Episcopal Curriculum for Youth

Who Are the People of God?

A Guide for Leadership Teams

Episcopal Curriculum for Youth—Who Are the People of God?
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Who Are the People of God?

The Bible is full of stories about people who have struggled with their faith in God in a variety of ways. Some, like Esther, hid their faith until they had to take a stand. Others, like Jonah, tried to run away from God's call. Some, like Thomas, had some reasonable doubts. Others, like Peter, denied knowing Jesus. In other words, they were people just like us who had faults and doubts, who were confused about what they believed, and who were unsure about what they were willing to say to friends and family.

Throughout history and in our own time, individuals have been involved in the same kinds of issues over and over again as they seek to live as Christians in the world. Those in this study stand out for what they have accomplished. Some are writers who share their faith through prose and poetry. Some risked and even lost their lives in the pursuit of their faith. There are many, many more persons, just like us, who question and seek answers, who make mistakes and seek forgiveness, and who find confusion and conflict in what parents, friends, and the Church believe.

The purpose of this study, *Who Are the People of God,* is to explore through scripture the lives of a variety of different people—past and present—and to discover that all people have many of the same feelings and questions that we have. Through this study, we can learn more about ourselves and how we are part of the Body of Christ in the world.

Introduction

Who Are the People of God? 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, "Planning Our Study," is designed as a tool for making decisions about how the group will proceed. It begins with a "Point of Contact"—a Personal Story about a young

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person who finds a special sense of the communion of saints while attending worship. The planning session begins, as do all other sessions, with prayer and the 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 *Who Are the People of God?* through these individual topics:

Finding Joy
Making Mistakes
Finding Courage
Help From Others
Facing Hardship
Having Doubts
Staying True
We Are God's People

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 to take place.

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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.

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- **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 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

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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 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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Who Are the People of God?

Planning Our Study

Objective

Youth will be able to plan a course of study that relates the stories of God's people to the lives of people today.

Personal Story

The church I go to is one of those really old churches. It has been around for at least a hundred years. Sometimes when I am there on Sunday mornings, I begin to get this funny feeling—maybe it's the way the music sounds or the way the light shines through the stained-glass window. I sense that there are people worshipping with me who I can't see. It's weird.

Last Sunday we had a bunch of baptisms, and we were doing that part of the service when you say the words, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints." As soon as I said "the communion of saints," I got that feeling again really strong. I started wondering about all the people who had been baptized in my church who were dead now and all the people who had had their funerals there. I wondered if somehow all those people who had died are still a part of us—a part of the communion of saints, the dead ones, the living ones, and maybe even the ones who haven't even been born yet.

I stopped thinking; it was too heavy for a Sunday morning. But the idea wouldn't leave my mind. The funny feelings I have in church aren't bad. I like saying I believe in the communion of saints. It helps the sadness I sometimes feel when I remember my grandfather who died when I was little, and my grandmother, who died just last year. There are times when I feel that they are sitting right next to me in church.

In a way, being a part of the communion of saints makes me feel connected to a lot of people in the past, even the old names in the Bible. And I guess it makes me feel connected to the people who haven't even been born yet. That is pretty amazing.

SESSION 1

Scripture

Leviticus 26:3-13
Colossians 3:12-17

Skill Focus

Communication
Respect

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Prayer
Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Proper 8
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 230

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

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

A. If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land. You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. I will look with favor upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain my covenant with you. You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new. I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

Leviticus 26:3-13

Commentary: The book of *Leviticus* is first and foremost a book of worship. It describes the laws and regulations for worship in the tabernacle, including instructions on ceremonial cleanliness, moral laws, and holy days. The key theme in *Leviticus* is holiness. The first half of the book explains how to become holy, and the second half instructs people on how to remain holy. The passage above describes God's blessings for the Israelites if they "follow my statues and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully."

B. As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17

Commentary: *Colossians* is a letter written by the apostle Paul to a congregation at Colassae, which is located in modern-day Turkey. Paul uses a metaphor of putting on clothing to describe how new Christians should embrace Christ's teachings about forgiveness and love. He ends by saying that their actions should reflect the acts of Jesus as if Jesus were there himself.

☐ Questions

- What is God promising the Israelites in the *Leviticus* passage? What promises might God make today?
- How would you define "God's people"? What word do Christians use to describe God's people?
- What does Paul say is the most important attribute in our dealings with others? Why?
- What role does forgiveness play in our relationships with others?

Point of Contact

Personal Story

Read the Personal Story as a group. Read the passage from the Baptismal Covenant the author refers to in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 304. The setting of the story is a church. Talk about other places youth have felt the presence of others, both living and dead.

- List the places youth have felt the presence of others. Why are these places different?
- Were you comforted by these feelings? How?
- What does the communion of saints mean to you? Why is it part of the Baptismal Covenant?

Resource Poster

Look at Resource Poster No. 1 illustrating the theme "Who Are the People of God?" Discuss the images and how they relate to your upcoming study.

- Who does each image represent?
- Are people of God only found in the Bible?
- Who are the saints in the poster? Who are the saints in your life? Who would you add to the poster?
- Why is Jesus in the center?

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☐ Activities

Naming Names

Sit in a circle. Ask each person to share each part of his or her name and explain its significance. For example, is it a family name? Are they named after a specific person? If so, what is that person like? Do they know if their names have special meanings?

After everyone has had a chance to describe the backgrounds of their names, ask the group what they would name a child today. Why did they pick those names? Discuss why names are important.

Who's Who

Divide the group into two teams. Ask each team to create two quizzes. The first is called "Who's Who Now?" and the second is "Who's Who Then?" Each quiz should have about twenty questions. The first should be about people in your church. For example: Who works at the local fast-food restaurant? Who is the senior warden? Who teaches the sixth-grade Sunday school class? Who makes the coffee every Sunday?

The second quiz should be about people in the Bible. For example: Who built the first temple in Jerusalem? Who led the Hebrew people from Egypt? Who took a ride inside a large fish? Who did Jesus call "the rock"? Exchange quizzes and answer as many questions as possible. Afterward, talk about how much the group knows about people in the church and people from the Bible. Were you surprised?

Saints of God

Look up the words of "I sing a song of the saints of God" (*The Hymnal 1982*, 293). Youth may remember singing this song when they were younger. Write a contemporary version of this song, or create one of your own that expresses the same ideas. Use the rhythms of rap or other styles of music.

- If you included careers or professions in the song, what determined your selections?
- Where do you find saints today?

☐ Steps for Planning

1. Limit activities to ensure the group has enough time to plan their study of *Who Are the People of God?* Before the meeting, make enough copies of the Planning Reference Guide located on p. 18 for each person in the group. Depending on the size of the group, divide sessions 2 through 8 among individuals or small groups, honoring preferences when possible. From an extra copy of the guide, tear out sessions and give them to the appropriate person or group. Ask the group to look at the scriptures, themes, and activities of their assigned sessions. Encourage them to make notes on their copies of the Planning Reference Guide. Allow about ten minutes for this activity.

2. The purpose of the planning session is to design a course of study that meets the unique needs of this group. There is no right or wrong way to do this. For example, the groups can decide to spend three weeks on one session and skip another completely. Look for topics and activities that are relevant to your lives now.

3. Report your findings and recommendations for the sessions you were assigned. Ask a volunteer to record the information on newsprint. Next to each entry, write the name of a participant who agrees to be the leader or coordinator for each theme and scripture passage the group has decided to study. This person will decide which activities to use, determine if outside resources or people are needed, and gather other necessary materials. Coordinators may not actually lead the sessions, but they are responsible for finding a leader.

4. Look at the resource posters and decide how each will be used. Distribute posters to the appropriate coordinators. Posters can be used as a focal point of a discussion or to set a tone. The following posters are available for this module:
   Poster 1: Who Are the People of God?
   Poster 2: Finding Joy
   Poster 3: Making Mistakes
   Poster 4: Help from Others
   Poster 5: Having Doubts
   Poster 6: Staying True

5. Collect the sessions from the people or groups who made recommendations and redistribute them to the appropriate coordinators. Take a few minutes to see if anyone feels that his or her ideas have been overlooked.
   - Do you agree with the decisions made so far?
   - Do the topics interest you?
   - If there are disagreements, are there compromises?

6. On another piece of newsprint, ask a volunteer to make a calendar of the themes the group will study. Include information from the church or school calendar that might affect scheduling, such as intergenerational events or exam weeks. Make sure every coordinator has a copy of the calendar and post it in a central location.

7. Discuss accountability for coordinators and participants.
   - What are our expectations for attendance?
   - If coordinators get sick, who can they call?
   - How can changes be made in the schedule if necessary?
   - Should someone call coordinators as a reminder?

8. Ask the following questions to measure how well the planning session went:
   - Did everyone participate?
   - Did the group listen to each person?
   - Is everyone comfortable with the study plan?
   - Does everyone have a role?

9. Save time at the end of your study of *Who Are the People of God?* to reflect on what you have learned and how it can make a difference in your lives. Session 9 is designed to help you do this through individual and group responses as well as celebrations involving art, liturgy, and activities in the community. Finding ways to have fun throughout your study is important.

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PLANNING REFERENCE GUIDE

Who Are the People of God?

Questions

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

Topic	Scripture	Theme	Notes
Finding Joy	*Genesis 45:4-5, 13-15* *John 19:25b-27* *Psalm 78:1-4*	Joseph Mary, the Mother of Jesus Verna Dozier	
Making Mistakes	*Genesis 28:10-17* *Matthew 26:69-75* *John 15:26-16:1*	Jacob Peter Thomas Cranmer	
Finding Courage	*Esther 4:14-17* *Mark 5:25-34* *Psalm 112:6-8*	Esther Suffering Woman Terry Waite	
Help from Others	*Exodus 4:10-16* *Acts 18:1-4* *Isaiah 35:3-6a*	Aaron and Moses Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Syle	
Facing Hardship	*Job 19:25-27* *Daniel 3:16-18* *Ezekiel 2:4-7*	Job Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Sojourner Truth	
Having Doubts	*Jonah 1:1-3* *John 20:24-25* *Psalm 37:3-6*	Jonah Thomas Evelyn Underhill	
Staying True	*I Samuel 18:1-4* *John 20:11-18* *Matthew 10:37-39*	Jonathan Mary Magdalene Jonathan Daniels	

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Who Are the People of God?

Finding Joy

SESSION 2

Objective

Youth will be able to describe how God shares in the joy and happiness that people experience.

Personal Story

I know a guy named Scott. He is a year older than me, and he is someone I have always admired. Everyone likes to be around Scott. We go to the same school and the same church. About eighteen months ago, things started to go bad for Scott. His mom got real sick and had to spend most of her time in bed when she wasn't in the hospital. Then Scott's dad lost his job. I couldn't believe it. I didn't think both those things should happen to the same family in the same year.

Scott has always been a great soccer player, and he has been on our high school team for the last three years. This year, though, in his senior year, he didn't try out. He said he needs to help around the house and take care of his younger brother. He also needs to work to save money for college, though he isn't sure he'll be able to go after he graduates.

I feel really badly for Scott, and I look at how things are going for me. I am so obsessed because I don't have my own car when Scott can't even play soccer. Sometimes I feel guilty when I compare myself to him. I am really thankful for my family and that both my parents are well and have jobs. That allows me to be pretty carefree.

We have been praying for Scott's family at church for a while now. When I think of it, I say a prayer for him and his family at other times. But this is the amazing thing: Scott is always smiling. Whenever I see him I feel better for some reason. He just lights up the room. The other night I went with my mom to take dinner over to his family. Scott's mom is in bed again, and she looks really sick. Despite that, there was a feeling in the house—like laughter and maybe even joy.

Later I finally got my nerve up and asked Scott, "How come you and your family seem so happy all the time?" He answered, "Since my mom got sick and my dad lost his job, something has happened to my family. The four of us have gotten closer." Scott told me that they talk about things that really count, and that he doesn't worry about the things he used to. He has also started noticing and appreciating small things.

The people at church have really made a difference in his family's life, too. They are always bringing food and helping take care of his little brother. Scott has gotten to know a lot of the adults in our church and found out that a lot of them are really cool. His family says they can feel all those prayers people have been saying and are aware of God being closer to them.

Scott would like his family's problems to go away and his mom to get well. But somehow, they have managed to find a special kind of joy.

Scripture

Genesis 45:4-5, 13-15
John 19:25b-27
Psalm 78:1-4

Skill Focus

Trust
Forgiveness

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Prayer
O heavenly Father, who filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Joy in God's Creation
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 814

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

1 Joseph

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. . . . You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here." Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Genesis 45:4-5, 13-15

Commentary: Joseph had never had a good relationship with his brothers in this story from *Genesis*. In jealousy, they had sold him to slave traders who took him far from his home. After many ordeals and even imprisonment, he had been named second-in-command to the Pharaoh of Egypt. When his brothers came to Egypt for the second time seeking food for the family, Joseph told them who he was and forgave them for their treachery. Joyously the brothers were reunited.

☐ Questions

- What role does forgiveness play in this story?
- What would the reunion have been like if the brothers had met in prison?
- In his darkest days, did Joseph expect to feel joy again?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How does Scott react to events in his life?
- Do you react to problems like Scott does or are you more likely to get angry?
- Are there some things in your life that could change if you had a different attitude?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 2.

- Which images of joy in the poster mean the most to you?
- What other images would you add?

☐ Activities

People of Joy

God intends God's people to be full of joy—to have fun and delight in God's creation just as God does. Ask the group to sit silently and think about places and situations in which they feel really joyful, are at peace, or have fun. List as many of these as you can on a piece of paper. Include major events, like a trip, or everyday occurrences, like taking a warm bath or sleeping. Share your list with the group and discuss.

- Which activities or situations bring you the greatest joy?
- Do some of your happiest moments occur when you're doing simple things?
- Have you wished for something that you knew would make you happy? Did it? Describe the situation.

From your discussion, identify common threads among the places or events that bring participants joy. Based on these observations, come up with five rules for joyful living. Post the rules in a place where you can see them every day.

Letters

Think about a time you felt God's peace and joy—maybe you felt it in nature while you were camping or at the midnight service on Christmas Eve. Write a letter to yourself describing that time and your awareness of God's closeness. Share the letters if you feel comfortable doing so.

- What made you aware of the joy you were feeling?
- How can you look for joy every day?

Take your letters home and put them in a place that's easy to find later. When life has been particularly unfair or you are feeling sad and alone, take out the letter and reread your thoughts.

Giving Joy

Joy often works best when it is shared. Think of someone who has moved away or you have lost touch with. Write that person a letter or call him or her.

The group could also get together to make cookies for care packages to send to young people from your church who have recently gone to college or joined the military. Make cards for each package with funny sayings and words of encouragement.

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2 Mary, the Mother of Jesus

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19:25b-27

Commentary: In this extraordinary scene, the horror of the crucifixion is abated for a moment as Jesus speaks these tender words to his mother and "the disciple whom he loved." John, the disciple, represents the faithfulness of all who try to love and care for one another in Jesus' name. From the cross, Jesus is creating a new kind of family, one that is based not on blood ties but on relationship with him. In Christ, all people are kin; bound to care for, nurture, and stick with one another. Even in the midst of his unimaginable suffering, Jesus first thought not about himself, but about those whom he loved.

☐ Questions

- How did Jesus reach out from the cross to comfort those he loved?
- Do you have friends who seem like family to you? What is that relationship like?
- How can relationships with others bring us joy?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How did the church "family" help Scott's family?
- Which programs in your church provide services to parishioners in need? How could you get involved in these programs?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 2.

- How are the images in the poster related?
- Who are you "related" to?

☐ Activities

Artwork

In the late 1970s, a baseball team in the World Series used a song called "We Are Family" as its theme. The words reflected the unity of both the team and its fans. In the scripture passage, Jesus creates a new family based on relationship with him. Talk about what it means to be in the family of God.

Create a mixed-media art sculpture in the shape of a cross or another symbol suggested to the group by the scripture passage or resource poster. The art should reflect the theme: "We are the family of God." With glue, add images cut from magazines, words or text fragments found or written by you, splashes of color, drawn or painted images, bits of fabric, or other small objects. Talk about the images, words, or objects selected for the sculpture. Use the artwork as the altar for a closing liturgy.

Family of God

Watch the crucifixion scene from the video *Jesus of Nazareth*. Watch for the moment when the outsider, Mary Magdalene, is included as "one of the family" by Mary, the mother of Jesus. Then look for the event described in the scripture passage, when Jesus entrusts Mary and John to one another.

- Who is in the family of God?
- Is anyone outside it?
- Does it only include human beings?
- What makes you part of God's family?

Share your own experiences and images of family—mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, children and parents, and possibly the extended family roles as well.

- What are the positive and negative aspects of family in your own experience?
- What is the best thing about being in a family?
- What is the hardest thing?
- How is your church family similar to your own family? How is it different?
- When you compare your church family and your biological family, is there anything you would like to change about either of them?

Pray for each other and your different "families."

Broken Families

Find ways to lift up or deepen the experience of family. Think of ways that your group can reach out to families that are broken or hurting in some way. For example, collect food or toys for needy families or for those in shelters because of spousal abuse; tutor or babysit children of parents who must work late; or do chores for the elderly.

Individuals in the group could also do something thoughtful or appreciative for someone who has been like a parent to them. Plan a project that would bring joy to someone in your church family.

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3 Verna Dozier

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings from of old,
things that we have heard and known,
that our ancestors have told us.
We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.

Psalm 78:1-4

Commentary: An important part of Jewish tradition is the handing down of sacred stories from generation to generation. The words above are a prologue to one version of these stories. Verna Dozier is a lay Episcopalian who has continued the traditions of sharing the sacred stories. A gifted teacher who is now retired from the District of Columbia public schools, she has concentrated on helping people learn to study the Bible. "The point of lay Bible study," says Verna Dozier, "is to help lay people reclaim their authority as people of God." A frequent speaker and retreat leader before her retirement, she often challenged groups to give more joy than they receive.

☐ Questions

- Is Bible study a part of your life? Could it be?
- How could knowing the Bible help you reclaim authority in your church?
- Do you know someone who has the studied the Bible in depth? What is this person like? How does he or she use this knowledge?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How could the Bible help Scott and his family?
- Do you know where to look for help in the Bible?
- Where could you go to find out more about the Bible?

For further study, read these books by Verna Dozier:
Equipping the Saints: A Method of Self-Directed Bible Study
The Dream of God: A Call to Return
Sisters & Brothers: Reclaiming a Biblical Idea of Community
(Co-authored by James R. Adams)

☐ Activities

What is Joy?

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, joy and gladness are specifically and consistently integrated into the life of the people of Israel as well as the life of early Christians. Many passages say different things about joy, such as "for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy" (*Psalm 63:7*).

Using Bible concordances, look up passages in the Bible that contain the words joy and gladness. Divide into two groups, with one looking at Old Testament passages and the other at the New Testament. If you cannot get a concordance, look for the two words in the *Book of Psalms*. Write down how the Bible characterizes joy and gladness.

- In what ways is joy different from just being happy?
- Describe the difference between a time you experienced joy and when you were just happy.
- In the Personal Story, Scott found joy in the midst of his family's problems. How can you feel sorrow and joy at the same time?

Commercials

Advertising influences every part of our lives. Make it work for you by making a commercial for God. Adapt a popular ad or create your own advertisement that emphasizes joy in a commercial for God, Jesus, or your church.

Divide into small groups and allow enough time for groups to create the commercials, practice them, and gather appropriate props. Present and discuss the ads when everyone is ready.

- How did the different groups portray joy?
- Is joy experienced in the church different from joy found in nature or other places?
- How can you find joy without a commercial?

If possible, set up a video camera and film the commercials. Show the commercials at a church meeting or other appropriate gathering.

Sharing Joy

Talk about favorite books that participants read as children. Make arrangements with a local school for youth to visit a kindergarten or first grade class. Take along your favorite books and read them aloud to children in the classes. Afterward, talk about your experiences.

- Were the children interested in your book?
- Did they listen or were they distracted?
- Would you like to do this again? How could you make that happen?

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Who Are the People of God?

Making Mistakes

SESSION 3

Objective

Youth will be able to explore ways that God helps people turn from their sin to walk with God.

Personal Story

Susan has always been the best at everything. She is smarter, more talented, and more perfect than any of us. I have to admit she worked at being the best. Even on the way to our youth group ski trip last January, from the time we got on the bus at 6:15 a.m., Susan studied vocabulary words to prepare for her SAT tests. All the rest of us slept or goofed off. Needless to say, she had great SAT scores.

She was also captain of the girl's high school volleyball team, all state in girl's softball, and she had the lead in the school musical her junior year. I don't think she ever had a bad hair day. She was always careful about what she ate, so she was never fat. She was more organized than anyone I've ever known. She has had a day planner since the sixth grade! I don't think her parents ever had to ground her for anything. When you got in trouble, you knew your mom thought, "Oh, why can't you be more like Susan?"

We were never really best friends—how could I be best friends with someone like Susan? She was nice, but I have to tell you, a little intense. Of course Susan got into the college of her choice, a great school. I thought everything for Susan was golden.

I was really surprised when my mom told me that Susan moved home from college before Thanksgiving. She had just quit or something and was taking the rest of the year off. I don't know the whole story. I was told that when she got to school she found she couldn't be perfect anymore, and she just freaked out. She apparently stopped eating, lost a lot of weight, and had what might be called a nervous breakdown. I hear she is getting some help now and is trying to learn how to accept who she is and that she doesn't have to be perfect.

Isn't life funny? We all make a lot of mistakes. I don't think I can get through one day without making at least ten mistakes. But I guess it is just as much of a mistake to think you have to be perfect as it is to act dangerously. At church they tell us that God loves us no matter what, that God loves unconditionally. When I have felt really bad about myself, I remember that love, and it makes me feel better. I hope someone tells Susan about God's love for her.

Scripture

Genesis 28:10-17
Matthew 26:69-75
John 15:26-16:1

Skill Focus

Responsibility
Forgiveness

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Prayer

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

Second Sunday in Lent
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 218

Dismissal

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

1 Jacob

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Genesis 28:10-17

Commentary: The story of Jacob and Esau, sons of Isaac, is a series of mistakes and trickery. First Esau unthinkingly sells his birthright to Jacob for a simple bowl of lentil stew. Then with the help of his mother, Rachel, Jacob tricks his father, Isaac, who is dying, into giving him the blessing that was meant for his brother Esau. Esau retaliates by threatening to kill Jacob, and Jacob runs away. He leaves town and heads toward Haran. On the way, he stops to rest, using a stone for a pillow. During the night, he dreams that God promises to always be with Jacob.

☐ Questions

- In the story, how does one mistake lead to another?
- What happens when mistakes are not addressed?
- Where is God when mistakes are made?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 3.

- Look at the cracks on the vase in the poster. Is it always possible to put something back together after it's broken?
- Do you know someone who has put his or her life back together after making a serious mistake? Describe this person.

☐ Activities

Family Feud

Retell the story of Jacob and Esau found in *Genesis 25-28.* Ask participants to listen for mistakes and tricks that the characters in this story make and list them on a piece of newsprint. Brainstorm similar errors that people make today in relationships with family members. Read the scripture passage on this page. Talk about Jacob's experience.

- Do you have sleepless nights when it feels like you have a stone for a pillow?
- Have you ever done something that you felt bad about?

Make a list of things that might keep you awake at night. For example, maybe someone misunderstood something you said, or you just broke up with your boyfriend, or a teacher falsely accused you of cheating. Look back over the list, and mark items with a red X that are your responsibility. Use a blue X for items that are someone else's fault, and a black X for items that are no one's fault.

- How can you take responsibility for things that go wrong?
- What does our culture teach us about taking responsibility?
- Is it easier to be a victim or to take responsibility?

Put the list the group made in the center of the room. Ask God to help you deal with the things that keep you awake at night and to take responsibility for the things you can control.

Bridge Builders

Put a large box in the center of the room surrounded by several smaller boxes placed at least three feet away. Pass out a bundle of popsicle sticks, tape, and glue to individuals or teams. The goal is to build a bridge from the smaller boxes to the large box to bring them all together. Afterward, talk about the experience.

- What unexpected things happened while you were constructing the bridges?
- How did you learn from your mistakes?
- How many ways can you reach the same destination?
- How is bridge building similar to reconciliation?
- How is asking for forgiveness the first step towards reconciliation?

Ask participants to think in silence about a relationship that is in need of repair. How can you begin to build a bridge to this person? Pray together that God will be with you even when you make mistakes just as God remained with Jacob.

Lentil Soup

Find a recipe for lentil soup, the meal that enticed Esau to give up his birthright. While some of the group prepares the soup, others can create a forgiveness ritual of liturgy based on the story of Jacob and Esau. Eat the soup as part of the ritual.

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2 Peter

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Matthew 26:69-75

Commentary: Peter, a fisherman by trade, was strong and fearless. He had been with Jesus almost from the start of Jesus' ministry, and he loved Jesus very much. These events took place shortly after Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemene and taken before the high priest to answer charges of blasphemy. Peter followed Jesus to the courtyard of the high priest. Three times he was asked if he was a follower of Jesus, and three times he denied that he knew Jesus. As the rooster crowed at the break of morning, Peter remembered that Jesus had foretold that Peter would deny him.

☐ Questions

- What was Peter's mistake?
- What does it mean to deny a friend?
- Have you ever betrayed a friend by denying him or her? What were the circumstances?
- Did this mistake separate Peter from Jesus? Why?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How are Peter and Susan similar?
- How could the narrator have helped Susan to accept being less than perfect?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 3.

- Are some mistakes easier to correct than others?
- Where can you go for help when you make mistakes?

☐ Activities

On the Spot

Read the scripture passage and describe the setting in which it took place (see *Matthew 26*). Ask participants to move their chairs apart so each person is in his or her own space. Pretend for a moment that you are Peter, and answer the following questions as he might have:

- What happened the night you denied knowing Jesus?
- How were you feeling?
- What was the mood of the people in the courtyard?
- If you could have talked to Jesus afterward, what would you have said?

After everyone has had time to reflect on these questions, select one person to play the role of Peter and another to be a talk show host. If the group is large enough, assign three participants to play the people who asked Peter if he knew Jesus. The rest of the group is the audience. Interview Peter and the others, taking questions from the audience. Compare this situation to times you have been in a position to stand up or to deny someone.

Making Mistakes

Invite several adults to be a part of a panel to talk about mistakes they have made that led them away from God and what they have learned from those mistakes. Before the discussion, read the scripture passage and/or talk about the images on Resource Poster No. 3. Encourage participants to think of questions for panel members, including situations members of the group may be facing now.

At the conclusion of the discussion, read one or more of the scripture passages from the sacrament of reconciliation on p. 449-450 of *The Book of Common Prayer*. End by saying together the closing declaration on p. 452, substituting the word "our" for "your."

Journaling

Keep a journal for a week to record the times you think you "blew it" or made a mistake that hurt you or others. After each entry, write a statement such as "Thank you God for forgiving me," or "Thank you God for loving me just the way I am." Read over your entries at the end of the week to see what you have learned from your mistakes.

- Do you need to seek forgiveness from someone?
- Is there an ongoing situation that you need to address?
- Does God's unconditional love and forgiveness change the way you look at yourself and the mistakes you make?

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3 Thomas Cranmer

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[Jesus said,] "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling."

John 15:26-16:1

Commentary: Thomas Cranmer was a liturgical genius who is responsible for the first Anglican Book of Common Prayer. He lived in England in the mid 1500s in a time of great upheaval. Governments, closely aligned with religions, swung between Catholic and Protestant dominance. When Queen Mary, a devout Catholic, came into power, Cranmer was urged to sign a statement denying his beliefs to avoid being burned at the stake. After he signed it, the authorities told him he would still face death. He immediately regretted the denial. He said, "forasmuch as my hand offended in writing contrary to my heart, therefore my hand shall first be punished; for if I may come to the fire, it shall first be burned." He ran to the place where he was to die, and thrust his hand into the flames as he had promised.

☐ Questions

- According to the scripture passage, who was with Thomas Cranmer when he faced death?
- Did Cranmer's mistake separate him from God?
- Are you aware of God's presence when you make mistakes? Does it make a difference?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 3.

- What does the vase represent in your life?
- Have you made mistakes that you don't think can be "fixed"?
- Can every mistake be forgiven?

☐ Activities

Sin in the News

Pass out newspaper sections and newsmagazines to participants. Give them ten minutes to tear out or mark with highlighters stories or pictures that illustrate something that is wrong or reflects sin. Share the findings with the group.

- Which articles or pictures illustrate a break in the commandment to love God?
- Which break the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself?
- What is the difference between a mistake and a sin?
- Do you believe that God can forgive anything that has been done? Why?

Collect the clippings or marked up pages into a pile. Stand in a circle around the pile, and ask each person to say a brief prayer (a sentence or a phrase) about the people or the situations in the stories they found.

Role Plays

Plan a role play based on one of the following situations or make up your own. Use the questions to plan the conclusions.

A. In English, you need an A or B on the final to pass the course. You studied long and hard, but your friend didn't study at all. During the test, you see your friend copying answers from another's paper. You get a C; your friend gets a B.

- Would you discuss this issue with your friend?
- Would you tell others in the class? The teacher?
- Who gets hurt if you do nothing?
- Would you still be friends with this person?

B. You are at your friend's house. The friend sneaks a candy bar from a little brother's stash. You say nothing, though you feel kind of funny. Later your friend offers you another kind of candy bar that you gladly accept. Then you find out the friend lifted it from the store without paying for it.

- How do you feel about your friend?
- Should you tell someone? Who?
- Should you have said something the first time this happened?
- Who needs forgiveness in this situation?

Act out role plays of the situations described above or ones you have created. Discuss the ways people sometimes enable others to continue to make the same mistakes. Ask God to help you love others by refusing to be a part of a continuing problem.

Rite of Reconciliation

Look at the Rite of Reconciliation in *The Book of Common Prayer* beginning on p. 447. The rite is designed for two people, one to confess and the other to hear the confession. In the first service, a priest hears the confession; in the second, it can be another Christian. Discuss the service and decide if the group would like to invite a clergy person to talk more about reconciliation.

The directions on p. 446 suggest that the penitent (the person seeking forgiveness and reconciliation) "confess all serious sins troubling the conscience." Light a candle in the middle of the room. Remain silent for a period of time to reflect on a mistake you've made that is troubling your conscience. Write the mistake down on a piece of paper. One by one, place the papers in a fireproof container, and set them on fire. As the flames destroy the paper, ask for God's forgiveness.

For further study about Thomas Cranmer, read:
Thomas Cranmer: A Life by Diarmaid MacCulloch (1996)
Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar edited by Paul Ayris and David Selwyn (1993)
What Did Cranmer Think He Was Doing? by Colin Buchanan (1976)

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Who Are the People of God?

Finding Courage

SESSION 4

Objective

Youth will be able to name ways people have found courage in facing injustice and conflict through their faith in God.

Personal Story

At our church we always have a party for All Saints Day. Everyone comes dressed up as his or her favorite saint. “Peter” brings his fishing pole, “Francis” brings his pets, “Hildegard of Bingen” brings all her hit CDs, and so on.

This year I wanted to go as one of the martyrs. I figured I could gross people out with some ketchup all over my clothes and some lion-tooth marks, or carry my head in my hands—lots of saints were beheaded—or drag my old skin around like that apostle who was skinned alive. So I started reading up on the martyrs.

When Christianity started out, it was illegal in many places. People thought it was pretty weird to worship some guy who got the death penalty and to drink his flesh and blood like cannibals. And they thought that Christians must be atheists because they didn’t believe in the Roman gods.

So Christians were sometimes rounded up and given a choice: either worship the same gods as everyone else or die. It wouldn't be a pretty death, either. Some Christians thought, “So I burn a little incense to Mars or Jupiter to get to go home to my family. I could keep my fingers crossed behind my back, and who would be the wiser?” So they’d pretend to go along, although it was a little harder when they had to do something like jump up and down on a picture of Jesus. Some just quit being Christians altogether. It was too hazardous to their health. But the martyrs were the ones who said, “Jesus has stood by me all my life, and I’m not going to walk away from him now.” More people took the easy way out, but the martyrs are the ones we remember.

The more I read about the martyrs, the more I wondered if I would risk *my* life for what I believe. Would my faith be strong enough to stand up under pressure? Can I really say that I would put Jesus Christ ahead of my own happiness, my own life?

But who gets martyred these days? You can believe anything you want now, right? I found out, though, that there have been more martyrs in the twentieth century than in all the other centuries combined. Priests getting gunned down at the altar, monks getting their throats slit, men and women dying in horrible ways because they followed Jesus.

But I’m just a high school kid. No big tests for my faith, right? But then I remember the weird kid that nobody likes, and how I didn’t risk my own popularity to talk to him even though he seemed pretty lonely. Letting him be without a friend—is that any worse than the early Christians who stomped their feet on a picture of Jesus?

Scripture

Esther 4:14-17
Mark 5:25-34
Psalm 112:6-8

Skill Focus

Trust
Conflict

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Prayer

Most loving Father, whose will it is for us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing but the loss of you, and to cast all our care on you who care for us: Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which you have manifested to us in your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

Eighth Sunday after the Epiphany
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 216-217

Dismissal

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

1 Esther

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[Mordecai said,] "for if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Esther 4:14-17

Commentary: In a story written to inspire the Jewish people during times of persecution, the king's minister, Haman, published an edict for the extermination of the Jews. The king did not know that his queen, Esther, was herself a Jew. She could have kept silent and saved her own life while her people perished. But with the wise counsel of Mordecai, she realized that she was the only one who was in a position to change the king's mind. Even though Esther was queen, she was still subject to the strict rule of the court: upon penalty of death, no one was permitted to approach the king without being specifically summoned. Yet she knew that if her people were to be saved from the evil designs of Haman, she had to step up and put her own life on the line. Putting her faith in God over the risk of incurring the king's wrath, she carried her people's cause before the throne. Jews were spared because of Esther's courage.

☐ Questions

- Where does Esther look for courage?
- If Esther had done nothing, what might have happened to her?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Have you been forced to defend or deny your faith?
- Have you found yourself in a situation similar to that of the narrator and the outcast? What did you do?

☐ Activities

Two Versions

There are two version of the story of Esther in the Bible. The Hebrew version is found in the Old Testament, while the Greek version is in the Apocrypha. There are subtle contrasts in the story, but the primary differences in the two versions are the references to God. God is not directly referred to in the Hebrew version, but is mentioned over fifty times in the Greek.

Divide into two groups, and assign one version of the story of Esther to each group. Perform your version of the story—be creative and playful; it is a story with elements of farce and whimsy. Afterward, talk about the differences between the two versions.

- Did you like the Greek or the Hebrew version better? Why?
- Can you think of a modern parallel to this story? Who would be the main characters?

Create and act out a modern version of the Esther story. Identify the people or groups that would be Haman, Mordecai, Esther, and the king.

Injustice

The story of Esther is not only about courage, but also about the injustices faced by the Hebrew people living in captivity. Discuss the problems these people faced at the time of the story and later in history.

- Can you describe an experience or situation of injustice at school or church?
- Did you do or say anything about it?
- Did your response (or lack of it) depend on the degree to which you were personally affected?
- Have you been involved in unjust situations where you, like Esther, were in a unique position to do something about it? What did you do? Would your intervention have cost you something?

Create role plays of several situations of injustice or unfairness. Include both a Mordecai character, who is directly affected but lacks the power or opportunity to act, and an Esther character, who is not immediately affected but has more power to make a difference. Look at *Esther 4:13-14*. Can we ever really remain unaffected by anything that happens to other people?

Hint: Negotiation books, such as *Getting to Yes* and *Getting Past No*, can help you separate out personality questions from the issues themselves.

Purim

Purim is the Jewish feast where the story of Esther is celebrated. Although survival in the face of persecution has been a tragically persistent theme in Jewish experience, the story is ultimately comic, with life winning over death. The holiday, therefore, is festive, with elements of carnival and masquerade—a combination of Halloween and Mardi Gras. Read about Purim in a book like *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary* by Micahel Strassfeld (Harper & Row, 1985). Talk to Jewish friends about how they celebrate, or invite them to speak to your group. Explore the possibility of attending a Purim celebration sometime in February or March.

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2 Suffering Woman

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was not better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well." Immediately her hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?" And his disciples said to him, "You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, 'Who touched me?'" He looked all around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."

Mark 5:25-34

Commentary: According to the Levitical purity code, the woman's chronic hemorrhaging would make her "unclean" and cause her to be ostracized. Thus she approached Jesus covertly, hoping to receive his healing power without being noticed. It was not easy to work her way through the crowd, and she risked being discovered and reviled. Yet her desire and her faith were strong enough to overcome obstacles and take great risks. But even though she was healed by simply touching his garment, Jesus did not let her remain anonymous and unnoticed. He addressed her, and to her credit she faced up to humiliation before the crowd by telling her story publicly. Then Jesus not only freed her permanently from her illness, but he also called her "daughter." She was no longer anonymous and outcast. Her bold faith had won her dignity and recognition as a child of God.

☐ Questions

- Why did Jesus insist the woman come forward?
- What took more courage—coming to Jesus secretly or publicly admitting her infirmity?
- Does Jesus expect us to make our faith public?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What is the difference between calling a "weird" person on the phone and sitting with that person at lunch?
- Is it harder to be a Christian today than it was when your parents were your age? Why?

☐ Activities

Telling Your Story

Ask each participant to think about his or her own story. Talk about how telling your story and having it heard and accepted can be a healing experience, a way of experiencing wholeness. What about your secrets, the parts of your story you are not ready to tell to others—maybe not even to yourself, or to God? Draw an iceberg, with only ten percent above the water and the rest submerged. Write or draw in the top portion things that everyone knows about you; on the other ninety percent fill in the secret, hidden, and undiscovered parts. Think about the parts that are hard to put down on paper, even if no one else will see them.

Hint: Assure participants that this is an activity that will not be shared.

- If anyone knew *everything* about you, would they still accept you?
- Do you feel that you are fully accepted and loved by God?

At the end of the exercise, offer up your whole self to God by burning your iceberg, letting the rising smoke be your prayer. Stand in a circle and try a trust fall. Select one person to be in the center of the circle—be sure those in the circle are standing shoulder to shoulder. The person in the center should keep his or her body straight and fall backward into the supporting arms of others. Do this as a prayer of trust that God will always be there for you.

Sacred Space

Hang a white vestment or drape a sheet in a "sacred space" near the altar or in an uncluttered room lit with candles. Read the scripture passage about touching the hem of Jesus' garment. Invite people to come forward, one at a time as they are moved, to touch the "garment" as a way of giving Jesus their pain or their hurt, and then letting it go. As this is done, the group might sing a Taize chant, or "Take, O take me as I am" (from *Iona* published by GIA).

On a sheet of newsprint hanging nearby, create a response to the experience, either in words or with another art expression. Talk about the experience of giving up some of your pain to Jesus.

- How did it feel to touch the garment?
- Were you glad that you could do it in secret?
- How could you turn over your pain to Jesus at other times?

Making Faces

From a crafts store, purchase plaster appropriate for face masks. Follow directions, first covering your face with Vaseline. Apply the plaster, and leave it on according to instructions. If some participants do not want to make face masks, encourage them to help others or make a cast of their hands. Paint the masks or castings when they are dry and decorate them if you wish, perhaps even writing some words on them. Or, simply leave them unadorned.

Take your mask home, and during the next week reflect on both sides of your face—the part that is shown to the world, and the inside, hidden part. Talk to the mask, ask it questions, and use it as a focus for offering your whole self to God. Embrace the wholeness of the outer and the inner you as Jesus embraced the suffering woman.

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3 Terry Waite

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

For the righteous will never be moved;
they will be remembered forever.
They are not afraid of evil tidings;
their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.
Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid;
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.
Psalm 112:6-8

Commentary: In the 1980s, Terry Waite, acting as personal representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, traveled widely in the Middle East to negotiate the release of western hostages in Iran, Libya, and Lebanon. Despite warnings that he might become a target, he continued to visit Lebanon on behalf of hostages and was kidnapped in 1987. He was held for five years, four of which were in solitary confinement. Although he has said he was just "an ordinary man chained to a wall," his extraordinary situation called up the deepest wellsprings of his faith. As he recounts in his book:

> "Each day I have walked through the Psalmist's valley. The shadow of death has been around me. Then, for a space, I have caught a glimpse of the warmth of light, and the shadow has receded. . . . [Christ] has taught me to face life as it is and not to be afraid of death. I may die in captivity. I may not see my family and friends again. Whatever happens, I have not been destroyed. My prayers have been puny, but once or twice I have touched the awesome mystery which lies at the heart of the universe, and which I call God." (*Taken on Trust*)

☐ Questions

- Do you think Terry Waite's heart was always steady as described by the psalmist?
- Where do you look for God when you feel completely alone?
- What is destructive in your life now? Can your "puny" prayers help you touch "the awesome mystery" of God?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Do you know of places where Christians are being threatened today?
- Are some of those places in our own country?

For further study, read these books by Terry Waite:
Taken on Trust (1993)
Footfalls in Memory: Reflections From Solitude (1995)

☐ Activities

Kidnapped

Describe the following scenario to the group: "You are an innocent victim who has been kidnapped and will be held indefinitely in solitary confinement. You have no idea how long you will be a hostage or whether you will live or die." Ask participants to put on blindfolds or separate into "solitary confinement" by going into separate rooms, closets, under tables draped with blankets, or by simply facing walls apart from the others. Keep absolute silence for ten minutes (if possible). Then talk about the experience:

- How did the experience feel?
- How did your body react?
- What was the first thing that came into your mind once you settled into the experience?
- Were there certain phrases, prayers, or songs that came to you?
- What did you think about? Did certain thoughts dominate, or recur over and over?

Terry Waite was able to recite memorized portions of the Bible and *The Book of Common Prayer* to sustain himself day after day. What would you like to have at your command to get you through such an experience? Select and commit to memory a passage from the Bible or prayer book, a hymn or song, or anything else that you think would give you hope and courage in a difficult situation.

Meditation

Prayer can often help people face incredible obstacles and situations. Many people use centering prayer or meditation to help them find God. Learn and practice some methods of deep breathing, centering prayer, and meditation that can help you stay calm in times of stress. Invite someone from your church to instruct the group in different forms of meditation.

In meditation, people often use mantras to help them remain focused. Think about your life now, what causes stress or pain, as well as what brings joy. Create your own mantra using a word or phrase that helps you maintain communication with God. Use this mantra for a week at home. Compare being silent with others in prayer to praying alone.

Amnesty International

Contact Amnesty International on the internet (http://www.amnesty.org), by mail (322 8th Ave.; New York, New York 10001), or by phone (212-807-8400) to find out more about political prisoners around the world. Learn what you can do to help, both individually and as a group. Identify ways to help each other follow through with your commitment.

An alternative is to investigate a prison ministry in your community. Find out how you might become involved as a group. **Hint:** Prison ministry programs can help you find appropriate activities that will not endanger individuals in your group.

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Who Are the People of God?

Help from Others

SESSION 5

Objective

Youth will be able to list ways that God's people have found strength and support from others.

Personal Story

I have a friend named Suzanne. She has had a really hard life compared to mine. Her mother is an alcoholic, and she never knew her father. And she has cerebral palsy, which gives her constant back pain and slurs her speech, making some people uncomfortable to be around her. Her own sister once asked her not to come to her daughter's graduation, afraid Suzanne's niece would be embarrassed by the presence of her "crippled" aunt.

And yet Suzanne is one of the loveliest people I know. She has a deep love of God, and tries to be kind even to those who hurt her. She's not happy all the time. She struggles with depression and can get down on herself, but she always finds a way to keep going. She writes poems that can make you cry—poems about faith, love, and hope, in addition to those about her pain and struggles. They sound a lot like the *Psalms*.

If you ask Suzanne where she finds her strength and her joy, she will talk about God and about her friends and fellow Christians. She has received support and encouragement from people at her church, as well as from the friends she has made throughout the diocese. One of her favorite times of the year is when she goes to a summer camp for the disabled, where everyone understands and everyone's got a story to tell. It is through these relationships with others that she has learned how much God loves her as one of God's children.

When I look at how important other people have been to Suzanne, I remember how many people have helped me to discover that I am important to God and that I have special gifts that make me who I am. My parents have always encouraged me to be myself, whomever that may be. I've also got some friends who have stuck with me when I totally messed up. There's the librarian who kept showing me great books, my uncle who gave me his old guitar that I play all the time, and the youth leader at church who helped me understand that God is always there for me.

I guess that just about everything we have is a gift from someone, and being grateful is probably a full-time job. Maybe the whole point of getting so many gifts is to learn how to pass them on, so the gifts keep moving from one person to another until everyone is rich with love.

Scripture

Exodus 4:10-16
Acts 18:1-4
Isaiah 35:3-6a

Skill Focus

Relationships
Influences

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Prayer
Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where they is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen*.

A Prayer Attributed to St. Francis
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 833

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

1 Aaron and Moses

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Then the Lord said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him."

Exodus 4:10-16

Commentary: Called by God to be the liberator of his people, Moses lists several reasons why God should choose someone else who is braver and more qualified. God isn't interested in Moses' self-doubt and is even impatient at Moses' hesitation. When Moses cites his lack of eloquence, his slow and stammering speech, God replies in two ways. First, God says that I will be with you to give you what you need to meet any challenge. Second, I didn't pick you because you were Superman, able to do everything perfectly by yourself. If I could only work with perfect people, I'd never get anything done. Learn to use the gifts of those around you. Aaron is eloquent—let him give the speeches. But I want *you* to lead my people out of bondage.

☐ Questions

- Why did God get angry with Moses?
- Have you ever responded the way Moses did when your parents or a teacher challenged you to do something new?
- Do you have someone like Aaron in your life? How does this person help you?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Who helps Suzanne in the story?
- Can you be Aaron for someone like Suzanne?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 4.

- Look at the symbols the artist chose to represent help. What images would you include to reflect help you've received from others?

☐ Activities

Sharing Gifts

Write at the top of a sheet of newsprint "Things I do well" and on another sheet, "Things I don't do well or am afraid to try." Pass out post-it notes and ask participants to write down on separate notes as many items as they can for each category. For example, "play an instrument in the band" for the first, and "can't sing" on the second. Youth can put them on the appropriate sheets as they write them.

Take turns finding a note from the "do well" side that can be moved to cover a note on the "don't do well" side. There may be instances in which more than one "do well" is needed to fully balance a "can't do well." If there are some uncovered items left, let the group devise a solution to deal with them.

- What have you learned about sharing gifts and strengths?
- Can others see your gifts more clearly than you can?
- Does God's design make interdependence necessary?

Magic Shoes

Not even Moses could do it all by himself. Play a game of Magic Shoes, where the group must cross from one side of a "river" to the other using only a pair of shoes that allows them to walk on water. Put two pieces of tape on the floor that are parallel and about six to eight feet apart. This is the river. You cannot swim across the river or use a boat, and each person may only walk on the water once. The shoes may not be tossed across the water—they may only be "walked" across. Afterward, talk about the game.

- How did the group respond to the challenge?
- Did some people let others solve the problem?
- What gifts were needed from each person?

Being Aaron

Be an Aaron for someone else's Moses by being aware of problems encountered by the disabled in doing simple tasks such as going to church. Take a wheelchair or a stroller loaded with a big bag of dog food and wheel it all around your church. Are any places inaccessible to you? Make a list of those places and submit it to the vestry along with suggested ways to deal with the situation.

Contact agencies in your community to find out more about the needs of the disabled and how you might help. Or invite disabled people from your church or community to share their experiences with you directly. Don't forget to identify gifts the disabled can use to help others.

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2 Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.

Acts 18:1-4

Commentary: Aquila and Priscilla were tentmakers forced to leave Rome when the emperor Claudius expelled the Jews. While living in Corinth, they met Paul, who took a job with them making tents. The growing friendship among the three led them deeper into their faith in Christ. They joined Paul when he moved on to Ephesus, and established a house church there. In the *Epistle to the Romans,* Paul fondly remembers how they "risked their necks" to save his life during his stormy mission to that city (*Romans 16:3*). Although we know few details about them, it is clear that such personal relationships, providing mutual encouragement and support, were essential to the spread of the gospel in the ancient world.

☐ Questions

- Aquila and Priscilla helped Paul not only in his ministry but also with personal needs. Do you have people like that in your life? How do they help you?
- How could you spread the gospel by helping someone as Aquila and Priscilla did?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- In the story, Suzanne found support from people who were also disabled. Is there something in your life that you don't do well? Could you share that failure or disappointment with someone who has similar problems?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 4.

- The central image in the poster is a lighted candle in front of a window that looks out on a storm. Is there someone in your life who has been a candle in a storm for you? What happened?
- Sometimes we are candles for others. Is there someone you could be a beacon for at school or at home? Find a way to let someone facing stormy times know that you care about him or her.

☐ Activities

Help at Work

A job can be a place to learn and interact as well as to earn money. Make a list of all the different kinds of places where youth might work or volunteer. Talk about how each of those situations might be places for youth to learn and grow by working with mentoring adults.

- What can you learn from the people you work with?
- How could each situation offer an opportunity for ministry?
- How can you touch other people in a low-skill job?

Sometimes a smile or a gesture of kindness can make the difference in a harried mother's day or in the attitude of a tired dad. Role play some of those situations to help each other identify times that you can serve Christ by serving others. Afterward, write a help-wanted ad that includes not only job qualifications but also qualities that might have a positive effect on others.

When Times Get Tough

Paul never forgot the help he received from Aquila and Priscilla. As a group, talk about where and how you get support from others when times get tough. Build a wall of support out of blocks of newsprint. On each one add writing and/or a drawing that describes your sources of support.

Or, let each person draw a circle in the center of a piece of paper with the word "ME." Surround the center with other circles, each one containing the names of adults who support you in some way. Color or put a star on the circles of those you feel closest to. From those you have marked, choose a person whom you would like to know better. Over the next two weeks do something to let that person know that he or she is important to you. Consider choosing a different person each month.

At the Mall

Go to some local stores at a mall and interview the owners or managers. **Hint:** Prepare interview questions as a group in advance.

Ask the supervisors how many youth they hire and what they look for in potential employees. Also ask them about the ways that they provide support, guidance, and encouragement to young people (in addition to job-related training and supervision) through their contact with them at work. Report your findings to the group, and discuss both your findings and the process of contacting and interviewing people.

- How were you treated by the people you interviewed?
- Did some managers refuse to talk to you? How did that make you feel?
- What was easiest and what was hardest about the interviews?
- What surprised you most about what you learned?

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3 Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Syle

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you."
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

Isaiah 35:3-6a

Commentary: Thomas Gallaudet was born in 1822 of a deaf mother and a father who was committed to the education of the deaf. Called to the priesthood, Thomas Gallaudet was persuaded by his father to first spend time as a teacher of the deaf. This work not only led him to meet and marry a deaf woman, Elizabeth Budd, but it also committed him to a lifetime of service to the "children of silence." Dubbed the "Apostle to the Deaf," Gallaudet helped establish congregations for the deaf in many cities across America. One of his parishioners and protégés was Henry Winter Syle, whom he encouraged to seek ordination. Although some felt that the sacraments might not be valid if the ritual words were not spoken, a more inclusive theology prevailed. In 1876 Syle became the first deaf person to be ordained by the Episcopal Church.

A story is told of one of Gallaudet's young deaf students who was recounting the tale of George Washington and the cherry tree. Reaching the moment of Washington's confession to his father, the student shifted the imaginary hatchet to his left hand. When Gallaudet asked why he did that, the youth replied that Washington would need his right hand to sign to his father about the tree.

☐ Questions

- Have you known anyone who is deaf? Do they believe that they are disabled?
- What would you miss most as a child of silence?
- How did Gallaudet open the church to the deaf? Is your church open to all people?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- An important source of support for Suzanne was the people in her church. Does your church help members who have special needs? How?
- Suzanne gave back to others as much as she received. Are you open to the gifts disabled people have to offer? How can you be more accepting of *their* help and support?

☐ Activities

Mentors in the Bible

Read the stories of mentors in the Bible, such as Eli encouraging Samuel in his call (*I Samuel 3:1-19*) and Elizabeth encouraging Mary in her call (*Luke 1:26-56*). Identify the calls of Mary and Samuel and the roles played by Eli and Elizabeth in the stories. Share experiences you may have had of being assisted by an older person.

- What is a "call"? Are there things that we are "meant" to do?
- When have you encountered a fork in the road that would lead you in two very different directions? How did you know which path to take?
- How does God guide people in their choices through the wisdom, example, assistance, or encouragement of others?
- Who has provided this assistance in your life?

Conclude in a quiet, darkened space with the following ritual or one that you design yourself. Say aloud the names of your mentors, influences, and guides. Describe in a few words, if you wish, about what they gave you. As you light a candle for them and place it on an altar or in the center of your circle, thank them for everything they have given you. End with an appropriate song and/or prayer.

Including Everyone

Thomas Gallaudet and Henry Syle both widened the circle of the Episcopal Church in significant ways. Look at the kinds of people in both your youth group and your congregation.

- Who is included and who is not?
- Are there any kinds of people who are not included? What are the reasons?
- If any of these people were to show up, what could you or others do to make them feel welcome?
- What would make them feel unwelcome?

Examine your church's ministry for newcomers. Make a list of ways to improve it. Offer your ideas to the vestry. Are there ways your group can reach out to young people to be more inclusive?

From the Outside

Individually or as a group visit another church in your community one Sunday. Observe how you are treated and welcomed.

- How does it feel to be there?
- What was positive about the experience?
- Were there any negatives? How would you have changed those if you were running that church?

Report back to the group and brainstorm ways in which your findings might improve your own church's sensitivity to strangers and newcomers. Write up your findings and publish them in a church newsletter.

For further study, read:
Thomas Gallaudet: Apostle to the Deaf, by Otto Benjamin Berg and Henry L. Buzzard

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Who Are the People of God?

Facing Harship

Objective

Youth will be able to identify ways that God's presence comforts people who face hardships of poverty, illness, prejudice, and death.

Personal Story

"Don't take my daddy yet, God, please. I'll do anything you ask," I cried. I was only in the seventh grade. Two years earlier my father had been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a rare cancer of the bone marrow, and given three years to live. Now he was in a hospital two hours from home, completely unaware of his surroundings.

For two days I cried and prayed. I prayed to a God who was just someone I had read about in stories, someone I went to church to honor every Sunday and then didn't think about for the rest of the week.

My father lived. A week later he came home to a rented hospital bed and a wheelchair. When I saw daddy, stubbornly hanging onto life, I knew then that there was a God—a real, personal Father. God existed, God listened, and God answered prayers.

The next few years were tumultuous. Several times daddy suffered relapses or injuries that landed him back in the hospital. Then came recovery, more of a struggle each year. Even so, this didn't stop him from doing the cabinetry work that he loved.

When physical labor was not longer possible, he took up woodcarving, and I took up a new prayer: "Lord, I love my daddy, and I know you love him, too. Please make him free of pain. While I would rather have him here with me, I want even more for him to stop hurting. So, if you want to take him to heaven to be with you, that's okay."

The summer after my junior year, my parents made a journey halfway across the country to daddy's high school reunion. A month later I was awakened at 4:45 a.m. by the sound of an ambulance in my driveway. By the time daddy reached the hospital, he was in a coma. Still, he would not let go of life. He waited until my sister, who was racing home from college, stepped in the door of his room. Then he took his last breath.

I miss daddy, but I know that he was hurting so much that God took him to heaven. Now he can once again stand straight and tall, free from pain, and still watch out for me.

SESSION 6

Scripture

Job 19:25-27
Daniel 3:16-18
Ezekiel 2:4-7

Skill Focus

Fairness
Compassion

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

For the Oppressed
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 826

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

1 Job

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me!
Job 19:25-27

Commentary: Job is held up as one who suffers terribly in body, mind, and spirit, despite having lived a good and exemplary life. This troubling biblical book looks at the unfairness of a world where bad things happen to good people. Suffering is disturbing to those who believe in a good and loving God. Job eloquently speaks their anguished cry, "Why, God? Why?"

In this passage, Job tries to reach beyond the pain and affliction of the world to a vision of everything being set right. Somewhere, he says, someday, it will all make sense, and suffering will be part of a larger vision that redeems and transforms it. If God is who we think God is, justice and love must ultimately prevail, even if that seems impossible. "I'm not crazy," Job insists. "God is just, and all shall be well before history is over." Was this merely wishful thinking, or a reference to the future resurrection of Christ?

☐ Questions

- Who does Job believe his Redeemer is?
- Who do you see as your Redeemer?
- When something bad happens to a good person, how do you feel? Where do you find hope?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- Who in the story was like Job?
- Where did the writer find comfort?

☐ Activities

Words of Comfort

When Job was suffering, three friends came to comfort him. At first they sat in silence, sharing his pain. Then they began to talk—and said all the wrong things. For the most part, their words brought Job no comfort at all. When something bad happens to someone we care about, we often struggle for the right thing to say. Make a list of all the things that are commonly said, such as "it's God's will," or "time will make things better."

- Are those words really helpful?
- How would you feel if they were said to you?
- Are the words the important thing?
- What else can you offer besides words to people who are suffering or grieving? What else can we do for them?

Role play situations involving serious illness, death, sadness, or disappointment, such as not getting into a college you wanted, not making a team, or losing a boyfriend or girlfriend. Try out different ways to offer comfort and caring, and talk about the results, especially how it felt both to give comfort and to receive it.

Psalms

The book of *Psalms* was written to express the deepest emotions, including pain and suffering, anger, joy, and praise. Look at some of the *Psalms* that give voice to deep pain and anguish. For example, *Psalm 55* is a complaint about a friend's treachery, while *Psalms 69* and *70* are prayers for deliverance against persecution and enemies. Note how the writers are not afraid to be honest and conflicted before God, and how they tend to move from lament to praise.

Select a situation you are now facing that is painful, such as estrangement from a friend or a disappointment you are facing at school. Using the *Psalms* as guidance, write your own poetic statement. Be sure to include praise as part of your lament. Work individually or in small groups. Afterward, share your work.

J.B.

Read the play *J.B.* by Archibald MacLeish, a modern version of the story of Job, or ask one person to read it and recount it for the group. Create your own version of Job's story, placing it in the world you live in.

- Who is Job?
- What happens to him?
- Who are his three friends? How do they try to help?
- What does God say at the end?
- Does God ever give an "answer" for suffering?

Write your own play based on the story of Job. Assign different sections to individual writers or writing teams. Then prepare a performance for the whole church, and hold a discussion afterward.

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2 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to, "O you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up."

Daniel 3:16-18

Commentary: The three protagonists of this story were young Israelites in captivity in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar was pleased with the young men, and gave them a place of honor in his court. Their enemies, jealous of their position, forced them into a confrontation over the worship of Babylonian gods. They encouraged the king to make a golden idol that everyone was to worship when they heard the sound of instruments. The refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship the idol enraged the king, who ordered them thrown into a furnace heated seven times beyond its normal capacity.

None of the young men was harmed by the flames, nor did their clothing even smell of smoke. The king was so amazed that he ordered his subjects to worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

☐ Questions

- Where do the three young men look for strength?
- Did they cause their own hardship? What could they have done differently?
- Are compromises sometimes not possible?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What hardships did the people in the story face?
- How did God help them face hardship?

☐ Activities

Sound of Instruments

Look at the entire story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in *Daniel 3*. Several times in the story when the king's decree is mentioned, the following phrase is repeated: "the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble . . ." Make instruments out of easily obtainable materials to represent sounds for each instrument in the list. For example, run a moistened finger around glasses filled with water at different levels to make the singing sound of a lyre. Find ways to represent the other instruments.

Give everyone an instrument to play as part of the "entire musical ensemble." Read the story in *Daniel 3*; instead of reading the phrase about instruments, make the appropriate sounds on your homemade instruments.

Work with a group of children to make additional instruments and practice the story together. Perform together at an intergenerational event at your church.

Hot Places

Rewrite the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego with a modern setting. Discuss possible scenarios about young people who get into trouble for their beliefs. Identify the idol that they are expected to worship. For example, a soccer team plans a practice for Sunday morning to get ready for an important tournament. Everyone can come, except three players who decide to go to church.

- Who is the idol in your story?
- Who is the king and what does he or she expect?
- Are there any compromises?

Identify things in your life that come first. As a group, create a symbolic idol and cover it with words or pictures that depict the things you love most. Describe the things that may conflict with your faith.

Video

Watch the movie *Chariots of Fire* or select the clip of the scene in which Ben Cross is called to appear before the Olympic committee. Discuss how the main character's patriotism and loyalty were questioned because of his faith. Can you think of current situations where people are questioned for their beliefs?

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3 Sojourner Truth

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[God said to Ezekiel:] The descendants are impudent and stubborn. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord God." Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, O mortal, do not be afraid of them, and do not be afraid of their words, through briers and thorns surround you and you live among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words, and do not be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. You shall speak my words to them, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house.
Ezekiel 2:4-7

Commentary: Sojourner Truth was born into slavery in New York state in 1797. As a woman and slave, she did not have much of a future in nineteenth century America. If she had remained passive to the conditions of her life, she would have vanished into oblivion. But she firmly believed that with God, all things were possible. She not only compelled her owner to free her, she also became an effective and famous social reformer, evangelist, abolitionist, suffragist, and lecturer. Everything she did was against the odds, yet she found the strength and poise to be a significant force in major American reform movements of the antebellum period. Despite her illiteracy, her frequent public speeches were remarkable for their keen intelligence and devastating wit. She was one of the most quoted activists of her time, and she always attributed her eloquence and her strength to the power of the Holy Spirit.

☐ Questions

- How was Sojourner Truth a prophet?
- List the obstacles she must have faced as an illiterate woman. What obstacles do you face in speaking out for what is right?
- What would Sojourner Truth tell people today?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- God gives people strength to do different things. What strengths did he give to the writer and her father?
- When has God given you strength?

I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen 'em mos' all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

—Sojourner Truth

For further study, read:
Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol, by Nell Irvin Painter
Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend, by Carleton Mabee with Susan Mabee Newhouse
Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song, by Suzanne Pullon Fitch and Roseann M. Mandzink

☐ Activities

Beating the Odds

Divide into two groups, and play a game where two teams are each asked questions and given rewards of cookies or other treats for every correct answer. One team is always asked easy questions, such as "Who's buried in Grant's tomb?" The other team always gets difficult and obscure questions, such as "What is the capital of Assyria?" Continue until someone notices or objects to the unfairness of the game, and see what happens.

- How long did you wait to react to the inequity?
- How did it feel to have an advantage? Were you bored?
- How did those who got the hard questions feel?
- Which side first spoke out against the unfairness?

Apply this experience to similar situations at home, school, or in the larger society.

- Have you experienced discrimination? What was it like?
- Have you seen another person being treated unfairly? Did you do anything about it?
- Is there anything you could do to reduce discrimination in your world? How might you begin?

On the Outside

Ask the group to stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Identify a volunteer who is kept outside the circle. That person tries to find a way in, while the group tries to keep him or her out. Avoid excessive force, but encourage the use of trickery and verbal pleas. Give each person an opportunity to be the excluded one. Afterward, share your reactions to the experience, both as part of the circle and outside of it.

- How did you feel when a friend who was on the outside tried to get past you?
- Were people in the group deaf to your pleas? How did that feel?
- Was it harder to be part of the circle or outside of it?

Write a statement about discrimination that reflects a Christian point of view. Think about times Jesus faced discrimination during his ministry. Find out more about groups that are working to break down barriers among people.

Music

Music was an important part of Sojourner Truth's life and the lives of others held in slavery. Research and learn some African American spirituals of comfort, hope, and liberation. Begin by looking at hymns in *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, such as "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?" (182) Horace Boyer, who arranged several hymns in *Lift Every Voice*, says that the suffering from which many of those songs arose is juxtaposed with the joy and hope of the music and lyrics.

Find and listen to other kinds of music that have provided solace or awakened hope, such as protest songs from the civil rights movement, "Pie Jesu" from Faure's *Requiem*, the blues, and South African liberation songs. Bring in a song to share that gives you hope when you are down.

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Who Are the People of God?

Having Doubts

Objective

Youth will be able to describe the role of doubt in a continuing relationship with God.

Personal Story

Last summer I had the opportunity to go to South Africa for three weeks with my church. I looked forward to meeting new people, and I hoped that this would give me a chance to get to know God better. When I first heard about the trip, I thought it would be great to see new sights, and encounter things I would probably never experience again.

As I received more information, however, I became skeptical. We were told that we would stay in homes of complete strangers, and our leaders did not know the conditions we would be in. I wouldn't even know if the house I was assigned to would have running water until I got there. What if I got sick—what would I do? So many questions were going through my head. Would I even be able to communicate with the people I met there?

I was wondering what I had gotten myself into. But I didn't want to give up an opportunity like this. I wanted to go and make a good time out of whatever was thrown my way, whether it turned out to be good or bad.

After several months of planning, I was on the plane and was getting ready for the 15-hour flight that was ahead of me, still worried with these thoughts and doubts. After the flight, while I was going to the hotel, I saw terrible living conditions that made me worry even more. Was this where I was going to stay? They were little more than shacks that were pushed together and propped up.

When we got to the hotel, I found a safe and peaceful place. I met people from all over South Africa and learned about many of the local customs. I learned that most of the people could speak English. Everyone I encountered was nice, kind, and generous to newcomers like me. I even met the people from the village where I would stay. I was no longer worried about going there.

Finally I arrived at the house where I had been assigned. It had electricity and even a big-screen television. As for running water, they had one sink and bath in the house. However, the bathroom was in an outhouse. At night I had to get there in pitch-black darkness. This was a new experience for me, but it certainly wasn't as bad as I had imagined.

The family spoke English very well, though it was a little hard to understand their dialect. We all had to repeat ourselves several times to be understood. Prince, the boy I stayed with, taught me a traditional African game, at which he beat me most of the time. We had many things in common. We both loved watching movies, listening to music, and playing soccer. The night I stayed with Prince was the best night that I had while I was in Africa.

As I got on the plane to come back to the United States, I was glad that I had made the trip. It was the best time I have ever had. I had grown closer to God, and I came home with a new friend from across the ocean.

SESSION 7

Scripture

Jonah 1:1-3
John 20:24-25
Psalm 37:3-6

Skill Focus

Trust
Choices

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Prayer
Everliving God, who strengthened your apostle Thomas with firm and certain faith in your Son's resurrection: Grant us so perfectly and without doubt to believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, that our faith may never be found wanting in your sight; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Saint Thomas
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 237

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

1 Jonah

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah 1:1-3

Commentary: *Jonah* is a story about a loving and faithful God who cares for Gentiles and Jews alike. The story opens as Yahweh calls Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, to preach repentance. Jonah attempts to wriggle out of God's call and instead boards a ship bound for Tarshish in the opposite direction. When a great storm comes upon the boat, the crew try everything to keep it from sinking. Finally, they rouse their sleeping passenger and prevail upon him to appeal to his gods. Jonah insists that they throw him overboard because he is the cause of the storm. After being thrown into the sea, Jonah is swallowed by a great fish, and then spewed out upon the shore after three days. He finally takes up the mission to which he was called. The Ninevites' response to his preaching is immediate: The whole town repents, and God decides not to destroy the city. In response, Jonah goes to a hillside overlooking Nineveh to pout. Even though God was generous in rescuing him from the storm, Jonah has difficulty extending that generosity to others. In spite of Jonah's doubts, God remains faithful.

☐ Questions

- How does Jonah express his doubts?
- When have you doubted something?
- When should you pay attention to your doubts?
- When should you overcome them?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What would have happened if the author had given in to doubt?
- Is doubt good or bad?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 5.

- Look at the doors in the poster. Has doubt ever kept you from trying new things? Is this always bad? Illustrate with pictures or with words things that might be behind the doors in the poster.

☐ Activities

Decisions, Decisions

Divide into small groups, and consider the following situation: Heavy rains have flooded your town. You have to evacuate, but fortunately, you have time to react. Choose three things to take that would help you deal with your loss. Be ready to share and explain your choices to the whole group.

- Were you glad to have the opportunity to take three items?
- How would you feel if you could take nothing?
- Does having choices make a difference? How?

With a partner, think of a time you decided not to do something but wish you had. Talk about the situation and the doubts that led you to not take action.

- What happened?
- Do you regret that decision? Did circumstances change?
- Was it a good decision at the time?
- What would you have needed at that time to make a different decision?

As a group, make a list of what you need to make good decisions. Think about people you could go to for advice. Close with a prayer for guidance in making good decisions.

Oh, Jonah

Read the story of Jonah, or assign chapters and verses to each participant. After everyone has had a chance to become familiar with his or her part of the story, form a circle and retell the story from memory. Use a "talking stick" to help the group focus. Give the stick to the person assigned the initial part of the story. That person tells a portion of the story including the original story line, but with the freedom to add details to make the story come alive. When that person is finished, the stick is passed to the next person, and the story continues. Assign passages randomly, so the participants will have to figure out what comes next in the story. Discuss your reactions to the story.

- What was it like to take the stick and step into the story?
- What surprised you about the details others added?
- Do you see Jonah in a new light?
- How does God help us move beyond our doubts?

Think about a situation you have doubts about. Briefly describe it on an index card. Gather the cards in a plain sack, and put the sack at the front of the room or in the center of the group. Ask God to help you deal with your doubts this week.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Visit a place where people face difficult situations, such as a hospital, a home for runaways, or a shelter. Before you go, talk about the challenges people face in life and the factors that affect how well they cope. Emphasize the importance of showing respect to those in difficult situations. At the site, talk with someone who works there. From their perspective, why do people come here? How does this place help people make positive changes in their lives? Afterward, share the most important things you heard or saw.

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2 Thomas

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

John 20:24-25

Commentary: After Jesus' crucifixion, Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, was not present in the upper room when Jesus made his first appearance. Thomas did not believe the disciples' story and demanded the same first-hand experience of Jesus' presence that they had had. A week later, he was confronted by the risen Jesus. Instead of following through with his demands to actually touch the wounds, Thomas confessed his faith saying, "My Lord, and My God." Thomas' courage to engage Jesus directly has inspired Christians across the ages who have faced questions that have no easy answers. While certainty can be comforting, questions and doubt often lead to a growth in faith. Questions, faithfully pursued, can lead to confidence.

☐ Questions

- What prompted Thomas' doubt?
- What makes you doubtful? Other people? Fear of the unknown?
- How did Thomas respond to Jesus when he finally saw him?
- Have you had an experience when your doubts were completely put to rest? What happened?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- How did the author react when confronted by reality?
- Can doubt keep you from doing interesting things? How can you confront your doubts?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 5.

- In the poster, the path is sometimes hard to see. How is the path like your life?
- What role does doubt play in keeping on the path?

☐ Activities

Questions

Gather resources that could be used to look up questions people have about their faith, such as Bibles, Bible commentaries and concordances, and *The Book of Common Prayer*. Tape sheets of newsprint around the room. When people arrive, ask them to write down as many questions as they can think of about faith and religion. For example, why do we do certain things, why do Bible stories often deal with killing people, or why do we believe in someone who lived 2,000 years ago. As a group, look at the questions.

- Are there particular themes running through these questions?
- Is there one question which shows up over and over?

Choose four questions the group would like answered. Assign one question to an individual or small group. Using the resources listed above, seek answers to the questions. Share your answer with the others. As a follow-up, consider inviting some of the adults or clergy from your parish to discuss these questions with you.

Is There a God?

Write "Is There a God?" in large print so that people can see it as they arrive. When the group is assembled, break into pairs for role plays. One person takes the position that yes, there is a God, the other that no, there is not. Take turns trying to convince the other person that you are right. Limit initial responses and rebuttals to three minutes each.

Come back together. As a group consider the following questions:

- Which five things would change in your life if you knew there was no God?
- What difference would it make in your living day to day?
- Which five things would change if you were absolutely convinced that there was a God?
- How would your day-to-day life change?
- What does it mean to live in the tension of knowing God exists and, at the same time, having doubts?

Close by asking God to help you use your doubts to grow in faith.

Power of the Press

Take a field trip to a newspaper, publishing house, or a business that does desktop publishing. Ask them to explain the steps they take to produce a finished document. Publish your own one-issue newsletter with articles, poems, songs, and drawings that would communicate an aspect of your faith to someone who knows nothing about your religion. Share your work with other groups in the church.

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3 Evelyn Underhill

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

Trust in the Lord, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

Psalm 37:3-6

Commentary: Evelyn Underhill was raised in an educated and intellectual family. The daughter of a distinguished London barrister, she attended King's College and later traveled extensively, reveling in opportunities often denied young women at the time. At the age of 32, she had a religious conversion. Though drawn to the Roman Catholic Church, she was unable to find a place for her questions and doubts. While the Anglican Church did not silence her questions, it gave her space to explore them. These spiritual struggles eventually led her to study the mystics. She advocated a distinct type of mysticism that emphasized a sense of community instead of focusing on the individual. She has been called the greatest Anglican mystic of the twentieth century. Evelyn Underhill's questions inspired much of her work and her many publications. Her life is a witness to how faithful searching draws people closer to God.

☐ Questions

- How did Evelyn Underhill use doubt to expand her faith?
- Living with her questions resulted in a new understanding of God. What questions about God are you living with?
- Can a person have doubts and still trust in God? Have you ever doubted a person you still trusted? How?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 5.

- Why did the artist use the image of puzzle pieces?
- What images would you use to show doubt?

From *The Inside Life*

. . . if we choose to shut all our windows, the room would certainly get stuffy; but we do not alter the quality of the fresh air outside. So the reality of God, the living atmosphere of Spirit, maintains its unalterable pressure; whether we acknowledge it or not.

—Evelyn Underhill

For further study, read these books about Evelyn Underhill:
Evelyn Underhill: Artist of the Infinite Life, by Dana Greene
Evelyn Underhill: Spirituality for Daily Living, by Annice Callahan
Fragments from an Inner Life: The Notebooks of Evelyn Underhill, edited by Dana Green

☐ Activities

Questioning God

Musicians often reveal a great deal about what they believe through their songs. Select several songs that disclose something about the artists' views on life. Make copies of the lyrics for the group. Play the songs and distribute the lyrics.

- What is the writer saying about what he or she believes?
- Does the writer believe in God? How would you know?

Look at the Nicene Creed on p. 358-359 of *The Book of Common Prayer.* Read it together. Stand up for the statements you believe. Sit down if you have doubts. Is there someone standing at all times? Faith is a shared experience—together people understand more than they do as individuals. Close with prayer that encourages each person to rest in the faith of the community for those things he or she wants to believe but can't.

Don't Box Me In

Bring in art materials, including markers, crayons, construction paper, and glue, and enough small boxes for each person in the group. Or assemble your own boxes out of cardboard.

Ask the group to remember what they thought about God when they were five or six years old. Give them each a box; draw a picture based on your childhood fantasies of what you thought God looked like. Invite people to share how their image of God has changed (or not changed) since that time.

- What do you need to add to your box to reflect these changes?
- What do you see on other boxes that you don't have?
- Could these people help you see God in a new way?
- What experience of God could you share with others?

Write or draw something that reflects your understanding of God on a slip of paper. Make enough copies to give to every person in the group. Ask the participants to put the slips from others in the group inside their boxes. When you add these other experiences, what happens to your box? Stack up the boxes and reflect on the different ways people have found God.

Finding Answers

Interview an adult about his or her understanding of God and how doubt affected that understanding. **Hint:** If your group meets at the same time as an adult group, invite this group to join you. As a group, make a list of questions, such as:

- What do you enjoy doing?
- If you could do one thing all the time, what would it be?
- What gives your life meaning? Why?
- What questions were important to you as a teen? What answers have you found?
- What questions are you struggling with now about your faith? Where do you go for answers?

Share with each other what you have learned. Since questions seem to be part of life, how do we learn to live with them instead of fearing them?

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Who Are the People of God?

Staying True

SESSION 8

Objective

Youth will be able to explore the qualities of God's people who maintained their devotion to God and others in spite of obstacles.

Personal Story

Baseball has always been a part of my life. I started playing T-ball in kindergarten, and continued to play in Little League as I grew older. When I was younger, my main talent was concentration. While my teammates in the outfield were playing catch with their gloves, my full attention was on the game. If a ball was hit anywhere in my vicinity, I went after it. I soon earned a place in the infield, not so much for my skill as for my powers of concentration.

As we got older, that talent became less important. As long as I played in my community recreational league, I was still one of the better players. However, when I tried to move up to a travel league, I began to discover my limits. I finally made a team, but barely. I often sat on the bench, but I never missed a game. Even though I didn't hit a winning run or make a spectacular play to save a close game, I had fun being a part of the team.

The older I got, the more I realized that love for a sport doesn't always mean you will be good at it. To this day I can recite the statistics for just about every decent major league player, and I have an extensive collection of baseball cards. And I still love to play baseball. When the weather turns warm every spring, I cannot resist the urge to put on my glove and play catch, even if it's with my little sister.

I figured out in middle school that a lot of other players were better than me. I didn't even try out for the junior varsity team when I got to high school. That doesn't mean I stopped playing, though. I still like being a part of a team, watching a game unfold, and feeling the tingle of the bat when I connect with a ball.

Last year, I played in a recreational league made up partially of kids who are a lot like me. We also had some really good players—boys who didn't have a high enough grade average to play on a high school team or who had been suspended or expelled. We were treated like stepchildren in the league; we had trouble finding a place to play and our uniforms consisted of t-shirts and sliding pants that were two sizes too big. But everyone in this program was there for one main reason: they loved to play baseball.

My team was very diverse. There was hardly any reason for us to be friends, much less play together as a team. However, we soon began to figure out each other's strengths and weaknesses and started to play as a team. After a strong beginning, we started to lose and lose and lose. The games were interminable. We made the same kinds of errors kids in the third grade might make. But everyone kept showing up; we even had a few laughs out on the field.

I still love baseball, and I plan to play in the spring. Staying true to yourself may mean going in a new direction; being true to others may mean just showing up.

Scripture

I Samuel 18:1-4
John 20:11-18
Matthew 10:37-39

Skill Focus

Responsibility
Individuality/Independence

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Prayer
O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Proper 9
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 230-231

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

1 Jonathan

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

I Samuel 18:1-4

Commentary: Jonathan was the eldest son of Saul, the first king of Israel. He angered his father by violating a fast imposed by Saul before an important battle. When Jonathan refused to apologize, Saul threatened to kill him. Only the intervention of the people saved his life. After this incident, God withdrew his favor from Saul. Instead of transferring favor to Jonathan, God chose David as the next king. Jonathan accepted God's decision and even became close friends with David. As the relationship between Saul and David deteriorated, Jonathan intervened with his father on David's behalf and visited him in hiding. Later, when David heard of Jonathan's death, he wept for the loss of his faithful friend. Jonathan remained true to David, even though his friend received honors that could have been his.

☐ Questions

- How did Jonathan show his friendship?
- How do you treat your friends?
- How do you feel when a friend gets or wins something you wanted? Does it affect your friendship?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.
- What role does loyalty play in the story?
- How did the writer show friendship?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 6.
- Is friendship more like the images of strength in the poster or like the symbols of direction?

☐ Activities

From My Perspective

Read the scripture passage and use the discussion questions to write a definition of friendship. Talk about your own friendships and decide if the definition written by the group applies.

- Have you ever been in an "unequal" friendship? What does it feel like? Is it really a friendship?
- How do you stay true to yourself in these situations?
- What do you need to be careful of?

History is usually written by the winners, which would leave out Jonathan and his family. How would the events of *I Samuel* have been written if they were told from Jonathan's perspective? Was David as good a friend to Jonathan as Jonathan was to David? Retell the story with Jonathan in the first person. In a time of quiet reflection, think about your friendship with God. Is it an equal friendship? Close the session with a time of silent thanksgiving for faithful friends.

Liar, Liar

Form groups of three to play the game Twenty Questions—with a twist. Set up the game as it is normally played: Two people know the object, such as dolphin, while the third asks questions to identify it. The twist comes when the first two get these additional directions: In response to the questions, the first person may lie, but the second must tell the truth. The third person does not know about these added directives. Play several rounds, then talk about how people felt during the game.

- How did it feel to ask questions and get answers that weren't always consistent? What did you think was going on?
- How did it feel to be the person who was always telling the truth? Did you feel at a disadvantage?
- How did it feel to be the person who sometimes lied?

With a partner discuss the following questions:

- How do you tell the truth when it hurts?
- Does staying true in a friendship mean always telling the truth?
- Can you remember a friend you had in middle school who you thought would be your best friend forever? What happened? Is there anything you want to do about it?

Find a way to contact an estranged friend during the week with a phone call, letter, or other means. Ask God to help you to be the kind of friend you want to have yourself.

Take the Challenge

One of the themes in the movie *Good Will Hunting* is friendship. Watch the movie and talk about the way it presents friendship.

- What are the qualities of friendship depicted in the movie?
- Is the central friendship equal?
- Does Will Hunting know how to have a friendship?
- Will's friend tells him that if he is still there in twenty years, he'll kill him. How do friends challenge us to live up to our potential?
- Do you have a friend who challenges you? Do you challenge anyone?
- What does it mean to be supported by friends?

Think of one thing that you could do to support a friend. Try to think of something you could do anonymously.

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2 Mary Magdalene

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20:11-18

Commentary: Mary Magdalene is one of Jesus' earliest and most constant companions. She is present in all four gospels and in each one is listed in the group of women who went to the tomb on the first day of the week to anoint Jesus. Her name, Mary of Magdala, implies that she had neither husband nor sons; therefore, she could only be known by her home town. In this passage, Mary reaches the tomb, only to find it empty. With all the other events of the past few days, this final indignity is too much and she breaks into tears. In her grief she does not recognize Jesus. It is only when he calls her name that she is able to recognize the person standing before her. She reaches out to the person she knew, a teacher who could be physically touched, not recognizing the changes brought by the resurrection. Jesus gently calls her to a new understanding, and tells her to announce the meaning of the resurrection to the disciples. Mary goes immediately and says to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." She becomes the first apostle (one who is sent) and the first to confess the risen Christ as Lord.

☐ Questions

- How does Mary Magdalene remain true to Jesus?
- Did her loyalty put her in danger?
- Can loyalty to friends put us in danger? How do you know if that risk is a good or bad thing?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What did the writer find out about himself? How did that affect his actions?
- What do you know about yourself that affects your relationships with others?

Option: Discuss Resource Poster No. 6

- Which of the images in the poster remind you of Mary?
- How would you like your friendship to be symbolized?

☐ Activities

Yes, You Can!

Form pairs, and blindfold one person in each pair. Tell the sighted person that they are going to lead their partner through an obstacle course. **Hint:** The pairs could go through a maze of chairs from one side of the room to another, through a building, or outside. After the blindfolds are in place, show the sighted partner a sign that says, "Only give your partner negative feedback, do NOT give them any encouragement."

When everyone has made it halfway through the course, show the sighted partner a sign that says, "Now give your partner lots of encouragement." Reverse roles, and do the exercise again. Afterward, talk about the experience.

- What were you thinking as you were being led?
- Which part was easier to go through? Why?
- How did it feel to get only negative feedback?
- How did it feel to give only negative feedback? Only positive? Which is more helpful?
- What kind of feedback do you get at home and school? What kind do you give?

Make a covenant with the group to give only positive feedback for a week. Report back on what happens.

Words *Do* Hurt

Draw a large, puffy figure on newsprint—like a bloated stick figure. Pass the figure around the group, and ask them to think of a negative comment, such as this guy is too fat. As they say the words, begin to literally tear the figure apart by ripping pieces off and throwing them on the floor. When everyone has had a chance to tear into the figure, bring out the tape. Challenge the group to make amends. Each time a positive comment is made, tape a piece back on the figure. When you have given it your best shot, look at your handiwork.

- Is your figure as good as new?
- Will it ever be the same?

Discuss how to honor growth and change in yourself and others. Sometimes people have to accept differences and learn how to say more readily that they are sorry. Individually, think about someone who you've hurt and how you can approach them. Also think about someone you need to forgive. Ask God to help you put your relationships right.

Movie Night

Watch the movie *Heaven Can Wait* with Warren Beatty. His character keeps changing form, while the character played by Julie Christie has to learn to recognize him.

- What are the clues she uses?
- How do we maintain friendships as we grow and change?
- Why do some friendships not survive? How is growth and change an essential part of our friendship with God?

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3 Jonathan Daniels

☐ Begin Here: Study Scripture

[Jesus said,] "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 10:37-39

Commentary: Jonathan Daniels, a student at the Episcopal Divinity School, responded to Martin Luther King Jr.'s appeal for people to come to Selma, Alabama, to secure the right to vote for all Americans. Later, after listening to the Magnificat during evening prayer, he knew he must return for more extended work in Selma. Daniels spent the spring and summer of 1965 in the racially charged atmosphere of Alabama. On August 14, 1965, he was jailed along with several others for participating in a picket line. The protesters agreed that no one would accept bail until arrangements could be made for all. Unexpectedly, on the morning of August 20, 1965, all the prisoners were released. When some of them attempted to enter a local grocery store, an armed man suddenly appeared and aimed a gun at a young woman named Ruby Sales. Daniels jumped in front of her and was killed instantly by the blast of a 12-gauge shotgun. Daniels believed in the sanctity of all life and the equality of all people under the hand of a loving God. For this belief, he gave his life. (Note: Ruby Sales, walking in Daniels' footsteps, graduated from the Episcopal Divinity School in 1998.)

☐ Questions

- How did Jonathan Daniels live out his faith?
- How did Daniels find his life by losing it?
- Have you ever lost something or someone by playing it safe? What happened?

Option: Read and discuss the Personal Story.

- What risk did the writer take? Should he have taken other risks?
- Sometimes taking a risk ends in failure. Has this happened to you? How do you respond to failure?

> The faith with which I went to Selma has not changed: it has grown. . . . I began to know in my bones and sinews that I had been truly baptized into the Lord's death and resurrection. . . . with them, the black men and white men, with *all* life, in him whose Name is above all the names that the races and nations shout. . . . we are indelibly and unspeakably one.
>
> —Jonathan Daniels
> Quoted in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, August 14

☐ Activities

In God We Trust

Look at Resource Poster No. 6. Talk about the artist's choice of images for staying true.

- What are the symbols used for trust in relationships, for staying true to your beliefs, or for holding the course?
- What symbols would you have included? What would they represent?
- Is trust an important component of faith? How important is trust in a relationship?

Create a banner, wall hanging, altar cloth, or another kind of artwork that depicts trust. Ask each person to design an element that represents trust for him or her. Write an explanation for each of the symbols to go with the artwork that is representative of how your group values trust in relationships with each other and God. Share a picture of the art and your write up in a church newsletter, or display both in a prominent place.

Change Happens

Hang several long strips of butcher paper to make a "wall" that divides your meeting space in half. **Hint:** String a piece of clothesline across the room and hang paper on the line.

Ask group members to write all of the things that divide people from one another on both sides of the "wall." Brainstorm ways to deal with each of the entries, such as listening to each other, forgiving a hurt, or changing the way we see things. Bring the wall down, piece by piece, as you address each of the issues. Ask participants to select one issue that speaks directly to them. Based on ideas shared by the group, think of a way to deal with this issue in your life. For example, anger might be countered with silence instead of retaliation. Ask God to help you be open to changes that will heal tears in your relationships.

Martyrs for the Faith

Jonathan Daniels lived in a world torn apart by racism. He believed that he could be a part of change that would improve the lives of all people—black and white. However, when he died, little had changed. Since his death, legislation and court decisions have altered the legal status of racism, but much work still remains.

- What issues of injustice are you concerned about that are happening, or not happening in the world?
- What role does your faith play in these issues?
- Could you work for change, even if you never saw it happen?
- What would you need to "stay true"?

Christians around the world are being persecuted for their faith. Find out where, why, and how persecutions are occurring and what you could do to help. Begin your research by contacting the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief on the internet or by mail. Make a plan of action that includes other individuals and groups in your church.

For further study, read:

American Martyr: The Jon Daniels Story, by Jonathan M. Daniels, edited by William J. Schneider

Outside Agitator: Jon Daniels and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, by Charles W. Eagles

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Who Are the People of God?

We Are God's People

SESSION 9

Objective

Youth will be able to list ways that God helps people experience joy and endure sorrow throughout their lives.

Personal Story

My grandfather died about a year ago. I faced it with my family, but it was hard. I had been out of town and had to catch a plane when I heard he had gotten worse. My family picked me up at the airport and drove me directly to the hospice. On the way they gave me an update of his condition.

By his choice, grandfather was being weaned from life support and was expected to die within 24 hours. In fact, the process had begun that morning. After arriving at the hospice, I found myself alternating between his room and the hospice chapel, retreating from his deathbed to a place of silence.

I was skeptical of prayer. It had never worked for me before. In my experience, prayer was little more than a placebo. But at the hospice that day, I prayed earnestly for my grandfather, hoping that he would be released from pain, that he could maintain his dignity, that he would not be alone, and that we would not forget what he was like when he was so full of life.

Later that afternoon, we gathered around the side of the bed to where his face was turned. He was unconscious, and we knew he was dying. We held each other, my grandmother, and him. It was very gentle, the ways his eyes softened and his body relaxed. His passing was so gradual that it took the doctor a moment to confirm his death.

While I stood there, an overwhelming sense of change struck me. I knew that I was witnessing a transformation, not merely a death. Grandfather was going someplace, not just dying.

I have wondered about my prayers. Did they affect his death, or did praying make me more open to what was happening? In my family, we believe that he lives on because we love him and still feel his love. We talk about the ease of his death, and retell our best memories of his life with us. Sharing this experience with a friend helped me realize that my prayers came true—at least in some way. I wondered for the first time if my prayers have always been answered, but that I have been unable to see it.

Scripture

Leviticus 26:3-13
Colossians 3:12-17

Skill Focus

Communication
Choices

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Prayer
We give thanks to you, O Lord our God, for all your servants and witnesses of time past: for Abraham, the father of believers, and Sarah his wife; for Moses, the lawgiver, and Aaron, the priest; for Miriam and Joshua, Deborah and Gideon, and Samuel with Hannah his mother; for Isaiah and all the prophets; for Mary, the mother of our Lord; for Peter and Paul and all the apostles; for Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene; for Stephen, the first martyr, and all the martyrs and saints in every age and in every land. In your mercy, O Lord our God, give us, as you gave to them, the hope of salvation and the promise of eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, the first-born of many from the dead. *Amen*.

For the Saints and Faithful Departed
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 838

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

☐ Begin Here: Remembering Scripture

A. If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land. You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. I will look with favor upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain my covenant with you. You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new. I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

Leviticus 26:3-13

B. As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17

Connect with the Personal Story

Read the Personal Story. Ask the participants to think about a time they have turned to prayer—during a crisis or to express joy. Pair up and tell your partner about an experience you've had with prayer or the frustration you have felt trying to pray. During the coming week, be open to ways God may be answering prayer that you had not anticipated.

☐ Questions

- What does God expect of God's people according to the *Leviticus* passage?
- The passage in *Leviticus* seems to say that good things will happen to good people. Is this always true? Why?
- How are God's people supposed to treat each other?
- What is the most important thing you can do for other people?
- In the Personal Story, the narrator says that he felt that his grandfather was going someplace. Where do you think God's people go when they die?
- Do you still feel close to someone who has died? How is that possible?

RESPONDING ACTIVITIES

Identify ways that participants can apply, both individually and as a group, the information they have learned while looking at people of God. Outreach ideas from sessions 2 through 8 are listed in a chart at the end of this session to help you find ways to share your experiences. During follow-up discussions, decide if the group wants to pursue one of these ideas or one of its own.

☐ Individually

Working individually, find ways to respond to the issues and ideas you have confronted in the study of *Who Are the People of God?* Talk about your ideas and write them on a piece of newsprint. Encourage each participant to find at least one idea to follow up. Possible responses:

- Of all the people you have studied in this module, who has interested you most? Why? Find out more about these people by reading what others have written about them, what they have written themselves, or by watching documentaries.
- Look at the exercise in Session 5 "Help From Others" that asked you to list things you did well and things you did not do well. If you did not select that activity, take time to make the two lists as described. Where could you get help from others to work on something you don't do well, but would like to try? Who could you help with something you do well? Find a way to help others with your gifts through tutoring, caring for others, or in some other way.

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- In Session 4, an activity about Terry Waite suggested that you memorize something that comforts you in times of trouble. Look through *The Book of Common Prayer* and find a prayer or scripture reference that has meaning for you. Commit this to memory to use when you feel empty and alone.
- Also in Session 4, an activity suggested you create and use a mantra to help you meditate. Continue to use your mantra or try new ones in the future. Make a covenant with another person in the group to find at least ten minutes every day to meditate.

☐ Group

The people of God are around you everywhere. They are not always saintly—they make mistakes and have doubts. However, people of God continue to seek God in others, through prayer, and at community worship. Think about ways the group can respond to ideas and issues raised in this study and how you can be more aware of God's actions in people around you. Record your ideas on paper, and select an activity that helps you as a group. Possible responses are:

- Find out how the Episcopal Church commemorates people of faith. Look at *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* to learn about people the Church has already honored. Make a list of people you think should be included in this group, such as Terry Waite. Select one or two from the list and do further research. Consider forwarding one of your candidates to the appropriate review bodies.
- The Personal Story in Session 7 talked about a youth mission trip. Find out if your youth group could be a part of a mission effort in your community, state, or even another country. Report your findings and help plan a trip of your own.
- In Session 5, an activity suggested that you look at newcomer practices at your church. Develop policies for newcomers under age 18. What activities would you design for toddlers as well as older youth?

☐ Celebrate!

Celebrate the completion of the group's study of *Who Are the People of God?* Find your own celebrations or use one of the following ideas.

Art

- Make a mural similar to Resource Poster No. 1 showing modern saints in your life.
- Display any artwork created during your study, such as the sculpture of a cross from Session 2 or the symbolic idol from Session 6. Include a response book and ask people to give comments.

Liturgy

- Create a liturgy using different components you created during your study of this module. For example, include the song about saints if you wrote one for Session 1, or use music that came from suffering you identified in Session 6.
- Plan a service of forgiveness or reconciliation using the Rite of Reconciliation (see Session 3) or the forgiveness liturgy developed around the making of lentil soup.
- Plan an All Saints Day service for all ages. Combine it with the party suggested later in this section or give a more serious tone.

Community

- Expand on the psalms the group wrote during Session 6 by asking others in the congregation to submit their poetic statements about facing trouble. Collect the poetry in a booklet to distribute to church members during Lent. Look at Session 7 for hints about publishing your own work.
- Make lentil soup for a Lenten supper at your church or for a community soup kitchen (See Session 3).

Fun

- Plan a joyous celebration of your study of the people of God for everyone in the parish. Invite people to come dressed as their favorite saint. This could be planned in conjunction with an All Saints Day celebration.
- Invite adults who have participated in your study as panel members in Session 3 or those who shared their doubts in Session 7 to a dessert party. Find ways to let them know how much you appreciate their contributions.

FOLLOW THROUGH

Individual Response: Ask God to help you to be more aware of God's presence in people you see each day. Continue to work on suggestions made during your study to be more positive in your responses to others and to reach out to friends who are estranged. Think about ways you can help others see God's love through the way you treat them. Reflect on your prayer life and how it could help you be one of God's saints.

- Do you need help from others in finding God?
- Can you identify someone in the group, the church, or the community who can help you?

Group Response: Go back over the list of ideas the group made as a response to your study of God's people. Decide which of the ideas is most interesting to the group. You may decide to do one major activity or several smaller ones. Take into consideration other commitments and responsibilities participants may have. Talk about group and individual actions needed to complete your choice. Designate one person or a leadership team to be responsible for completing your group response.

- What kind of activity did the group select?
- Can every person participate who wants to?
- Can you identify people in the church or community who can help the group finish the activity?

Celebrate: Ask for volunteers to choose an appropriate liturgy response to your study of God's people. Ask other participants to gather materials needed for an art or community response. If you decide to have a party, delegate responsibility for invitations, food, and decorations. If you opt to have a dessert party for adult mentors and participants, find a time that is most convenient to them.

- Does the celebration include all participants?
- Does your celebration enable you to share with others some things you have learned in your study of *Who Are the People of God?*

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MOVING AHEAD

Who Are the People of God?

Outreach Activities for Sessions 2-8

Session	Theme	Suggested Outreach Activity
Finding Joy	1 2 3	• Make care packages to send to young people from your church who have recently gone to college or joined the military. • Reach out to families that are broken or hurting in some way. • Read your favorite book to a group of young children in your community.
Making Mistakes	1	• Make lentil soup and create a forgiveness ritual or liturgy for others.
Finding Courage	1 3	• Respect other faiths by learning about their customs and beliefs, such as attending a Jewish Purim festival. • Contact Amnesty International to find out more about political prisoners around the world; learn what you can do to help.
Help From Others	1 3	• Take an accessibility survey of church buildings; submit your list and suggestions for improvements to the vestry. • Learn more about needs of the disabled in your community and how you might help. • Examine your church's ministry for newcomers; make suggestions for ways to improve it. • Visit another church to see how it treats newcomers; investigate ways to use ideas you discovered in your own church.
Facing Hardship	1 2 3	• Perform a play based on your story of Job for another church group. • Work with children to make instruments for the story Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; perform the story at an intergenerational event. • Find out more about groups that work to break down barriers among people.
Having Doubts	1 2 3	• Learn more about places that serve people who are facing difficult situations. • Publish a newsletter that communicates an aspect of faith. • Talk to adults about the role of doubt in a growing faith.
Staying True	1 2 3	• Reach out to an estranged friend with a phone call or letter. • Support a friend by doing something for them anonymously. • Make a covenant to give only positive feedback to others for a specific amount of time. • Create a trust banner and display it in your church. • Find out where, why, and how persecutions occur in the world and what you could do to help.

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