

# **PRESCHOOL KINDERGARTEN CROSS**

## **BACKGROUND FOR TEACHERS**

### **THE TEACHING MINISTRY IN EPISCOPAL CHURCHES**

“You shall put these words of mine in your heart (and) . . . Teach them to your children . . . .”  
(*Deuteronomy 11:18a, 19a*).

Sharing the stories of God’s acts has always been important to the people of God. The word *rabbi* means “teacher.” Over hundreds of years, rabbis have been devoted to instructing children and bringing them into the community of faith. They speak of learning as “sweet.”

To make their point, rabbis would put a bit of honey on the tongue of each child, saying, “Learning is sweet.” Or they would dip a piece of apple in honey, saying, “What you are about to hear is much sweeter than this.”

Jesus was a *rabbi*. His teaching was through parables, stories that people remembered even when they did not fully understand them.

The example of Jesus calls us to be teachers in his Church. The apostle Paul declared teaching a gift of the Holy Spirit, for the building up of the Body of Christ. At every baptism, we promise to do all in our power to support the person who is being baptized in their life in Christ. It is this promise that has led many of us to teach in the Church. We are called to be faithful to the promises made at our own baptisms.

Being a teacher in the church is a ministry, prayerfully undertaken. The task requires that we be open to new learning and to the leading of the Spirit as we prepare to teach and work with children.

The Episcopal Children’s Curriculum seeks to support and strengthen the ministry of all who teach in congregations. Grounded in the Baptismal Covenant, the Curriculum assumes that Christian formation is a lifelong process. The role of Christian teachers is to help learners to discover and proclaim God’s presence in us.

It is hoped that teachers who use the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum materials will be enriched personally as they prepare to teach from the Bible, *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Hymnal 1982*, and other sources for interpreting the Church’s faith and practice. The design of the teaching sessions and presentation of age-level characteristics of learners stress active involvement in teaching and learning.

The *Children’s Charter for the Church*, developed by the Office of Children’s Ministries and a number of dioceses, calls for three responses to the children in our care. Nurture of the Child—to treasure each child as a gift from God; Ministry to the Child—to recognize and foster children’s spirituality and unique gifts; and Ministry of the Child—to appreciate children’s abilities and readiness to represent Christ and his church. All three responses affect relationships between teachers and students.

#### **The Roles of Teachers**

As we learn about the faith development of young children, we discover the importance of adults as models for prayer, worship, and learning in the church. Many members of the Christian community recall teachers who played a significant part in their growth. They shared their faith and opened up the words of Scripture.

Sometimes teachers never know the roles they play in students’ lives. It is important, therefore,

that we take teaching seriously. Ours is a grace-filled opportunity to share ourselves—our love for God, our faith, and our experience.

Sharing is a key word in the act of teaching. We do not “teach” by simply providing information; rather, we teach by engaging others in exploration. Teachers who are open to learning new things are better able to share with children the joy of discovery.

Teachers of young children are enriched by the joy of learning the children express. As we learn alongside the class members, we gain new insights, share stories, begin projects, and join in seasonal activities that affirm who we are as Christ’s people.

We grow in our knowledge of and faith in God, when we are open to learning as a creative enterprise between teacher and student. At least five functions of a Church teacher are summarized, as follows:

1. ***Teachers orchestrate learning.*** The teacher is a director, leader, chooser, and conductor—the person who takes the initiative. A responsibility rests with teachers to prepare themselves, the classroom environment, the materials, the session plans, and to attend to all other details.

Teachers take steps to see that something actually happens. Like orchestra conductors, teachers bring together different parts and players to create a whole.

There is an element of control in this function of a teacher; but with preparation, planning, and structure comes the freedom to focus on learners.

*Learners are dependent on teachers for the provision of materials and sufficient opportunities for choices.*

2. ***Teachers understand their learners.*** Teachers begin by learning and remembering names of learners, and backgrounds about their families and circumstances. Teachers observe and listen closely, noting individual characteristics and responses.

Developmental information and age-level characteristics are sources for an understanding and appreciation of each child’s unique being. To nurture and guide the faith journey of a child demands a personal relationship. A bond of trust, respect, and affection can grow only where love and understanding prevail.

*Learners can expect care, positive experiences, and reasonable challenge.*

3. ***Teachers are interpreters.*** Teachers talk with children not only to share language and words but also to communicate feelings and values. In classroom situations, what children talk about, wonder about, question, and explore reflects their teachers’ ability to interpret faith. Often the simplest of questions can evoke profound answers.

*Learners can expect honest answers to their questions, including the response, “I don’t know.”*

4. ***Teachers are links with the community.*** Children spend their days in the company of parents, family, and peers. Teachers become part of the social constellation for children, helping to bridge the distance between the familiar world of family and friends and the larger sphere of parish, school, and community.

Some children are surprised, and most are comforted, as they come to understand they have a place that is known and valued within the larger group. Church schoolteachers are a vital link between children and the parish community.

*Learners come to know and trust a community of adults.*

**5. Teachers are part of a team.** Teachers, especially volunteers in church schools, often work in teams to share time and talents. Teachers also work in partnership with parents, clergy, and church staff in enhancing the faith journeys of children.

The perspective of a teaching team is not confined to a particular classroom. A broader view will include all the programs and events children experience in the church throughout their lives.

*Learners will interact with many teachers in many different settings.*

## **Teachers and Learners**

Teachers who work with young children value early childhood as a key time of life and understand the role of play. For these children, play is their “work.”

Often teachers of young children are endowed with generous quantities of patience and stamina, and a tolerance for mess, noise, and movement. Comfortable with language and the expression of feelings, teachers of young children enjoy being with children. Teachers who want to be with this age level nurture the distinctive qualities and developmental capabilities of young children.

Expectations for a teacher of young children using the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum are:

1. Take seriously your own role as learner and actively pursue an adult-level understanding of the themes and content of the sessions.

2. Be a storyteller. Throughout this Curriculum, teachers are expected to tell a story at every session. Young children are an appreciative audience—receptive to and delighted by all sorts of storytelling tactics. To know a story well enough to tell it in your own way is to own it. Teachers who share stories with learners offer gifts of their faith through the story.

3. Show respect for children. Keep in mind the critical difference between *childish* and *child-like*.

4. Offer young children plenty of choices and opportunities to touch and explore. Real objects, props, and pictures are the “stuff” of play. Make time to gather these enhancements.

## **THE EPISCOPAL CHILDREN’S CURRICULUM**

The Episcopal Children’s Curriculum is designed for intentional, systematic, classroom-centered interactions between teachers and young learners. The Curriculum seeks to provide resources that will support Episcopal Sunday Schools and other organized programs of Christian education.

This focus on planned teaching/learning encounters does not deny the importance of other Christian education in a congregation. There can be no substitutes for teaching the biblical narrative and the story of the Church.

However, what happens in the process of teaching and learning will always have a certain

mystery. We cannot expect any curriculum to result in any one particular outcome.

What transpires over the years between teachers and learners is the creative weaving of themes, understandings, language, and experience into a whole. The Episcopal Children's Curriculum is a tool for teachers and learners to use together for what is a small part of the lifelong journey of Christian education.

### **What Does an 'Episcopal Curriculum' Uniquely Offer?**

We are Christians who have chosen to affirm our beliefs and live our faith within the traditions and practices of the Episcopal Church. To impart, transfer, and train our children in the ways and customs of the identity of our Church is natural.

The theological foundation of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum is in a *Foundation Paper* (January 1990). A copy of this document is included at the end of this guide. Teachers are urged to read the complete statement. Repeated below are the first few lines:

"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. Hence, the common ministry of teachers and learners 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 reexamined as we search Holy Scripture and the tradition of the Church. All Christians have access to these sources and are invited to discover for themselves not only the record of God's action in former times but also God's living presence in our contemporary world; in that sense, every member of the Church is engaged in theological reflection."

The creation of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum has been measured with the spiritual yardstick of the beliefs and promises of the Baptismal Covenant. In the forefront of consciousness for editors and writers has been the question, "Does this help a learner to live out the Baptismal Covenant?"

Baptism confers full sacramental participation in the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Children's Curriculum sets forth a framework for helping our children interpret and grow in their understanding of the meaning of sacramental experiences as all seek to live out the covenant made in Holy Baptism.

The Episcopal Children's Curriculum introduces learners to the Holy Bible, *The Book of Common Prayer*, and *The Hymnal 1982*. Appropriate material from these sources is incorporated at all levels in nearly every session. Teachers will find it helpful to have available a copy of each of these essential books: Bible (NRSV), *The Book of Common Prayer*, and *The Hymnal 1982*. *The Access Bible* (NRSV) provides commentary, study tips, maps, and a concordance.

Children are encouraged through exposure and experience to learn words and actions for participation in worship. The pictures used in the Episcopal Children's Curriculum are appropriate for Episcopalians. Clergy, churches, liturgical actions, text, and language are portrayed as children in Episcopal settings are most likely to experience them.

The Curriculum is seasonally compatible with the three-year cycle of the Lectionary, but it is not based on the week-by-week Sunday readings.

The Curriculum is designed to follow the narrative of the biblical story in ways understood by

young learners, while incorporating Episcopal customs and practices. There is an explicit connection to the liturgical Church Year in the units that feature special attention to feast days.

### Ages and Levels

The Episcopal Children’s Curriculum is planned for three-year-olds through Grade 6—a span of nine years. Grouped into three broadly graded age levels (Preschool/Kindergarten, Primary, and Intermediate), the Curriculum matches conceptual content and activities to the needs of children of these varying ages. (See the accompanying charts for each level.)

#### PRESCHOOL/KINDERGARTEN — STORIES

Shell	Creation	Jesus: Son of God	Baptism: Belonging	We Are the Church
Chalice	Promise	Jesus: Storyteller	Eucharist: Sacred Meal	The Church Prays
Cross	Shepherd	Jesus: Teacher	Worship: Environment	The Church Sings

**Preschool/Kindergarten.** Written for three- through five-year-olds, this level of the Curriculum emphasizes stories as the principal experience for teaching and learning. This is consistent with what we know about how children this age come to know more about their world. The Old Testament thread focuses on the stories of a few key figures in the Bible. We move in Unit II to stories of Jesus’ birth and ministry. Unit III looks at Sacraments in the context of stories of personal participation and experience. Unit IV focuses on worship and participation church.

#### PRIMARY — PEOPLE IN RELATIONSHIP

Shell	Pentateuch	Jesus: Healer	Baptism: People in Covenant	The Church in the New Testament
Chalice	Judges/Kings	People in Parables	Eucharist: People in Communion	The Church in the Prayer Book
Cross	Stories	Sermon on the Mount	Worship: People in Community	Saints of the Church

**Primary.** Planned for children in Grades 1-3, the Curriculum continues the focal emphasis on stories with particular attention paid to people and relationships. The great goal is make the people of the Bible and the Church come alive for young learners. This is consistent with our belief that the Christian faith is not nurtured apart from relationships. Each of the foundational themes involves a revisiting and expansion of the stories first encountered at the Preschool/Kindergarten level. The Unit I, Old Testament sessions all focus on specific people, their families, their actions, and the events in their lives. In each session of Unit II, we look more broadly and deeply at Jesus’ life among us, and the people he taught, preached to, and healed. Each of the Sacrament Units considers people in relationship to the sacrament and to each other. The Church Units (IV) emphasize people and their stories from the Bible and the history of the Church.

## INTERMEDIATE — SYMBOLS

Shell	Covenant	Miracles	Baptism: New Life	The Apostle Paul
Chalice	Prophecy	Parables of Promise	Eucharist: Shared Life	The Catechism
Cross	Psalms and Wisdom	The Reign of God	Worship	Christian Symbolism

**Intermediate.** Learners in Grades 4-6 are increasingly able to use and manipulate symbols for the ideas and events they encounter. The stories, people, and relationships first met at earlier levels are recalled and examined through the increasing symbolic complexity of their perspective on the world. The Old Testament Units focus on the concepts of covenant, prophecy, and praise to God. Jesus' life and ministry are approached through miracles, parables, and the coming reign of God. The sacraments are examined in relationship to living out the gospel and creeds, and in Unit IV, Church history is recounted with continual reference to the great figures, events, and traditions as each has impacted our life today.

For each of the three levels, three years of material are provided. These three years are designated in the Curriculum as the Shell year, the Chalice year, and the Cross year. The curriculum designations should not be confused with the three years (A, B, C) of the Sunday Lectionary cycle. Children who begin a level of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum at age three, Grade 1, or Grade 4 will participate in different experiences during each of the three years within the level.

This broadly graded age grouping allows planners to group small numbers of children more effectively. It also offers flexibility for larger parish programs to run nine closely graded groups, one at each age level every year.

### Conceptual Organization

The content for the Episcopal Children's Curriculum is woven from four foundational threads: Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures), New Testament, Sacraments, and Church. The unit themes for each year are drawn from these sources. (See the accompanying chart, "Conceptual Organization of Curriculum Units.") The conceptual organization is intended to be logical, sequential, and consistent over the scope of the curriculum.

Teachers will find that concepts are extended without duplication of session material in subsequent years and levels. For example: A child beginning the Episcopal Children's Curriculum at the age of three and proceeding forward through the sessions for nine years until the end of Grade 6 will revisit themes but will not repeat any material. The approaches will be different at each level.

Year	Age Level	Old Testament	New Testament	Sacraments	Church
Shell	Preschool/ Kindergarten	Creation	Jesus: Son of God	Baptism: Belonging	We Are the Church
	Primary	Pentateuch	Jesus: Healer	Baptism: People in Covenant	Church in the New Testament
	Intermediate	Covenant	Miracles	Baptism: New Life	The Apostle Paul
Chalice	Preschool/ Kindergarten	Promise	Jesus: Storyteller	Eucharist: Sacred Meal	The Church Prays
	Primary	Judges/Kings	People in Parables	Eucharist: People in Communion	Church in the Prayer Book
	Intermediate	Prophecy	Parables of Promise	Eucharist: Shared Life	The Catechism
Cross	Preschool/ Kindergarten	Shepherd	Jesus: Teacher	Worship: Environment	The Church Sings
	Primary	Stories	Sermon on the Mount	Worship: People in Community	Saints of the Church
	Intermediate	Psalms and Wisdom	The Reign of God	Worship	Christian Symbolism

## Scheduling Units and Sessions

The organization of the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum materials can support a wide variety of congregational schedules and calendars. The undated materials permit flexible adaptations. The units and sessions have an intrinsic integrity in their content as well as predictable connections with the major feasts and seasons of the Church Year.

## Unit Patterns

Each of the four units is most appropriately used during a particular church season(s). The chart below displays the pattern of seasonal connections for each unit, using the unit titles of this Teacher’s Guide as examples. Across all years and all age levels of the Curriculum, a clear,

consistent pattern of unit/session connections to the Church Year has been preserved. Note that this pattern will hold true for all levels and years of the Curriculum.

Unit Title	I. Shepherd	II. Jesus: Teacher	III Worship: Environment	IV. The Church Sings
Church Calendar	Late Pentecost	Advent/Christmas/Epiphany	Lent/Easter	Easter/Early Pentecost
Probable Months	September-November	December-February	February-April	April-May
Session Detail	#1-8—Old Testament Themes #9—All Saints	#1-4—Advent/Christmas #5—Epiphany #6-9—New Testament Themes	#1-5—Sacramental Themes #6-9—Lent, Holy Week, Easter	#1-8—Church Themes #9—Pentecost

Church school leaders and teachers must schedule sessions to fit both their particular congregation’s calendar and the yearly fluctuations in the liturgical calendar. Factors affecting scheduling variations are:

- different starting dates for local church schools;
- substitution of other parish activities during church school meeting times;
- rotation of class sessions with chapel or worship;
- and the yearly variations in the lectionary cycle that result in an “early” or “late” Easter, affecting the lengths of the Epiphany and Pentecost seasons.

Within any given unit of nine sessions, teachers will find some sessions that should be “pinned” to the current Lectionary calendar. Other unit theme sessions can “float” and be more flexibly scheduled. Users will arrange the numerical order of sessions within a unit to accomplish scheduling requirements. Referring to the chart above, note the scheduling decisions to be made within each unit.

**Unit I—Old Testament Themes.** Designed to be used during the period from September (start of church school) through November (but not into Advent), this unit coincides with the Church Year season of Late Pentecost. The nine sessions should be scheduled during this time period. (In an extreme case, if church school begins the first Sunday in September and runs continuously without non-class days, this could be a period of 13-14 weeks.) Enough activity suggestions are available in any session outline to allow for extending material to cover two class meetings. Teachers can choose which sessions to “extend” or to “combine.”

Session 9 is always an All Saints’ session. Depending on the local schedule, teachers could plan to use the material in Session 9 on the Sunday closest to All Saints’ Day, the week before, or perhaps the week after if no classes are held on that major feast day. The other sessions of thematic material can precede or follow the All Saints’ session.

**Unit II—New Testament Themes.** Sessions 1-4 are for Advent/Christmas, and Session 5 is an

Epiphany session. Teachers should look at the focus statements for these sessions and match the most appropriate ones with the available dates for class meetings. Many congregations have plays, pageants, and other seasonal events that take precedence over class work at this time of year. Teachers may see a need to combine or compress material from Sessions 1-5 .

Sessions 6-9 of Unit II are developed around the designated content theme for the unit. These sessions will be used during the Epiphany season (January-February). Once again, fluctuations in the liturgical calendar can result in a “long” or “short” Epiphany season, requiring teachers to adjust session materials accordingly.

**Unit III—Sacrament Themes.** Schedule this unit for use during Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and for one session into the Easter season. The sacramental focus of each year’s material (Shell—Baptism; Chalice—Eucharist; Cross—Worship) is developed fully in Sessions 1-5. The material in the remaining four sessions extends the year’s specific sacramental focus in connection to the liturgical events surrounding Easter.

Schedule the sessions of this unit around Easter. Identify the date on which the Easter Session (8) will be used for classes, depending on meeting times and parish customs. Arrange for Sessions 6 and 7 to occur before Easter Day, and for Session 9 to be scheduled after Easter’s Session 8. Use the sacramental material in Sessions 1-5 during the preceding weeks of Lent. Extend, combine, or compress session material to fit the calendar for the year.

**Unit IV—Church Themes.** Begin this unit during the weeks of the Easter season and into early Pentecost. Materials in Sessions 1-8 are focused on church traditions and church history. Within each year of the Curriculum there is a slightly different basis for supporting the Church themes (Shell—Bible; Chalice—*The Book of Common Prayer*; Cross—*The Hymnal 1982*). Session 9 is always about the Feast of Pentecost. Plan to use it on the most appropriate date for your classes even if it means interrupting the order of the other sessions.

To summarize, within each unit teachers can schedule sessions to fit with their local calendars and customs for feast days. In addition, most session outlines contain suggestions for activities that are easily adaptable for intergenerational groups. Every session in the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum is a self-contained set of suggestions for teachers and learners. Within the sessions of a unit, continuity does not require perfect attendance.

## **Preschool Curriculum Materials**

At each level of the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum, materials are provided for teachers and learners. The basic organization and structure of the materials remains the same for the Shell, Chalice, and Cross Years within each age level. The materials are appropriate for the differing stages of the learners’ growth and development.

### **Director’s Materials**

#### *Director’s Guide*

Provides a comprehensive overview of all levels and years of the curriculum, including hymns and scripture citations.

### **Teacher’s Materials**

All of these materials are sufficient for an entire year and can be reused. We recommend that

congregations try to purchase one Teacher's Guide for each teacher and one Teacher's Packet for each class group.

*Teacher's Guide (this volume)*

Contains 36 sessions of material organized into four units of the year. Background and resources for teaching are included. The Preschool/Kindergarten—Chalice Year units are Unit I. Promise; Unit II. Jesus: Storyteller; Unit III. Eucharist: Sacred Meal; and Unit IV. The Church Prays.

*Supplemental Guide (Preschool/Kindergarten)*

Provides additional activities and alternative approaches for teaching at this age level.

*Teacher's Packet*

Offers posters, artwork, patterns, and other resource material to supplement the activity plans and suggestions for each year's set of four units. The materials in the Teacher's Packet were developed to support the teaching suggestions in the session outlines. Teachers will find the large-size posters and selected art helpful in telling stories and talking with children about the session themes. The Teacher's Packet includes a master content list so that the materials can be saved and reused in subsequent years. It is suggested that the posters be laminated or covered in clear adhesive to preserve them for future use.

*Music Tapes*

Contains music recorded by a children's choir for each session for each unit.

## **Children's Materials**

*Children's Take-Home Cards*

An innovative feature of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum is the set of collectible Take-Home Cards that are keyed to each session. Each card (5 x 7 inches) contains pictures, Scripture verses or prayers, and occasional poems. A note to parents helps link the class activities with the home. The Take-Home Cards should be purchased each year for each child. Across the three years of the Preschool/Kindergarten level, 108 cards are packaged in yearly sets of 36. There are many ways to help children collect these cards. Inexpensive plastic picture frames, recipe boxes, or simple rings help to keep the cards together and to add a new card each week. Teachers should consider sending cards home to children who miss class.

*Children's Books*

A children's book with original art and text has been produced for each unit of the Preschool/Kindergarten level of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum. These storybooks highlight the faith and practice of the Episcopal Church. The storybook titles for the Cross Year units are:

Shepherd—*David*

Jesus: Teacher—*Love One Another*

Worship: Environment—*My Church*

The Church Sings—*Let Us Sing*

Each child should be given a personal copy of each book at some point during the nine weeks. Teachers can remind children to look at the class story in their own books at home.

## **UNDERSTANDING YOUNG CHILDREN**

Threes, fours, and fives approach the world in unique and delightful ways. Active and full of energy, young children are acutely aware of the sounds, smells, tastes, and textures of their world. Young children are doers who experience the world in concrete, tangible ways. They are

keen observers who, through play and role play, seek to understand their world. They are magical thinkers capable of spinning tales of fact and fantasy.

Often, teachers speak of the wonder and joy that radiate from young children as they go about the playful business of discovery. The qualities of trust and openness associated with this age group are worthy of sustaining over a lifetime.

We have come to see that children's faith and understanding of God's love are closely related to their experiences with caring, concerned adults. Parents, relatives, teachers, and neighbors are the significant adults in a young child's world. Group experiences in preschool, kindergarten, and church school classes are typical for three-, four-, and five-year-olds. Teachers cannot ask a more important question than this one: How does it feel to be a child in this place?

## Faith

From the early Church to the present, Christians have struggled to define faith. All too often, they have succeeded only in discovering that it is a mystery.

A biblical view of faith is that it is a gift from God. We do nothing to achieve faith, and we cannot impose faith on anyone else. As human beings, we have the choice to accept and witness to our God-given faith, or not. We can never presume that our work as teachers will create faith in the hearts and minds of learners.

Personal acceptance of faith can begin at any age. Those who work or care for young children often speak of the presence of faith in young people. They describe children whose magical sense of play seems at times to cross over into the mystical; children whose gazes reflect unspeakable awe and wonder. They may describe children whose bleak everyday lives belie their trust and expectation of love in this world.

Descriptions of faith are sometimes startling, such as "religious imagination" and "godly play." Children themselves have created surprising metaphors for faith, such as "dancing with God."

A program that helps to develop the religious imagination and language of children is *Godly Play*. *Godly Play* is a Montessori-based religious education program that has evolved through the work of The Rev. Dr. Jerome W. Berryman. It provides children with a worship environment that encourages children's responses to biblical stories. Storytelling and wondering are components of *Godly Play* that are shared with the Episcopal Children's Curriculum.

**What does faith look like?** Children may be comfortable talking freely about God. They may include God in their play, confidently assigning roles to God and supplying dialogue. They assume God is with them.

**How do preschoolers see God?** God is powerful, magical, and all-knowing. God is human and very real. Children are not the least bothered by illogical discrepancies in God's actions and presumed motives. The young child's image of God is positive and loving.

**What kinds of questions do preschoolers ask?** Where does God live? What does God eat? Where does God go at night? during thunderstorms? Why can't we see God? Does God have clothes?

As teachers of young children, we are called to:

- accept them as people of faith,
- nurture the awakening of faith, and
- share the words and language of faith.

Faith awakens in young children and is seen in different ways from the faith of adults. The signs of awakening faith are welcome to an alert, sensitive teacher.

## **Language**

Throughout scripture and liturgy, history and tradition, the language and vocabulary of faith becomes part of the common experience of all teachers and learners. We should meet preschoolers' needs for clear, simple language without resorting to a "watered-down" vocabulary.

Young children love words, especially those that are conveyed with feeling. Certain words feel wonderful when rolling around young tongues. "Alleluia" is a good example: Shout it, whisper it, stretch it out, march it out to a beat. With voice and body, children can feel the meaning of the word. We need not hesitate to use the words of our faith with young children.

The words are not burdensome, heavy, hard, or complicated beyond measure. They are meant to be enjoyed, played with, and tried out in a thousand ways in prayer, song, and story. To think in this way about vocabulary provides us with a prescription for language activities in the preschool/kindergarten classroom.

*Children love to talk.* They talk and talk, to gain mastery over the link between thoughts and words, the physical connection between mind and mouth.

*Children love to chat.* They may even seem to be chattering. Every thought, however briefly held, comes out and is shared. One has only to keep responding, "Mmm," to keep the child-thoughts flowing.

*Children love to converse.* They actually engage in conversation. The lively dynamic of conversation includes both speaking and listening. Conversation is always about something. Through speaking and listening, the participants in a conversation use language to create a relationship within which the thoughts of one's heart, feelings, and values can be shared. To awaken and nurture the gift of faith, conversation is crucial.

In a sort of logical progression, children's use of language will fall into these categories of talking, chatting, and conversing.

## **Developmental Patterns**

As children develop through the preschool years, they change in several ways. The most obvious is physical, but they also change in the ways they think and interact with their world, the ways they relate to other people, and the ways they experience emotion and feeling.

The patterns of development have implications for how children relate to aspects of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum program at different ages. The chart, "Developmental Characteristics," summarizes typical ways in which children of different ages may be expected to respond to activities in the session outlines.

Such age-level descriptions of developmental characteristics provide only general guidelines for expected behavior. In using this chart to understand developmental differences across the preschool/kindergarten age span, it is important to note the ways in which young children differ from one another and from adults.

*Individual differences.* No two children are alike. The developmental differences between two children of the same age are sometimes surprising. One three-year-old may speak in complete sentences, while another will communicate effectively with a series of single words. Some five-year-olds can read a few words; others do not care to try yet. Teachers of young children should try to plan activities with the expectation that some children will need more or less help, more or less challenge, more or less time. Teachers need to accept children as they are, adapting session plans to accommodate the differences within age groups.

*Learning Styles.* One way in which children are individuals is in their learning styles. There are

three dominant styles: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. Auditory learners are those who listen carefully and are able to remember directions given orally. Visual learners need pictures and real objects to make the learning connections. Kinesthetic learners need to be able to move their bodies, to touch, and manipulate items in order to learn. Preschool/kindergarten children use all three approaches when learning something new. Teachers who present lessons using the three learning styles will engage the interests of more of the children. The Episcopal Children's Curriculum offers options for all these modes of learning.

*Multiple Intelligences* is an approach to the classroom experience developed by Howard Gardner. Gardner proposed that humans have eight different ability areas, or intelligences. Since most educational experiences focus on only two, language and logical thinking, most students do not reach their full potential for learning. Teachers who find ways to employ all of the different intelligences will engage more students in the learning process.

The eight intelligences are Linguistic (Word smart), Logical Mathematical (Number smart), Musical, Visual-Spatial (Picture smart), Bodily-Kinesthetic (Body smart), Intrapersonal (Self smart), Interpersonal (People smart), and Natural (Nature smart). Each of the intelligences can provide an entry into the learning experience for different students. Using the biblical story of Noah, linguistic students could write stories. Number students could measure the ark or count the animals. Musical students would compose or sing a song. Visual students would paint pictures. Bodily-kinesthetic students would dance the story. Interpersonal students would talk with each other about the story. Intrapersonal students would focus on their feelings. And nature students would consider the different kinds of animals.

Using multiple intelligences process in the classroom provides a variety of learning experiences for all children and can make the planning process more exciting and meaningful. See the Development Characteristic chart on the next page.

### **Multi-Age Groups**

In church schools with small numbers of children, learners of similar ages are frequently grouped together in broadly graded classes. The most desirable groupings combine children whose developmental capabilities and learning styles are similar. The broadly graded levels of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum correspond to traditional age groupings for children: Preschool/Kindergarten (ages 3-5); Primary (Grades 1-3), and Intermediate (Grades 4-6).

The situation in many congregations is not always so neatly handled. There may be only a few families with children of church school age. Or, a growing parish may find the numbers of children are unevenly distributed across age levels—with many preschoolers and only two or three in Grades 4-6. Mixed-age groups are a practical necessity in these situations.

Mixed-age groups offer special opportunities as well as challenges for both teachers and learners. Teachers need to be especially aware of the range of skills and capabilities that are present. A three-year-old who enjoys the splash of water play could be side-by-side with an eight-year-old who does not want to get wet. A five-year-old may be quite happy with a colorful collection of glued rainbow paper strips while an eleven-year-old has drawn intricately detailed pictures of Noah's Ark showing all the nail holes. How does a teacher plan for such wide-ranging differences? Here are two key concepts for teachers to consider when working with children of varied ages in the same group:

*The learners' emerging skills and capabilities.* Children themselves are aware of the varying levels of skill among their peers. Teachers can set the tone in a class by recognizing the value of every effort and every product.

## DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

	THREES	FOURS	FIVES
<b>Gathering and Goodbye (Group Interaction)</b>	May be first group experiences Need immediate rituals and clear routines Will do little sharing; everyone needs something to do	Enjoy being with friends Rituals help them to make transitions	Participate fully in rituals; can lead these Cooperative and interactive in groups
<b>Story</b>	Like simple stories with repetition	Like action stories; will help in telling these	Remember words, plots; some will begin to read
<b>Creating</b>	Process is all-important for them Need help with cutting, painting, gluing	Enjoy making things, often surprised by product Will cut, paint, glue just for the sheer ability to do it	Like to produce things that look real Enjoy projects requiring several skills
<b>Games</b>	Play games through imitation of others' actions	Play games for the sheer joy and exuberance of movement	Like to be in-charge Enjoy interacting with others
<b>Doing (Process)</b>	Singularly focused and involved in the actions of doing Minds appear controlled by what their bodies are actually doing	Able to anticipate events, think ahead Are good visitors and tourists	Involved in planning; can handle details Able to focus on content and events during trips
<b>Wondering (Imagination)</b>	Tied to immediate visual world Offer very concrete explanations	Capable of wild and woolly fantasies Like facts and notice details	Maintain some balance of fact and fantasy Engage in creative, highly imaginative play
<b>Music</b>	Respond to sounds and vibrations Imitate fingerplays and actions	Can match actions to rhythms Learn key words to simple songs through action	Can sing simple melodies Remember words to songs
<b>Conversation (Language)</b>	Working hard to master the mechanics of language Have rapidly increasing vocabularies Respond to descriptive language related to current activities	Like to talk to adults; may talk a lot Play with words and word sounds; use language for shock value Struggling to use words rather than hitting in conflict situations	Are good conversationalists; listen and talk to other children Like new and grown-up words Beginning to recognize words in print and use language as a tool for thought

Teachers who praise and comment truthfully according to standards appropriate for each age will confirm for children the value of their work. The message to all is that it is all right to be growing and trying and learning.

When planning and selecting activities, teachers can anticipate how the oldest and youngest child in the group might handle the activity. With this understanding in mind, teachers can then plan variations most likely to have maximum appeal.

For example, a story about Moses with puppets and dialogue will captivate preschoolers. Intermediates may speak the dialogue, move the puppets, or retell the story to younger children at a later time.

A fingerpainting activity with red paint may appeal to all ages if there is latitude for process as well as interpretation. Expect younger children to enjoy the sheer muck of the painting process while older children will enjoy sharing their explanations and descriptions of ideas related to red (feast days, flames, etc.).

*The necessity for family-style social interaction.* Probably the best approach for handling group interaction for children of widely varying ages is to assist them in learning to help one another. At times older children can assume leadership roles, sharing their skills with younger children. Other times, children will work individually or rotate personal time with the teachers. The give-and-take of sibling and parent relationships provides a familiar and accessible model for managing group living in small, mixed-age groups.

## **PLANNING CLASS SESSIONS**

Volunteers carry on the ministry of teaching in most Episcopal congregations. Enthusiasm for the task of teaching on Sundays is best preserved when:

- commitment of time is clear and limited,
- work load is accurately described,
- support is abundant, and
- sources of satisfaction are apparent.

The seasonal unit structure of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum furnishes a basis for outlining teachers' time commitments. Teachers may choose to teach an entire year, overlap some units, or teach only one unit. Planners can make these determinations based on recently successful patterns and a realistic appraisal of the number and ages of children in the parish.

Teaching is a task worthy of genuine effort. In churches where classes are larger, it helps to arrange for teaching teams of two or three people for each class. Team members pool their strengths and talents to allow for greater success.

Particularly in classes with young children, a teaching team makes supervision and contact with individual children manageable. Teams allow teachers to rotate responsibility for planning and preparing materials.

For instance, one teacher may have talent for leading music, another enjoys creative projects, and still another tells stories with ease. Getting more people involved is a better strategy than "burning out" a few dedicated volunteers.

The Episcopal Children’s Curriculum is designed for both inexperienced teachers and others who are more confident.

Whatever curriculum resources are used, clergy involvement and support from the congregation are vital. Teachers need to share and talk about their ministry. Recognition of teachers in meetings, services, parish publications, and events gives the teaching ministry its rightful, prominent place in the life of the parish.

Teaching on Sundays is an opportunity to make an enduring friendship with a small group of boys and girls. It is a chance to cross generations in friendship, or meet the friends of one’s own children. After teaching a class of young children, a teacher can continue to observe their growth and involvement in the church, looking back on the earlier years with satisfaction.

## **Sunday Morning**

Congregations make Sunday schedules for worship and education in response to numerous factors. In planning class time for young children, teachers need to think through just what Sunday is like for each one. Consider such aspects as these:

What have the children done prior to their arrival? When did they have breakfast? How long did it take them to get to the church building? Who brought them?

What are the norms for children’s dress in your church? Will they be in their “Sunday best” clothes? If so, how will that affect choice of class projects?

Gaining a total perspective on the children’s situations will help teachers to plan to make the church experience a pleasant and productive one.

## **Units and Session Outlines**

The session outlines are consistent throughout the Preschool/Kindergarten level. Included are these sections:

**FOCUS**—Statement of the session theme and the goals for children. The statements are derived from the unit themes and the Church’s calendar.

**GETTING READY**—Preparatory material for teachers, including a brief background on the session themes and a suggestion for prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer*. This section seeks to inspire and to nurture teachers in their personal spiritual preparation.

**TEACHING TIP**—Information on young children’s development or useful practical information related to the suggested activities of the session.

**GATHERING**—The first event of the session, designed to establish a comfortable, familiar ritual for coming together. Teacher and children use words from the services in *The Book of Common Prayer* to mark the beginning of their time together. A simple activity or conversational focus is suggested to help smooth the uneven times of arrival of all the children and to focus everyone’s attention on the theme.

**STORY**—The heart of the session, for teachers and learners. Teachers are invited to tell a story in their own words at every session and are encouraged to read from the Bible in the way this is done at worship. Children are invited to see the location of the reading and to use language they will hear at services. Materials from the Teacher’s Packet may be used at this time. There is a clear-cut expectation that teachers will use words and gestures most comfortable for them. All the suggested options for activities given in the session outline are conceptually linked to the story.

**TIME ESTIMATE**—Each activity suggestion includes a time estimate to aid teachers in selecting and planning. While these time estimates are “best guesses,” they are a helpful guide for teachers.

**CREATING**—Suggestions for art and other activities (two in each session). For young children, the process of making something is just as important as the product. At least one of the Creating options will be tidy. Most assume access to standard art supplies. Teachers will determine needed supplies after choosing an activity option. These activities usually result in a product children can take home.

**GAME**—Simple, familiar childhood games, frequently with a wording variation that offers a way to relate to the session theme. Games are non-competitive and provide opportunities for movement.

**DOING**—Suggestions for activities that encompass both action and experiences. Trips and tours of the church grounds and building and visits from special people are included. Props and other items for active roleplay and construction are suggested regularly.

**WONDERING**—Suggestions to encourage imagination and fantasy. Whatever the proposed activity, the intended purpose is to promote exploration and discovery. No right answers, no required behaviors are expected.

**MUSIC**—Hymns, usually two or three in a unit, from *The Hymnal 1982*. Most also appear in *We Sing of God*. Introducing young children to the music of faith helps them to take their places in the congregation’s worship. All of the hymns selected have been recorded on audio tape for each year of the material. The tapes are called *Children Sing!*

**CONVERSATION**—Ideas for talking and listening. Children like to talk and have much to say. Each session outline suggests questions teachers can use as conversation starters. Sharing ideas and feelings through language is a critical component of coming to know and own stories. Note that the Conversation time is not solely teacher talk; it is a reflective time to allow children to speak.

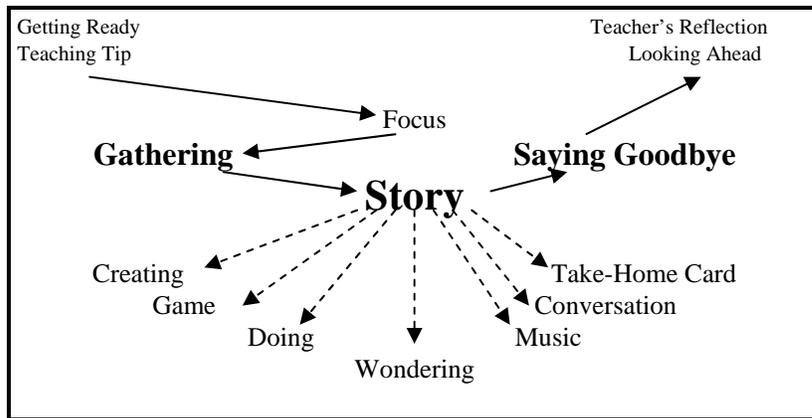
**TAKE-HOME CARD**—A brief description of the card to be taken home by each child. See the section above for a more complete explanation of the cards.

**SAYING GOODBYE**—The last event of the session is intended to mark the conclusion of the time teachers and children spend together. A prayer for others and ritual of closure are provided.

**TEACHER’S REFLECTION**—Questions and comments to help teachers analyze and reflect on the events of the session.

**LOOKING AHEAD**—A preview of the next session. The aim is to help teachers begin to think about the conceptual connections among sessions of the unit.

There are three essential activities for every class meeting.



## Gathering...Story...Saying Goodbye

As teachers nurture faith in young children, they learn to rely on the combined power of *ritual* and *story*. In the Episcopal Children's Curriculum, these two elements are present in all the sessions. All other activities provide for practice, follow-up, and extension of understanding the core (story).

*Gathering.* For young children, a regular opening ritual conveys a message of caring. It is an acknowledgment that the present moment is a special time. A suggestion is provided in each session for an activity or conversation intended to help learners "settle in" for whatever amount of time it takes for the class to gather. This activity looks ahead to the story theme of the session, but it avoids "giving away" completely what the story will be about.

Children in church school may come from different day schools and even from different communities. They may need help in learning one another's names. Simple name games and conversation about interests and play are a valuable part of community-building. Use name games throughout the year.

Words and prayers from *The Book of Common Prayer* are suggested for repeated use at the Gathering.

When teachers and learners manage a comfortable start, their time together is much more likely to include joy and pleasure. First-time teachers will find their confidence grows through consistent use of Gathering rituals. Teachers may be surprised at the vigor with which young children practice these rituals.

*Story.* The theme of every session is presented to children through story. All the optional activity suggestions in the Episcopal Children's Curriculum are linked to the session theme as presented in the story.

Teachers are storytellers. There is no substitute for "telling" a story. With preschoolers, teachers are not conveying content through storytelling as much as values, feelings, and understanding. The stories of our faith are stories for a lifetime. We tell them over and over. We hear them through the years as we come to church, and we read them in our Bibles. Every time we encounter a story, we are a little older with more life experience. Each story has potential for conveying new meaning. Stories are truly multi-generational and all listeners hear what they are ready to hear.

Through stories, teachers and learners share their hearts and their faith. The magical thinking style of the preschooler becomes a foundation for mature acceptance of the mystical dimensions of faith. Storytelling is thus central in the ministry of teaching and an essential part of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum.

*Saying Goodbye.* The closing ritual of Saying Goodbye will help learners (and parents) to make a transition away from the classroom activity. The children are invited to gather once more for a closing prayer and dismissal. The last lines of the prayer remain the same throughout the year. The first lines are composed to relate to the theme of the session. The dismissal is the familiar "Let us bless the Lord," to which the children respond, "Thanks be to God."

Teachers should strive to make Saying Goodbye an important moment, unhurried and reverent in tone.

The children's Take-Home Cards are designed to be a link between church and home. While there is no prescribed method for using the cards, teachers will likely find it useful to incorporate the cards in some way as part of the Saying Goodbye ritual.

Watch carefully as children in your class come and go. See if any children make up their own

rituals for these times. Teachers will find that young children respond to the familiar, dependable structure of rituals. Repetition of routines, words, and/or actions can have profound effect on attitudes and feelings of the learners at this age level.

## **Composing a Session**

With the session's story at the center, teachers are free to select activities from the other categories in the outline. Local resources and constraints will affect how the Episcopal Children's Curriculum is best implemented by individual teachers. In addition to the three essential activity blocks described above, each session outline contains six other activity categories:

Creating. . .Game. . .Doing. . .Wondering. . .Music. . .Conversation.

These activity suggestions are keyed to the Focus statement and story theme of each session. The activity categories will be consistent across all three years of the Preschool/Kindergarten level of the Episcopal Children's Curriculum.

Read through the activity suggestions for an individual session and note those that seem to be particularly meaningful extensions of the story. Discern how each suggested activity is related to the story theme. Make any minor adjustments of activities that seem appropriate, marking the ideas that appeal to you, and which you think you would enjoy doing with children. The time estimates given for each activity should be close to the total time period available for teaching. Time for Gathering and Saying Goodbye will vary in each situation.

Plan 1, below, is an example of a selection and straightforward sequencing of activity blocks.

### **Plan 1**

Gathering. . .Story. . .Creating. . .Game. . .Saying Goodbye.

Another option for composing a session is to overlay two activity blocks in the session sequence. Teachers may wish to use the Conversation suggestions as part of the Story time (Plan 2) or may combine the Music and Game, as in Plan 3. A decision to overlay or combine activities may result from teacher preference or learner interests. Classes with mixed-age groups may also find this a useful strategy for composing sessions.

### **Plan 2**

Gathering. . .Story/Conversation. . .Creating. . .Music. . .Saying Goodbye.

### **Plan 3**

Gathering. . .Story. . .Music/Game. . .Saying Goodbye.

In most session outlines, activities could be set up as Learning Centers and made available throughout the class period to individuals or small groups of children. With some adaptation, the entire set of suggestions in many session outlines could be set up in a Learning Center format.

Plan 4 is an example of a session composed for a period of time spent in Learning Centers.

## **Plan 4**

Gathering. . .Story. . .Centers:

- Wondering
- Game
- Doing
- Creating. . .

Conversation. . .Saying Goodbye.

These four examples of planning illustrate the flexibility and numerous options possible for customizing the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum. Other variations may be necessary in certain circumstances. For example:

- In situations where children come to class after a long period of sitting, teachers may wish to offer Music or Game activities as part of the Gathering.
- Some Doing activities are tours and visits to parts of the church building and could conceivably require most of the time in a session. Teachers may wish to modify the class routine to accommodate such a tour.

## **Time**

Time is a concern as a session is composed. Not having enough to do in the time available can be a teacher’s nightmare. Young children, with their short attention spans and high energy, can appear to fly through activities that were hours in the planning. And there is always the chance that an activity will be a clearcut “washout” that no one seems the least bit interested in pursuing.

Conversely, some activities will stretch out and extend for long periods of time, sustained by children’s interest and involvement. Even the most prepared teachers occasionally will misjudge the difficulty or complexity of an activity, and learners and teachers will struggle for closure. It is important to remember activities children have liked. Repeat them when interest and time permit. Be prepared for those times when classes run a little over because of special church services or events.

The pacing and rhythm of a class session grow out of the interactions of teachers and learners as they are together in class. Those who look forward to the moments of being together with children will find fulfillment as teachers.

## **Space**

Dedicated space for Sunday classes is a luxury unavailable in many church settings. Meeting spaces in local parishes are frequently multi-purpose and not specifically designed for young children’s play. Art projects may be prohibited or restricted to outdoor areas and nails and tape on walls may be banned.

Sometimes children must be quiet so they do not disturb nearby meetings. Closet and storage space may be at a premium or nonexistent. Teachers may need to carry materials in and out and remain to do all clean-up work.

In parishes with weekday preschool programs, space does double-duty. Good outdoor play space may also be available. But Sunday School teachers will probably have little control over the furnishing and arrangement of preschool space.

It is little wonder that many Sunday School teachers are sensitive to “mess” potential and wary of activities that have an aura of noisy movement about them. Preschool children need their Sunday School teachers to be advocates for adequate meeting places in the parish. Young children learn by doing, and that requires space.

Resourceful teachers can make adjustments to minimize the difficulties inadequate space poses. Teachers will invent clever procedures such as painting with Q-tips rather than brushes used at an easel. Props needed for stories can be kept in boxes. Getting these out then becomes part of the ritual of settling in for storytime. These types of adaptations will not compromise the overall emphasis on active involvement.

Where space conditions are difficult, take a long-term view of the selection of messy versus tidy, noisy versus quiet, sit-down versus move-around type activities. It is a question of balance. Let parents and others know in advance which Sundays will be devoted to particular activities. Trade spaces with other groups for some sessions if that is the only way to sing or paint or dance.

### **Classroom Arrangement**

When a child comes to the Sunday School classroom, what are the options for movement and activity? What does the child see when surveying the space? Thoughtful designation of activity areas along with visually inviting materials will contribute greatly to the outcome of a young child’s experiences. Classrooms for young children should provide:

- a comfortable *area for the entire group to come together* with sufficient space/seating—as free as possible from competing noise or visual distractions;
- a surface *area at the right height for projects*, table games, and snack time;
- access to an *area large enough for movement*, or the ability to move back furniture to create a more open space;
- the possibility of *areas for small group or individual play*;
- short- or long-term *areas for the display of children’s work*;
- ready access to toilets and lavatories;
- a place to hang coats when needed.

### **Group Interaction**

Preschoolers are mostly concerned about themselves and their own activities. This focus on self is appropriate for young children. Think of a class of preschoolers as a collection of

individuals who happen to be in the same place, at the same time, for the same activity. Children's behavior in group settings is characterized by their ever-present focus on themselves.

Teachers who understand the practical implications of young children's self-focus will find that smooth management of class groups hinges on their ability to connect with individual children.

Greeting children and paying close attention to how each child makes the transition into the class setting is an effective technique for preschool class management. Young children in group settings depend on the teachers in charge for approval and cues on how to behave. The basic relationship for preschoolers in a classroom setting is centered on the teacher, not other children. Whether sitting in a large group for a story, working independently on an art project, or taking a tour of the church with a small group, preschoolers will act as if they alone have a personal, direct connection to the teacher.

Teachers who make frequent eye contact with children, sitting, stooping, or kneeling at their play level will find that children feel connected to them throughout a variety of activities.

Friendships for preschoolers are of the "best friends" sort; both friends do the same things and play closely alongside each other. Recognizing this pattern, teachers should provide enough materials and playthings for each child to do things at the same time. The self-focus of a preschooler makes sharing materials or waiting for a turn difficult, since the child's emphasis is on doing things at the same time as others.

Four- and five-year-olds will play in small groups rather than by themselves or with one other child. This reflects the increasing complexity of their play ideas, as well as their increasing cooperation and social skills. But the composition of these small play groups will be quite fluid and elastic. Children will "check in" in many ways to keep alive their sense of a personal connection with their teacher.

Teachers of preschoolers frequently express concern about their ability to "keep the children busy." The fast-moving, quickly changing scenes of the children's television program, "Sesame Street," are familiar to most children and parents. The program design is perhaps the outstanding example of effective response to the short attention spans of young children. Related strategies useful for teachers include:

- recognition of the appeal of colorful, visual images (pictures, props, puppets, and people all attract and hold children's interest),
- presentation of content in an interesting fashion (with intentional use of the dramatic and unusual, and an invitation to wonder).
- pacing of events (providing choices and options, moving on to the next activity before interest wanes, or redirecting individual children to another activity).

Preparation, anticipation, and prevention are useful skills for teachers of preschoolers in the management of group interactions.

## CURRICULUM ACTIVITIES

### Storytelling

In a sense, we tell stories daily—to our families, neighbors, co-workers, or passing acquaintances . . . quick or long stories, sad or happy stories.

We ask one another for stories all the time: “How was your day?” “What did you do at school today?” “What happened when the bus broke down?” “Tell me about your visit to the doctor.” The daily stories of life are seldom about mighty deeds and legends, destined to be shared with a wide audience. But from this daily collection of events will come the stories that are destined to represent who we are.

The stories are told and retold, often polished a little more with each telling: “Remember the time when the electricity went off for three days?” Or, “I remember what I was doing when I heard the news report that the President was shot.”

We choose to tell some stories over and over because they simply mean a lot to us. We know the details by heart and embroider them with feeling with each repetition.

Teachers using the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum will be telling stories in their own way at every session. The story themes are specified in the curriculum and suggestions for emphasis and props are given.

A principal part of teachers’ preparation needs to be directed toward knowing the details of the biblical story.

“Telling a Story” (below) is a preparation worksheet for getting ready to tell the biblical story. The purpose is to aid teachers in identifying and remembering the details of the session story. To use the worksheet, do three things:

1. Write in the facts of the story. Sort the details by category.
2. Use the special-effects box to jot down notes about props, voice tone, words to describe the environment, the clothes worn by persons in the story, and other singular details. Try to generate a list of words that color in the detail of the story.
3. Reflect on the emotional moments in the story. Relate these to the personal feelings the story evokes.

### THE SHAPE OF A STORY

Introduction.....plot...Plot.....PLOT...PLOT....CLIMAX.....Ending

Allow yourself time to live with the story. There are no right or wrong ways to fill in this worksheet. Mull over things, change them, embroider and embellish as the story is absorbed into your consciousness. Tell the story to yourself. Select some words to begin with. Use them each time you tell the story to yourself. Line up the details of the plot. Some storytellers call this the narrative action or the storyline. Be sure the facts of the story are straight. Decide on the climax

of the story, for you. What is the big moment in your telling? How will you convey the emphasis at this point? Then, finish the story quickly. Storytellers shape their stories, pacing, and punctuating to captivate their listeners. Imagine a shape for every story, and let that shape guide the telling.

**TELLING A STORY  
A SIMPLE WORKSHEET**

Story Worksheet	<b>The Facts</b>	<b>Special Effects</b>	<i>Moods and Moments</i>
WHO			
WHAT			
WHEN			
WHERE			
WHY			

**Storytelling Resources**

Bausch, William J. *Storytelling: Imagination and faith*. Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984.

Donovan, John Britt. *The family book of Bible stories*. Wilton: Morehouse, 1986.

Gobbel, A. Roger, and Gertrude G. Gobbel. *The Bible—A child’s playground*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986.

Griggs, Patricia. *Using storytelling in Christian education*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

Maguire, Jack. *Creative storytelling: Choosing, inventing and sharing tales for children*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985.

Russell, Joseph P. *Sharing our Biblical story*. Rev. Ed. Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1988.

Sawyer, Ruth. *The way of the storyteller*. New York: Viking, 1965.

Ward, Elaine M. *The art of storytelling*. Brea: Educational Ministries, 1990.

**Creating**

Consider these two vignettes of young children engaged in Creating activities with art materials:

**I**

The session story was about the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan. Following storytime, the teacher puts out large sheets of white paper and several pots of blue fingerpaint, inviting children

to think about water and rivers. Smocks are donned, and children begin working.

A child using fingerpaint may be unconcerned about what the final picture looks like. The process of painting—the gush and gook, the swirl and mounding, the color, and even the smell of the paint—is what matters. Over a period of a few minutes, several “pictures” may emerge from the painting process—each one smoothed over and replaced by another and still another.

Children may spontaneously describe their series of emerging pictures or may talk about what they are doing. Teachers may observe and comment on the painting process. After awhile, the heavy, paint-laden paper put on the side table to dry offers few clues about the intensity and complexity of either the painting or talking.

## II

Children have been talking about their church and the people they see there. Teachers provide large sheets of gray paper, each one prepared with thick black magic-marker outlines of a church building. Stacks of magazines, scissors, crayons, and markers, along with glue bottles and sticks, are laid out on the tables in the room. Children are invited to fill the churches with people. Soon the group is at work, and the table is awash with scraps of paper.

One child cuts out faces and laboriously pastes them inside the church in tight, even rows. Another child colors in the church with gay ribbons of color and announces, “Everyone’s at the feast, and you can’t see them.” Still another child sits and watches, doing little with the church outline in front of him, but keeping up a steady chant of the names of all the people he can think of who go to church.

In these examples, children are actively engaged in the process of creating. The art materials and the teacher’s general suggestions served as stimuli for a wide variety of responses. Much of what was most valuable for the children in experience and discovery, language and meaning occurred in the context of the activity. To the unenlightened observer, the finished pictures may reveal precious little of the details of intense involvement.

Activities suggested in the Creating section of the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum sessions have the potential to stimulate the creative process. Art materials can be excellent vehicles for children’s exploration and expression. How materials are presented and how children’s efforts are received determine the critical balance.

### Creating Resources

Flemming, Bonnie Mack, Darlene Softley Hamilton, and Joanne Deal Hicks. *Resources for creative teaching in early childhood education*. New York: Harcourt, 1977.

Howard, Lori A. *What to do with a squirt of glue: And paper, paint and scissors too!* Nashville: Incentive Publications, 1987.

Lasky, Lila, and Rose Mukerji. *Art: Basic for young children*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1980.

Mathson, Patricia. *Burlap and butterflies*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1987.

Milord, Susan. *The kids’ nature book*. Charlotte: Williamson Publishing, 1989.

Montgomery, Mary, and Herb Montgomery. *What can we make? What can we do?* Los Angeles: Winston Press, 1992.

Schirmacher, R. *Art and creative development for young children*. New York: Delmar, 1988.

### Games

Games are often nothing more than play actions children want to repeat. Children invent and

improvise games all the time. Teachers in preschool classrooms will find that games can serve a variety of functions, from settling children down to letting loose all their energy.

All the best preschool games are action games. Many come to mind: Simon Says; Mother, May I?; Duck, Duck Goose. Other games are really duets of song and action: Here We Go ‘Round the Mulberry Bush, A Tisket-A Tasket. Finally, there is a whole genre of games called fingerplays, rhymes, and finger movements that children enjoy.

Games for preschoolers should be non-competitive. Games can also help build a sense of community in a group. Three-year-olds will enjoy games that allow them to participate all the time. Everyone pantomimes a camel or everyone “walks” to Bethlehem. Fingerplays are especially useful with younger preschoolers. Older preschoolers can handle games where they take turns being “it” or performing the game action are rotated around the group while everyone watches.

Directions for all games need to be very simple. It is hard to remember rules, move, and enjoy things at the same time. Teachers should rehearse games mentally before introducing them to children, taking care that they can explain them quickly and smoothly.

The Episcopal Children’s Curriculum contains many standard childhood games that have been adapted to the theme and/or language of particular sessions. This is consistent with encouraging young children’s active, physical involvement in session stories. Many game suggestions are really nothing more complicated than somewhat formalized role-playing related to the story themes.

Action and movement games need space and may produce joyful noises. Where classrooms cannot contain this activity, evaluate the environmental situation. Do not abandon games altogether where space precludes movement. Modify the game, use a hallway, or when conditions permit, go outside.

### **Game Resources**

Ferretti, Fred. *The great American book of sidewalk, stoop, dirt, curb, and alley games*. New York: Workman Publishing, 1975.

Gregson, Bob. *The incredible indoor games book*. Carthage: Fearon Teacher Aids, 1982.

Kamii, Constance, and Rheta DeVries. *Group games in early education: Implications of Piaget’s theory*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1980.

Montgomery, Mary, and Herb Montgomery. *What can we make? What can we do?* Los Angeles: Winston Press, 1992.

Sobel, Jeffrey. *Everybody wins: Non-competitive games for young children*. New York: Walker and Company, 1983.

Ward, Elaine M. *Be and say a fingerplay*. Brea: Educational Ministries, 1982.

Warren, Jean. *1-2-3 Games*. Everett: Warren Publishing, 1986.

### **Doing**

Children make sense of their world through concrete experience and actions—by acting on their world and by acting out varied roles. We have defined Doing to include tours, trips, visits, drama, and role play, as well as construction and large-scale projects.

Young children need opportunities to touch and explore the church and its furnishings and ornaments, its places and spaces. Children need to meet and begin to know the people they see in services and programs. Guided by their teachers and parents, young children should become

familiar with the physical environment and the people of their church.

Trips to the church to stand where the Bible is read, try out kneeling in the pews, and look around the organ, are compatible with young children's need to experience the world in concrete ways.

The rehearsal and repetition inherent in role play allows children to try out actions and feelings and to practice what they see the adults around them doing. The actions and words of faith and church life need to be incorporated by children through role play just as surely as they incorporate the actions of housekeeping, taking care of a baby, and building a house.

Water, bowls, and baby dolls can be the ingredients for a play session about Baptism. Pieces of cloth and dishes can easily be used as vestments or Eucharistic meals. Teachers can facilitate children's role play with the provision of a few suggestive props and comments.

Preschool church classes that meet in weekday nursery school rooms probably can have some access to equipment and materials such as blocks, sand and water play tables, and other small manipulative materials. When possible, use these treasures for preschool church activities. Children can build altars, construct churches, and set up pews with blocks. Help children connect with the water of baptism and new life through water play. Use the sand table to take trips through Bible lands. Wet sand is a marvelous sculpting material definitely well-suited to process rather than product.

It is not a sign of disrespect for children to "play" church. That is an adult interpretation that is inconsistent with a true understanding of how seriously children take the business of play. We recommend some books in the Wondering resource section for teachers who are deeply interested in young children's religious play.

### **Doing Resources**

Gilbert, La Britta. *I can do it! I can do it!* Mt. Rainier: Gryphon House, 1984.

Hill, Dorothy M. *Mud, sand, and water*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1977.

Houle, Georgia Bailey. *Learning centers for children*. (3rd. ed.) West Greenwich: Consortium Publishing, 1987.

Lee, Rachel Gillespie. *Learning centers for better Christian education*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1982.

Smith, Judy Gattis. *Developing a child's spiritual growth through sight, sound, taste, touch, & smell*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983.

### **Wondering**

Wondering and imagination are the mental fuels of children's play. Consider the energy unleashed when children:

*marvel, ponder, puzzle, question, doubt*  
*experiment, invent, explore, pretend, envision, make-believe*

To wonder about the world is to engage in the creative act of learning. Without wonder, learning may be reduced to sets of facts and fixed meanings. The awakening and nurture of faith is full of wonder. Teachers of preschool children are ever on the lookout for wonder-filled moments.

The suggestions for Wondering, in session outlines, include a wide range of activities that at first glance might appear to be equally well-listed under other session headings. Many of the Wondering activities are simply a series of questions that could accompany a child's play. These questions have no right or wrong answers. Teacher and learner are simply invited to wonder together.

I wonder . . .

what did Jesus do with his friends?

why are there so many kinds of crosses?

are birds surprised by the coming of spring?

The intention of the Wondering activity suggestions is to provide examples of how wondering can become a part of every activity teachers and learners engage in while using this curriculum.

### **Wondering Resources**

Cappadona, Diane Apostolos, ed. *The sacred play of children*. New York: Seabury Press, 1983.

Cavalletti, Sofia. *The religious potential of the child*. New York: Paulist Press, 1983.

Nelson, Gertrud Mueller. *To dance with God*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.

Smith, Judy Gattis. *Teaching to wonder: Spiritual growth through imagination and movement*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.

### **Music**

Music is an integral part of the language of faith. Young children's response to music is spontaneous. Children sing for pleasure and expression. Preschoolers are capable of learning the words and the rhythm of a song. The hymns used in corporate worship are songs of prayer and praise to God that young children can begin to recognize.

Each unit of the curriculum introduces two or three hymns related to the themes of the unit and the liturgical calendar. Typically a single stanza, simple refrain, or a combination is chosen for the music activity. Teachers may be familiar with many of the selections. All music and words are available in *The Hymnal 1982*. It is recommended that prior to teaching a unit, teachers identify the unit hymns and become familiar with words and melody. Ask for help from a parish musician.

A set of companion volumes to the hymnal is designed specifically for use with children. *We Sing of God: A Hymnal for Children* is a sturdy paperback booklet of hymns for use in children's worship. A teacher's guide, in a separate volume, provides activity suggestions for each selected hymn.

### **Music Resources**

*The Hymnal 1982*. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985.

Roth, Robert N., and Nancy L. Roth, eds. *We sing of God: A hymnal for children*. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1989.

Roth, Robert N., and Nancy L. Roth, eds. *We sing of God: A hymnal for children. Teacher's Guide*. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1989.

Smith, Judy Gattis. *Teaching with music through the church year*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979.

### **Conversation**

Throughout this Teacher’s Guide, an emphasis is placed on the importance of language between teacher and learner. To tell the stories of our faith requires language. The vocabulary of faith, words children have available with which to talk of their faith, grows in direct relationship to exposure and practice. Conversation is part of the nurture of faith for young children. Prayer itself is a conversation with God.

Teachers faced with the prospect of a designated conversation time with young children may comment, “But they’ll never sit still,” or, “It’s so hard to get them to listen.” Of all the activity categories suggested in the curriculum, staging a conversation is probably the most challenging for teachers.

Depending on circumstances and session planning, teachers may choose to incorporate conversation with other activities. The conversation suggestions may be used to extend the storytime or as the basis for interacting during projects. Several tips for satisfying conversations follow.

1. Understand that young children are learning the patterns of a conversation; you talk, I talk, you talk, I talk, etc. Use gestures and word-cues to help children key into the “moves” of a conversation. Without a balance between teacher-talk and child-talk no real conversation occurs.

2. Project confidence and enthusiasm; through posture, eye contact, and face-to-face expressions, communicate to children that their ideas are valuable. Expect conversations to increase in proportion to children’s feelings of comfort with people and surroundings.

3. Promote listening by respecting silence and slow responses. The “pregnant pause” as a child gets ready to speak and the silence of an active “inner conversation” are important parts of a conversation. Look for the patterns of children’s conversation to change to a duet: I talk and you listen, you talk and I listen; I talk and you listen.

Good questions are conversation-starters. The session outlines contain examples of questions, related to the theme of the session, for teachers to use with learners in their classes. Most of the questions are stated as invitations for response rather than as requests for correct answers. For example: “What did you notice during the baptism in church today?” or “What do you think Mary and Joseph did on the way to Bethlehem?”

### **Conversation and Language Resources**

Cazden, Courtney, ed. *Language in early childhood education*. Rev. Ed. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1981.

Zavitovsky, Docia, K.R. Baker, J.R. Berlfein, and M. Almy. *Listen to the children*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1986.

## VARIATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

### Children's Literature

Picture books and storybooks are windows on the world for young children. Generations of parents and teachers have devoted time to sharing books with young children, passing on the stories of their own childhood as well as delighting in new works now available.

Looking and sharing, reading and talking together about a storybook, can help children engage in broader thinking about living a Christian life. Teachers and learners can view children's stories through the prism of Christian meaning.

Good children's literature asks and answers major questions of life. Stories can be "bridges" to wondering, route markers for the imagination. Stories are molded from the stuff of everyday, contemporary life. Universal themes appear and reappear as stories deal with the questions that shape a child's identity: Who am I? What am I doing here? Where am I going? How do I get there from here?

Sharing stories with children helps us, as adults, to re-connect with, and re-live how it feels to be a child. The emotions of a moment can be an intense mingling of joy, fear, hope, and mystery. The stories we share are a powerful bond of common experience and understanding.

Look for children's books that speak to the larger themes of the sessions in the Episcopal Children's Curriculum. Use good children's books to enhance the focal emphasis of Bible stories.

### Children's Literature Resources

Coles, Robert. *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *Trailing clouds of glory: Spiritual values in children's literature*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985.

Patterson, Katharine. *Gates of excellence: On reading and writing books for children*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988.

Thomas, Virginia Coffin, and Betty Davis Miller. *Children's literature for all God's children*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1986.

Trelease, Jim. *The read-aloud handbook*. New York: Penguin, 1985.

### Intergenerational Activities

For small parishes, intergenerational activities offer a workable solution to the allocation of clergy/staff time and resources and meeting the needs of mixed-age groups of learners. Large parishes with closely graded classes may have to work hard to replicate the cross-age and cross-community linkages that occur naturally in small parishes. Intergenerational activities at regularly scheduled intervals can foster a sense of connection in large parishes. Parishes of all sizes may find that celebrations of major feast days and special parish days are most successful when all ages are involved together in the activities.

How do intergenerational activities look? Recall potluck suppers, hymn-sings, Pentecost parties, storytimes, movie showings, greening the church, meal preparation for soup kitchens, house repairs, and outings for senior citizens—offering a wide array of possibilities blessed by faithful people and practical actions. Satisfying intergenerational activities offer all participating age groups realistic and interesting options for social and purposeful involvement.

The seasonal liturgical plan of the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum is compatible with parish plans for intergenerational use. Within each unit, the session outlines keyed to major feast days and celebrations contain activity suggestions that can be adapted and incorporated easily into intergenerational programs. For example: A preschool birthday party for the Church (at Pentecost) can be expanded to include all ages—with games, party foods, and the symbolic use of red in clothing and in creative projects.

The thematic sessions in every unit contain similarly adaptable ideas for activities suitable for all ages, such as a tour of the church building to look for crosses followed by making crosses from various materials—or storytelling about Jesus feeding the five thousand, accompanied by making fishes and perhaps baking bread.

The sources listed below provide further information about the philosophy of organizing a parish for intergenerational education, as well as sample ideas for events and programs.

### **Intergenerational Resources**

*Growing together*. Vol.I, Vol.II. Denver: Living the Good News, 1989.

Griggs, Donald, and Patricia Griggs. *Generations learning together*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

White, James W. *Intergenerational religious education*. Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988.

Williams, Mel, and Mary Ann Brittain. *Christian education in family clusters*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1982.

### **Food and Snacks**

Organized snack time is not a formal part of the preschool/kindergarten session outlines. The decision about how to handle snacks for church school programs should be made at the parish level. Note also that food items, such as beans and rice, are not used as arts and crafts material in the curriculum.

Preschoolers typically are served a mid-morning snack when attending weekday programs. When activity levels are high, young children need the nourishment of a snack between meals to help them stay alert and happy. If young children are at church on Sunday for an equivalent period of time (three to four hours), teachers and parents should make sure that appropriate snacks are available at some point near mid-morning. These snacks may be served in children’s classes, provided as part of all-parish hospitality, or brought from home by parents for their children.

Aside from nutritional needs, snack is considered by many teachers to be an important opportunity for socializing and community building with groups of young children. Breaking bread together is very much a part of the Christian tradition of community. In class situations where serving snack is feasible, teachers can combine it with conversation. Teachers may find it more practical to set up a snack table, letting children eat when they wish.

## Other Resources

### Bibles and Bible Storybooks for Children

- Batchelor, Mary. *The children's Bible in 365 stories*. Batavia: Lion Publishing, 1985.
- Ingram, Kristen Johnson. *Bible stories for the church year*. Edited by Joseph P. Russell. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *Ladder of angels*. New York: Seabury Press, 1979.
- The Taize picture Bible*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968.
- Turner, Philip. (Brian Wildsmith, illus.) *The Bible story*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

### Children's Prayerbooks

- Baynes, Pauline. *Thanks be to God: Prayers from around the world*. New York: Macmillan, 1990.
- Field, Rachel. *Prayer for a child*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.
- Halverson, Delia. *Teaching prayer in the classroom*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.
- The Lion book of children's prayers*. Batavia: Lion Publishing, 1977.
- Newman, Marjorie, ed. *My favorite book of prayers*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989.
- Roth, Nancy L. *Praying: A book for children*. New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1991.
- Tudor, Tasha, illus. *Give us this day: The Lord's Prayer*. New York: Philomel Books, 1987.
- Watson, Carol. *365 Children's prayers*. Batavia: Lion Publishing, 1989.

### General Resources

- Ames, Louise Bates, and Frances L. Ilg. *Your four-year-old*. New York: Delta, 1976.
- . *Your five-year-old*. New York: Delta, 1976.
- . *Your three-year-old*. New York: Delta, 1976.
- Berryman, Jerome W. *Godly play: A way of religious education*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.
- Berryman, Jerome W. *Teaching Godly Play: The Sunday morning handbook*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Bowman, Locke E., Jr. *Teaching for Christian hearts, souls, and minds*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990.
- Cooper, Judy, and Carol Cowden. *The miracle man: A journey through the life of Jesus*. Brea: Educational Ministries, 1990.
- Hanchey, Howard. *Creative Christian education*. Wilton: Morehouse-Barlow, 1986.
- Stewart, Sonja M., and Jerome W. Berryman. *Young children and worship*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989.
- Westerhoff, John H., III. *Will our children have faith?* New York: Seabury Press, 1976.