

Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

CHRISTIANS BUILD COMMUNITY 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 forms 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 Voight 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 relationships 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.

CHRISTIANS BUILD COMMUNITY

The content of this module focuses on New Testament and Community. Titled *Christians Build Community*, each session examines a the lives of people in the early church faith community as they discover, “Who and Whose they are?” It tells of stories of people from Scripture who struggled to build a community of believers in the midst of persecution and conflict. The people in this module face difficulty and confusion as they build the community that will be the God's Church in the world. Youth today are also faced with struggle, difficulty, and conflict in an ever increasingly secular world. Seeing themselves as Christians in the community of faith and responding to God's call 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:
Peter & Paul: Building the Church
Ananias: Healing an Apostle
Cornelius: Calling a Gentile
Lydia & Phoebe: Women Following Christ
Romans: Establishing the Church
Corinthians: Growing in Love
Ephesians: Receiving the Gift of Faith
Philippians: Shining as Lights
Philemon: Settling an Account

- **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.

Peter & Paul: Building the Church

Christians Build Community

Objective

The focus of this session is how the early Church, under leaders such as Peter and Paul, struggled with building a new Church on the traditions of the Jewish faith. Youth will be able to describe how early Church leaders built upon the history and tradition of Israel. They will list ways tradition is a part of new endeavors and how to incorporate old ideas with new undertakings.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session looks at the issue of how Gentiles would be accepted into the faith. Key names are Paul, Peter, and James; key terms are customs and traditions. In the Personal Views section, think about customs and traditions in your church and how you feel about making changes.

Commentary

The scripture passage in *Acts 15* recounts the events of an apostolic council in the early Church that dealt with the inclusion of Gentiles. Peter and Paul took the stance that the Church should welcome Gentile converts without holding them to the strict Jewish laws. Jesus and all of the first Christians were Jews, and the early Christians continued to observe Jewish law. They believed the Jewish Messiah had come in the person of Jesus. Therefore, the early conflicts between Jews and Christians were, in effect, a family quarrel or domestic fight.

The disagreement reported in the Book of Acts revolved around the fact that many non-Jews or Gentiles—who were often considered

outside God's elect—were becoming Christians. The Jews believed that anyone who was to become a member of the religious community must be circumcised and observe Jewish dietary laws as a sign of that membership. This was a belief that had held for centuries, and the conflict was a major dispute.

James stepped into this argument at a crucial time in the new church's growth. Many Gentiles had already joined the religious community by receiving the Holy Spirit directly from God. James argued that since they had already turned to God, the Church should not insist on circumcision. However, Gentiles should not have free entry either: membership brings with it responsibilities, and new converts must observe the same standards as the rest of the Church.

In this session, the terms “customs” and “traditions” are both used. Unfortunately, these two words are often used interchangeably. The word custom, in this session, refers to practices done each year—hanging greens during Advent, the use of Alleluia during Lent, red balloons at Pentecost, and Christmas trees. Tradition means the handing down of information and beliefs from one generation to another—the Nicene Creed, the Lord's Supper, and the reading of Scripture during worship services. Both customs and traditions have helped to build the Church.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.'*—Acts 15:16-17a
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Robert McAfee Brown, Ramakrishna, Arthur J. Moore
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For the Church (BCP, p. 816)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

After they finished speaking, James replied, "My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.' Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues."

Acts 15:13-21

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Changing customs or traditions often causes conflict. Be prepared to deal with conflicting ideas within the group, especially about changing customs in your own church and the changes in tradition in the larger Church.
- One of the main disputes in the early church over the inclusion of Gentiles centered on the need for circumcision. If you raise this issue, be sure the youth know what the term means.
- **Discussion Starter:** Which customs or traditions in the Church help to build a Christian community?

Personal Views

In every generation, groups of Christians have thrown off old customs and even traditions, often establishing new ones in their place. Change can be natural and healthy as communities of Christians work to build up the body of Christ—the Church.

Reflect on times in your life when you have witnessed significant changes in your church, your place of business, or your home that have led to growth. Were these changes necessary? Were they welcome? What kinds of thoughts and feelings did you experience? Did your views or feelings change over time?

Some of the traditions of the early Church, such as the public reading of scripture, shared bread and wine at communion, and baptism with water, are basic foundations of the Church. Our Church is also built on the traditions of the Apostle's Creed and the sacraments. In addition, the early Church observed customs that reflected its Jewish heritage, such as strict dietary laws, that have since been set aside.

As the body of Christ—the Church—seeks to fulfill the call to preach the Gospel to all people, customs and traditions change. Examine the life of your congregation. What helps to encourage new life and growth? What hinders or discourages it?

Lord Jesus Christ, make this a temple of your presence and a house of prayer. Be always near us when we seek you in this place. Draw us to you, when we come alone and when we come with others, to find comfort and wisdom, to be supported and strengthened, to rejoice and give thanks. May it be here, Lord Christ, that we are made one

with you and with one another, so that our lives are sustained and sanctified for your service.

At the Consecration of a Church
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 568

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Before youth arrive, rearrange the room by turning it around 180 degrees. Reverse the direction of all the chairs and tables. Take down old posters and put new ones in their place or move them to different locations. Change as much as possible.

As the students enter, watch what happens. If you are asked why the room is different, just shrug your shoulders. See if the youth put the chairs back in order. Listen to what they say. Take notes if possible without being conspicuous.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Acts 15:13-21* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, help us to understand your will and your ways. We hope to build up your church by fulfilling your needs and by teaching others no matter who they may be. By helping others, we are helping you use everyone to spread your word. We are your tools and the world needs repairs. Use us to build your home.

Nick, Grade 7

Lector: *A reading from Acts, chapter 15, verses 13 through 21.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Fold large sheets of drawing paper into four sections. Distribute pencils and colored markers. Invite youth to draw or write in each section using the following guidelines: section one should include a custom or tradition they have always observed at home; section two,

one related to school; section three, a favorite tradition; and section four, one they dislike.

After youth complete their drawings, ask them to share their work with the entire group or with those sitting near them. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- What customs did you grow up with that are comforting to you?
- How do you feel when the custom is changed?
- What did you think as you entered the room today? Did the new arrangement make you uncomfortable? Share with youth any comments or actions you observed.

Explain the differences between “customs” and “traditions.” Describe the conflict from the scripture passage and the solution proposed by James. Ask the youth to identify traditions in the Church and customs practiced in your church.

- How is our Church similar to the early Church?
- Which traditions and customs are important to you? Would you change any traditions and customs in your church?

- What customs or traditions invite others to become Christians?

Refer to Resource Poster No.1 that shows construction tools. Ask the youth to think of people or spiritual components needed to build a church that correspond to the tools.

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

- **Word association:** Distribute pencils and paper, and invite

students to complete these sentences with the first two or three things that pop into their minds. “When I bring a friend to church, I want them to ____.” “If Jesus came to our church on Sunday, he would like ____.” “He would not like ____.” “If our church lots of people would come.” Share answers, giving youth time to describe unique customs that are a part of their lives.

Games

- **Building towers:** Divide the youth into two groups. Give them a specific amount of time to build a tower. Give one group tennis balls to use as the base, and the other group wooden blocks to use as the base. Which one is more reliable? What kinds of traditions or customs are tennis balls, and what kinds are blocks?
- **Including others:** Ask the youth to walk slowly around the room. Choose one person to be “It.” At a given signal, everyone begins to shake hands. When “It” shakes hands, the hands are “glued” together. Anyone who shakes hands with someone glued to “It,” also becomes “glued.” Continue until all members of the group are stuck together.

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:** Show the scene from the movie *The Lion King* where Simba

WEAVINGS

- Schedule this session at a time in the year when your church has a number of traditions, such as Christmas or Advent. Ask an older parishioner to share the history of a special church custom observed during these seasons.
- Churches are not the only institutions that embrace customs and traditions. Find out if any of the youth are members of organizations that have unique customs or ceremonies and ask them to share their experiences with the rest of the group.
- Sometimes we lose sight of the reasons certain customs or traditions got started. In the familiar story of *The Lottery*, a barbaric practice is carried on each year even though no one can remember how or why it started. Even in the Church, no custom or tradition is more important than the mission of spreading the gospel to all people.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Tools (No. 1)

is telling Rafiki that the past doesn't matter, that "what's happened has happened, and it doesn't make any difference." Ask the youth what is wrong with Simba's thinking.

- **Print:** Bring in a photo or encyclopedia entry about Sequoia trees. Describe or let youth read about the root systems of these massive trees: without deep root systems, the trees reach enormous heights by intertwining their roots with each other. How are members of a church like the Sequoia trees?

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 "The God of Abraham praise" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 401).
- Sing "Even Me" (*Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, 167).
- Play the song "Tradition" from *Fiddler on the Roof*. What do the words say about tradition? Do you agree?

Service

- **Local customs:** Which customs does your community sponsor that youth can participate in? Find a local CROP Walk or food drive that welcomes youth participation.

Sharing

- **Church customs:** Brainstorm ways youth can participate in evangelism at your church. Is there an activity the youth can join? Is there something they would like to start? Why is evangelism important to youth? To the church?

Study

- **Looking back:** Invite an adult who has been active in your church for a long time to talk about what the Church was like when they joined or were confirmed. Encourage the speaker to bring souvenirs, pictures, or leaflets to share.

Voices

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

The Church cannot be content to live in its stained-glass house and throw stones thru the picture windows of modern culture.
Robert McAfee Brown

The breeze of divine grace is blowing upon us all. But one needs to set the sail to feel this breeze of grace.
Ramakrishna

When the early church fathers came together, they talked about their powers; when modern church [people] come together, they talk about their problems.
Arthur J. Moore

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 816 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*
Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior. Amen.

For the Church
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 816

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can the youth describe some of the conflicts in the early Church and how they were handled? Can they identify Jewish traditions that are a part of the Christian Church? Are youth aware of the importance of custom and tradition in their own lives? Do the youth recognize the importance of building up the Church—the body of Christ?

Ananias: Healing an Apostle

Christians Build Community

Objective

The focus of this session is how Ananias heeded God's call even though he did not understand it. Youth will understand that sometimes Christians are called to do things that may not seem to make sense or that they do not want to do. They will also be able to list ways God can use each person to further the mission of the Church.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session looks at the story of Ananias and how he obeyed God's call to help Saul (Paul) regain his sight. Key names are Saul, Paul, and Ananias. In the Personal Views section, examine times in your life when you have been called to do something you did not understand.

Commentary

Von Goethe said, "If we take people as they are, we make them worse. If we treat them as if they are what they can be, we help them become what they are capable of being."

When Ananias heard a message from God to go to and minister to Saul of Tarsus (Paul), it must have sounded insane. Saul was a known persecutor of believers in Christ, and a notorious enemy. Earlier in *Acts 9:1*, Saul is said to be "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord." Saul reportedly "was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison." (*Acts 8:2-3*) Saul was Prosecutor, Judge, and Executioner of the early Church.

Ananias was asked to treat Saul not as he knew him to be—an enemy—but as God knew Saul would become—a friend and a brother. Ananias received word that this sworn enemy was not only someone to whom he must minister, but who was, inexplicably, "God's chosen instrument."

Ananias protested, but ended up doing as he was told. He went to the house where he was sent and laid his hands on Saul as instructed. Ananias greeted Saul, not as "this man" but as "brother." Through Ananias' loyalty to God, in the face of circumstances he did not understand, a hated and feared enemy became a fully accepted member of the community. Ananias, therefore, while not famous or well-known, is a model of Christian discipleship.

Personal Views

After his conversion experience, Saul was renamed Paul and became an apostle. Although God used Ananias at a pivotal time in the history of the Church, we never hear from him again. God often uses ordinary people and ordinary circumstances to do his work. William Willimon writes, "The Lord's disciples are not only the prominent 'heroes' of the faith like Peter or Philip but also ordinary folk like Ananias, who walk on stage for a particular mission and then exit as the story moves on. Ministry is a function (a job to do for the Lord) more than a status or a privilege." (*Interpretation, Acts*, p. 78)

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—...and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.—*Acts 9:12*
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Mary Baker Eddy, Lewis Carroll, Abraham Lincoln
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—From Evening Prayer II (BCP, p. 124)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized.

Acts 9:10-18

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Students can be confused by the use of the names Saul and Paul. Saul is a Hebrew name used by the Apostle Paul before he became a Christian. Paul is the Greek form of the same name.
- Youth are often fascinated by the mystery of God and being part of a plan that they cannot comprehend. Use the story of Ananias and his willingness to obey God's call to talk about the mystery of our faith.
- Even "ordinary" people have special gifts from God. Not using these gifts is the same as saying "no" to God. Help youth identify gifts they have never used.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been asked to help someone you considered an enemy?

Ananias expressed reluctance and even fear at being asked to show hospitality to an enemy. "God's ways are not our ways, nor God's thoughts our thoughts" says the Bible, and God sometimes asks us to do things that go against our nature. What person or types of people do you assume are beyond God's reach?

Have there been times in your life when you have obeyed God even though doing so did not make sense at the time? Have there been times that someone was an Ananias to you, overcoming their own fears and suspicions to welcome you? What people do you know now who seem "hopeless"? Spend a few minutes thinking about them, not as they are, but "as they can be." What would change if you started treating them "as they can be" right now?

I lay my hands upon you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, beseeching our Lord Jesus Christ to sustain you with his presence, to drive away all sickness of body and spirit, and to give you that victory of life and peace which will enable you to serve him both now and evermore. Amen.

From *Ministration to the Sick*
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 456

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Ahead of time prepare a set of cards with syllables or words that when held in the proper order will spell out "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen." On the reverse side, in very small print, write a number code that will enable youth to line up correctly at the appropriate time. Be sure to use a number that has no repeating digits!

As the youth enter the room, pass out the cards randomly, making sure to distribute all the cards. (Give some more than one card, if necessary). Don't tell anyone what the cards will be used for. Ask the youth to stand in a circle and hold up the card letter-side-out, to allow everyone to see everyone else's card. The result will be scrambled phrase that has no meaning. Observe student's comments and questions. Now tell the group the code number, and ask them to rearrange themselves in the circle in order, using the numbers on the backs of the cards. After they rearrange themselves, the sentence will make sense.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Acts 9:10-18* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God,

Please help us to realize that we may not always understand what we are called to do, but help us to understand that we are needed to help to spread the Church's message. Help us to see that each and every one of us is needed by the Church to participate in this task.

Lea, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from Acts, chapter 9, verses 10 through 18.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Relate the following case study in your own words or by reading the following text. Feel free to substitute a similar story from the media or people you know.

Rebecca Hanson, the star of her high school soccer team, was hit by a drunk driver midway through the season in her senior year. Her leg was crushed, and her hip was broken in several places. She spent six weeks in

the hospital, and underwent several months of intensive physical therapy in order to regain the ability to walk. Rebecca's doctor has told her that she probably will wear a brace for the rest of her life and will never be able to run again—certainly never play sports.

One day, about a year after the accident, Rebecca receives two letters. The first letter is from the person convicted of drunk driving. He says that as part of his recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous, which he has attended faithfully since serving a three-month prison sentence, he is attempting to “make amends to those whom he has harmed.” He wants to meet for lunch with Rebecca and her parents to ask them to forgive him. The other letter is from the athletic director of the college Rebecca had planned to attend, informing her that her athletic scholarship has been canceled. She calls to ask you, her best friend, how she should respond.

- What does your first instinct tell you to say?

- How would Jesus respond?

Ask the youth what they thought about the story of Ananias from the Book of Acts. Emphasize God's use of an ordinary person to start an incredible ministry that would change not only the Church, but also the world.

- Would you have risked your life helping an enemy?

- Do God's commands always make sense?

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

- **Response:** Ask the youth to put themselves in Rebecca's position

at the time she receives the letter from the person who hit her. Write a letter in response to the man's letter. What would your letter say if you were Rebecca's mother or father?

- **Journaling:** Ask the youth to write down their responses to the following questions. Since this is a personal exercise, be sure they are aware that they will not have to share their responses. What do you think God is calling you to do? How could God call you to be an Ananias? How do you know when God wants you to do something?

Games

- **Who was sent?** Sit in a circle. The first person says, “Ananias was sent to Saul, who was sent to (name person on your left.)” That person says, “Ananias was sent to Saul, who was sent to NN, who was sent to NN (person in the circle on their left, or in the circle picked at random.)” Continue until all persons have been named; the last person to be picked must remember the correct order of all the “chosen.”

- **Building together:** Distribute to each person an object with which something could be built (e.g. pieces of scrap wood, blocks, nails, a hammer, a screw, a screwdriver, glue). Ask the group to design and build something using each object. Make it harder: each person must keep the preferred hand behind his or back at all times.

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

WEAVINGS

- Mystery is defined as anything that is kept secret or remains unexplained. Ananias is only told that Saul is to be an instrument of God—how that will happen is not explained. By accepting mystery as part of his faith, Ananias is able to heed God's call.
- We often overlook the contributions of ordinary people in every part of life. In our churches we take for granted that the altar will be ready for each Eucharist. In our communities, the corps of volunteers that deliver meals to the elderly allows many to remain in their homes instead of nursing facilities. Relief organizations throughout the world rely on complex networks of ordinary people to gather and distribute food to people living in areas hit by strife or natural disaster. Are you one of these ordinary people?

RESOURCE POSTER

- Paul Preaching (No. 4)

and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch the movie *Babe* or the scene in which the sheepdog council is considering whether or not to allow a pig to enter the contest. Discuss prejudices of the sheepdogs, other farm animals, and people in the film. How does each group overcome prejudice?
- **Print:** Cut up one or more comic strips from the Sunday paper and scramble the pieces. Challenge the group to sort and reconstruct the stories.

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.

- Learn "I heard the voice of Jesus say" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 692).
- Sing "He Healed the Darkness of My Mind" (*Gather*, GIA Publications, Inc., 639).
- Listen to "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" by The Hollies.

Service

- **Sacrifice:** Invite youth to give something up that they can't imagine not having, for example television for two weeks, video games, or time on the computer. Ask them to offer the time normally spent on these activities to a person who has been neglected.
- **Stretch:** Do something you wouldn't ordinarily do such as gathering blankets and distributing them to homeless persons on a night when youth usually spend time with friends.

Sharing

- **Reaching out:** The next time the youth plan a "fun" activity, invite the next younger group. A junior high (7 to 9 grades) group would invite young people in the sixth grade. Serve a dinner and plan activities with the younger youth in mind.

Study

- **Healing:** Examine the healing rites of *The Book of Common Prayer*, beginning on page 455. Compare the service to the way Ananias restored Saul's sight.
- **Map study:** Paul was well-known for his missionary journeys. Find Damascus on a map and locate other cities Paul visited during his ministry.

Voices

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

The prayer that reforms the sinner and heals the sick is an absolute faith that all things are possible to God,—a spiritual understanding of Him, an unselfed love.

Mary Baker Eddy

"Please, tell me where I am," Alice said.

"Where are you going?" said the [Cheshire] Cat.

"I don't know," said Alice.

"Well," the Cat said, "if you don't know where you are going, what difference does it make where you are?"

Lewis Carroll

Let us have faith that right makes might; and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it.

Abraham Lincoln

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 124 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

O God and Father of all, whom the whole heavens adore: Let the whole earth also worship you, all nations obey you, all tongues confess and bless you, and men and women everywhere love you and serve you in peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From Evening Prayer II
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 124

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can the youth name Christians who have been called to do things that may not seem to make sense? Can they list ways that they can further the mission of the Church?

Cornelius: Calling a Gentile Christians Build Community

Objective

The objective of this session is to look at God's expectations for the Church through the story of Peter and Cornelius. Youth will be able to describe ways the Church throughout history has reached out to all people. They will list ways their own church encourages different kinds of people to join the community.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary focuses on the expansion of the Christian faith in the early Church and the model of evangelism. Key names are Peter and Cornelius; the key place is Caesarea. In the Personal Views, think about how well our churches today welcome all people.

Commentary

The *Book of Acts* tells the story of an ever-expanding Christian faith. The gospel of Jesus has spread from the people of Jerusalem, not only geographically, but also among all kinds of people. The new faith called Christianity has brought together even the detested Samaritans and an Ethiopian who would have been seen as a powerful person from an exotic far-off land. Into this scenario comes Cornelius, a Gentile fully outside the Jewish religious community of the time.

To accept Gentiles in the new faith would mean that Christianity was not restricted to a particular people, but available to all people everywhere. To accept a Gentile would mean a fundamental reinterpretation of what it means to be God's chosen people, to give Gentiles equal footing with Jews.

The Bible says that Cornelius "and all his family were devout and God-fearing," a generous helper to the poor and regular in prayer. In those days the religious authorities believed that people of other nations were outside the mercy of God. Strict Jews would have no contact with Gentiles or Jews who did not strictly observe the law.

For strict Jews, it would have been taboo to be a guest or have as a guest someone from outside the religion. Yet Peter invited these men to be his guests (v. 23) and went into Cornelius's house in Caesarea (v. 27). Through Peter's actions, God tore down the walls of separation. Once the walls had been destroyed, Peter proclaimed the gospel. Cornelius was a "pioneer" to a new understanding.

Peter also provides a model of Christian evangelism: he offers hospitality to the Gentiles; he visits their homes; he preaches to them; and he confirms that God has sent his spirit through baptism.

Personal Views

The early Church had to wrestle with the issue of whether or not the Gentile believers were equal to Jews. Peter comes to see that what counts is not membership in a particular nation or people or observance of its customs or laws, but rather the way a person responds to God. How do you, as an individual, measure up to "the Peter Principle"? Does your church welcome all those who are seeking God?

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."*—Acts 10:34-35
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—C. S. Lewis, Grace E. Uhler, Isaac K. Beckes
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For Peace (BCP, p. 815)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Cornelius replied, "Four days ago at this very hour, at three o'clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.' Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say." Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." . . . While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Acts 10:30-35, 44-48a

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Some youth might bring up the Church's mistreatment of people in the name of missionary work, such as the Crusades. Talk about the Church as a group of humans who sometimes make terrible mistakes.
- In the recent history of the Church, people have been excluded because of race, ethnic origin, or sexual preference. Some youth may have strong feelings about these issues. The leader should set boundaries of mutual respect for one another if these issues are discussed.
- **Discussion Starter:** Today, to which group of people would you be reluctant to take the Gospel of Christ?

It has been said that "if we don't include, we exclude." Do you agree with that statement? If you agree, then are there people you exclude by not deliberately welcoming them into the church? In what ways can we open the Church? Reflect on Jesus' command to go into all the world and preach the gospel. What parts of "the world" are we leaving out?

Reflect on Jesus' saying, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) If we were to emphasize the word "all" in this sentence, then we could say that the only criteria that Jesus establishes for people to come to him are that they are a) weary, and b) carrying heavy burdens.

O God, the creator and preserver of all people, we humbly beseech you for all sorts and conditions of men and women; that you would be pleased to make your ways known to them, your saving health to all nations. More especially we pray for your holy Church universal; that it may be guided and governed by your good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life. . . . And this we beg for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

For All Sorts and Conditions of Men
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 814
(Adapted)

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

As youth enter the room, ask them: How did you come to this church? What brought you here? When and why did you first start coming?" (Possible responses include: this is the closest church to our house, all my friends come

here, my parents make me come, other places made us uncomfortable.) Allow them to tell their stories. As latecomers enter, be sure to summarize what others have said and invite them to tell their story, too.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find Acts 10:30-35 and 44-48a in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord, help us to do what is right, even though what is right is not always explained. Help us worship you at all times, and have trust in you. Strengthen our minds, bodies, and souls, and we will do all we can to serve you. We will have trust in you, and you in us. Thank you Lord. Amen.

Molly, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from Acts, chapter 10, verses 30 through 35 and 44 through 48a.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Set up a mock press conference to tell the story of Cornelius. Use Resource Poster No. 2 of Peter and Cornelius to help you set the stage. Ask for volunteers to play the parts of Cornelius, Peter, reporters, Gentiles, and skeptical "believers from the circumcision." Give the actors playing Cornelius and Peter time to prepare their parts while you work with the rest of the group on their roles.

Begin with Cornelius who will tell his story, and then turn the microphone over to Peter to tell his version of the story. Let the actors playing Gentiles or orthodox Jews offer their viewpoint. Those posing as reporters ask questions to get to the bottom of the story.

After the role play, use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- How did it feel to be cast as the Jewish skeptics? Could you better understand their viewpoint?
- How did the Gentiles feel in the role of “second-class citizens”?
- What is God's message to both Jew and Gentile?
- How did Peter and Cornelius act out the “great commission”? (*Matthew 28:19-20*)

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

- **Extra! Extra!** Write a story for a newspaper based on the Cornelius press conference. Encourage youth to give their slant on the story based on the role they played. Everyone should include a paragraph answering the questions who, what, where, and when.
- **Newscast:** Bring in a video camera (and tripod if possible) and let several youth tape the role play. Ask them to write a summary to produce as a segment of a newscast. They will need an anchor, at least one reporter, and a camera operator.
- **Set the scene:** Design a set for the press conference or television studio. Take the play on the road!

Games

- **Corny Cornelius:** Ask the group to spread themselves around the room and close their eyes. Invite them to wander around the room. Whenever you bump into someone, you shake their hand and ask, “Corny?” If the other person asks “Corny?” back, you

have NOT found Cornelius. You must keep your eyes closed, and keep moving, until you bump into another person and repeat the process. One person is designated covertly by the leader as Corny; that person opens his or her eyes, but cannot SAY anything. Whenever someone shakes Corny's hand and asks, “Corny?”, Corny does not respond. The person who bumped into Corny can then open his or her eyes and join Corny by the hand. Corny is now two persons, growing as more and more people bump into them and join the line at either end. The game ends when the last person wandering around finally bumps into Corny and joins the end of the line.

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 together the segment of the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird* in which the outsider Bo is accepted by others.
- **Print:** Obtain ahead of time a brochure from the Anglican Frontier Missions, Society for the Propagation of the Christian Gospel, or any local missionary effort. Read about the ministries described there. Can you see yourself joining similar ministries?

WEAVINGS

- This session flows naturally from Session 1 in this module about the leadership of Peter and Paul in building the early Church.
- It is easy to find fault with the Church—its history is riddled with events and actions we cannot explain away. Some of its most damaging acts have been silence in the face of oppression and abuse. However, the Church is the vehicle given to us by God to strengthen our own faith and spread the gospel. Each person, as part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, is responsible for the integrity of the institution.
- Much of the strife in the world today is a result of one group of people who feel superior to another. The terrible civil wars in Rwanda, Somalia, Ireland, the former Soviet Union, and Bosnia are the result of racial hatred and religious intolerance. Pray for the healing power of forgiveness and acceptance in nations torn by war and upheavals.

RESOURCE POSTER

- St. Peter in the House of Cornelius (No. 2)

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 together "In Christ there is no East or West" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 529).
- Sing "One Bread, One Body" (*Glory and Praise Vol. 2*, 127). Can you add other verses?
- Listen to "Ebony and Ivory" by Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder. How can we live "together in perfect harmony"?

Service

- **Heifer Project:** Gather information about The Heifer Project, Inc. (P. O. Box 808; Little Rock, Ark. 72203). The Heifer Project spreads the gospel by providing for the physical needs of hungry people.
- **Building for others:** Find out how youth from your church could participate in Group Workcamps in Loveland, Colorado. This organization brings together over 400 youth from churches all over the country for one-week periods to repair the homes of people who live in poverty.

Sharing

- **Newsletter:** Publish a story about Cornelius in the parish newsletter based on the Expressions exercise. Either select the best story or ask the youth to take the best parts of several stories to make one article.
- **Showtime:** Show the video of the coverage of the Cornelius news conference to another group in the church.

Study

- **SPCG:** Learn more about the Society for the Propagation of the Christian Gospel. Research its history and current mission work.
- **Missions:** Find out how your church began. Was it a mission church? If so, what was the "mother" (sponsoring) church? Has your church sponsored any missions itself?

Voices

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

Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.

The Weight of Glory
C. S. Lewis

For God so loved the world, not just a few,
The wise and great, the noble and the true,
Or those of favoured class or race or hue.
God loved the world. Do you?
Grace E. Uhler

We must stop giving the impression that the church is surrounded by a wall, fighting for its existence against a world that is trying to destroy it; instead, we must realize that the church is a force pushing out into the world.
Isaac K. Beckes

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 815 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.
Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.*

For Peace
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth relate the struggles in the early Church to define to whom and where the gospel should be spread? Are they able to describe how the Church throughout history reached out to all people? Can the youth name ways their own church encourages different kinds of people to be a part of the church community?

Lydia & Phoebe: Women Following Christ

Christians Build Community

Objective

The focus of this session is the role women have played in the Church. Youth will be able to describe the role women played in the early Church and the roles women perform in churches today.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary is about Lydia and Phoebe, two women encountered by Paul during his missionary journeys. Key names are Lydia, Phoebe, Paul, and Timothy; key places are Rome and Thyatira. For spiritual preparation think about the role of women in your church and the importance of both men and women in spreading the gospel.

Commentary

The two women described in the selected scriptures are significant not only for who they were but also for the different things they did. Lydia, by her trade, was probably a woman of means who heard Paul and Timothy speak. The financial status of Phoebe is unclear.

In the passage in *Acts*, Lydia is part of a group of women who have gathered at a place of prayer, probably a synagogue. The story takes place in Thyatira, a city in an ancient area called Lydia in Asia Minor. Lydia is converted after “. . .the Lord opened her heart.” (*Acts 16:14*) The story of the conversion becomes more powerful by giving one of the women a name. Her response to the gospel is immediate and she quickly moves to bring the good news to her household. In the joy of her transformation, she invites the missionaries into her home,

prevailing on them to stay. The story of Lydia's conversion puts “flesh and blood” on those whose lives are transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ.

In *Romans 16*, Paul asks the church in Rome to extend the hospitality of the church to Phoebe because of her tangible support of Paul and others. Because accommodations were often treacherous and unhealthy, Christian travelers depended on the hospitality of other Christians. Phoebe, in *Acts 16*, is called a deacon by Paul, which could indicate an ordained office or simply one who serves the Church. She is, however, clearly a recognizable leader in the Church. Tradition indicates that she had been entrusted to bring the Letter of Paul to the Church in Rome, an important task for a woman of that time. Paul makes it clear in that letter that she is to be offered hospitality in the “grace-cious” manner that she has ministered to others. He states that Phoebe has been a “benefactor of many.”

For further study: Read about other women in *People of the Bible* by Martin Woodrow and E.P. Sanders.

Personal Views

Women have always had a leading role in the life of the church; from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, women heard the “good news” and answered his call to follow. The roles that women have performed and continue

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—. . .so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.
—Romans 16:2
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Sojourner Truth, Alfonse de Lamartine, William Sharp
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—From Burial II (BCP, p. 504)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

Acts 16:14-15

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

Romans 16:1-2

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- The Church needs the gifts of both men and women working together to spread the good news of Christ. Encourage the youth to explore both traditional and contemporary roles of men and women today.
- Keep focused on the powerful witness of women both in the past and in the present.
- **Discussion Starter:** What kind of work do women perform in this church? Is it different from work men do?

to perform in the church are a vital part of the community of faith. Throughout history women have exercised great influence and leadership in the church.

Did you know anything about Lydia or Phoebe before you looked at this session? How are Lydia and Phoebe similar to women in the Church today? How are they different?

Can you think of the names of women who have led your own church? What roles have women historically played in your congregation? Can you name at least five?

In the past 20 or 30 years the roles of men and women have become less divided. Do men now participate in roles previously reserved for women? Do women perform tasks that were primarily done by men in the past? Are there still places where it is appropriate for men and women to have separate roles?

In the end, all of us are seeking to serve Christ together. Just as Paul helped men and women in their ministries, we are called to be open to the ministry of everyone in our churches. Use the following prayer this week as you think about how God has "made of one blood all the people of the earth."

O God, you have made of one blood all the peoples of the earth, and sent your blessed Son to preach peace to those who are far off and to those who are near: Grant that people everywhere may seek after you and find you; bring the nations into your fold; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; and hasten the coming of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

From Morning Prayer II
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 100

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

If possible hang pictures of women from the New Testament in your meeting room, such as women around the cross, the woman at the well, the woman anointing Jesus' feet, and the women at the tomb. Make sure several Bibles are also available.

As youth enter give them one of the names listed below or one of the scripture citations. Ask them to match the name with the appropriate scripture by looking up the citation in the Bible.

Lydia: Acts 16

Priscilla: Acts 18

Dorcas: Acts 9

Phoebe: Romans 16

Eunice: II Timothy 1

Lois: II Timothy 1

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Acts 16:14-15* and *Romans 16:1-2* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, our Heavenly Father, help us to respect and recognize you in our work and everyday life. Help us also respect the work of others, both men and women. In your name we pray, Amen.

Lector: *A reading from Acts 16, verses 14 through 15 and Romans 16, verses 1 through 2.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

On a large piece of paper or chalkboard, draw a wall made with blocks of bricks or stones. In some of the blocks throughout the wall write the names of famous men of the early Church, including Paul, Peter, Timothy, James, Barnabas, and Luke. Leave the remaining blocks blank.

Ask the youth to report their findings from the Coming Together activity by matching the names to the scripture and reading aloud the specific reference to each woman in the Bible. Get a volunteer to write the names of the New Testament women on empty stones in the wall.

Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- How many of you had heard of these New Testament women before today?
- Were you aware that women played a role in the early Church?
- If you removed the stones with women's names, what would happen to the wall? Would the same thing happen if you took away the stones with men's names?
- What would your church be like if women had no leadership roles? What would it be like if there were no male leaders?

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

- **Mural:** Look up the hymn "The first one ever, oh, ever to know" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 673) and list the women mentioned in each verse. After talking about how each of these scenes might have looked, divide into small groups to depict each scene on a long piece of butcher or wrapping paper. Use paint, pastels, or crayons for the artwork.
- **Group poem:** Assign each of the women from the Coming Together activity to youth working in pairs. Ask each pair to write one verse

of a poem about Women of the New Testament. Put all the parts together when each pair finishes, and read the poem aloud.

Games

- **Name her:** Divide the youth into two groups. Ask each group to come up with three clues about a famous woman Biblical, saint, or other. The youth can use Bibles and *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* to help them find clues. Invite the youth to take turns offering one clue at a time until the other team guesses the name of the woman chosen.

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 selected parts of *Sister Act* that show what women working together can accomplish.
- **Print:** Make a mock or real bulletin to be used for the worship service described under the Sharing activity.

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 could be scheduled on or near a feast day for a woman in the Church. (See *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*.)
- In Paul's letters, he gave clear instructions to the fledgling Christian churches to help them deal with cultural conflicts and other problems. Some of his writings about women are seen by some as punitive and harsh. However, his actions showed his great respect for women in the early Church. His selection of Phoebe to carry his letter to the Romans showed his trust of this special deacon. Most of the women in this session are named in conjunction with Paul. Sometimes actions are stronger than words!
- Women have played important roles throughout the world. In recent history, women have held important political posts in countries such as Great Britain and India. In medicine women such as Marie Curie have played key roles. None of these women, however, worked in a vacuum. By working with other men and women they were able to accomplish great deeds.

- Learn to sing the hymn “The first one ever, oh, ever to know” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 673).
- Sing “Song of the Chosen” (*Gather*, GIA Publications, Inc., 584).
- Listen to *Respect* by Aretha Franklin.

Service

- **Phoebe project:** Ask the youth to come up with different ways they could do something for people who live harried lives, such as a free morning of babysitting, yardwork, among others. Just as Phoebe helped others, we can help people around us.

Sharing

- **Women in the church:** Work with the worship committee to plan a service to honor women in the church. Incorporate the mural made in the Expressions activity and/or the poem written by the youth. Be sure to include the hymn “The first one ever, oh, ever to know” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 673).

Study

- **Mary and Martha:** Look up the story of Mary and Martha in *Luke 10:38-42*. Ask youth to contrast the two women and how they responded to Jesus. Are there times you are anxious and worried? Are you able to stand still and listen even when others are busy around you?

- **Women in the Church:** Look up women named in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. Select one that interests you and see how much you can find out about her.

Voices

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

I have ploughed, and planted,
and gathered into barns, and no
man could head me! And ain't I
a woman? I could work as much
and eat as much as a man—
when I could get it—and bear
the last as well! And ain't I a
woman? I have borne 13
children, and seen 'em mos' all
sold off to slavery, and when I
cried out with my mother's grief,
none but Jesus hear me! And
ain't I a woman?

Sojourner Truth

God has placed the genius of
women in their hearts; because
the works of this genius are al-
ways works of love.

Alfonse de Lamartine

In the beginning, said a Persian
poet—Allah took a rose, a lily, a
dove, a serpent, a little honey, a
Dead Sea apple, and a handful
of clay. When he look at the
amalgam—it was a woman.

William Sharp

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 504 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

*O God, the King of saints, we praise
and glorify your holy Name for all
your servants who have finished
their course in your faith and fear:
for the blessed Virgin Mary; for the
holy patriarchs, prophets, apostles,
and martyrs; and for all your other
righteous servants, known to us and
unknown; and we pray that,
encouraged by their examples,
aided by their prayers, and
strengthened by their fellowship, we
also may be partakers of the inheri-
tance of the saints in light; through
the merits of your Son Jesus Christ
our Lord. Amen.*

From Burial II
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 504

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 role women played in the early Church? Can they list ways women work in the Church today? Can they identify women in their church who perform tasks that help the church perform its mission? Are youth able to list ways men and women get things done by working together?

Romans: Establishing the Church

Christians Build Community

Objective

The focus of this session is Paul's teachings about working together to build the Church. Youth will be able to list gifts and talents needed to establish and maintain a church (faith community). They will identify the components they believe make a community of faith work.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session looks at Paul's writings about grace in the *Letter to the Romans* and gifts given to God's people through grace. Key concepts are grace and gifts. In the Personal Views section look at your own development of faith.

Commentary

The *Letter to the Romans* is Paul's great exposition of grace, God's gift of unconditional love and unmerited favor given to humanity. Grace was demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The twelfth chapter of *Romans* focuses on Paul's teaching about God's grace and the life that flows from it.

Other chapters in *Romans* are about the good news that makes Jesus Christ become real to men and women. Humanity, Paul asserts, needs to discover a way out of the all-pervasive problem of sin. Paul points out in *Romans* 3:23 that human beings cannot be perfect because all humanity falls "short of the glory of God."

Yet, God's love and acceptance, unmerited and undeserved, is available to all—old, young, good, bad, tall, short, whatever.

The family of God is made up of people who have heard the good news in Christ and accepted it. Everyone has gifts, although the gifts may differ. For example, some people are smart; while others are funny, warm, or sincere. These are gifts from God.

In establishing the Church, God's people first encounter and experience God's love in unmerited favor which is grace. They become part of the community of faith and find ways to use their God-given gifts. Finally, the varied gifts from all members are combined to create and complete the unity of the Church as the body of Christ.

Personal Views

Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Rome as they struggled to live together faithfully, keeping their belief in Jesus Christ alive in the midst of danger, conflict, and diversity. Is life much different today? The Church seems always to have been in conflict over ideas, traditions, and beliefs that differ among its members. Danger is still a part of daily life although it now comes in different forms. People are faced with major and minor choices that can be life giving or life threatening. These choices can lead us toward God or away from God.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.*—Romans 12:5
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Nicolai F. S. Grundtvig, Anonymous, Samuel A. Eliot
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For the Parish (BCP, p. 817)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. . . . May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 12:3-8; 15:5-6

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Many youth have trouble identifying their gifts or things that they do well. Be prepared to help them see what others see but they do not.
- Youth may question the need for doing things together. Sometimes, even to us, tasks would be easier if we did them ourselves. Help youth discover the benefits of working together and sharing their gifts.
- **Discussion Starter:** How can you use one of your gifts to do something for others?

The good news, as Christians struggle to live faithful lives, is that God's grace is abundant. The "amazing grace" of God seeks out and finds the lost, the hopeless, the lonely. It is through grace and only through grace that we are saved from our sins. Because we are humans we will fall hard and often. Because God gives us grace, undeserved and unearned, we can get up and move forward again and again.

The response of Christians to God's grace is to offer to God's service the gifts that we have been given. Individually, the task of building up the body of Christ, the Church, would be impossible, for no one person has what is needed. Together, each person using the gifts that have been given according to God's grace can help the Church do God's work in the world.

What are your gifts? Consider the experiences that bring joy and satisfaction to your life and lead you to give thanks and praise to God. What acts or work do others compliment you on, but which you find effortless? These experiences and activities may help you identify your gifts from God. As you reflect on your own gifts, also think about the gifts of the youth in your group. Can you help them recognize their unique gifts from God?

Lord God Almighty, for no merit on our part you have brought us out of death into life, out of sorrow into joy: Put no end to your gifts, fulfill your marvelous acts in us, and grant to us who have been justified by faith the strength to persevere in that faith; 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 Feast and Fasts, No. 11

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Before the group gathers, hang a large piece of paper divided into two columns, the first labeled "Things I Do Well," and the second, "Things I Don't Do Well." As the youth enter ask them to write down one entry for each category. Tell them they won't have to identify which entries they have written. Possible entries in either category include: sports, meeting new people, getting homework done on time, playing an instrument, talking to adults.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Romans 12:3-8; 15:5-6* in their Bibles. Show the group Resource Poster No. 3 that depicts the ruins of the Forum in Rome. Ask them to think about the setting for Paul's letter and the type of people that received it. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord, please help us establish a stronger relationship with you. If it is your will, please allow our church to grow and prosper. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Ryan, Grade 7

Lector: *A reading from Romans, chapter 12, verses 3 through 8 and chapter 15, verses 5 through 6.*
(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Divide the youth into groups of six. Assign each person one of the following functions: brain, eyes, hands, arms, legs, feet. (Additional functions can be added or double up functions if necessary.) Tell each group to stand close together to make "one body."

Ask the youth to think about how the body works together. For example, if the eyes see something to pick up, they relay a message to the brain; the brain sends a message back out through the

nerves in the arm to tell the hand to pick up the object. Give each “body” a different task. For example: Walk across the room through an obstacle of chairs to pick up a pencil and bring it back. Each part of the body must do its job!

After the game, talk about how it felt to be dependent on others. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- Was there a part of the body that didn't cooperate? How did the body deal with this “part”?
- Was it frustrating to have to work as a group?
- How is the body like the Church?
- How could we use the entries from the “Things I Do Well” list at church? Does it matter if some people don't do these things well?
- What happens to the body of Christ (the Church) if some people don't use their gifts?

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

- **Rebuilding a church:** Describe this scenario: Your church building has been completely destroyed and everything is gone. Working alone or in small groups, ask the youth to determine the three most important material things you would need to function as a church and the three most important spiritual things you would need. Share your findings.
- **Pot luck:** The week before this session or sometime during the week, ask each youth to bring one food ingredient from a recipe you have chosen. Before you give

them the recipe, ask the group to try to figure out what they are making, how much of the ingredient to use, and when to add it. Pass out copies of the recipe and compare it to their “recipe.” As we build up the community of the church, how are the ingredients in the recipe like the gifts of God's people? How do they fit together?

Games

- **Grace notes:** Pass out blank index cards and pencils or pens to youth who are seated in a circle. Ask them to write down something the person on their left does well. Collect the cards and shuffle them. Read the cards aloud, and let the group decide who the cards refer to.

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 together the movie *Charlotte's Web*. How does each character help save the pig?
- **Print:** Bring in catalogues or magazines. Ask the youth to find things that are essential for your church and things that would be nice to have for the church.

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

WEAVINGS

- Schedule this session during your church's stewardship campaign. Help your youth find a way to use their time and talent for the church.
- Sometimes in church we use the words “talent” and “gift” interchangeably. The dictionary defines talent as a special natural ability or aptitude, a capacity for achievement or success. Gift is, in the first definition, something given; it is also defined as a special ability. While many of us lack “talents” of artistic or musical skills, we are blessed with “gifts” of dependability, a cheerful heart, compassion, or other traits. Finding the unique gifts God has given us is not always easy; discernment of these gifts may take a lifetime.
- In our country, individuality is a prized trait. The influence of the vast frontier as people established this country resulted in the glorification of the individual. The Church, however, calls us to community, to put aside our individual aspirations, and to work for the good of the group. It is difficult to put aside our desire for personal achievement to be an anonymous part of a larger body.

RESOURCE POSTER

- The Forum in Rome (No. 3)

within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Read together the third verse of “Come, risen Lord, and deign to be our guest” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 306).
- Sing “One Bread, One Body” (*Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, 151).
- Listen to the song “For Future Generations” by 4HIM. How can your faith benefit future generations?

Service

- **Sign up:** Look at the list made during the Coming Together activity of things people do well. Using this list of talents, design a service project to help others in the community.

Sharing

- **Get help:** Examine the list the youth made of things they do not do well. Think about people in the church that are not a part of the group who can do those things. Invite one or two people to meet with the group and look for a way to use outside gifts with the youth's gifts to do something for the parish.

Study

- **Concordance:** Look up the word “gift” in a Bible concordance. Where else is this word used as Paul used it in *Romans 12*?

- **Dictionary:** How many different meanings can you find for the word “interdependence”? When you hear the word, do you think it has a positive or negative connotation?

Voices

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

We are God's house of living stones,
Built for his own habitation;
He fills our hearts, his humble thrones,
Granting us life and salvation;
Were two or three to seek his face,
He in their midst would show his grace,
Blessings upon them bestowing.
Nicolai F. S. Grundtvig

Give to the world the best that you have and the best will come back to you.

Anonymous

A church should be a powerhouse, where sluggish spirits can get recharged and reanimated.

Samuel A. Eliot

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 817 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Parish
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 817

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth identify their own gifts and talents that can be used in the church? Are they able to list gifts and talents needed to establish and maintain a church? Can they distinguish the components that are most important for a community of faith?

Corinthians: Growing in Love Christians Build Community

Objective

This session looks at Paul's passage about love written to the church in Corinth. Youth will be able to identify and describe the characteristics of God's love. They will be able to list ways the love of God is spread.

Background for Leaders

The focus of this session is the thirteenth chapter of *I Corinthians*, Paul's poetic passage on love. Key names are Paul and Corinthians; the key place is Corinth. As you prepare this session think about your own views about love and the ways that God has loved you.

Commentary

Chapter 13 of *I Corinthians* is one of the most famous passages in the Bible and is often heard at weddings. The words are sometimes taken out of context which may change the meaning. *I Corinthians 13* forms the poetic climax of a three-chapter section in which Paul describes the spiritual gifts of the Church and its members, making his discussion about love the "heart" of the matter and the most important gift of all.

The gifted Corinthians were not getting along with each other. They had written to the apostle asking about the use and importance of spiritual gifts in their conflicted community. In his reply, Paul uses the term "agape" to describe the gift of love Christians are to give to one another. This love is not subject to the fluctuation of every whim and emotion or dependent on the gifts that others might have. It is a gift for

loving people who are unlovable, the people with whom we do not always get along. It is almost an act of the will and demands that we respect the dignity of all people, no matter who they are. Agape is the same love Jesus calls his followers to show to their enemies in *Matthew 5:43-48* and the love at the center of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Paul divides his hymn to love into three sections. In verses 1-3 he compares using the gift of tongues without love to the crashing of cymbals used in the pagan worship of Greek gods. Other gifts are empty unless love lives at the heart of them.

In verses 4-7 Paul writes that love is patient with people, meets them where they are, and does not keep a running tally of hurts. In Shakespeare's words, "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds."

The final section portrays love as the only enduring gift in the Church. It will outlast any conflict over whose gift is more important. Even the Church's important gifts of prophecy and knowledge are only for this world. Love remains forever.

Personal Views

When this passage is read, most listeners reflect immediately upon relationships with persons with whom they have been in love. Its use at weddings, in some ways, reinforces this perception. This is how we are to love our spouse or the one we will marry. This standard for love is probably impossible to live into and can lead to a sense

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*
—I Corinthians 13:13
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Stanley Hauerwas, Chuck Murphy, Jr.; C. S. Lewis, Henry Ward Beecher
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Proper 25 (BCP, p. 235)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

I Corinthians 13

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Younger youth may be uncomfortable talking about love. Be prepared for a few giggles and embarrassment.
- Some youth, especially those living through divorce or their parents' separation, may be cynical about love. Emphasize that while human love is sometimes undependable, God's love endures and never ends.
- **Discussion Starter:** What is the first image that comes to your mind when you hear the word "love"? What is the second?

of failure. "If I cannot love this person in this way, I must not be truly in love with them."

If this passage is read as Paul intended with the whole community in mind, then it takes on a whole different meaning. In a community with God at the center, all things are possible. The kind of love defined here is love beyond all human understanding. It is the way God loves each of us: love beyond belief, intricately bound in and based on faith. It is by striving to love others as God loves us that we are able to love our neighbors as ourselves.

As you reflect on your faith community, where is that love evident? Where is it absent? In what ways are you able to show this kind of love to the youth and to others in your congregation? How has your life been changed by the assurance of God's love for you? The proof of that love is in the gift of God's only Son, Jesus Christ. We need only have the faith to believe in it.

As you think about the meaning of love, read the prayer for the mission of the Church (BCP, p. 101 and below). The words speak eloquently about God's love for us and through us.

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.*

From Morning Prayer II
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 101

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Display the word LOVE prominently at the front of the room. At

the top of a large piece of paper, write "Love is. . ." On a separate piece write "Love is Not. . ." or make the symbol for "no" (a circle with a slash).

As youth enter, give them a card with one of the words or phrases listed below from the passage in *I Corinthians 13*. Ask them to attach it to the appropriate piece of paper. Words are: patient, kind, envious, boastful, arrogant, rude, insists on its own way, irritable, resentful, rejoices in wrongdoing, rejoices in truth, bears all, believes, hopes, endures, and never ends.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *I Corinthians 13* in their Bibles. Point out Resource Poster No. 4 that shows Paul preaching. Explain that this passage is one of Paul's most quoted excerpts. Also display Resource Poster 5 of a Greek seaport. Corinth would have looked similar to this photograph during Paul's time. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Lord, we thank you for your immeasurable love through which everything is possible. Thank you for giving us a lifeline, your son, because without him our lives would be pointless. Amen.

Josh, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from I Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 1 through 13.*
(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Invite the youth to play a People Dictionary game. The members of the group are the only dictionaries available and the people of Corinth want to make sure they understand each of the descriptive words Paul used in his letter to them.

Pass out the words from the pieces of paper used in the Coming Together activity. Ask the youth, working alone or in pairs, to write the best definition they

can for each word on the back of the card. Ask the youth to give an example from their own experience. Share the definitions and examples with the entire group and put the cards back on the appropriate papers.

- Did you know the meaning of your word? Have you ever thought that word was related to love?
- How is God's love different from love depicted in movies and magazines?
- Would you use the same words displayed in the room to describe the kind of love portrayed in our culture?
- Where have you found the kind of love that Paul describes in *1 Corinthians 13*?

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

- **Love songs:** Divide the youth into small groups and ask them to think about every song they can remember about love. Get one volunteer from each group to write down the name of the song and one or two phrases from the song. After five or ten minutes let each group report their "findings." What do the words say about love? Do they express the same meaning as God's love?
- **Love images:** Bring construction paper, assorted colors of tissue paper, glue, feathers, sequins, and other craft items. Ask the youth to make images of love using the materials available.

Games

- **The Love Connection:** Take down or cover the words used in the Coming Together and Engaging activities. Ask the youth to line up in pairs, making two lines. Those in one line are "The Hips," those in the other are "The Hops." Ask the first two players, one from each line, to step forward. Say a word from the list in the Coming Together activity or from a list of words not in the passage, such as admirable, adorable, esteemed, disdainful, annoyed, indignant, or bitter. Feel free to add your own words. The teams take turns identifying the word as being in *1 Corinthians* or not and then acting out the word in mime.

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 and discuss the movie *Romeo and Juliet*. (The version that came out in the late sixties is less violent than the 1996 movie.)
- **Print:** Make a love poster by cutting out magazine pictures that show different kinds of love.

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

WEAVINGS

- This session could be scheduled in February close to Valentine's Day. Contrast the greeting card messages of love to Paul's words in *1 Corinthians*.
- Unlike the Greeks who had at least three words for love, we try to squeeze a host of meanings into the word love. We love chocolate, and we love our children. We love lovers, and we love our best friend. When we try to express our feelings for God, the word "love" seems inadequate. When we live our love through the descriptions used in *1 Corinthians*, we give love a new definition.
- Too often, we allow greeting card companies to express our deepest feelings. Using their gooey words in rhyming couplets, we tell the people we love what they mean to us. Instead of sending your spouse or other loved one a commercial card, use Paul's words to tell them what they mean to you; tell your friend how much you appreciate her patience; your mother for not being irritable; your father for believing in you. What would they say about you?

RESOURCE POSTER

- Paul Preaching (No. 4)
- Greek Seaport (No. 5)

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 the hymn “God is love, and where true love is” (*The Hymnal* 1982, 576, 577).
- Sing together “Ubi Caritas” (Live in Charity) in *Gather*, GIA Publications, Inc., 301.
- Listen to “Love Song for a Savior” by Jars of Clay. How many different ways do the lyrics describe the love between God and us?

Service

- **Year-round Valentines:** Get addresses of a local or regional Veterans hospital, and send Valentine cards and messages to patients.

Sharing

- **Heart attack:** Before a vestry or other meeting at church, bring in homemade snacks and leave them anonymously marked only by a heart-shaped sticker. Plan other “heart attacks” during the year.

Study

- **Greek love:** Using a Bible dictionary, look up three Greek words for love: agape, filios, and eros. Think of a situation in which each word would be appropriate. C. S. Lewis cites a fourth Greek word for love—storge—in *The Four Loves*. This form of love refers to the affection a person feels towards animals and pets.

- **Loving God:** God's love is radical. Throughout history there are examples of restrained or deferred love: Greek stoicism shunned sadness at death because it was inevitable; high infant mortality rates in the middle ages resulted in mothers withholding love from a newborn to see if it lived; arranged marriages disconnected love from the equation. Find other ways love has been expressed throughout history. How do these practices differ from the love Paul described?

Voices

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

You don't fall in love and get married. . .you marry and learn what love costs.

—Stanley Hauerwas

God doesn't necessarily call us to like everybody, but God does call us to love everybody.

—Chuck Murphy, Sr.

You cannot love a fellow-creature fully till you love God.

—C. S. Lewis

Love is not a possession but a growth. The heart is a lamp with just oil enough to burn for an hour, and if there be no oil to put in again its light will go out. God's grace is the oil that fills the lamp of love.

Henry Ward Beecher

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together Proper 25 on page 235 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and [love]; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Proper 25
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 235

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth identify and describe the characteristics of God's love? Are they able to describe the differences between the ways God calls us to love and the way modern culture calls us to love? Can youth list ways the love of God is spread throughout our churches, our communities, and the world?

Ephesians: Receiving the Gift of Faith

Christians Build Community

Objective

The focus of this session is the gift of faith through God's grace. Youth will be able to define faith from both a personal and community perspective. They will explore their own faith and list ways faith relates to their lives.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary looks at the authorship and content of the *Letter of Paul to the Ephesians*. The key name is Paul; key places are Ephesus and Asia Minor; the key concept is grace. Read the Personal Views section and think about your own faith journey.

Commentary

Though *Ephesians* is attributed to Paul, it differs from other Pauline letters in several ways. Primarily, it addresses no pressing issues or controversial situations. Instead, the letter communicates the author's theology to the community of faith of another generation, reminding them that the foundation of their community and their lives is Jesus Christ. *Ephesians* was also probably a "circular letter," not written specifically for the church at Ephesus, but distributed to several churches in Asia Minor.

Ephesians contains several inter-related themes that center on the Church and its relation to Christ and on Christian behavior. Paul points out that the Church must be involved in fulfilling God's plan.

The *Letter to the Ephesians* was probably written in the latter part of Paul's ministry during his imprisonment in Rome. The language of the

letter is both powerful and poetic, and was probably drawn in part from Christian hymns and liturgies of that time. The letter celebrates the life of the Church that was established by and for God's purpose. Paul states that through faith, believers are bound to God through Christ and the Holy Spirit as they await a full union in the life to come.

Throughout *Ephesians*, the community of faith is called to a radically different way of life in comparison to the surrounding culture. This new life that begins with baptism is not based on what can be earned or accomplished, but on the grace of God. The Ephesians are reminded that salvation comes only through Jesus' death and resurrection, not through anything they can do. Good works are a loving response to Christ's supreme gift of grace.

Personal Views

With the Christians at Ephesus, we are called to a radically new way of life. We are welcomed into the community of faith through baptism, which signifies our dying with Christ and being raised with him. Baptism takes our unique, God-given selves and places us in community, where we can grow and learn from others.

Faith is first of all a relationship with the God who made us and saves us. Our new identity is formed within a community of faith and we "grow up" into Christ. We discover through the lives of others how God loves us, what God gives us, and how God forgives us.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*—Ephesians 2:8
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Karl Barth, Rabbi Hillel, C. S. Lewis, Samuel Butler
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Proper 22 (BCP, p. 234)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

But god, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Ephesians 2:4-10

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- The paradox of faith is sometimes difficult for youth to understand. How can God use their questions, doubts, and weaknesses as stepping stones in their journey in faith? Encourage youth to explore their doubts within the faith community.
- Youth are taught that the scientific method is an effective means of solving many different kinds of problems. Help them discover that life's deepest and most troubling issues can only be explored through faith.
- **Discussion Starter:** If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?

Living in community allows us to discover how the doubts and fears of others have led them to deeper faith; from these experiences we are led to see our own possibilities for growth. Think of those teachers, friends, or mentors who have been most helpful and encouraging to you in your faith journey. How has God used such people to help you know Christ?

The *Letter to the Ephesians* tells us that faith is not our own doing—it is a gift from God. What experiences remind you that faith comes only from God? Is it easy for you to receive gifts? How have certain people or experiences helped you accept the gift of faith? Can you share these experiences with the youth?

Our culture tends to focus on what we can do and what we can control. It's a radical shift to realize that God is in control. God offers us the gift of faith as the starting point for all that we do. Faith must come first—good works grow out of that faith. Do you sometimes get the cart before the horse, with good works consuming most of your time and energy and faith weighing in a distant second? Ask God to help you accept the gift of faith before you set priorities.

Almighty God our heavenly Father, renew in us the gifts of your mercy; increase our faith, strengthen our hope, enlighten our understanding, widen our charity, and make us ready to serve you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. *Amen.*

Weekdays of Lent
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 5th Week

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

As the youth enter, pass out pencils and a "pop quiz" with three or four questions from the previous

week's session. Before passing out the quiz write with a red pen at the top of each paper: Grade—A. Note their reactions. If they ask why you put the grade on the quiz before they had answered the questions, tell them you wanted to give them a gift.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Ephesians 2:4-10* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Jesus, give me help this day

To follow you the whole long way.

Give me faith to know you're there

And hold me against the wear and tear.

Tanna, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 4 through 10.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the youth if they have ever heard the passage in the Bible about the mustard seed. Get a volunteer to look up *Matthew 17:20b* and read the passage aloud. In front of the room place an empty tissue box and a brick. Ask for two volunteers with lots of faith to stand next to the box and the brick. Then tell them to let the two objects support their weight by standing on them. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- Did you think the empty box would support the person?
- Did the person who stood on the tissue box just not have enough faith?
- Did you think the brick would support the person? Why?
- Do you ever have faith in something that doesn't support you?
- Do we need to place our faith in someone who can support us?

Refer back to the quiz the youth received at the beginning of the session. Ask them how they felt about getting a quiz and if they answered the questions.

- What did you think when you saw the quiz was already graded?
- If you completed the quiz correctly, how did you feel when others who didn't know the answers or didn't bother to put answers down got the same grade as you?
- How does this quiz relate to the passage in *Ephesians*?
- If our salvation is a gift from God, can we do anything we want?

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

- **Faith drawings:** Hang Resource Poster No. 6. Set up a workplace with paper, crayons, pastels, and markers. Ask the youth to think about faith and what it means to them. Show faith by drawing a picture or simply displaying whatever colors or shapes come to mind. The Resource Poster shows an artist's depiction of the wholeness of Christ's peace through faith. The painting shows tribal people from different parts of the Philippines coming together through the power of God.
- **Journaling:** Ask the youth to write down their experiences of faith. Encourage them to work alone; those who want to share their ideas can do so when everyone has finished writing. Use the following prompts to help them get started:

"Being faithful means. . ."
"It's not easy for me to have faith when. . ."
"One thing that makes my faith stronger is. . ."

Games

- **Circle of faith:** Ask youth to get in a circle, one behind another, so that each person is facing the back of another person. Ask two volunteers to step out of the circle. Ask one of them to support the other in a sitting position by bending the knees. The weight of the other person should topple them both. Now ask them to rejoin the circle. Tell everyone to stand as close as possible to the person in front of them. At your command they will "sit," resting their weight on the person behind them. What happened when the group worked together as a whole? Did you have faith that the group could support each other's weight?

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 final scene in *The Poseidon Adventure* as the survivors had to wait for outside help to be saved. Have there been times in your life that you have had to get help in spite of your best efforts to go it alone?
- **Print:** Ask the youth to scan several magazines looking at ads. Who or what do the ads tell you to trust? Could this person or thing let you down?

WEAVINGS

- This session might be helpful if youth are facing some crisis of faith, such as the death of a young person, the departure of an important person in their lives, or similar event.
- It is often easier to give gifts than to receive them, especially if we feel unworthy. Sometimes we fall into the trap of trying to earn God's favor by "getting points" for good works or coming to church or other good deeds. We forget that this gift came with a steep price—the death of Jesus. As Paul said in the lector's text, God "even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him" (*Ephesians 2:5-6a*).
- Reports of wars, disasters, disease, and untimely death are a part of our world today. Why does God let such things happen? How do we believe in a God who lets them happen? Our ideas of justice are often contradicted by the reality of human suffering. Just as we accept God's gift of grace, we must also recognize that human understanding has God-given limits.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Christ Our Peace (No. 6)

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 the hymn "What wondrous love is this" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 439).
- Learn the song "We Are God's Work of Art" (*Gather*, GIA Publications, Inc., 580).
- Listen to the song "Just the Way You Are" by Billy Joel. What does this song have to say about the way God loves us?

Service

- **Rake and run:** Find an activity such as raking leaves that youth can do anonymously for people in the community. Leave a card that says: You have been the victim of a random act of kindness!

Sharing

- **Grace notes:** Ask the youth to think about people in the church who perform important and often thankless tasks, such as clean-up after dinners, gardening chores, and others. Write a thank you note and either send it to the person or post it on a bulletin board where others can see it.

Study

- **Unconditional love:** The Bible includes several stories about love that is given with no strings attached. For example, the story of the Prodigal Son in *Luke 15:11-24* tells about a father's love. Read this passage and contrast it to the second part of the story in *Luke 15:25-32*. How did you feel about the elder brother and his reaction to his sibling's return?

Voices

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

No one who is drowning can pull himself up by his own hair. Someone else must pull him out of the water.

Karl Barth

When gifts are random—that is the highest form of giving.

Rabbi Hillel

But you will find that even those who insist most strongly on the importance of good actions tell you you need Faith; and even those who insist most strongly on Faith tell you to do good actions.

C. S. Lewis

What is faith but a kind of betting or speculation after all? It should be, "I bet that my Redeemer liveth."

Samuel Butler

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 234 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Proper 22

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 234

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 define what faith means to them on a personal level? Can they list ways the community expresses faith in God? Are youth able to name ways faith is related to their own lives?

Philippians: Shining as Lights Christians Build Community

Objective

In this session, Paul exhorts Christians to be beacons for God. Youth will be able to name the differences between values embraced by the world and the way Jesus taught Christians to live. They will describe the difficulties of shining “like stars in the world. . . in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.”

Background for Leaders

The focus of the Commentary is Paul's encouragement to the church in Philippi to be faithful in the face of opposition. The key name is Paul; key places are Philippi, Macedonia, and Europe. In the Personal Views reflect on how “murmuring and arguing” can distract you from following Christ.

Commentary

The church at Philippi in the country of Macedonia was among the first established by Paul in Europe. It appears that Paul's relationship with the church was close and happy. A main theme of this letter is persistence in faith in the face of opposition. The church had met with local opposition since its formation. Paul tells the new Christians not to be preoccupied with their own fate, but focus on proclaiming the gospel. Paul uses his own life as an example of this calling. Many scholars believe Paul wrote this letter during his imprisonment in Rome.

While Paul encouraged the Philippians to be strong, he also warned the community about the dangers of murmuring and arguing among themselves. This may be a reference

to the Israelites' experience in the wilderness when they repeatedly grumbled and complained about their situation. Paul stresses that God calls people to simple obedience.

Just before the text for this session is a moving and powerful passage that celebrates the story of Jesus' obedience and humility (*Philippians 2:5-11*). These hymn-like verses were probably quoted by Paul from earlier tradition. The passage ends with praise that “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Verses 12 through 16 that follow this hymn focus on Paul's hope that the community of faith in Philippi will, in the midst of a corrupt and heathen society, stand out as God's children, shining as lights in the darkness. The Greek word used for lights in this passage is the one used for heavenly bodies—celestial beings that shine with light that comes from beyond themselves. Paul may have been alluding to *Daniel 12:3*: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

Personal Views

Daily doses of advertising bombard us with images of what we need to be happier, more lovable, and more comfortable. We are encouraged to compare ourselves with others and to be less than content with who we are and what we have. And so we murmur and complain.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.*
—Philippians 2:14-15
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Rabbi Hillel, Hildegard of Bingen, Erasmus, John Robinson, Thomas Carlyle
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Second Sunday after the Epiphany (BCP, p. 215)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

Philippians 2:12-16

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- All of us, youth and adults, have difficulty maintaining Christian values in a world that values revenge, money, sex, and power. Look for role models within your church and community who can share their experiences of keeping focused in their work and personal lives.
- Being part of a group is very important to younger youth. Shining like light may feel like being in an unwelcome spotlight. Help youth identify situations when it would be better to be different or to be the same as others.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you known a person that seemed to “shine” from within?

When needs aren't met easily, voices get louder and more irritated. Argument has replaced discussion in much of our communication, as demonstrated by our talk shows and political forums. We get the message that the louder we talk, the better we're heard. And so we argue.

The murmuring and arguing can lead to violence, but just as often it leads to hopelessness—a feeling that things are bad and getting worse. What do you complain about? What are the issues and feelings that pull you into arguments? Have you found ways to take these concerns into prayer, so God can help you deal with them? If not, think of two such concerns that you can pray about throughout the coming week.

Paul had plenty to murmur about, and the darkness around him was often pervasive. His example can lead us to reflect on what Christ has done for us and those things for which we can be thankful. Focus on Christ's death and resurrection and how these acts have changed your life. What other people or events are you grateful for?

Noticing how God acts in our own lives can help us see God at work in the events and people around us, freeing us to see the light that is there and to let the light of Christ shine through us. Think of two or three people you know who are in darkness. What are some simple things you could do this week to let the light of Christ shine on one of them?

O God, with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light: Quench our thirst with living water, and flood our darkened minds with heavenly light; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Weekdays of Lent
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 4th Week

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

During the week gather a variety of candles with different sizes, shapes, and colors, enough for everyone. Display the candles at the front of the room. As youth enter, ask them to select a candle and hold it. Listen for their comments about the differences in the candles.

When everyone has arrived, ask the youth to stand in a circle. After darkening the room, light one candle and let the youth light each other's candles around the circle. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

God, sometimes I feel that the “crookedness” and “perverseness” in the world are more powerful than the good. It is difficult in these times to remember what you want rather than what I want. Help me be obedient so that I can be a “shining” example in bad times as well as good. Amen.

Wynn, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from Paul's Letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 12 through 16.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Blow out the candles and collect them to be used later.

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Bring in a small table lamp and several lightweight paper bags that fit over the lamp or a powerful flashlight with several paper napkins or towels that can be put across the lighted end. You will also need a felt marker of a color that can be easily read.

Darken the room, and light the lamp or flashlight. Ask the youth to begin naming things that keep us from shining as Christ's light, such as not telling the truth, or being selfish. As they list sins that are common to us all,

write them on the sacks or paper napkins. After noting each idea, cover the lamp or flashlight with the sack or napkin. The light will become dimmer and dimmer. Continue until the light is completely blocked. Discuss what has happened with the youth.

- What happened to the light?
- Did the “sins” make much difference at first?
- What happened when the “sins” accumulated?
- How does sin block a Christian's ability to shine in the world?
- What can we do to make our lights shine brighter?

God can help us remove sin through confession and forgiveness. Begin reading the words on the sacks or napkins, slowly removing the paper coverings one at a time.

- What happens when we remove sins from our lives?
- What is keeping your light from shining as brightly as it could?
Ask the youth to think about the candles lit during the opening exercise.
- Did the size, shape, or color of the candle make a difference in the amount of light it made? Are Christians like the candles?
- What happened when all the candles were lit? How can we make more light as Christians?
- How were the candles lit? Where is the source of our light?

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

- **Shine through:** Give youth wax crayons to cover a piece of white paper with bright colors. Cover the design with a solid coat of black water color paint. With a fingernail or pencil, scratch through the black coating in a design that lets the colors show. How is your life like this drawing?
- **Stained glass:** Make “stained glass” pictures using paper, baby oil, and crayons. Make a design on the paper with the crayons, then coat the drawing with baby oil. Hang in a window or in front of a light to get the full effect.

Games

- **Pass the light:** Ask the youth to stand in a circle and give each person a candle. Begin the game by saying something you appreciate about one of the people in the circle. Let the youth guess who that person is. When they correctly identify the person, light his or her candle. That person will continue the game by saying something about another person in the circle. How can we help others to keep their lights shining brightly?

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 *Chariots of Fire* when the runner refused to compete on the Sabbath. What decisions have you faced that were similar to this?

WEAVINGS

- This session could be scheduled before an Easter vigil service, especially if candles are to be used.
- There are times in our lives when we prefer darkness to light. At night, the anonymity and comfort of the darkness lull us to sleep. Sometimes we even prefer the darkness of our sin to the brightness of Christ and his call to discipleship. Which sins in your life do you find comforting? What is keeping you from being as bright as God made you?
- Throughout history people from all walks of life have shone their lights in situations that were full of despair. During the Holocaust, individuals and even towns risked their lives to hide Jews from the authorities. People like Desmond Tutu in South Africa have remained firm against oppression despite persecution. People whose names we will never know have reached out to enemies in places like Ireland, Serbia, and the Middle East. Pray for all those who shine in times of despair.

- **Print:** Look through newspapers for headlines that illustrate the world's values. How are they different from what Jesus taught? Where do you see the light of Christ?

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 "I want to walk as a child of the light" (*The Hymnal* 1982, 490).
- Learn "The Light of Christ" (*Songs for Celebration*, H-311).
- Listen to "You Light Up My Life" by Debbie Boone.

Service

- **Hang it:** Frame the stained glass papers made during the Expressions activity in heavy card board. Take them on a visit to a nursing home. Hang the artwork in the windows of people you visit.
- **Light a candle:** Design a project to bring light into the world of those who live in darkness. For example, distribute blankets to homeless people where they tend to gather.

Sharing

- **Liturgy:** Plan a service of light for your congregation or find a way to use light as part of a regular worship service. Meet with the worship committee to share your ideas. The liturgy could be modeled after a vesper or tenebrae service. Find hymns and prayers about light in *The Hymnal* 1982 and *The Book of Common Prayer*.

Study

- **Candles:** The last words of Nicholas Ridley to Hugh Latimer before his martyrdom were: "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as (I trust) shall never be put out." Find out more about these two men and Thomas Cranmer, another martyr, in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*.

Voices

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

It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness.
Rabbi Hillel

. . . God is the living light in every respect. From God all lights shine. Therefore, we remain a light that gives off light through God.
Hildegard of Bingen

Give light, and the darkness will disappear of itself.
Erasmus

Fresh light shall yet break out from God's Word.
John Robinson

Religion cannot pass away. The burning of a little straw may hide the stars of the sky, but the stars are there, and will reappear.
Thomas Carlyle

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. If there is time, pass the candles back out and relight them. 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. Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshiped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

Second 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

Can youth identify values embraced by the world? Are they able to name differences between these values and the way Jesus taught Christians to live? Can they describe the difficulties of living as Christians in a world that holds other values?

Philemon: Settling an Account

Christians Build Community

Objective

This session is about Paul's letter to Philemon concerning the slave Onesimus. Youth will discuss the issue of fairness and how Christians deal with unfair situations. They will list ways to deal with unfair situations and determine which ways might not be appropriate from a Christian point of view.

Background for Leaders

The focus of the Commentary is Paul's intercession for Onesimus and Paul's willingness to settle the account with Philemon. Key names are Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus; the key place is Colossae. In the Personal Views reflect on Christian responsibilities that may counter accepted practices in the work place or your personal life.

Commentary

The *Letter to Philemon* is from Paul to the owner of Onesimus, a runaway slave who had accepted the good news of Jesus' saving grace. He became Paul's valued friend and assistant, and it seems clear that Paul's desire was for Onesimus to remain with him.

As Paul and Onesimus worked together for Christ, they must have seen the need to deal with the issue of Onesimus' relationship to his master, Philemon. Runaway slaves could be treated harshly, and Onesimus could have faced severe punishment or death when he encountered Philemon. Paul and Onesimus knew this, but they also knew that for their work to maintain its integrity, the "account" with Philemon should be settled openly and honestly.

Because Paul could not accompany Onesimus to Colossae and speak for him in person, he wrote a letter of appeal to Philemon, imploring him to receive Onesimus kindly, like a fellow brother in Christ. The letter indicates that Paul and Philemon were acquainted and that Paul hoped to have Onesimus back after his debts to Philemon had been settled. Paul accepted responsibility for whatever Onesimus might owe, but Paul does not force Philemon to bow to his authority as an apostle. He wanted Philemon to make a choice that came out of the love that was manifested within the Christian community.

Although the letter had a specific purpose, Paul meant it not only for Philemon, but also for the church that met in Philemon's house. The message of how to treat a returning slave was written in the context of the life of the church. Paul did not address the issue of slavery, but he did expect Onesimus to be received with forgiveness by Philemon and the church community.

For further study: Read the entire *Letter of Paul to Philemon*.

Personal Views

In his letter to Philemon, Paul calls us to look at our own "business as usual" attitudes in the light of our Christian responsibility. Paul's need to "settle the account" with Philemon may raise questions for us. What rights does a master have if slavery is wrong? Is it fair

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.*
—Philemon 18
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Martin Luther King, Jr.; H. L. Mencken, Seneca, Malcolm Boyd
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Proper 5 (BCP, p. 229)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Philemon 10-21

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Unfair situations can often occur within families. Be aware of youth in your group who are dealing with divorce, separations, chronic illnesses, substance abuse, or other problems. How they react to these dilemmas can result in hope or despair.
- Don't discount unfair situations that trouble teens because they seem trivial to you. Try to look at problems from the youth's point of view.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been treated unfairly by a teacher or parent? How did you feel about this person?

for Paul to send Onesimus back, knowing the dangers that may face him? Isn't Paul's loyalty to his friend Onesimus more binding than the "account" with Philemon?

Our daily lives present similar dilemmas, and we can't always find a solution that is completely fair. Are you facing a situation that pits your faith against accepted norms at work or in your personal life? Paul doesn't write a diatribe against slavery, but he does call Philemon and the church to act with love and forgiveness. Can they still hold on to the institution of slavery and live as Christians? Can you go about "business as usual" and still be a Christian?

Paul encountered more than his share of unfair situations, and he made peace with those situations in several ways. He concentrated on what Christ had done for him, realizing that Christ settled all accounts in a way that no human action could. This letter shows us that Paul's dilemmas, like ours, seldom had simple, easy solutions. When have you been faced with a situation that seemed unfair? How did you deal with this situation?

Our culture generally implies that people should pay their own way. But what about those who can't? Are we sometimes asked to pay for something someone else has done or to settle someone else's account? Can you remember doing that or having someone do it for you? How did you feel about it? Was it fair that a sinless Jesus died for our sins?

O Lord, strong and mighty, Lord of hosts and king of glory:
Cleanse our hearts from sin,
keep our hands pure, and turn
our minds from what is passing
away; so that at the last we may
stand in your holy place and
receive your blessing; through
Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives

and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Weekdays of Lent
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, 2nd Week

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Bring in several news magazines, newspapers, and scissors. As youth enter the room, ask them to find stories or pictures about unfair situations. (For example, a trial ended for technicalities, child abuse, world hunger.) Tell them to clip the articles and put them in a pile.

After everyone has gathered, ask the group to stand in a circle. Pass out the pictures and articles, and ask the youth to pray silently for the people described in the clippings.

Ask the youth to find *Philemon* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, I have seen many things that I deemed unfair. I have also lost many friends because of what I thought was unfair treatment of me. Help me find a way to show these people that what they are doing isn't right or just. Help me also to be fair and not judgmental of others, for only you are perfect enough to see others' imperfections. Amen.

Annah, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Paul's Letter to Philemon, verses 10 through 21.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Divide the youth into small groups. Make sure each group has paper and pencil and access to a Bible. Tell the story of Onesimus or ask a youth to read the *Letter to Philemon*. Ask the youth to imagine that they are Paul, Onesimus, Philemon, or members of the church. Hang Resource Poster No. 4 in the room to help them picture Paul.

Ask some of the groups to plan a dialogue that could have occurred between Paul and Onesimus. Ask the remaining groups to plan a similar dialogue among Onesimus, Philemon, and members of the church. Remember that the letter was also addressed to “Apphia our sister” and “Archippus our fellow soldier.”

Using the dialogues prepared by the two groups, put on a role play for the entire group. Let the youth select the people to play the various roles. After the play, use the following questions to guide a discussion:

- Should Paul have made Onesimus return to Philemon?
- How did Onesimus feel about being a slave again?
- Did Philemon resent Paul's involvement in his business?
- Did Paul really “owe” Philemon anything?
- Have you ever been asked to do something that seemed unfair? Were you resentful or did you just accept it?
- Are there any accounts in your life that need to be settled?

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

- **Backdrop:** Paint a backdrop for the two scenes in the story of Onesimus. Find Colossae, the site of Philemon's church, on a New Testament map. What would a setting in this locale look like?
- **Prisoners:** On a piece of white paper, draw bold, black lines to resemble prison bars. Reproduce enough copies for each youth to have a sheet. Ask them to envision something that makes

them feel imprisoned—a personal fear, powerful people, a cliché at school. Ask the youth to depict these fears or people behind the bars. Which side of the bars are they on?

- **Update:** Rewrite the story of Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon in a current setting.

Games

- **No Fair!** Divide the youth into three groups, the Pauls, the slaves, and the rich. Ask the youth in each group to line up for a relay. Tell them they will run to the end of the room, pick up an object, and return to tag the next person. However, there is a catch. Wrap masking tape around the lower legs of everyone in the slave group. Tell the Paul group they have to do everything backward because they are in prison. The wealthy have no constraints, but the others can politely ask for their help. Let each group try all three roles. Was the race fair? How did it feel to be a slave? Do you ever stop and think about what life is like for people who have less than you?

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 *Green Card*. What parts of the story seem unfair?
- **Print:** Discuss some of the stories or pictures youth found in the Coming Together activity.

WEAVINGS

- Plan a follow-up to this session with a group of seniors from your church. Ask the older members to share their views about fairness and then encourage the youth to respond. Allow time for debriefing with the youth.
- The dictionary defines fair as free from bias, dishonesty, or injustice. A less used definition is free from blemish, imperfection, or anything that impairs the appearance, quality, or character. These two definitions sum up the qualities found in Jesus, and yet his life was filled with bias, dishonesty, and injustice that came from the world he lived in. We are called to do no less.
- The world is filled with inequality. Why should some people be born in a land of plenty while others suffer famine and drought? Why are some persecuted for their faith while others don't even exercise their right to worship? Where do you see inequality in the world today? Pray for those who face injustice, hunger, poverty, and other adversities.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Paul Preaching (No. 4)

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 "Dear Lord and Father of mankind" (*The Hymnal* 1982, 652).
- Learn "With Faith Grown in Suffering" (*Glory and Praise, Vol 3*, 247).
- Listen to "Let It Be" by The Beatles.

Service

- **Book drive:** Plan a book drive to collect books for a nearby prison or jail library.
- **Cards:** Send seasonal cards (Christmas, Valentines, and other holidays) to inmates in a prison. Get names from a local prison ministry organization.

Sharing

- **The play's the thing:** Invite another group to see the role play created by the youth about Onesimus and Philemon. Use the backdrops created in the Expressions activity. Let youth lead a discussion after the play.

Study

- **Bible stories:** Explore the stories of the Good Samaritan (*Luke 10:29-37*) or the Parable of the Talents (*Matthew 25:14-30*). What is fair or unfair about the people in each story?

- **New Testament lands:** Find out more about Colossae, the place Philemon lived, and the practice of slavery in the Roman Empire.

Voices

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

God dwells with us in life's most confining and oppressive cells. . . The Christian faith makes it possible for us nobly to accept that which cannot be changed, to meet disappointments. . . without abandoning our sense of hope.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Injustice is relatively easy to bear; what stings is justice.

H. L. Mencken

To obey God is perfect liberty; he that does this shall be free, safe, and quiet.

Seneca

Lots of well-fed, comfortable, middle-class people everywhere are praying for "situations" like this all the time. But they don't seem to do enough about changing such situations by altering political and economic facts of life, or helping specific men, women, and children who are victims.

Malcolm Boyd

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 229 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

O God, from whom all good proceeds: Grant that by your inspiration we may think those things that are right, and by your merciful guiding may do them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Proper 5

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 229

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 issues of fairness? Can they identify specific issues and describe how Christians can deal with these issues? Can youth list ways to deal with unfair situations that are appropriate from a Christian point of view?