

Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

COMMUNITY LEADERS **Leader's Guide**



Copyright 2009 by Virginia Theological Seminary

All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Developed by
Virginia Theological Seminary
Center for the Ministry of Teaching
3737 Seminary Road
Alexandria, VA 22304

Amelia J. Gearey Dyer, Ph.D., Editor-in-Chief

Dorothy S. Linthicum, Managing Editor

George J. Kroupa, III, Associate Editor

Writers for *Covenant Ancestors*

Mr. Michael Hinson
The Rev. Tambria Lee
The Rev. John Ohmer
The Rev. John Palarine

ISBN: 0-8192-6050-0012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Teaching Youth in Episcopal Churches	1
Understanding Younger Youth	3
Who Are Leaders?.....	7
The Episcopal Curriculum for Youth	11
Using the Curriculum	12
Community Leaders	14

COMMUNITY LEADERS: SESSION TITLES

Joseph: Interpreting the Future	16
Deborah: Leading with Wisdom	20
Gideon: Victory for God.....	24
David and the Ark: Dancing for God	28
Josiah & Huldah: Seeking Direction.....	32
Esther: Saving Her People	36
Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego: Surviving Fire	40
Ezra & Nehemiah: Rebuilding Jerusalem	44
Maccabees: Lighting the Way	48

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.

Developmental Resources

Ames, Louise Bates, Ilg, Frances L., & Stanley M. Baker. *Your ten to fourteen-year-old*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1988.

Dillard, Annie. *An American childhood*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.
 Elkind, David. *All grown up and no place to go*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1987.
 Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and society*. (2nd ed.) New York: W. W. Norton, 1963.
 Gilligan, Carol. *In a different voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
 Kozol, Jonathan. *Death at an early age*. New York: Plume/Dutton, 1985.
 Kuhmerker, Lisa with Uwe Gielen & Richard L. Hayes. *The Kohlberg legacy for the helping professions*. Birmingham: R.E.P., 1991.
 Singer, Dorothy G. & Tracey A. Revenson. *A Piaget primer: How a child thinks*. New York: Plume/New American Library, 1978.
 Stevens, Richard. *Erik Erikson: An introduction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983.

Resources on Faith

Aleshire, Daniel O. *Faithcare*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988.
 Fowler, James W. *Stages of faith*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.
 Hyde, Kenneth E. *Religion in childhood and adolescence*. Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1990.
 Stokes, Kenneth. *Faith is a verb*. Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1989.
 Westerhoff, John H., III. *Will our children have faith?* New York: Seabury Press, 1976.

Episcopal Resources

The Book of Common Prayer. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979.
The Book of Occasional Services. (2nd. ed.) New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1988.
 Booty, John E. *What makes us Episcopalians?* Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1982.
 Holmes, Urban T., III. *What is Anglicanism?* Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1982.
The Hymnal 1982. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985.
Lesser feasts and fasts. (1991 ed.) New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1991.
 Molrine, Charlotte N. & Ronald C. Molrine. *Encountering Christ in the Episcopal Church*. Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1992.
 Sydnor, William. *More than words*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990.
 Wall, John S. *A new dictionary for Episcopalians*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.
 Westerhoff, John H. *A people called Episcopalians*. Atlanta: St Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, 1993.
When in our music God is glorified. (disks or cassettes) New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, undated.
 Wolf, Barbara. *Journey in faith: An inquirer's program*. (rev. ed.) Minneapolis: Seabury Press, 1982.
 Zinser, Henry A. *Continue thine forever*. (2nd ed.) Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1985.

THE EPISCOPAL CURRICULUM FOR YOUTH

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

A Tool for Teachers

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

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

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

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

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

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

USING THE CURRICULUM

Planning Class Sessions

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

Teacher Supports—six sections directed at helping teachers prepare.

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

Optional Activities—a variety of different suggestions of activities,

which teachers may choose to do in a given session. *No teacher or class is expected to use every optional activity in any session outline. The stress is on choice.*

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

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

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

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

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

The Learning Environment

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

Consider three possibilities to create the desired environment.

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

celebration.

A Final Word

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

COMMUNITY LEADERS

The content of this module focuses on Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) and Community. Titled *Community Leaders*, each session examines the lives of people as they relate to God and other people in their community as they discover the answer to the question: "Who and Whose are they?" It tells about people from scripture who struggled to build a community of believers in the midst of persecution and conflict. The people in this module face difficulty and confusion as they build the community that will be God's people in the world. Youth today are also faced with struggle, difficulty, and conflict in an ever increasingly secular world. Seeing themselves as Christians in the community of faith and responding to God's call to live out the promises of the Baptismal Covenant is the outcome desired for 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:

Joseph: Interpreting the Future

Deborah: Leading with Wisdom

Gideon: Victory for God

David & the Ark: Dancing for God

Josiah & Huldah: Seeking Direction

Esther: Saving Her People

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego: Surviving the Fire

Ezra & Nehemiah: Rebuilding Jerusalem

Maccabees: Lighting the Way

■ **Poster Pack**

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

The Guide and Packet are undated and can be reused. We recommend that congregations have one Leader's Guide for each teacher along with one Poster Pack for each group of youth.

For Students

■ **Session Leaflets** (student leaflets—one for each session)

In attractive, colorful format, each leaflet includes:

Scripture

Commentary and prayer by youth

Illustrations

Voices: thoughts from various authors, politicians, theologians, and others on the session topic

Prayers and words to remember

Bible reflections to read during the week

■ **Bibles and Prayerbooks**

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

■ **Additional Gear**

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

Teaching Resources

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

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

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

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

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

Music Resources

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

Baptist Hymnal. Nashville: Convention Press, 1975.

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

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

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

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

Joseph: Interpreting the Future

Community Leaders

Objective

This session is centered around Joseph, focusing on his interpretation of the Pharaoh's dreams. Youth will be able to tell the story of Joseph's rise to power.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session describes the context of the story in *Genesis 41*. Key names are Joseph, Potiphar and his wife, and the Pharaoh of Egypt; the key event is the interpretation of the Pharaoh's dream that leads to Joseph's rise to power. For spiritual preparation, think about your willingness to live fully in the present and trust the future to God.

Commentary

Genesis 41 recounts Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and his subsequent rise to power in Egypt at a critical time in its history. The story of Joseph and his "coat of many colors" is familiar to many people, but it leaves off the remainder of his life as recounted in the rest of *Genesis*. Joseph received the coat as a result of being the favorite son of his many brothers. This favored status, along with Joseph's God-given ability to interpret the future through dreams, led Joseph in and out of trouble throughout his youth.

Joseph's dreams of his brothers and the stars bowing down to him provoked so much jealousy that his brothers plotted to kill him. They later agreed to sell him into slavery. Instead, he was sold to an Egyptian, Potiphar, who had him imprisoned after what may be history's first false charge of sexual harassment on the part of Potiphar's wife. While in

prison, Joseph interpreted the dreams of two fellow prisoners, Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer and baker.

Two years later, Pharaoh was deeply disturbed by a dream which none of his magicians or wise men could interpret. Finally the cup-bearer remembered Joseph's power to interpret dreams, and Pharaoh sent for him. Because Joseph alone can give meaning to Pharaoh's dream (and thus predict the future), Pharaoh believed that Joseph possesses god-like powers. Joseph reminded him that the future, and therefore the power to predict it, belongs to God alone.

Pharaoh gave Joseph control over virtually all his kingdom. Egypt benefitted from stockpiling grain and other supplies during seven years of good crops, guaranteeing a regional monopoly during seven years of drought. These events led to a reunion for Joseph and his family.

Later generations of Israelites would live in Egypt under kings "who did not know Joseph" (*Exodus 1:8*), setting the stage for the Exodus.

Seen from a broad historical perspective, God uses not only the faithfulness of Joseph, but the jealousy of his brothers, the greed of slave traders, the lust of Potiphar's wife, the memory of a cup-bearer, and the political motivations of Pharaoh to fulfill God's wishes.

For further study: Read the entire story of Joseph beginning in *Genesis 37*.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer."*
—Genesis 41:16
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Anatole France, John Dewey, Ralph Abernathy, Augustine of Hippo
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Prayer of St. Chrysostom (BCP, p. 126)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was hurriedly brought out of the dungeon. When he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." . . . So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt."

Genesis 41:14-16, 39-41

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- In selecting items for the Coming Together exercise, be aware that some objects, such as Tarot cards, may be controversial.
- When discussing the concept that the future belongs to God or that God has a plan for each person's life, be prepared for questions such as "Where was God when my friend or parent died?"
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever asked God to help you face the uncertainty of the future?

Personal Views

It is very human to worry about the events of yesterday or brood over the future. Someone said that "yesterday and tomorrow are twin thieves that rob us of today." Today is, in fact, the only time that human beings live—the past is over, and the future belongs to God. Yet, like Pharaoh, we want to interpret our own future.

Pharaoh's brooding ends when he allows God to interpret the future through Joseph. The situation does not change. Egypt still is faced with preparing for the kingdom's survival of seven years of famine through stockpiling during seven years of plenty. It must have seemed brash to set aside such a large store based solely on one night's dream. But Pharaoh had, at that point, entrusted his future to God.

As you prepare this week, think about your ability to "let go and let God." Do you dwell on past events in your own life? How much time do you spend worrying about the future? Do you truly believe the future belongs to God or do you try to control it as much as possible? How would you live if you really believed Jesus when he said, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today" (*Matthew 6:34*).

Give ear to our prayers, O Lord, and direct the way of your servants in safety under your protection, that, amid all the changes of our earthly pilgrimage, we may be guarded by your mighty aid; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Third Week in Lent
Lesser Feasts and Fasts

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

As youth enter the room, prominently display on a table various objects from our culture that purport to tell the future. For example, bring in horoscopes from the newspaper or supermarket checkout line, advertisements for the Psychic Friends Network, a magic 8-ball, an origami paper folded with answers printed inside, or fortune cookies. Invite the group to examine the objects.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Genesis 41:14-16, 39-41* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (*Session Leaflet, p. 2*).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord, please help us not to be consumed by our own talents. Let us see your face in our gifts, and remember that it is you, not us, that has provided them, as the Holy One who speaks in a voice much louder and much clearer than our own voices can. Help us look deeper to see and feel your presence.

Kevin, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Genesis, chapter 41, verses 14 through 16 and 39 through 41.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Divide the youth into three groups if possible, or work on the following story as a group. Assign the parts of Joseph's life to the different groups: Act 1 describes Joseph and the gift of the coat of many colors and ends when he is sold into slavery (*Genesis 37*); Act 2 describes his time in Potiphar's household, his subsequent imprisonment, and his interpretation of the servants' dreams (*Genesis 40*); Act 3 is the

interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and Joseph's rise to power (*Genesis 41*).

Give youth time to prepare their part of the story and plan a way to present it to the rest of the group. One person can be a storyteller or several can take parts and act out the story. Encourage the youth to tell the story from different viewpoints, such as that of Joseph, his brothers, Jacob, or Pharaoh.

After they have recounted the story, talk about Joseph's gift of interpretation.

- How was Joseph able to see the future?
- Do people today have similar gifts?
- How useful are the objects you examined in the Coming Together activity in telling the future?
- Have you depended on these items to see the future? Are they accurate?

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

- **Fortune Cookies:** Buy enough fortune cookies for each person in the group. Remove the fortunes by using tweezers. Write Christian or faith-based fortunes on appropriately sized slips of paper and re-insert the fortunes. To help youth think of appropriate "fortunes," bring in books of quotations and Bibles. Pass out the cookies for consumption and discussion.
- **Spectrum:** Draw a horizontal line on a piece of paper or chalkboard. At one end of the line write the words: God controls everything;

what I do doesn't matter. On the other end, write: I control everything; what God does doesn't matter. Ask each person to put his or her initials in a circle on the line according to his or her belief. Discuss responses or give the youth time to reflect their thoughts in a journal.

Games

- **Heads Up, Seven Up:** Ask the youth to sit in a circle, not touching, with their heads bowed and eyes closed. One person identified by the leader taps seven people lightly on the head and sits down, head bowed like the others. After the leader says, "Heads Up, Seven Up," everyone looks up. Those tapped try to guess who the mystery tapper is. Repeat as often as time or interest permits.

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch an episode of a television show that looks to the future, such as *Early Edition*, a drama about a newspaper that foretells events a day before they happen. How does knowing the future affect the main character?
- **Print:** Bring in horoscopes from a newspaper or magazines. Ask the youth to compare the predictions and talk about the ambiguity of the language. Using the same type of words, write your own horoscope for the week.

WEAVINGS

- This session would be a good way to begin the church school year. It could be a springboard for discussions about what the future will be like in school, specific fears about the new year, and ways God can help the youth face their futures and fears.
- Dreams have always been fascinating to people. Some therapists, such as Carl Jung, believe that dreams have much to tell us about our unconscious thoughts. Try to hold on to a dream this week and explore its possible meaning for your life.
- People who can foretell the future have always been in demand. In early Greek history, the oracles of Delphi played an important role in decisions. Today we have different kinds of people who look into the future. We often question or even ridicule psychics and astrologers, but may depend on weather forecasters who, despite technical equipment, don't always get it right. Where do you look for guideposts to the future?

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 "All my hope on God is founded" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 665).
- Sing together "Take My Hand, Precious Lord" (*Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, 106).
- Listen to "Just a Container," by [Eric] Cherry.

Service

- **Preparing for drought:** Gather food or other items for an area hit by famine or drought.
- **Helping children:** Provide snacks or other food for a local Head Start program. By feeding children today, youth can make a difference in the future.

Sharing

- **Faith cookies:** Make enough fortune cookies as described in the Expressions activity to serve at a coffee hour or at a Sunday School snack time for the whole parish. If there is time, the youth may wish to bake their own fortune cookies. Recipes can be found in Oriental cookbooks.

Study

- **All Hallow's Eve:** Study the Bible readings assigned for the All Hallow's Eve service in the *Book of Occasional Services*, page 106. Read about the Witch of Endor, the Vision of Eliphaz the Temanite, the Valley of Dry Bones, and the War in Heaven.
- **Jesus's Words:** Read in *Matthew 6:25-34* what Jesus says about worrying about the future. What does he call on us to do?

Voices

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

The future is hidden even from those who make it.

—Anatole France

To the being fully alive, the future is not ominous but a promise; it surrounds the present like a halo.

—John Dewey

I don't know what the future may hold, but I know who holds the future.

—Ralph Abernathy

Trust the past to God's mercy, the present to God's love, and the future to God's providence.

—Augustine of Hippo

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 126 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.

A Prayer of St. Chrysostom
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 126

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 tell the story of Joseph and how he rose to power in Egypt? Can they relate God's role in Joseph's ability to interpret the future to God's role in facing the future in their own lives?

Deborah: Leading with Wisdom

Community Leaders

Objective

The focus of this session is the leadership of Deborah, an Old Testament judge. Youth will be able to tell how Deborah, a woman in a patriarchal society, led the people of Israel at a difficult time.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the setting of the story of Deborah and how she worked with others to lead her people to victory. Key names are Deborah, Barak, and Sisera; a key term is judges; the key place is Ephraim. For spiritual preparation, think about the role of women in scripture and the world today.

Commentary

Deborah lived during the time of the judges, a period in Israel's life between the conquest of Canaan and the anointing of Saul as the first king. During this time, the people of Israel were a loose confederacy of tribes spread throughout the hill-country of Canaan. Life was not peaceful. Periodically, under the leadership of the much-feared Sisera, Canaanites threatened the Israelites, cutting off their roads and lines of commerce and communication, to threaten their very survival. During times of crisis, God would raise up individuals called judges who not only interpreted law, but were also military strategists, "deliverers" of the people, and charismatic leaders.

Deborah lived in the hill country of Ephraim. She is the only woman described as a judge in the book of *Judges* (chapters 4 and 5). The Israelites relied on her guidance

in legal matters and, eventually, in military strategy.

After a vision from God, Deborah sent for Barak of the tribe of Naphtali, telling him to take 10,000 men from several tribes to meet the Canaanites in lower Galilee.

Deborah assured Barak that God himself would draw out Sisera, the leader of the Canaanites, and "give him into your hand." Barak agreed to go, but on the condition that Deborah accompany him.

They marched, joined along the way by other tribes of the surrounding area. Eventually the army grew to 10,000 men. Sisera promptly assembled his entire army, including 900 chariots, and marched to the Wadi Kishon, just as Deborah had predicted.

At Deborah's signal, Barak made a sudden charge with 10,000 Israelites at his back. Although the Israelites were poorly equipped, fighting only with swords and slings, Sisera's troops were surprised and panicked by the attack. Their efforts to regroup were frustrated by heavy rains that overflowed the river and turned the battlefield into a muddy mess. The chariots, bogged down and unable to maneuver, were easily overtaken. Sisera himself fled on foot.

Fulfilling Deborah's prediction, Sisera, unsuspecting, fled to an enemy camp where Jael, wife of Heber, welcomed him. Thinking he was secure, he fell asleep. ". . . But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*[Deborah] used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.*
—Judges 4:5
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Anatole France, Dietrich Bonhoeffer
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For those in the Armed Forces of our Country (BCP, p. 823)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.'" Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him.

Judges 4:4-10

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Don't let youth get sidetracked by arguing about who is better, women or men. The Israelites were successful because men and women worked together in a common cause.
- Because they live in a country where women hold many different kinds of jobs, youth may not understand how unusual Deborah's position as judge was.
- **Discussion Starter:** Has anyone ever assumed you could or couldn't do something because of physical attributes?

down into the ground. . . and he died." (*Judges 4:21*) After his death, the people of Israel lived in relative peace.

Personal Views

To an Israelite, being killed by a woman was shameful. When Abimilech realizes he is about to die by the hand of a woman (*Judges 9:54*) he asks his own soldier to kill him. Women were considered second-class citizens at best. Men were generally the judges and military leaders. Yet at precisely this time, God chose Deborah to lead the people of Israel into battle against the entire army of their most feared enemy. So powerful was her leadership that Barak refused to go into battle unless she accompanied him.

In the baptismal covenant, we promise to "respect the dignity of every human being." Using stereotypes can defeat efforts to keep this promise. Reflect on your own use of stereotypes. With the recent admission of women to a number of previously all-male military academies, the question of women in the military has been on the minds of many. Are there reasons women cannot lead others in battle or fight? What women today exercise authority in government, politics, and military matters?

Have there been women clergy in your own parish? Have any girls in your class considered ordained ministry? Think about role models you have had while growing up. Were any of the opposite gender, or were they all of your gender? How can you provide role models of both genders for youth?

O Sovereign Lord . . . Awake in us also a keen desire to increase our understanding while we are in this world, and an eager longing to reach that endless life where all will be made dear, through Jesus Christ

our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Collect for Alfred the Great
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, October 26

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Hang Resource Poster No. 1 showing the group of people. Or, clip several pictures from magazines and newspapers of people doing various things. Remove the captions, and write numbers on or beside each person. As youth enter, give them a sheet of paper with a list of occupations represented by people in the poster or pictures. Ask them to decide which person goes with each profession and put a number by their answer. To make the exercise more difficult, add several professions that are not included in the pictures.

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

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord, teach us to be strong, no matter what sex, race, or class we are. We are your children, and we are all your messengers. Give us people to love us as we are all stronger when we are unified. But even when we are afraid or abandoned by our peers, help us to be strong. Thank you for giving us strength in everything we do. Amen.

Nick, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Judges, chapter 4, verses 4 through 10.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Retell the story of Deborah in an engaging manner. Include these points:

- Deborah was a judge, someone who not only interpreted the law, but also led the community in military and political matters.

- At the time of the story, the Israelites were being randomly attacked and harassed by the Canaanites led by Sisera.
- Led by God, Deborah convinced Barak, the leader of a powerful tribe, to gather 10,000 men and march against the more powerful and better-equipped army of Sisera, predicting that Sisera would be defeated by a woman.
- A surprise attack caused Sisera's army to panic.
- The attack coincided with torrential rains, bogging down Sisera's chariots and scattering the army.
- Sisera ran to a nearby camp, thinking he was safe, but was killed by a woman.

Discuss the story. Ask the youth to compare the matches made between people and professions during the Coming Together activity.

- Are there reasons women cannot fight or lead others in battle, exercise authority in government, church, or military matters?
- Why did Barak and others in the community have confidence in Deborah at a time when men did not easily follow a woman's advice?
- What leaders do you admire, and what do you admire about them?

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

- **Deborah for President:** The group has been hired to promote Deborah for President of the United States. Design a brochure or television advertisement for her.

- **Here comes the judge:** Ask two youth to serve as judge. Ask others in the group to submit questions, dilemmas, or problems from school, sports teams, or their own lives. After each judge renders an opinion, ask the youth to decide which to follow.

Games

- **Human tic-tac-toe:** Arrange nine chairs in a square (three rows of three). Line up two teams on opposite sides, and assign a number to each person on each team (one person on each team should be number 1, one from each team should be 2, etc.) When you call out a number, that person from each team jumps into a seat. Continue until there is a tie or a team gets three in a row. Did either team use strategy or was seat selection random? Which was more successful?
- **Strategy:** Bring in several sets of the game "Battleship." After playing the game, discuss strategies used by different players.

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch all or segments of *Contact*. How is the scientist portrayed by Jodie Foster like Deborah?
- **Print:** Bring in local sections from the newspaper and ask the youth to find articles about community leaders. What can you say about a leader based on the information presented?

WEAVINGS

- Schedule this session around the time of local elections. Youth can gather information about candidates and compare them to Deborah.
- Leadership is defined as the position of a leader or the quality of a leader that provides the capacity to lead. Before the people of Israel turned to Deborah for leadership, they knew her in the capacity of a judge. Through her sound judgments, she had earned their trust and respect. What do you look for in a leader? What qualities do you have that build the trust and respect of others?
- While the death of Sisera came from the hand of a woman, she would never have been able to slay the enemy leader without the involvement of many other people. God chose to use Deborah to communicate with the Israelites, and she chose Barak to lead the army. He wisely insisted that Deborah accompany him, sensing her wisdom and leadership. Even today, when men and women work together, great deeds can be accomplished.

RESOURCE POSTER

- What Do They Do? (No. 1)

How many leaders are men? How many are women?

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 "O day of peace that dimly shines" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 597).
- Learn "Canta, Débora, Canta!" (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, 437), a song based on The Song of Deborah in *Judges 5*.
- Listen to "Thank You for Being a Friend" by Andrew Gold.

Service

- **Send a card:** Take part in the Ann Landers' "Send a Valentine to a Vet" program, or contact a veterans' hospital in your area for a list of names of people who would like to receive cards. (Cards should be from your church; be sure youth do not put their names on the cards.)

Sharing

- **Wise leaders:** Poll the congregation for the names of people in the church who are wise leaders. Select three from those mentioned, and interview them. Design a bulletin board with their pictures and visions of leadership.

Study

- **Invite a leader:** Ask a woman leader from the community to speak to the group. For example, a judge, politician, or business leader.
- **Women in the Church:** Look through the book of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* for women who have played different roles in the Church. Find out the roles women have played in your own church. Share your discoveries with others in the group.

Voices

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

The best leaders train leaders while they are leading.
—Author Unknown

Slowly, but surely, humanity realizes the dreams of the wise.
—Anatole France

The question of trust, it is so closely related to that of authority, is determined by the faithfulness with which a [person] serves Jesus Christ, never by the extraordinary talents which he [or she] possesses.
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Going Forth

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

Leader: *Let us pray. Almighty God, we commend to your gracious care and keeping all the men and women of our armed forces at home and abroad. Defend them day by day with your heavenly grace; strengthen them in their trials and temptations; give them courage to face the perils which beset them; and grant them a sense of your abiding presence wherever they may be; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

For those in the Armed Forces of our Country
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 823

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to relate the story of Deborah and her role in the victory over Sisera? Can they describe the importance of men and women working together for common goals?

Gideon: Victory for God

Community Leaders

Objective

This session focuses on Gideon, an Israeli judge and military leader, and his encounter with the Midianites. Youth will be able to describe the way Gideon chose his troops, and how that action influenced the outcome of the battle.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the unusual situation Gideon found himself in when he obeyed God in the selection of his army. Key people are Gideon, the Israelites, and the Midianites; the key event is the defeat of Midian. For spiritual preparation, think about the gifts and resources God has given you and how well you use them.

Commentary

Gideon lived during the period of judges in Israel. With no centralized government and yet no longer nomadic, Israelites lived the hard, busy lives of farmers, working the land toward harvest in order to survive the winters. Their lives were constantly endangered by swarms of camel-riding Bedouin tribes who would pour in from the deserts to plunder and destroy the harvests. These raids were so frequent and numerous that they are described as “plagues of locusts,” forcing the farmers to flee to surrounding caves and mountain hideouts (*Judges 6*).

The situation was so terrible that Gideon and his family were forced to thresh their wheat in the cramped secrecy of a wine press instead of using farm animals on the plains, where the wind could carry off the chaff. While tending to the wheat,

Gideon received a vision in which he is called by God to rid the land of foreign idols and gather troops to rid Israel of the Bedouin pillagers.

Under God’s guidance, Gideon acts in ways that seemed foolish for a military leader. After gathering 32,000 troops, God tells Gideon, “The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, ‘My own hand has delivered me.’” (*Judges 7:2*) God tells Gideon to allow any who are fearful to return home, and 22,000 troops leave.

In the scripture passage, God orders Gideon to take the remaining 10,000 to the river to drink; any who drink water by scooping it up in their hands is sent home; any who lap up water like dogs remain. Although only 300 are left, God promises to deliver the Midianites into Gideon’s hands.

Wondering how he can go up against an army with only 300 men, Gideon makes the best of the situation, using his skills of reconnaissance and timing. He puts lanterns and trumpets in each person’s hands, thus making them appear more numerous. The army surrounds the camp of the Midianites in the middle of the night. Gideon blows the trumpet, instructing the others to do the same—shouting, “for the Lord and for Gideon!”

Waking up from a deep sleep, surrounded by blasts of trumpets and bright torchlight, the Midianite army is plunged into panic. They flee toward the Jordan valley, where Gideon’s allies are waiting.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets around the whole camp, and shout, “For the Lord and for Gideon!”*
—Judges 7:18
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Joseph Conrad, Samuel Butler, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Merton
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Proper 26 (BCP, p. 235)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Then the Lord said to Gideon, "The troops are still too many; take them down to the water and I will sift them out for you there. When I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; and when I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." So he brought the troops down to the water; and the Lord said to Gideon, "All those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, you shall put to one side; all those who kneel down to drink, putting their hands to their mouths, you shall put to the other side." The number of those that lapped was three hundred; but all the rest of the troops knelt down to drink water. Then the Lord said to Gideon, "With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes." . . . After he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and put trumpets into the hands of all of them, and empty jars, with torches inside the jars, he said to them, "Look at me, and do the same; when I come to the outskirts of the camp, do as I do. When I blow the trumpet, I and all who are with me, then you also blow the trumpets around the whole camp, and shout, 'For the Lord and for Gideon!'"

Judges 7:4-7, 16-18

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Point out that God expected Gideon to use his ability to lead and plan strategy. Faith gives us the courage to use our gifts when facing impossible tasks.
- Gideon's ultimate defeat of Sisera was successful because his allies pursued the Midianites when they fled. Who supports you?
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever faced an "impossible" task? What did you do?

The "day of Midian" would later become a catch phrase to signify God-given victory (*Isaiah 9:4, Psalm 83:9, and Isaiah 10:26*).

Personal Views

The story of Gideon is particularly appealing to young people, because it is a story of going up against impossible odds and emerging victorious. The tale foreshadows David's victory over Goliath, a feat that also seemed impossible.

Gideon's story is a reminder that while God is in charge of the final outcome, we have a role to play in that outcome. Put another way, we may not be able to do anything about the cards we have been dealt in life, but we can play them to the best of our ability. Before facing Goliath, David chose his stones carefully. Gideon effectively and ironically neutralized his disadvantage by fooling the Midianites into believing his army was larger than it was.

How do you play the hand that has been dealt to you? Do you complain about what you have, or do you see yourself as an agent of God? How could you use your own unique talents in concert with others to do something that would be impossible to do alone? Reflect on the words of Paul in his letter to the Corinthians:

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. . . . "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

I Corinthians 1:26-29, 31b

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

As youth enter, give each person five cards at random from a deck of playing cards. Ask them to join three or four others to play the game of "war." Each person puts down a card; the one with the highest card wins the pile. The goal is to get as many cards as possible. Change the rules to allow the youth to see their cards and play them in any order they want.

About halfway through the game, announce a major change in the rules: all face cards are now worth only two points, and threes are higher than any other card. Notice the reactions of the youth as the rules are arbitrarily changed.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Judges 7:4-7, 16-18* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Lord, let us hear you in our lives and open ourselves not only to hear you but also apply your words in our daily lives. Let us see you as the loving and righteous God you are, and not as an object of our own fame. Let us be messengers of your glory and your love and not messengers of evil. Let our tongues speak with all of your good deeds and not of our own. Give us the strength to know whether we are serving you or ourselves, and help us proclaim the glory of your name and of your Son. Amen.

Spence, Grade 6

Lector: *A reading from Judges, chapter 7, verses 4 through 7 and 16 through 18.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Discuss the game played during the Coming Together exercise.

- Did you like the cards you were dealt? Was the game "rigged" so that you couldn't win?

- What kind of strategies did you use in the game?
- How did it feel to have the rules changed midway?

Display Resource Poster No. 2 showing Gideon's army drinking from the river. Tell the story of Gideon, being sure to emphasize the major points listed below.

- Gideon lived at a time when most Israelites lived on open hillsides as farmers.
- The biggest threat to the Israelites were camel-riding Midianites who would raid the farmers of their crops near harvest time.
- After being commanded by God to fight the Midianites, Gideon gathers an army of 32,000 men.
- God tells Gideon that if he were to win the war with 32,000 men, they will credit the victory to themselves instead of God.
- Gideon first reduces his army to 10,000.
- The remaining troops are told to drink from the river, and Gideon is told to keep only those men who drink from the river like dogs.
- With the 300 remaining men, Gideon fights against the entire Midianite army. Using trumpets and lanterns in a surprise night-time attack, Gideon routs the enemy, forcing them to flee.

Discuss the story.

- What was Gideon's role in the battle? How important was his strategy?
- Have you ever felt that the cards were "stacked" against you? How did you respond?

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

- **Strength or weakness:** Ask the group to think of human weaknesses. Write them down on one side of a piece of paper. On the other side, write down situations in which each weakness could become a strength. For example, a blind person could lead others during a power failure.
- **Drama:** Dramatize the Gideon story. Use paper bags for lanterns and kazoos as trumpets. Find a new way for Gideon to reduce his army down to a few.

Games

- **Chosen by God:** Stand and face the group, who are also standing, and tell them you are looking for a mystery person. No one knows what the person looks like, but certain aspects are known. Name a characteristic such as anyone wearing something yellow or anyone born in December. Anyone with that trait sits down. The person left standing, an arbitrary choice, is the mystery person.
- Play the card game of Old Maid. How many ways can a person get rid of the Old Maid?

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch the movie *Hoo-siers* about an underdog beating the favored team. How does the coach turn weaknesses into strengths?
- **Print:** Look in magazines or visit the library to find stories about

WEAVINGS

- In history, we can point to a number of wars and battles when outnumbered troops managed to win against overwhelming odds. Early in our country's history, the untried patriots courageously refused to be ruled from across the sea, and were willing to fight against one of the world's greatest armies. More often, the underdog, no matter how noble the cause, bows to the superior strength of the victor. God, however, is always with both in victory and in defeat.
- The clamor Gideon and his men made as they descended on the Midianite camp must have been deafening. Noise and confusion can often cause us to lose our sense of direction. With televisions blaring and CD players blasting, our own lives can flounder in bewilderment. Try to find a place and a time each day this week to look for God in silence. Rest in God's compassionate presence.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Gideon's Army (No. 2)

people who have overcome tremendous odds to be successful. For example, Christopher Reeve, the cinema Superman who was paralyzed in a riding accident, directed a movie from his wheelchair. What do these people have in common?

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 "Lead on, O King eternal" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 555).
- Sing "To God Be the Glory" (*The Baptist Hymnal*, 4).
- Listen to "Show Me the Way" by Styx on *Edge of the Century*. Did Gideon follow the way shown by God? Do you follow God even when it is difficult to do so?

Service

- **Beating the odds:** Identify people in your community or area who are struggling against seemingly impossible odds, and brainstorm how the group could help them. Undertake an "impossible task," such as restoring an inner-city playground. Who will be your allies to get the job done?

Sharing

- **Put the show on the road:** Act out the story of Gideon for a younger group of children based on the play in the Expressions activity. Find ways for the children to join the cast.

Study

- **Impossible odds:** Find other stories in the Bible about overcoming impossible odds with God's help, such as Joshua and the battle of Jericho, or David and Goliath. Identify similarities and differences in the stories.
- **Motel Bibles:** Find out why the society that places Bibles in hotel and motel rooms throughout the United States is named the Gideon Society.

Voices

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

Woe to the [person] whose heart has not learned while young to hope, to love—and to put its trust in life!

—Joseph Conrad

Faith. You can do very little with it, but you can do nothing without it.

—Samuel Butler

God is the silent partner in all great enterprises.

—Abraham Lincoln

. . . I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

—Thomas Merton

Going Forth

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

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty and merciful God, it is only by your gift that your faithful people offer you true and laudable service: Grant that we may run without stumbling to obtain your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Proper 26

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 235

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to describe the way God told Gideon to choose his troops? Can they recount the outcome of the battle? Can the youth describe how God changes weaknesses into strengths? Can they relate this to their own lives?

David & the Ark: Dancing for God

Community Leaders

Objective

This session centers on the return of the ark of the covenant during the reign of David. Youth will be able to state the importance of the ark to the people of Israel and explain why the people rejoiced so greatly at its return to Jerusalem.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the events leading up to the return of the ark and why the ark was so important to the Israelites. Key people are David and the Israelites; the key event is the return of the ark. To prepare spiritually, think about objects that remind you of God's presence and the importance they hold in your life.

Commentary

The ark of the covenant was a sacred chest used by the Israelites since the time of Moses. It may have contained the tablets on which the ten commandments were written, which were of great spiritual value to the Israelites. The ark accompanied the Israelites in the wilderness and was considered to be God's "footstool" in their midst. In other words, the presence of the ark was like having God's presence among them.

The ark was present when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to enter the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. It would sometimes accompany them into battle to help ensure the Lord's guidance and ultimate victory. Enemies of the Israelites were intrigued by the ark, and it was once stolen by the Philistines but later returned.

II Samuel tells the story of David as he attempts to unite the nation of Israel under his authority. He is now king over all of Israel and is trying to form the loose confederacy of tribes into a nation. David brings the ark to Jerusalem because he wants to add to the prestige of the city by making it the religious focus, as well as the political and military center of Israel.

This period of history is a time of great joy for David and many Israelites. In the past, David had struggled with many enemies and detractors, including Saul, the previous king. But now his time to rule has come. The ark serves as a symbol of his leadership and his dependence on God's guidance. The joy he feels is reflected in the celebration in Jerusalem. David offers a sacrifice to God and dances before the Lord "with all his might." This time of celebration would be long remembered by David and many others.

Personal Views

As Christians, we can understand the importance of the ark of the covenant at a certain level. The ark was a tangible sign of God's care for the Israelites. But what kinds of things remind Christians of God's presence? When some people look at a church, or a cross, or stained glass windows, or certain areas of a sanctuary, they are reminded of God.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.*
—II Samuel 6:15
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Vincent Van Gogh, June Jordan, David Ben Gurion, Malcolm Boyd
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Proper 17 (BCP, p. 233)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

It was told King David, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

II Samuel 6:12-15

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Be ready to discuss the importance of using images to help us make sense of God's mysterious presence.
- Some people in the church bow when the cross in a procession passes by. Explain the reason people do this is to honor perhaps the most sacred image in the Christian Church.
- Explain the difference between Noah's ark—a boat—and the ark of the covenant—a sacred chest.
- **Discussion Starter:** What image in the church or at home makes you think of God?

People of faith need tangible signs of God's guidance just like the Hebrews of the Old Testament period. You may have read about and even shared the trauma felt by churches when their buildings are burglarized and irreplaceable objects are stolen. When a storm or some other natural catastrophe destroys a church, the community of faith can often feel spiritually lost.

Most of us have tangible reminders that assure us that God is with us. We can feel lost if we don't have them. The ark was important to the Hebrews just like the many signs and symbols that make our faith real.

What are the images or the places in your church that mean the most to you? Is there a place or even a time where you feel the presence of God?

Almighty God, whose beloved Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption: Give us courage to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Collect of the Holy Cross
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 252

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

On a chalkboard or large piece of paper, draw the corporate logos of the Nike swish symbol and the arches of MacDonalds or cut them out of a magazine or newspaper. As youth enter the room, ask them to think of one or more symbols that are easily recognizable, and to add them to the paper or chalkboard. Bring several magazines for them to look through if they need inspiration.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *II Samuel 6:12-15* in their Bibles. Select a

lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

I'm thankful that we have things that remind us of God, just as the Hebrews did when the ark was brought into the city of David. I'm also thankful that we have things that remind us that God is still watching over us, even though those things aren't always near us. Thank you God for all of our blessings. Amen.

Chris, Grade 7

Lector: *A reading from II Samuel, chapter 6, verses 12 through 15.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Talk about the use of symbols in our lives today. Look at the symbols youth added to the paper or chalkboard.

- Did anyone use religious symbols, such as a cross?
- How would you define the word symbol?
- Are symbols useful? Can they have bad connotations as well as good ones?

Take down the symbol sheet and hang Resource Poster No. 3, a picture of David returning with the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. Describe the event and the importance of the ark to the Israelites.

Build an ark similar to the one in the poster. (If the group is large, plan to divide into smaller groups and make several arks.) You will need to bring in enough cardboard, tape, and gold paint to make one or more arks. You will also need rulers or tape measures and scissors.

Look up specific instructions about the construction of an ark in *Exodus 15*. The ark was essentially a portable wooden chest used to carry sacred items. Be sure to tell them that the length of a cubit is about 18 inches.

After the ark (or arks) are completed, talk about the meaning of the ark to the Israelites and the meaning of religious symbols to Christians today.

- What was the ark?
- Why was it important?
- What are symbols of our faith?
- Are there special places in the church that are sacred to you?

Optional Activities

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

Expressions

- **Symbol cards:** Pass out 3"x5" cards. After discussing symbols of our faith, ask youth to draw different symbols on one side of the card and write descriptions on the back. To help the youth think of symbols, visit the altar or look at stained glass windows at your church. Or, bring in books about Christian symbols for youth to look at.
- **Liturgical dance:** Just as David danced with joy at the return of the ark, Christians can reenact portions of services through liturgical dance. Identify movements that would symbolize the words in a canticle for Morning Prayer or for a part of the Eucharist service.
- **Sacred places:** Talk about symbols that help make spaces sacred. For example, a sanctuary light contributes to the sacredness of the altar area. Look around your meeting space and make a portion of it a "sacred space." Identify symbols that evoke worship, prayer, or God's presence. Create the symbols and use them to designate the group's sacred place.

Games

- **Symbols:** Divide into two teams and stand in two lines, one person behind the other. The first two people in each line step up to get the first clue. Hold up the symbol side of a card made for the Expressions activity. The first person to raise a hand and guess the meaning of the symbol earns a point for his or her team. (You can also use symbol cards from the Episcopal Curriculum for Children, Intermediate level.)
- **Ten Commandments:** See how well the youth know the contents of the ark of the covenant. On separate slips of paper, write the ten commandments. Put them in a jar or hat, and ask youth to pick one out. The object of the game is to get them in the right order. For smaller groups, line up the slips in the correct order. For groups of ten or more, ask youth to line up in the correct order. For large groups, divide into two groups to see which group is closest to the correct order. Pass out Bibles, and look up *Deuteronomy 5:1-22* for the answer.

Media

- Today's youth live in a media-rich culture that the Church cannot ignore. However, congregational norms about appropriate experiences vary and need to be respected. When choosing media activities consider local sentiments and prevailing laws covering public performances of copyrighted material.
- **Video:** Watch the scene at the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when the ark of the covenant is opened by the Nazis. Discuss the power of the ark and why the army was destroyed.

WEAVINGS

- This session could help youth deal with the vandalization of your church or a church in your community. A service in *The Book of Occasional Services*, called Restoring of Things Profaned, is to be used "when a church building, altar, font, or other objects that have been set apart or consecrated, have been profaned, they may be restored to sacred use. . . ."
- Some churches, especially the Eastern Orthodox Church, use icons to help people focus their thoughts and strengthen their faith. To those unfamiliar with these religious symbols, the icons may look like idols. To help youth differentiate between the two, remember that an idol is something to worship while an icon is something to help you find God.
- Some popular interpretations say that David was naked when he danced with the ark. While he did shed his royal robes, he wore a simple tunic as he danced. At the time, David was criticized for this, but he responded that he danced before the Lord his God, who had made him king of the Lord's people.

RESOURCE POSTER

- David and the Ark (No. 3)

- **Print:** Make a brochure or pamphlet about “How to be a Good Guest” in other people’s churches, mosques, and synagogues. Talk to leaders from other faiths to determine what to include.

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 “How lovely is thy dwelling place” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 517).
- Sing together “I Danced in the Morning” (*Gather*, GIA Publications, 511).
- Listen to “Thank You” by Ray Boltz on the *Thank You* CD about being involved and supportive instead of detached and destructive.

Service

- **Rebuilding:** Join a work crew that is rebuilding or painting a religious space that has been damaged. Or plan a fundraiser to help a church that has been damaged or vandalized.

Sharing

- **Dance:** Invite another group to join you for Eucharist or a prayer service. Perform the liturgical dance planned for the Expression activity.
- **Display:** Display the arks constructed for the Engaging activity. Leave space around the ark for others in the church to bring pictures or descriptions of sacred objects from their families.

Study

- **The Ark in the Bible:** Using a concordance, find out where else in the Bible the ark is mentioned. Where did Solomon put it? What eventually happened to it?
- **Sacred gifts:** Learn more about the people who donated some of the sacred objects in your church, such as stained glass windows and chalices.
- **Day of glass:** Find out about “Krystallnacht,” the day the Nazis destroyed Jewish shops and synagogues in Germany, Austria, and other countries. What happened to sacred scrolls and documents looted from the synagogues?

Voices

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

To believe in God for me is to feel that there is a God, not a dead one, or a stuffed one, but a living one, who with irresistible force urges you towards more loving.

—Vincent Van Gogh

To believe is to become what you believe.

—June Jordan

In Israel, in order to be a realist you must believe in miracles.

—David Ben Gurion

Can we somehow get through all the decoration which has been developed about the cross and just be quiet and be there with you?

—Malcolm Boyd

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the collect on page 233 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Proper 17
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 233

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 state the importance of the ark to the people of Israel? Can they describe the feelings of the Israelites when the ark returned to Jerusalem? Can the youth identify important Christian symbols and how they are used to strengthen faith?

Josiah & Huldah: Seeking Direction

Community Leaders

Objective

This session focuses on Josiah, king of Judah, and his reliance on wise mentors for help and advice. Youth will be able to describe how God calls people of all ages and how others can provide help and support.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the state of the southern kingdom of Israel, and how Josiah brought the Israelites back to God. Key people are Josiah, Huldah, and Hilkiah; key events are the crowning of Josiah at age 8 and the discovery of the book of the law; key places are Judah and the Assyrian Empire. For spiritual preparation, think about how the church calls all of us, young and old, to service, and how our lives can be enriched by turning to others for help.

Commentary

Many years had passed since David had brought the ark to Jerusalem and Solomon had built the magnificent temple and surrounded it with a palace and fortified city. The Assyrian Empire had reached its heights, plundering the countryside and conquering the northern kingdom of Israel. Judah, once called the southern kingdom of Israel, was all that remained of the unified nation that David and Solomon had ruled.

When Josiah came to power, many Israelites had abandoned God, and foreign idols were worshipped throughout Judah. Josiah was only 8 years old when he became king of Judah after the assassination of his

father. He was righteous and faithful to God from a very early age.

Josiah was a reformer, and he worked diligently to get Israel back on track with God. The decline of the Assyrian Empire made the reforms that Josiah brought to Judah possible. The nation needed to change and recommit to its covenant with God.

II Kings tells the story of the discovery of the book of the law, which was probably one of the early copies of the book of *Deuteronomy*. Josiah was struck with fear and sadness when he heard the book read and realized the people of Judah had been worshipping other gods.

Josiah realized that he needed direction to help him lead the nation back to God. He asked the priest Hilkiah and the prophetess Huldah for counsel about God's instruction to the nation and to himself as king. The wise mentors counselled Josiah that the worship of idols and unfaithfulness to God would result in a harsh judgment on Judah.

Josiah responded by removing all traces of foreign gods and restoring worship of the one true God to Jerusalem. His reign resulted in a time of spiritual and political renewal in Judah. *II Kings 23:25* says, ". . . there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him."

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*[Josiah] did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.*
—II Kings 22:2
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Phillips Brooks, James Russell Lowell, Oscar Wilde, Robert Louis Stevenson
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—A Prayer of Self-Dedication (BCP, p. 832-833)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left. . . . Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "The priest Hilkiah has given me a book." Shaphan then read it aloud to the king. When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah, saying, "Go inquire of the Lord for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." So the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; she resided in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter, where they consulted her.

II Kings 22:1-2; 10-14

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Youth may be reluctant to identify their accomplishments. Encourage them to discover what they do well.
- Emphasize the importance of Josiah's willingness to ask for advice. Do the youth know adults they can turn to when they need help or advice?
- **Discussion Starter:** Do you know a young person who has made a difference to others?

Personal Views

Josiah was only 8 years old when he became the king of Judah. By the time he reached his teens and certainly by the time he was 20, he was making great changes in the kingdom of Judah. Despite his youth, he worked wisely and diligently to reconnect his people with God. He also knew the importance of asking for advice and direction from people such as Huldah the prophetess.

Some of us have been guilty of making teens think that the church doesn't need them until they are old enough to contribute something important. Josiah's story, however, shows that no one is ever too young to lead and serve God. In fact, many youth are strong leaders who add a very special dimension to the church.

Think about the times that youth have pushed for a special outreach project to help the needy. Or how they model hospitality by their inclusion of an outsider into their group. Or when they have prayed for someone in need.

The issue is not, "When can I serve God?" It is instead recognizing the ways we already serve God and finding new ways to use our gifts in service to God and the Church. To do both these things, we all need advice and direction from others. How can we follow Josiah's example in this area? Who do you turn to for advice? Who do the youth go to for help and direction? How do we know when advice is good and when it is harmful?

O God of peace . . . Give us the grace to recognize and accept the varied gifts you bestow on men and women, that our common life may be enriched and your gracious will be done; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you

and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Collect for Hilda
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, November 18

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Set out books about young people who accomplished great deeds. For example, mark the stories about David and Goliath and Samuel in a children's Bible. From the library bring biographies about people like the composer Mozart. As youth enter, encourage them to look at the books and the stories. At one end of the table, place a hand mirror. When youth pick it up, ask them to look at themselves and think about the things they have accomplished.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *II Kings 22:1-2, 10-14* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Thank you, Lord, for giving us an example of a person who followed you even though he was young.

Lord, please show us how to humble ourselves and follow your way. Help us seek advice like Josiah.

Katie, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from II Kings, chapter 22, verses 1 through 2, and 10 through 14.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Retell the story of Josiah, including the discovery of the book of law and his decision to seek guidance in leading the people of Judah.

If the group is large enough, divide into three small groups or select one of the scenarios. Describe the following situations: 1. You are lost in the forest and you left your backpack at the

campsite. How will you find your way back? 2. You are in a skyscraper in a place with no windows, and the electricity goes out. How will you get out? 3. You are in a life raft in a large body of water and cannot see land. You have two oars. How will you find land?

After the youth have had time to find a solution, discuss the possible resolutions to the situations.

- Describe a difficult situation you have encountered.
- What did you choose for a “compass”?
- Who do you listen to?
- When do you trust in yourself?
Ask the youth to share some of the accomplishments they identified in the Coming Together exercise.
- Could these accomplishments be used in service to God?
- What are some ways you could contribute to your church?
- Do you need others to help you find ways to serve 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

- **Getting there:** Ask youth to write directions for getting from the church to their houses. Tell them the person using the directions knows nothing about the area. If you don't know the names of streets, how can you give directions? What landmarks will you use to help the person navigate through your community?
- **Paint by number:** Bring in inexpensive paint-by-number books or sets. Remove all directions for matching the colors

with the picture. Color the picture without directions. How do the pictures look without directions? When do you need directions in your life?

- **Letter:** Think about one adult other than a parent you could turn to for advice. Identify a problem you are facing right now. Write a letter (it doesn't have to be sent) to this person asking for advice. Would you consider talking to this person about a problem in the future?

Games

- **Balance beam:** Put two parallel strips of masking tape on the floor about six inches apart for eight to ten feet (or longer if needed). Ask the group to line up with every other person facing in the opposite direction. Ask the two people on each end to move along the “beam” to the other end. They must stay within the two lines of tape. See how well the group works together to complete the task.
- **Finding the right voice:** Blindfold one person in the group. Place one or more obstacles in the room. The goal is to go from one side of the room to the other without touching an obstacle. Ask the other youth to start talking loudly about anything that might be confusing. Assign one person to be the guide, who can only give directions orally. The challenge is listening to the right voice and following its guidance.

Media

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

WEAVINGS

- The name Josiah can be translated as “God gives,” “cures,” or “brings forth.” Think back to the story to see how each translation fits—God gave the people a righteous leader and the book of the law to guide them, Josiah cured the evil in the land by removing false idols, and he brought forth a renewal of faith and security in Judah.
- While the text is unclear about the contents of the “book of the law” recovered during Josiah's reign, most scholars think it was probably *Deuteronomy*. Take a few minutes to look through *Deuteronomy* to see why Josiah “tore his clothes” and commanded the priests to consult the prophetess Huldah after he heard the contents of the book.
- The prophets sometimes referred to Josiah when exhorting other kings to do better. Josiah was highly regarded by Jeremiah who lived during Josiah's reign. See *Jeremiah 22:15*.

public performances of copyrighted material.

- **Video:** Watch a movie about a young person who seeks advice from others, such as *The Karate Kid* or *Searching for Bobby Fischer*.
- **Print:** Bring in several “Dear Abby” or “Ann Landers” columns. Cut off the replies, and pass the question portion to the youth. Discuss the answers they would give, then read the advice the columnist gave. What do you do when you get conflicting advice? What are the characteristics of good advice?

Music

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

- Sing or read the words of “Breathe on me, Breath of God” (*The Hymnal* 1982, 508).
- Sing together “Jerusalem Is Fair” (*Songs for Celebration*, H-301), about the glory of the City of God.
- Listen to “True Colors” by Cyndi Lauper on the *True Colors* CD. Who did Josiah turn to for help? Who helps your “true colors” shine through?

Service

- **Tutoring:** Contact a neighborhood school, child-care center, or community agency about tutoring children in your area.

Sharing

- **Mission statement:** Find out if your church has a mission statement, and get copies for each person in the group. Read it together. Does your church live up to it?

Study

- **Making decisions:** Explore decision making in the Bible. Who provided guidance to people like David or Moses? How did they know to whom to turn?
- **Judah’s kings:** Find out what happened after Josiah was king by reading more of *II Kings*. See what Jeremiah had to say to Josiah’s son in *Jeremiah 22*.

Voices

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

The future of the race marches forward on the feet of little children.

—Phillips Brooks

If youth be a defect, its one that we outgrow only too soon.

—James Russell Lowell

It is absurd to talk of the ignorance of youth. The only people to whose opinions I listen now with any respect are people much younger than myself. They seem in front of me.

—Oscar Wilde

For God’s sake, give me [young people] who have brains enough to make fools of [themselves].

—Robert Louis Stevenson

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 832-833 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

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. 832-3

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to describe how God calls people of all ages? Can they name ways other people can provide help and support? Can they identify people that can give advice and guidance in their own lives? Can they list characteristics of good advice?

Esther: Saving Her People

Community Leaders

Objective

This session concentrates on Esther, a Jewish queen in a Persian court, who risked her life for her people. Youth will be able to explain the risks that Esther took in saving the Jews from death.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the situation Queen Esther is in when the king signs a death warrant for all the Jews in the kingdom. Key people are Esther, Mordecai, Haman, and King Ahasuerus; key events are the plot to destroy the Jews and Esther's unbidden appearance before the king; the key outcome is the festival of Purim, celebrated by Jewish people today. To prepare spiritually for this session, think about people you have known or read about who have given themselves for others.

Commentary

Esther was queen to King Ahasuerus of the Persian Empire, about 400 BCE. Following the advice of her uncle, Mordecai, she had told the king that she was a Jew.

Not too long after Esther became queen, Mordecai uncovered a plot by Haman, the king's advisor, to kill all the Jews in the land. Both Esther and her cousin Mordecai were greatly frightened and disturbed by Haman's plot and his power over the king. Haman convinced the king to issue an edict that allowed the Persians to kill any Jews in the kingdom. Jews in Persia were captives, and they were not allowed to possess weapons to defend themselves.

Mordecai called on Esther to intervene. According to custom, no one could approach the king while in the inner court, unless that person had been called. An unapproved visit could mean instant death. At great risk, Esther approached the king. If the king had refused to see Esther, she would have been put to death.

The king, however, was receptive to Esther and invited her to come forward. By using a careful strategy, Esther informed the king that she was a Jew and asked that the persecution of her people be lifted. Her plea was heard, but in Persian law, the king's edict could not be revoked. However, the Jews were given the right to openly defend themselves.

Esther risks everything to save her people. She is a hero in the truest sense. The Feast of Purim, a Jewish celebration, is based on the story in *Esther*. Both Esther and Mordecai are fondly remembered as Jews recall God's deliverance of their ancestors.

For further study: Read the entire book of *Esther* to discover how Esther and Mordecai thwarted Haman and saved the Jews from extinction.

Personal Views

Esther stands out as one of the great women of the Old Testament. She was loyal and had courage. Although she found herself in a risky situation, she chose to do everything she could to help her people.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request."*
—Esther 7:3
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Vauvenargues, Martin Luther King Jr., Paul Whitehead, British soldier
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For Protection (BCP, p. 832)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him. . . . On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request."

Esther 4:15-17; 7:2-3

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Taking risks can be very appealing to young people. Be sure to note that Esther took a risk to save the lives of other people. She did not risk her life for pleasure or thrill.
- **Discussion Starter:** How do you think the Israelites felt when they were not allowed to defend themselves against aggressors? Has this happened at any other time in history?

Do you know of anyone like Esther? Is there a person at your church or in your community that consistently puts the needs of others before his or her own needs? Sacrifice and giving one's self for others is not often popular in our society. Many of our cultural messages have to do with "taking care of yourself" or being "number one," surpassing or outperforming an opponent or competitor. There seems to be very little honor in being second, and being last is disgraceful.

All of us are bombarded daily with rampant individualism and an obsession to be the best. This message is far from the values we see exhibited in Esther or in the teachings of Christ.

The value of Esther's story becomes more meaningful when we make connections between her life and others throughout history. Jesus's sacrifice comes immediately to mind. More recently, people like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. have put their lives at risk to take a stand against injustice. We can help our youth to see the value of living and sacrificing for others even when it is unpopular or even dangerous.

Grant, O God, that in all time of our testing we may know your presence and obey your will; that . . . we may accomplish with integrity and courage what you give us to do, and endure what you give us to bear; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Collect for John Keble
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, March 29

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

As youth arrive, invite them to play a game one on one. Give each them a card with a green dot on one side and a red dot on the other.

At your signal, tell the youth to select which side of the card to put face up on the table. If both put the green dot up, each person gets a point. If one person puts the red dot up, and the other puts the green dot, the person who put the red dot gets five points. If both people put the red dot up, they lose five points. The game is over when either person has zero points.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Esther 4:15-17; 7:2-3* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God,

Thank you for sending Esther to take a stand for her beliefs and her people. Your encouragement has helped people like Esther and Martin Luther King Jr. take stands for their beliefs. Help us to be brave enough to take a stand for our friends.

Amen.

Marco, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Esther, chapter 4, verses 15 through 17 and chapter 7, verses 2 and 3.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Discuss the game played during the Coming Together activity.

- What happened when one person risked putting the red dot up?
- Are risks always beneficial?
- Do the risks we take sometimes hurt not only ourselves but also others around us?
- Can you think of people who have taken risks to help others?

Before telling the story of Esther, point out the characters in the painting of Esther in Resource Poster No. 4. Then pass out noisemakers. During the Jewish festival of Purim, the audience participates in the telling of the ancient

story by cheering or booing the characters as they are mentioned.

Tell the youth that every time they hear Esther's name, they should say, "Yea!"; when they hear Haman, they say, "Boo!"; and when they hear Mordecai, they use the noisemakers. Tell the story with as much animation as possible. Discuss the story.

- Why did the king listen to Haman in the first place?
- Why did Esther ask the Israelites to fast and pray for her?
- Do you ever ask for help when you are in a risky situation?

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

- **Purim booth:** Find information about the Feast of Purim at the library or from a local synagogue. Construct a Purim booth used during the festival as a place where food and other tokens are distributed. You can make the booth from an appliance carton, or using pieces of cardboard and tape.
- **Risks:** Fold a piece of construction paper in half. On one side, write a risk that is worth losing your life for; on the other side write a risk that is not worth your life. Divide into small groups, and discuss the kinds of risks on both sides of the paper.
- **Drama:** Plan a play based on the story of Esther. Several youth could work on the script, deciding which parts of the story to include. Others could design and make sets and costumes. Assign a "director" to oversee the production.

Games

- **Froggy:** One youth is the "frog bogger," while everyone else is a frog. Any player who is tagged by the "bogger," must crouch down, frog fashion, and say "ribbit, ribbit" loudly to show that he or she is caught in the bog. "Free" frogs can release caught frogs by leap-frogging over them. The game ends when everyone is caught in the bog. Did people help each other, or did they just protect themselves? How did it feel to be "saved" or ignored by a "free frog" after being caught in the bog?

Media

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

- **Video:** Show the clip from the movie *Schindler's List* in which Schindler selects Jews to work in his factory, arguing that children were needed because of their small hands. Discuss the risks he took in shielding these Jews from the Nazis.
- **Print:** Find pictures from magazines or newspapers of people who have taken risks for others or unnecessary risks. Make two collages, separating pictures by type of risk. On the collage of unnecessary risks, make the symbol for no, a circle with a bar through it. Display the posters in a youth room or meeting 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.

WEAVINGS

- If this material is used in late winter, schedule this session in February or March around the time of the Purim Festival. Find the correct date on a calendar that lists religious holidays.
- The name Esther comes from the Persian word for star. In the story, Esther became a beacon to save her people from certain destruction. She still guides us today with her light, challenging us to put the needs of others before our own.
- The *Book of Esther* appears in both the Hebrew portion of the Bible and the Apocrypha. In the latter source, it is sometimes referred to as the "Rest of Esther." This version is also more dramatic. For example, when Esther comes unbidden before the king, he is enraged. As she swoons in terror, his feelings change to compassion. The Apocryphal version also includes prayers for divine assistance and is very clear that God maintains control over events.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Esther Before the King (No. 4)

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 “God is working his purpose out” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 534).
- Learn “I Will Trust in the Lord” (*Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, 193).
- Listen to “Wind Beneath My Wings” by Bette Midler on *Beaches*. How did Mordecai help Esther be more than she otherwise would have been?

Service

- **Random act of kindness:** Take the risk of helping someone anonymously. Give out candy at a movie theater or buy an ice cream cone anonymously for the next customer.

Sharing

- **Booth:** Set up the Purim booth made for the Expressions activity and give out food during coffee hour.
- **Purim for children:** Stage the play designed for the Expressions activity for a younger group of children. Beforehand, make noisemakers from small boxes on popsicle sticks that are filled with pebbles. Let the children be a part of the play by cheering the heroes and booing the villains.

Study

- **Apocrypha:** Read books of *Esther* in both the Hebrew and Apocryphal portions of the Bible. Compare the two. Which do you like better?
- **Holocaust:** Compare the events in the book of *Esther* to those in Nazi Germany. Find stories about people who risked their lives to help Jews during this time.
- **Vashti:** Read about Vashti, King Ahasuerus’s first queen, in *Esther 1*. What happened to her?

Voices

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

Nothing but courage can guide life.

—Vauvenargues

Courage faces fear and thereby masters it. Cowardice represses fear and is thereby mastered by it.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

True courage is not the brutal force of vulgar heroes, but the firm resolve of virtue and reason.

—Paul Whitehead

Stay with me, God. The night is dark,
The night is cold: my little spark
Of courage dies. The night is long

Be with me, God, and make me strong.

—British soldier in Tunisia, 1944

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 832 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Assist us mercifully, O Lord, in these our supplications and prayers, and dispose the way of your servants towards the attainment of everlasting salvation; that, among all the changes and chances of this mortal life, they may ever be defended by your gracious and ready help; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Protection
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 832

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to relate the risks that Esther took to save her people? Can they name other people in history who have taken similar risks? Can youth differentiate between risks taken to help others and risks that are unnecessary?

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego: Surviving Fire

Community Leaders

Objective

This session focuses on three young men who faced a fiery death rather than renounce their faith. Youth will be able to tell the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary recounts the story of the young men who survived the fiery furnace, and describes the events leading up to this situation. Key names are Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, King Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel; the key place is Babylon; the key event is their night in the furnace. For spiritual preparation, reflect on the place God has in your life and the difficulties in putting God first.

Commentary

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is in the book of *Daniel*. Their experience is a powerful example of how faithfulness can transcend fearfulness.

The tale is set in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar where these Jewish youth, along with Daniel, served in the royal house. The southern kingdom of Judah had fallen to the Babylonians, and the people were taken into exile. The king had ordered his palace master to bring young Israelites “without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight” (*Daniel* 1:4) to be taught the language and literature of the Babylonians.

Among those taken to court were Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel. The king was pleased with the young men, whom he found to

be “ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom” (*Daniel* 1:20).

The young men had defied the court by refusing to eat the royal food that defied Jewish dietary laws. Daniel had proven to be invaluable in interpreting the king’s dreams. The young men had enemies who forced a confrontation over the worship of Babylonian gods.

King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue for everyone in the land to worship. The king made a decree ordering his people to fall down and worship the golden statue when they heard the sound of instruments. Anyone refusing to do so would be thrown into a furnace.

Several people were quick to point out that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to follow the king’s decree. Their refusal to follow orders filled Nebuchadnezzar with rage. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than customary, and ordered his strongest guards to tie up the young men and throw them into the furnace. In their hurry to carry out the king’s commands, the guards were killed by the heat of the fire as they threw the young men in.

Looking into the fire, the king was amazed to see four figures walking in the middle of the fire unhurt. The three were miraculously protected by God’s angel who stayed with them during this trial. Approaching the furnace, the king called for them to come out. Not only were the young men untouched by the fire, but also their

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Nebuchadnezzar said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. . . .”*
—Daniel 3:28a
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Samuel Johnson, Oswald Chambers, George Macdonald, Dag Hammarskjöld
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Of a Saint (BCP, p. 250)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up." . . . And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them. Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

Daniel 3:16-18, 27-28

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Youth may wonder why God has let others who stood up for their faith be destroyed. Be ready to talk about God's presence and God's promise to always be with us.
- There is a fundamental difference between taking a stand and being stubborn. Ask the youth to differentiate between the two.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been tempted to do something you know goes against God's teachings?

their clothing did not even have the smell of smoke.

The king was so amazed by this display of courage and obedience to God that he issued a new decree: "Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb by limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (*Daniel 3:24*). The story ends with the three men promoted to higher positions in Babylon.

Personal Views

The three young men in the story are very clear about God's place in their lives. They have already refused to eat the royal food because doing so goes against Jewish dietary laws. Daniel, also part of the Babylonian court, later defied the king's decree by refusing to give up his daily prayers and is thrown into the lion's den.

In our lives, we are not forced to worship gods or forego daily prayer. However, we may lack the certainty that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego expressed about their belief in God. Sometimes other people and events keep us from putting God first in our lives. We sometimes put sporting events before church attendance, or allow a busy schedule to keep us from regular Bible study and prayer.

Is there a "golden statue" in your life that keeps you from putting God first? Who erected the statue? Who can tear it down? Look for a way to put God first this week, even if you are forced to face the fires of contempt and anger from others.

Keep us, O Lord, constant in faith and zealous in witness, that . . . we may live in your fear, die in your favor, and rest in your peace; for the sake of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who

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

Collect for Cramer, Latimer, and Ridley
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, October 16

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

As youth arrive, ask them to write on an index card the name of the most famous government official or head of state they have ever met or would like to meet. If possible bring in news magazines or newspapers for ideas.

After everyone has gathered, gather the cards, and ask the youth to find *Daniel 3:16-18, 27-28* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, help us to be strong and believe in you like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Help us to learn your ways so that we may trust in you and not worship other gods. Teach us to have faith in you, shield us from harm, and deliver us from evil. Amen.

Katherine, Grade 6

Lector: *A reading from Daniel, chapter 3, verses 16 through 18, and 27 through 28.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Put the cards from the Coming Together activity on a bulletin board or write the names down on a chalkboard. Identify the names that are of greatest interest. Talk about what it would be like to be in the presence of these people.

- What would you talk about?
- Are there questions you would like to ask?
- What if they asked you to do something you found questionable? What would you do?

Tell the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Refer to Resource

Poster No. 5 of the three youth in the furnace as you relate the story.

Divide into small groups of two or three. Give each group a section from the newspaper that has local or national news. Find stories about people who have taken stands, or about issues where there is disagreement. Report to the larger group your findings and discuss.

- Did you find any issues on which you would take a stand?
- Do you think people who took stands were always right?
- How do you know if the stand you are taking is right?
- What if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had perished in the furnace?
- Does taking the “right” stand mean you always come out on top?

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

- **In the future:** Rewrite the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as a Star Trek episode. Where would they be? Would you change their names? Which issue would they be willing to stand up for, even if it meant their death?
- **Clay objects:** Pass out lumps of clay that can be fired for each person. Ask youth to make an object that represents who they are. A dancer, for example, might make a ballet shoe. Arrange to have the art fired in a kiln.
- **All in a name:** The names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had changed along with their new destinies (see Weavings). Similarly, we change our

names to reflect maturity, marriage status, or for other reasons. Bring in books from the library listing names and their meanings. Find a name that you think sums up who you are. Illustrate the word using markers, crayons, or paints. Would changing your name change your identity? How important is a name? Why are parents asked to name the child at baptism?

Games

- **Bed of coals:** The object of the game is to reach the other side of the room without touching the floor. Using two thick closet dowels (available at most hardware stores), ask four youth to each take an end of the dowel and face each other, two youth on each side. Holding onto the shoulders of those holding one dowel, the youth stands on the dowel and uses it as a stepping stone to the next dowel. As the youth leaves one dowel, the holders move in front of the second dowel, repeating this action to form a dowel bridge to the other side of the room. Give everyone a chance to “cross the coals” and be a part of the bridge.

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch the “Veggie Tales” episode of the children’s series *Shad Rach and Bennie*. Or show a portion of the movie *Backdraft* depicting the intensity of raging fires.

WEAVINGS

- Schedule this session before Easter if your church has an Easter vigil and you are working with this material at that time. Talk about the use of fire as a symbol in the Christian faith to make the lighting of the new fire at Easter vigil more meaningful.
- When they arrived in Babylon from Judah, the three young men in the story had the Hebrew names Haniah, Mishael, and Asariah. A familiar eastern practice at this time in history, they were given new names to signify a change of fate. The names Shadrach and Abednego refer to the local gods Marduk and Nebo. Meshach also comes from Babylonian roots but less directly. While the three young men became known by their Babylonian names, Belteshazzar, Daniel’s new name, is not used in the narrative accounts of the book of *Daniel*.
- Fire is often used to describe the manifestation of God in the Bible. In *Genesis*, the presence of God as a covenant party with Abraham is symbolized by a passing fire. God later appeared to Moses in a flaming bush in *Exodus* 3:2. At Sinai after the Hebrews left Egypt, the mountain was wrapped in smoke because God “had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln” (*Exodus* 19:18). In the New Testament, the most significant expression is described in *Acts* 2:3 on the day of Pentecost: “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.”

RESOURCE POSTER

- In the Fire (No. 5)

- **Print:** Bring in books about people who have stood up against totalitarian governments, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Use these stories as a springboard for discussing the terror of standing against a totalitarian government.

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 "Surely it is God who saves me" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 679).
- Learn a new song about trusting God called "On Eagle's Wings" (*Gather*, GIA Publications, 433).
- Listen to "Go for Broke," by Bruce Hornsby and the Range.

Service

- **Burn victims:** Plan a fundraiser to benefit the burn ward of a local hospital.

Sharing

- **Smoke alarm:** Sponsor a battery replacement campaign for smoke alarms in your congregation. Ask members to bring in old batteries for disposal, and offer to replace them for a nominal fee. Contact a fire station for pamphlets or brochures about smoke detectors that you could distribute to participants.

Study

- **Fiery furnace:** Look up the word furnace in a Bible concordance to find out how it is used throughout the Bible.
- **Martyrs:** Read in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* about others who have faced fiery deaths, such as Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer, and Nicholas Ridley (October 16).
- **Anglican Communion:** Find out where Christians in the Anglican Communion, such as those in Sudan, are persecuted and even killed for their beliefs. Pray for them and the countries they live in.

Voices

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

Courage is the greatest of all the virtues, because if you haven't courage, you may not have an opportunity to use any of the others.

—Samuel Johnson

The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

—Oswald Chambers

Fear is faithlessness.

—George Macdonald

Never for the "sake of peace and quiet" deny your convictions.

—Dag Hammarskjöld

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 250 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty God, by your Holy Spirit you have made us one with your saints in heaven and on earth: Grant that in our earthly pilgrimage we may always be supported by this fellowship of love and prayer, and know ourselves to be surrounded by their witness to your power and mercy. We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ, in whom all our intercessions are acceptable through the Spirit, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Of a Saint
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 250

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to tell the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Can they relate the experiences of these young men to more recent events? Are youth able to name beliefs for which they would stand up?

Ezra & Nehemiah: Rebuilding Jerusalem

Community Leaders

Objective

This session focuses on the Jewish community's return to Palestine from exile in Babylonia. Youth will be able to state the importance of the return of Ezra and Nehemiah in the reestablishment of the city of Jerusalem.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary tells about the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah as they worked with the Jews in reconstructing not only the buildings of Jerusalem, but also the spiritual life of the people. Key people are Ezra, Nehemiah, and King Artaxerxes; the key events were the return of the Jews to Palestine and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. For spiritual preparation, think about your own abilities and how God has helped you use them.

Commentary

Nehemiah and Ezra are considered to be the creators of the Jewish community after the return from exile to Palestine.

Nehemiah was a member of the Jewish community that returned to Jerusalem at the end of the Babylonian exile. When he first arrived in Jerusalem, he was still a trusted official in the court of Artaxerxes, the Persian king. Moved by the city's disarray, he sought God's counsel about its future.

Filled with the power of his prayer, he approached King Artaxerxes about rebuilding the city. The king granted him permission, and he began to rebuild the city's walls. At the same time, he sought both

religious and social reform, earning him a reputation of a shrewd politician and protector of the distressed. Nehemiah's work pitted him against non-Jews, forcing him to survey the walls secretly and to go forward despite considerable hostility.

While Nehemiah focused mostly on bricks and mortar, Ezra worked toward restoring the worship of God among the people. Ezra's leadership as priest and scribe focused on temple worship and Jewish lifestyle. He had a way with words and, like Nehemiah, an ability to work with difficult personalities. The power of Ezra's leadership rested on his ability to observe and teach.

Nehemiah had more success in getting the walls of the city built than Ezra did in changing people. Ezra, however, is important as a preserver of religious traditions, especially the ninety-four books lost in the exile, a quarter of which are now part of the Bible.

Both men kept their eyes on the restoration of the City of God and its people. Nehemiah was reputed to be emotionally explosive, vain, and a separatist. He often praised his own works in writing, in stark contrast to Ezra whose personal life is almost unknown. Together they form a model of humanity working with God to restore a city, rebuild a temple, and preserve a tradition.

SESSION LEAFLET

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

■ **Key Verse**—*I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good.*

—Nehemiah 2:18

■ **Youth Commentary and Prayer**

■ **Voices**—George Bernard Shaw, George Santayana, Shelby Steele, Marian Wright Edelman

■ **Daily Reflections**

■ **Words to Remember**

■ **Prayer**—For Cities (BCP, p. 825)

LECTOR'S TEXT

On the first day of the first month the journey up from Babylon was begun, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the gracious hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra 7:9-10

Then [Nehemiah] said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we may no longer suffer disgrace." I told them that the hand of my God had been gracious upon me, and also the words that the king had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us start building!" So they committed themselves to the common good.

Nehemiah 2:17-18

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Young people often see people as either good or bad. Help them see that each person has good and bad qualities, and that God is more concerned with how a person is growing in faith than what they have done in the past.
- Nehemiah must have been a difficult person to work with. Encourage youth to share experiences about teachers, coaches, scout leaders, and even peers who are sometimes difficult.
- **Discussion Starter:** Which is more important: rebuilding a wall for safety or restoring a person to faith?

Personal Views

The history of the two men in this session takes into consideration the limitations of our humanity. Ego, pride, and inflexibility are but a few of the weaknesses that God can turn into strengths to work wonders.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah had extraordinary, but very different, gifts. Therefore, God called them to different kinds of service. Take a few moments this week to think about those parts of your life that seem to be weaknesses. Some of us have trouble listening to others when we have our own agendas. Sometimes, it is difficult to be flexible when we have decided to do something a certain way. Are you able to put a lesson plan aside to play a game or to talk about an issue that has nothing to do with your preparations?

How does God communicate with you? Are you open to hearing God's voice through a teenager? Listen carefully this week to people around you at home, the office, school, or recreation area. God speaks to us in many different ways. Pray that God uses your words to communicate with someone close to you this week.

Teach us, gracious Lord, to begin our works with reverence, to go on in obedience, and finish them with love; and then to wait patiently in hope, looking joyfully to you whose promises are faithful and rewards infinite; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

A Prayer Book for Australia, p. 216

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Bring in some kind of blocks to build a wall, such as Legos, cardboard bricks used by younger children, or wooden blocks. As youth arrive, hand them several

blocks, and ask them to work with each other to build a wall. Don't give them any other instructions. Observe how they work together.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Ezra 7:9-11* and *Nehemiah 2:17-18* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

*Dear Lord, help us never to lose faith in you through good times or bad times. Help us to be good leaders and to motivate others. Give us the strength to guide others towards goals for the common good. Help us to be more like you every day.
Amen.*

Creighton, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Ezra, chapter 7, verses 9 through 10, and Nehemiah, chapter 2, 17 through 18.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Finish building the wall that was started during the Coming Together activity. When it is completed, talk about the interactions that took place during the activity. Share your observations with the group during the discussion.

- Did anyone take a leadership role?
 - Did the group work in confusion or create a plan?
 - Did you resent the person that took charge or tried to control others?
 - Would it have helped if one person had been in charge or if there had been clear directions?
- Tell the story of Ezra and Nehemiah, emphasizing their strengths and weaknesses.
- Which was more important to Israel—building a wall for safety or shoring up the spiritual life of the people?
 - When you built your wall, were some people more interested in getting the task done even if some youth were

left out? Were some in the group more interested in how people felt?

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

- **Construction:** List all the people who are involved in constructing a building from blueprints to completion. Leave space between entries so the group can add ideas while they are brainstorming. Cross two or three people off the list. What happens if a job is not done? How does that affect the final product? Have you ever worked on a group project when someone did not do an assigned task? What happened?
- **Brick walk:** Bring in enough bricks for each person in the group. With permanent markers, ask the youth to write a word or phrase that reflects the teachings of Ezra about the law. For ideas look at the book of *Deuteronomy*, especially chapter 5. Place the bricks in a line going from one end of the room to the other to illustrate that God's laws are a strong foundation of our faith.
- **Foundations:** Walk outside to explore the foundations of your church building. Have additions been made? Are some parts of the foundation stronger than others? What is the first thing that must be done before a new building is started or an addition is made to an old one?

Games

- **Working together:** Divide the group into two teams. Begin by

tying the legs together of two people from each team for a three-legged race. After they race from one side of the room and back, add another player for a five-legged race. Continue until everyone on each team has participated. How did each group work together? Was one team more successful than another? Why?

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch *The Building of the National Cathedral* from the Public Broadcasting Service. Or show a travel video that highlights the walls of a city and the excavation projects over the years that have revealed different portions of the walls.
- **Print:** Look at blueprints of the original building at your church or a later addition. Talk about the parts of buildings that are essential even though we can't see them. How are people similar to the unseen parts of the blueprint?

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 "O what their joy and their glory must be" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 623).

WEAVINGS

- Visit the site of a groundbreaking for a building project or expansion in your community.
- When the Israelites returned to Palestine in about 500 BCE after the exile in Babylonia, others had moved into their cities and homes. Nehemiah faced opposition from those who had taken up residence in the lands that had once belonged to the Jews. After World War II when Jewish people began returning to Palestine, they faced similar opposition from the Palestinians who had lived there for centuries. Some of the issues that cause unrest in this part of the world today are probably similar to those faced by Nehemiah and Ezra.
- Walk through an unfinished building in your community. Look at the superstructure. If the foundation of the building is weak, what happens to the rest of it? Compare the building to your life. What is your foundation? How strong is that foundation?

- Sing together “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” (*Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, 175).
- Listen to “Paper in Fire” from *The Lonesome Jubilee* by John Mellencamp about having dreams and doing nothing to accomplish them. What was Nehemiah’s dream? Did he accomplish it?

Service

- **Building for others:** Contact a Habitat for Humanity project in your community or one nearby. Find out how youth can be part of building teams.

Sharing

- **Church history:** Learn about the history of the buildings in your church. Talk to older members about how and when the church grew. Prepare a presentation for others, such as a group of newcomers.

Study

- **Dedication:** Attend the dedication of a public building in your community. Why are these events important to people?
- **Ezra’s prayer:** After fasting, Ezra prayed to God about the sins of the people (*Ezra 9:5-15*). He listed the ways the people had strayed from God. Write a prayer Ezra might say about our country today.

- **Concordance:** Look up Ezra and Nehemiah in a Bible concordance to find out what others had to say about them. Hint: You will need a Bible that includes the books of the Apocrypha.

Voices

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

We are made wise not by the recollections of our past, but by the responsibilities of our future.
—George Bernard Shaw

We must welcome the future, remembering that soon it will be the past; and we must respect the past, remembering that once it was all that was humanly possible.
—George Santayana

The promised land guarantees nothing. It is only an opportunity, not a deliverance.
—Shelby Steele

Lord, I want to be free of the pressure to do great things in the world by being great in doing small things for Thee.
—Marian Wright Edelman

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 825 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

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

Are youth able to list reasons the return of both Ezra and Nehemiah was important in the reestablishment of the city of Jerusalem? Can they describe how both people used their strengths and weaknesses to carry out God’s will? Are youth able to relate this story to their own lives?

Maccabees: Lighting the Way

Community Leaders

Objective

This session focuses on the history of a particular Hebrew people. Youth will be able to define the Apocrypha and describe the significance of the Maccabees in the history of Israel.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary describes the period of Hebrew history that falls between the Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament. Key names are the Maccabee family, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and Mattathias; a key event is the rededication of the altar at the Jerusalem temple; key terms are Hanukkah and Apocrypha. For spiritual preparation, think about cultural influences in your life and the way you live out your faith.

Commentary

The Maccabee family, whose exploits are chronicled in the books of *Maccabees*, provided religious, military, and political leaders for Judea in the second and first centuries BCE.

They are most famous for their revolt against Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Syrian who tried to force the people to accept Greek culture and customs. While some Jews supported the spread of Greek culture, others violently opposed it as a contamination of their way of life. Antiochus insisted that the Jews worship Zeus on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. When Mattathias, a Maccabee, tried to offer a sacrifice to God, a full-scale military rebellion developed. Mattathias and his sons were forced to flee to the hills. They became like guerrilla warriors fighting for the faith of their ancestors.

After Mattathias's death, his son Judas took the revolt a step further. His brilliant and faithful leadership turned the smaller Jewish forces into a formidable match for the larger Syrian armies. He recaptured Jerusalem and rededicated the desecrated altar. This momentous event has been celebrated by Jewish people since that time as Hanukkah or "the feast of the dedication."

The celebration of Hanukkah is based on the following story. On the day the temple was reclaimed for God, the priests had only enough oil in the lamp for one day. It was important to keep the lamp burning to signify the presence of God. When they lit the lamp, expecting the oil to be used quickly, the lamp continued to burn for eight days.

I and *II Maccabees* chronicle the struggle against Syria beginning in 168 BCE and culminating in the cleansing of the temple. *III* and *IV Maccabees* further explore the struggle between culture and faith, often ending in martyrdom. All of these books are found in the Apocrypha.

The Apocrypha is a group of books or parts of books not included in the Jewish canon of the Hebrew scriptures but found in the early Christian versions of the Old Testament. The word apocrypha means "hidden" or "concealed," although current usage suggests that this section of the Bible is not fully accepted as part of the canon.

Religious traditions differ on the inclusion of these books. Episcopalians include those normally associ-

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**— . . . *they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence.*
—II Maccabees 10:3b
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Fannie Lou Hamer, the Christopher Society, Lucretius, Martin Luther King Jr.
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Easter Vigil (BCP, p. 286)
-

ated with the Old Testament, authorizing their use in Sunday worship and throughout many pastoral offices. The books of the Apocrypha are largely of Jewish origin and written prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now Maccabeus and his followers, the Lord leading them on, recovered the temple and the city; they tore down the altars that had been built in the public square by the foreigners, and also destroyed the sacred precincts. They purified the sanctuary, and made another altar of sacrifice; then, striking fire out of flint, they offered sacrifices, after a lapse of two years, and they offered incense and lighted lamps and set out the bread of the Presence.

II Maccabees 10:1-3

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Introduce the word “apocrypha” before using it. If possible, let everyone in the group look through a Bible that contains an Apocrypha.
- Most young people want to fit in with their peers and not stand out. Help them find ways to belong without betraying their beliefs.
- **Discussion Starter:** What part of your church is most sacred to you? How would you feel if vandals desecrated it?

Personal Views

The Maccabees are not the only family to face the threat of excessive cultural influence on religious identity. Our culture, expressed through the media and societal norms, affects our lives and our beliefs. The media tells us what is important even as advertisers follow us to the mall to influence our choices. The call to worship material gods alongside God is powerful.

Like the Jews who supported the Greek way of life, we think that we can worship God and do what everyone around us does, too. The Doonesbury comic strip once depicted a couple shopping for a church; the congregation that offered aerobics won out over all the rest.

Are there places in your life where the call to faithfulness contradicts the messages of society? What voices do you listen to when your values are in question? Do you compromise your religious principles in favor of secular acceptance?

Examine the amount of time you and your family spend watching television. How much time each day do you set aside for prayer and Bible reading? Pray about ways to neutralize some of the cultural influences in your life.

Almighty God, you have shed upon us the light of your incarnate Word: may this light, kindled in our hearts, shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns

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

Prayer of the Week
A Prayer Book for Australia, p. 476

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Hang Resource Poster No. 6 of a lighted menorah at the front of the room. As youth arrive, hand them a candle to place on a table in the center of the room creating eight points of light.

After everyone has gathered, turn off the lights, and let each person light one candle. As the light fills the darkness tell the story of Hanukkah.

Still in candlelight, ask the youth to find *II Maccabees 10:1-3* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God,

Thank you for light and the chance to choose your side, the side of love. Even if we make the wrong choices, thank you for always giving us another chance to redeem ourselves and choose light. Amen.

John, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from II Maccabees, chapter 10, verses 1 through 3.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Before youth arrive, wrap boxes containing one letter of the word “apocrypha” in festive paper. Hide the boxes throughout the room or outside if weather permits. Tell the youth to hunt for the nine boxes, but ask them not to open them until all are found.

After opening the boxes, ask them to arrange the letters to spell apocrypha. After they have put it together correctly, see if anyone can guess its meaning. Give them hints to see if anyone can come up with “hidden” or “concealed.”

Pass out Bibles and invite the youth to find the Apocrypha section of the Bible. From information in the Commentary, describe some of the history and the issues faced by the Maccabees and the Israelites.

- Do any of the books in the Apocrypha sound familiar?
- The Greeks influenced Jewish thought a great deal. Which cultures or countries have influenced the way we think, act, and talk?

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

- **Oil lamp:** Sculpt an oil lamp from a lump of clay. A lamp in ancient times looked like a bowl pinched together on one side to hold a wick. Make designs on the wet clay, using old toothbrushes and table knives. After the lamp has dried completely, fill it with lamp oil and add a wick. Light it in a safe place.
- **Mural:** Select a story from the Apocrypha, such as *Susanna* or *Bel and the Dragon*. After reading it together, select several key scenes that tell the story. On a long sheet of butcher paper, make a mural of the story showing the different scenes.
- **Hanukkah:** Write your own version of the story of Hanukkah. Decide who will tell the story, and write it from their point of view. For example, the priest who lights the candle or a youth who comes to the temple each day to watch the miraculous lamp.

Games

- **On the line:** String a clothesline across the room. Prepare in advance the names of all the books in the Bible, including the Apocrypha, on index cards. Divide the cards among the youth. As fast as possible, without looking at a table of contents, put all the cards in order on the clothesline with tape or clothespins. After they are finished, look at a Bible to check the answers. Did any of the books of the Apocrypha end up in the Old or New Testaments?

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch the television movie *Masada* about the Hebrew battle against the Romans. When did this battle take place in the history of the Israelites?
- **Print:** Look through magazines and newspapers for advertisements that seem to be in contrast to leading a life of faithfulness. How did you determine which ads contradict a Christian life and which ones have a neutral impact?

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

- If the group is studying this module in late fall, schedule this session around the time of Hanukkah in December.
- The story of the events around Hanukkah in the books of the *Maccabees* goes into detail about the military victory and the reclaiming of Jerusalem as the holy city of the people of Israel. The account in the Talmud, ancient rabbinic writings for traditional Judaism, focuses primarily on the miracle of the oil. At first Hanukkah was celebrated to remind people of the victory of the Maccabees. Only later did the miracle of the oil become the focus of the celebration.
- Ironically, our culture has had an impact on the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah. Because the holiday falls close to the Christian celebration of Christmas, gift giving on each of the eight days is observed by many families. Just as the Christmas tree with gifts piled underneath has taken precedence over the Christ child, the exchange of gifts at Hanukkah sometimes overshadows the miracle of the lamp.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Menorah (No. 6)

- Read or sing “Lamp of our feet, whereby we trace” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 627).
- Learn a new song about light called “The Lord Is My Light” (*Gather*, GIA Publications, 429).
- Listen to “Shed a Little Light” by James Taylor on *Live*. Do you know of other songs about standing up for your beliefs?

Service

- **Light a candle:** Read the quote from the Christopher Society below. Find a place of darkness in your community and light a candle of hope. For example, paint a building covered in graffiti, or plant a garden in a trash-filled lot.

Sharing

- **Praising God:** Plan a worship service for another group or the congregation using Evening Prayer or Compline. Discuss ways to use light to make the service more effective.

Study

- **New Testament light:** Using a concordance, find three different examples of miracles in the New Testament that involve light.
- **Hanukkah:** Invite a Jewish person to talk to the group about Hanukkah. Ask for a description of the historical background and modern observances.
- **Lectionary:** Scan the entries in the lectionary in *The Book of Common Prayer* beginning on p. 889. Look for citations from the Apocrypha. Were you surprised by how many readings came from the Apocrypha?

Voices

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

When I liberate others, I liberate myself.
—Fannie Lou Hamer

It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness.
—Motto of the Christopher Society

For as children tremble and fear everything in the blind darkness, so we in the light sometimes fear what is no more to be feared than the things children in the dark hold in terror and imagine will come true.
—Lucretius

We die when we refuse to stand up for what is right. We die when we refuse to take a stand for that which is true. So we are going to stand up right here . . . letting the world know that we are determined to be free.
—Martin Luther King Jr.

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Turn to the prayer on page 286 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison.

Leader: *Let us pray.*
All you who stand near this marvelous and holy flame, pray with me to God the Almighty for the grace to sing the worthy praise of this great light; through Jesus Christ his Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Easter Vigil
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 286

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Are youth able to define the word “apocrypha” and find the Apocrypha section of the Bible? Can they describe the significance of the story of the Maccabees in the history of Israel? Are youth able to name cultural influences that affect the Christian life?