

Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

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

WHO ARE LEADERS?

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

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

- **Rooted in their faith and committed to Jesus Christ.** Who leaders are speaks loudly to teens. This doesn't mean that leaders have to be biblical scholars or perfect Christians. It also doesn't mean they no longer have any doubts or are at the end of their own spiritual journey. Good leaders have a strong relationship with God and are comfortable with their faith.
- **Is Willing to be a part of a team.** Helping a young person to grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord is an overwhelming task. It is essential for leaders to understand that they do not have sole responsibility for this task. Wise leaders know that they are not only part of a teaching team but also part of a network of people in the church who care about and support young people.
- **Is fun and enjoys being with young people.** A key phrase to help leaders is “relax and enjoy.” Effective leaders know how to have fun and to share joy with young people without giving up expectations of them. Leaders must find their own balance of fun and seriousness. Affirming joy and excitement with the group, however, is essential for the leaders' full participation.
- **More concerned about people than facts.** The ECY provides an excellent base of information to learn more about God, scripture and the Church. The sessions incorporate this learning with the issues that effect young people's lives. Effective leaders are aware of issues that are unique to their groups and look for ways to include these ideas in their presentations. When leaders give priority to what youth are thinking and feeling, the content follows.
- **Has a long-term commitment to the group.** Good leaders are committed and consistent. There will be ups and downs, and successes and failures. Some weeks the youth may be impossible to reach, but the steadfastness of faith and commitment to the class will make a real difference in the long run. Focus on the overall success of the program and not on any one moment, hour, or week.

Building the Team

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

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

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

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

- **Begin with social time** together, including sharing basic facts about each other.
- **Share faith stories.** A simple way to do this is to ask people to make a chart from birth to the present showing the highlights and low moments of their faith journey. Allow time for

everyone to finish before sharing so each person can listen to each presentation.

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

Youth as Leaders

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

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

- **Sharing Information.** In order for youth to participate effectively in planning for and leading a group, they must have the basic information available to leaders and be able to make choices of their own.
- **Training usually involves practice.** Allowing the teens to try out new ideas, theologies and skills in a safe environment is a great way to train them for leadership roles. Giving them opportunities to lead the group is a way to practice the gifts and talents that God has given them.
- **Young people are not “blank slates.”** The youth in the group come with a richness of ideas, thoughts, opinions, and experiences. They are not empty, inexperienced human beings just waiting to receive facts and gems of wisdom. They have as much to teach as they have to learn. Often they are so used to being treated like “blank slates” that they are reluctant to share all that they have to offer. When they trust that their experiences and opinions are

valued, a whole new world of information, learning and sharing will open up. Encourage this process, and be patient if it takes some time for it to develop.

- **People deserve input into decisions that affect their lives.** Youth in your program deserve to have input into their learning process. Often adult leaders plan the sessions with little or no involvement from those they are trying to reach. This often leads to apathetic learning. Also, the adults miss the benefit of the wisdom and understanding of the youth about their needs, desires and insights. Although the process will be different in each situation, be intentional about learning from the youth both before beginning and then during the sessions.
- **Young people should be responsible for their own learning.** One way to value the participants in the group is to allow them to take responsibility for their learning. This means agreeing ahead of time what will be learned and how the learning will be carried out. A contract or covenant should be established with the group, and the adult leader should hold people accountable to what they have agreed. It will take time to develop the trust for this to happen, but the benefit is enormous.
- **Leadership skills apply to all facets of life.** If adult leaders are successful at lifting up youth leaders, the skills developed will affect other areas of the youth's lives. Youth group members will find themselves involved in leadership roles in their schools, families, churches and other organizations. They will have discovered tools that will last them the rest of their lives. These skills along with their Christian faith will make an impact on all with whom they come in contact.
- **Forming a youth leadership team.** Although a youth leadership team will have many variations depending on each situation, it is recommended that one is formed. This may be as simple as gathering a few young people ahead of time to review the materials and make suggestions on how best to use this curriculum. A team of youth that meet with the adult team regularly and share in planning for the sessions can be developed. Certain sessions or projects could be given to a small group of youth to let them “run with it.” It is important that the adult leaders build in some time to plan the role of young people as leaders of this curriculum.

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THE EPISCOPAL CURRICULUM FOR YOUTH

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

A Tool for Teachers

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

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

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

It is hoped that leaders who use the ECY will be nurtured, inspired, and enriched personally as

they prepare to teach and learn and as they reflect on their efforts.

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

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

USING THE CURRICULUM

Planning Class Sessions

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

Teacher Supports—six sections directed at helping teachers prepare.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Youth can be intensely interested in wrestling with “real-world” ethical issues. As teachers and students engage in conversations of faith, they are sharing feelings and values, as well as words and

facts. In a very real sense, teachers expose their beliefs when they engage in conversation with youth.

The Learning Environment

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

Consider three possibilities to create the desired environment.

- **The youth room.** One good alternative is a room at the church designated for young people and arranged with comfortable chairs, couches, etc. This provides a comfortable and inviting atmosphere.
- **Meeting in a home.** Holding meetings at someone's home who lives nearby the church can be a great asset. This provides a casual, comfortable setting that usually enhances the process. This may provide some logistical problems for younger youth but it is well worth investigating. Also, people may be more open to making their homes available if it is done on a rotating basis. Don't rule out this possibility without carefully considering it.
- **Gathering in a restaurant.** A restaurant can provide a wonderful opportunity for a meal, fellowship, and learning. Often young people who wouldn't come to the church will feel comfortable in this setting. Of course, this will raise some financial considerations, but these are not insurmountable. You could also consider meeting at a restaurant on an occasional basis as a way of promoting outreach and for celebration.

A Final Word

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

CALLED BY GOD

The content of this module focuses on Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) and Call. Titled *Called by God*, each session examines a call from God to individuals in the Hebrew Scriptures. Each person answers the call in a different way, but not without struggles, difficulties, and conflict. Youth today are also faced with struggle, difficulty, and conflict in an ever increasingly secular world. Seeing themselves as Christians in the world 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:

Abraham & Sarah: Being Faithful to God
Hagar & Ishmael: Living in Hope
Moses: Finding Self-Worth
Samuel: Serving All His Days
Ruth: Call to Patience
Jonathan & David: Call to Friendship
Abigail: Doing the Right Thing
Amos: Seeking Justice
Daniel: Putting God First

■ **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.

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.

Abraham & Sarah: Being Faithful to God Called by God

Objective

Abraham and Sarah are the ancestors of all of God's people who live in the promise of an intimate relationship with God. They are the first people to respond to a direct call from God. Youth will be able to recount the call of God to Abraham and Sarah and to consider how youth, themselves, may respond to God's call for lives that are different from the ones they are leading.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this section focuses on God's call to Abraham and Sarah to leave all that they know for a new life. Key names are Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah, Haran, Canaan; the key event is God's call to Abram and Sarai. For spiritual preparation, think about God's call today to new ways of living and seeing relationships to God and others.

Commentary

The call from God comes in different ways and at different times. Some people speak of hearing God's voice, while others have responded to more subtle urging. Some people are called from an early age to serve God while others are called later in life and may give up a great deal to respond to that call. Abraham and Sarah were called directly by God, giving up all that was familiar to them in response to that call.

The call of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12 marks a change in the relationship between humans and God that becomes specific and historical. Their call marks the beginning of the history of God's

direct involvement in people's lives and shows that God has a purpose in history. Abraham and Sarah's faithfulness in responding to God's call results not only in a change of location, but also in new names. Abram becomes Abraham, the ancestor of a multitude of nations. Sarai becomes Sarah (Genesis 17).

Abraham and Sarah lived during the period of the patriarchs or ancestors, dating between 2000 BCE and 1400 BCE, the period of the late bronze age. This was a time of great migration throughout the Middle East and Mediterranean areas. Since travel was difficult and usually by foot, migrations came in small increments only a few miles over a generation. The protection of the extended family kept most people, including those families such as Abraham's and Sarah's, from moving from one land to another.

Abraham's and Sarah's move, however, is different. They are an established family and rich by the standards of their day. Abraham is 75 years old and Sarah is well past child-bearing age. They have extended family living nearby, and they have no compelling reason to move from Haran except for their faithfulness in responding to God's call.

God's call is clear and direct. They are to leave all that is familiar and go to an unknown country that God will show them. Abraham and Sarah leave their families and head for a place known only to God. They begin a physical and spiritual pilgrimage, depending upon God for direction and a new life in an

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Mosaic, 12th c. Duomo, Monreale, Italy. (Art Resources)
- **Key Verse**—*Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan.* Genesis 12:5a
- **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
- **Voices**—John of the Cross, Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, Martin Luther King, Jr.
- **Daily Reflections**
- **Words to Remember**
- **Prayer**—Reinhold Niebuhr

unknown land. Abraham's and Sarah's faithfulness is challenged throughout their lives as they wander in and out of the promised land. They are aware of God's presence and promises and wait with patience for God to reveal those promises.

God continues to call people to new lands and new lives today. All of us are called by God in different ways at different times. Sometimes that call is clear and spectacular. Most times, it is a quiet urging that leads us into new vocations and avocations. Sometimes that call brings us into a "new land" known only to God.

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curse you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the canaanite were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

Genesis 12:1-7

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Youth are interested in considering different ways of living, but they are often hesitant to make major changes.
- Abraham and Sarah heard God's voice when he called them. Youth need to explore the many other ways God communicates with people.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been called by God? What was that like?

Personal Views

Consider how God has called you to something new. Look over the text for this session. Are there any similarities to your call and the call Abraham and Sarah received? Have you ever been called to leave what is familiar to you and go to a new place or to a new way of life? How did you decide that you were called to this? Who called you? Did you have any doubts? Concerns? Fears? Why did you agree to answer the call to an unfamiliar place or ministry?

Talk to others in your church and your community. How did they discern a call from God to take on some new or different ministry or service? Listen to their stories about calls and discernment. How does God's call on their lives compare with yours? How do you think Abraham and Sarah felt when they learned that they were being called by God? Was it easy or hard for them to respond?

Heavenly Father, Shepherd of your people, we thank you for your servants, who were faithful in the care and nurture of your flock; and we pray that, following their examples and the teaching of their holy lives, we may by your grace grow into the stature of the fullness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Of a Pastor

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 248

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Have several road maps or atlases in the room as the youth arrive. Invite them to name the places they have lived, visited, or would like to see.

When all are present ask the youth to find Genesis 12:1-7 in their Bibles. Select a Lector.

Lector: *Let us pray*

God, you call us to live our lives in relation to you. Be with us as we travel to new places and new experiences. Give us the faith of Abraham and Sarah to follow where you lead, even when we don't know where you're taking us. Amen.

Coleman, Grade 8

(Student leaflet, page 3)

Lector: *A reading from the Book of Genesis, Chapter 12, verses 1 through 7.*

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask someone to read from the "Voices" included here (p. 3 of the Session leaflet):

Well and good if all things change,
Lord God, provided we are rooted in
you.

John of the Cross
Christian Monk and Mystic

Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore.
Dorothy, *The Wizard of Oz*

If a man is called to be a street
sweeper, he should sweep streets
even as Michelangelo painted, or
Beethoven composed music, or
Shakespeare wrote poetry. He
should sweep streets so well that all
the hosts of heaven and earth will
pause to say, here lived a great
street sweeper who did his job well.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Ask the youth to react to each of these quotations. How much of what they do and how they live comes out of a call from God? Do they feel that God is leading them? Share with them your experience or that of someone you know about being called by God to something new or different. Is it easier to go your own way or to go in the way that God has called you? Is there a

difference? How do people know when they are called by God?

Return to the text for today and talk about Abraham and Sarah's call. Do you suppose that Abraham and Sarah had a relationship with God before this call to leave for a promised land? Would it help you to have a strong relationship with God before being called to something completely different? What would it be like to be in a different land or situation relying on God for direction?

For further discussion:

- Do you know anyone who has felt called to something or to someplace? What did they say about it?
- Who are the people in your life who have answered a call?
- What would you do if God spoke to you tonight?
- What would it be like to go to a new place, strange or unfamiliar?

Optional Activities

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

Expressions

- **Drama:** Divide the youth into groups of three to study and plan a short drama based on the story of Abraham and Sarah. They may choose to rewrite the story with modern people, destinations, and language. Present the dramas to the entire group.
- **Pack for the trip:** Pass out 3" x 5" cards and ask the youth to write down what they will need for a journey to a new life. Share the list. How would the items change if the destination were different?

- **Construct a model:** Bring in books with pictures of nomadic peoples. Make a model of a typical campsite, using these resources. The model can be constructed from paper mache, clay, or other craft supplies.

Games

- **Seek and you will find:** Divide youth into two or more groups. Provide each group with a list of items hidden in the building or outside that they would need to take on a trip (such as a toothbrush, comb, etc). Instead of the actual items, you may hide a piece of paper with the item's name on it. The first group to find everything on their list wins.
- **Travel to the unknown:** Divide the youth into groups with one adult per group. Let each leader take his or her group to an unfamiliar place in the church, such as the boiler room. Let half of the group lead the other half who are blindfolded. At the destination, remove the blindfold, and discuss how it feels to be led to a strange and unfamiliar place. Did they trust the people leading them?

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 laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch together an episode of *Star Trek*. How does the mission of the *Enterprise* connect with God's call to travel to new and unexplored places?

WEAVINGS

- This session would be helpful when the youth are preparing to start some project or new program in your church or in the community
- In the story for this session, Abram and Sarai are given new names as they become closer to God. This is not an isolated incident in the Bible; others include Isaiah who became Israel; Saul who became Paul; and Simon who became Peter, among others. Each of us is also "named" at baptism. Think about the importance of names in families and in other cultures.
- During wars or famines, moving to a new place is often very painful. Photographs of Jewish people sent to concentration camps in World War II, refugees from Eastern Europe, Cambodia, Bosnia, Africa, and other places are haunting. Although the world may force people to leave their homes, God is always with them, calling them with love and compassion.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Abraham and the Three Angels (No. 3)
- Women of the Bible (No. 4)

- **Print:** Bring in travel brochures from travel agencies. Ask youth to find a place they want to go to where they might serve God. From the information in the brochures, what would they need to take on their journey?

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 "Day by Day," from the musical *Godspell*.
- Sing or read "Be Thou My Vision, O Lord of My Heart," *The Hymnal 1982*, 488.
- Listen to "Salvation" by The Cranberries.

Service

- **Moving experience:** Identify a family in your congregation or community that is moving. Let the youth help them by providing babysitting services, meals, cleaning, help with a yard sale, or in other ways.

Sharing

- **Exhibit:** Display the model of the campsite made in the Expressions activity in a prominent place in the church.
- **Party time:** Plan a party for newcomers to the church— young and old.

Study

- **Other calls:** Look through the other calls on Abraham's and Sarah's life in Genesis 13:14-17; 15:4-5; 15:13-16; and 18:17-19.
- **Nomadic life:** Learn more about the places Abraham and Sarah traveled. Find books from the library that describe the geography of the lands from Egypt to Israel.

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Ask a youth to lead the group in reading together the prayer below (p. 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison.

Leader: *Let us pray.*

God grant me—

The serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

The courage to change the things I can,

And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

Reinhold Niebuhr

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 relate to the story of Abraham and Sarah? Can they discuss in an open manner how God may be calling them? Do they understand the difference between the way God may be calling them to an active relationship versus their own choices or paths presented to them by others? Are they open to new experiences and new ways of living that involve risk? What experiences have they brought to the discussion about changes in their lives?

Hagar & Ishmael: Living in Hope Called by God

Objective

Hagar is the maidservant of Abraham's wife Sarah. She bore a son to Abraham named Ishmael, but was later cast off by Abraham. Hagar, however, receives a direct call and promise from God. Youth will be able to recount the call of God to Hagar and Ishmael and to learn how they can respond to God's call to live in hope even when bad things happen to them and to those they love.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this section focuses on God's call to Hagar and Ishmael who seem to be in a hopeless situation. Key names are Hagar, Ishmael, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac; the key event is God's call for Hagar and Ishmael to live in hope. For spiritual preparation, ponder God's call and promise during hard times in your own life.

Commentary

The call from God comes to many people in direct and in indirect ways. The Bible tells of many who were called to great things. There are stories about being called by God for ministry. Hagar is one such person who is called by God when she is at the very limits of her endurance and strength. God's call to Hagar and her son Ishmael reveals God's love even in the darkest moments.

Hagar, a servant of Sarah, may have been obtained in Egypt during Abraham's and Sarah's travels, following their call by God to the promised land of Canaan. God had promised Abraham and Sarah an heir whose children would be as numerous as the stars in heaven and the grains of sand at the ocean.

Because Sarah is barren, she offers Abraham her servant in keeping with the traditions of their day. Consequently, Hagar gives birth to a son who is named Ishmael. Ishmael is a play on words in Hebrew that implies that Abraham 'listened' to his wife and was therefore rewarded with the child.

About 14 years after the birth of Ishmael, Abraham and Sarah are told by an angel that a son will be born to them. Sarah conceives in her old age and bears a son named Isaac, a Hebrew verb meaning to "laugh," because Sarah had laughed at God's promise that she would conceive and bear a child. To ensure that her son Isaac will inherit Abraham's wealth and position of leadership, Sarah convinces her husband to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham consents only after receiving a message from an angel that God would take care of Hagar and Ishmael.

Early one morning, Abraham places a goatskin of water upon Hagar's shoulder and sends her and Ishmael into the wilderness with the understanding that they are no longer welcome. Hagar and Ishmael wander in the wilderness until their water is gone. Hagar then places her son under a shrub to die and weeping, lifts up her voice to God.

When God hears Ishmael and Hagar crying, God tells her not to be afraid and promises that Ishmael will also thrive and become a great nation. God opens Hagar's eyes to the presence of a nearby well of water that saves her and

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
- **Key Verse**—“Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.”
—Genesis 21:18
- **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
- **Voices**—Linda J. Vogel, Marian Wright Edelman, Ann-Muir Moomaw
- **Daily Reflections**
- **Words to Remember**
- **Prayer**—Proper 2 (BCP. p. 228)

Ishmael from certain death.

Hagar is a slave, yet God speaks directly to her when she is without hope and ready to die with her son. Hagar responds to God's call and promise by raising her son and finding him a wife in Egypt.

In the biblical worldview, Ishmael becomes the father of the Ishmaelites, the nomadic Arabs who lived in and around the land of Canaan. Islam considers him the ancestor of the prophet Mohammed, the founder of Islam.

God continues to speak to those who are in the depths of physical and spiritual despair, calling them to a new life. The call to a life lived in hope is not only “spiritual,” but also involves

LECTOR'S TEXT

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. When the water in the kin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Genesis 21:14-20

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Reinforce the idea that God does not make bad things happen to people. God promises always to be present to help us; we only have to turn to God.
- Many youth already approach life with little hope. Urban teens besieged by violence believe they will be lucky to live until their twenties. The suicide rate for all teens is staggering. Be prepared for some teen to be cynical about this session's message of hope.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever felt completely alone and hopeless?

physical realities like the promise to Hagar that Ishmael would survive their present situation and live.

Personal Views

Recall a time in your life when you had lost hope. How does it feel when God appears to be absent? Did God speak to you in your hopelessness? Have you ever been called by God to a new life when it appeared that there was no logical reason to hope? Was there a "well of water" nearby that was offered to you when you heard God's call or felt God urging you? Did God provide for your spiritual as well as physical needs in that time? Do you know of this happening to someone else?

How do you think Hagar felt when she learned that she was being called by God? Was it easy or hard for her to respond? Consider the different ways God calls those who live in despair to hopefulness. Think about ways God expects us to bear messages of hope to others.

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the Renewal of Life fulfilled? Which method did Hagar and Ishmael need to rely on in the desert?

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 99

Coming Together

(Time t: 10-15 min)

Bring a pile of newspapers in to the class. As the youth arrive invite them to look through the news to find stories of despair, homelessness, disaster, and the

like. Cut the stories out and save them for later.

When all are present, ask the youth to find Genesis 21:14-20 in their Bibles. Select a Lector, and begin with the prayer below.

Lector: *Let us pray
God, sometimes our lives are hard, even when we try our best. Sometimes we forget that you are with us and get really sad or mad. Help us to have hope. Help us to be glad in everything and live our lives in hope. Thanks for being with us. Amen.*

Laurie, Grade 7

(Session Leaflet, p.2)

Lector: *A reading from the Book of Genesis, Chapter 21, verses 14 through 20. (See page 2 for text.)*

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time est: 15-20 min)

On three sheets of newsprint, ask the youth to list the hopes they have for themselves, for current world problems, and for their church. Keep the lists prominently displayed for later reference.

Lead the group in defining the word "hope". What does it mean for youth? Is it different from wishing? In their opinion, do their lists represent hopes or wishful thinking?

Post a list of possible ways their hopes can be realized: personal initiative; community or church efforts; government involvement; or God's action.

Refer to the lists of hopes the youth created earlier. Which of the ways listed above will help their hopes to be fulfilled? Which method did Hagar and Ishmael need to rely on in the desert?

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

- **Dramatic writing:** Write a dialogue between Hagar and Ishmael as they wander in the wilderness before and after Hagar's encounter with God. Remember that Ishmael is about their age. How would they feel being left under a bush by their parent to die of thirst?
- **The play's the thing:** Using the dialogue from the exercise above, stage a one-act play about Hagar and Ishmael
- **Collage:** Using the pictures and news articles in the Coming Together activity, make a collage of people in need.

Games

- **Water relay:** Hagar and Ishmael were without water. Play this game to demonstrate how precious this resource can be. Divide youth into two or more teams. Ask them to line up behind bowls that have been filled with water. At the opposite end of the room, place an empty measuring cup opposite each team. Give each team a tablespoon: each person on the team, in turn, must carefully transport a spoonful of water to the cup. Set a time limit, but do not emphasize speed. The team with the most water in their cup wins. (Try to play this outside if possible.)

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 laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** *The Little Princess*, available at video stores, portrays a child who continues to live in hope despite many setbacks.

- **Print:** Using headlines from the newspaper stories from the Coming Together activity, put together a scrapbook of "Places for Prayer." Use this book in the Going Forth exercise to pray for others.

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 "Lord of All Hopefulness," *The Hymnal 1982*, 482.
- Learn together "Be Not Afraid," by Bob Dufford, in the *GATHER Song Book*, 608.
- Listen to MC Hammer's "Pray."

Service

- **Visit:** Plan a trip to a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter or a nursing home. Talk to youth beforehand about their responsibility as Christians to bring compassion and hope to those in need.

Sharing

- **Lights, camera, action!** Videotape the play staged in the Expressions activity to show to other groups in the church.
- **Exhibit:** Display the collage from the expressions activity during a church fair to recruit people for missions or outreach projects.

Study

- **Call to hope:** Find other stories in the Bible about God calling people to hope.
- **Islamic belief:** Visit the library

WEAVINGS

- This session would be a good way to begin a mission project that involved people in need. Youth will be more prepared to confront people who have little or no hope.
- Despair may seem too "heavy" a term to describe feeling that teens have. Research about eating disorders and teen suicides, however, indicates that teens experience real despair and are desperate for God's message of hope.
- The world offers hope through new diets, the allure of personal products, one-day seminars for success, and even the "sophistication" of smoking cigarettes. These cultural messages are usually louder than God's call because they offer quick fixes. Encourage youth to think about the messages they get from the media and each other and compare them to God's promise of the "peace that passes understanding."

RESOURCE POSTER

- Women of the Bible (No. 4)

to learn more about the beliefs of people who trace their ancestry to Ishmael. Find out who the Prophet Mohammed is and what he taught.

- **Listen:** Invite a follower of the Prophet Mohammed to explain his or her faith. Ask this person to also discuss the role of Ishmael in the Islamic faith.

Voices

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

Persons of faith are not alone on their journeys.

Linda J. Vogel

God, help us to remember
that there are no
illegitimate children in Your
sight.

Marian Wright Edelman

Hope: Hold On Praying Endlessly
Ann-Muir Moomaw

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Turn to the prayer on page 228 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on page 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison.

Leader: *Let us pray.
Almighty and merciful God, in
your goodness keep us, we
pray, from all things that may
hurt us, that we, being ready
both in mind and body, may
accomplish with free hearts
those things which belong to
your purpose; through Jesus
Christ our Lord, who live and
reigns with you and the Holy
Spirit, one God, now and for
ever. Amen*

Proper 2

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 228

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 recount the story of Hagar and Ishmael? Can they relate this ancient tale to their own lives? Can youth find hope even in situations of despair? Do they know how to seek help when they feel hopeless?

Moses: Finding Self-Worth Called by God

Objective

Moses is one of the greatest heroes in the Bible. When he was called by God, he did not consider himself worthy for the task assigned to him. Youth will be able to understand that although Moses felt unworthy, he trusted in God's promise to provide him with the skills necessary to liberate the Hebrews from bondage to the Egyptians. Youth will be able to connect Moses' feelings of unworthiness with their own lives and realize how God promises to be with them.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session focuses on the life of Moses and his call to lead the Hebrews to the promised land. Key names are Moses, Pharaoh, Zipporah, Jethro, and Aaron. For spiritual preparation, ponder your own natural feelings of unworthiness and how you find strength to face challenges in your life.

Commentary

Moses is known as the liberator of the Hebrew people from Egyptian bondage. In response to God's call, he led them out of Egypt, through the wilderness and eventually to the outskirts of the promised land. His character has been glorified through the ages as a great hero and leader of the Hebrew people.

However, it is often forgotten that Moses had humble and even scandalous beginnings. Before his call to greatness, Moses was the son of Hebrew slaves who managed to save him from an Egyptian decree to kill Hebrew infants. Found by an Egyptian princess and raised in royalty as the grandson of Pharaoh,

he murdered an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave. He became an outlaw and fugitive and was forced to flee Egypt. In the land of Midian, he married Zipporah and became a shepherd for his new father-in-law, the priest of Midian. As an outcast of Egypt and with a new family of Midianites, Moses seemed to be an unlikely candidate as God's chosen liberator of the Hebrew slaves.

Moses' experience on Mt. Sinai with the burning bush is one of the most dramatic call stories in the Bible. It compares with the story of Paul in the Book of Acts. Both experienced profound encounters with God. Neither, however, seems worthy by human standards. God also promised Moses help in completing his task. Not only would God be always present, but also God would provide other people to assist him, such as Aaron who became the spokesperson for Moses.

With the power of God as their inspiration, Moses and Aaron went before Pharaoh and sought the liberation of the Hebrew slaves. Pharaoh did not instantly let the Hebrews go. Neither Moses nor the miracles performed at Moses' command were the catalyst for liberation. With each plague that Moses brought to Egypt, God hardened Pharaoh's heart even more. When Pharaoh finally did release the Hebrews from bondage after the tenth plague, it was clear that Pharaoh's decision was caused by God and no one else: not Moses, not Aaron, and especially not Pharaoh.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
- **Key Verse**—*But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you. . ."* Exodus 3:11-12
- **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
- **Voices**—Benjamin Franklin, Phillips Brooks, Felix Adler, Meister Eckhart
- **Daily Reflections**
- **Words to Remember**
- **Prayer**—Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany (BCP, p. 216)

For further study, read Exodus 4:1-12 about how Moses felt about himself. Also read about the call of Paul in Acts 9:1-8.

LECTOR'S TEXT

[Moses] came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land. . . . So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt." He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

Exodus 1b-8a; 10-12

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Whether youths are shy, outgoing, spontaneous or cautious, they generally equate their own self-esteem in relationship to their peers. They know the difference between a person who is "popular" and one who is not. Their perceptions of their own status can dictate their self-esteem and govern their behavior to remain in, rebel from, or aspire to a particular peer group.
- Help youth discover that self-worth comes from God, rather than the opinions friends, classmates, teachers, relatives, or others.
- **Discussion Starter:** Would God ever call you for an important task?

Personal Views

Moses felt unworthy when God called him. The story of the Book of Exodus makes it apparent that the real liberator of the Hebrew slaves was God. While God worked through Moses and Aaron, it was God who performed the many miracles, such as the ten plagues, which led to freedom. It was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart which kept the Hebrews in bondage until the tenth plague; it was God who allowed Pharaoh to release the Hebrews to Moses.

God calls people who may seem unworthy, such as Moses, to tasks that cannot be done without God. Moses' accomplishments are ultimately God's accomplishments. Before Moses could act for God, he had to trust God by believing in his own self-worth.

Not one of us is worthy of liberating the world from poverty, oppression, hunger, war, or homelessness. Yet, God can work through us as he worked through Moses. This makes each of our personal contributions to the world very valuable. Like Moses, God needs us to do God's work. By believing in ourselves we can do seemingly impossible tasks.

Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Oppressed

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 826

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

As the youth arrive ask them to write a description of what God would look like if God were to appear in the classroom at this moment. Invite them to share their ideas with one another as others arrive.

When all are present ask youth to find Exodus 3:1-12 in their Bibles. Select a lector and read together the following prayer (p. 2 of the Session Leaflet).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord, please help me find the courage and wisdom in myself to carry out your deeds. Show me that I am not nobody, but somebody. Be with me in my times of weakness, and let me have pride that, like you, I am who I am, and I will be who I will be.

Kellie, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Exodus, chapter 3, verses 1b through 8a, 10-12.*
(Text on page 2)

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the youth to think about the way God called Moses by first getting his attention with a burning bush that was not consumed. Find out if they have ever had something happen to them to get their attention. Sometimes God uses "near misses," such as an accident that doesn't happen, to make us listen.

During the week, gather art supplies such as paper, paint, brushes, charcoal, pencils, colored tissue, glue, crayons, and colored pencils. Using the supplies available, ask each youth to make a rendering of the scene with Moses and the burning bush in any way they imagine it. Encourage those who think they don't have artistic gifts to make an abstract creation using colors and symbols. Allow time for youth to share their creations with each other.

For further discussion

Describe how Moses used a shepherd's staff to command the power of God. Ask youth what tool or modern day instrument they would use to command the power of God to fulfill their call. (For example, computers, high school diploma, college degree, television, government, etc.)

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

- **Nominations, please:** Ask each person to think of the 10 most important qualifications for a person running for president of the United States. (If this session occurs during local elections, select an appropriate local office for this activity.) Give youth time to write down their ideas, then collect their responses. Discuss the qualifications they list and compare them to the story of Moses.
- **Rapping:** Write a rap song about Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and the 10 plagues. Read about the plagues in Exodus, chapters 7 through 12.

Game

- **Where's my shoe?** Ask each group member to remove one shoe and place it in the center of the room. Walk around the pile of shoes several times. At the count of three, everyone grabs a shoe and matches it with the owner.

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 laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** View *Home Alone*. How does the boy in the story pull himself together in spite of his fears and protect his home?
- **I have a dream:** Read a copy of the speech "I Have a Dream," given by Martin Luther King, Jr. at a famous civil rights march in Washington, D.C. in 1968. Discuss how a black minister found the courage and skill to inspire people then and now.
- **Fairy tales:** Provide a copy of collections of fairy tales or folklore. Invite the youth to read or remember stories about the young and the weak overcoming great odds.

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 "Go Down, Moses," *The Hymnal 1982*, 648.
- Learn "Lead Me, Guide Me," 194 in *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*.
- Sing or listen to "Like A Bridge Over Troubled Waters" by Simon and Garfunkel.

Service

- **Something new:** Help youth plan a service project that they have never tried before. If youth have never met a homeless

WEAVINGS

- This session could be offered at a time when youth pass some milestone in their lives. For example, it could be used as they enter middle school or junior high as a way to help them face their fears.
- Much has been written about self-esteem or self-worth, and schools across the country have incorporated into the curriculum ways to help children feel good about themselves. Still, most younger youth don't like what they see in the mirror. Part of this is due to cultural and peer pressures, and part is due to the uncertainties of this age group. Be sensitive to this issue and help youth see themselves in a good light. Also help them to be less judgmental of others.
- The media bombard youth with messages about what they should look like, what they should wear, and how they should talk. Hardly any youth can be as thin, wealthy, or "cool" as these messages suggest. One way youth can feel good about who they are and what they are is by helping others. Find a way to get youth involved in on-going service projects.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Old Testament Map (No. 1)

person, plan to spend time at a shelter. Instead of just preparing a meal for someone, deliver it in person.

Sharing

- **Art exhibit:** Display the art made for the Engaging activity in a prominent place in the church.
- **Reach out:** Ask youth to invite a friend who doesn't attend church to come to class. Set aside one Sunday for "Invite a Friend to Church," and plan special activities, games and refreshments on this day.

Study

- **Reading:** Read the second part of Moses' response to God's call in Exodus 4:1-12.
- **The tenth plague:** The last plague to befall Pharaoh and the Egyptians is recalled in the Jewish celebration of the Passover. Find out more about this celebration and what happens during the Seder meal.

Voices

Read the quotations below (p. 2 of the Session Leaflet) and use the questions for a discussion.

God helps those that help themselves.

Benjamin Franklin

O Lord, I do not pray for tasks equal to my strength: I ask for strength equal to my tasks.

Phillips Brooks

The hero is one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for people to see by. The saint is the one who walks through the dark paths of the world, a light.

Felix Adler (adapted)

If you do not know how to love yourself, how is it possible that you will love God?

Meister Eckhart (13th century)

Discussion:

- Is there a relationship between self-esteem and greatness?
- Does God call only great people to do important tasks for him?
- Would you have chosen Moses to lead the Hebrews considering his credentials?
- Who was responsible for liberating Israel from bondage with the Egyptians?
- What is keeping you from doing God's work?

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Turn to the prayer on page 216 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (p. 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison.

Leader: *Let us pray.*

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 216

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are the youth able to see the weaknesses of Moses? Do they understand that God uses people to do God's work in spite of their weaknesses? Can youth find something about themselves that is unique for God to use? Are youth able to recognize their own weaknesses and realize that God still loves them? Can youth begin to see others as God does, setting aside their weaknesses to find their strengths?

Samuel: Serving All His Days Called by God

Objective

The focus of this session is on Samuel, the last of the great judges of Israel and the first of the great prophets, a man whose life was spent in total dedication to serving God from his earliest childhood. Youth will be able to recount the call of God to Samuel and to explore how God may call them to service.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this Session focuses on Samuel's call from God and the response he makes. Key names are Samuel, Eli, and Hannah. Ponder God's call to people today. What are some of the ways God calls?

Commentary

The call from God may come in direct and indirect ways. Some people who know they have been called by God can speak of hearing God's voice, literally hearing the spoken words. Others who have been called by God speak of a gentle urging—no voice, but a sense of assurance that God has called them to a service or to a place. God calls all of us at different times and in different ways. Samuel is a person who was called directly by God and served God in special and spectacular ways all his life. We know of Samuel's call and his service to God through the Book(s) of Samuel.

The span of time between the entrance into the "Promised Land" and the crowning of the first king of Israel was between 250 and 300 years. During that time, the people of God were led and governed by "judges" who were called by God to face critical challenges encountered

by the people. Judges were not selected through traditional methods, such as succession by family, by ability, or by age. Instead they were chosen by God. Most were men, but at least one was a woman. These judges received God's Spirit to assist the people in maintaining their lands, their civil order and their faith in the one, true God. During this time of tribal confederacy, Israel relied on God to call leadership when it was needed. Israel was unique among the nations in that it recognized no king other than God.

The last judge to be called in Israel was Samuel, the son of Hannah, a woman who prayed to God for a child whom she would dedicate to God's service. God heard and answered her prayer. When Samuel was old enough to leave home, Hannah took him to the temple to dedicate him to the Lord. While he was still a boy, Samuel received a separate and clear call from God that he would be God's judge, prophet, and priest among the people of Israel. God spoke directly to Samuel and sent God's Spirit upon him.

Samuel's call to serve God changed in his lifetime. Samuel was the last judge of Israel because the people of God wanted a king. God raised up Saul and then David, both of whom were anointed by Samuel. With the coming of human kings and succession, the days of the judges ended. Samuel became the first of many prophets who spoke the word of God to the people, sometimes in opposition to the wishes and desires of Israel's kings. Throughout his life Samuel

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—*Samuel Blessing Saul*, Gustave Doré
- **Key Verse**—*Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle."* 1 Samuel 3:11
- **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
- **Voices**—Mother Teresa, Abraham Heschel, Jeremiah, Malamud
- **Daily Reflections**
- **Words to Remember**
- **Prayer**—For Reaffirmation (BCP, p. 419)

answered God's changing call to serve as a "bridge" in the evolving lives of the people of God.

Call stories are prevalent throughout the Old and New Testaments. Yet, God continues to call people today. All of us are called by God to serve in different ways at different times. Sometimes, that call is clear and spectacular. Most times, though, it is a quiet urging that graces our everyday living, leading us into vocations and avocations. The story of Samuel's call by God provides us a way to examine God's persistent call on our own lives and how we may respond.

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. The Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle." 1 Samuel 3:1-11

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Young people are struggling with who they are and who they will become. Often those thoughts are based on fame and fortune. The task here is to present another view—God's call.
- Consider the ways God "talks" to us, just as other media "talk" to us, move us.
- Be a listener for yourself and for your class on how God may be calling you and them.
- **Discussion Starter:** How do you think Samuel felt when he learned that he was being called by God?

Personal Views

Consider how God has called you in your life. What similarities are there to your call and the call Samuel received? How do you know that it was God who called you to some task or service? How were you asked to become a leader for this group? Was it a call? Did you have any doubts?

At first Samuel did not realize God was calling him. When he finally remained still, he heard God's call. Was it easy or hard for him to respond? How about when a call changes? Take time to consider some of the different aspects of God's call. Relating stories about Samuel's call, your call, and other persons' calls will help youth discern calls in their own lives.

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth; Deliver us in our daily occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*
Collect for Vocation in Daily

Work

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 261

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15)

Write the names of the youth all over a large sheet of paper. Use different colors and sizes of print. As they enter ask them how it feels to see their names displayed. Invite them to share their responses.

When all are present select a lector, and ask the youth to find 1 Samuel 3:1-11 in their Bibles.

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Almighty God, please make yourself present in our lives so that we may hear you call. Fill us with your love so that we may follow your teaching as did Samuel, your faithful servant. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen

Amanda, grade 9

(*Session Leaflet*, p. 2)

Lector: *A reading from First Samuel, Chapter 3, verses 1 through 11.*

(See page 2 for full text.)

Lector: *The word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask a youth to read from the "Voices" quotes included here (also on page 2 of the *Session Leaflet*):

Make sure that you let God's grace work in your souls by accepting whatever God gives you, and giving God whatever he takes from you. True holiness consists in doing God's will with a smile.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Mindfulness of God rises slowly, a thought at a time. Suddenly we are there. Or is He here, at the margin of our soul? When we begin to feel a qualm of hesitation lest we hurt what is holy, lest we break what is whole, then we discover that He is not austere. He answers with love and trembling awe.

Abraham Heschel

Lord, you are in the midst of us, and we are called by your Name.

Book of Jeremiah 14:9

My father wanted me to be a farmer, too, but I wanted to be a baseball player.

Malamud, *The Natural*, spoken by Roy Hobbs

Ask for reactions to each of these quotations. Come to some consensus on the variety of ways people

understand the call of God in their lives. Talk about your understanding of Samuel's call and of calls in general. To the extent you are comfortable, share how you came to be their leader. Whether it was "mundane" or a spoken word of God, they will be interested in your call and how God is caring for them through you and your ministry. Ask them if they have ever felt God's call.

For further discussion:

- How was Samuel the prophet called?
- What was Samuel's reaction to hearing God's voice?
- Are there times when we, as a community, help others to discern God's call in their lives?
- Look at one of the people on the pictures on the wall from the "Coming Together" activity. What was it like for that person to be called?
- Do you know anyone who has felt called to something?
- Have you ever been called by God? What was that like?

Optional Activities

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

Expressions

- **Living the call:** Divide the class into two groups and invite them to act out a situation in which God calls someone today to a specific task or ministry.
- **Art:** Draw or paint a picture of what God is calling you to do now or in the future.

Games

- **Who am I?** Take turns having one person turn his or her back on the rest of the class. Ask another

youth to speak to that person as God spoke to Samuel. See if the person whose back is turned can turn quickly and point to the correct speaker. The identified speaker then becomes the person being called. Repeat several times.

- **When I grow up:** As a take-off of "what I want to be when I grow up," invite the youth to write down on a piece of paper what they want to be. Appoint a recorder and write these vocations next to the names from the "Coming Together" activity. Ask the question, "What does God want me to be when I grow up?" Are there any differences? Why?

Media

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

- **Video:** Show and discuss *Mr. Holland's Opus* or *Sister Act*, both contemporary movies about call.
- **Photo essay:** Select several youth to do a photo essay about people in your church who have been called to serve God in different ways. Display their work in a prominent place.

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 can be used at any time. It would be particularly helpful during confirmation as the youth begin to consider how they may serve God in the church and community.
- This session would also be helpful when the youth are preparing to start some project in outreach or youth evangelism training.
- As you work through this section on calls in the Old Testament consider how this story compares to other stories of God's call.
- Samuel's call changed several times throughout his life. That happens to us, too. John Glenn, for example, first served his country as a pilot, then as an astronaut, and now as a U.S. Senator. Think of others in the news or from your community who have followed God's call to new vocations or service.

RESOURCE POSTER

- The Tabernacle (No. 5)

- Play and discuss the song “Here I am, Lord” by Daniel L. Schutte, New Dawn Music.
- Read or sing “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God.” (*The Hymnal* 1982, 293)
- Listen to “One of Us” by Joan Osborne, or Mike Scott’s song “What Do You Want Me to Do?”

Service

- **Called to service:** Explore the sense of call that the youth might respond to in their community. Some might feel a call to work with young children, others, with older people, or with the sick. In what ways could they take action on that call?

Sharing

- **Telling others:** Create a series of posters about people who have responded to God’s call to serve in the church and in the world. Display these in a prominent place.

Study

- **Concordance:** Use a Bible concordance or study Bible to look up other call stories. Consider how they are different or similar to Samuel’s call.
- **Lists:** List all the different ways a member of your congregation can serve in your church.
- **Biographies:** At the library, find biographies of people you admire and find out how they were called to a life of service.

Going Forth

Gather the group for closing for a prayer and dismissal. Turn to the prayer below in *The Book of Common Prayer* (page 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison. The leader or an appointed youth says:

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty and everliving God, let your fatherly hand ever be over us, your servants; let your Holy Spirit ever be with us; and so lead us in the knowledge and obedience of your Word, that we may serve you in this life, and dwell with you in the life to come; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Reaffirmation

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 419

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Do the youth understand the consistent action of God in calling people throughout the Bible? In their own day?

Ruth: Called to Patience

Called by God

Objective

Ruth took risks to remain faithful to God. She never turned her back on her family or on God, but she remained faithful and loyal in her commitment to serve the Lord. The youth will be able to identify the patience exhibited by Ruth as a model for their own faithfulness. They will be able to recognize the call of Ruth as a call to patience that they can learn to develop in their own lives.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session focuses on the faithfulness of Ruth despite uncertainty and setbacks in her life. Key names are Ruth, Elimelech, Naomi, Orpah, and Boaz. For spiritual preparation, consider your own call to patience and how you find inspiration from the Bible to endure hardships.

Commentary

The Book of Ruth is very short; it is a good idea to read the entire story in order to prepare for this session on patience. It is a story of three kinds of love: between Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, between Ruth and her new husband Boaz, and between Ruth and God. The symbolic names of the characters add to the richness of the story. Ruth means “companion,” Boaz means “strength,” and Orpah, who stayed in Moab, means “disloyal.”

Even though Ruth was a non-Israelite from the land of Moab, she became King David's great grandmother. She married one of the sons of Naomi and Elimelech who had fled to Moab to escape a famine in Judah.

As the story begins, Elimelech and his two sons die, leaving Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth as widows facing a very bleak future. Naomi has no recourse but to leave the foreign land of Moab and return to her home in Bethlehem. Orpah decides to remain in Moab, but Ruth insists on going with Naomi, embracing in faith the God of Israel with the famous lines, “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” (*Ruth 1:16*) Ruth's patient faith in this God of mysterious power and her loyalty to Naomi transform her life in unexpected ways.

Poor and homeless when they arrive in Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth are forced to depend on the charity of others. For daily food they rely on the Israelite custom of gleaning grain the reapers have failed to reap in the field. According to the law of Moses, the owner was required to leave the unharvested grain behind for the poor, the fatherless, widows, and vested grain behind for the poor, the fatherless, widows, and strangers.

As Ruth gleans behind the reapers she finds herself in a field belonging to Boaz, a relation of Naomi's deceased husband. He protects Ruth and encourages her to gather as much as she can for her table, even providing water for her in the heat of the day.

Jewish custom dictated that a widow was to be cared for by her husband's nearest male relative. When this person refuses to marry Ruth, Boaz's love, unbounded

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
- **Key Verse**—*But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”*
Ruth 1:16
- **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
- **Voices**—Shakespeare, Abraham Lincoln, Titus Maccium Plautus, St. Francis of Assisi
- **Daily Reflections**
- **Words to Remember**
- **Prayer**—A Prayer for the Poor and Neglected (BCP, p. 826)

generosity, and faithful obedience to God lead him to take the young Moabite woman as his wife.

The happy ending of Ruth's story should not overshadow the predicament she faced. Her willingness to remain with Naomi shows her patience and trust that God would be faithful to them. True faith in God is not dependant upon blood lines, marriage, or status, but upon patience and love.

LECTOR'S TEXT

So (Naomi) said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

Ruth 1:15-19a

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Younger youth consider themselves ready for almost everything and invulnerable to long term consequences of their immediate actions. Patience is difficult when short-term rewards are so inviting. Help them see the value of patience in their lives.
- Patience can help youth deal with the pressures to engage in sexual activity, drugs, and alcohol. Faith in a God that is always present can help youth deal with peer pressure.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been rewarded for being patient?

For further study, refer to other examples of romance in the Bible, such as the relationship of Rebecca and Isaac in Genesis 24; a hymn dedicated to the ideal wife in Proverbs 31:10-31; and the loving marriage between two Israelites in Tobit chapter 8. Also study the liturgy for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage in the Book of Common Prayer, p. 423. Pay particular attention to the theme of patience in the Declaration of Consent on p. 424 and the vows on p. 427.

Personal Views

Consider your own ability to exercise patience in various situations. There are two different approaches to the discipline of waiting. The first involves waiting for those things we know will come in due course, such as waiting in line or watching the clock. These situations are sometimes inconvenient because we live busy and hurried lives. As we wait, we can monitor our progress towards the anticipated goal. Patience in this context can help us with our prayer life and spiritual discipline.

The second approach to waiting offers no opportunity to measure how close we are to the expected goal. In fact, there is no guarantee the goal will ever be achieved. Examples include fishing, finding the right job, getting promoted, or meeting the perfect spouse.

Waiting on God is much like the second approach to patience because it forces us to rely on faith and hope rather than fact. Waiting on God means having steadfast faith. This is the kind of faith that does not falter when times become difficult.

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast

faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 218

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Ahead of time place penny candy in a large box and wrap it in colorful paper and ribbon. Place the box in an obvious place in the room and ask the youth as they arrive to guess what is in the box.

When all have arrived begin the session without referring to the box. At some time during the activities about patience and waiting, ask how difficult it was to wait and not know what was in the box. At the end of the session, allow the youth to open the box and distribute the candy.

When all are present, ask the youth to find Ruth 1:15-19a in their Bibles. Select a lector and say together the prayer below (p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Heavenly Father, so that we may be able to follow your guidance and teachings, help us to have patience in our daily lives like you did with Ruth. Give us the courage to wait in our times of hardship and uncertainty. We ask this in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Michelle, Grade 7

Lector: *A reading from Ruth, chapter 1, verses 15-19a.*

(See page 2 for full text.)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Pick a controversial issue, such as drug use or under-age drinking, and ask the youth to debate the merits of waiting in the context of the topic. Divide them into two groups, pro and

con, and give them time to form their ideas. Each group can select a spokesperson or opt for a panel discussion format.

Ask the groups to weigh the rewards against the risks and consequences of indiscretion. Encourage them to think about Christian principles as they form their arguments. Be careful not to interject your own opinions until the youth have had ample opportunity to express theirs.

Optional Activities

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

Expressions

- **Role play:** Assign the youth to play the characters from the Book of Ruth. Let different groups decide which part of the story they will act out. Allow time for each group to perform.
- **Fingerpainting:** Make backdrops for the plays using fingerpaints. Encourage youth to be creative and abstract in their depictions.
- **Letter writing:** Ask youth to put themselves in Ruth's place as she leaves her home to follow Naomi. Let them write a letter from Ruth to her family in Moab about her new life.

Games

- **Gleaning relay:** Divide the youth into two or more groups. Ask them to line up behind a starting point at one end of the room. At the other end of the room, set containers with dried flowers or stocks of grain. The object of the relay is to see how quickly a team can "glean the harvest" one piece at a time. To make the relay more interesting ask them to hop on

one foot, backwards, or add other obstacles of your choice.

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 laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** View the film *Dances With Wolves*. Is it difficult for the soldier to wait at the fort? How did it change his loyalties? Why did he decide to live with the Lakota tribe? How was his experience similar to Ruth's?
- **Print:** Bring in different kinds of magazines and ask youth to find advertisements that offer quick relief or instant happiness. See if youth can find ads that indicate products may take time to work.

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 "Seek Ye First," *The Hymnal 1982*, 711, as a round. Discuss the theme of patience.
- Sing "I Say 'Yes,' Lord" from *Gather*, 421.
- Sing or play a recording of "Let it be" by Paul McCartney and John Lennon.

WEAVINGS

- This session could be scheduled near the beginning of the school year when youth will be facing peer pressure to look for short-term rewards instead of seeing the long-term consequences.
- While most people say that "patience" is a virtue, few seem to have it. The next time you go somewhere, observe the driving habits of people in cars. How much patience did you find? Try to nurture patience in your own life as you drive, stand in line, or wait for a medical appointment.
- It is difficult to have patience in a world that celebrates instant gratification. Be aware of how advertising on television and in the print media affects our expectations of quick relief or happiness.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Women of the Bible (No. 4)

Service

- **Helping others:** Working with the elderly can sometimes tax our patience. Arrange an outreach project with the youth to a nursing home. Let them serve as volunteers for a day with the residents in the home.

Sharing

- **Helping hands:** Offer to give the child care workers or preschool teachers a break one Sunday in appreciation of their efforts. Let some of the youth take care of the children while others serve refreshments to workers and teachers.

- **Presenting a play:** Using the backdrops made in the Expressions activity, present a role play about Ruth to young children. Let them be a part of the play, too! This activity could be a part of the Helping Hands project.

Study

- **Journal:** Pretend that you are Ruth and write a journal about leaving home and following Naomi to a new land.
- **Patience of Job:** Invite the youth to explore other stories of patience. A folk proverb often speaks of the “patience of Job.” Study the book of Job in the Bible. Was he really patient?

Voices

Read and discuss the following voices (p. 2 of the Session Leaflet).

How poor are they that have not patience! What wound did ever heal but by degrees?

Othello, Shakespeare

I am a patient man—always willing to forgive on the Christian terms of repentance; and also to give ample time for repentance.

Abraham Lincoln

Patience is the best remedy for trouble.

*Titus Maccium Plautus
(3rd century B.C.E.)*

Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance. Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor vexation. Where there is poverty and joy, there is neither greed nor avarice.

Where there is peace and meditation, there is neither anxiety nor doubt.

St. Francis of Assisi

For discussion:

- How do you think Ruth exercised patience?
- What are some examples of patience in your life?
- What are some examples of impatience in your life?
- What does it mean to wait on God?
- What is the value of waiting?

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Turn to the prayer on page 826 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (p. 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison.

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Prayer for the Poor and Neglected
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 826

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth see the value of patience as shown in the story of Ruth in their own lives? Can they identify times and places in their own lives in which patience would be helpful? Are they able to understand that quick fixes do not always provide the best solutions?

Jonathan & David: Call to Friendship Called by God

Objective

Jonathan is the son of Saul, the first king of Israel, and the best friend of David, the next king of Israel. Jonathan is called to serve God by making peace between his father and his friend. Youth will be able to recount an incident of Jonathan's call to be a good friend and a good son and to consider the role of friendship in their lives.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session focuses on the challenge faced by Jonathan in reconciling his friend with his father. Key names and ideas are Jonathan, Saul, David, kingship, call, and friendship. For spiritual preparation, ponder God's call to be friends with others and with God, even when those friendships place us in conflict.

Commentary

A call from God is sometimes so much a part of us that we cannot name a specific time when we were called to a specific task. Such is the call of Jonathan to love and care for both David and Jonathan's father, King Saul. Jonathan lives and acts as one who has been called from birth to serve God by caring for others. His call to be a friend places him in a difficult conflict between David and his father, a conflict that has ramifications for his succession to the throne of Israel.

Saul is the first king over all of Israel. Before Saul's kingship, God's people had been ruled by a series of judges who were called by God to face specific challenges. In times of peace, the twelve tribes governed themselves.

After the last judge Samuel anoints Saul as the first king over all

of Israel, Saul battles the Philistines and begins to establish a kingdom that he expects to pass on to his children. As long as Saul follows the ways of the Lord, God's Spirit will be upon him and his children, and they will rule over all Israel.

Saul, however, is disobedient and is rejected by God. The kingdom is torn from him and given to David, a young shepherd. The Philistines, at this time, regroup and continue to fight against Israel. In one battle, they send up a champion who challenges Israel to a one-on-one fight. No one accepts Goliath's challenge until young David arrives with supplies for his brothers. David defeats Goliath and is hailed by all of Israel, including King Saul. David becomes part of Saul's inner circle, and his friendship with Jonathan flourishes.

The Book of Samuel says that Jonathan loved David as he loved his own soul. Jonathan makes a covenant with David, pledging their friendship to one another. Jonathan gives his most cherished belongings to David as a sign of their covenant.

As general over the whole army, David has success wherever Saul sends him. Saul envies David's success and his close friendship with Jonathan. Despite a reduction of David's command, he continues to succeed. Eventually, out of jealousy, Saul decides to kill David.

Jonathan warns David to hide because Saul plans to kill him. Jonathan pleads with his father not to kill an innocent person, reminding him of David's courage and deeds. Saul repents and brings

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
- **Key Verse**—*So Jonathan called David and related all these things to him. Jonathan then brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.* 1 Samuel 19:7
- **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
- **Voices**—Hilaire Belloc, Abraham Lincoln, Mother Teresa
- **Daily Reflections**
- **Words to Remember**
- **Prayer**—For Those We Love (BCP, p. 831)

David back into his court.

Jonathan is remarkable in that he places his friendship with David above his own desire to follow his father as king. He courageously confronts his father on behalf of his friend and on behalf of God to save David from being killed needlessly.

The conflict and rivalry between Saul and David does not end here. Jonathan is later unable to stop his father from trying to kill David. David hides until Saul and Jonathan are both killed in battle. When David does become king, he remembers his friendship with Jonathan and cares for Jonathan's family as if it were his very own.

LECTOR'S TEXT

Saul spoke with his son Jonathan and with all his servants about killing David. But Saul's son Jonathan took great delight in David. Jonathan told David, "My father Saul is trying to kill you; therefore be on guard tomorrow morning; stay in a secret place and hide yourself. I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you; if I learn anything I will tell you." Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul, saying to him, "The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you; for he took his life in his hand when he attacked the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; why then will you sin against an innocent person by killing David without cause?" Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan; Saul swore, "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death." So Jonathan called David and related all these things to him. Jonathan then brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.

I Samuel 19:1-7

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Friendships can be very difficult for young teens. A researcher found that at some time during the year, over 70 percent will feel they have no friends. Be open to talking about friendships with youth.
- Youth are expected to begin to discern between healthy friendships and those that are destructive. Sometimes a youth may need to listen to a parent instead of a friend. Be ready to discuss this issue.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever stood up for a friend even though it caused conflict?

Christians are called to love their neighbors as themselves and to serve as reconcilers in the world. Like Jonathan, they are called to care for and love their friends even when that brings them into conflict.

Personal Views

How is your call to serve and follow God similar to Jonathan's? Has a friendship ever come between you and a family member? Between you and God? Think about your best friends and your friendship with God. Reflect on times in your life when your call to care for a friend was challenged. How does it feel to have your call to follow and be in relationship with God brought into question by others?

Look again at the text. How would you respond in similar circumstances? When are you willing to make a stand for your friendship?

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope and charity; 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

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

As the youth enter the classroom, provide them with paper and pencils. Ask them to make a list of all their friends, using a secret code of their own to indicate which ones are best friends and which ones they would do anything for to save their lives if they were threatened.

When all are present ask them to find I Samuel 19:1-7 in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the group.

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Thank you for my friends and for the love we share for one another. Give me the courage and strength to be like Jonathan when people attack my friends. Make me a good friend to those who love me and my friends and to those who don't love me or my friends. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Nancy, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from the First Book of Samuel, Chapter 19, verses 1 to 7. (Full text on page 2.)*

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask someone to read the Voices below (Page 2 of the Session Leaflet):
From quiet homes and first beginning,
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning,
But laughter and the love of friends.
Dedicatory Ode, Hilaire Belloc

Am I not destroying my enemies
when I make friends of them?
Abraham Lincoln

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God
with thy whole heart, with thy whole
soul and with thy whole mind and
love thy neighbor as thyself. This is
the commandment of the great God,
and he cannot command the
impossible. Love is a fruit in season
at all times, and within reach of
every hand. Anyone may gather it
and no limit is set.
Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Ask for reactions to each of these quotations. Do you believe that God is calling you to love God and your neighbors? On what other basis can friendships develop? Share with them your experience or the experience of

someone you know about being called by God to support a friend against a family member or another friend. How would it feel to stand up for their friends?

Return to the text for today and talk about Jonathan and his call to reconcile his father with his friend David. Would youth have done the same? Are there any modern equivalents to this story? Finally, what is the single guiding principle for their own friendships with others and their friendship with God?

Look back to the lists that they made earlier. How is God involved in these relationships? Do you believe that God has ever called you to be a friend to others, to reconcile people to one another and to God? How far would you be willing to go? What does it mean in practical terms to seek to be friends with God and with others above all else? How can God help us heal misunderstandings with our friends?

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

- **Symbols:** Think of symbols that represent friendship for youth, i.e. friendship bracelets or rings, becoming “blood” brothers or sisters, and so on. Create a symbol for friendships with others and a symbol for friendship with God.
- **Writing:** Invite the youth to write about some situations that they may encounter every day when they have to choose to be a friend to someone else and to help others to ‘love’ their friend.

Paint the story: Youth may draw or paint the story and place their art work in a prominent location in the church. You might consider an ancient and a modern depiction of the call to a life of friendship.

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 laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch together *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, or *The Sandlot*, and discuss the friendship that develops in these films.
- **Print:** Gather several copies of magazines teens might enjoy reading such as *Seventeen*, *Sports Illustrated*, or *People*. Ask them to find photos and stories about friendship.

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 “My Song is Love Unknown,” in *The Hymnal*, 458.
- Sing together “Lord Make Me a Means of Your Peace,” James Foley, SJ in *Dwelling Place*.
- Listen to “Making Friends,” by Elton John, or “That's What Friends Are For.”

WEAVINGS

- This session would work well in a retreat setting.
- Jonathan's friendship with David is special because Jonathan had so much to lose in remaining David's friend. Friendships that have an equal amount of give and take are easy to maintain. However, there are times in every friendship when one person must give more than the other.
- The media often report stories of unusual friendships. People have been willing to place their lives on the line for a special friend. Be aware of stories in the media this week about friendship.

RESOURCE POSTER

- David Crowned by Samuel (No. 6)

Service

- **Pen pals:** Friendships are not just those among peers. Youth benefit greatly by developing friendships with older people. Contact a nursing home and get a list of names of the residents who would like to correspond with youth. Invite the youth to send a letter or greeting card introducing themselves.

Sharing

- **Symbolic exhibit:** Display the symbols or paintings from the Expressions activity on a bulletin board or in a place where members of the congregation can see them.

Study

- **Look it up!** Use a Bible Concordance or Study Bible to look up friendship. What other stories focus on this concept?
- **Bible study:** Find other times in scripture when God's people had to make a choice for friends and for God in the face of opposition.
- **Friends in other places:** Go to the library and find biographies of people you admire and are known for their friendships.

Voices

Read and discuss the following voices (p. 2 of the Session Leaflet).

From quiet homes and first beginning,
Out to the undiscovered ends,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning,
But laughter and the love of friends.

Dedicatory Ode, Hilaire Belloc

Am I not destroying my enemies
when I make friends of them?

Abraham Lincoln

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God
with thy whole heart, with thy whole
soul and with thy whole mind and
love thy neighbor as thyself. This is
the commandment of the great God,
and he cannot command the
impossible. Love is a fruit in season
at all times, and within reach of every
hand. Anyone may gather it and no
limit is set.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

For Discussion:

- What does friendship mean to you?
- Have you ever turned an enemy into a friend?
- Would you need to change your life if you loved your neighbor as yourself?

Going Forth

Gather the group for closing for a prayer and dismissal. Turn to the prayer on page 831 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (p. 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison.

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us to your never-failing care and love, for this life and the life to come, knowing that you are doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For those we Love

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 831

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth tell the story of Jonathan and David and describe the difficult situation Jonathan faced? Are youth comfortable with the friendships they have? Are they able to discern when a friendship is harmful? Have they ever thought of God as a friend?

Abigail: Doing the Right Thing Called by God

Objective

Abigail is a servant of God who lived during the time that Israel was united into one kingdom. Abigail is called by God to use her judgment to choose to do good even though it may place her in a difficult situation. Youth will be able to recount one incident of Abigail's call to do the right thing regardless of the cost and begin to consider God's call in their own lives to do what is right and good in the eyes of God.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this section focuses on Abigail's decision to answer God's call—to do the right thing for David and his men. Key ideas are call and hospitality to the stranger. Think about God's call to do what is right and good even when it brings us into conflict with others.

Commentary

We seek to follow God by doing what is right and good in each situation. Such is the call of Abigail, a person of wisdom who chose to do what is good even though it threatened her marriage and position.

Abigail lived during the time of the united kingship in Israel, (1000 B.C.E.). Saul was king of Israel, but had failed to follow God's will. David had been anointed the next king. Saul drove David into the wilderness to remove him from the center of power and made several unsuccessful attempts to kill him.

In the wilderness of Paran, David and his band of soldiers protected the herds and holdings of fellow

Israelites while Saul and his army fought the Philistines. It was here that David met Abigail for the first time.

Abigail was the wife of one of the richest men in the region, Nabal (which actually means *fool* in Hebrew). David and his men protected Nabal's herds from harm during the sheep shearing season.

This season was also a time of great celebration. All who had anything to do with the success of the herds would be invited. David sent some of his men to ask Nabal if they might join in the feasting. Nabal refused and insulted David.

Abigail heard of Nabal's harsh refusal. Because this was a violation of the laws of hospitality, Abigail gathered provisions for David and his men and loaded them onto donkeys herself. She searched for David to give him the food that was due him.

Abigail chose to take the right action, even though it went against her husband's wishes. Her disobedience, under the law, was grounds for divorce or death.

Abigail's call to do what was right regardless of the cost was an act of great courage. Later David took Abigail as his wife and relied on her counsel all their lives.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—“. . . Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt; please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant.”
1 Samuel 15:24
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—C.S. Lewis, William Sparrow, Booker T. Washington
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For the Right Use of God's Gifts (BCP, p. 827)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he shouted insults at them. . . .

Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs. She loaded them on donkeys and said to her young men, "Go on ahead of me; I am coming after you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. . . .

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and alighted from her donkey, fell before David on her face, bowing to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, "Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt; please let your servant speak in the ears, and hear the words of your servant. . . . And when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant."

David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today!"

1 Samuel 25:14,18-19,23-24,32

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Youth are interested in models for their lives in faith and are especially interested in people of principle who do the right thing in a given situation.
- How do young people know something is "right" when everyone else says it's wrong? Making these kinds of choices is part of growing up. Let the youth know that even when they make the wrong choice, God will never desert them.
- **Discussion Starter:** What would be the consequences of doing what is right but going against parents or others in authority?

Personal Views

How is your call to serve and follow God similar to Abigail's? How do you decide what is the good and right way to act and live your life? Sometimes there are more than one "right" choices. How do you let God lead you to the choice that is right for you?

Reflect on the times when your call to do the right thing might have had potentially negative consequences. How did it feel to have your decision challenged by others?

Look again at the text for today. How would you respond in similar circumstances? Share with the youth the limits of your own ability to do good regardless of the consequences. When are you willing to take a stand for good in the name of Jesus?

Do you know if other leaders in your church and your community have been called to do good regardless of the consequences? How did they respond when their commitment to do the right thing was challenged, even threatened?

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Collect for Guidance

The Book of Common Prayer, p.832

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

In preparation for this class find pictures of people making choices for good or evil. Find the same number of examples of each. As the youth arrive, give them paper and markers.

Ask them to look at the pictures and write down how each picture or poster relates to making choices for good or evil. Invite them to choose a good deed they have done similar to those on display. Or, ask them write down one good deed they have done during the past week. Tell them to think about how God may be involved in the different situations.

When all are present ask them to find 1 Samuel 25:14 in their Bibles. Select a lector, and read the following prayer in unison (p. 2 of the Session Leaflet).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

O God, we know that you have called us to be good and to do the right thing. Show us how to follow you more clearly. Show us what is good and right every day. Give us the courage to face challenges and be with us as you were with your servant Abigail and with your Son, Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

Chris, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from the First Book of Samuel, Chapter 25, verses 14, 18-19, 23-24, 32).*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 30 min)

During the week, come up with situation in which a decision for the good versus the expedient is difficult. Start with Abigail, then proceed with stumblers like receiving more change than you deserve at the store; telling the truth when no one would know otherwise; copying homework from a friend; finding out questions on a test from someone who has taken it earlier in the day; helping someone when no one else is willing to do so; etc. Some youth believe that "getting caught" is the criteria for right and wrong. This would be a good time to dispel these ideas.

Write the situations down on separate pieces of paper or cards. Ask the youth to say or act out in a role play what they would do in each situation. Encourage them to challenge one another.

For further discussion:

Return to the text for today and talk about Abigail and the call on her life to do the right thing. Would they do the same, given the possibility that their actions might get them in deep trouble? What modern equivalents can they come up with? How would they respond to these circumstances? Finally, what is the single guiding principle for their understanding of what is good?

Optional Activities

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

Expressions

- **Drama:** Divide youth into groups to review the biblical text. Rewrite the language with a more modern twist. Each group can act out the story using modern language. Talk about the difficulties of doing the right thing when everyone else thinks you are wrong.
- **Paint:** Draw or paint the story of Abigail and David. Consider an ancient and a modern depiction of their meeting.
- **Short stories:** Present situations describing choices youth face that may get them into trouble with their family or friends, even if it is the right choice. Ask youth to write a short story about a personal experience.

Games

- **Doers of Good:** Divide the group into two teams to see

how many people, living or dead, each team can name who chose to do the right thing in the face of opposition. Some examples are Itzhak Rabin, Yasir Arafat, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Take turns; the team who is stumped, loses.

Media

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

- **Video:** See part or all of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, A Man for All Seasons, Clueless*. Select segments that illustrate choosing good over self.
- **Print:** Bring in several copies of the one day's newspaper. Tally the number of stories about people who choose to do what is right versus those who are self-serving. The difference in the numbers could lead to an interesting discussion.

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 together "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God," *The Hymnal 1982*, 293.
- Learn "The Servant Song," by Richard Gilliard, in *Come Celebrate*, C-223.

WEAVINGS

- This session should be used after youth clearly understand the concept of God's call.
- The story of Abigail and David will be helpful to youth who are struggling to follow God in a materialistic world.
- Hospitality to strangers is an Old Testament concept that is almost foreign in our world of locked doors and security systems for homes and automobiles. However, God still expects us to extend hospitality to strangers in our midst. Think about ways that you can safely offer hospitality to those you do not know.
- Most of us never face situations in which choosing right is life threatening. During the Holocaust, many people turned their backs on Jewish friends and neighbors. However, many also put their lives on the line for the outcasts. Today we call these people heroes.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Women of the Bible (No. 4)

- Play the recording of “The Wind Beneath my Wings” by Bette Midler.

Service

- **Service project:** Select a project in your church or community that no one else, including the youth, is willing to do. Talk about how youth can help others and what effect that may have on their world.

Sharing

- **Display:** Find a prominent place in the church to display the paintings or drawings of Abigail and David from the Expressions activity. Find a time when youth can describe their work to another group in the church and what they have learned about making the right choices.

Study

- **Reading:** Read the entire story about Abigail and her husband's encounter with David. Try to see the situation from the husband's point of view.
- **Scripture:** Using a Bible concordance, find other times in scripture when God's people had to make a choice to do the right thing in the face of opposition.
- **Biographies:** Go to the library and find biographies of people who have stood up for what is right, even when it hurt them. (Look for books about Martin Luther King, Jr., Dietrick Bonhoeffer, among others.)

Voices

Ask a student to read the quotes included here (p. 2 of the Session Leaflet):

People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, "If you keep a lot of rules, I'll reward you, and if you don't I'll do the other thing." I do not think that is the best way of looking at it. I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you into something a little different than it was before . . .

C. S. Lewis

Seek the Truth, come what may, cost what it will.

William Sparrow

The world cares very little about what a man or woman knows; it is what the man or woman is able to do that counts.

Booker T. Washington

For Discussion:

- How much of what people do and how they live their lives comes out of a sense of God's call to do the right thing?
- How do people know what is right in every situation?
- Does God have a standard for what is good and right?

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Say the following prayer in unison (p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty God, whose loving hand hath given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor thee with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of thy bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Right Use of God's Gifts
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 827

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth discuss in an open manner how God may be calling them? Can they understand the difference between the way God is calling them to follow him as opposed to the expectations of the world? Are youth aware of the costs of choosing the “right” alternative?

Amos: Seeking Justice Called by God

Objective

The prophet Amos spoke out against religious and community practices that were in opposition to God's call for justice and community care. We remember Amos especially for his harsh rebuke of Israel's unjust religious practices. Youth will be able to recall Amos' humble beginnings, state Amos' objections to practices of society of his day, and describe the alternatives he proposed.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this Session focuses on God's call to Amos to deliver a difficult message to the people of Israel. Key words are justice, prophecy, prophets, call, and prediction. For spiritual preparation think about justice within your own church community, in the country and in the world. What is your usual response?

Commentary

The call from God comes in different forms to different people. We often assume that God's call comes to very important people who, by the nature of their position or personal gifts, are best suited to make God's intentions known. This is rarely the case. God often chooses people who appear least able, possibly as a way to make God's message more important than the messenger. Amos is such a person.

Amos is considered to be a "minor" prophet. The term "minor" is no reflection on the importance of the message Amos was called to convey. It simply refers to the length of his written prophecies that are shorter than some of the "major"

prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah. The prophets whose writings appear in the Old Testament were not the only prophets for the people of God. Prophecy has been a gift of the Spirit to God's people from the time of Moses. It reached its classical form in the days when Israel and Judah had kings and later when the kingdoms had been destroyed by foreign nations.

In our day, prophecy is often related to prediction. Prophets in our culture are people who can predict the future, as if they have a crystal ball. This is not the biblical understanding of prophecy. Prophecy might have involved prediction, but it primarily dealt with the present and how God's people could better respond to God's word.

Amos was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel around 750 BCE. We know from Amos' own words that he was not a professional prophet (*Amos 7:14-15*). A herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, he was a lay person whose work was interrupted by God's call, a call so strong that Amos left his community to share God's word for Israel.

God's message was difficult to accept for those in authority in Israel at a time of relative prosperity. The prosperity, however, was limited to the rich who were more interested in trade than in the general well-being of the nation. This discrepancy between rich and poor was particularly obvious in Amos' time since they lived side by side in walled towns.

Amos revealed to the people that Israel had broken the covenant

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Amos, Martin Woodrow in *People from the Bible*
- **Key Verse**—*But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.* Amos 5:24
- **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
- **Voices**—Marian Wright Edelman, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr
- **Daily Reflections**
- **Words to Remember**
- **Prayer**—For Cities (BCP, p. 825)

with God by placing their desire for wealth over the common good of all of God's people. If they did not change their ways, a great disaster would befall Israel and the kingdom would be destroyed. This message made Amos very unpopular with the authorities.

Justice and care for the less fortunate of the community are key elements of the Jewish religion. Prosperity is not evil itself, but by ignoring the needs of the less fortunate people, the leaders in Amos' time were not living into the full covenant God had set before them.

Prophecy is present throughout the Old Testament calling God's people back to right relationship with God. This right relationship involves the whole person, body, mind, and spirit.

LECTOR'S TEXT

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

Amos 5:21-24

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- “Fairness” is a very important concept to youth of this age, yet they are already experiencing unfairness in their lives. Be open to their concerns about injustices they have experienced.
- While many youth are struggling with becoming adults themselves, they may be beginning to see shortcomings in their parents and other adults in authority in their lives. This questioning of authority is inevitable and healthy as they become adult members of the community. Discuss appropriate ways to question authority.
- Be ready to talk about incidents of injustice that are currently in the news. Use these timely topics to help the group better understand the difficulties Amos faced as God's messenger.
- **Discussion Starter:** What would Amos' message be for our nation?

Personal Views

Spend a few moments reflecting on the text for this session in light of your understanding of the role of prophecy. What does Amos tell us about life in community with God and our neighbors? Can you recall a time in your life when apparent injustice made it difficult for you to participate in the life of the Church or the community in which you live? What was that like? How did you feel and how did you respond?

Who are the prophets of our age with a message similar to that of Amos? What would Amos say to the Church today—the Church in general and your church in particular? How does Amos speak to you as a leader of youth?

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. *Amen.*

For Social Justice

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 260

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Write “The Church,” “The Nation,” and “The World” in large letters at the top of four pages of newsprint. Put them up around the room or where they will be obvious to the youth as they enter. Ask them to write down issues or examples of injustice from the media or other sources in each category.

When all are present ask youth to find *Amos 5:21-24* in their Bibles and select a lector. Read the prayer together (p. 2 of the Session Leaflet).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, Help us to follow your law as you proclaimed it in the Bible. Help us to be like Amos and teach others the same. Help our government to make wise decisions regarding the children of our country. Amen.

Amanda, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from the Book of Amos, chapter 5, verses 21 through 24.*
(See p. 2 for full text.)

Lector: *The word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the youth to tell you what they think the text for this session means. Give them some background about the situation Amos found himself in.

Refer to the lists made by the youth during the Coming Together activity. Ask them to define justice. Is it fairness or is there more to it? Why is justice important to Christians? Explore with the youth issues in the community, nation and world that are concerns for justice.

Make available a variety of craft supplies, paper, and pencils. Ask the youth to select one of the injustices the group has discussed that they feel strongly about. Ask them to illustrate the injustice or its solution by painting a picture, making a sketch, writing a poem or narrative, or composing a song. Allow enough time for everyone to finish and share their creations with the group.

For further discussion:

- Who are some modern day prophets?
- If Amos were to come to the United States, how would he get his message across?

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

which seem best suited to local time and talents. Remember no one can do everything!

Expressions

- **Illustrations:** Pass out paper and drawing materials and ask the youth to create a picture of a prophet who might have lived in Old Testament or a prophet from our own age.
- **Role Play:** Act out the setting of Amos' words. Some actors can be wealthy, some poor; one should be Amos. Respond to Amos' words from the view of the person they represent.

Media

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

- **Video:** Obtain a video of Martin Luther King's speech, "I Have a Dream." Get the youth's reaction to a modern day prophet.
- **Print Media:** Bring in newspapers or news magazines and ask youth to find articles about justice or injustice.

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 "I Will Teach God's People." (*Youth! Praise Songbook*, p. 41)
- Read or sing, "Jesu, Jesu." (*The Hymnal*, 1982, 602)

- Sing "We Shall Overcome."
- Listen to "Rockin' in the Free World" by Neil Young.

Service

- **Action:** Ask the youth to identify an injustice in the community in which they are willing to take personal action. Give youth guidance about how to get involved in a constructive way.

Sharing

- **Intercession:** Write a prayer for justice to be used in the prayers of intercession during worship. Talk about ways your class can share their new understanding of faith in action with the parish.

Study

- **Covenant:** In the Baptismal Covenant, (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305) what does the last question mean? How does it relate to the Jewish teachings during the time of Amos?
- **Dictionary Work:** Use a dictionary to look up some of the key words, such as "justice," "prophet," "prophecy," and "prediction." How do we commonly use these words?
- **New Words:** Ask the youth to rewrite the scripture text in their own words, selecting a contemporary issue and creating a message Amos might have for us.

Voices

Read and discuss the following quotes (p. 2 of the Session Leaflet):

God, please stop injustice,
So our children may live
and love and laugh and play
again.

Marian Wright Edelman

WEAVINGS

- This session can be used at any time during the year, but it may be more helpful at the beginning. God's interest in both the physical and spiritual worlds can lead to interesting discussions.
- Youth sometimes make quick judgements and go on to other things. Use this lesson to help them take time to seek solutions. Assure them that their words and actions throughout the week can have a profound effect. God speaks and acts through all of us, no matter our age or position in the world.
- Be as open as you can to their criticisms of the community, the nation, and the world. Allow them to use this time to "try on" some different thinking and ideas. They will appreciate and remember your openness.

If there is not struggle there is no progress.

Frederick Douglas

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

For Discussion

- Have you ever witnessed injustice in your community?
- Can young people do anything to address injustice?
- Is there a community project individuals or groups could participate in that is seeking to change a situation where injustice is occurring?

Going Forth Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Turn to the prayer below (p. 4 of the Session Leaflet.) Read it in unison.

Leader: *Let us pray. Heavenly Father, in your Word you have given us a vision of that holy City to which the nations of the world bring their glory: Behold and visit, we pray, the cities of the earth. Renew the ties of mutual regard which form our civic life. Send us honest and able leaders. Enable us to eliminate poverty, prejudice, and oppression, that peace may prevail with righteousness, and justice with order, and that men and women from different cultures and with differing talents may find with one another the fulfillment of their humanity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

For Cities

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 825

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

From your observations, do the youth understand how they can become “prophets” through their words and their actions? Can they see injustice both inside and outside of their community? Have they examined the risks involved in taking a stand?

Daniel: Putting God First

Called by God

Objective

Daniel is among the Jewish exiles sent to Babylon after Judah has been conquered and destroyed. Daniel and his friends must choose between the ways of the culture and following God. Youth will be able to recount an incident of Daniel's decision to follow God in the face of adversity and to consider how they can serve and obey God even when it runs counter to the culture.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this section focuses on the challenge faced by Daniel and his fellow exiles in a culture that worships many gods instead of the one God. Key names and ideas are Daniel, Darius, Persians, prophecy, service, and obedience. For spiritual preparation, ponder God's call to serve and follow God regardless of the prevailing culture and customs.

Commentary

The book of Daniel is the story of Daniel's commitment to follow God in the face of opposition. At every juncture and challenge to his faith, Daniel lives as one who is called by God from birth. His calling brings him into several conflicts with foreign customs and worship. He consistently chooses to follow God, even when his life is threatened.

The Book of Daniel is consistent with the other prophets: a call to be faithful to God alone. The book encourages God's people to remain steadfast, even in the face of persecution. Daniel holds out the promise of deliverance from the God who is in control of history.

The Babylonian empire conquered the kingdom of Judah, including Jerusalem, in 587 BCE. The Babylonians removed conquered peoples from their homelands and scattered them to other places in the empire to curtail rebellion. Additionally, the move to other lands was meant to wipe out the culture and religion of the conquered peoples who learned to live and worship in the very heart of the victorious empire. The royal family, wealthy residents, merchants, artisans, and skilled laborers were exiled to Mesopotamia where they would be given new lives in a new culture. Only the poorest and least likely to rebel against Babylon were allowed to stay in their own home. People from other parts of the Babylonian empire moved into Judah. The Hebrews were now a people in exile in a land that did not know God, but worshiped many gods, including the king.

The Babylonians and later the Persians, who conquered Babylon a generation after the fall of Jerusalem, were not in the habit of enslaving the peoples they conquered. They were adept at using people's skills to better the empire. The children of the exiles were even invited to join the court where they learned the wisdom and knowledge of the day. Exceptional students who were loyal to the king were given positions of authority and power in the empire itself.

As a young man, Daniel was invited with other Hebrew exiles to come to the court, to eat from the

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
- **Key Verse**—*Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously.* Daniel 6:10
- **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
- **Voices**—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Stephen L. Carter, Julian of Norwich
- **Daily Reflections**
- **Words to Remember**
- **Prayer**—Proper 15 (BCP, p. 232)

king's table and to serve in the palace. Daniel showed exceptional abilities as an administrator and interpreter of dreams and became a trusted advisor to Persian King Darius.

Even as Daniel rose to a position of prominence, he never wavered in his loyalty to the God of his people. The stories in the first six chapters of the book of Daniel recount challenges faced by Daniel and his friends. The book opens with Daniel refusing to defile himself with food and wine from

LECTOR'S TEXT

All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever prays to anyone, divine or human, for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions. . . Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously. The conspirators came and found Daniel praying and seeking mercy before his God. Then they approached the king and said concerning the interdict, "O king! Did you not sign an interdict, that anyone who prays to anyone, divine or human, within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions?" The king answered, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they responded to the king, "Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the interdict you have signed, but he is saying his prayers three times a day."

Daniel 6:7, 10-13

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Young teens are beginning to question the faith of their parents. It is important that they establish their own understanding of and relationship with God. Be open to new ideas they express about God.
- Youth probably won't face death for putting God first, but they may face ridicule from their peers. Things youth don't say or do may be as important as overt actions in putting God first. Help them realize that their silence or inaction speak as strongly as words.
- **Discussion Starter:** Is it possible to help others follow God without having to preach to them?

the king's table, preferring to eat vegetables and fruit that have not been offered to gods. Daniel is willing to forego power and authority to maintain his call to follow and obey God. At every turn, Daniel refuses to set aside his relationship with God.

The ultimate challenge to Daniel is a decree issued by the king that forbids the worship of any god except the king. Those who disobey this decree will be put to death. Daniel risks his life to pray to God three times each day. Caught in his regular act of devotion, Daniel is sentenced to death in the den of lions. He enters the pit expecting death, but God is faithful and delivers Daniel.

Like Daniel, Christians live in a time and culture in which the call to serve and obey God is increasingly questioned. God calls each person to remain faithful, to serve and obey God, even when faced with difficulties and challenges.

Personal Views

How is your call to serve and follow God similar to Daniel's?

Think about the ways the culture we live in encourages people to put worldly values ahead of God. The "labor saving" devices at home and at the office have only quickened the pace of life. The activities that sap our time are usually good, but often we have allowed them take control of our lives. Try to find time in the coming week to spend time with God each day away from the hustle of daily routine.

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through

our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Prayer of Self-Dedication
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 832

Coming Together

(Time : 10-15 min)

As the youth enter, ask them to write down on newsprint activities they are involved in, their hobbies, how they spend their time, things they like to do. Suggest they look back at the previous week and think about all the things they did. Have extra paper available so everyone has a chance to add to the list. When they are finished, hang the newsprint so all can see it.

When everyone is present ask the youth to find Daniel 6:7, 10-13 in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the group in the prayer below (page 2 of the Session Leaflet):

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Lord, I want to serve you and obey your will for my life, but it is very hard to do. Help me to learn to put you first and to be willing to take a stand when I have to. Give me the courage you gave to Daniel so I can follow you always and do what you want me to do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thomas, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from the Book of Daniel, Chapter 6, verses 7, 10 through 13.*

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Review the story of Daniel and his decision to put God before anything else. Go over the lists of activities displayed in the room. If youth think of additional responses, add these to the lists.

Pass out paper and pencils and ask youth to write down the 10 most important activities in their lives, with the most important items first. Give them about five minutes to complete their lists. Tell them to look at their lists carefully because they are probably

indicative of what is most important in their lives. Ask them to take a second, more critical look at the lists and decide if these are the things they want to have priority in their lives.

Take a quick survey to see if certain activities—like listening to music—make up most of the group's list. Where is serving and obeying God on their lists? What would have been on Daniel's list if he were in the group?

Discuss the ways our culture tries to dictate how we spend our time and what we think is important, much like the Babylonians forced the exiles to adopt new lifestyles. Almost all of the activities on the lists probably have some worth. How do we decide which ones to do and which ones get in the way of God's call to service and obedience?

Ask the youth to keep their lists and check them occasionally to see if the lists are accurate. Suggest they find time to try out other priorities, such as helping others in service to God.

Optional Activities

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

Expressions

- **Role Play:** Divide youth into small groups to plan a role play based on the story of Daniel in the lion's den. Let the youth identify the characters and write or plan the dialogue. Ask at least one group to move the story to the present. Allow time for each group to present its play to the class.
- **Sculpture:** Bring in enough modeling clay for each person to create a part of Daniel's story.

Some may want to work in groups to make a tableau of a scene.

Games

- **I had a dream:** This game is based on Daniel's ability to tell the king not only what the king's dreams meant, but also what the king actually dreamed. Everyone sits in a circle, except for one person, the king, who stands in the center. The king selects something in the room for the others to guess. The king stands in front of someone and gives a clue: I had a dream about something green (or tiny, etc.) That person takes a guess. If incorrect, the king symbolically removes the player's head and that person leaves the circle. The king continues in this way with each player until a correct guess allows that person to become the king. The game continues until no one is left except the king.

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 laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch together the film, *E.T.*, and examine the issues of faithfulness, belief in going home, and children's faithfulness in protecting E.T. from the authorities.
- **Print:** Read together the script "Rescue in the Night", a musical version of Daniel in the lion's den, available from Friends of the Groom, 909 Center St., Milford, Ohio, 45150, (513) 831-2859.

WEAVINGS

- This session would be helpful in teaching confirmation, especially as youth begin to identify the importance of God in their lives.
- "Obedience" is seen by many as weakness. However, stories from the Bible make clear God's expectation of obedience from the people who claim God as Lord. Find examples of the importance of obedience today, such as the military, certain sports, etc.
- Today we aren't threatened by mauling in a lion's den. However, people still pay a price for following God. Politicians have lost office, businesses have been shunned, and others have paid a high price for their principles or their faith. Think about people in the news or from your community who have suffered because of their beliefs.

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 "Tell Out, My Soul," *The Hymnal 1982*, 437.
- Learn "Be Not Afraid," from the *Gather Song Book*, 608.
- Play a CD or tape of "Who Will Save Your Soul?" by Jewel.

Service

- **God first:** Ask the youth to pick one day to give to someone else. Plan a group project to clean house, mow lawns, or rake leaves for an elderly person in your congregation.

Sharing

- **On stage:** Select the best role play from the Expressions activity and perform it for another group in the church.

Study

- **Reading:** Read other stories in Daniel, especially the tale about Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- **Comparisons:** Compare the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament to Daniel in the apocryphal books of The Prayer of Azariah, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. How are they similar? How are they different?

- **Writing:** Read the youth commentary on page 2 of the Session Leaflet. Write your own commentary about the story of Daniel.

Voices

Who stands fast? Only the person whose final standard is not reason, principles, conscience, freedom, but who is ready to sacrifice all this when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and in exclusive allegiance to God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

One good way to end a conversation is to tell others that you hold a position on an issue because it is required by your understanding of God's will. In the unlikely event that anyone hangs around to talk with you about it, the chances are that you will be challenged on the grounds that you are trying to impose your religious beliefs on other people.

Stephen L. Carter

Prayer makes the soul one with God.

Julian of Norwich

For Discussion

- Have you ever been in a situation in which you have had to defend your faith or your beliefs? What happened?
- Do your friends at school know what you believe about God?

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Turn to the proper on page 232 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on page 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison.

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty God, you have given your only Son to be for us a sacrifice for sin, and also an example of godly life: Give us grace to receive thankfully the fruits of his redeeming work, and to follow daily in the blessed steps of his most holy life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Proper 15

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 232

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth recount the story of Daniel and his decision to obey God in the face of death? Can they identify ways our culture tries to keep young people from God? Can they find ways to put God first in spite of cultural influences?