, or Savior.

Do you see Jesus as the Samaritan woman did? Is he somewhat of a stranger to you? Is he someone you respect, but hold at a distance? Do you consider him a prophet? Are you wrestling with the idea that he is the Messiah, the one promised by God to restore creation to its fullest?

O loving Father, grant that your Church, being gathered by your Holy Spirit, may be dedicated more fully to your service, and live united in love, according to

your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Weekdays of Easter
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 20

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Before the youth arrive, write on the board or on a large sheet of newsprint "Who Is a Christian?" Ask the youth to draw a picture or write a brief description of what they consider a Christian to be. Or ask them to cut out pictures from magazines and newspapers of people who look like Christians. Do not comment on their selections.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *John 4:7-14* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord, please remind us that we are greater than our differences, or skin colors, or gender. Please remind us that we are first of all human beings and your children. Help us to show others that is all that matters. Amen.

Allyson, Grade 7

Lector: *A reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 4, verses 7 through 14.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Stand in a circle large enough for youth to move around in their space. As a series of statements are read, they are to respond in one of four ways: lie on the floor if they strongly disagree with the statement, sit on the floor if they disagree, stand if they agree, and stand with both hands above their heads if they strongly agree.

Ask the youth to defend their positions during the exercise. Ask those who are completely opposite in their opinions to state reasons for their point

of view. Make up your own statements or use the ones listed below:

- There is a heaven.
- There are some people in this church Jesus does not love.
- Jesus does not love murderers.
- Jesus loves me even when I lie.
- No one goes to heaven unless they believe in God.
- Jesus loves people with AIDS.
- Jesus loves animals.
- Jesus loves non-Christians.
- Jesus loves some people more than others.

Tell the story of the woman at the well. Refer to Resource Poster No. 3 of the painting of the outsider.

- Did the exercise make you feel like an outsider?
- How did Jesus treat outsiders?
- Have you ever felt like the figure in the poster? What was it like?
- Does Jesus love people everyone else hates? Is this fair?
- How does Jesus love you?

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **Wishing Well:** Bring in a covered container with a slit in the top to be a “wishing well.” Give each person a piece of paper. On one side of the paper, write or draw something that makes you feel like an outsider. On the other side, finish the statement “If I met Jesus at the well, I would ask him to . . .” After everyone is finished, put the container in the center of the room. Pray about the “wishes” in the “well.”

- **Jumbo shrimp:** Think of modern contradictions of stereotypes of people and events in our world that do not make sense to young people, such as cool parent, smart cheerleader, wimpy boxer, or fun geek. Discuss why some stereotypes are harmful.

Games

- **Outsider:** Sit in a circle, except for one person who is in the middle. That person calls out something shared by several youth, such as the hair color or an article of clothing. Everyone included in the statement must exchange places with another person in the circle. For example, if the person in the middle says, “Everyone wearing jeans,” all those wearing jeans must move to a new place. The person who cannot find a chair is now in the middle.

Media

Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch all or part of a movie about outsiders, such as *Pump Up the Volume* or *Mask*.
- **Print:** Using the pictures youth found during the Coming Together activity, make a collage. Are there other people you should include who you can't find pictures of? Draw or write a description of these people and include them in the collage.

WEAVINGS

- At the 1997 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, Presiding Bishop Browning said in his closing statements that “there will be no outcasts in our Church.” Although the story of the woman at the well reinforces that statement, it is sometimes difficult to welcome all people who live in our communities into our churches. Does your church open its doors to everyone?
- The dictionary defines “outcast” as one who is cast out by society. An “outsider” is a person who does not belong to a particular group. Are there any young people at your church who have been “cast out” or made to feel they do not belong?
- The growing number of immigrants in this country has strained resources and changed the ethnic makeup of many places. School systems struggle with teaching English to people who speak many different languages and dialects. Welfare and health-care systems also grapple with the needs of new arrivals. At the same time, immigrants bring a new vitality to this country. Pray for the people who come to this country looking for a better life and for those who help them find it.

RESOURCE POSTER

- The Outsider (No. 3)

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of Bible and church activities. The music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Sing or read "The first one ever, oh, ever to know" (*The Hymnal* 1982, 673). In verse two, why is the woman at the well called "blessed"?
- Sing together "Jesus Met the Woman at the Well" (*The Tune Book Songs*, 15).
- Listen to "I Want to Know What Love Is" by Foreigner on the CD *Agent Provocateur*. When was the loneliest time in your life? How did you live through it?

Service

- **Baking:** Find out if you can bring baked goods to a detention center for juveniles in your community. If it is possible, find a way to do so.
- **Living water:** Contact the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief to see if there are any water projects the group could support with a fundraiser.

Sharing

- **At the well:** At an adult forum or other gathering of the parish, pass out wishing-well papers, similarly to the ones used in the Expressions activity. Put the slips into a container, and select several each time you gather. Pray for the "wishes" described on the slips.

Study

- **Comparison:** Compare and contrast the stories of Nicodemus (in Session 6) and the Samaritan woman at the well. List the similarities and the differences in the two people. Did Jesus love them both?
- **Samaritans:** Find out more about Samaritans in a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. Discover the reasons why they were ostracized by the Jewish people. What happened to the Samaritans?

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

The thirst after happiness is never extinguished in the heart of [a person].

—Rousseau (Adapted)

Unbelief starves the soul.

—Richard Cecil

Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father's heart? . . . Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?

—Thomas Wolfe

Those who are at war with others are not at peace with themselves.

—William Hazlitt

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 818 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Unity of the Church
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 818

Leader: *Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to list the reasons the woman at the well was an outcast? Are they able to relate the story to the gospel message? Can youth state that Jesus loves all people?

Mary Magdalene: Staying True Called by Jesus

Objective

The focus of this session is a woman who remained true to Jesus at risk to her own life. Youth will be able to explain the devotion of Mary Magdalene to Jesus.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes Mary Magdalene's relationship with Jesus, and distinguishes her from the other Marys in the New Testament. Key names are Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Jesus, Mary sister of Martha and Lazarus, Mary mother of James and Joseph, and Mary wife of Cleopas; the key event is the resurrection. For spiritual preparation, think about the role of loyalty in your life.

Commentary

Mary Magdalene is one of several women who remained loyal to Jesus throughout his betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and death. Because there are several Marys mentioned by name in the gospels, it is important to keep Mary Magdalene distinct from the others.

The most famous Mary is the mother of Jesus and wife of Joseph. Another Mary is the sister of Lazarus and Martha who lived in Bethany (*Luke 10*). There is also Mary the mother of James and Joseph, the apostles (*Matthew 27*), and Mary the wife of Cleopas (*John 19*).

Mary Magdalene is introduced in the *Luke 8*. Jesus was traveling through cities and villages accompanied by the twelve apostles and "some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities," including "Mary called Magdalene, from

whom seven demons had gone out."

Mary is next mentioned at the Resurrection, when she and other women take spices to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They find the stone rolled away, but not the body of Jesus. At the tomb they encounter an angel, who reminds them of Jesus' words foretelling his betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection. "Then they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest" (*Luke 24:8-9*).

The women, including Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, returned at once to tell their story to the apostles. However, because of their despair, the women's words "seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (*Luke 24:11*).

Mary Magdalene is a model of female discipleship throughout the gospels. In *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*, the disciples flee when Jesus is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane. Although Peter followed as far as the high priest's courtyard, no male disciples were present at the crucifixion. (The apostle John is present at the crucifixion in the *Gospel of John*.)

In all four gospels, it is women who visit the tomb to anoint the body. Every gospel portrays Mary Magdalene alone or with other women at the empty tomb on the first Easter morning. Women are the first to encounter the resurrected Jesus and the first to proclaim the triumph of his resurrection.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—*The Child's Life of Christ*
 - **Key Verse**—*Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.*
Matthew 28:9
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Mother Teresa, Richard Evans, Dag Hammarskjöld
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Saint Mary Magdalene (BCP, p. 242)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:1-10

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Be clear about the identity of Mary Magdalene. Because of the placement of her story in the gospels, she is sometimes linked with the story of a woman caught in adultery. However, there is no evidence to unite the two women.
- This is not a story about women versus men. Focus on the true devotion shown by Mary Magdalene.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been loyal to a friend when others rejected him or her? Describe the experience.

Personal Views

Younger youth are often sensitive about their names and are just beginning to develop a sense of identity outside their parents. Youth often change their names, modifying them from those their parents use, or selecting names to stand out or blend in with others.

From stories in the New Testament, Mary must have been a common name. To distinguish her from the other Marys, she is identified as Mary Magdalene—not the mother or wife of other people. Is your name important to you? Did you change it at some point in your life?

Youth are also wrestling with the question, "Who am I?" While this question is important in a young person's development, it can turn into a self-absorbed journey. As they explore this question, challenge them to also examine "Whose am I?" God wants to be a part of all the journeys we take. Do you seek God's guidance in facing the big and small events in your life?

The final lesson we can learn from Mary Magdalene is her constant devotion to Jesus. She knew exactly to whom she belonged. She gave Jesus her presence when he was in his darkest hour. Do you have "Mary Magdalenes" to turn to in times of trouble or abandonment? What kind of friend are you? Do you stay with friends through their dark hours?

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Proper 10
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 231

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Ask the first youth to arrive to write his or her name on the chalkboard. As others arrive, ask them to add their names, matching one of the letters in the names already on the board like a crossword puzzle. If the group gets stumped, use last names.

After everyone has gathered and everyone's name is on the board, join hands with one person you are linked to on the board. Stand in a circle and select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord, I feel strongly about this passage, because you sent your angel to tell Mary Magdalene about the great news of seeing Jesus, even when she was scared. Give us that excitement, and help us to tell the great news of seeing Jesus. Help us to be faithful followers, and make us joyful to see you. Amen.

Spence, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Matthew, chapter 28, verses 1 through 10.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Talk about the importance of names.

- Do you like your name? Did you ever change it?
- Do you have a common or unusual name? What is that like?

Introduce the story of Mary Magdalene by mentioning the different Marys mentioned in the New Testament. Tell her story, making sure the youth do not confuse her with the other Marys. Emphasize her devotion to Jesus at the risk of her own life.

Ask several youth to help you put a large cross on the wall using masking tape. The cross should be approximately four feet tall and three feet wide, allowing enough room for several post-it notes.

If the group is large, divide into small groups to discuss fears they have conquered, such as facing an opponent in a game or mastering a summer camp, and fears they are facing, such as a major test or a parents' divorce. Distribute two post-it notes to each person. On the first, describe a fear that was conquered; on the second, a fear they are still facing.

Ask the youth to place the conquered fear at the foot of the cross and give thanks to God for helping them overcome that fear. If they feel comfortable doing so, post the fear yet to be conquered on the cross. When everyone is finished, form a semicircle around the cross, and pray for the fears we all live with.

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

■ **Lyrical lyrics:** Listen to the song "I Don't Know How to Love Him," sung by the actress portraying Mary Magdalene in *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Rewrite the words reflecting the fears and problems faced by youth today. How do you show your love for Jesus?

■ **Watercolors:** Set out watercolors, brushes, and paper. Ask each youth to find the color that represents fear for them and paint it on a piece of paper. Put one piece of paper in the center of the group and ask everyone to put their "fear colors" all together. What is the result? Can you pick out one color from the rest? Is it easier to work on one fear at a time or to bunch them together?

Games

■ **Fear Cards:** Ahead of class, write down on index cards the names of different kinds of fears, such as looking stupid, being laughed at, failing a test, falling down, causing my team to lose a game, or losing my best friend. Without letting the youth see what is written on the card, tape one card to each youth's back. Mingle around the room trying to guess your "fear" by asking only yes or no questions. Only one question can be asked before moving on. The game is over when all the fears have been identified.

Media

Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

■ **Video:** Watch a video of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Discuss the characterization of Mary Magdalene.

■ **Print:** Bring in newspapers and look for stories about people who have stayed true in times of fear. Share the stories you find with others in the group.

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of Bible and church activities. The music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

WEAVINGS

- The feast day for Mary Magdalene is July 22.
- The word "devotion" has taken on a religious connotation. The first definition is religious fervor or piety. However, the devotion of Mary Magdalene is more like the second definition: ardent love or affection. Mary's devotion to Jesus went beyond ordinary friendship or affection.
- Women take on extraordinary roles in the Bible considering the lack of importance women had in the culture. Women are held up as role models for devotion, courage, and generosity. Women are another subset of the disenfranchised people that Jesus reached out to again and again. From these stories, all people who face despair and abandonment can find hope and solace.

- Sing an Easter hymn such as “Lift your voice rejoicing, Mary” (*The Hymnal* 1982, 190). Look for references to Mary Magdalene.
- Sing together “Christ Has Risen” (*Gather*, GIA Publications, 308).
- Listen to “I Don’t Know How to Love Him” from *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Service

- **Quiet presence:** Visit a nursing home to provide a “Mary Magdalene” ministry of giving your presence. Don’t plan a program or bring in music or pictures. Simply be present to listen, to read, or to talk.
- **Visiting the tomb:** Find a cemetery in your community that needs maintenance work. Spend a Saturday pulling weeds and planting flowers.

Sharing

- **Being there:** Volunteer in the nursery or toddler class during the worship hour. Be there to hold infants or to give your presence to young children.

Study

- **Marys:** Using a concordance, read about other Marys mentioned in the New Testament. How many can you find?

- **Mary in the gospels:** Find other places where Mary Magdalene appears in the gospels.
- **Apocrypha women:** Read about women in the Apocrypha section of the Bible. Who are Judith and Susanna? Share these stories with the group.

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

We shall not waste our time in looking for extraordinary experiences in our life but live by pure faith, ever watchful and ready for his coming by doing our day-to-day duties with extraordinary love and devotion.

—Mother Teresa

Sincere love is something that sacrifices—not something that indulges itself. Sincere love is responsible. It would never knowingly hurt, but would heal.

—Richard Evans

Give me a pure heart—that I may see thee,
A humble heart—that I may hear thee,
A heart of love—that I may serve thee,
A heart of faith—that I may abide in thee.

—Dag Hammarskjöld

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the collect for July 22 in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty God, whose blessed Son restored Mary Magdalene to health of body and of mind, and called her to be a witness of his resurrection: Mercifully grant that by your grace we may be healed from all our infirmities and know you in the power of his unending life; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Saint Mary Magdalene
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 242

Leader: *Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to describe the devotion of Mary Magdalene? Can they distinguish her from other Marys in the New Testament? Are youth able to describe how Mary faced her fears? Can they list ways they can face their own fears?

Nicodemus: Learning from Jesus Called by Jesus

Objective

This session centers on a late-night meeting between Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, and Jesus. Youth will be able to explain the significance of Nicodemus' visit with Jesus.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary provides the setting for the conversation between Jesus and the powerful Pharisee leader. Key names are Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea; key terms are rebirth and born from above; key groups are Pharisees and the Sanhedrin. For spiritual preparation, think about the way you learn about Jesus and who has helped you in your faith journey.

Commentary

John is the only gospel that includes the story of Nicodemus. He is mentioned three times in the *Gospel of John*: his initial meeting with Jesus at night (*John 3*), in a brief conflict with the temple police (*John 7*), and after Jesus' crucifixion when he comes to help with burial preparations (*John 19*). In each instance, particularly in his encounter with Jesus at night, Nicodemus represents not just an individual, but the entire Jewish people.

In *John 3*, Nicodemus grows in his understanding of who Jesus is. He begins on a very tangible level. Because he has heard of the miracles Jesus has done, and because he believes that only someone sent from God can do miracles, Nicodemus concludes that Jesus is sent by God. Jesus meets him at this level, but invites him to a deeper understanding.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that unless he is "born from above," he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. The expression means both "born again" and "born from above." Nicodemus takes the words of Jesus literally and asks how he can be "born again," Jesus makes clear he is referring to spiritual rebirth.

For Episcopalians, spiritual rebirth comes at baptism. At the blessing of the water for baptism, the celebrant prays, "Now sanctify this water, we pray you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that those who are here cleansed from sin and born again may continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior." This rebirth is not an end, however; it begins a lifelong journey in the Christian life.

The story of Nicodemus does not end with his late meeting with Jesus. *John* portrays Nicodemus as someone who finds it difficult to profess his belief in Jesus openly. Nicodemus does, however, speak up in defense of Jesus among the chief priests and Pharisees, and he accompanied Joseph of Arimathea to anoint and bury the body of Jesus. The story of Nicodemus also provides the forum for Jesus' words in *John 3:16*, a summary of the gospel message.

Personal Views

When Nicodemus approaches Jesus late one night, he addresses Jesus as "Rabbi," or "teacher." At this point in his life, Nicodemus is a seeker, looking for answers from a higher source. We may have experienced similar stages of faith where we feel "in the dark" and

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*[Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God."*
John 3:2
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Jean de la Fontaine, Thomas Huxley, Brigham Young, J. H. Jowett
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For all Baptized Christians (BCP, p. 252-253)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. . . ."

John 3:1-6

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Youth may be asked by other teens if they have been "born again." Help them understand that Episcopalians believe spiritual rebirth comes at baptism.
- Be sensitive to youth who have not been baptized, who were baptized at an older age, or who were baptized in another denomination. If they have questions about their baptism, encourage them to talk to their parents or the clergy.
- Pharisees were members of a Jewish sect during the time of Jesus which emphasized strict interpretation of the law. The Sanhedrin was a judicial council made up of about seventy Pharisees.
- **Discussion Starter:** How do we care for babies when they are very young? What do we do for new Christians?

long for illumination. Have you ever felt "in the dark"? Where did you look for direction or light?

A visit to Jesus by Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, was a perilous venture that could have put his career and life at risk. Have you known anyone who practices their faith at great risk to themselves? Has your faith in Jesus ever caused you to take risks?

Think about times you have heard Christians identify themselves as "born again." What does this expression mean to you? Do you think of your own baptism as a spiritual rebirth? Do you believe you were "born again" at your baptism?

Although Nicodemus was a teacher and a leader, he knew he had room for growth—an example that we never stop learning or growing. If you were baptized as an infant, in what ways are you living the new life that was granted to you then? How can you help young people live the vows in the Baptismal Covenant (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 304-5)?

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works.
Amen.

From Holy Baptism
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 308

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

During the week, draw a "timeline" lengthwise on a piece of paper; label one end "birth" and the other "death." Make enough copies for each person in the group.

Give the youth a timeline as they enter the room. Ask them to put the date of their birth on the far left side of the paper and then add other significant events along the timeline. Offer assistance by making suggestions, such as first pet, getting braces, major trips, or graduation from elementary school.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *John 3:1-6* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

O God, please help us to realize the incredible gift you gave us at baptism—your Holy Spirit. Nurture and care for us as we continue to grow physically and spiritually in your love. Help us to live our lives according to your will, fairly, kindly, and faithfully until we rejoin you in heaven. Amen.

Emily, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from John, chapter 3, verses 1 through 6.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Continue filling in the timelines from the Coming Together exercise. Ask the youth if any of them included being "born again."

Tell the story of Nicodemus. Refer to Resource Poster No. 4 the classical drawing of the meeting between Nicodemus and Jesus. Be sure to include Nicodemus' position as a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, his nighttime visit to Jesus, the other times he appears in the *Gospel of John*, the risks he took coming to Jesus, and Jesus' response about being "born from above."

- Did you include baptism on your timeline? If you know the approximate date of your baptism, add it to your timeline.

- What did Jesus mean when he said you must be “born from above” to enter the kingdom of heaven?
- When do we believe people are “born from above”?
Add other major life events that are likely to be a part of your future, such as confirmation, getting a driver’s license, graduating from high school, getting a first car, going to college, or getting married.
- How is God a part of the events of our lives?
- Does being “born from above” affect our lives? How?

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **I can fly!** Butterflies symbolize new birth from something that crawls (caterpillars) into something that flies. Using egg crates, tissue paper, and other materials, create caterpillars and butterflies. Suspend the butterflies from the ceiling to decorate the room. When have you felt like a caterpillar? When do you feel like a butterfly?
- **Drama:** Reread the story of Nicodemus’ visit with Jesus. Rewrite the scene for the present. Which groups would Nicodemus belong to? What would Jesus say to him? Where and when would they meet?

Games

- **Caterpillar tag:** Play a game of tag. Ask a youth to be the “transformer.” When the “transformer” tags people, they must

imitate a caterpillar, scrunched on the ground, crawling on all fours. Until others are tagged, they are butterflies and can run and flap their wings. Two butterflies can turn caterpillars into butterflies by touching them at the same time. The game is over when everyone has been a caterpillar at least once.

Media

Today’s youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch *The Secret of Nihm*, an animated cartoon about a widow mouse. Which character is called Nicodemus, and why?
- **Print:** Cut out random stories from the newspaper and put them on a piece of poster board. Ask the youth to make butterflies and caterpillars out of construction paper. Talk about the stories that are displayed and decide if the people described in the stories are caterpillars or butterflies. Tape the appropriate symbol on top of each story. Which symbol is used more?

Music

Music is important for today’s youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of Bible and church activities. The music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

WEAVINGS

- This session may be scheduled on a Sunday a baptism is planned.
- As Christians, we are accustomed to hearing the phrase “born again.” To Nicodemus, the words sounded ludicrous. Think about terms you now understand that sounded absurd when you first heard them. If you had never used a computer, terms such as icons, bytes, disk drives, and CD-roms would sound like nonsense. When you are struggling to learn the terms of a new technology, think about Nicodemus.
- Sometimes Christians from different denominations clash over theological differences. We tend to label those who may have different views as liberal, conservative, charismatic, or orthodox. Instead of looking for the issues that divide us, look for the things that bring us together: the love of Christ who died for all of us.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Nicodemus and Jesus (No. 4)

- Read or sing “We know that Christ is raised and dies no more” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 296). What does “reborn we share with him an Easter life” mean?
- Sing together “Bullfrogs and Butterflies” (*The Tune Book Songs*, p. 207).
- Listen to “Show Me the Way” by Styx on *Edge of the Century*. How did Jesus show Nicodemus the way? Does Jesus’ explanation make sense today? Why?

Service

- **Write a letter:** Find out if your church or diocese has a sister parish in another country. Contact the church and ask for a list of young people who would be willing to correspond with youth in your church. Ask each youth to select one of the names on the list and write a letter describing your church.

Sharing

- **Baptism:** Find out if youth could make a presentation to parents and godparents preparing for a child’s baptism. Use the symbols of butterflies and caterpillars to describe baptism as “birth from above.” Or decorate the entry to your church on a baptism Sunday with the butterflies and caterpillars that were made for the Expressions activity.

Study

- **Service of baptism:** Read through the baptismal service in *The Book of Common Prayer*, beginning on p. 299. Look for references to new birth.
- **Ancient traditions:** Visit the library or surf the Internet to find out how early Christians baptized new converts. Contrast the way baptism was done in the past with today’s service.
- **Nicodemus:** Find the two other places in the *Gospel of John* that mention Nicodemus. What kind of person was he?

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Let ignorance talk as it will,
learning has its value.
—Jean de la Fontaine

To learn what is true in order to
do what is right is the summing
up of the whole duty of [human-
kind].
—Thomas Huxley

We might ask, when shall we
cease to learn? I will give you
my opinion about it: never,
never.
—Brigham Young

My Father, teach us not only thy
will, but how to do it. Teach us
the best way of doing the best
thing.
—J. H. Jowett

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 252 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.
Grant, Lord God, to all who have
been baptized into the death and
resurrection of your Son Jesus
Christ, that, as we have put away
the old life of sin, so we may be
renewed in the spirit of our minds,
and live in righteousness and true
holiness; through Jesus Christ our
Lord, who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one
God, now and for ever. Amen.*

For all Baptized Christians
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 252-253

Leader: *Let us go forth into the
world, rejoicing in the power of the
Spirit.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to describe the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus? Can they relate their baptism to being “born from above”? Can youth explain the significance of Nicodemus’ visit to Jesus?

Mary, Martha, & Lazarus: Life Out of Death Called by Jesus

Objective

This session focuses on the visit of Jesus and his disciples to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus four days after Lazarus has died. Youth will be able to retell the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and Christ's triumph over death with life and healing.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the setting of the story, including the events before and after Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Key names are Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; key places are Bethany and Judea; the key event is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. For spiritual preparation think about the emotions of Mary and Martha as they waited for Jesus and mourned their brother's death.

Commentary

The story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus actually starts at the beginning of *John 11* when Jesus receives a message from the sisters that their brother is very ill. The family apparently is very close to Jesus; he seems to have enjoyed their company and friendship. While most scholars are intrigued with the idea that the sisters of Lazarus might be the same Mary and Martha described in *Luke 10*, there is no evidence to confirm that they are the same.

For his own reasons, Jesus stays two days longer rather than setting off immediately for Bethany to see Lazarus. His disciples believe the trip is risky because the Jews have threaten to stone him if he returns to Judea. Jesus is aware that Lazarus

has already died.

Nearing Bethany, Jesus encounters the mourners who have come to console the family. Jewish ceremonies were elaborate and attended by many people. At least ten people were expected to take part in the rituals over a thirty-day period. Martha greets him, while Mary remains at home. Although she is deeply disappointed that Jesus did not arrive before her brother died, Martha is still hopeful that Jesus will intervene even though Lazarus has been in the grave for four days.

Jesus tells Martha that her brother will rise again, but Martha misunderstands, thinking that he is referring to a widespread belief among Jews that there would be a resurrection on the last day. Jesus tells her that he gives eternal life now; the body may die, but the person will never die. Martha responds with a ringing declaration that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (*John 11:27*).

The story continues with Martha going to get her sister Mary, who arrives with other mourners. When Mary sees Jesus she says, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." The sorrow of the sisters and the mourners so moves Jesus that he also begins to weep.

When Jesus and the mourners reach the tomb, Jesus tells them to take away the stone covering the entrance to the cave. Although God can hear his thoughts, Jesus speaks aloud to convince the people that he is not a magician, but sent by God. At Jesus' command,

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—*The Child's Life of Christ*
 - **Key Verse**—*The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*
John 11:44
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Augustine, St. John of the Cross, *The Hymnal 1982*
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—From Holy Eucharist II (BCP, p. 374)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

John 11:30-44

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Death is a fascinating topic to youth. Listen carefully to conversations. Any comment about suicide should always be taken seriously.
- After a death, some people say that it was God's will. Youth may find it difficult to love a God that wills death to children or other innocent people. Be ready to point out Jesus' sadness at Lazarus' death and his promise to always be with us.
- **Discussion Starter:** What would you do if a dead person climbed out of a grave and walked toward you?

Lazarus, still bound with strips of cloth, comes out of the cave. Jesus tells the community who had come to mourn Lazarus' death to "unbind him, and let him go."

While many of those who witnessed the miracle believed in Jesus, others went to the Pharisees to report this latest blasphemy. The chief priests called a meeting of the Sanhedrin, the official Jewish court. After discussing their fears that Jesus would provoke the Romans to destroy the temple and the Jewish people, they begin a plot to put Jesus to death.

Personal Views

How difficult it must have been for Mary and Martha to watch their brother die before their friend Jesus arrived. They both believed that Jesus would have made a difference if he had come earlier. In the midst of their grief, they must have also felt some anger that Jesus had not been there for Lazarus.

Most of us have also felt anger in the midst of grief. When we are disappointed or mourning the loss of a loved one, we wonder where God is. When we need the comfort of Jesus, we feel estranged. Have you ever wondered why Jesus wasn't there when you needed him?

Before Mary arrives on the scene, Martha had already confronted Jesus with disappointment that was softened by her hope that maybe Jesus could still intervene. Have you ever come to God filled with disappointment and even recrimination? Did you still feel a flicker of hope that God still might be able to help you or someone you love?

Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus will rise again. But these words of comfort do not take away the pain and loss Martha is experiencing now. Have God's promises ever

failed to comfort you? Have you ever felt separated from God?

Jesus responds to her that "everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." Martha understands for the first time who Jesus really is. Do you believe that Jesus is who he says he is? Does that knowledge lessen the pain of loss? How does Jesus comfort you?

Grant, O Lord, to all who are bereaved the spirit of faith and courage, that they may have strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience; not sorrowing as those without hope, but in thankful remembrance of your great goodness, and in the joyful expectation of eternal life with those they love. And this we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

From Burial II

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 505

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Hang Resource Poster No. 5 of the raising of Lazarus. Bring in several old sheets. As youth arrive, tell them to tear the sheets into strips about two inches by six feet. Use scissors to get started if necessary. Fold the strips as they are torn.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *John 11:30-44* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Lord, please help us not to fear death, but rather to accept it. Help us to find comfort in knowing we are going to a place filled with love and grace, and that you will always be there for us. In your name we pray, Amen.

Jessica, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from John, chapter 11, verses 30 through 44.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Give everyone a Bible or a copy of the Lector's Text. Ask the youth to read the text aloud in a normal voice as they walk around the room. If the group is large enough, divide into small groups of three to four. Read the scripture passage one more time, with each person reading a different verse.

Give each person a strip of cloth. With markers, write or draw on the cloth something that hurts. For example: divorce, being fat, wearing braces, death of a pet or loved one, being an outsider. After finishing, take the strip of cloth and wrap like a bandage somewhere on the body, around the head, on an arm or leg, or around the torso.

When everyone is bandaged, note that everyone has wounds. One by one, let the group unbind each wound and uncover the hurt. After the bandages have all been removed, talk about the scripture passage and the hurts that every person carries around.

- How did Mary feel when Jesus arrived after her brother died? Have you ever felt alone even after you pray?
- Why did Jesus ask the mourners to unbind Lazarus? Have you ever had a hurt or disappointment healed? Did you feel that someone had "unbound" your pain?
- How did Lazarus feel when Jesus told him to come out of the cave? Where had he been for four days? After the discussion, stand in a circle for prayer. Put the strips of cloth that were used as bandages in the center of the circle. Pray silently and aloud for the hurts of the group.

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select

those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **Drama:** Read the entire story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in *John 11:1-53*. Select one scene to dramatize, or divide into small groups to act out several scenes. Encourage one group to look at the last part of the story that takes place before the Sanhedrin or council.
- **Picture it:** Draw a picture of death. Some people who have been clinically dead and come back to life have described a tunnel or bright light. What do you expect to see?
- **Colors:** Look at the lector's text or the entire story in *John 11*. Identify the emotions of each of the characters. For example, Martha was cautiously hopeful, Mary was a little angry, and Jesus was sad. Select colors for each of the emotions you identify. Using colored tissue paper, make a collage of the emotions of the story.

Games

- **Lazarus:** Before the game, secretly ask one person to be Lazarus and another to be Jesus. Explain to the group that everyone will walk around shaking hands. If someone squeezes a hand twice while shaking it, the recipient has been touched by Lazarus. After a few seconds, that person dies, as dramatically as possible. After several people are "dead," the group will begin patting them on the back in addition to shaking hands. If someone scratches a back while patting it, the recipient has been healed by Jesus and can get back up. The game is over when Jesus and Lazarus are identified.

WEAVINGS

- Artists throughout history have illustrated the story of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha at the cave where Lazarus was buried. A figure frequently portrayed in paintings of the raising of Lazarus is that of a man holding his hand to his nose. This figure recalls the warning of Martha that "already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."
- The seasons of the year play out the story of life, death, resurrection, and new life. Each fall, the leaves of deciduous trees lose their chlorophyll to allow the natural colors to emerge. Reds, yellows, oranges, and browns provide breathtaking beauty to hillsides and parks. The cold winds blow the dying leaves to the ground where they return to the soil. In the spring, new life fed by the nutrients of the dying leaves pushes up through the ground in gentle greens. The deep greens of summer soon take over, basking in the warmth of long, sunny days. Which season do you like best? Why?

RESOURCE POSTER

- The Raising of Lazarus (No. 5)

Media

Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch the scene from *Dead Poet's Society* when Robin Williams takes his class to the school trophy case. Ask the youth to think of one way they can "seize the day."
- **Print:** You cannot come to mourn with Mary and Martha, but you do want to send a sympathy card. What will the card say? How will you decorate it? Make a card for Mary and Martha before you find out Lazarus is alive.

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of Bible and church activities. The music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Sing "When Jesus wept, the falling tear" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 715) as a round.
- Sing "Leave It There" (*Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, 197) about taking burdens to the Lord and leaving them there.
- Learn or listen to "Lean on Me" (*The Tune Book Songs*, 71).

Service

- **Hospice:** Visit a hospice facility in your community or contact a hospice volunteer to visit someone in a home. Find out about the services offered by hospices and how youth could help.

Sharing

- **Cards:** Send sympathy cards to parishioners who are grieving. Ask the church office to give the group, each week for the remainder of the year, a list of people who are in mourning.

Study

- **Stages of grief:** Read about the stages of grief that people pass through for a "healthy" mourning in *On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross.
- **Alive again:** Visit the library and look for books or search the Internet for articles about people who have been clinically dead and come back to life. Compare the descriptions of their experiences.
- **Lazarus:** Read about Lazarus' fate in *John 12*.

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Grant unto us thy servants
To our God—a heart of flame
To our friends—a heart of love
To ourselves—a heart of steel.
—Augustine (adapted)

My spirit has become dry because it forgets to feed on you.
—St. John of the Cross

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
all else be nought to me, save that thou art—
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.
—*The Hymnal 1982*, 488

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 374 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Father, you loved the world so much that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, he lived as one of us, yet without sin. To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation; to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy. To fulfill your purpose he gave himself up to death; and, rising from the grave, destroyed death, and made the whole creation new.

From Holy Eucharist II
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 374

Leader: *Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to retell the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead? Can they list the different emotions felt by Mary, Martha, and Jesus? Are youth able to identify a wound or disappointment in their own lives?

Thomas: Searching for Jesus Called by Jesus

Objective

This session centers on the scene between the apostle Thomas and Jesus after the resurrection. Youth will be able to describe Thomas' doubts about Jesus' resurrection.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary introduces the apostle Thomas and his relationship to Jesus. Key names are Thomas; the key place is Judea; the key event is Thomas' confrontation with the risen Christ. For spiritual preparation think about your own doubts and how your faith may have been strengthened by questions you have encountered in your faith journey.

Commentary

Thomas, who was also called the twin in the *Gospel of John*, was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. While he is only mentioned in the list of disciples in the gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*, he is given distinct characteristics in *John*.

Thomas first makes an appearance when Jesus decides to return to Judea to see his dying friend Lazarus. Thomas encourages the other disciples who fear for Jesus' safety, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (*John 11:16b*). Later he is mentioned again as the disciples meet with Jesus at the Last Supper (*John 14*).

The most familiar reference to Thomas comes after Jesus' resurrection. He had not been with the other disciples when they saw Jesus. He refused to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead "unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails

and my hand in his side. . . ." (*John 20:25b*)

When he finally encounters Jesus, Jesus invites him to put his finger on his hands and in his side. Thomas then proclaims his faith by saying, "My Lord and my God!" (*John 20:28b*) This response is the first time in the Bible that Christ and God are mentioned together as being part of the Godhead.

Thomas is mentioned two other times in the Bible. He is with the disciples who join Jesus for breakfast after a fruitless night of fishing. The final reference to Thomas is in *Acts 1:13* as one of those present in the upper room after the ascension of Jesus.

Thomas seems to have been a thoughtful, if literal-minded, person. His readiness to accompany Jesus to an unwelcome place shows his loyalty and courage. He is often referred to as "Doubting Thomas," a name that may not be entirely fair. He wanted desperately to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, but he needed more evidence than the words of other people. Though Jesus refused to give the Pharisees a sign, he invited Thomas to touch the wounds from the crucifixion. The "sign" he allowed Thomas to experience did not create faith; it did, however, allow Thomas' faith to be confirmed.

Personal Views

Many people have found the story of Thomas comforting. We see ourselves in the man who needed more evidence than the words of a few people, even people

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."*
John 20:27
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Robert Blake, William Penn, C. S. Lewis
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Collect for Saint Thomas (BCP, p. 237)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."
John 20:24-29

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Many youth have doubts about their faith and even the existence of God. Use Thomas to explore these doubts, and let youth know that the church welcomes questions and uncertainty.
- Encourage youth to listen to each other even when they don't agree. Sometimes they may hear something that opens them to a new way of thinking.
- **Discussion Starter:** If you met someone claiming to be Jesus, what sign would convince you?

he loved and trusted. His questions and his doubt help us when we are filled with doubt. Have you ever sought a sign from God to help you with your doubts? How did God respond to you?

Thomas appears to have been both a literalist and a skeptic. He wanted concrete proof that the person who claimed to be Jesus was the same person who had died on the cross. Some people who share Thomas' traits are relieved that his doubts were satisfied and that the marks of the crucifixion were indeed visible. Do you need concrete proof to activate your faith? What has God revealed that helps you in your faith?

The response of Jesus to Thomas is also comforting. He does not rebuke him or even treat him with impatience. Instead Jesus invites him to touch the wounds that will prove to Thomas that this is really the Jesus he has followed.

Jesus goes further to bless those who have not seen signs "and yet have come to believe" (John 29b). Most of us have seen the signs of Jesus' love through our parents, friends, spouses, and children. We have witnessed events when Jesus' presence could be felt. Some people in our communities have never experienced the unconditional love of another person or felt the presence of Christ in the places where they live. Some youth may feel unwanted and unloved in their own homes. How do we share the gospel with these people? How do we let them "feel" the signs of Jesus through our words and actions?

During the week think about those who have helped you know Jesus. Was it through words or actions? What can you do to help those you meet see Jesus?

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of

bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Third Sunday of Easter
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 224-225

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

On a large piece of newsprint, write the question: Where do you go to find Jesus? As youth enter, ask them to write or draw their answer to the question on the graffiti board. More than one response can be recorded.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *John 20:24-29* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God,

Help me to never doubt your love and to always see your way. Have patience if I lose my way, and please help me to come back to you. Amen.

Nancy, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from John, chapter 20, verses 24 through 29.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Look over the responses from the Coming Together exercise. If appropriate, share details about the places youth go to find Jesus.

Imagine that you are in that place. On index cards, write at least one question you would like to ask Jesus. Put additional questions on separate cards. Collect the cards and put them into a sack.

Divide the youth into two groups. Either stand in two circles, one surrounding the other, or in two lines facing each other. The first group takes a question from the hat and gives an answer they think Jesus might give.

The second group must remain silent. After several questions, ask the groups to switch places. Talk about having questions and listening for answers.

- Did you like the answer to your question? Why?
- Do you ever get an answer to a question from your parents that you don't like? What do you do?
- Who do you go to for answers to the harder questions? Do you keep them to yourself?

Tell the story of Thomas, emphasizing his questions and how the answers were inadequate. Look at Resource Poster No. 6 of the mural of Thomas and Jesus. Note that Thomas' faith remained even with all his doubts.

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **Role play:** Stage two dramas. In the first, act out the confrontation between Thomas and his friends (the disciples, the women who visited the empty tomb) as they try to convince him Jesus has risen. In the second drama, move the scene to the present. Act out a meeting of people in a church discussing an issue that all but one person agrees on. How do you treat those who question and doubt?
- **Doubting Thomas:** Write the word "DOUBTING" lengthwise on a piece of paper. Find at least one word that begins in one of the letters in the word that indicates a positive trait for Thomas. For example, unafraid, thoughtful, daring. Bring in dictionaries and a

thesaurus as resources. Do people ever label you? What good qualities counteract that label?

Games

- **I doubt it:** Pass out Bibles to individuals or small groups. Ask them to write down a list of statements that are true and a list that are false. Give each person or group different colored paper or markers so the author(s) can be identified. Line up in the same groups. A moderator directs a statement from one of the lists to an individual or group. (Contestants are not allowed to respond to statements that they helped to write.) They say either "true" or "I doubt it." One point is given for each correct response. The game ends when every statement is read.

Media

Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch the end of *Indiana Jones: The Last Crusade* when Harrison Ford's faith is tested. What sign helped him span the chasm to the sacred chamber where the chalice was kept?
- **Print:** Bring in a copy of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. Read one or more of the stories about the miracles Jesus performed as a child.

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of

WEAVINGS

- December 21 is the feast day for St. Thomas. The story of Thomas is also in the lectionary the week after Easter, another appropriate time to look at this session.
- The Syrian Christians of Malabar, India, who identify themselves as the Mar Thoma Church, believe that Thomas brought the gospel to India. He was later martyred, according to their tradition, and buried at Mylapore, Madras. His relics are believed to be at nearby Abruzzi, where they are still venerated.
- When the Church established the canon, the accepted books of the Bible, the Gospel of Thomas was not included. Unlike the gospel books in the Bible, it is not historical in form but instead is made up of sayings and discourses of Jesus. Several entries have similarities with parts of *Matthew* and *Luke*, and some scholars believe the book may contain a few words of Christ not found in the Bible. A similar book, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, recorded miracles performed by Jesus in his childhood. Part of the legacy of Thomas is the doubt raised by the legends and writings attributed to him.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Doubting Thomas (No. 6)

Bible and church activities. The music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Read or sing “How oft, O Lord, thy face hath shone” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 242) about Thomas and how the truth “sets us free.”
- Sing together “It’s Just You” (*The Tune Book Songs*, 159).
- Listen to “I Believe in You” by Bob Dylan on *Slow Train Coming*. Why is it hard to believe in a God that we cannot see?

Service

- **Prayer:** Brainstorm places or people in the community, region, or world in situations that seem hopeless. List the ideas on index cards. Ask the youth to each take a card home and pray for the situation listed there each day. While we may doubt that these situations can be healed, remember that the Berlin wall was dismantled peacefully by the people after years of prayers and intercessions.

Sharing

- **Doubt boxes:** Decorate a medium-size box, leaving a slit at the top. Place it somewhere in your church where it is accessible to the congregation. Place index cards nearby, and invite others to put their doubts in the box. Use the cards to write a Prayers of the People (see p. 383 of *The Book of Common Prayer*). Say the prayer at a worship service at your church.

Study

- **Thomas in India:** Find out more about Christians of the Mar Thoma Church of Malabar, India, who believe Thomas brought the gospel to India. Look up India and the Holy Land on a map depicting the first century. How would Thomas reach India? Which other lands would he cross?
- **Thomas stories:** Using a concordance, find other references to Thomas in the Bible.

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

He who shall teach the child to doubt
The rotting grave shall ne’er get out.
—Robert Blake

O God, help us not to despise or oppose what we do not understand.
—William Penn

Many people think one can decide whether a miracle occurred in the past by examining the evidence “according to the ordinary rules of historical inquiry.” But the ordinary rules cannot be worked until we have decided whether miracles are possible. . . For if they are impossible, then no amount of historical evidence will convince us.
—C. S. Lewis

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 237 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray. Everliving God, who strengthened your apostle Thomas with firm and certain faith in your Son’s resurrection: Grant us so perfectly and without doubt to believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, that our faith may never be found wanting in your sight; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Collect for Saint Thomas
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 237

Leader: *Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to describe Thomas’ doubts about the resurrection of Jesus? Can they compare their own doubts with those of Thomas? Can youth identify doubts and places to go to look for answers?

Stephen: Called to be Different Called by Jesus

Objective

This session focuses on a Christian from the early church in Jerusalem who was put to death for his beliefs. Youth will be able to tell why Stephen is known as the first Christian martyr.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary provides background about Stephen's activities in the early Church and his statement of belief before the Jewish council. Key people are Stephen and Saul, later known as Paul; the key place is Jerusalem; and the key events are Stephen's defense before the court and his stoning by the angry mob. For spiritual preparation think about times you have made a stand for your beliefs.

Commentary

Stephen is first mentioned in *Acts 6* as one of seven men "of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" chosen by the apostles to take over tasks of the Church in Jerusalem. The Bible refers to the work of the seven as "waiting on tables" to allow the apostles to devote themselves to prayer and "serving the word." Sometimes called deacons, the seven men did not have the duties of present-day deacons in the Church, although Stephen apparently was seen as a teacher.

Described as a bold man, he was also considered as wise, full of faith, and possessed of the Holy Spirit. Like Jesus, Stephen was falsely charged by a group of Jews he had confronted with teaching against the temple. He believed that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

meant that the Mosaic law should now be seen in a new and different light. Other Jews in Jerusalem were enraged by his beliefs which they perceived as threatening to worship at the temple.

The defense of Stephen's beliefs is found in his speech recorded in *Acts 7:2-53*. He spoke before the Sanhedrin, a council of seventy priests, scribes, and elders, presided over by the high priest. Stephen believed that the Israelites were once again, as they had been throughout their history, in danger of not recognizing the way God had chosen to fulfill his promises to the people of Israel.

This speech so enraged the people listening to Stephen that they "all rushed together against him" (*Acts 7:57b*) and dragged him out of the city to be killed without a trial. Stephen seemed oblivious to the danger as he gazed into heaven to see a vision of God and Jesus.

Watching, though not directly participating in the violence, was Saul, later known as the apostle Paul. The angry "witnesses," legally required to cast the first stones at the offender, laid their coats at his feet. Saul's silence was taken to indicate consent.

While Stephen prayed, the mob threw stones at his kneeling figure. His last words were an intercession to his persecutors, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (*Acts 7:60b*). After saying these words, he died. Stephen is recognized today as the first Christian martyr.

SESSION LEAFLET

■ **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*

■ **Key Verse**—*While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*

Acts 7:59

■ **Youth Commentary and Prayer**

■ **Voices**—Reinhold Niebuhr, John S. Hoyland, Christopher Smart

■ **Daily Reflections**

■ **Words to Remember**

■ **Prayer**—Collect for Saint Stephen (BCP, p. 237)

LECTOR'S TEXT

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Acts 7:54-60

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Youth may find it difficult to relate to a man who died for his faith over 2,000 years ago. Help them identify situations when they are called to stand up for their beliefs or for other people in the face of opposition.
- Some youth may be tempted to throw or even toss the rocks used in the exercises. Be ready to intervene if necessary.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been in a situation when others belittled someone you considered a friend? What did you do?

Personal Views

While many people have suffered for their beliefs, many Christians in this country will never face an angry mob or be called on to be a martyr for Christ. It is hard for most of us to relate to the difficulties faced by these early Christians. As a nation, we cherish our rights to freedom of religion.

However, there are times that we may have been ostracized by others for standing up for our beliefs. Have you ever faced an angry coach because you would not let your child play a game on Sunday morning? Have you ever met a stony silence for standing up for an unpopular colleague or neighbor? Have you ever felt singled out at a party for not laughing at an inappropriate joke?

Sometimes the most difficult part of living our faith is recognizing the times we are called to be different. When we are with friends, we sometimes don't hear ourselves say negative or unkind things about another person. Stephen knew exactly what he believed when he faced the Sanhedrin. Do you know what you believe? Do you know how to act out your faith so that others know what you believe?

During the week, listen to your conversations with others. Would you care if anyone listened in? Do your words mirror your beliefs? Would you have the same conversation with Jesus?

Probably one of the most difficult experiences for a young person is being different from the rest of the group. As Christians, we are all called to be different at some points in our life. What can you do as a leader of youth to exemplify Christian ideals and beliefs? How can you help them to become aware of actions that are not Christ-like?

Almighty and everlasting God,
who kindled the flame of your

love in the heart of your holy martyr Stephen: Grant to us, your humble servants, a like faith and power of love, that we who rejoice in his triumph may profit by his example; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Of a Martyr
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 247

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Bring in smooth-surfaced rocks, enough for each person in the group. Set out *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* and other books about people from history and the Bible who have died for their beliefs. Ask the youth to write with a marker on the rock the name of a person who has died for his or her beliefs.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Acts 7: 54-60* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord,

*Help me to do what is right,
no matter what everyone else does.
And help all humankind and the
leaders of nations
to see what is right.*

Amen.

James, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from The Book of Acts, chapter 7, verses 54 through 60.*
(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the youth to tell the stories about the people they have named on their rocks. As each one finishes, begin making a pile of rocks at the front or center of the room.

Tell the story of Stephen. Include his role as "servant" in the early church, his defense of his beliefs before the Jewish council, and how the mob killed him. Be sure to note that Saul, later known as

the apostle Paul, was also present at the stoning of Stephen, and that the rocks are a symbol of Saint Stephen. Discuss the stories of Stephen and people the youth identified.

- Are there similar themes in the stories?
- How did these people find strength?
- Where do you look for strength? Who do you turn to for help?
- How can Jesus change anger and hurt into something good?

Ask the youth to find their rocks from the pile and rearrange them into the shape of a cross. Close by saying together the Collect for Saint Stephen (BCP, p. 237 or p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Optional Activities

The following activities offer groups a wide range of choices. Consider the interests and strengths of youth and leaders and select those activity options that seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember, no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **Role play:** Write several scenarios of situations when youth are called to stand up for others. For example, a group decides to exclude your friend because she's overweight. Act out the dramas with two endings: one in which you participate in the "stone throwing" by your actions or silence and one in which you stand up for one another.
- **News:** Write a story based on the stoning of Stephen as if you were observing the scene as a journalist. Which questions will you ask? How can you be objective? Should you get involved?
- **Trial:** Stage a trial based on Stephen's story. Read about his statement before the Jewish council in *Acts 6*. What will he be

accused of? Who will defend him? What role will Saul (Paul) play at the trial? Invite an impartial judge to decide the outcome.

Games

- **Paper wads:** Divide into two groups. Clear the room of furniture, and put a strip of masking tape down the center. Give each group a pile of papers and give them a few minutes to make as many paper wads as possible. When the ammunition is ready, tell each group to begin throwing their "rocks" across the line into the other group's territory. Continue for five minutes, then stop. Count the number of "rocks" on each side; the side with the most rocks loses.

Media

Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch *Chariots of Fire* in which a British track star refuses to represent his country in the Olympics because he will not run on the sabbath.
- **Print:** Bring in art books from the library with picture of the stoning of Stephen. How is Saul (Paul) depicted? What is similar in all the pictures? Which artist do you prefer?

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of youth experience in the context of Bible and church activities. The

WEAVINGS

- December 26 is the feast day for Saint Stephen.
- When the Jewish leaders sanctioned the stoning of Stephen, they probably thought they could put an end to this faction of Christ-followers. However, the fear that dispersed the Church in Jerusalem did not destroy the faith of the people. An unintended consequence of the stoning of Stephen was the spreading of the gospel outside of Jerusalem for the first time.
- The story of Stephen's death in *Acts* closely parallels accounts of Jesus' death in the gospels. Like Jesus, Stephen was wrongly accused of heresy. The involvement of an angry mob also occurs in both stories. Finally, both die with words of forgiveness on their lips. Stephen's story also serves as a link to the future. At the stoning, we find the silent Saul condoning the acts of the mob. Later, after his conversion, the transformed Paul is a leader in spreading the gospel in the world.

music suggestions offered here reflect a broad variety of possibilities from simple listening to hearty music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Sing or read “When Stephen, full of power and grace” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 243) about Saint Stephen.
- Sing together “We Walk by Faith” (*Gather*, GIA Publications, 414).
- Listen to “Rachel Delevoryas” by Randy Stonehill on *Stories*. Who is the “Stephen” in this song? Who are the people throwing the stones?

Service

- **Reach out:** Do research on the Internet or visit the library to find places where Christians are suffering for their faith. Find a way to help by writing letters or raising money for organizations such as the Presiding Bishop’s Fund for World Relief.

Sharing

- **Contemporary drama:** Stage a play for another group based on Stephen’s story in *Acts 7:54-60*, but set in the twentieth century. Who will be the martyr? What is his or her cause? Who is the mob? Discuss the play afterward with the group.

Study

- **Standing up:** Find other characters in the Bible who have stood up for their beliefs, such as Daniel and Esther. Do they all die?

- **What’s next?** Find out what happened to Christians in Jerusalem and prominent characters such as Peter and Paul after the stoning of Stephen. Begin your study in *Acts 8*.
- **Stoning:** Look up “stoning” or “stoned” in a concordance to discover where else the practice is mentioned in the Bible. Which animal is associated with stoning in the Old Testament? What happens to Paul in *Acts 14*?

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotations (*Session Leaflet*, p. 2).

O Lord, you have made us very small, and we bring our years to an end like a tale that is told; help us to remember that beyond our brief day is the eternity of your love.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Christ,
In this dark hour
Be near,
Be swift to save!

—John S. Hoyland

Hearken to the anthem glorious
of the martyrs robed in white;
they, like Christ, in death victorious
dwell for ever in the light.

—Christopher Smart
The Hymnal 1982, 241

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 237 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the *Session Leaflet*).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

We give you thanks, O Lord of glory, for the example of the first martyr Stephen, who looked up to heaven and prayed for his persecutors to your Son Jesus Christ, who stands at your right hand; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Collect for Saint Stephen
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 237

Leader: *Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to relate the story of the stoning of Stephen? Can they tell why Stephen is known as the first Christian martyr? Can youth name others who have stood up for their beliefs? Can they list ways they are called to stand up for what they believe?