Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

Treasuring Our Gifts

A Guide for Leadership Teams

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Treasuring Our Gifts

God has given each person unique gifts to be used in service to God and others. While the world places unequal value for gifts, God treasures them all and expects us to respect and use each of them. The apostle Paul often wrote about the importance of gifts and how Christians were to use them. He compared gifts to the different parts of a body—each valued and necessary. In *I Corinthians 12* Paul said, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Christians are responsible not only for finding and using their own gifts, but also to help others explore and use their gifts.

The purpose of this study, called Treasuring Our Gifts, is to explore and discover the gifts God has given to each of us. Sometimes we need others to help us identify and use these gifts. Similarly, we can encourage others to use their gifts that they may not recognize in themselves. How do I find the gifts God has given me? How can I help others find their gifts? Does God have a purpose for me and my gifts? What is it? The exploration of gifts is a lifetime activity. As we learn more about ourselves, we continue to discover how we have been equipped to live fully in relationship to God.

Introduction

Treasuring Our Gifts is one of a series of modules developed for Older Youth who are in senior high school. The curriculum is based on the promises made in the Baptismal Covenant found in *The Book of Common Prayer.*

The vision for the curriculum also includes the development of leadership skills for Christian young people. Youth need to be leaders of their own lives by following Christ's example and making choices that are best for them.

The leadership of the group will come from a team that includes youth and adults. It is recommended that leadership teams of youth and adults meet in advance, perhaps on retreat, to choose and plan for the various areas of study.

This Guide

This guide contains nine sessions, seven of which provide maximum opportunity for choice. Two copies of the guide will be helpful in sharing responsibility for leadership. The first session, "Finding Our Way," is designed as a planning tool for the remaining eight sessions. It begins with a "Point of Contact"–a portion of the Baptism service from *The Book of Common Prayer,* p. 308. The planning session begins, as do

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all other sessions, with prayer and scripture study to focus the experience on the presence of God in our hearts and God's will for our lives.

The activities in **Session 1** are designed to develop the leadership skills of communication, trust, and relationship. Specific help such as Steps for Planning and the Planning Reference Guide is included to facilitate the planning effort for all members of the leadership team. Because pre-planning is not always possible, the first session can also serve as a tool for involving all participants in the choices to be made.

At this time the group will choose youth leaders and develop plans for study of the other eight sessions. In this process, adults will serve as facilitators for youth-directed planning.

Sessions 2 - 8 examine the issues of Spirituality through these individual topics:

Affirming Our Gifts
Caring for Ourselves
Caring for Each Other
Caring for People in Need
Caring for God's World
Using Resources Fairly
Financial Resources
Using Our Gifts

Each session begins with prayer, scripture, and a Personal Story. The Personal Stories, written from the perspective of a young person, focus on the heart of the topic for that session. The group may select from a variety of themes and activities developed from those themes the ways in which they want to interact with the materials.

A study of issues and Scripture often leads to more than just awareness of an issue. **Session 9** is designed to help youth bring together what they have learned and make decisions about the actions they will take in response. This may be done as individuals or as a group. The final activities include plans for liturgical celebrations, social action, and just plain fun.

Other Modules in the Episcopal Curriculum for Older Youth

Diversity	**Relationships**	**Spirituality**	**Violence**
Peace & Justice	**Success & Failure**	**Difficult Decisions**	**Treasuring Our Gifts**
Who Is God?	**What Am I Called to Be?**	**What Do Others Believe?**	**What Is Evil?**

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How to Use These Materials

1. DECISIONS ARE MADE BY LEADERSHIP TEAM

This curriculum is based on a model that requires a team of people to lead the sessions and the planning process. The assumption is that this team will consist of several teenagers who will take the key leadership roles and adults who will provide resources and support.

Each issue-based session develops three themes using a specific passage from the Bible as a focus for study. Suggestions for activities, discussion topics, and questions are provided for the three themes. Teams can decide to focus on one or two of the themes or take a broader look using all three.

The members of this team may change during the year as new issues are introduced or the needs of the group change. Leadership skills introduced throughout the module are for the whole group of youth and adults.

2. BUILDING A YOUTH-LED TEAM

The best way to function well as a team is to spend eight to ten hours together before the year begins. The team may decide to meet several times or go on retreat for this purpose. Here is a way to set up an effective team.

- Identify four to six teens who are leaders in school, church, and other settings. Choose two to four adults who are leaders but who also know how to follow.
- Spend time together getting to know each other and building community with one another. This can best be done in a retreat setting by sharing prayer time and meal times as well as planning times.
- Share faith stories in whatever way seems appropriate and comfortable.
- Review all of the materials in the chosen module and begin to make some plans about how best to use this resource. If time permits, it may also be a good time to make plans for future modules. Be aware that new leadership may emerge during the coming year.
- Decide on a plan and delegate responsibilities for planning, leading sessions, and communicating.
- Meet with the entire group, share your plans, and get their input.
- Finalize the plan and begin.
- Be prepared to revise your plan if circumstances change.

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3. CORE COMPONENTS

Each session includes the same basic information. Optional activities and sections change as needed in response to the issue and themes. These components are:

- **Session design**. Three elements are essential for every session. 1) A beginning prayer, chosen from *The Book of Common Prayer*, is offered as a way to center the group's time together. 2) The heart of the session is the three themes and activities that help the participants to gain deeper understandings of the issue. 3) The dismissal brings everyone together as the time ends and sends them out to do God's work in the world.

- **Objective.** A learning objective is found at the top of page one of every session. The objective guides the team in determining what is to occur as a result of the time spent with this material.

- **Scripture.** With a note to "Begin here," youth are asked to look at passages from the Bible that relate to the issue. Three different pieces of Scripture provide three different views of the issue. Most sessions include both Old and New Testament references.

- **Commentary.** Each passage from the Bible is briefly explained in a paragraph following the biblical quotation. Leaders who wish to know more may explore larger works such as *The Interpreter's Bible*, a Bible commentary, or a Bible dictionary.

- **Personal Stories.** Except for the initial planning session, all of the sessions include a Personal Story. Typically it is a story of an experience that youth encounter as a part of their daily lives. In telling these stories to each other the youth will be able to examine their own experiences and be more aware of the feelings of others.

- **Questions.** Suggestions for questions to be used as discussion starters are offered throughout the sessions. An icon easily identifies the questions.

- **Skill Building.** Because a specific goal of these materials is to help youth recognize their strengths and improve their leadership skills, certain skills are emphasized in each session. These will be developed through the optional activities.

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- **Optional Activities.** A goal of the *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* is to offer a wide range of options that allow flexibility within groups and meet the needs of different types of groups. Leadership teams are invited to use their own creativity in choosing other games or activities they enjoy. The following options will be available throughout various sessions:

1. **Creative activities** to stimulate the artistic talents of teens.

2. **Games** to build trust and skills as well as explore issues.

3. **Movies, TV Shows, and Print Media** that illustrate the theme presented in today's time.

4. **Literature**, books, and short stories, that develop the theme as well as those created by the individual members of a group.

5. **Music** from *The Hymnal 1982* and from contemporary and Christian resources relevant to the topic.

6. **Field trips** to places that provide an enhancement of the theme.

7. **Service projects** that arise from the themes to carry the mission of the church beyond the walls of the classroom or the church.

8. **Posters.** A set of six posters representative of the themes within each issue are provided separately. The posters are designed to stimulate thoughts, discussion, and reflection on the various concepts.

4. SAMPLE SESSION

After the leadership team has met and the planned study of the module, the group begins to meet. A model for a session might look something like this:

1. **Planning for a session.** The leadership team has selected Theme 2 as the way they wish to approach Session 2. One or two members of the group are assigned to be leaders. They prepare for the group to participate in several of the discussions and activities for Theme 2. Any necessary speakers or other outside arrangements are made in advance.

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2. **Begin with Prayer.** Starting together with prayer is a way to help the group focus their attention. A prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer* is printed above Theme 1. Leaders may use this prayer, choose another, or compose one of their own. The prayer can be said by one person, or everyone can pray together. This may also be a time for sharing of any concerns of those present or for those absent.

3. **Scripture.** These materials are unique because they look at issues through specific passages in the Bible. The leaders read the designated Scripture and use the questions to talk about the relationship of the Scripture to the theme.

4. **Activities.** The group participates in one or more of the activities furnished in the guide. The choice will depend on the interests of the group and the time frame of the gathering.

5. **Preparing for Next Time.** A few minutes before the end of the time, announce any coming events and give leaders for the next session an opportunity to give a preview.

6. **Dismissal.** Just as the start of time together needs prayer for focus, so does the closing. The participants share any concerns to be held in prayer during the coming days and close with the "Dismissal," also printed above the beginning of Theme 1.

5. SOME GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

A key to the effectiveness of these materials is to help the group learn how to talk with one another about the issues that affect their lives and faith.

Sharing of individual stories. People are given the opportunity to share the things that are important in their own lives. This will become easier as the group members grow in trust for each other. Sometimes this may be difficult or impossible for an individual. This person needs to be allowed to pass if they wish.

Issues, themes, stories. There are many interesting topics and stories that serve as a "launching pad" for rich and deep discussion. Choose those that will engage those who participate.

Active learning. There are many opportunities for trips, visits, and other activities to bring great energy into your study. Your team can decide what works best for your group and plan times for these events

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to take place.

Speakers and guests. There are many people in your community with fascinating stories. The team can find the right people who will have an influence on your group.

Statement to the church. Teens have valuable things to say about and to their church. This can be incorporated into the program around any issue that the members of your group feel moved to respond to.

Here are some simple guidelines that can be used to facilitate sharing and community building. It is a good idea to discuss these guidelines with your team and add or delete suggestions from your group.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Make and commitment to all sessions (continuity).

2. Include everyone, even yourself, in the conversation.

3. Be real—be honest.

4. Send "I" messages—share feelings.

5. Talk about your own experiences.

6. Listen with great respect.

7. Listen, understand, but do not fix.

8. Be specific.

9. Respect confidentiality.

10. Allow the Spirit, within and beyond, to work in this group.

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6. THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The setting where your session takes place is crucial to the success of your program. In short, the less it is like a classroom the more you will be able to facilitate learning, sharing, and growth. Pay attention to the environment you are providing, as this will have 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 near the church can be a great asset. This provides a casual, comfortable setting that usually enhances the process. This may cause some problems 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 impossible. You could also consider meeting at a restaurant on an occasional basis as a way of promoting outreach and for celebration.

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For Members of the Leadership Team

A General Philosophy of a Teaching Ministry

God made all people with great intelligence, skills, talents, feelings, opinions, and ideas regardless of their age. All people are growing in their faith journey. Two key words in working with others are value and respect. Never assume that you know more than they do or that your or their experience in life gives either one more value. Instead, enter into a learning adventure, side by side. You will discover as much as you impart. You will be impacted as much as you impact others. Keep an open mind and heart to all that is said, felt, and shared; and experience God doing greater things than you could pray or ask for.

Who are Older Youth?

Volumes have been written on the lives of teens and adolescent development. The purpose here is to give the leadership team some keys about what young people are like. Youth who are on the leadership team may agree or disagree. A lively conversation about these issues will enhance the ability of the team to work together.

Characteristics of Older Youth:

- **THEY LIKE TO HAVE FUN**
  Fun is not the opposite of learning and should not be something to avoid. On the contrary, people learn best when they are having a good time. When they are having a good time, there is often chaos. Don't be afraid of a little commotion if most of the group is on task. Encourage each other to have fun in class and see how much you can learn.

- **THEY HAVE SKILLS, TALENTS, AND ENERGY**
  Teens are not empty vessels waiting to be filled up. They are people blessed with skills, talents, and intelligence. Draw upon the rich resources of the members of your group and know that there is much to offer, to share, and to teach to others. The energy of the group can deeply enhance the learning experience.

- **THEY ARE PEOPLE IN TRANSITION**
  Youth are in a transition stage of life. The essential element is change as a person moves from dependence to independence. The

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closer a person gets to graduation from high school, the more this reality will set in. Youth need freedom to make choices with adult support. Never underestimate the abilities of each other or the need for adult cooperation and support.

- **THEY ARE SELF-RELIANT AND ACCOUNTABLE**

Most youth want to be self-reliant. By this point they have had enough experiences to form their own opinions and be able to make their own decisions. Of course, like everyone else, they will both succeed and fail. Encourage the group to take responsibility for the choices they select and hold them accountable to the agreements they make. Remember that everyone deserves input on decisions that affect his or her life.

- **THEY LIKE MAKING CHOICES**

Youth can and do make good decisions. Our gift to others is to help them to develop their abilities to make good decisions and to treat them as capable human beings.

• **THEY NEED TO BE HEARD**

One of the best tools you can provide for members of the group are opportunities to speak out and be heard, and to listen to others with respect. It is important to set the example not by what you say but by what you do. Your ability to listen to others and respond to their ideas and comments will be a model for developing good listening skills. Being heard for even a moment can be a powerful experience. This is true for people of any age.

• **THEY WANT TO BE VALUED AND SIGNIFICANT**

How you treat the people in your group is much more important than what is taught. If all members feel important and significant, they are more likely to learn something. It is also crucial to pay attention to how the members of the group treat each other. The atmosphere of the classroom can inspire or destroy the whole experience. Encouraging all members of the group to treat themselves and others with extraordinary respect is one of the most important lessons to teach.

• **THEY ARE LOOKING FOR A FAITH OF THEIR OWN**

Teenagers are seeking their own opinions, values, and faith. Identity comes from becoming your own person. Youth often reject much of their parents' 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 doubts will encourage or discourage others' journeys to

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spiritual knowledge. You can't teach faith but you can grow together in your knowledge and love of the Lord.

- **RELATIONAL MINISTRY**

  This curriculum is based on building relationships in three ways. Be constantly aware of the importance of these three dynamics of relationships.

  1. The first, and most important, is the relationship between each person and God. This should be an ongoing focus in whatever is taught, discussed, or explored.

  2. This second is the relationship between young people and adults. The adult's role is not that of teacher but rather one of "mature friend." One-to-one relationships take on special significance in this model.

  3. The third is the peer relationship. How the members of the group treat each other enables or destroys the building of a caring community.

- **OWNERSHIP**

If youth are going to be truly involved in a program of learning, they must have a sense of ownership. The wise teen will learn how to share the program and build a sense of ownership together with the adults. This process can be improved and simplified by the formation of a team in the beginning with youth taking responsibility for leadership roles.

Who Are The Adults?

Adults who work with youth are more than teachers. To foster effective teaching and learning among youth, 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.

Youth can have input into which adults are selected for the leadership team. Seek out people who care about youth, have a strong faith, and are committed to the program. Adults who want to be kids or who don't keep commitments are not effective over time. The following points should be carefully considered as leadership teams are formed.

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Characteristics of Effective Adult Leaders:

- **THEY ARE ROOTED IN THEIR FAITH AND COMMITTED TO JESUS CHRIST**

Who adults are speaks loudly to teens. They don't have to be biblical scholars or perfect Christians. It also doesn't mean that 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.

- **THEY ARE WILLING TO BE A PART OF A TEAM**

For some adults working with teenagers as they grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord is an overwhelming task. It is essential for teens to understand the sense of responsibility that comes with this task. Wise teens know that they are only part of a teaching team and that adults are accountable to other people in the church who may or may not care about the activities of young people. Adults need to be able to let go of their need to be in charge and still have the ability to use their gifts as part of the team.

- **THEY ARE FUN AND ENJOY BEING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

Adults should be able to relax and enjoy their time with youth. Effective adults know how to have fun and to share joy with young people without giving up expectations of them. Adults must find their own balance of fun and seriousness. Affirming joy and excitement with group, however, is essential for the adults' full participation.

- **THEY ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT PEOPLE THAN FACTS**

The *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* provides an excellent base of information to learn more about God, Scripture, and the Church. The sessions incorporate this learning with the issues that Affect young people's lives. Effective adults are aware of issues that are unique to their groups and look for ways to include these ideas in the work of the group. Adults should give priority to what youth are thinking and feeling.

- **THEY HAVE A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO THE GROUP**

Adults are committed and consistent. Steadfastness of faith and commitment to the class will make a real difference in the long run. Leaders should focus on the overall success of the program and not on any one moment, hour, or week.

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A Final Word

Remember that this is a process of growing in the 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 another person's life. So much happens intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually in individuals' lives that they themselves are not aware of the people who have had an impact on them. Trust in each other, trust in yourself and, most of all, trust in God.

For More Ideas

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Finding Our Way

Objective

Youth will be able to describe how the group will explore the gifts they have been given by God and how to use those gifts to serve others.

From the Service of Holy Baptism

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon *these* your *servants* the forgiveness of sin, and have raised *them* to the new life of grace. Sustain *them*, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give *them* an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. *Amen*.

Then the Bishop or Priest places a hand on the person's head, marking on the forehead the sign of the cross and saying to each one

. . . you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. *Amen*.

When all have been baptized, the Celebrant says
Let us welcome the newly baptized.

Celebrant and People
We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.

The Peace is now exchanged
Celebrant The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People And also with you.

The Baptism
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 308

SESSION 1

Scripture
Luke 10:25-28
Luke 11:9-13

Skill Focus
Communication
Respect

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Prayer
O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Sixth Sunday of Easter
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 225

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

A. Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

Luke 10:25-28

Commentary: This passage is the preamble to the story of the Good Samaritan. Here Jesus is asked about the qualifications for eternal life. Jesus replies by forcing the lawyer to answer his own question. The lawyer knows the words of the law, but he does not understand its implications for his own life. Jesus challenges him to act upon what he knows.

B. "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:9-13

Commentary: This passage is part of a larger section in which Jesus is teaching his disciples to pray. Jesus says they can be confident that God will give them what they need for the work God has given them to do. However, they must ask God for guidance, seek diligently, and persist in the face of obstacles. Christians can be confident that God will give them what they need. That confidence will help them to look for solutions creatively and step out confidently.

☐ Questions

- Have you ever measured your love for God? How can people love God with all their hearts, souls, strength, and minds?
- Do you love yourself? Can you love your neighbor if you do not love yourself?
- In the second passage, where can you find answers to the hardest questions?
- Where do you begin looking for answers?

Point of Contact

Holy Baptism

Look over the excerpt from the service of Holy Baptism from the previous page. In *The Book of Common Prayer*, see where this passage fits in the service. The prayer at the beginning of the passage gives thanks for the forgiveness of sins, asks for support through the Holy Spirit, and seeks the gifts that are needed for a new life in Christ.

- What is the most important part of the prayer at the beginning of the passage for you? Why?
- Are the themes from the scripture passages similar to this prayer?
- Where can you go for help as a person who is "Christ's own for ever"?
- How can you, as a member of the household of God, help others?

☐ Activities

Sharing God's Love

Write the words "God's Love" on index cards. Make enough for each person in the group. Ask the group to stand in a circle. One person takes a card and gives it to another person along with an appropriate demonstration of love—such as a hug or a word of encouragement. The receiver then becomes the giver who then selects someone else. At the same time, the person who began the activity takes another index card and starts the process again. New cards are used until the whole group is involved. Collect the cards or make sure everyone has one to take home.

Interview A Partner

Ask participants to pair up with another person in the group. Give each pair a list of the following questions to ask each other. After everyone is finished, come back together to share.

- What is the best gift you ever received? What is the worst?
- What is the difference between a "good" gift and a "bad" gift?
- How do you respond gracefully to a "bad" gift?
- Can you think of a time when a gift you thought was bad turned out to be good later on? What happened?

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What's My Gift?

Make a list of personal gifts, such as good friend, good listener, helpful, and cheerful. You may also want to include talents or things people do well, such as dancer, musician, or computer technician. On index cards, write one gift or talent per card. Ask participants to select a card and take turns pantomiming the gift or talent for the group to guess. Afterward, talk about the difference between gifts and talents.

- How do you know if you have a particular gift or talent?
- Can it change over time?
- Can gifts or talents be developed?
- Can they be lost?

☐ Steps for Planning

Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose-Driven Church*, points out that when God created animals, each one was given a particular area of expertise. Some run, some fly, some swim. Each has a particular role based on the way they were shaped by God.

Using clay, shape yourself as an animal—real or imaginary—and share it with the group. Where do you live? What do you do? What makes you special?

God also created humans with unique designs and gifts. We are most effective when we use our spiritual gifts in a way that best expresses our personality.

During the study of Treasuring Our Gifts, you will discover more about who you are and how you are "shaped" for ministry. Use the letters in the word "shape" to help you explore different aspects of your gifts:

Spiritual Gifts: What spiritual gifts do you have?
Heart: What do you really care about?
Abilities: What abilities make you special?
Personality: How does personality affect the way you do things?
Experiences: Name important experiences that have affected you.

Write answers to these questions on a piece of paper and seal them in an envelope. Appoint someone to take care of the envelopes until the end of the module. As a group, determine how and what you will explore in your study of Treasuring Our Gifts. Suggested steps for planning are outlined below:

1. Pass out copies of the Planning Reference Guide on the following page to each participant. Take a few moments to describe the themes for each session to help everyone see where the group is going. Give the participants time to review the sessions and answer the questions on the Reference Guide.

2. Give the participants time to discuss topics that interest and excite them. Which sessions and themes do they want to study? Do they want to spend more time on sessions that are of greater interest? Talk about keeping individual journals to help participants remember what they are learning about themselves. A journal can include insights, thanksgivings, meditations, or reflections on particular events. If the group decides to keep journals, provide a notebook for each person in the group.

3. After discussing the topics, write down the sessions and themes the group has selected to study on newsprint. Next to each entry, write the name of participants who agree to be the leaders or coordinators for each week. These people will prepare activities and gather any materials that are to be used. The coordinators may not actually lead the session, but will assume responsibility for making all the preparations.

4. Look at the resource posters and decide how each will be used.
   Poster 1: Caring for Ourselves
   Poster 2: Caring for Each Other
   Poster 3: Caring for People in Need
   Poster 4: Caring for God's World
   Poster 5: Using Resources Fairly
   Poster 6: Financial Resources

5. Distribute copies of the sessions to the participants who have agreed to be coordinators. Check the process to see if anyone feels that his or her ideas have been overlooked.
   - Do you agree with the decisions made so far?
   - If there are still disagreements, can we find a way to come to agreement?

6. Make a calendar of the sessions and themes you select on a grid of your own design. Make sure every coordinator has a copy and post it in a central location.

7. Discuss the ground rules and common understandings of the group.
   - What are our expectations for attendance?
   - If coordinators get sick, who can they call?
   - Who can make changes in the schedule if necessary?
   - Should someone be in charge of calling coordinators to remind them about upcoming responsibilities?

8. If the group wants to have a snack, decide who will be responsible for assigning and reminding people to bring in food. Make provisions for cleanup at the same time.

9. Measure how well the planning session went by asking the following questions:
   - Did everyone participate in the planning?
   - Did the group listen to each person?
   - Is everyone comfortable with the study plan?

10. Save time at the end of the unit to reflect on what you have learned and how you can put that knowledge into practice. Session 9 will help you do this.

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PLANNING REFERENCE GUIDE

Treasuring Our Gifts

Questions

- What surprises you in this session?
- What ideas do you like in this session?
- Which scriptures and themes would you want to focus on?

Topic	Scripture	Theme	Notes
Affirming Our Gifts	*Judges 6:11-16* *Romans 12:3-8* *Matthew 25:14-30*	God Calls Everyone God Gives Gifts Using Our Talents	
Caring for Ourselves	*Psalm 116:5-7* *II Corinthians 10:12-18* *I Peter 5:6-11*	Resting in God Comparing Ourselves to Others Strength From God	
Caring for Each Other	*Deuteronomy 22:1-3* *Romans 13:8-10* *Galatians 6:1-2*	Helping Others Loving One Another Bearing Each Other's Burden	
Caring for People in Need	*Leviticus 23:22* *Psalm 41:1-3* *Luke 10:29-37*	Leaving the Gleanings Rewards for Service The Good Samaritan	
Caring for God's World	*Genesis 1:1-5, 20-23* *James 4:13-17* *Revelation 22:1-5*	Primordial Planet Doing the Right Thing The River of Life	
Using Resources Fairly	*Genesis 41:53-57* *Matthew 25:1-13* *Romans 11:29-36*	Keeping Our Heritage Being Prepared Appreciating What God Gives Us	
Financial Resources	*Malachi 3:6-10* *Matthew 22:15-22* *Luke 21:1-4*	Do Not Rob God Giving God What Is God's Using God's Gifts	

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Affirming Our Gifts

Objective

Youth will be able to name and affirm their own gifts and those of others.

Personal Story

I once got back an English paper on which I received an A. The teacher had written in several places, “Are these your words?” I was shocked that my teacher thought I would plagiarize a report.

Then on a history paper, the teacher wrote, “Your answers look a bit like Scott’s—are you sure they’re yours?” I was stunned. I had never cheated before, and I didn’t expect the teacher to think that I had.

On another occasion, during an art exam, three people at my table looked at their notes from class. One held the notes under the table, one on the floor, and one under his hat on the table.

These events helped me see the differences that separate us every day. I realize that all of us have different goals and priorities in our lives, and that we act differently as a result.

While I put a great amount of importance on grades and schoolwork, some people may focus on sports in high school. Others may focus on art, music, or their jobs outside of school. They may want to just pass so that they can begin to do what is important to them.

This doesn’t mean that cheating is okay. I can’t say why those students were cheating on that test. I did feel that they were part of the reason why I was not being trusted by my teachers. However, life isn't always fair. As a teenager, I often feel like the underdog. How can I get life to work in my favor without sacrificing my integrity?

I can start by learning to use the gifts God gave me. Everyone has gifts. For some, it’s the ability to speak well. Others write well, and some are born leaders. We need to build on our gifts. If we use our own gifts and talents, there is a chance that we will create something original, something as good or better than what existed before.

I used to think that people were worse off than I if they didn’t get good grades or if they didn’t think like I did. At some point I began to realize that everyone has strong points. Lots of people are better than I am at sports, art, and math. Some people can look at a situation and see the solution quicker than I can. Sometimes I forget that everyone is different and has their own gifts and special ways of doing things.

God gave each person different gifts. I believe that God meant for us to be different, creating distinct thoughts and lives. We need to find those gifts and use them the best way we know how. And we need to support each other in recognizing our gifts. God will take care of the rest.

SESSION 2

Scripture

Judges 6:11-16
Romans 12:3-8
Matthew 25:14-30

Skill Focus

Choices
Influences

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Prayer

Let us give thanks to God our Father for all his gifts so freely bestowed upon us.
For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth and sky and sea,
For all that is gracious in the lives of men and women, revealing the image of Christ,
For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our friends,
For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve,
For health and strength to work, and leisure to rest and play, . . .
We thank you, Lord.

A Litany of Thanksgiving
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 836

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 God Calls Everyone

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the wine press, to hide it from the Midianites. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty warrior." Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian." Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you." He responded, "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them."

Judges 6:11-16

Commentary: The *Book of Judges* tells the stories of Israel's greatest tribal heroes. One of the figures is Gideon. God appears to him while he is threshing wheat and calls him to deliver the Israelites from the marauding bands of Midian. Gideon protests that he is the weakest member of a weak tribe. But God insists on tapping Gideon for the challenge that lies ahead. Throughout the Bible, God tends to call the weak and unexpected members of the community to a life of great service. God promises Gideon important gifts for the task: a commission to serve and God's presence. God can call anyone to serve and always provides the gifts needed to live out the summons.

☐ Questions

- What does it mean to be "the least"?
- How does God help Gideon in this story?
- Do you know anyone who is the least? Have you ever felt that way?
- Have you ever been asked to do something you thought you couldn't do?

☐ Activities

Gideon's Gifts

Read the story of Gideon's call to be a leader of God's people in *Judges 6:11* through chapter 8. After reading the story, decide how to retell the story in a dramatic way. The group may set the stage for a storyteller, with members of the group providing background noises and suggestive props (such as someone lying on the floor as the fleece). Other suggestions for telling the story include drama, mime, and role play.

After becoming familiar with the story, recall that Gideon believed he was not only a member of a weak tribe but also the weakest in his tribe. Discuss what being the least means.

- Have you known someone in Gideon's position?
- Have you ever felt that you were the least in your family or group?

Using newspapers and magazines, find stories where the unexpected happened, the underdog won, or less able people accomplished something important. Look for stories about the school not expected to do well in the science bowl that wins, or a young person who uses untried skills and saves a life. The sports section may have other stories, such as a short person who plays on the basketball team. Make a display of the clippings for others to see.

Personality Type

Many magazines and newspapers have funny quizzes or tests that are supposed to tell what kind of person the reader is. There are also actual tests of personality types and aptitudes. Bring in an astrology book or other resource that suggests ways people are to behave according to predetermined criteria. Discuss with the group any experiences they have had with these types of tests.

- Do they know their personality type?
- Does more than one description often apply to the same person?
- Where do the descriptions differ from the actual person?

Consider the possibility that God might keep a book that describes people. Scripture tells us that God knows everything about each one of us; therefore, God's description would be unique for each person. Write your own version of God's description of you. If the group is comfortable doing so, invite everyone to share what they have written.

Hint: Decide as a group if it is better to share ideas or to allow individuals to keep these thoughts private.

Seeking Gifts

God gives gifts to all people, but humans don't always see those gifts in an obvious way, either in ourselves or in others. Invite the group to discover the gifts God has given to members of the congregation. First, draft a set of questions, such as: How has God called you to serve? What are the gifts that you share with others?

Practice interviewing each other. Then send members of the group out in pairs to interview other members of the congregation at coffee hour, after church, or at some other convenient time. Bring your results back to share with the group.

- What was new?
- What surprised you?

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2 God Gives Gifts

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

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

Romans 12:3-8

Commentary: Paul's letter to the Romans is upbeat and joyful as he writes about the freedom from sin made possible by the power of God's Spirit. God's great gift is this: In the power of the Spirit through Jesus Christ, God's people are saved from enslavement to evil and sin. God's victory over sin and death is final, and his people are free. For Paul, liberation from evil and death is the mark of the Christian life. God's gift of the Spirit makes all people free to live in a new way, at peace with God and with one another.

☐ Questions

- What are the gifts listed in the passage?
- How are those gifts demonstrated in everyday life?
- Who do you know who shares these gifts with others?

☐ Activities

Sticker Gifts

Give each person in the group three large stick-on labels. Secretly, each person chooses three gifts from the scripture passage or the Traits List in the next column. Write one gift on each sticker. Without letting others see what you have written, place one sticker on the back of three different people. No one person may get more than three stickers. Individuals must then guess, by asking yes or no questions what gifts are on their backs.

After everyone has discovered their gifts, remove the stickers and put them on a piece of paper under the following categories: 1) Yes, I have this gift; 2) No, I don't have this gift; or 3) I never thought I had this gift before. Decide where and how each person might use their gifts during the coming week, even those in the second category. Encourage participants to take home the sheet with the stickers and put it someplace to remind them to use the gifts God has given them.

Traits List

On one sheet of paper write a list of individual traits. You may use those listed below, add others, or create your own list based on the scripture. Make a copy for each member of the group. Distribute the sheets and three different color pens so that any three people seated next to each other will not have the same color pen.

First, ask each person to circle three items that describe his or her own gifts. Then pass the sheets to the person on the right. This person underlines the items circled if they agree and then adds three other traits the person may have. Finally, pass the sheets to the left twice (the sheets are now to the left of the original person) and underline the items that they agree with and circle three other traits. Return the sheets to the owner. Each person now has nine items circled. Spend some time in pairs discussing the gifts.

- When did you see me use this gift?
- Why do you think I can do this?

As a group discuss the surprises and affirmations of the process.

Items for the Traits List: good listener, trustworthy, sympathetic, cheerful, encourages others, teaches others, makes others laugh, completes tasks, makes others welcome, creative, organized, spiritual, full of hope, faithful, forgiving, sensitive, nurturing, helpful, direct, problem solver.

Gift Tiles

After completing one of the other two activities, invite each member of the group to illustrate one of their gifts on a ceramic tile. Bring in enough tiles for each person. Tiles can be purchased any place that sells plumbing and bath fixtures. Use permanent markers, acrylic paint, or glue aquarium gravel or other items to create unique tiles that depict individual gifts.

The finished product can be covered with clear acrylic to preserve it. Share with each other the gifts illustrated on the tiles, and how the gifts are used for service to God and others. Gather the finished tiles to be used in the liturgy in Session 9.

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3 Using Our Talents

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Matthew 25:14-30

Commentary: The parable of the talents is a story about the Kingdom of God. In the last week of his earthly life, Jesus encourages his hearers to use the gifts God has given them and warns about the consequences of ignoring gifts. The slave who covers up the master's gift is not willing to take the risk of using his talents and energy to improve it. He is afraid to embrace the opportunity for a richer, fuller future, preferring instead to cling to the bankrupt security of his fears. He is not willing to invest himself. As Jesus faces the cross, he points to a radical new future: the Kingdom of God. He teaches that all God's gifts have great worth—no matter how seemingly insignificant—and that each person is called to use them in service to God and others.

☐ Questions

- Compare the elements in this story with today's business world. What is like the actions of each of the servants?
- Do individuals "bury" money today? In what ways?
- In this parable, how is Jesus asking us to deal with money? Is that practical?

☐ Activities

Personal Story

Read the Personal Story for this session.

- How does the author suggest that teens find their own gifts and use them?
- How do the gifts described in the story compare with the talents in the scripture passage?
- Who in the story is burying their talents?

Sometimes it is hard to figure out how God is working in our lives and what our gifts really are. Discuss ways in which members of the group can support each other through prayer and other ways to help each person find and use the gifts God has given us.

If individuals have agreed to keep a journal during this course of study, write down the gifts you have identified for yourself. Next to this entry, write down ways the group can support you in using these gifts. As a group, make a list on a piece of newsprint or posterboard of ways that participants in the group can help each other use gifts. Post this somewhere in the meeting space for the rest of this unit.

A Gift's Worth

Read the scripture passage in *Matthew* and discuss what happened in the story.

Give each person sixteen pieces of candy and three paper cups. Ask them to put ten pieces in one cup, five in the second, and one in the third. Then ask them to identify a gift for each cup that is worth ten, five, or one—with ten being the gift that most people know you have, five being the gift that only some people know you have, and one being the gift that no one or just your closest friends know you have, the gift you have buried. Consider all kinds of gifts in this exercise, including those related to time, talents, or treasures. At the time of the story in *Matthew*, if people buried money, they were no longer responsible for its safety. Talk about the value you place on your gifts.

- In what ways does burying a gift make us not responsible for sharing it?
- What are the reasons someone might bury a gift?

After naming and discussing the three different types of gifts, consider ways each gift might be shared with others in the community or the church during the coming week. Work in small groups or together so that group members can help each other determine ways in which gifts can be used, especially those that have been buried.

Gifts of Others

Identify fictional characters from books and movies who use their gifts for both good and evil. For example, in *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, the Artful Dodger uses his gift both to steal and to help Oliver; in *Frankenstein*, the intention of Dr. Frankenstein was not to create a monster but to create life. What other fictional characters can the group think of?

Watch a movie based on one of these stories, such as the musical *Oliver*. Look for ways characters used their gifts for good and evil.

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Caring For Ourselves

SESSION 3

Scripture
Psalm 116:5-7
II Corinthians 10:12-18
I Peter 5:6-11

Skill Focus
Independence
Trust

Objective
Youth will be able to discuss ways to care for themselves in light of God's love for them.

Personal Story
I am a high school junior who likes things that are considered normal—I go to the movies with friends. I go to concerts. I hang out in coffeehouses. I even play guitar. Being normal and in control hides how severely depressed a person can be. Like many other normal kids in this country, I have been diagnosed with bipolar depression. And although it may seem like it's a bad thing to be tagged with such a name, it is not. When I first sought help, I was incorrectly diagnosed. But since I found out exactly what is wrong with me, I have been able to get proper treatment. My life is much brighter than I once thought it could be.

In eighth grade I started to notice I was not like other kids. I had no friends, and I liked to sit at home and read in my spare time. I was obsessed with death and I had little perspective on reality. It was scary. But ninth grade rolled around, and I had tons of friends. I still noticed something was different about me. I did not have as much control of my words and actions as others did, I was sad all of the time, and I was still obsessed with death. I needed some sort of escape from myself. Instead of finding things about myself that were good, I turned to drugs and alcohol. My supposed escape turned out to be my prison.

I spent the next two years coping with my depression. When I had problems, I used drugs to make them go away. When I felt strong enough to cope, I tried to stay away from drugs and alcohol. I was only fooling myself.

The worst part was the fact that drugs and alcohol couldn't drive away my problems, and only brought them right into my face. I was lying to my parents and friends all the time. I was doing poorly in school, even though I was working so hard. I hated myself for hurting so many people with my actions. I finally could not take anymore. After a normal, actually good day, I took 60 over-the-counter pills in an attempt to kill myself. Even after I did it I knew I didn't want to die. That's the nature of my illness. Without treatment, I lose control. I went to the hospital, and the doctors and nurses saved my liver from severe damage.

After the incident, I spent two weeks in a mental institution. There I was analyzed and diagnosed with bipolar depression. The doctors and nurses helped me learn about my disease and they taught me that although depression is not curable, it is treatable.

I now take medicines that have helped me regain control of my life. I go to AA meetings and I have been clean for a considerable time. My mind has gotten clearer, and the world is a much kinder, safer place. I no longer hate myself, I have a great girlfriend, the courage to make amends to those I've hurt, and the perseverance to live my life the way I want to.

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Prayer
Grant, Lord God, to all who have been baptized into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, that, as we have put away the old life of sin, so we may be renewed in the spirit of our minds, and live in righteousness and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.
For all Baptized Christians
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 252-253

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Resting in God

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is merciful.
The Lord protects the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
Return, O my soul, to your rest,
for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
Psalm 116:5-7

Commentary: In a complex, highly technological society, people expect to find solutions to any problem. Because they expect to be able to solve their own problems, they often accept without gratitude the privileges that come to them. When people are sick, they expect to get well, often forgetting to thank God or the physicians, nurses, and researchers who contributed to the healing. This psalm is a personal hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from an illness that brought the writer to the very brink of death. The psalmist recognizes the frailty of life and gives thanks for the gracious healing of God. "Simple" here refers to the young or inexperienced, those who are vulnerable, naive or seem to trust too easily. As is common in scripture, these people are often the first to recognize the hand of God at work.

☐ Questions

- Do you sometimes forget to turn to God when you are ill?
- Have you ever felt that you had been "brought low"? What did you do?
- Why is this passage included in the Prayer Book service for the Thanksgiving for the Birth or Adoption of a Child?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.
- What happened when the writer hit bottom?
- Where did this person find rest?

☐ Activities

God in My Story

Ask each person to get comfortable in a position where they aren't touching anyone else. Ask them to close their eyes, quiet their minds, and breath deeply and slowly. Invite a volunteer to read *Psalm 139:1-17* (or another appropriate passage). Wait a few minutes to let people think about what was read.

Ask the group to make a list of six to twelve significant events from their birth to the present time. Review your list. Are there places where you were particularly aware of God being present and active? Focus on one event. Remember the time, what kind of day it was, and the emotions you felt. With a partner, share one event from your list.

Gather the group and invite them to share some of their experiences with the whole group if they are comfortable doing so. Close by thanking God for being present throughout our lives.

Taking Stock

Look at the Resource Poster No. 1, Resting in God.
- How is this person taking care of herself?
- What clues are there in the poster? Is there anything the poster doesn't tell us about her?

Give each person two pieces of paper and a pen. Set one piece aside. Take the other and fold it in half, then fold it in half again. Open it up to four quadrants. Label one quadrant "physical," another "emotional," another "spiritual" and the last "intellectual." In each quadrant, make a list of all the things you are doing to take care yourself in that particular area. After you are finished, score yourself, zero to four for each area (zero means you are doing nothing; four means you are doing everything possible). Add up your total and divide by four. This is your caring quotient—how are you doing? Are you "passing"? Are you doing enough for yourself? Do you need to spend some time on others? Look at your quadrants again, and list anything you want to be doing but aren't. Identify one thing in each area you are willing to do that would make a difference.

Using the other piece of paper, make a bookmark as a reminder. What would be the short-term costs of making some of these changes? What might be the long-term benefits? Keep the bookmark where you will see it. Close the session by asking for God's support to follow through on your commitment.

Movie Night

Watch the movie *Regarding Henry*, and then discuss it.
- How did Henry take care of himself prior to the accident?
- What kind of relationships did he have with his family and friends?
- How did the accident change Henry?
- How did it affect his relationship with his family and friends? How did his family and friends change?
- Have you ever known anyone who has had to radically change his or her life? What happened? How were others around them affected?

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2 Comparing Ourselves to Others

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense. We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you. For we were not overstepping our limits when we reached you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ. We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labors of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action. "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.

II Corinthians 10:12-18

Commentary: Paul confronts the hollow motives of his critics who are attempting to force him out and assume leadership of the church at Corinth. Using irony and mock humility, Paul observes that his critics measure themselves by one another, a standard to which he could not "dare" to compare. And why would he want to anyway? While they are taking credit for what has been done by others, Paul is doing what God has assigned him. The only real standard is Christ, in comparison to whom all will be found wanting. Since everything comes from God, credit for accomplishment belongs to God alone. Finally, Christians should seek God's approval, not the approval of others.

☐ Questions

- Do you ever compare yourself to others? What happens?
- Do comparisons make us work harder to do better or make us smug like the people in Corinth?
- What do you use as a standard to measure yourself?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- At first, how did the writer measure his actions?
- Could the writer solve his problems alone?

☐ Activities

Measuring Up

Make a giant ruler without any markings on a roll of paper or use masking tape to mark off sections on the floor. Ask each person to lay down or stand against the ruler to be measured. Ask the question, "How do we measure ourselves?"

Make a list of other ways we measure ourselves, such as grades, clothes, or the number of friends. Associate the instrument used—for example, grades—with what is being measured—intelligence, knowledge, academic effort. Discuss the measurements we used for ourselves.

- Why do we measure ourselves against others?
- What is at stake for us?
- What do we hope to learn?
- How effective are the measuring instruments on the list? (A stopwatch will tell you who can run the fastest, while counting the number of parties you are invited to may or may not indicate how good a friend you are.)

Identify three good measurements for yourself, such as hours spent helping others or eating a balanced diet. Be aware of measures that are useful or damaging.

Most Likely to . . .

Many yearbooks name students who are most likely to do or be something. Bring in index cards for each person in your group. Ask each participant to take a card and make up a "Most likely to …" for each person, such as be elected president, win a smile contest, or earn a scholarship. Sit in a circle, and begin with one person introducing him or herself, as "Hi, I am Andy." The others in the group will respond with the "most likely" they have written for that person.

Afterward, ask the group to reflect.

- Is what the group says about you what you want to be?
- Ten years from now, what would you like to win a prize for?

Think about where you hope to be in twenty years. Write a brief summary of your life's work.

- What do you hope that you will have been able to accomplish?
- What would you like to be in a position to give back to your community?
- What you would like to be able to find out from an older person right now?

If you feel comfortable doing so, share the summaries. Discuss your definitions of success. Does the group agree with you?

The Best Years of My Life

Interview older members of your congregation at a church dinner or make arrangements to visit them at home or after church. With their permission, videotape or record the interview. Ask them about their expectations as a teen.

- What did they hope to do?
- What did they want to be?
- Were they surprised at how their lives worked out?
- What were some of the things that happened that they didn't expect or weren't prepared for?
- How do they define success?

Talk about the interviews, and find a way to share them with others in the church.

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3 Strength From God

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

I Peter 5:6-11

Commentary: The imagery of the mighty hand of God recalls God's great acts of deliverance, particularly the exodus from Egypt. Christians live in the humility imposed by a hostile culture and take their confidence in God's promise to transform the world. Whatever they suffer is temporary, because the God of grace will relieve their suffering and give them a share in the glory of Christ. The writer calls people to turn over their anxieties about personal well-being to God and stand together with others who also suffer. Strength does not come from the world; it is a gift from God.

☐ Questions

- What do you do when you feel anxious? Do you think about God?
- Look at the list of words at the end of the passage describing what God will do. Which word is most comforting?
- What or who is the "roaring lion" in your life? How do you stand up to it?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What was the "roaring lion" in the writer's life?
- How did this person confront it?
- Are you aware of the suffering of others? What would you do if a friend had problems like the writer of the story?

☐ Activities

Squirms

Ask the group to write a series of questions using three different colors of index cards. One color will be for low risk questions, another for high risk questions, and the third will be left blank to be used as "pass" cards. Low risk questions focus on personal opinions, such as "I think people spend too much money on ____." High risk questions focus on personal behavior, such as "I feel closest to God when ____." Whoever makes up a question should be prepared to answer it.

Deal out "pass" cards to everyone in the group. Select a person at random to choose a question from either pile and read it aloud. They can either answer it or use the "pass" card. The person to the left has the option to ask one follow-up question and then he or she becomes the next to select a question. Talk about how you answer questions in your life.

- Where do we draw strength to make hard decisions in our lives?
- How can we be a source of strength to one another?

Write a group prayer that expresses your conclusions.

Hugs All Around

Bring in an old raincoat or a garbage bag with holes for head and arms and ask the group to decorate it with pictures or symbols of things that make them anxious, for example, asking someone on a date, taking a timed test, or competing in a sport.

After the coat is complete, play a game of "Hug Tag," a modified form of regular tag. A person is safe if they are touching another person or group. The number of people you have to be in contact with depends on the size of your group. You are not safe if you are not connected to the correct number of people. The person chasing the others wears the raincoat.

Talk about the anxieties depicted on the coat and playing the game.

- How did it feel to be chased by everyone's anxieties?
- How did you feel finding safety in community?
- Can people at home, in school, or at church help you deal with your anxieties? How?

Take the coat and put it at the front of the room. Say the prayer at the beginning of the session or write your own about giving your anxieties to God.

Movie Night

Watch the movie *Beyond Rangoon* which is loosely based on a true story about repression in Burma in the late 1980s. **Note:** This movie is rated R and contains several scenes of violence. The scenes are shocking representations of human brutality; however, none of them is gratuitous.
Afterward, discuss the movie to find the hope that lay beyond the violence.

- How are the assumptions of the main character about personal safety and government accountability challenged?
- How does she take responsibility for herself ? When does she expect others to assume their responsibility?
- What is the appeal of Aung San Suu Kyi? From where does she take her strength?

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Caring for Each Other

SESSION 4

Scripture
Deuteronomy 22:1-3
Romans 13:8-10
Galatians 6:1-2

Skill Focus
Relationships
Forgiveness

Objective
Youth will be able to name ways they can show concern and care for each other.

Personal Story
Last summer, while I was at camp with my best friends, something happened that changed my life. It all started on an advanced rock climbing trip.

My best friend Chelsea and her friend Will had both been away from home for two and a half weeks. Both of them missed their families and friends a lot. They had decided to sneak out and call home at the first opportunity.

The advanced rock climbing class was eating dinner in a small town when Will and Chelsea saw their chance. They left the group and found a phone.

Chelsea immediately called her boyfriend's house. Her boyfriend's mother picked up the phone. After a few seconds, Chelsea collapsed to the ground in hysterics. Will grabbed the phone and asked what was going on.

Chelsea's boyfriend had been in an accident. He had been driving from his hometown in Michigan to Chelsea's house in Kentucky with his friend when he fell asleep at the wheel. The car flipped over, and he died instantly. His friend was unharmed.

Chelsea was in love with her boyfriend and had been going out with him for almost a year. She considered him her first love. Throughout the first two weeks of camp, all she talked about was him. She had pictures of him above her bunk which she kissed nightly before falling asleep.

After Chelsea found out about his death, she stopped talking. All she did was cry. She was my best friend, and I hated to see her like that. I did not know what to say to her because I knew there was nothing I could possibly tell her to make her feel better. She kept the pictures of him above the bunk and cried herself to sleep each night.

I wanted to help her so badly, but I did not know how. Finally I realized that the best thing to do was just to be there with her and listen when she wanted to talk. I had never experienced someone dying before, and I think about life a lot differently now. I also learned that sometimes the best thing you can do for another person is to just listen and care about them.

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Prayer
O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

Proper 10
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 231

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Helping Others

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

You shall not watch your neighbor's ox or sheep straying away and ignore them; you shall take them back to their owner. If the owner does not reside near you or you do not know who the owner is, you shall bring it to your own house, and it shall remain with you until the owner claims it; then you shall return it. You shall do the same with a neighbor's donkey; you shall do the same with a neighbor's garment; and you shall do the same with anything else that your neighbor loses and you find. You may not withhold your help.

Deuteronomy 22:1-3

Commentary: This section of *Deuteronomy* is chiefly concerned with relationships between neighbors and responsibility for the welfare of others. Concern for others in the wider community was very unusual in the ancient world, but the Israelites considered it part of their covenant with God. In the passage, finding lost property is not an occasion for profit; it must be restored to its owner. Furthermore, it is not enough simply to hold the property for safe keeping. The finder is required to take action by returning the items to the owner. In relationships with others, the expectation is not simply to do no harm. It is to take action to ensure and promote the welfare of others.

☐ Questions

- Have you ever withheld help from a friend? To someone you didn't know? Why?
- What does the writer in *Deuteronomy* say our responsibility to others is?
- Has anyone returned something you thought you would never see again? How did you feel?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How did the writer help her friend?
- What else could she have done?

☐ Activities

With a Little Help

During the week, find several items that can be easily taken apart and reassembled, such as a ballpoint pen or a flashlight. Take the items apart and give one piece to each participant. Without talking, they must reassemble the items by finding the remaining parts. Or, cut postcards or pictures from magazines mounted on cardboard into three pieces and scramble the pieces. Give each person an envelope containing three puzzle pieces, but don't tell the group that the three pieces don't fit together. They will need look for the correct pieces from one another. The first to reassemble the puzzle wins.

When the group is finished, talk about the activity and about times when people in the group needed help.

- What did it feel like to know you needed help?
- Did someone come to your assistance? What happened?
- What did you learn from the experience?
- When have you helped someone? What was that like?

Identify one person you could help this week at home, at school, or in your community.

Lean on Me

Form a tight circle (shoulder to shoulder), and ask participants to extend their arms out straight.
Hint: About ten people works best. If your group is large, form several circles.
Select someone to be in the center. This person crosses his or her arms across their chest and gently begins to fall. The people in the circle catch the person and gently pass the person back and forth. Take turns being in the center.

Talk about the experience of being in the circle and being in the center.

- What was it like to depend on other people?
- Were you worried? Relaxed?
- What are other ways that we can take care of each other?

Divide into small groups to role play situations young people face. Each situation should include several different solutions. For example: A former boyfriend asked my best friend to the prom. We had agreed to double date; what do I say now? Possible solutions: make separate arrangements; ask her how she could do this to me; make her choose between him or me; say nothing; or another response. Ask the groups to rank the choices and role play the top choice.

- Were there things you didn't expect?
- Based on the role play, would you make a different choice?

Close by inviting the group to pray for particular situations they face.

Community Pilgrimage

Take a pilgrimage to places of need in your community or one nearby. Visit abandoned lots, homeless gathering points, or places where car accidents frequently occur, and pray. Also, visit places of hope where needs are being met, such as a shelter, community recycling program, or hospice. Arrange in advance to meet with someone who can tell you about the program and give you a tour. Plan to walk or take public transportation. End your pilgrimage at your church and worship together.

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2 Loving One Another

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Romans 13:8-10

Commentary: The four laws Paul cites come from the portion of the Ten Commandments that protect human life from violation. These can be summed up in the command to love one's neighbor as one's self. Love is a fulfillment of the law. The Greek word for love here is agape, which Paul uses primarily to designate God's love of humankind. The love in humans is not their own, but God's. By giving love to one another, God dwells in people. This passage arrives at the same point as *I Corinthians 13* that love is the supreme gift because it is the very presence of God.

☐ Questions

- Look at the four laws Paul cites in the passage. What "commandments" would you write to keep people from hurting each other?
- Have you ever stopped caring about someone who continued to hurt you?
- How can you love this kind of person without endangering your own safety?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How did the writer show her love for her friend?
- How can we repay love that others give us?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 2.

- Love means many things in our culture. How can you show love to another person at your school, at home, at your church, or other places in your community?
- Is it sometimes easier to love someone you don't have to be around every day?

☐ Activities

Love Is

Before the group arrives, set up a graffiti board (perhaps in the shape of a heart) that has the words "Love is" printed on the top. Ask everyone to add at least one ending to the phrase. Using a Bible dictionary, define the word agape. Brainstorm examples of agape love, and compare this with the graffiti heart.

- What are some similarities?
- What are the differences?
- Are other kinds of love good or bad?

As Christians, sometimes we love people because they are nice to us and make us feel special, and sometimes we love them because we said we would (see Baptismal Covenant, *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305). Write an agape love note to someone you really don't feel like loving at this particular moment, such as a parent, sibling, or friend you have had a disagreement with. Collect the notes in a basket and pray for these people and your feelings toward them.

Music Night

Ask the group to bring CDs with songs about love, and, if possible, a copy of the lyrics.
Hint: Call those who volunteered to bring in music sometime during the week to remind them.
Play the songs and look at the lyrics.

- What does popular culture mean by love?
- How is this different from or the same as what Paul is referring to in the passage from *Romans*?

Popular culture talks a lot about passion. The Latin root of the word passion means "to suffer." The death of Christ is referred to as "The Passion."

- How is God's love for us reflected on the cross?
- What does this have to do with our love of one another?

Compare the music you listened to with music from the *The Hymnal 1982* or contemporary Christian music. As a group, write the lyrics to a love song that reflects God's love for us and our love for God and each other. Close by singing your song.

Love Feast/Love Fest

The Moravians are a group of Christians who are known for their love of one another. They developed a ritual to express that love known as the Moravian Love Feast, which includes a shared meal; particular foods, such as bread, milk and honey; and prayer. Arrange in advance with parents of teens who will be joining your group next year for a place where the younger teens can be collected by members of your group.

Arrive at their house or pre-arranged location and shower them with love—cards, a funny hat, and balloons. Bring them back to the church for your very own love feast to let them know how much you care about them and that you are looking forward to welcoming them next year.
Hint: If driving is involved, make sure to have an adult driver.

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3 Bearing Each Other's Burdens

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:1-2

Commentary: This section includes practical advice from Paul about how to live in community. The law of Christ is the law of love, which cannot be discharged by the narrow limits of legal requirements. Though not required to do so, Christ takes on the burdens of humans because they cannot carry them alone. People are expected to extend the same grace to one another. Since everyone is subject to temptation, Christians must practice forgiveness. While each person is responsible for carrying his or her own load, in a Christian community, burdens are shared because when one suffers, all are affected. Sharing another's burdens doesn't relieve a person of personal responsibility, rather it is an expression of corporate responsibility.

☐ Questions

- Has anyone ever helped you carry a burden? What was that like?
- Can you think of a person in your community who needs your help? How can you share his or her burden?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How did the writer share her friend's burden?
- Does sharing a burden make it lighter? How?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 2.

- How can you use your gifts to help someone else?
- Think about everything you do in a typical day. How many times did you reach out to help someone, even in a minor way? How many times did others help you?

☐ Activities

Inside/Outside

Collect several items—the more interesting the shape, the better—and put them in opaque plastic bags. Number and seal the bags. Give each person in the group a piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to try to identify what is in each bag. They may look or touch, but they may not open the bag. Share your guesses and open the bags. Any surprises?

Now give everyone a small paper bag, scissors, glue or tape, and some magazines to cut up. On the inside of the bag put things you are sure people don't know about you. Include things that may be bothering you. Glue or tape things you think people know about you on the outside of the sack. Share the outside of your bag with another. Reflect on how well the other person "knew" you. Are you surprised? How well can we truly know another person?

Everyone carries burdens. For many reasons, there are some we are unable or unwilling to share with others. As a group, decide how to pray for each other.

The Truth is in the Music

Ask the group to bring in songs about our responsibility to one another. Examples from golden oldies include the Rolling Stones, "I'll Never Be Your Beast Of Burden"; the Hollies, "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother"; and Simon and Garfunkel, "I Am A Rock." Play the music, paying special attention to the lyrics.

- What is the lyricist's view of the world?
- What would the world be like under this scenario?

Everyone carries burdens that are too heavy to be borne alone. Although Christianity doesn't wave a magic wand to make them go away, it does provide a community to help share the load. As a group, think about the question, "What are burdens I have to carry in my life?"

To close, give each person an individually wrapped adhesive bandage and a pen. Ask them to write one of their burdens on the wrapper. Collect the bandaids and place them in the center of the group. Pray for the courage to bear one another's burdens. Randomly take one bandage, save the wrapper, and place the bandage on your shoulder as a visible symbol of the burdens we bear for one another and the healing we can expect through God's grace. When you get home, put the wrapper in a place where you will be reminded to pray for the person who wrote it.

Walking the Talk

Plan a walk outside as a symbol of the journey we all are on. Include times of silent reflection as well as opportunities for the group to stop and talk. Share the burden of carrying whatever supplies you need. While you are walking, reflect on the Personal Story. The writer's friend was away from her family, which made the support of her friends even more critical. Talk about relationships within families. We know our families better than anyone else, and they know us. Often, however, they are the most difficult for us to love.

- What are the burdens your family faces?
- What are ways you can help bear some of those burdens?

Pick one specific way you could pick up the load in your family. While you are walking, find a rock to represent the burden you are assuming in your family. Carry it with you as a reminder. Report back to the group about your experience.

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Caring for People in Need

Objective

Youth will be able to identify needs of people in the community and list ways those needs can be addressed.

Personal Story

It was near Christmas and freezing cold. I looked around and shivered as we rang the doorbell of a house, the first of many where we would be delivering presents to children. We were Santa's Helpers. When someone came to the door, we could hear the screams of delight from the children inside. As we walked in, the children swarmed around us, all wanting to say hello and get a hug from Santa.

I sat down and gave Tiffany, the 2-year-old, her present. Her eyes lit up with delight. She opened it and let out another squeal when she found a bright pink stuffed teddy bear hidden in the wrapping. Instantly, she was in my lap, giving me a hug. We played for a minute. Then she was off to find out what her brothers and sisters had gotten.

As the Santas sat and watched the children play, we learned that their parents had been in a car accident. Both parents were still hospitalized, and the children were being taken care of by next-door neighbors.

When we got up to leave, I gave Tiffany a hug and wished her a merry Christmas. She still had the little teddy bear clutched in her hand and had not put it down since unwrapping it. Even though we all wanted to stay, we said good-bye and headed to the next house which also needed a visit from Santa that year.

Throughout the day we visited many others, and it was rewarding to see them so happy to get a present. Many lived in run-down trailers or houses with no heat. Some lived in one-room houses, sharing beds with their brothers and sisters.

I guess you could say that I have been hooked on community service work since that Christmas. That day, and others like it, taught me how much of a difference one person, or a few people, can make to someone who needs a Christmas present, a hug, or just someone to be with for a while. It also taught me how much I need to do this. I'm not quite sure how to put it into words, but doing community service work has really changed me.

Sometimes when I have a moment to myself, I think about how differently life can turn out for different people. What would happen if my parents had a car accident? Would someone be there to care for me? I wonder how many other children like Tiffany and her brothers and sisters need a helping hand.

I continue to do community service work for all kinds of people. I have discovered that by helping others, you learn how to relate to all kinds of people. Helping and being with other people makes you feel better about yourself. Although there are times when I am tired and don't feel like helping, I think back to a little girl in a yellow sweatshirt named Tiffany. I picture her smiling face in my mind, and I can't wait to go help someone else.

SESSION 5

Scripture

Leviticus 23:22
Psalm 41:1-3
Luke 10:29-37

Skill Focus

Responsibility
Ethics

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Prayer

Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be served but to serve: Bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of others; that with wisdom, patience, and courage, they may minister in his Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy; for the love of him who laid down his life for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

For Social Service
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 260

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Leaving the Gleanings

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien: I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 23:22

Commentary: On one level, the book of *Leviticus* is a liturgical manual for the clergy of ancient Israel, with detailed instructions on the conduct of worship. But it also makes connections for all of God's people between the practice of worship and the exercise of holiness in everyday life. In chapter 23, which tells worshippers how to observe the liturgical year, there is this reminder not to take everything from fields and vineyards when harvesting. God instructs his people to always leave something behind for the poor and needy. This text reflects a recurring theme in the Bible: Remembering God must go hand in hand with remembering your neighbor.

☐ Questions

- Most of us no longer grow our food. If this passage were written today, what would God ask you to do for the poor and alien?
- Why does God continually call his people to help others?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 3.

- Is helping others a one-way street?
- Who actually gets the most out of caring for others?

☐ Activities

Noticing What's Before Your Eyes

Hide twenty common items, such as buttons, pens, paper clips, and rubber bands, in your meeting space, all in plain sight where nothing has to be moved or touched in order to see them. Who can find the most items? Try to blend them in with their background as much as possible, such as putting a round button in the center of a round stereo dial. Display a tray of objects identical to the ones hidden to let everyone know what to look for. This can be a contest between two or more groups if you wish.

After the game, ask the group to list items among their own possessions which they no longer use, but which might be useful to others, such as clothing, books, recordings, or sporting equipment. Come up with ways to pass these things on to other people.

- How can we put our possessions to better use?
- Do we give away things that we no longer value, or are there things on your list that you value but no longer use?

Worship and Life

Reread the biblical passage and share the information in the commentary. Talk about what parts of the liturgy connect with your daily life, and what parts do not. Discuss why or why not. Do you think the Israelites had the same problems?

If possible, pass out Prayer Books for each person in the group. Read the intercessions from one of the forms of The Prayers of the People, beginning on p. 383. Share examples from your own experience for everything named in the prayers.

Look at the Eucharist service beginning on p. 355.

- What does communion (p. 361) tell us about our own need to be fed?
- What does it say about sharing with all of the children of God?
- How does the service relate the Christian life to the idea of hospitality, including others, and loving each other?
- Is the message learned at God's banquet table different from the one we learn in the culture about who is in and who is out?

Look at the post-communion prayers (p. 365-366). How can you apply them to your life in the coming week?

Gleanings Program

Some communities sponsor gleaning projects, where food that might be wasted is collected and given to the hungry. In rural areas, arrangements are made with farmers for volunteers to glean from fields and orchards. In urban areas, caterers, bakeries, restaurants, and food stores donate unused food that has not been handled by the public. These programs follow local health laws to ensure the food is usable.

Find out whether there are any gleaning programs in your community. If there are, interview the participants and share information about their work with your church. Find out if there are any ways that your group can help by working in the fields or gathering, sorting, and delivering food.

If there are no programs, research how one might be started and maintained. Investigate the needs and resources of your own community and consider becoming involved in creating a gleaning program.

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2 Rewards for Service

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Happy are those who consider the poor,
the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.
The Lord protects them and keeps them alive;
they are called happy in the land.
You do not give them up to the will of their enemies.
The Lord sustains them on their sickbed;
In their illness you heal all their infirmities.

Psalm 41:1-3

Commentary: The *Psalms* were often concerned with receiving God's blessing, of being looked upon with compassion by the Maker and Redeemer. In this passage, concern for the poor and helpless is described as a practice which brings such blessing. By caring for others, God will in turn care for us. This text might be read in a selfish way: only help others in order to get something back. But the rest of the Bible enables us to hear a different message: God is love, and to be a friend of God, a person must be one who loves, one who cares.

☐ Questions

- Look up what Jesus said about loving others in *John 13:34*. What would he have to say about *Psalm 41*?
- If people believed this passage was true, what would they do? Who is considered more important in our society, a successful business person or someone who works at a soup kitchen?

☐ Activities

Kinds of Rewards

Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What were the writer's rewards for service to others?
- Is helping others always rewarding?
- Have you been in a position of helping another person directly? What was that like?
- Have you ever received help from someone you didn't know? How did that feel?

Write the word "Rewards" on a large piece of paper. Divide the paper into two categories, tangible and intangible. Brainstorm examples of both kinds of rewards that might result from helping others. For example, good feelings would be an intangible reward while a new friend might be a tangible one.

Look at the story again, identifying which rewards were tangible and which were intangible for the writer. Then ask everyone to describe some tangible and intangible rewards for things that they have done for others, if they feel comfortable doing so.

Learning from the Saints

On separate sheets of paper, copy short descriptions of the Christians who have lived lives of service. Use the one-page summaries from *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, a book that might be available from your clergy, or from a book of saints, available in most public libraries. Select enough saints for each person in the group.

Ask each person to draw a page at random to study for five or ten minutes. Make a list of three ways in which the saint was rewarded. Then ask each person to describe to the group the Christian on his or her sheet and the rewards this person received from a life of service. Afterward, talk about similarities and differences of the people highlighted.

- Which lives would be easiest to imitate, and which the hardest?
- Which rewards would be most desirable, and which the least?
- Is simply being Christ-like reward enough, even if no other benefit results in serving others?

The work of most Christians will never be included in a book. However, their service may change a life or help someone see light in the midst of darkness. Ask each person to think of one way to help another person in the coming week. Share your ideas with each other or a partner.

Random Act of Kindness

Look at Resource Poster No. 3.

- What is going on?
- What is the reward here?
- Can you think of anything that might make this activity difficult or taxing?
- Is it necessary to give something up to help others?

Plan to spend a day trying out some acts of random kindness. For example, set up a table in a safe public place, such as a soccer field, park, or outdoor shopping mall (get permission for commercial locations). Offer passersby cold water or lemonade (in hot weather) or hot chocolate or coffee (in cold weather) at no charge. If anyone asks why you are doing this, give a simple answer, such as "It's a hot day, and you must be thirsty."

Remain at your post for half a day, noticing your own reactions to the weather, boredom, your self-consciousness—especially when school friends come by, and the responses that you receive. Discuss these reactions with each other. What were your rewards from the experience?

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3 The Good Samaritan

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:29-37

Commentary: In the parable of the Good Samaritan, a wounded traveler is helped by someone who was not respected in that culture. Samaritans, to the people listening to Jesus' story, were "not our kind." They were shunned and disliked, because they thought differently and did things differently—nobody wanted to be seen with a Samaritan. But as he lay in that ditch, totally helpless, the victim didn't get to choose who would help him. Jesus' answer to the person's question about neighbors went against the customs of society. While the questioner wanted to limit his duty, Jesus opened it even wider.

☐ Questions

- When a Samaritan rather than the victim's own crowd acted like a true friend, do you think he was grateful or embarrassed?
- Did he learn anything by the way the Samaritan reached across boundaries to do the right thing?
- Did Jesus give the questioner the answer he was looking for? Why?
- Who are the Samaritans in your community or school?

☐ Activities

Film at Eleven

Without rehearsal, act out the parable of the Good Samaritan in the following manner. Cast all the parts for the story, including the donkey. Establish the geography of the story—in a biblical setting, another time in the past, or the present. Send the characters to their starting places. Ask a volunteer to read the story slowly, pausing when necessary to allow the characters to carry out the actions described in the text. Those without parts will be reporters, observing what happens.

When the play is over, hold a press conference where each character is questioned about his or her actions and responses. **Hint:** You may want to give everyone a little time to think about what they want to say and what questions they will ask before the press conference starts.
If the group is too small for multiple reporters, hold a talk show type of interview instead.

- What would you do if you saw that an outsider needed help?
- What would you do if helping another affected your personal safety?

Videotape the whole presentation, beginning with the play, to share with another group in the church.

Lying in the Ditch

Ask the group to name types of people in society they would not want to associate with or whose behavior they find reprehensible. Then ask them to close their eyes and visualize lying helpless in a ditch, too injured to move. The person who comes to help them is the type of person they just named. Discuss how they felt about that scenario.

Come up with a list of the "cool" people in school—those who are popular and admired—and then list the outcasts—those who are scary, uncool, or hard to like. Don't use names, just stick to types. Retell the parable with the characters you have identified. How did that affect your hearing of the story?

Share personal stories about a time when you needed and received help, and were surprised or made uncomfortable by who gave that help. Was there ever a time when you refused help because you did not want to be associated with or obligated to the person who offered it?

Consider the question that prompted Jesus' story: "Who is my neighbor?"

- Is there anyone who is not my neighbor in Christ?
- What makes it so hard to cross the boundaries that divide us from one another?
- Are there some ways that each of us might reach out across a boundary in the coming week?

As you talk, notice whether your feelings about other people have shifted. Ask God to help you to treat others as the Samaritan did.

Video

Watch the movie *City of Joy* (1992), in which a disillusioned American surgeon travels to India and finds a sense of purpose by serving the poor in Calcutta. Afterward, discuss your reactions to the movie.

- Can anyone conceive of doing something similar?
- Did you see anything in the movie that applies to your own life and the needs among those you see every day?
- Do you need to go to Calcutta to find people in need?

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Caring for God's World

Objective

Youth will be able to explain why it is important for Christians to care for the environment.

Personal Story

There was an oil spill on the coast where I live, and for days I heard requests on the news for people to come and clean the oil off the birds who were dying. You hear so much about bad things happening, and you think there's nothing you can do. How can one person really make any difference? But I just kept hearing this message: "Come and help the birds. Come and help the birds."

So when the weekend came, I went out to the beach. For two days my arms were up to my elbows in soapy water as I lathered and massaged those wriggling birds, trying not to get jabbed by their sharp beaks. I did my best to keep them alive. Sometimes it took half an hour to clean a single bird, and even then it might die of shock within a few days. But while you hold those birds in your arms, you don't really worry about how many birds will die and how many will live, or why did there have to be all that oil in the first place.

I used to take nature for granted. I always felt good when my family went camping, because being in all that beauty and quiet allowed me to feel more relaxed, more at ease with myself. But it was always sort of "out there," something I visited but didn't really belong to.

But looking into the eyes of a dying bird changed all that for me. I saw in those eyes something so beautiful and precious—like looking into its soul. And I suddenly felt so connected with it. It needed me and I needed it. It was made by God just like me, and without it the world wouldn't be the same. I didn't think about these things until I held a bird in my own arms, but animals are God's gift to us. We'd be lonely without them. And they need our friendship, especially with the mess that we have made of their environment.

Who's going to care about those birds if we don't? Who's going to prevent oil spills if we don't? I know we should trust God when bad things seem bigger than anything we can do to make a difference. Some of my friends don't care, or think the Earth is too far gone to save anyway. Why bother? But God made such a beautiful world. I don't think God has given up, and maybe washing birds, or recycling, or not polluting are ways we can be part of God's plan to save the Earth.

SESSION 6

Scripture

Genesis 1:1-5, 20-23
James 4:13-17
Revelation 22:1-5

Skill Focus

Choices
Trust

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Prayer
O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

For stewardship of creation
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 259

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Primordial Planet

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. . . . And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Genesis 1:1-5, 20-23

Commentary: The Bible begins with the creation of the universe. This story is poetic, not scientific. Its author was not interested in how the world was made. That was unknown, and not as important a question as the one that is answered in this passage—*Who* made the world? This symbolic story says that God made the world, and that "God saw that it was good." God wanted more than a formless void. God wanted an earth that was beautiful, good, teeming with life. God took delight in the world and in human beings, who were made in God's image to share it with the other creatures. We are intended to mirror God's delight and love in the way we respect and care for creation.

☐ Questions

- What part of God's creation do you find good?
- How can you keep this part of creation good?
- Read the entire creation story in *Genesis 1*. What responsibility did God give to humankind in creation?

☐ Activities

Visualizing the Creation

Watch *The Creation*, a storytelling version of *Genesis 1*, from *The Electronic Campfire* (available from the Episcopal Media Center, 800-229-3788). Then watch the "Rite of Spring" sequence from the Disney animated movie *Fantasia*. After viewing these films, look at Resource Poster No. 4.

- What are the similarities and differences among these three pictures of creation?
- What did they tell you about the creation?
- Why do you think God made the world?
- How much does God care about the non-human world?
- Are humans obligated to love and respect nature as much as God does?
- Is the creation something that happened in the past, or does God continue to be involved in the workings of the natural world?

Genesis 1 describes an orderly, benevolent world, where everything lives in harmony. Is this a story about the past (the way the world once was), the present (the harmony that underlies nature, even if we are not aware of it) or the future (the harmony that God intends for creation)?

Deconstructing Creation: A Ritual

Seat everyone in a circle on the floor in a darkened room and give each person an unlit candle. In the middle of the circle, place a large bowl of sand with seven candles. A volunteer recites an abridged version of each day of *Genesis 1*, naming the things created and ending with "evening came, and morning, the [first, second, etc.] day." Conclude with "And on the seventh day, God rested." As each day is mentioned, light one of the seven candles.

Ask the group to name things which destroy, injure, or threaten each of the seven "days," beginning with rest, and continuing with humans and animals; birds and aquatic creatures; sun, moon and stars; vegetation; and the sky. After each list is made, turn one candle over and extinguish it in the sand. Ask the group to close their eyes. Invite them to think about a place of darkness or chaos in their own lives.

After a brief pause, a volunteer prays: "Be our light in the darkness, O God, and in your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. *Amen*." Invite everyone to come one at a time to the center, name something that brings light to the world, to which all respond, "Let there be light!" Then the person lights his or her candle and puts it in the sand. When all have done so, and the bowl is filled with burning candles, conclude with a song or prayer. Depending on the time and the mood, reflect on the experience, or simply go in peace.

Sharing the Creation Story

Plan and execute an art installation depicting the seven days of creation for the whole church. This could involve seven paintings or murals, or a mixed media construction using images, objects, and creatures from the natural world (rocks, sand, water, branches, plants and flowers, fish, birds, and animals). Let *Genesis 1* stimulate your imagination. Play field recordings of the natural world, available on tape or CD. Each "day" could have a separate space in the church or parish hall.

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2 Doing the Right Thing

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money." Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

James 4:13-17

Commentary: The writer of this letter gives guidance for Christians who want to understand how they should live and act as followers of Jesus. He reminds them that life is uncertain, and all their plans are like the morning mist, which quickly vanishes. Everything they do should be rooted in the will of God which is lasting and true. Basing their lives on anything less is foolish and futile.

☐ Questions

- Do you look for guidance from God before making important plans or decisions?
- What are some ways God communicates?
- Have you ever failed to do "the right thing" even though you knew you should? What happened?

☐ Activities

Washing the Birds

Discuss the Personal Story. Relate the scripture passage to the story.

- How did the writer do the right thing?
- Could you imagine doing anything like that?
- What would you have done or felt in that situation?

Ask the group to identify opportunities they have had to help and care for the Earth. For example, cleaning up a creek or river, picking up trash, or recycling household items.

- Which of these are things they can do right now?
- Which involve a wider sphere of action?
- How far are you willing to go to change your behavior or to participate in environmental causes?
- What would be hard to change or give up for the sake of a better environment?
- How are these things connected to what we believe as Christians?

Ask each person to identify one thing the group has discussed to do in the next month. The activity can be as simple as recycling the soft drink cans you buy after school to taking part in a local cleanup project.

Council of All Beings

Provide materials to make masks, such as paper plates or bags with eye and mouth holes, paint, feathers, leaves, and construction paper. Ask everyone to take a few minutes to choose a creature (animal, bird, or fish) or some other part of the natural world, such as a mountain, river, or tree, whose nature they will assume. When they have made masks to represent their selections, sit in a circle on the floor wearing the masks and begin the Council.

First, let everyone introduce themselves, and tell something about what it is like to be who he or she is. Next, the characters begin to tell how they are suffering from human abuse of the environment. Ask for a couple of volunteers to take off their masks and sit in the middle of the circle as human beings to listen to the complaints and laments of the creatures. Finally, let every creature give a gift to the humans, some quality or aspect of their own nature, which will help the humans live more in harmony and love with the natural world. After the Council concludes, reflect together on the experience.

Hint: This can be a longer activity in a retreat situation. Invite imagination and be prepared for some grief and anger as well as humor and playfulness.

A shorter alternative would be to have two or three volunteers sit together on the floor while the rest of the group dumps "garbage" and "toxic waste" on them. These could be represented by wadded-up paper, plastic bags, or clothing. In an outdoor setting on a warm day, colored water or even mud could be added to the mix. Give the "Earth" a chance to complain to the polluters. After the exercise, reverse the roles.

Hint: Ask for volunteers to be the "Earth." Don't ask participants to do things that make them uncomfortable or put them in difficult positions.

Cleanup

Gather on a weekend at some appropriate place in your neighborhood to pick up litter. Be sure everyone brings work gloves. Afterward, make lists of everything the group picked up.

- What kinds of things did you find?
- How many bags did you fill?
- Were you surprised at some of the things people had discarded?

Videotape parts of the cleanup, interviewing people as they work. You might ask participants about what they had found, if they were having a good time, if anything had surprised them, and the most disgusting thing they had found. Run the video at a coffee hour or other gathering of the church.

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3 The River of Life

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God, and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river, is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Revelation 22:1-5

Commentary: *Revelation* is a book whose symbolic imagery can appear strange and difficult to understand. But its aim is to tell us how God is the driving force behind history, the source from which the universe began, and the conclusion toward which it is moving. In this last chapter of the last book in the Bible, is a vision of a city, the heavenly Jerusalem, which represents the community of creation, gathered together in the place where God lives. In this city is a river from which all may drink the water of life. There are also trees whose fruit will feed humankind and whose leaves will heal them of every ill. God will be so near and so bright that they won't even need the light of the sun.

☐ Questions

- Have you ever seen a place that has some of the qualities of the vision in the passage? Describe it.
- Water is used throughout the Bible to symbolize life. Can you think of examples from both the Old and New Testaments?
- Where could this passage be used in the service of Holy Baptism (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 299)?

☐ Activities

The Tree of Life

Create a "tree" in two or three dimensions. For example, prop up a large tree branch, without leaves, in a Christmas tree stand or draw a tree on butcher paper and attach it to a wall. Ask everyone make leaves by tearing construction paper of different colors.

Talk about the verses in the scripture passage that refer to the "healing of the nations."

- What kind of healing does this passage refer to?
- Is it limited to healing among nations?
- What kind of healing would you like to take place in your community? Your school? Your own life?

Label each of the construction paper leaves with a word or phrase for something that brings healing to the human or natural worlds, as well as to your own personal worlds. Make and attach as many leaves as you wish. Display the tree where the whole congregation can see it.

The Water of Life

Look at Resource Poster No. 4, and discuss the meaning of each image.

- What does its imagery suggest to you about the Earth and the Creator who put us here?
- List all the ways we depend on water and all the forms that water takes.
- Why has water been an important image for the sacred dimension of life?
- Why do we use water in the baptism service?
- Does water symbolize more than one thing in baptism?

The river symbolizes the never-failing life by which God sustains all creation, day after day. Share with each other the places in your own life where you have drunk deeply from the River of Life. List as many qualities of water as you can, such as refreshing, cleansing, deep, or dangerous. Create a ritual that recognizes and celebrates the ways that these qualities either affect you or represent something within. Involve all your senses—touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste—in this ritual.

Water Cleanup

Look for a group in your community or region that is cleaning up a body of water, such as the edges of a river, lake, ocean beach, or even a dry river bed. Find out what your group can do to help. For example, you could join the group for a day, help publicize special cleanup days, or recruit members of your congregation to work.

Some members of the group may want to research the effects of litter on local waterways. Use the information to make posters about keeping our waters clean to place in stores and restaurants near popular water areas.

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Using Resources Fairly

SESSION 7

Scripture

Genesis 41:53-57
Matthew 25:1-13
Romans 11:29-36

Skill Focus

Fairness
Conflict

Objective

Youth will be able to name ways that inequities of resources affect their communities and themselves.

Personal Story

Whenever I am surfing around the television channels, I often come across a commercial or infomercial with a famous celebrity talking about supporting a Third World country. This person is hoping that the people watching will make a donation to help save the children, feed the hungry, or minister to the sick.

I can never keep the commercial on for more than a minute or so. The producers always seem to show only the bad part of Third World countries. Everyone pictured is either starving or lying in a hospital. There is no beauty, not even in a child's eyes. Maybe all of those places are bad, but these images make me feel so uncomfortable. I never stick around very long before switching to the next channel.

Part of me feels guilty. Another part of me takes a moment to thank God for all that I do have. It makes me wonder why some people have so much while others have so little. Another part of me feels that even if I make a contribution to this cause, the situation in that country isn't going to change. A few dollars won't feed a child more than a day or two.

I know that I live in a wealthy country and that I have more than many people. However, lots of people still have more than I do. Sometimes when I see these appeals, I just want to scream, "It's not fair!"

I sometimes think to myself that if everyone participated in sharing everything they have, would there still be poor people? Can the disparity of wealth among people and nations ever be evened out? Isn't that what we Christians are supposed to be doing anyway?

Jesus said that the poor will always be with us. It seems to me there are enough resources for everyone in the world to have enough to eat and a place to sleep. But, I wonder, if I were to help, if my family were to help, if my church were to help, would it really make a difference in the world? Can one person really make a difference when entire nations are living in poverty? Maybe one day I will have an answer.

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

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

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Keeping Our Heritage

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world.

Genesis 41:53-57

Commentary: Joseph, having foreseen that seven years of abundance would be followed by seven years of famine, had stored up the extra grain in the good years to prevent starvation in the lean years. Instead of "stealing from the future" by using more than they needed, the Egyptians in the story showed concern for those who would be living in the time of famine. Instead of keeping all the extra grain for themselves, they saved the grain for those who would otherwise go hungry, creating a food supply that would sustain everyone over the long haul.

☐ Questions

- Who was Joseph and how did he come into power?
- Why is bread used as a symbol of plenty? What does bread symbolize in the Eucharist?
- Have you ever saved something for the future? Why?
- Is it hard to save when there are things you want now? How do you set priorities?
- How did Joseph's policies help people outside of Egypt?
- Do people of different countries help each other today? How?

☐ Activities

Earth in the Balance

Look at Resource Poster No. 5. List all the different categories of the images in the picture. In each category, name other items. For example, the category represented by the fish could be ocean life. Other items in this category could be whales, porpoises, and other marine life.

- What are some of the difficulties and challenges in balancing the needs of all creation, human and non-human?
- If human desires conflict with the health of the environment, are we obligated to recognize and respect the rights of all creatures of God?
- If we injure nature, are we injuring ourselves? In what ways might that be true?
- Is loving creation another way of loving and serving God?
- Where are the human and non-human worlds in conflict or out of balance in your own community?

Identify and explore further one of the imbalances in your community. Find out if you could help an organization that is combating this problem.

The "Undinner"

Create a buffet with an assortment of food that is wholesome and easy to bring in, for example water, milk, crackers, orange slices, carrots, hard-boiled eggs, and cheese. Put prices, ranging from one cent to ten cents on the various items.

When participants enter, give them each thirteen cents, equaling the daily food budget of the world's poorest. Invite them to create their own meal with the money they have. Decide beforehand if money can be pooled or must be kept separate. After the meal, discuss world hunger.

- What did the exercise teach you?
- How did it make you feel?

Read and discuss the Personal Story in light of the exercise.

- Can you relate to the feelings of the writer?
- How would you answer the questions the story raises?
- List everything you ate yesterday, including snacks. Make an estimate of the total cost of the food you consumed. How does this compare to the diet of other people in the world?

Restoring the Balance

Identify places in your community where something is out of balance or people do not have an equal opportunity to exercise their own gifts. Discuss what the group can do, making sure that your ideas are appropriate and realistic for teenagers. You may uncover a situation or problem that can be shared with another group in your church, inviting them to help create solutions.

Look for existing programs that are addressing situations that are out of balance. For example, members of the group could become involved in a tutoring program or soup kitchen. Or you might create some initiative of your own.

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2 Being Prepared

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a shout, 'Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise replied, 'No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I do not know you.' Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day not the hour."

Matthew 25:1-13

Commentary: It was customary during the time of Jesus for bridesmaids to dance around the bridegroom with lighted lamps. In this story, five of the women had not brought enough oil to see them through the unexpected delay of the bridegroom. When they went to buy more oil, they missed his coming. This can be a disturbing story because the unprepared or careless are treated harshly. But Jesus often painted strong pictures to get a strong reaction. He is not trying to give an example of how to behave toward those who have less oil. He is speaking to the foolish, not the wise, urging them not to be careless with what they have and to be ready for the unexpected.

☐ Questions

- If you were one of the wise bridesmaids, would you have shared your oil, even if it meant missing the party?
- Have you ever been caught unprepared for a presentation, a test, or some other activity? What was it like?
- Earlier in *Matthew 6*, Jesus tells his followers not to worry about their lives. What is the difference between being prepared for the future and worrying about it?

☐ Activities

Role Play

Reread the scripture passage. Ask volunteers from the group to act out the parable, changing the setting to the present. Instead of lamps and oil, use flashlights and batteries. Let the bridegroom come up with a reason to be late, such as traffic jams or a flat tire. Afterward, discuss the story.

- What is it about?
- Describe a time when you were prepared and others were not. What happened? Did you suffer the consequences of not being prepared?
- Tell about a time when you were unprepared. What did you do? What were the consequences?

Identify situations in your community or in your school where resources are distributed unfairly. For example, students in the inner city may not have enough textbooks for every student while other schools have plenty. Or, a new road cuts into an older, less prestigious neighborhood rather than a newer, more wealthy area. Role play these situations.
Hint: Try reversing roles as well. Try to experience both sides of the problem.
Discuss what happens in the plays.

- Is there anything you can do about the situations that were portrayed?
- What steps can you take to make a difference?

Wise and Foolish Flashlights

Hide candy kisses in a room without windows or a space that can be in complete darkness. Before the group enters the room, tell them they will be given flashlights to search for the hidden candy. The person who finds the most candy within the allotted time wins.

Before passing out the flashlights, make a few alterations. In some flashlights, leave in both batteries; in others, leave only one; and in a few, take out all the batteries. Pass out the flashlights at random, without telling the participants about the differences. After the game, talk about what happened and how participants dealt with the inequities.

- How did you feel if your flashlight did not work?
- Did those with working flashlights offer to help others?
- Did people with only one battery pool their resources?
- How do you think the maids in the scripture passage who were shut out of the party felt?
- Does Jesus sometimes seem to send mixed messages? Why?

Hint: Set aside extra candy for those who are unable to find any during the game.

Video

Watch the video *The Women of Brewster Place*, about black women who share both an apartment house and their problems with each other. The film looks at disparities resulting from poverty and how the women work together to pool their resources.

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3 Appreciating What God Gives Us

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

. . . for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

The depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

"For who has know the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"

"Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Romans 11:29-36

Commentary: In this portion of his letter to the Romans, Paul is celebrating the wisdom of God in the gifts God has bestowed each person. This passage is part of Paul's discussion of gifts and God's expectation that gifts be used to create and sustain community. Because gifts are given by God, they belong to the whole community. God can help us reach our potential by using our God-given gifts.

☐ Questions

- What happens if we don't use the gifts God has given us?
- Do you sometimes feel your gifts are inferior in comparison to others? Why?
- Have you ever wondered why you were given some gifts and a friend was given other gifts? Do you think God is fair?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Why do some people have so much while others have so little?
- Does the action of one person make a difference? Why?

☐ Activities

Faith and Life

Give every person two index cards. Mark one with the word "Faith," and the other "Life." Ask the participants to write a word or phrase describing what each category means to them at this point in their lives.

Divide into pairs and share with your partner what you wrote, and then discuss your thoughts as a group.

- How do faith and life affect each other?
- Do you keep them separate?
- How can you relate your faith to your life more closely?

After the discussion, ask each person to join the two cards together with tape and lay them on a table or floor so that all the cards together make the shape of a cross. End with prayer and singing around the cross.

Gifts in Search of Needs

Create a list of gifts, including as much as possible ones that members of your group possess, such as musical ability, aptitude for math, joyfulness, the ability to listen, or cheerfulness. Define gift as broadly as possible. Then make a list of corresponding needs which each of those gifts might meet in some way.

Hint: Ask your adult mentor to help you identify gifts and needs if necessary.

Write each gift and each need on separate index cards. Give each person in the group one gift card and one need card. The object is to match needs and gifts in the shortest amount of time. There may be some ambiguity about which gift matches which need. Encourage the group to keep looking if they find more than one match for either a gift or a need. Afterward, talk about the ease or difficulty in matching gifts to needs.

- Was it hard finding a match?
- Can any of these pairings of gifts and needs actually be carried out? How?

Invite individuals who identify with a particular gift to follow up with concrete action. For example, someone who feels they have the ability to listen might spend an hour at a nursing home. Report the results to the group.

Hunger Banquet

Celebrate and use the gifts God has given you by conducting an Oxfam hunger feast for your group or with another group from your church. To find out more about this organization, look up Oxfam on the Internet.

If possible, plan the feast around a mealtime after Sunday worship or for an evening. Cook enough rice for 75 percent of those participating. Select a menu of the group's favorite foods, such as pizza, and bring in enough for the other 25 percent. Before the group arrives, prepare red slips of paper for 75 percent of the group and green slips for 25 percent. As people enter the room, ask them to randomly collect one of the slips. Invite the "reds" to sit on the floor in one corner with a large bowl of rice and a bucket of water. Small bowls and paper cups are optional. Prepare a table for the "greens" with a tablecloth, napkins, glasses, plates, the favorite food, and a special beverage. After a prayer, begin the meal. The reds can try to get food and drinks from the greens, but they must ask. The greens do not have to share.

During and after the meal, talk about people's feelings. Point out that at least 75 percent of the world's population have a "red" diet. Discuss the fairness of the situation.

- What would it be like to have only one "red" meal a day?
- What could you do to help those who have less?

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Financial Resources

SESSION 8

Objective

Youth will be able to examine stewardship practices in their own congregation, the national church, and the Christian Church and to identify ways the Church distributes its financial resources.

Personal Story

For the last couple of months, Sarah's youth group has been asking people to donate money toward purchasing socks for the homeless. The group had put a notice in the monthly newsletter asking the congregation to give their donations to youth after worship services.

Unfortunately, only a few dollars came in and there really wasn't enough money to buy more than one or two pairs of socks. Most of the group were uncomfortable asking people for money. Often no one was available to take money, and those who came usually stood off to one side. After several weeks, the youth group decided that they couldn't complete the project by themselves. They started to ask other people in the congregation for some ideas on what specific things they could do to get this campaign off the ground.

A few of them talked to Jake Brown, who seemed to be able to get things done around the church. He offered to make a huge sock out of plywood that would grab people's attention. The group used the little money they had collected to buy nylon netting to attach to the board. Someone else gave them some paint. After a Saturday afternoon's work, they had a huge sock to stand by the entrance to the church. Some people on the buildings and grounds committee helped them secure it so it wouldn't fall and hurt someone.

Jane Drake, who edits the church newsletter, offered to write a new article after she saw the sock. She thought they had come up with a clever idea. The article was called "Sock Appeal."

Members of the youth group took the article and visited several stores. They got four dozen socks from a local discount department store that they put in the display sock. When members of the congregation saw the sock partially filled, they began to buy socks at the grocery store, the drug store, and other places where they happened to be shopping. The sock was beginning to fill up. After a few weeks, there were over 500 pairs of socks. The youth group spent another Saturday sorting them and delivering them to shelters.

At first Sarah and the others were discouraged when no one wanted to donate money. They learned that people were more likely to spend their money buying socks when they were doing other shopping than to give a cash donation. They also found out that the group needed the talents of others in the parish to make this project a success.

Sarah was surprised and impressed at the way the whole church came together to fill the sock. Not only did people who needed the socks benefit, the whole church felt good about the project.

Scripture

Malachi 3:6-10
Matthew 22:15-22
Luke 21:1-4

Skill Focus

Influences
Ethics

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Prayer
Almighty and everlasting God, who in the Paschal mystery established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Thursday in Easter Week
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 223

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

1 Do Not Rob God

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?"

Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Malachi 3:6-10

Commentary: In this passage the writer compares God's never-changing faithfulness with the perpetual falseness of Israel. The people are robbing God by not keeping the commitment to give to the temple storehouse a portion of their harvests. This portion is called a tithe, defined in *Genesis* as 10 percent of a person's goods. It was also to be the first fruits or the best of the harvest. In this situation, robbing God meant more that just not paying their dues. The temple storehouses were the means for distributing food among the people. Not paying a tithe, therefore, meant that one person could upset the harmony of the community and assurance of future abundance.

☐ Questions

- What are the choices we are given as human beings?
- What does the scripture passage refer to when it says curses or blessings?
- What does a tithe mean today?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 6.

- What are some of the resources in your church?
- How could these be used to help others?

☐ Activities

Making a Budget

Think about the money you had control over in the past week, including earnings from a job, allowance, lunch money, and gifts. Write down how you spent or saved the money. Talk about how you spend money.

- Did any of it go to helping another person, such as buying lunch for a friend who didn't have any money?
- Did you give any of it to the church or to God's work in the world? Did you even think about it?
- Determine how much 10 percent of the total would be. Is it very much?

Consider beginning a "Pennies from Heaven" project. Collect only the pennies you get in change every day. Bring them to church and pool them with other members of the group. Commit to do this for a given period of time, then decide what to do with the pennies.

Tithe or Stewardship

The dictionary defines "tithe" as a tenth part of the produce of land and livestock originally allotted for church purposes. Using a concordance, a reference book to words in the Bible (sometimes an abbreviated one is in the back of a Bible), find out how many times and where the word tithe is used in the Bible. Where is the first reference?

In the church today, we tend to talk about stewardship, a more comprehensive term for giving of our treasure. Stewardship is the care of all things belonging to God and the offering of gifts of time, talent, and treasure to the church in order to do God's work in the world. Find out how stewardship campaigns are carried out in your congregation.

- Who is responsible for the efforts?
- What are the goals of the committee?
- Who is given or sent pledge cards?

Get a copy of the budget of your church. Look at the different categories and how money is spent.

- What percentage of the church's income goes to the maintenance of buildings, utilities, repairs, and salaries?
- What percentage is given to outreach, missions, shelters, or food and clothes closets?

Money may not be the only way that these ministries are supported. In stewardship campaigns at your church are people asked to give time and talents, gifts other than money? Discuss your findings with the group.

Stewardship Design

After investigating the current way that the church gets its financial support, design a creative program that will help others understand the importance of supporting God's work through the church.

- What speeches would you make?
- How would you describe the importance of the effort?
- What would persuade you and your friends to give a tenth of your income from allowance, babysitting, or after-school jobs?

Invite members of the Stewardship Committee to talk with the group about its plan.

- What did you learn from them?
- What did they learn from you?

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2 Giving God What is God's

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Matthew 22:15-22

Commentary: In this story Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees. It is part of a plan on the part of these religious leaders to catch Jesus in a heresy, a false statement against the Jewish religion and way of life. The issue they raise has to do with the taxes imposed on the people by the Roman government. The tax could only be paid in Roman money, which meant that people would have to sell their goods to obtain it. The money had the head of Caesar and an inscription that was sacrilegious to the Jews. They are trying to trick Jesus. If he answers yes, those who oppose the Romans would be against him; if he answers no, the Romans would arrest him. Jesus avoids both by declaring that what belongs to the emperor should be given to the emperor and what belongs to God should be given to God.

☐ Questions

- What was the purpose of money in Jesus' time?
- What is the purpose of money now?
- How does the acquiring of money affect the way we live our lives? How does it control our lives?
- Could anyone live without money?

☐ Activities

Scripture Today

Reread *Matthew 22:15-22.* Consider this parable in light of today's priorities.

- In terms of financial resources, what would Jesus say to us now?
- What tax would people be angry about in your community?
- Who would be asking the questions of Jesus?
- What question or questions would be asked? How would they try to trick Jesus?

Prepare a news story that might appear in a weekly news magazine. Assign individuals in the group different roles as reporters and characters in the story. Decide whether to set the story in biblical times or the present. Discuss points made in the story, and how your story is similar to debates about money and taxes in the news today.

Weighed Down by Possessions

There is an ancient story about a beggar in the marketplace who was asked why he came to the marketplace to beg each day. The old man replied that it was because of the dance. The questioner looked confused until the beggar explained, "People come to the marketplace all weighed down by their possessions. When I ask them for a coin in the name of God, they are relieved of some of their heavy burden and can dance."

How do our burdens weigh us down? Have the participants divide into two teams. It doesn't matter how many there are on each team, one or twenty. Tell one team that they are the rich, and they have all they want. Inform the other team that they are poor and only have the essentials for life. Ask each team to write down what they "own" or what is important to that group of people in today's world. Then give each team an empty canvas sack. Using stones or bricks, put in one stone for each item on the list. The poor group should only have a few while the other group should have a full bag. Then have a relay race where the team must carry their bag to another point in the room and return to the starting place. Each person on the team must carry the bag. Return to the group and talk about the experience.

- How are people today tied down to their possessions?
- What would happen if they lost them all?
- What could they really live without? What do they need to live?
- What do we need to follow Christ?

Clothes Horse

Ask each member of the group to list the items of clothing they are wearing and the approximate cost of each item when it was new. Total the cost. Using that sum of money, consider what items cost in Third World countries. Consult news resources, UNICEF, or Heifer Project International, P. O. Box 808, Little Rock, AR 72203, 1-800-422-0474; http:/www.heifer.org/.

- What could you buy for the cost of the clothes you have on today?
- What could someone in a Third World country buy with your allowance for a week? A month? A year?

Plan to use a third of the money the class is gathering through the 10 percent tithe or the "Pennies from Heaven" for one of these projects. Before you decide on a project, read and discuss the Personal Story. Talk about how the group could include others in the church in raising money or collecting items for an outside organization.

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3 Using God's Gifts

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."

Luke 21:1-4

Commentary: Jesus is teaching in the temple in Jerusalem, the center of worship for all Israel. As he faces fierce opposition from some religious leaders who have corrupted their office, Jesus observes a widow placing in the temple treasury an offering of two "lepta," the smallest coins in the realm. His lesson is that gifts from God—whether power, money, or talent—are to be used sacrificially in ways that honor God and respect the dignity of God's people. Even the smallest of God's gifts are never to be used for greedy, fraudulent, or artificial purposes.

☐ Questions

- Why would someone give all that they had to the church?
- How are even the smallest gifts used for God's purposes?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How did different people contribute their gifts for the sock project?
- Was every gift important?

☐ Activities

Poster Art

Examine the poster for this session of the hand holding a variety of items. List the items shown.

- What do they represent?
- What other items might you add? Why?
- Are there any you might take away? Why?
- Using the poster for ideas, list the gifts God has given individuals in the group.
- How can these gifts be used to further the mission of the Church?

As a group, create your own three-dimensional, larger-than-life hand using plaster of paris. Place objects in the hand that represent the resources of people today that can be used to carry out God's work in the world. Include gifts of individuals in the group identified earlier. Display the finished hand where members of the congregation can see it.

Ten Thin Dimes

Share the following story with the group: There once was an unemployed man who made a bargain with God. If God would get him a job, he would give God 10 percent of all the money he made each year. The first year he made $100, and he gave God $10. The second year he made a $1,000, and he gave God $100. The years went by and the man became more wealthy through investments and hard work, always giving God 10 percent of what he had each year. Finally after ten years the man made $1,000,000. When it came time to give God 10 percent, the man realized that he would have to give God $100,000. The man went to God and asked to be released from the bargain saying he just could not afford $100,000 dollars. God replied, "I can not release you from your bargain, but I can make it possible for you to afford me again."

Give everyone ten dimes.

- How hard would it be to give a tenth of this to the church for God's work?
- What would it be like to give all of it?
- Refer to the scripture passage. Why did the woman give all her money to the temple?

Now pretend that each dime is worth $100 dollars.

- Would you be able to give away all of it? Why? Why not?
- If each dime were worth $1,000 or $1,000,000, would you be able to give all of it away? Half of it? A tenth?

God doesn't ask for all we have. But God does ask for the best of what we have. What are the things that God asks from us? How do God's expectations differ from the world's expectations?

Take A Hike

Plan an outdoor hike for the group. Ask everyone to bring a backpack or other type of sack to carry water and other necessities. When everyone has gathered ask each person to make a list of the necessities of life. What do they have or own that they can't live without? For example, a CD player, favorite CDs, a television, a computer, or certain clothes.

For every item on the list, give them a stone with the name of the item written on it. When you have finished packing up the stones, begin the hike. Half way through (or sooner if participants start to complain), stop and ask what "necessary items" they might like to get rid of. Allow them to make decisions about what they will leave behind. When everyone has lightened his or her load, continue the hike. At the conclusion, talk about what was important to each person at the beginning and what became less important after they had been hiking a while.

Return to your meeting place, and during a meal watch the movie or read *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan.

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Treasuring Our Gifts

Using Our Gifts

Objective

Youth will be able to list ways to use their gifts individually and as a group for God and for others.

Personal Story

For Confirmation I was required to spend at least 15 hours doing a service project that used my gifts. We spent at least two sessions figuring out what our gifts were and how to use them to serve God and others.

From my babysitting experience, I knew that I had a gift for working with children. I was also interested in learning more about medical professions. I decided to call our community hospital to volunteer to work with children who were in the hospital.

After several attempts, I finally connected with the volunteer coordinator at the hospital. She said that I was too young to work directly with the children. I could take the training to be a Candy Striper, but that wasn't being offered for another six months.

I didn't know what to do. The deadline was nearing for our service projects, and I didn't have a single hour of work done. My friend suggested I volunteer at a local stable that gives riding lessons to disabled children and adults. The riding center was always looking for volunteers to lead horses and riders around the rings, to clean stalls, and groom the horses.

I had no interest in cleaning up after a bunch of horses. My dad is allergic to cats, and we don't even have a dog. I don't dislike animals, but I am not particularly fond of them either. But time was running out, and I needed to get my project done.

My friend, who loves everything that walks on four legs, invited me to go to the stables with her on a Saturday. This was not what I had planned to do to serve God. I had pictured myself reading and playing with children who were sick or recovering at the hospital.

With great reluctance, I went that Saturday, and, sure enough, my first job was cleaning out stalls. Later, though, I was asked to help a child with cerebral palsy ride around the ring. While my friend led the horse, I helped the child stay steady in the saddle.

I decided to try working at the stables the next Saturday even though my friend had another commitment. That day I brushed an older horse that is much loved by the riders, and helped several children and adults maneuver their horses around the ring. I became more sure of my skills, and was allowed to work unassisted in the ring by the end of the day.

To make a long story short, this service project may have changed my life. It allowed me to use the gifts I had identified at the beginning of the process, and helped me discover new gifts. I earned all the hours I needed in three Saturdays, but a year later, I still spend many weekend hours at the stables.

I am looking into veterinary medicine as a career. I learned that I have a gift for working with animals. My friend saw a side of me that I couldn't see myself. I wonder what other gifts I haven't yet uncovered.

SESSION 9

Scripture

Luke 10:25-28
Luke 11:9-13

Skill Focus

Responsibility
Independence

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Prayer
Almighty God, we thank you that by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ you have overcome sin and brought us to yourself, and that by the sealing of your Holy Spirit you have bound us to your service. Renew in these your servants the covenant you made with them at their Baptism. Send them forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before them; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

At Confirmation, Reception, or Reaffirmation
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 309

Dismissal
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

☐ Begin Here: Remembering Scripture

A. Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

Luke 10:25-28

B. "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Luke 11:9-13

Connect with the Personal Story

Read the Personal Story for this session. Think about a similar experience you may have had either in the process of helping others or discovering a gift that you never knew you had. Look around the room at different people in the group. Try to find one attribute or gift each person has that they might not know about or may not be using. Then focus on yourself. Think about the things you like to do first. Then mentally list the things you think you do well. Put the two lists together to see if you can uncover an unexpected gift or talent.

☐ Questions

- Have you identified any new gifts during this course of study? What are they?
- Reread the passage from the Baptism Service in the first session. Do you have a better understanding of the gift of joy and wonder?
- The prayer on this page asks for power to perform the service you are to do. Do you know what that service is?
- How do we treasure our gifts by helping or caring for others?
- Does God give everyone gifts? Do some seem better than others? Why?

☐ Individually

Working individually, find ways to respond to issues and ideas confronted in the study of Treasuring Our Gifts. Share your ideas and record them on a piece of newsprint. Possible responses include:

- Do the exercise under the section about the Personal Story, but actually write the two lists. After making the comparisons in the lists, select one unused gift or talent to attempt in the next month.
- If you kept a journal during the course of study, reread the entries. Was it helpful? Decide if you want to continue a journal on your own.
- Gifts are often uncovered when we help others. Look for a new way to help someone at school, church, in the community, or within your own family.
- Be aware of the gifts and talents of people around you. Help your friends and family members identify and treasure their gifts.
- If you examined your expenditures for a week as suggested in Session 8, Theme 1, make a personal budget for a month or other period of time. Decide how much to allocate to your church or a project that is special to you.

☐ Group

Think about ways the group can respond to ideas and issues raised in your study of Treasuring Our Gifts. Record your ideas on newsprint. Possible responses are:

- If you used the SHAPE exercise at the planning session for this module, bring in the envelopes with the answers to the questions. Pass them back out to the appropriate people and see if your responses have changed over this course of study. If you did not do this exercise, discuss the questions under Steps for Planning.
- Display information from interviews with members of the congregation about their gifts (See Session 2, Theme 1).
- Review the list of ways Participants can help each other use their gifts (Session 2, Theme 3). Decide if you want to continue this effort.

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- Go outside and each find a small stone that will fit in a pocket or purse. Discuss ways you can carry each other's burdens. Keep the stone as a reminder to follow "Christ's Law."
- Use the masks made for Session 6, Theme 2 to present an environmental message to another group.
- If you collected pennies or tithes (Session 8, Theme 1), decide what to do with the proceeds.

☐ Celebrate

Celebrate the completion of your study of Treasuring Our Gifts with a specific activity. Think of something you want to do together or use one of the following options:

Art

- Make treasure or keepsake boxes with another group in the church (Session 4, Theme 3) showing the parts of us we show others and the parts we hide. Remind the participants that God treasures us, both from the outside and inside.
- Make a display of the tiles illustrating individual gifts (Session 2, Theme 2).
- Install the mural of the seven days of creation as described in Session 6, Theme 1. Select music to play while people view the mural.

Liturgy

- Use the song about agape love written by the group at a worship service (Session 4, Theme 2).
- Use the display of tiles (see above) near the altar for a youth worship service.
- Plan a worship service around the Deconstructing Creation Ritual in Session 6, Theme 1.

Community

- Show the video made during the cleanup project in Session 6, Theme 2. Encourage others to be a part of a cleanup project in your community.
- Plan an Undinner (Session 7, Theme 1) for another group in the church or community.

Fun

- Stage an awards banquet for members of the church who use their gifts to help others. Use the interviews (Session 2, Theme 1) to help you identify those you want to honor. Design the awards to reflect the contributions people made. For example, a sparkplug could be given to someone who gets things going; a megaphone for the one who cheers us on; and a Dear Abby column for the one who always listens.
- Invite the older members interviewed in Session 3, Theme 2 to join you one Sunday. Show the videotapes if they were made.

FOLLOW THROUGH

Individual Response: Ask God to help you identify gifts you haven't used, to find a creative way to use them, and to include God in making difficult decisions. Identify a specific time each day to work on your journal if you want to continue it. If you decide to help someone, make sure you follow through. Be aware of the many gifts God has given you and the people around you.

- Does God expect you to use your gifts to serve God and others?
- Do you need outside help in reaching your goals?
- Can you identify a person in the church or community who you can turn to when you or someone close to you is facing a difficult decision?

Group Response: Look at the list of possible responses the group has put together, including the suggestions in this session. Decide which of the suggestions the group would like to carry out. The group may want to divide up to respond in several different ways or to select a more comprehensive project. On a piece of newsprint, write down the activities or project the group has selected. List the actions that must be taken to complete the activities or project. Estimate the time each will take and designate a person to be responsible for each action. Ask for a volunteer to oversee the activities who can make sure each component has been completed.

- How did you determine which action to take?
- Do the activities include each person in the group?
- Are there people in the church or community who can help you complete the tasks?

Celebrate: Ask for volunteers to select and plan an appropriate liturgical response to your study of Treasuring Our Gifts. The people coordinating the art response may need to work with the liturgy group in creating the worship space. Set a time for the group to gather for the liturgy and discuss who you want to include. Talk to the clergy about an appropriate space to install the mural. If you host an Undinner, assign the preparation and purchase of food to different people. Be sure you have contacted someone about use of kitchen facilities. Make sure that the people you are honoring at the awards banquet plan to attend. Enlist the aid of their families.

- Does your celebration include all the Participants in the group?
- Does your celebration embrace people outside the group?

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MOVING AHEAD

Treasuring Our Gifts

Outreach Activities for Sessions 2-8

Session	Theme	Suggested Outreach Activity
Affirming Our Gifts	1 2	• Interview members of the congregation about how God called them and how they use their gifts. • Display in the church tiles made to show individual gifts.
Caring for Ourselves	2 3	• Interview and videotape older members of the church about their expectations as teens. • Pray for the anxieties people carry with them .
Caring for Each Other	1 2 3	• Identify a person to help at school, home, or in the community. • Pray for places of despair and place of hope in the community. • Write an agape love note to someone difficult to love. • Hold a "Love Fest" for teens joining the group next year. • Pray for the burdens of another member of the group. • Carry a burden for a member of your family.
Caring for People in Need	1 2 3	• Pass on possessions you no longer need. • Participate in or help start a gleanings program. • Commit a random act of kindness at a sports field, park, or mall. • Share the Good Samaritan video or play with another group in the church.
Caring for God's World	1 2 3	• Make a mural of the seven days of creation for the church. • Protect the earth by doing one activity or changing one behavior that is harmful. • Pick up litter at a site in the community. • Display the "Tree of Life" that describes healing. • Join a group cleaning up a body of water. • Make posters about the effects of litter on waterways.
Using Resources Fairly	1 3	• Help restore an environmental imbalance in your community. • Work with others to restore balance among people. • Conduct an Oxfam feast with another group to better understand disparities of resources among nations.
Financial Resources	1 3	• Collect pennies from daily change for a group project. • Design a creative program for stewardship at your church. • Consider giving a tithe of your income to the church.

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