

Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

COVENANT ANCESTORS Leader's Guide



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BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

TEACHING YOUTH IN EPISCOPAL CHURCHES

The aim of Christian education in Episcopal Church parishes and congregations is to assist every member in living out the covenant made in Holy Baptism (*The Book of Common Prayer*, page 304). Hence, the common ministry of leaders and youth focuses on matters of both faith and practice:

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

The content of our faith and practice is continually re-examined and corrected as we search Holy Scripture and the preserved tradition of the Church.

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

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

Teaching Is a Ministry

All Christians are teachers. Our daily lives bear witness to what we believe and treasure. Youth and leaders in the church are poised to share a singular experience that goes beyond the facts and activities of the moment. The aim of Christian education is to assist all members of the Church to discern the signs and spirits of the age and to bring sound theological judgment to bear upon what we observe and experience.

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

Guidelines for Youth

The teenage years can be a time of special opportunities for encountering the invigorating challenge and abiding hope of the Christian gospel. Adolescents are continuing their journeys as full members of the Church, capable of taking part in all aspects of its governance and mission in the world. Within the Baptismal Covenant, this means worshipping and learning in the Christian community, resisting evil, proclaiming the Good News of

God in Christ, seeking to serve Christ in all persons, striving for justice and peace, and respecting the dignity of all human beings.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

lecture and instruction.

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

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

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

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

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

UNDERSTANDING YOUNGER YOUTH

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

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

- **Developmental theory** offers insights for the teaching task. Customarily, educators have looked primarily to such theories for help in understanding the growth and development of children. Younger youth are well past the early stages of development, however, and no single developmental viewpoint appears to be adequate by itself to provide a comprehensive basis for planning instruction.

- **Literature** is another source. Stories of youth enable adults to reconnect with adolescents and to experience, vicariously, radically different life-shaping situations.
- **Experiences** of teachers themselves can contribute much reliable information, including memories of their own journeys as young people.

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

Theory—A Source of Information

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Literature—A Source of Understanding

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

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

Experience—A Source of Connection

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

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

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

Nevertheless, certain aspects of adolescents remain virtually unchanged across the years. Successes, failures, feelings, doubts, joys, and struggles remain a vital part of students' daily lives. Universal themes are evident in the questions youth ask and the answers they seek: “Who am I? Whose am I? Why am I here? What should I do? Where am I going?” It is essential to

acknowledge that these themes exist. They were part of our own youth and now become a powerful link with today's students.

Faith in the Classroom

Faith is a gift from God.
We are people of faith.

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

Structure of faith

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

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

In contrast, John Westerhoff uses the image of concentric rings to portray how faith grows and matures within the web of relationships in a faith community. In his model, the faith of adolescents is one of belonging to a faith community (affiliative faith) yet moving beyond to question the faith of our parents (searching faith). The title of Westerhoff's book, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (1976), still resonates among leaders in Christian education.

Who are Youth?

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

Characteristics of younger youth:

- **They like to have fun.** Fun is not the opposite of learning nor should fun be seen as something to be avoided. On the contrary, people learn best when they are having a good time. When youth are having a good time, they often make a lot of noise. Don't be afraid of a little commotion if most of the group are on task. Encourage your teens to have fun in your class and see how much they will learn.
- **Seek identity.** Younger youth are in an energetic process of seeking who they are, while at the same time, fearing that they may find out. Two key words for the wise leader are: accept and affirm. Accept

each person as he or she is; look for qualities in each that you like. Don't try to change them. Affirm the skills, talents, questions, concerns and uniqueness of each person in an intentional way.

- **Like-making choices.** Many adults believe that younger youth should not be allowed to make decisions for themselves because they are too immature. Some people teach without seeking input or options from those they are teaching. Youth make decisions all the time. Our gift to them to help them to develop their abilities to make good decisions and to treat them as capable human beings.
- **Need to be heard.** One of the best tools you can provide for younger youth are opportunities to speak out and be heard, and to listen to others in the group with respect. It is important to set the example not by what you say but by what you do. Your ability to listen to youth and respond to their ideas and comments will be a model for their own listening skills. Being heard for even a moment can be a powerful experience.
- **Seek approval.** Approval from peers and adults is essential at this age. This need for attention and approval can lead to various expressions of behavior. Some youth will be over-achievers, trying to please by standing out above the rest. Others will seek attention by how they dress, or by the language they use. The skilled leader looks for ways to offer appropriate approval, acceptance, and affirmation while still providing guidelines, boundaries, and expectations.
- **Want to be valued and significant.** How you treat the younger youth in your class is much more important than what you teach. If youth feel important and significant, they are more likely to learn something from the class. It is also crucial to pay attention to how the teens treat each other. The atmosphere of the classroom can enliven or poison the whole experience. Encouraging youth to behave in respectful ways to adults and to one another may be the most important lesson you can teach. Many youth in today's church school classes come from different schools, belong to different clubs and organizations, inside and outside of their schools. Building a successful group that reaches out in hospitality to newcomers and those on the fringes is one of the main goals of working with younger youth. It is also the message of the gospel.
- **More interested in who's there than what is taught.** The friendships that already exist and the friendships that develop are often the motivating factor for attendance and learning. The skilled teacher supports and encourages these relationship while trying to avoid cliques that exclude others. A key word here is inclusiveness.
- **Growing and changing.** Everything about this time in the lives of younger youth calls them to growth in mind, body and spirit. The hunger to grow (often subconscious) is a great ingredient for learning.

Youth want to know more about the things that affect their lives. This includes God and knowing Jesus Christ. However, they also change constantly which makes them unpredictable. Accept these deep down longings and ever-changing attitudes as gifts.

- **Looking for a faith of their own.** Younger youth are seeking their own opinions, values, and faith. Their identity comes from becoming their own person. Youth often reject much of their parent's faith. This is an important sign that new values and a stronger faith are being formed. Embrace the searching process and affirm the importance of the ability to question, doubt and think. Your response to their doubts will encourage or discourage their journeys to spiritual knowledge. Their questions will ultimately lead to faith.

WHO ARE LEADERS?

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

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

- **Rooted in their faith and committed to Jesus Christ.** Who leaders are speaks loudly to teens. This doesn't mean that leaders have to be biblical scholars or perfect Christians. It also doesn't mean they no longer have any doubts or are at the end of their own spiritual journey. Good leaders have a strong relationship with God and are comfortable with their faith.
- **Is Willing to be a part of a team.** Helping a young person to grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord is an overwhelming task. It is essential for leaders to understand that they do not have sole responsibility for this task. Wise leaders know that they are not only part of a teaching team but also part of a network of people in the church who care about and support young people.
- **Is fun and enjoys being with young people.** A key phrase to help leaders is “relax and enjoy.” Effective leaders know how to have fun and to share joy with young people without giving up expectations of them. Leaders must find their own balance of fun and seriousness. Affirming joy and excitement with the group, however, is essential

for the leaders' full participation.

- **More concerned about people than facts.** The ECY provides an excellent base of information to learn more about God, scripture and the Church. The sessions incorporate this learning with the issues that effect young people's lives. Effective leaders are aware of issues that are unique to their groups and look for ways to include these ideas in their presentations. When leaders give priority to what youth are thinking and feeling, the content follows.
- **Has a long-term commitment to the group.** Good leaders are committed and consistent. There will be ups and downs, and successes and failures. Some weeks the youth may be impossible to reach, but the steadfastness of faith and commitment to the class will make a real difference in the long run. Focus on the overall success of the program and not on any one moment, hour, or week.

Building the Team

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

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

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

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

- **Begin with social time** together, including sharing basic facts about each other.
- **Share faith stories.** A simple way to do this is to ask people to make a chart from birth to the present showing the highlights and low moments of their faith journey. Allow time for everyone to finish before sharing so each person can listen to each presentation.
- **Make a list of each person's gifts** and identify the gifts, talents or interests that he or she would like to contribute to the class.

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

Youth as Leaders

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

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

- **Sharing Information.** In order for youth to participate effectively in planning for and leading a group, they must have the basic information available to leaders and be able to make choices of their own.
- **Training usually involves practice.** Allowing the teens to try out new ideas, theologies and skills in a safe environment is a great way to train them for leadership roles. Giving them opportunities to lead the group is a way to practice the gifts and talents that God has given them.

- **Young people are not “blank slates.”** The youth in the group come with a richness of ideas, thoughts, opinions, and experiences. They are not empty, inexperienced human beings just waiting to receive facts and gems of wisdom. They have as much to teach as they have to learn. Often they are so used to being treated like “blank slates” that they are reluctant to share all that they have to offer. When they trust that their experiences and opinions are valued, a whole new world of information, learning and sharing will open up. Encourage this process, and be patient if it takes some time for it to develop.

- **People deserve input into decisions that affect their lives.** Youth in your program deserve to have input into their learning process. Often adult leaders plan the sessions with little or no involvement from those they are trying to reach. This often leads to apathetic learning. Also, the adults miss the benefit of the wisdom and understanding of the youth about their needs, desires and insights. Although the process will be different in each situation, be intentional about learning from the youth both before beginning and then during the sessions.

- **Young people should be responsible for their own learning.** One way to value the participants in the group is to allow them to take responsibility for their learning. This means agreeing ahead of time what will be learned and how the learning will be carried out. A contract or covenant should be established with the group, and the adult leader should hold people accountable to what they have agreed. It will take time to develop the trust for this to happen, but the benefit is enormous.

- **Leadership skills apply to all facets of life.** If adult leaders are successful at lifting up youth leaders, the skills developed will affect other areas of the youth's lives. Youth group members will find themselves involved in leadership roles in their schools, families, churches and other organizations. They will have discovered tools that will last them the rest of their lives. These skills along with their Christian faith will make an impact on all with whom they come in contact.

- **Forming a youth leadership team.** Although a youth leadership team will have many variations depending on each situation, it is recommended that one is formed. This may be as simple as gathering a few young people ahead of time to review the materials and make suggestions on how best to use this curriculum. A team of youth that meet with the adult team regularly and share in planning for the sessions can be developed. Certain sessions or projects could be given to a small group of youth to let them “run with it.” It is important that the adult leaders build in some time to plan the role of young people as leaders of this curriculum.

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THE EPISCOPAL CURRICULUM FOR YOUTH

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

A Tool for Teachers

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

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

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

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

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

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

USING THE CURRICULUM

Planning Class Sessions

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

Teacher Supports—six sections directed at helping teachers prepare.

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

Optional Activities—a variety of different suggestions of activities, 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.

COVENANT ANCESTORS

The content of this module focuses on Old Testament (Hebrew scriptures) and Covenant. Titled *Covenant Ancestors*, each session examines relationships with God and individuals in the Hebrew Scriptures. Each person's relationship with God is encountered, challenged and nurtured by their experiences with God. Youth today are also seeking relationships with God, but often encounter doubts and questions. Seeing themselves as Christians in relationships with God in Jesus Christ as they live out the promises of the Baptismal Covenant, is the hoped for outcome of this course of study.

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

For Teachers

- **Leader's Guide** (this volume)
Contains 9 sessions of material. The sessions are:
Adam & Eve: Beginning Together
Cain & Abel: Brothers Apart
Noah: Starting Over
Jacob & Esau: Deceiving a Brother
Miriam: Giving Thanks
Joshua: Claiming the Land
Samson & Delilah: Ill-Fated Love
Elijah: Standing for God
Jonah: Running Away

- **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.

Adam & Eve: Beginning Together

Covenant Ancestors

Objective

The focus of this session is God's plan for men and women on earth. Youth will begin to understand that God created humans to work together. Youth will be able to name deeds and activities that people accomplish together that are "indeed, . . . very good" (*Genesis 1:31*).

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session focuses on God's original design in creation for men and women to work together. Key people are Adam and Eve; the key event is God's creation of humankind. For spiritual preparation, consider human-created obstacles that thwart cooperation between the sexes as well as deeds and activities in which men and women complement one another.

Commentary

The Bible's second creation narrative found in *Genesis 2:4b-25* provides a more detailed account of God's creation of humankind than the first creation narrative in *Genesis 1:1-2:3a*. From both accounts, it is clear that God's original intent in creation was for men and women to be partners in the stewardship of God's "good" creation. The creation of woman from "Adam's rib," described in *Genesis 2*, symbolizes this side-by-side design.

The Hebrew word adam is a collective term and is, therefore, never used in the plural; adam literally means [humankind]. The Hebrew word for Eve resembles the word for "life" or "living." The woman is not named specifically as Eve until

Genesis 3:20. The man is named Adam in *Genesis 4:25*.

Just as Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden (*Genesis 3*) alienated humankind from God, it also estranged men and women in contrast to God's original design. This estrangement often tarnishes the account of God's creation. The second creation narrative has been used incorrectly to legitimize male superiority, primacy, and domination in the stewardship of God's creation. This reading contradicts God's original plan for men and women to work together in caring for God's creation.

As the ancient story of "the fall" of Adam and Eve shows, sin has the potential to destroy human relationships. Christians believe that the reconciliation of humans—restoration to the original relationship—is possible through the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross (*Galatians 3:27,28; Ephesians 2:11-20; Colossians 1:19-21*). God continues to bless men and women who were created "in the image of God" (*Genesis 1:27*).

For further study: Read chapter 4 of the book *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* by Phyllis Trible.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."*
—Genesis 2:18
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Guru Nanak, Marian Wright Edelman, Cuban Proverb
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For Labor Day (BCP, p. 261)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken."

Genesis 2:18-23

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Youth may have preconceived notions or stereotypes for men and women. In some cases, certain roles do fit men or women better. Be prepared to discuss stereotypes and how roles have broadened in the past 25 years.
- The focus of the session is God's intent for men and women of all ages to work together as partners. Encourage partnership in the learning activities of this session.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been in a situation in which two very different people by working together were able to accomplish more than two people working alone?

Personal Views

You may find it helpful to read both creation narratives and compare and contrast the events and important themes in each before planning this session. Think and write your own ideas about the interaction between men and women. Are men or women the dominant sex? What prejudices do you have that may cause a competitive rather than complementary relationship between men and women? What stereotypes, obstacles, or barriers to a complementary relationship do you see in the workplace, at church, school, or home?

Consider tasks and activities in which men and women work together. When have you observed a competitive relationship between men and women? When have you seen a complementary relationship? What factors seemed to make a difference? What are some activities and tasks where men and women work together effectively for the stewardship of God's creation?

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Proper 29

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 236

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Display Resource Poster No. 1 that shows men and women of different ages working together. Scatter an assortment of magazines around the room, and

ask youth to identify and cut out pictures or words that portray men and women of different ages working at some task together. Tell the youth to keep the pictures they found for later.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Genesis 2:18-23* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Thank you for every thing you have given us, especially for everyone else.

Thank you for making Adam and Eve, so humankind can work together to better serve you.

Thank you for making people able to do good and for us all to be better people.

Help us all to serve each other as well as you, and help everyone receive you as their Lord and Master. In your name we pray.

Amen.

Katie, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from Genesis, chapter 2, verses 18 through 23.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging

(Time: 15-20 min)

Create a large or several small collages using the pictures from the Coming Together activity. Discuss the images in the Resource Poster and collages using the following questions as a guide:

- What's happening in these pictures?
- What kind of activities are the people engaged in?
- How are the tasks or activities being accomplished?
- How did we create this collage?
- What are some activities that some men can do better? What are some activities that some women can do better?

- Where do you see roles that are typically male or female reversed in the pictures or from your own experiences?

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

- **Creation:** Divide into groups of two or three. Give each group modeling clay and ask them to create adam using *all* of the clay. After they have shared their creations, ask the youth to take part of the clay from their “Adams” to make “Eves.”
- **Word game:** Divide the group into pairs. Ask each pair to make as many words as possible using the letters in ADAM, EVE, CREATION, and HUMANKIND. Words should have at least three letters.

Games

- **Running together:** Divide into pairs and have a three-legged race.
- **Hula hoop loop:** Ask the youth to stand in a circle, holding hands with those on either side. Place a hula hoop over the head and under the arm and clasped hands of one of the youth. The object is to move the hoop around the circle as quickly as possible by stepping, stooping, and climbing through the hoop. Teamwork is essential!

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:** Tape parts of television programs such as *ER* that show men and women working together to accomplish a common task. Talk about the different and similar roles of men and women in the program.
- **Video:** Watch the movie *Babe*, and discuss role reversal and role stereotypes. No one told Babe that a pig can't herd sheep!

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 “On this day, the first of days” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 47).
- Learn “Beginning Today” (*Glory and Praise*, Vol. 3, 183).
- Listen to “Took a Hundred Pounds of Clay” from the 1960's.

Service

- **Building together:** Join a Habitat for Humanity crew or other project that encourages young people to work together on equal footing. Before going on the work day, ask someone familiar with the project to describe what will be done and who will do it.

WEAVINGS

- This session could be scheduled before a proposed youth project that calls for cooperation and working together.
- In the biblical passages for this session the word “man” in earlier translations of the Bible has been changed to “humankind” when referring to the human race in the New Revised Standard Version. While inclusive language may sound a strange note in our ears at first, reflect on the new images the broader terms depict. Ask the youth what they envision when you say the word “man” and then say the word “humankind.”
- The Episcopal Church has changed its stance about the roles of men and women in the past two decades. Men, who held almost all the leadership roles in the past, are now working together and sharing those responsibilities with women on vestries, as clergy, and in other roles.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Working Together (No. 1)

Sharing

- **Exhibit:** Display collages made in the Engaging activity at your church in conjunction with a Habitat for Humanity presentation.
- **Side by side:** Work together as a group or in pairs at a clean-up day at your church.

Study

- **Reading:** Investigate some of the new books about Genesis and other Old Testament themes. Look for the section about creation.
- **Speaker:** Invite a guest speaker who works in a job most people have labeled either male or female who doesn't fit the stereotype.

Voices

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

By the grace of God's name
May humanity find itself lifted
high and higher.
In thy dispensation O Lord,
Let there be good in all
humanity.
Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism

What unites us is far greater
than what divides us as families
and friends and Americans and
spiritual sojourners on this
Earth.
Marian Wright Edelman

Three, helping each other, will
bear the burden of six.
Cuban Proverb

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the Collect on page 261 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*
*Almighty God, you have so linked
our lives one with another that all we
do affects, for good or ill, all other
lives: So guide us in the work we do,
that we may do it not for self alone,
but for the common good; and, as
we seek a proper return for our own
labor, make us mindful of the rightful
aspirations of other workers, and
arouse our concern for those who
are out of work; through Jesus
Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit, one
God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

For Labor Day
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 261

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Did the youth work together as partners during the activities? Do they understand that God created humans to work together? Can they name tasks and activities people accomplish together?

Cain & Abel: Brothers Apart

Covenant Ancestors

Objective

This session focuses on the inability of Cain and Abel to deal with their differences. Youth will be able to discuss the destructiveness of sibling rivalry, identifying feelings of jealousy, superiority, and distrust there may be between brothers, sisters, and others. They will explore constructive ways to deal with these feelings.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session will focus on God's rejection of Cain's sacrifice and the first sign of sin's effect on humanity after Adam's and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden (*Genesis 3*). Key names are Cain and Abel; the key event is Cain's murder of Abel. For spiritual preparation think about estrangement of human relationships in your own life.

Commentary

Cain's murder of Abel represents the first expression of sin for a fallen humanity. Adam's and Eve's ultimate sin of pride caused God to banish them from the Garden of Eden. The relationship between God and humanity was changed forever and marked by alienation, estrangement, and hostility. Cain's murder of Abel demonstrates the depth of that alienation and hostility. The story in *Genesis 4* about the two brothers illustrates how life went very wrong after the rebellion in the Garden of Eden.

A question often raised by the Cain and Abel story centers on the offerings made by the brothers to God (*Genesis 4:3-5*). God rejected Cain's "offering of the fruit of the

ground" while accepting Abel's offering of "the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions." Although both animal and agricultural offerings would later be acceptable to God in the Old Testament, scholars differ on the reason for God's rejection of Cain's offering. Perhaps Cain offered second-quality produce compared with Abel's first-quality meat, or perhaps Cain offered the fruit of the ground begrudgingly and in anger.

Although scripture is not obvious about the reason for God's rejection of Cain's offering, it is clear that Cain's hurt and anger toward God is transferred and directed at his brother.

As a result of this anger, Cain murders Abel. Murder leads to denial and repudiation as Cain further abandons his brother when he asks God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (*Genesis 4: 9*) The pattern of sin followed by denial first illustrated in the story of Adam and Eve continues with Cain's response to God.

Christians believe that reconciliation—the restoration of the broken relationships between God and humanity and among humanity—is possible through Jesus Christ and his atoning death on the cross (*Ephesians 2:11-20 and Colossians 1:19-21*). Christ came to earth in human form to bridge the gap between God and humanity and heal the wounds separating people from one another.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"*
—Genesis 4:9
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Van Wyck Brooks, Joseph Francois Eduard Desmahis, Cecil Hunt
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For the Human Family (BCP, p. 815)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord." Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. . . . Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

Genesis 4:1-5, 8-11

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- The broken human community for youth often can be found in sibling rivalries. If brothers and sisters are present in the same class, encourage them to share and listen to each other's perspectives.
- Young people may question God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice and the rejection of Cain's. The focus of this session is how we handle feelings of anger and jealousy resulting from events that may be unexplainable. Fairness is not the issue.
- **Discussion Starter:** What is your reaction when you feel you have been treated unfairly by someone in your family?

Personal Views

The story of Cain and Abel highlights the deep effects that human sin and pride have on our relationships with one another, including coworkers, friends or family members. The story illustrates the break-up of the human community and the rejection of those we love. Too often people refuse to become involved, and in effect ask the same question Cain put to God: "Am I my brother's keeper? Am I my sister's keeper?"

Think or write about a broken family relationship that you may have experienced. In what ways have you been alienated from brothers, sisters, parents, or a spouse? Where have you seen the effects of human sin in your personal relationships? In what ways have you been "murdered" or "disowned" by a family member? Have your parents played favorites in your family?

Consider the issue of violence in our society today. In many cases, young people learn from media or experience that the only way to resolve a conflict or difference is through violence. For example, drive-by shootings and murders in cities arise from disagreements or turf wars. Parents and community leaders in many areas are requiring school uniforms to prevent jealousy, envy and conflict over designer clothing and shoes. Where have you seen violence in your community? How can we help young people deal with destructive emotions?

Be gracious to your people, we entreat you, O Lord, that they, repenting day by day of the things that displease you, may be more and more filled with love of you and of your commandments; and, being supported by your grace in this life, may come to the full

enjoyment of eternal life in your everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Monday in the 5th Week of Lent
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, p. 48

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Bring a large bag of M & M's or a package of cookies to the meeting. As youth arrive, unevenly distribute the candy or cookies. Don't use any rationale for giving out the treats other than whim. Tell the youth there is only one rule: No sharing allowed. Youth can eat the treats immediately or save them for later.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Genesis 4:1-5 and 8-11* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: Let us pray.

God, please help us in our relationships with our siblings and friends. Help us get along with each other, control our feelings, and deal with emotions in a good way. Help us to talk about our problems and be open with each other. God, please guide us to make the right decisions dealing with siblings and friends. Amen.

Alan, Grade 9

Lector: A reading from *Genesis, chapter 4, verses 1 through 5 and 8 through 11.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging

(Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the group to describe their feelings about the uneven distribution of the candy or cookies. Were they jealous of those that received the most? Did they mistrust the person who gave out the treats? Did those who received

more feel superior to those receiving less? Did anyone plot revenge?

Ask the youth if they ever have those feelings at home, at school, or when they are with their friends. Encourage them to share the circumstances that caused the feelings. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- How do you handle feelings of jealousy and envy?
- Do you treat family members differently than friends and classmates?
- How does it feel when someone is jealous of you or envious of something you have?

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

- **Color your feelings:** Provide youth a wide assortment of bright or neon finger paints. Pass out large pieces of paper and ask them to depict feelings of anger, jealousy, or resentment. Before they begin, suggest that the youth close their eyes and think about a situation that caused them to have these feelings.
- **Cartooning:** Draw a cartoon with one or more panels describing a conflict situation between brothers, sisters, or friends. Create final panels that show several possible solutions that defuse anger.

Games

- **Murder!** Before the game, quietly inform one of the young people that he or she is the “murderer.” Ask everyone to stand and begin shaking hands with everyone else in the room. (Anyone who doesn't

participate is out of the game.) Explain that the murderer's handshake will be subtly different from the others: the last three fingers will be curled under. When the murderer shakes your hand, you must die, but not immediately. The “death” can be as dramatic as the youth want it to be. The object of the game is to identify the murderer before everyone is murdered.

- **Twenty questions:** Ask the group to think of questions that will lead to the identification of the characters in this story (Abel Cain, God, Adam and Eve.) To make the game harder, limit the number of questions to three, and ban certain words to be used in questions, such as murder, die, and kill.

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:** Discuss the ways that action movies (for example, films starring Arnold Swartzenager) encourage us to resolve conflict and handle our feelings. Watch all or parts of *East of Eden* starring James Dean.
- **Print:** Clip current stories of murder and violence from newspapers. What are the causes of the violence? Are they valid? How often are family members involved? What might have been better options?

WEAVINGS

- This session could be scheduled in conjunction with the session on Jacob and Esau. A main difference in the two stories is the murder of Abel. While distrust and jealousy also separated Jacob and Esau, they were later able to reconcile.
- The inability of people to resolve conflict peacefully has led to a rise in the number of “conflict resolution” programs. Schools across the country are encouraging students to meet with peer mediators to resolve disputes. The same emotions that triggered Cain's murder of Abel—jealousy, hostility, and anger—still rule many of us today.
- According to popular culture, the solution for any slight, big or small, is revenge. In movies and on television retaliation is the only act that results in satisfaction for the victim. Christ taught us, however, that true peace can only be found in forgiveness and reconciliation.

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 "In Christ there is no East or West" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 529).
- Sing together "Faithful Family" (*Gather*, GIA Publications, Inc., 300)
- Listen to the song, "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing."

Service

- **Diocese project:** Contact your diocese about peace and justice projects in your community. Find out if the projects include a youth component.

Sharing

- **In the news:** Publish the cartoons created as an Expressions activity in your church newsletter. If that is not possible, mount the cartoons on poster board and display them in your church.

Study

- **Interviews:** Contact school administrators and ask them about conflict resolution programs in the schools. Find out who mediates the discussions between youth and how mediators are trained.
- **Speaker:** Invite someone familiar with conflict resolution issues to speak to the youth. Ask the speaker to help youth identify their "conflict styles" and how to approach those who are estranged.

Voices

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

If [humans] were basically evil, who would bother to improve the world instead of giving it up as a bad job at the outset?

Van Wyck Brooks

We cannot do evil to others without doing it to ourselves.

Joseph Francois
Eduard Desmahis

Give me strength to be the first to tender the healing word and the renewal of friendship, that the bonds of amity and the flow of charity may be strengthened for the good of [all people] and the furthering of thine eternal, loving purpose.

Cecil Hunt

Going Forth

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

Leader: *Let us pray.*

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Human Family
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 815

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Were the youth able to explore their feelings of jealousy and anger? Can they see the destructiveness of feelings of superiority and distrust among families and friends? Are youth able to name constructive solutions for dealing with their anger? Are they able to value forgiveness more than revenge?

Noah: Starting Over

Covenant Ancestors

Objective

The focus of this session is God's desire for a new start after the destruction by the flood as related in the book of *Genesis*. Youth will discover that destruction can bring new life. They will be able to state how God's love can help them begin again after they have faced setbacks in their lives.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this section focuses on God's covenant with Noah after the flood. The key name is Noah; the key events are the flood, God's covenant, and the rainbow as the sign of God's covenant. For spiritual preparation, think about the times God has given you an opportunity to start over and the signs of God's promise or covenant in your life.

Commentary

The complete biblical account of the flood begins at *Genesis* 6:5 and continues through *Genesis* 9:28. The story begins with God's call to Noah to build the ark and follows with the 40 days of rain that floods the land. The number 40—days or years—is a term used in scripture to express a long period of time: for example, Moses and Israel wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, the 40 days of rain, and Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness after his baptism. God destroys the world with the flood because of humanity's wickedness, but keeps alive the creation by giving Noah a new start.

In the wake of the flood's massive destruction, God promises Noah a

new start. God's promise to Noah in *Genesis* 9:1-3 is similar to God's words to the first man and woman of creation in *Genesis* 1:28-30. God made a covenant or promise with Noah never to destroy all the earth through a flood again. The rainbow serves as a reminder today of this covenant. In the wake of destruction rose the opportunity for a new start and new life.

Christians believe that Jesus Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave are the ultimate expressions of God's desire for all people to have new life. Through baptism, water—once a means of destruction—is now the sign or symbol of hope in the participation in Christ's death and resurrection (*Romans* 6:3-6).

Personal Views

Reread the narrative of the flood in *Genesis*, and think or write about your own understanding of starting over. Have you seen God bring life and hope to situations you thought were lifeless and hopeless? Consider the times and places that God has granted you an opportunity to start over after a "flood" or disaster.

Just as God provided for the continuation of his creation with the ark, God provides openings and windows of opportunity in our lives for new starts. When have you experienced God's abundance in a moment of apparent disaster?

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—"I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."
—*Genesis* 9:13
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Charles Dudley Warner, Stanley Kunitz, The Way of Lao Tzu
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—The Flood (BCP, p. 289)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Then God said to Noah, "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." . . . I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

Genesis 8:15-17; 9:11-15

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Some of the young people in your class may voice deep feelings of despair about the events in their lives. What seems insignificant to adults (broken romances and unsuccessful athletic pursuits) may be of great importance to young people. Respect their feelings and emotions.
- Young people may focus on the "hows" of the flood and press the biblical narrative for details that are not explained: what was the evil behavior, how did Noah house and care for all the animals? The focus is not the how of the flood and ark but the why of the rainbow and God's care for creation and humanity.
- **Discussion Starter:** How did you feel after facing a natural or personal disaster?

Perhaps you, a loved one, or a friend has experienced a natural disaster: a flood, earthquake, fire, tornado or hurricane. Think about the feelings that accompany such a destructive event. Why is it difficult to remember God's promise and the hope of life after death? What signs or "rainbows" have you seen after a time of destruction that served as reminders of promise and the hope?

All things look to you O Lord, to give them their food in due season: look in mercy on your people, and hear our prayer for those whose lives and possessions are threatened by drought [flood, fire].
In your mercy restore your creation and heal our land. So guide and bless your people, that we may enjoy the fruits of the earth and give you thanks with grateful hearts, through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

In time of drought, flood or bushfire
A Prayer Book for Australia, p. 205

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Before class, hang Resource Poster No. 2 showing Noah's ark in the meeting room. Bring in different prisms and/or suncatchers and several sheets of plain, white paper. As youth enter, point out the picture on the poster and give them prisms or suncatchers to make rainbows from sunlight on the white paper. Flashlights or other bright lights will also create a rainbow effect.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Genesis 8:15-17 and 9:11-15* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*
Dear Lord, please forgive our sins,

and remember the covenant of the rainbow.

*Forgive our corrupt society,
and look past the violence that plagues us.*

*Understand that we will continue to try to do your will,
but as you well know we are not perfect.*

*Dear Lord, please forgive our sins,
and remember the covenant of the rainbow.*

Amen.

Philip, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from Genesis, chapter 8, verses 15 through 17 and chapter 9, verses 11 through 15.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging

(Time: 15-20 min)

During the week, start a "junk collection" for the Engaging activity. For example, collect bits of string, waste paper, (clean) food containers, jars, pieces of ribbon, cotton balls, etc. Dump the junk collection on the floor, and ask the youth to create something from the chaos. Encourage them to talk about the creation before they begin working. You may also want to bring in tape and glue to help them put pieces together.

Discuss how they felt about working with junk and the creation they made.

- Have you ever felt as though you were "junk?"
- Has there been an event in your life that you felt was "junk?"
- What are the "floods" in your life? Has someone you loved died? Have your parents or close friends gone through divorce? Have you experienced failure at school, while performing, or in sports?

- What can you do when you have bad feelings? Do you seek help from your friends, your parents, or other adults?

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

- **Crafts:** Make rainbow mosaics or suncatchers with broken pieces of glass or plastic. (Materials for this activity are available in most craft stores.) Explain that the original Tiffany lamps were first created from shards of broken glass.
- **Journal:** Write about any disastrous event in your life that left you feeling alone. Answer these questions: How did you confront the event? Where did you go for help? Do you still need help?

Games

- **Bubbles:** Go outside on a sunny day to see who can make the biggest bubble. Bring in jars of commercial bubble liquid and wands or make your own with Liquid dish detergent and loops of string. Look for the rainbows in the bubbles.

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch together either *Places in the Heart* or *The River*, movies about new life in the face of destruction.
- **Print:** Using write-on slides and fine-point colored markers, illustrate the story of Noah and the Ark as a slide presentation.

Music

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

- Sing together "Earth and all stars" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 412).
- Learn "God Has Spoken" (*Songs for Celebration*, Series IV, H-309).
- Listen to Bette Midler sing "The Rose," a song about hope.

Service

- **Relief:** Seek ways to assist those affected by floods or other natural disasters by bringing hope to those who have been left hopeless. Contact the local chapter of the American Red Cross to find out what is needed. For example, youth could plan a food collection or fund-raising activity.
- **Brighten a corner:** Take the mosaics or suncatchers made for the Expressions activity to a nursing home and given them to residents to hang in their windows. Take time to visit those receiving your gifts.

WEAVINGS

- This session could be scheduled before a Baptism to help youth understand better the symbol of water and the new life it represents.
- Water is an important symbol in most cultures. As Christians, we associate water with new life in the sacrament of Baptism and with the death and resurrection of Christ in the sacrament of Eucharist. God has the power to take a destructive force such as water and turn it into a life-giving resource.
- Floods continue to bring destruction all over the world, either from heavy rains or tropical storms and hurricanes. Some communities never recover from the devastation of high water. Ironically, the very cause of destruction also is necessary for life. Parts of the world, especially portions of Africa, have been devastated from long periods of drought. Pray for communities and countries that have experienced the pain of too much or too little water.

RESOURCE POSTER

- God's Promises (No. 2)

Sharing

- **Worship:** The Psalms contain many references to human feelings of despair in destruction and God's abundance. These are often known as Psalms of lament, such as Psalms 40; 51; 69; and 77. Write a class psalm or prayer that expresses despair and trust in God that can be used in a worship service at your church.
- **Storytime:** Tell the story of Noah and the Ark to a group of young children using the slides made in the media print activity.

Study

- **Mythology:** Find out what author and mythologist Joseph Campbell had to say about myths and flood stories from different cultures.
- **Physics:** Invite a scientist to talk about rainbows. Ask him or her to describe the conditions necessary for us to see rainbows in the sky. Compare these conditions with information we have about other planets in the solar system.
- **Museum:** Visit an art museum that features contemporary art. See if you can find creations that look as though they were made from "junk."

Voices

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

To own a bit of ground, to scratch it with a hoe, to plant seeds, and watch the renewal of life—this is the commonest delight of the race, the most satisfactory thing a [person] can do.
Charles Dudley Warner

Now, while the antler of the eaves
Liquifies, drop by drop, I brood
On a Christian thing: unless the leaves
Perish, the tree is not renewed.
Stanley Kunitz

To yield is to be preserved whole.
To be bent is to become straight.
To be empty is to be full.
To be worn out is to be renewed.
To be little is to possess.
To be plenty is to be perplexed.
The Way of Lao Tzu, #22

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 289 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*
Almighty God, you have placed in the skies the sign of your covenant with all living things: Grant that we, who are saved through water and the Spirit, may worthily offer to you our sacrifice of thanksgiving; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 289

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth describe ways that new life can emerge from destruction? Can they relate how God's love and promises, symbolized in the rainbow, can help them begin again after disastrous events? Can the youth identify people who can help them rebuild their lives?

Jacob & Esau: Deceiving a Brother

Covenant Ancestors

Objective

This session focuses on the lies and deceit that separated Jacob and Esau. Youth will be able to discuss the divisiveness that can destroy families and how taking sides and deceiving one another leads to separation.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session looks at the conflict between two brothers that began in their mother's womb. Key people are Jacob, Esau, Isaac, and Rebekah; a key word is reconciliation. For spiritual preparation think about the times in your own life that lies have separated you from someone you love.

Commentary

The conflict between Jacob and Esau is one of three significant struggles in Jacob's life. The other two involve conflict between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban, and Jacob's spiritual conflict with God. For this lesson, it is helpful to read the entire story of Jacob and Esau, particularly Genesis 25:19-34; 26:34-28:10; and 32:3-33:20. As the story unfolds, Jacob and Esau are twins, born of Rebekah and Isaac. The brothers struggle with each other in Rebekah's womb even before they are born. Bewildered, Rebekah is told by God:

"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger." *Genesis 25:23*

A parallel is established between the story and Israel's later relationship

with a neighboring people, the Edomites.

Esau is born first with Jacob clinging to his heel. Interestingly, Esau is named for his appearance as "red, all his body like a hairy mantle." This is most likely an insulting pun upon the people of Edom, which means red in Hebrew. Jacob receives his name from the meaning "he takes by the heel," or "he supplants." As the firstborn and because of his preference for hunting, Esau receives his father's favor. Rebekah favors Jacob who is described as more civilized and domestic than his brother. The divisiveness of the brothers, therefore, quickly spreads to the parents.

As young men, Jacob tricks Esau out of his birthright, forcing Esau to foolishly trade his birthright for a meal, another insult to the Edomites. This event becomes very important as Jacob later earns the blessing of his father Isaac, intended for Esau. When the mistake is discovered, Isaac refuses to give a duplicate blessing to Esau, despite Esau's pleas. Instead, his blessing for Esau is more a curse, the fate for the people of Edom. Jacob flees to his mother's native land in order to escape Esau's anger, thus destroying the family nucleus.

Reconciliation between the brothers comes a generation later as Jacob returns to his homeland with a new family. There is obvious distrust among the brothers, an indication that the damage done earlier left permanent scars. They are little more than cordial to one

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing."*
Genesis 27:35
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—James Weldon Johnson, Proverb of Mexico, Goethe, Sir Walter Scott
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Confession of Sin (BCP, p. 79)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

So he went in to his father, and said, "My father"; and he said, "Here I am; who are you, my son?" Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me." . . . As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. He also prepared savory food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father sit up and eat of his son's game, so that you may bless me." His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your firstborn son, Esau." Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and blessed he shall be!" When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, me also, father!" But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing."

Genesis 27:18-19, 30-35

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Be careful about overemphasizing the issues of guilt and sin raised in this lesson. Some youth don't feel guilty while others don't like to be labeled sinners.
- If you use the term "reconciliation," be sure youth understand its meaning.
- **Discussion Starter:** How did you feel when you discovered a person you trusted had lied to you? Did you forgive him or her?

another as they continue to live separate lives. Similar feelings of superiority, racism and distrust describe Israel's uneasy relationship with Edom.

For further study: See Gary Smally and John Trent's *The Blessing and Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen.

Personal Views

Readers are often baffled by Isaac's unwillingness to give Esau a "good" blessing or to rescind his blessing for Jacob. Today the blessing sounds like a wishful prayer of a father for his son. We feel he should grant the same fortune for both sons. However, to the Hebrews blessings carried the authority of God's Word and were not retractable. Isaac intended to give his blessing to his firstborn in the same way he meant to give his entire estate to Esau after Isaac's death. The blessing was no more retractable than a modern will of the owner of an estate. Furthermore, having given everything good he had to Jacob, there was nothing left to give to Esau. Esau's blessing, then, can only be a curse.

In our lives blessings and curses are often just as irrevocable. We can try to take back our words or apologize for what we have said. Often, however, we cannot rewind the tape or undo what has been done. We can only seek forgiveness and reconciliation. The old adage "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me" has proven to be false. Words can be very damaging and sometimes permanent in their destructiveness.

Be sensitive not only to the struggles youth experience among siblings, family members and friends, but also to conflicts in your own life.

May God in his love enlighten your heart, that you may remember in truth all your sins and his unfailing mercy. *Amen.*

From Reconciliation
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 449

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

After the youth enter the room, pass out black paper and black pens. Paper run through a copier with the lid up is best suited for this exercise, although construction paper will also work. Ask youth to write down incidents in which they have lied to a family member. Assure them that nothing they write will be read aloud or collected.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find Genesis 27:18-19 and 30-35 in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God: Please help those who live their lives in deceit. Please help them to see the positive roles that loyalty, trust, and obedience have in carrying out your will in everyday living. Amen.

Andrew, Grade 8

Lector: *A reading from Genesis, chapter 27, verses 18 through 19 and 30 through 35.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Before class, collect a sack of feathers. If possible, take youth outside to open the Engaging activity. After everyone is outside (or standing in a circle inside), throw the feathers into the air and ask the youth to quickly gather them. (A windy day is ideal; if the activity is indoors, bring a fan to help scatter the feathers.)

Compare the feathers to words that cannot easily be taken back. Discuss the story of Isaac's blessing, and how he could not take his words back even after discovering the deceit. Ask the youth if the lies they recorded on the black pieces of paper are like the feathers they had to pick up. Were the lies difficult to put "to right"? Use the questions below to guide your discussion.

- Have you ever been deceived or lied to by family members or friends?
- What are the consequences of lies? (Some youth may be willing to share a personal experience.)
- How can two people separated by lies and distrust come together again?

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

- **Creative writing:** Write a poem or narrative about lies and deceit, describing your feelings as either the liar or the deceived.
- **The Oprah-Sally-Geraldo Show:** Plan a role play using the format seen on television talk shows with the theme of sibling rivalry: "my brother tricked me." Assign youth to be the host, panelists, or audience members. Give the panelists time to come up with a modern version of the Jacob/Esau conflict, and encourage the audience to ask the panelists hard questions.

Games

- **Shell game:** Using shells or small paper cups and a pea (penny or other small object), play the shell game. With sleight of hand, try to confuse the youth about the location of the pea. The first time, move the pea in the open with everyone watching. The second time, ask them to close their eyes. The third time, ask half the group to close their eyes. How did you feel when you played the game? How do we use deceit in "the open" and in "the dark"?

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:** A movie that explores the topics of trust and betrayal is *Stand By Me*. This film is rated R for mature language; make sure it is appropriate for your group or use pre-selected scenes.
- **Print:** Pass out several weekly television guides from the magazine or newspaper. Ask the youth to look for program listings that indicate the program is about lies or deceit. Why does this topic attract so much attention?

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

WEAVINGS

- This is a confessional, introspective session that can stimulate discussion of a common theme among teenagers: lies and deceit. The goal is to move beyond the false and focus on taking responsibility for one's own actions.
- Reconciliation is defined as the act of being no longer opposed or to bring into agreement and harmony. In an orchestra, harmony cannot be achieved if the instruments are not in tune with each other. Similarly, families and friends cannot act in concert if they are separated by lies or deceit.
- Civil strife within a country can be as divisive as separation between brothers. The seething anger among closely related people in Ireland, Bosnia, Sudan, and other nations results in terrorism and tragedy. Pray for peoples in lands torn by internal strife.

music making. Seek out musicians within youth, church, and community groups to sing and play along.

- Sing or read the hymn, “Rock of ages, cleft for me” (*The Hymnal* 1982, 685).
- Sing “Open my eyes that I may see,” from the *Baptist Hymnal*, 358, about recognizing God in our lives.
- Listen to the song “He’s Not Heavy, He’s My Brother.”

Service

- **Caring for children:** Contact a single parent organization or group in your community or church. Offer to provide child care during a meeting or plan a party for children of single parents.

Sharing

- **In Worship:** With the clergy, plan a service of reconciliation for families based on the Rite of Reconciliation in *The Book of Common Prayer*, beginning on page 446.

Study

- **Find out more:** Read more about Jacob, particularly his parallel conflict with Laban and his struggle with God. Look for reconciliation at the end of the stories.

- **Comparisons:** Look for other parallels in the Bible that favor the younger brother over the older. For examples, look up the story of Joseph and his brothers, David and his brothers, the parable of the prodigal son, and Jesus’ emphasis on “the first will be last and the last will be first.”

Voices

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

Young man, Young man,
Your arm's too short to box with
God
James Weldon Johnson

Everyone is the child of his or
her own works.
Proverb of Mexico

We are never deceived: we de-
ceive ourselves.
Goethe

O, what a tangled web we
weave,
When first we practise to de-
ceive!
Sir Walter Scott

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the Confession of Sin on page 79 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Confession of Sin
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 79

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 identify the reasons lies are so destructive in families and among friends? Do they understand how taking sides and deception lead to separation? Can they begin to list ways to heal this separation?

Miriam: Giving Thanks

Covenant Ancestors

Objective

This session focuses on the Israelites' thanksgiving to God after the successful crossing of the Red Sea as they fled the Egyptians. Youth will explore the importance of thanksgiving and praise in their relationships with God. They will be able to express thanks in different ways, and name the people and events in their lives for which they are thankful.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary briefly describes the events leading up to the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea. Key names are Pharaoh, Moses, Aaron and Miriam; key events are the Passover, crossing the Red Sea, and giving thanks to God.

Commentary

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for many generations, mistreated and oppressed by their masters. God heard their cries and raised up a leader whose name was Moses. With the help of his brother Aaron, Moses repeatedly asked Pharaoh to free God's people. The Pharaoh refused each time even after a number of plagues. Finally after the death of every firstborn, the Pharaoh freed the people of Israel. The Jewish passover celebrates this event and how God spared the firstborn of the Israelites who had marked their doors with the blood of a lamb.

The Israelites left with the belief that God had delivered them from bondage. The Pharaoh and his officials, however, had a change of heart and decided to pursue the

Israelites. When the Egyptian troops approached, the Israelites were terrified because they were stranded at the banks of the Red Sea.

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the waters back with a strong east wind. The Israelites crossed safely on dry land, but the Egyptians continued their pursuit. On the other side Moses again stretched out his hand over the sea. The waters returned quickly, covering the Egyptian chariots.

After the successful crossing came the great celebration for this act of God and the deliverance from bondage. On this great day by the sea, God had saved God's people with a mighty hand. Miriam, Moses' sister, took a tambourine and began to sing and dance with the other women. Miriam's song of thanksgiving and celebration (*Exodus 15:21*) is one of the oldest texts in the Bible, similar to the Song of Moses beginning at *Exodus 15:1*. This defining moment in Israel's history was truly a joyous event, profound in every sense. Praise of God was the only suitable response.

For further study: Read the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt in *Exodus*, chapters 5-15.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Martin Woodrow Amos in *People from the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."*
—Exodus 15:21
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Cicero, Christina Georgina Rossetti, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Judith Jamison
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea (BCP, p. 289)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

Exodus 15:20-21

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Don't get sidetracked into a discussion of the scientific reasons for the parting of the Red Sea. Thankfulness and praise to God are the focus of this session.
- These sounds of praise and thanksgiving could "raise the roof!" Try to schedule this session at a time and place the youth can be exuberantly noisy.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever been so happy you had to sing and dance?

Personal Views

Being thankful to God sounds so basic, but its importance can be overlooked. What does it mean to be truly thankful for God's mercy in our lives? Of course we don't all experience the terror and excitement of the Red Sea crossing as the Israelites did, but most of us have been aware of God's many blessings in our lives. When something good happens, how do you respond? When you feel that God has guided or protected you, do you spontaneously give thanks?

Think of a situation in which you felt God's presence that you could share with your class. Was there ever a time in which you felt God delivered you from a dangerous situation? How did you thank God?

It is easy in our culture to think we have control over our lives, especially with recent medical and technological advances. How often do we give God credit for being a part of our lives—in good times and in bad? Remind youth that it is not only appropriate but also necessary to give thanks to our gracious God for those times in which we are protected or delivered.

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

Prayer for mission
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 124

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Before class gather material for youth to make instruments. You will need paper plates, stapler, dried beans, small bells, string, rubber

bands, strips of cardboard or plastic, pencils, and empty ice cream cartons.

Ask the youth to make rattles by stapling two paper plates together after putting a handful of beans between them. Make tambourines by tying small bells onto two paper plates that have been stapled together. Make a drum with paper plates and ice cream cartons; use pencils for drumsticks. To make stringed instruments, stretch rubber bands on a strip of cardboard or plastic.

Play a praise and worship tape in the background to set the mood, and display Resource Poster No. 3 of the dance of Miriam.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find *Exodus 15:20-21* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, thank you for being there when we need you the most. Thank you for listening when we need to be heard. We thank you for loving us, even when we are wronged. We praise you for the lives you have given us and the great things you have done for us. We appreciate everything we have received from you, and give thanksgiving for it. Amen.

Catherine, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from Exodus, chapter 15, verses 20 through 21.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging

(Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the youth to open *The Book of Common Prayer* to the Easter Vigil service that begins on page 285. Briefly describe the service and when it is used. (See notes on page 284 of the BCP.) An important part of the service is

the retelling of the story about God's covenant relationship with the Hebrew people in The Liturgy of the Word, pages 287 through 291.

Ask half the youth to find the section in the service that relates to the Lector's text. Ask the remaining youth to look up the service of Holy Baptism in *The Book of Common Prayer* beginning on page 299 and find the reference to the crossing of the Red Sea. Suggest they look for references to water to begin their search (see page 306, *Thanksgiving over the Water*).

Retell the basics of the Exodus story from information in the Commentary. Point out the importance of the exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea to both the Jewish and Christian faiths.

Use the following questions to guide your discussion.

- Why was Miriam so thankful?
- How do we show our thankfulness to God?
- Why is the symbol of water so important?

One way people have worshipped God from very early times is through music. Turn on the tape of praise music that was playing during the Coming Together activity. Ask the youth to take the instruments they made and accompany the music. Encourage them to sing along if they know the words.

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

- **Dance:** Choreograph a dance of praise. Talk about what Miriam's dance might have looked like. Use the instruments made in the Coming Together activity during the dance.
- **Costumes:** Some youth may wish to design costumes for the dancers. Either make the designs on paper or with available materials. Pieces of bright cloth or scarves can be used in making costumes.
- **Psalms:** Write a psalm of praise that lists praiseworthy acts of God.

Games

- **Musical chairs:** Play a game of musical chairs using the praise music from the Coming Together activity. As youth are eliminated from the game, ask them to pick up an instrument and accompany the music.

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch the scene from *The Ten Commandments* that portrays the crossing of the Red Sea.
- **Print:** Examine closely Resource Poster No. 3 of Miriam's dance. What symbols can you find? Why did the artist choose the colors you see?

Music

Music is important for today's youth and can be an integral part of

WEAVINGS

- This session could be scheduled during the Easter season or around the Thanksgiving holiday. If your church has an Easter Vigil service, encourage youth to attend as a group.
- Praise is the offering of grateful homage in words or song as an act of worship. Often we approach God with our list of needs and neglect to thank God for his abundance and continuing care. This week write down the petitions you make to God. Be aware of how God answers your prayers.
- Most cultures set aside time during the year to be thankful. Often these celebrations coincide with the growing seasons, especially harvest times. In the United States, more people travel during the Thanksgiving holiday than at any other time of year. Compare our holiday with celebrations in other lands.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Miriam's Dance (No. 3)

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

- Sing together "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 710). Use your instruments as an accompaniment.
- Sing the "I Want to Praise Your Name" (*Gather*, GIA Publications, Inc., 382).
- Listen to the song "Freedom," by Richie Havens.

Service

- **Freedom:** Contact the Amnesty International organization and find out how the youth can participate in a letter-writing campaign.

Sharing

- **Make a joyful noise:** Help a group of young children make instruments similar to those made for the Coming Together activity. Encourage the youth and children to play the instruments and improvise a dance of thanksgiving.
- **Dance:** If appropriate for your church, find a time during a worship service for the youth to perform the dance created for the Expressions activity.

Study

- **Shavuot:** Invite Jewish friends to visit the class to share information about the Jewish celebration of Shavuot, a holiday celebrating the harvest festival.

Voices

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

A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but the parent of all other virtues.
Cicero

Were there no God, we would be in this glorious world with grateful hearts: and no one to thank.
Christina Georgina Rossetti

Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God.
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Once you have danced, you always dance. You can't deny the gifts that God sends your way.
Judith Jamison

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 289 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

O God, whose wonderful deeds of old shine forth even to our own day, you once delivered by the power of your mighty arm your chosen people from slavery under Pharaoh, to be a sign for us of the salvation of all nations by the water of Baptism: Grant that all the peoples of the earth may be numbered among the offspring of Abraham, and rejoice in the inheritance of Israel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 289

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 express thanksgiving with joy? Can they begin to see the importance of praise in their relationships with God? Can they name events or people in their lives for which they are thankful? Are youth able to name different ways to express praise and thanksgiving?

Joshua: Claiming the Land

Covenant Ancestors

Objective

The focus of this session is following God's commands. Youth will be able to explain the importance of Joshua's spiritual leadership as he brought his people to the promised land. They will explore the importance of patience and trusting in God and themselves in achieving goals that may look impossible.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session focuses on Joshua and how he led the Hebrews into the promised land. The key name is Joshua; key places are Canaan, Egypt, and Asia. For spiritual preparation consider how God has always helped his people conquer seemingly impossible tasks as discussed in Personal Views.

Commentary

The Book of Joshua opens where the Book of Deuteronomy leaves off. Moses is dead and Joshua has been elevated as his successor. It is Joshua's task to lead the Hebrew people into the promised land, known as Canaan or Palestine.

Until now the Hebrews have been a nomadic people wandering for 40 years in the region between Egypt and Canaan. The Book of Numbers indicates that none of the adults who were over 20 years of age when they left Egypt were permitted to enter Canaan because of their disobedience to God's law (Numbers 14). They had all died by the time Joshua was positioned to lead the new generation of Hebrews across the Jordan River.

Canaan was already inhabited by people with a pagan religion and

culture. Joshua's conquest was often violent and destructive of the native people and their culture. However, Canaan was historically the site of frequent conflict between warring empires. Its geographical location between Egypt and Asia made it an inevitable battleground during war and a busy trade route during peace. Joshua's conquest of the region and the settlement of the 12 Hebrew tribes brought stability, law, and governance where there had been none before.

Joshua's success depended largely on belief in God's intervention and power. Failure was also seen as the result of God's participation or lack of it. When the people obeyed God's law, they were rewarded with victory. When they disobeyed, they were punished.

The lesson for the Hebrews in the Book of Joshua is that the land of Canaan was a gift promised by God. Holding on to the land was dependant upon the Hebrew's commitment to the law and to God. The conquest of Canaan may have seemed impossible to the Hebrews because realistically it was impossible. Only through God could the Hebrew dream of becoming a nation become possible and real.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbutt's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.*—Joshua 1:6
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Harry S. Truman, Thomas Carlyle, Proverb from Panama
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For Our Country (BCP, p. 820)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them.

Joshua 1:1-6

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- The Book of Joshua is filled with violence. However, the Hebrews felt they were justified because they believed they were acting according to God's will. Be prepared for youth to question a loving God condoning terrible acts of violence.
- The focus of this lesson is our dependence on God to help us with seemingly impossible tasks. Emphasize the importance of **not** using God's favor to justify sinful behavior.
- **Discussion Starter:** Can you think of some event in your life that occurred even though you thought it would be impossible?

Personal Views

Historically, land has always been crucial to the strength and vitality of nations. Next to religious beliefs, it is one of the most critical issues in war, as people vie to protect or expand their borders.

The Book of Joshua is not exceptional in its harsh treatment of the native population. However, it is important to recognize that the story is told by a people who felt they were acting according to the will of God. Anyone who opposed the Hebrews opposed God. Their treatment of the Canaanites was based on the Canaanite's rejection of God's will.

As Americans we must also consider the "conquest" of our own soil. The native Americans were systematically and violently pushed westward as the American frontier grew. The native people and culture were sacrificed for what the nation considered its "manifest destiny."

While each of us must come to terms with violence in the Bible and our own history, the importance of both stories goes beyond the destruction and death. The stories of the Hebrews facing huge armies and walled cities as well as tales of hardships endured by early settlers can help us in our own faith journeys.

Think about your own willingness to turn to God when you are faced with an impossible task, such as placing a loved one in a nursing home, facing an unreasonable boss, making decisions that could change your entire family's life. This week ask God to help you tackle a problem that you cannot solve alone.

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and

ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Guidance
Lesser Feasts and Fasts, p. 21

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Before the group arrives, tape three large sheets of paper on the wall at the front of the room to be used as graffiti boards. At the top mark one sheet "The World," another sheet "The Community," and the third sheet "My Life." Set out markers and crayons nearby.

As the youth enter, ask them to think of at least one impossible dream for the world, the community, or their own lives. (For example, peace in Ireland, an end to homelessness in the community, passing algebra.) Ask them to write their dreams on the graffiti boards as boldly as possible. Encourage them to illustrate their dreams if they have time.

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

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, give us the strength and courage to know that we can achieve all our goals through you. teach us as you did Joshua that if we are strong in our belief and patient and trusting in you, in time any goal can be achieved.

Matt, Grade 9

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

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging (Time: 15-20 min)

Ask the group to look at the graffiti board they created for the Coming Together. Tell the story of Joshua and how he led the Hebrews into the promised land. Describe the obstacles they faced and how they turned to God for help. After a brief discussion, let the group select one dream from each category: the world, the community, their own lives.

Ask the youth to look at the three dreams they selected and outline three steps to achieving each dream. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- What makes each of these dreams seem impossible?
- Does God sometimes ask us to be patient? How good are you at waiting?
- Why did the dream of the Hebrew people to have their own homeland seem impossible? Did they let overwhelming odds stop them?
- Does God ever help us redefine our dreams? Does failure sometimes lead us to new opportunities with God's help?

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

- **Illustrations:** Take down the three sheets of graffiti created for the Coming Together activity. Illustrate each sheet with drawings or pictures from magazines.
- **Shields:** Look at the shield depicted in Resource Poster No. 4. Ask the youth to design a symbolic shield that will protect them as they pursue one of the

dreams discussed in the Engaging activity.

- **Song writing:** Rewrite the words to "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" to fit your own dreams.

Games

- **Trust and obey:** Divide the group into pairs. Ask one partner to put on a blindfold. Ask those without blindfolds to lead their partners on a tour of the church or through a parking lot. Halfway through the tour, change roles. Did you run into any obstacles? Did you trust your partner to keep you safe? How is this game like having faith in God?
- **Word association:** Gather the group in a circle. Ask a youth to say one word of a dream discussed in the Engaging activity. Ask the next person to say the first word that comes to mind. Continue around the circle to see where the "dream" leads them.

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch the movie *The Man of La Mancha* about having impossible dreams.
- **Print:** Look through recent news magazines or newspapers for stories about situations that seem to have no solution. Cut out the articles and place them on the floor at the end of the session. Ask the youth to stand on the articles and pray for the people caught up in these impossible situations.

WEAVINGS

- The same struggle for Canaan—now called Palestine—exists today. Modern Israel only came into existence in 1947, after the Jewish people spent almost 2,000 years dispersed throughout the world without a homeland. The region of Palestine Israel now calls home has always been populated by different sects of people: Christian, Muslim, and Jew. The conflict in Palestine today is a struggle not only for land, but also for the rights of Jews and Muslims to exist as a people. Both sides claim to have God on their side. Pray that God will be with the leaders of both sides as they try to find a way to live in peace.
- When the Berlin wall was erected over 30 years ago, it seemed impregnable. However, thousands of people all over the world prayed that somehow it would be destroyed. Hardly anyone, including those in policy think-tanks, dreamed that the people themselves would one day dismantle the wall. God can accomplish the impossible when we let God lead us.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Sun and Moon (No. 4)

Music

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

- Sing or read "God of our fathers, whose almighty hand" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 718). Could the Hebrews have sung this song as they crossed into the Promised Land?
- Sing together "World Peace Prayer" (*Gather*, GIA Publications, 523) for the closing of the session.
- Listen to "The Impossible Dream," from *The Man from La Mancha*.

Service

- **First steps:** Look back at the steps listed by the youth in the Engaging activity to achieve an "impossible" dream. Take the first step as a group. For example youth could write a letter to a member of Congress or send a care package to an organization or impoverished family.

Sharing

- **Graffiti:** Display the graffiti boards created by the youth for community and world needs at a parish outreach fair.
- **Working together:** Encourage the youth to attend a meeting of the parish outreach committee to find out if the parish could join the youth in a project to reach an "impossible dream."

Study

- **Palestine:** Learn more about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the nation of Israel was formed in 1947.
- **Crusades:** Read about the Christian crusades to the Holy Land during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. What was the purpose of the crusades? Do you think the Christians were following God's will?

Voices

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

I studied the lives of great men and famous women; and I found that the men and women who got to the top were those who did the jobs they had in hand, with everything they had of energy and enthusiasm and hard work.

Harry S. Truman

Show me the [person] you honor, and I will know what kind of [person] you are.

Thomas Carlyle

Among the weak the strongest is the one who doesn't forget his weakness.

Proverb from Panama

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 820 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in thy Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For our Country

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 820

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Do the youth know who Joshua is and how he led the Hebrews to the promised land? Can they describe how his spiritual leadership was important in getting the Hebrews to conquer their fears? Are youth able to identify the importance of patience and trust in their faith in God? Can they find ways to begin to solve seemingly impossible tasks?

Samson & Delilah: Ill-Fated Love Covenant Ancestors

Objective

Youth will discover that the emotions of love can sometimes blind people to the obvious. Youth will also be able to list ways people can be lured by others to lose sight of the source of their strength.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session focuses on the story of Samson and Delilah from the book of Judges. Key names are Samson, Delilah, and the Philistines. For spiritual preparation, think about how God has helped you in situations calling for difficult choices.

Commentary

Prior to the historic kingships of Saul and David, as depicted in I and II Kings, Israel was ruled by a series of judges. For the most part, these judges were military leaders that governed a loosely knit confederacy of the twelve tribes of Israel. Military actions at that time were primarily sporadic border skirmishes against neighboring states. In addition to military leadership, Israel's judges also had a judiciary role. They settled internal disputes in a legal capacity, and their authority extended beyond their local tribes across the whole confederacy. They also presided as mediators when the tribes convened for covenant renewal festivals.

Samson was unique among the judges in that he was not involved in significant military encounters. He did, however, command great strength that served as the instrument of his many and marvelous exploits. Theologically, Samson's strength was due to his *charisma*,

the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit was not with him, symbolized by his hair, his strength was lost, and he became a weak and vulnerable man. The story of his tragic end depicts the consequences of disregarding God and following his desire for a beautiful woman, Delilah. His choice not only cost him his life but also threatened the security of Israel.

As the story is told, Delilah was hired by the Philistines to seduce Samson into betraying the secret of his great strength. At this time, the Philistines were just beginning to threaten the Hebrew tribes. Three times Samson lied to Delilah. Although he was handed over to the Philistines, the real source of his strength was not jeopardized, and he escaped without harm. Then, under persistent pressure from Delilah and in a move of remarkable weakness, Samson revealed his true secret. Delilah betrayed him to the Philistines, who cut off his hair, gouged out his eyes, and threw him in prison. The Spirit of the Lord returned to him only as his hair grew back. Samson died in a final feat of strength destroying both the Philistines and himself in one courageous act.

There is no question that Samson understood the stakes at risk. The best explanation for his recklessness was that his desire for Delilah blinded him to the risks involved in trusting her. His choice to make himself vulnerable despite the obvious pattern of her behavior showed how Samson was willing to

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—Then she said to him, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me three times now and have not told me what makes your strength so great."
—*Judges 16:15*
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Proverb of Bolivia, Plato, Oscar Wilde, Ludwig von Beethoven
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—A Collect for the Renewal of Life (BCP, p. 99)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

After this he fell in love with a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. The lords of the Philistines came to her and said to her, "Coax him, and find out what makes his strength so great, and how we may overpower him, so that we may bind him in order to subdue him; and we will each give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." So Delilah said to Samson, "Please tell me what makes your strength so great, and how you could be bound, so that one could subdue you." . . . Finally, after she had nagged him with her words day after day, and pestered him, he was tired to death. So he told her his whole secret, and said to her, "A razor has never come upon my head; for I have been a nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head were shaved, then my strength would leave me; I would become weak, and be like anyone else." When Delilah realized that he had told her his whole secret, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "This time come up, for he has told his whole secret to me." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her, and brought the money in their hands. She let him fall asleep on her lap; and she called a man, and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. He began to weaken, and his strength left him. Then she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" When he awoke from his sleep, he thought, "I will go out as at other times, and shake myself free." But he did not know that the Lord had left him.

Judges 16:4-6, 16-20

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- While the goal of this lesson plan is not primarily to discuss sex or the dangers of sex, it can help the youth identify their personal strengths, given by God, and to appreciate how those strengths can be lost through careless decisions.
- Asking youth to list or identify their strengths often results in a vacuum of silence, especially when youth feel vulnerable. The leader may need to help them identify their strengths and gifts, such as smiles easily, likes little children, many friends, etc.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever let someone talk you into doing something you knew was bad for you?

risk everything for her. He rejected his responsibilities and betrayed himself and the security of Israel for the love of a woman.

Personal Views

This lesson is an excellent opportunity to address in a Christian environment sexuality among teenagers. The story of Samson and Delilah shows how sexual desire and the emotions of love can overpower a person's sense of right and wrong. The risks and consequences of sex are often ignored or undervalued by youth for the sake of lust or simply for acceptance. The issue here is not merely the temptation of sex, but also the temptation of succumbing to peer pressure. Samson's weakness is not just his lust for women, but also his vulnerability to Delilah's persistent and manipulative pressure.

How should a young person respond to the words, "If you love me, you'll have sex with me?" Or even, "If you love me, you'll do drugs with me?" Teenagers caught in this situation may have difficulty understanding the long-term repercussions of choices they make. Many fail to weigh the possibility of contracting incurable diseases, such as AIDS, becoming pregnant, or jeopardizing their future. They have an especially difficult time appreciating the emotional drain sex can have on their spirituality and self-worth. Instead, their priorities adapt to survive the present situation, i.e. keep the love affair going, rather than looking toward the future.

It is important for teenagers to value their individual strengths in order to appreciate the consequences of losing them. On the basis of his choice, Samson valued Delilah's affection more than he valued God's favor, symbolized by

his hair. The consequence of his choice was to lose God's favor, not indefinitely, but long enough to change his life forever.

Q. What are we by nature?

A. We are part of God's creation, made in the image of God.

Q. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

A. It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 845

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Collect popular fashion and teen magazines. Ask the youth to cut out pictures of ads depicting sexual images. As they work, ask the youth to respond to the pictures.

- What is so luring about these pictures?
- Is there any harm in publishing ads like these?
- Do these images threaten Christian values? Is God present in any of them?

When everyone is present, ask the youth to turn to *Judges 16:4-6, 16-20* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2):

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, we pray that you will guide us when we are faced with making decisions concerning love. Please help us to determine what is true and what is false and help us to hold onto what is important. Amen.

Lauren, Grade 9

Lector: *A reading from the book of Judges, chapter 16, verses 4 through 6 and 16 through 20.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging

(Time: 15-20 min)

At the front of the room, hang Resource Poster No. 5 depicting Samson and Delilah. Some young people may have heard the story of Samson and Delilah; others may have heard references to the pair. Ask them to fill in parts of the story not included in the Lector's Text. Look up Judges 16 to see if their memories match the story in the Bible.

Encourage youth to share their thoughts about this story. Use the questions below to guide your discussion.

- What is Samson's source of power?
- How did he lose it? What made him give it up?
- Do you know someone, either a celebrity or a friend, who had it all and lost it through carelessness or a poor decision?
- What are your strengths or sources of power?
- How could sex, or any other temptation threaten your strengths?

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

- **Letters:** Write a letter to a friend whose choices are destroying his or her strengths. List in the letter the gifts this person has.
- **Diary entries:** Write about difficult situations you are encountering and the choices you have had to make. Have others tried to lure you into doing something you did

not want to do? How did you act in this situation? Pass out envelopes and encourage youth to take home their answers and write down additional ideas as new situations arise.

- **Role play:** Divide into small groups and ask youth to think of a situation where youth may be tempted to give up what is important. Examples: the only person in a group who is not drinking alcohol; leaving a party because of questionable activities; not cheating on an exam.
- **"If you love me, you'll. . .":** Let youth of both sexes play the role of the partner who wants to have sex and the one who tries to say no.

Games

- **To tell the truth:** Ask the youth to sit in a circle. Tell them to come up with three strengths or traits that describe themselves: two that are true and one that is false. (For example, I am a good swimmer; I like to read; I have been sky diving.) Let each person share his or her traits; the group must decide which are true or false.

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:** Tape a current television show and/or commercials that have high sexual content. Watch the show together and ask youth to look for situations in which choices are being made that might affect the future. Stop the

WEAVINGS

- This session could be used in conjunction with a youth group meeting about sexuality.
- Sexuality, defined as having the character of being either male or female, is one of the gifts from God. We are designed, men and women, to work together. How we use this gift, however, is up to us.
- Youth are aware of young people in our culture who lost everything although they seemed to have it all. Poor decisions and pressure from others led gifted artists such as Kurt Cobain of *Nirvana* and actor River Phoenix to deaths through drug overdoses. Be ready to discuss the pressures young people face and constructive ways to deal with these pressures.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Samson and Delilah (No. 5)

tape and discuss possible outcomes before continuing.

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 the second verse of "Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 559). What weakness keeps you from following Christ?
- Sing together "Only in God" (*Glory and Praise, Vol. 2*, 128).
- Listen to the song "Fire" by Bruce Springsteen or "Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places" by Mickey Gilley.

Service

- **Letter campaign:** Write a letter to a company or an advertising agency criticizing or questioning the use of sex to sell a product.

Sharing

- **Acting out:** Refine the role plays described in the Expressions activities and perform them at a meeting of the youth group. Ask a person who counsels young people to speak to the group about sexuality.

Study

- **Samson:** Before he met Delilah, Samson had many exploits. Read his story beginning in the thirteenth chapter of Judges. What other characters in the Bible had mothers who were barren but gave birth after praying to God?
- **Judges:** The Hebrews were led by a series of judges before Saul was made king. In a Bible dictionary find out who they were and what they did.

Voices

Love and prudence are absolutely incompatible.
Proverb of Bolivia

Whatever deceives seems to produce a magical enchantment.
Plato

It is difficult not to be unjust to what one loves.
Oscar Wilde

Love demands all, and has a right to all.
Ludwig von Beethoven

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Turn to page 99 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet). Read it in unison.

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

A Collect for the Renewal of Life
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 99

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

While this lesson begins with sexual images, the goal is to affirm the various strengths that teenagers have as gifts from God. Do the youth recognize their strengths as gifts? Are they aware that desire can jeopardize their future and their relationship with God? Can they name ways others might lure them into making bad decisions?

Elijah: Standing for God

Covenant Ancestors

Objective

This session focuses on Elijah's faithfulness to God in the face of death and rejection by his people. Youth will be able to express ways that the life God calls them to may be at odds with the culture in which they live. They will focus on how God helps them face the difficulties they encounter by rejecting lifestyles and norms in the media and among their peers.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session highlights Elijah's engagement with the priests of Baal at Mount Carmel. Key names are Elijah, Baal, Ahab, and Jezebel. For spiritual preparation think about your beliefs and how they are challenged by the world in which we live.

Commentary

The story of Elijah begins in Chapter 17 of *I Kings* and continues through the second chapter of *II Kings*. Elijah is one of those colorful Old Testament prophets who always seems to get people's attention. Yet very little is known about his birth or early life. He probably prophesied some time in the ninth century BCE, over 800 years before the birth of Christ. Elijah is portrayed as God's answer to King Ahab and his wife Jezebel who had substituted the worship of Baal, a fertility god, for the one true God.

Chapter 18 of *I Kings* tells the story of Elijah's engagement in a contest with the prophets of Baal, one of several Canaanite gods often worshipped through cruel ceremonies. Many Israelites had tried to

conform to the pressures of their neighbors to worship Baal, but Elijah knew that the God of Abraham wanted full commitment from the chosen people. Baal worship in any form was prohibited by God.

The Hebrew people wanted the benefits from their covenant with God, while still paying tribute to Baal. Elijah was the prophet who stepped forward to show the people of Israel that there is only one true God. He reminded the Israelites that God expects full devotion from the chosen people.

In the contest, Elijah's God proves to be far superior to Baal. While the altar to Baal remained unlit by fire even with the dancing and incantations of the hoard of priests, the altar Elijah built for God was consumed by the "fire of the Lord," even though it had been doused repeatedly with water. Could Elijah's victory turn hearts back to God? By standing firmly against the harmful worship practices, Elijah embraced the difficult task of meeting the damaging trends head-on. Popular or not, he spoke God's word and encouraged a return to the true God.

For further study: Read *A Generation At Risk* by Robert DeMoss.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Martin Woodrow Amos in *People from the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—"Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."
—I Kings 18:37
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, La Rochefoucauld
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—For Young Persons (BCP, p. 829)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did not answer him a word. . . . At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back." Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The Lord indeed is God; the Lord indeed is God."

I Kings 18:21, 36-39

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Be prepared to help youth discern when good things become false gods. For example, involvement in sports can be a positive, healthy experience. However, when a particular sport begins to define who and what a person is, it has become a false god.
- Youth can be influenced by the people they choose as friends, just as Ahab was influenced by Jezebel. Youth may be defensive about this topic, especially if their parents don't approve of their friends. Listen to their concerns and encourage them to be their own person, not blindly following others.
- **Discussion starter:** What are the false gods in your life?

Personal Views

Fortunately, most of us will never have to face the challenges that confronted Elijah. However, our beliefs are often challenged by the world around us. The larger culture in which we live sends us many messages that run counter to our Christian beliefs. What are the false gods or Baals of today? How is success and the "good life" portrayed in the media or in our communities?

Even in very subtle ways, our beliefs and convictions can be challenged at work and at home. How do we respond when we feel compelled to speak out against something at work that is generally accepted by many of our peers? What do we do when we hear ethnic slurs in the form of a joke? How important is money to our sense of success and happiness?

Money and status are two popular false gods, even among those who call themselves Christians. Does materialism drive our lives? What do we have to say about the proper place of material things?

Youth are constantly reminded of the need to play the right sport, to look a certain way, to live in the right neighborhood, or wear the right shoes to be accepted and "cool." How do we help youth begin to see the false gods in their lives that claim to bring them security and acceptance?

O God, you have created all things by the power of your Word, and you renew the earth by your Spirit: Give now the water of life to those who thirst for you, that they may bring forth abundant fruit in your glorious kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 290

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

If a television and VCR are available where you meet, tape a typical segment from the MTV cable station. Start the tape as youth enter. Try not to make comments as the group gathers. If a television and VCR are not available, pass out teen magazines (sports, fashion, and general interest), and invite youth to browse through them.

After everyone has gathered, turn off the television and ask the youth to find *I Kings 18:21 and 36-39* in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear Lord, as it says in I Kings, chapter 18, those who believe in God will not be lead astray by false prophets. Teach us to recognize those who are not our friends and are out to harm us by their words or through their actions. Please Lord, guide us in the right direction; help us to think for ourselves and not be swayed by others. Keep us strong in our convictions and help us to remember the difference between right and wrong. Amen.

Lauren, Grade 7

Lector: *A reading from the first Book of Kings, chapter 18, verses 21 and 36 through 39.*

(Full text on p. 2)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging

(Time: 15-20 min)

Tell the story of Elijah and the priests of Baal. Use the Commentary for background. Be sure to emphasize the influence the neighboring Canaanites had on the Hebrew people. Explain that Baal worship was introduced to the Hebrew people by Jezebel, a foreigner

made queen and given great power by King Ahab.

Ask the youth to list what they saw on the MTV segment during the Coming Together activity or in the magazines. How do the people look? What kinds of things seem to be most important? Record their responses on a flip chart. Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- How did the worship of Baal break the covenant between God and the Israelites?
- Why do you think the Hebrew people wanted to worship this foreign god?
- According to MTV or magazine stories and ads, what makes a person successful?
- How are we influenced by what we see and read in the media?
- Who or what influences your decisions the most?
- Although you may not actually worship other gods, are there people or activities that have assumed “god-like” importance in your life?

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

- **Collage:** Create a collage on a large poster board from magazine ads that try to tell you what is important or how you should live. Talk about subtle messages contained in the ads. For example, some ads for jeans imply name brands are necessary for acceptance and a person's sexual desirability.

- **Letters:** Invite youth to write a letter to the editor of a teen magazine about questionable images. For example, ask the editors why only thin models with flawless skin and hair are used in illustrations. Why not put more typical youth in some pictures?

Games

- **Dating game:** Play a version of television's Dating Game. Select a contestant to question three people of the opposite sex, one of which will take this person on a “dream date.” The three contenders should be out of sight, but able to hear and respond. Ask the youth to name the most important qualities they look for in a friend.
- **Shoes in the middle:** Ask the youth to take off their shoes, put them in the middle of the room, and then walk away. Hold up each pair of shoes and let the group guess which shoe belongs to which person. Ask the youth to rate which shoes are the “coolest.” Does the shoe say anything about the person? Does God care what kind of shoes or clothing we wear? Do “things” make us more valuable to God?

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 *Clueless* about the importance of materialism in youth culture.

WEAVINGS

- Jezebel was such an imposing character in the Bible that her name is a part of our language today. The term “jezebel” is used to describe a shameless, abandoned woman. While we may not know anyone personally who fits that label, most of us know what it is like to be influenced by someone or something harmful.
- There is a saying: The god that you worship signs his name on your face. Think about people you have known whose lives are closely linked with God. What do you see in their eyes and on their faces? Look at your activities for the past week. What do they say about what is important in your life? What is written on your face?
- We are greatly influenced today by media, both by what we read and what we see. Keep a log for one week of the amount of time your family spends in front of the television. Compare this to the time spent on family activities, Bible study, or at church. What is the most important influence in determining what you think and how you act?

- **Print:** Bring in clippings of stories about violence involving youth and clothing. Ask the group to suggest solutions to the importance placed in designer clothing and shoes.

Music

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

- Sing together "Rise up, ye saints of God" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 551).
- Learn the communion hymn "May We Be One" (*Gather*, GIA Publications, Inc., 247). Find out what the reference to Elijah in Verse 1 means by reading I Kings 19.
- Listen to "Tell Me Your Thoughts on God."

Service

- **Send a letter:** Find addresses for magazine editors to whom letters were written for the Expressions activity. If one magazine was targeted, send the letters together to make a stronger statement.
- **Boycott:** Investigate the possibility of organizing a boycott of a company using inappropriate advertising.

Sharing

- **Go public:** Share the letters written to magazine editors with the church community by posting them on a bulletin board or publishing them in a newsletter.

Study

- **Elijah:** Find out more about Elijah in I Kings 17 through II Kings 2. The lector's text tells only one story about this Old Testament giant. Find out why he was important enough to be included at the Transfiguration of Jesus.
- **Art:** The life of Elijah has been captured by many classic artists. At the library look at books with Old Testament themes and see if they include Elijah. Artists often depict him surrounded by ravens. Find out the background of these art works in I Kings.

Voices

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

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

Ralph Abernathy

It gets dark sometimes, but the morning comes. Don't you surrender. Suffering breeds character. Character breeds faith. In the end faith will not be disappointed.

Jesse Jackson

[People] who have never been in danger cannot answer for [their] courage.

La Rochefoucauld

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 829 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

God our Father, you see your children growing up in an unsteady and confusing world: Show them that your ways give more life than the ways of the world, and that following you is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in you, and to keep alive their joy in your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For Young Persons

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 829

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

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Look For

Can youth look critically at the voices of culture? Can they list the things our culture claims are important? Do they understand that these may be in conflict with Christian beliefs? Are youth able to see that God can help them encounter harmful lifestyles?

Jonah: Running Away

Covenant Ancestors

Objective

This session focuses on Jonah's response to a difficult call from God. Youth will be able to discuss the issues resulting from running away from problems or difficult situations that often lead to even worse conditions. They will also begin to discover that God does not desert them and can help them find their way.

Background for Leaders

The Commentary for this session discusses the story of Jonah and his call to go to Nineveh. The key name is Jonah, and the key place is Nineveh. For spiritual preparation explore your own response in difficult situations.

Commentary

In the book of Jonah, only four chapters long, Jonah was called to preach to the Ninevites, who were arch enemies of the Israelites. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire that gradually absorbed and destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Jonah, therefore, was being asked by God to help an enemy nation in the process of destroying his own country.

Viewing these people as brutal, military-minded sinners, Jonah decided to run from God's call. He probably viewed God's call as unrealistic, difficult, and completely unnecessary. In his mind, the inhabitants of Nineveh deserved punishment rather than God's word of hope.

As he fled God's call, he found himself on a ship bound for Tarshish. During the journey, the

travelers faced death in a turbulent sea until Jonah, recognizing that he was the cause of the rough seas, jumped overboard. Almost immediately he was swallowed up by a great fish. After suffering fear and despair inside the sea creature, he prayed to God in the words of the Psalms. The fish spewed him out on dry land, and Jonah, once again, was told to proclaim God's message to the people of Nineveh.

Jonah traveled to Nineveh and called for their repentance of evil ways. Much to Jonah's chagrin, God was pleased by the Ninevites' repentance and withheld punishment. Jonah felt betrayed because he had come to announce their doom, not watch a reconciliation with God.

Perhaps God's message to Jonah and the people of Israel was that God's mercy reached far beyond the borders of Israel, even to enemies. True repentance, even by the people of Nineveh, was acceptable to God. Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites probably represented mainstream Jewish thoughts about God's view of foreigners and enemies. God, however demonstrates his graciousness to all who truly repent.

SESSION LEAFLET

- **Art**—Charles Foster in *Story of the Bible*
 - **Key Verse**—*But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.*
—Jonah 1:3a
 - **Youth Commentary and Prayer**
 - **Voices**—George MacDonald, Elbert Hubbard, Seneca, Proverb of Cuba
 - **Daily Reflections**
 - **Words to Remember**
 - **Prayer**—From the Solemn Collects of Good Friday (BCP, p. 277)
-

LECTOR'S TEXT

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. . . But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. . . Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land. . . The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.

Jonah 1:1-3a; 17; 2:10; 3:1-3a

TIPS ON THE TOPIC

- Even though Jonah ran from God, God never deserted him. Emphasize to youth that God is with them even when they turn their backs on God. They may not travel the road God intended, but God can help them return.
- Don't get bogged down talking about how or if a fish swallowed Jonah. The focus of this session is running away from difficult situations.
- Talking about difficult situations might result in youth revealing their thoughts about suicide. This may be a good time to remind the group that there is one confidence no one should keep: if a friend talks about suicide, you must go to an adult for help.
- **Discussion Starter:** Have you ever tried to run from something

Personal Views

Jonah is the classic example of the man who runs away after being called to do the difficult and the unexpected. It didn't make sense to him to go to Nineveh. One can't help but see the humor in this story as Jonah runs, as if to hide from God. But, what about us: Do we run from difficult tasks that God urges us to seek out? Are we sometimes called to unlikely ministries? Have we been called to serve our enemies? Do we run from these opportunities to serve?

Some people, for example, become advocates for certain social causes that would have been meaningless to them in the past. Others have run from such obvious issues as world hunger, AIDS, and youth violence. Sometimes we think that we know God's will (like Jonah) only to be surprised later on as we gain better understanding.

What issues and situations are youth running from? What are they afraid to get involved with because of possible difficulties?

Causes that are not popular are difficult to face, but this does not mean we can always avoid them. God challenges us all to respect those around us, even those who are different. This is not necessarily popular, but important in our role as witnesses for Christ.

Almighty God, kindle, we pray, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth; that in tranquility your dominion may increase, until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

From the Solemn Collects of Good Friday
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 278

Coming Together

(Time: 10-15 min)

Before class begins, hang Resource Poster No. 6 on a blackboard or easel. Put a piece of plain paper under the poster or have chalk available if using a blackboard. Ask the youth to write their own captions for the poster—serious or humorous.

After everyone has gathered, ask the youth to find the book of Jonah in their Bibles. Select a lector to lead the following prayer (Session Leaflet, p. 2).

Lector: *Let us pray.*

Dear God, We pray that we can handle whatever obstacle is set in front of us. Help us to be strong and conquer it. Also, help us to understand that even when we run away, you will always watch over us with love and guide us back. Amen.

Rachel, Grade 7

Lector: *A reading from Jonah, beginning at the first chapter.*

(Full text on p. 2 and as the Words to Remember, Session Leaflet, p. 3)

Lector: *The Word of the Lord.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Engaging

(Time: 15-20 min)

Divide the youth into groups of two or three. Each group will need access to a Bible. Ask the groups to write a contemporary version of the story found in the Book of Jonah. The new stories can include all the events from the Book of Jonah, or they can focus on part of the story. For example, youth might end their stories with an event similar to the fish spewing out Jonah onto the beach.

After the youth are finished, ask each group to relate the new version of this old story. Discuss the stories, using the follow questions:

- Why did Jonah run from God?
- Are there difficult situations and tasks that we run from? What are they?
- Why do we try to run from these situations and tasks?
- Do you ever run from God?
- Describe your feelings when you are running away from something.

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

- **Drawing power:** Put two magnets together so they attract each other. Next, turn them around so they repel each other. When we turn our backs on God, we are alone or separated. But when we stop running away, we become connected to God. Write a poem about your observations about the magnets and the story of Jonah.
- **Role play:** Instead of telling or reading the contemporary versions of the Jonah stories, ask the groups to act out their stories.
 - **Backdrops:** Create scenery for the role plays. Have available a roll of butcher paper and colored markers or paints. If a blackboard is available, bring in colored chalk.

Games

- **You're it!** Go outside and play a game of tag. Select one youth to be "it." Every person tagged by the person who is "it" joins him or her in chasing the other youth. Those who safely get "home" are free.

Choose a home base that is a symbol of God or the Church.

Media

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

- **Video:** Watch together the Disney animated movie *Pinocchio*. What happens inside the whale? In what other ways is the story of Pinocchio similar to Jonah?
- **Print:** Find at a library illustrated children's books about Pinocchio. Compare these illustrations with classic art showing Jonah and the big fish. Are the scenes similar? Why do you think artists rarely show Jonah inside the fish?

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 together "I sing the almighty power of God" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 398), a hymn of praise similar in thought to Jonah's prayer.
- Sing together "By Name I Have Called You" (*Glory and Praise*, Vol. 3, 186).
- Listen to "The Maker of Noses" by Rich Mullins on Reunion Records. Who does the song tell us to follow?

WEAVINGS

- We usually think of Jonah being swallowed by a whale. Scientists who study this mammal quickly note that this is highly unlikely. However, the Bible never mentions a whale. The NRSV translation says "the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah" (*Jonah 1:17*).
- The second largest mound in the ruins of Nineveh today is called "Yunas," which can be interpreted as "Jonah." The mound covers 40 acres and is about 100 feet high. Tradition says that Jonah's tomb lies within the mound. The tomb is so sacred to the people who now live there that no large-scale excavation has been allowed.
- A problem for many large cities is the number of run-away youth who are looking for a better life or escaping a dysfunctional family. Some of these youth return home safely, but others end up as male or female prostitutes, dependent on drugs, or homeless. Organizations provide service for these young people through 1-800 hot lines or free transportation home. Pray for these young people and the families they have left behind.

RESOURCE POSTER

- Jonah (No. 6)

Service

- **Feed the hungry:** Contact organizations that provide world relief, such as the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief or Bread for the World. Find out how youth can reach out to people in foreign lands.

Sharing

- **Perform:** Present one or more of the role plays created in the Expression activity to a group of younger children. Also use the backdrops that were made.

Study

- **History lesson:** Find out more about Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. How did the culture of these people differ from Israel? How was it the same?
- **New Testament:** Jesus referred to the story of Jonah in *Matthew 12:39-41*. What was the context of Jesus' reference to this story? Who was he talking to? What lesson or point was Jesus trying to make?

Voices

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

Fear is faithlessness.

George MacDonald

[People] are punished by their sins, not for them.

Elbert Hubbard

You need a change of soul rather than a change of climate.

Seneca

A lie runs until it's overtaken by truth.

Proverb of Cuba

Going Forth

Gather the group for a closing prayer and dismissal. Read together the prayer on page 277 of *The Book of Common Prayer* (also on p. 3 of the Session Leaflet).

Leader: *Let us pray.*

Dear People of God: Our heavenly Father sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved; that all who believe in him might be delivered from the power of sin and death, and become heirs with him of everlasting life. We pray, therefore, for people everywhere according to their needs.

From the Solemn Collects for Good Friday
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 277

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 identify times in their lives that they have run away from difficult situations? Do they understand that God stays with them even when they turn their backs on God? Do they know that God is ready to forgive them even when they defy God? Do they know how to ask God for help?