Liturgy Celebrates New Generation of Saints

By the Rev. Kent Schneider

A family liturgy to celebrate All Saint’s Day last year added a new dimension to children’s Christian formation at Trinity Church, New Orleans by tapping into different ministries within the congregation.

The ministry of hospitality welcomed families as they entered the worship space. Everyone was greeted by name and asked to “sign-in” his or her name on a paper saint’s shield that was worn around the neck.

One of the missions of Trinity is to interconnect adults, youth and children so that they feel valued, recognized and appreciated. Calling each person a “saint” opened the door to wondering “who is a saint?”

Seating was arranged in a “U” shape with the altar (an 8-foot table covered by a red cloth) at the opening. The band was seated on the left, with the children’s choir on the right. The congregation gathered by singing “This Little Light of Mine” and “Shout to the Lord,” music that involved all ages.

The Gathering

To open, a family came forward to lead the Sh’m a, which means hear, from Deuteronomy 6:4-8. Each line was spoken and interpreted into sign language with an invitation to the congregation to repeat the words and movement.

The children gathered in an area outside the worship space for the processional. Some were costumed as favorite saints, while others carried poster board emblems or waved colorful flags. The congregation welcomed them by singing “I sing a song of the saints of God” (The Hymnal 1982, 293). After processing, the children joined their families.

Continued on p. 5.
Editorial

**Popular Culture Can Be Powerful Teaching Tool**

Mass culture is often debunked as a social force that makes it hard for contemporary Christians to live out their faith. Preachers, curriculum writers, and authors frequently use it as a punching bag, a faceless victim on whom we can blame the disintegration of society, the empty pews in our churches, and the falling attendance in religious education classes. We line up the usual culprits—movies, television, music and the news media—and take our shots at them.

Writing in *Religious Education* last year, Catholic scholar Mary E. Hess noted that “most teachers, whether faculty in graduate institutions or volunteers in parishes, engage popular culture—if indeed they do at all—primarily by way of negative contrast.” Yet, she asserts, Christian education and “mass mediated popular culture” are inextricably intertwined.

Certainly, negative aspects of popular culture—obsessive fixations on violence and consumerism, for example—can harm the development of faith. Movies, television and the news media sometimes distort religious experience. When they do, we need to speak up and illustrate the ways mass culture misinterprets the spiritual life.

**Positive Impacts**

We need, however, to tune into thoughtful commentators, screen writers and musicians in American mass culture that help us think with integrity and spiritual insight about the events in our world.

Hess contends that teachers in the church should be “mining them for new insights into our articulation” of faith. Some curricula do this well. Cokesbury’s *Reel to Real* uses contemporary films to help youth enter the gospel and discover connections between life and the spiritual journey. LeaderResources draws on the Harry Potter series—the pop culture icon that has spun off countless consumer products from dolls to key chains—as the organizing theme for Vacation Bible School.

What would happen to our teaching if we followed Hess’s advice to “take popular culture seriously in religious education?” Doing so might open us to seeing spiritual content in cultural materials that are not openly “religious.”

An episode of Rod Sterling’s *The Twilight Zone* called “The Shelter” (a 1960’s TV series, available on DVD at entertainment.msn.com) contains no outward religious content yet it is rich in teaching possibilities in the church. When a nuclear attack is imminent, suburban residents fight over the only bomb shelter in the neighborhood. The owners must decide who will enter. Discussion about that dilemma could parallel questions of inclusiveness the church is facing today.

**Using ‘Religious Ears’**

In a class several years ago we listened to blues recordings with “religious ears”—as Hess calls them—and discovered parallels to the psalms of lament in the Hebrew Bible. We also identified our own laments in the process, thanks to a music genre from popular culture that is rarely, if ever, heard in a religious education class.

When I criticized a Vacation Bible School curriculum for couching its theology in the theme of the 2004 Olympics—a powerful cultural theme in America—a student reminded me that Paul used Olympic athletics as a theme for conveying his understanding of the gospel in *I Corinthians* 9:24-27.

The church gives us a framework for dissecting, critiquing and using popular culture with authority and faithfulness in our teaching. It provides us with theological tools for assessing how well published materials use themes and images appropriately from the broader culture.

We need not issue blanket denunciations and turn our backs on the mass culture where our learners are situated. With thoughtfulness and prayer we can use culture creatively to deepen their relationships with God.

—GJK
Use ECC Curriculum for All Saints’ Day Event

Plan an All Saints’ intergenerational event for your congregation using ideas from Unit IV and Session 9, Unit I of the Primary Cross Teacher’s Guide of the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum. Set up four to six learning centers, depending on the size of the group.

If possible set up tables for each activity (except storytelling) in a large open area. On each table set out the necessary supplies. Instructions for each activity should be written out and copied for each participant. Encourage participants to work as pairs, with an adult or teen paired with a child under twelve.

Allow participants to move freely from one area to another. At the end, gather everyone together to share their creations and have refreshments. Close with a prayer or read the collect for All Saints’ Day in The Book of Common Prayer, p. 245.

You may want to set some guidelines to help with traffic flow. For example:
1. Suggest that participants work with another person at any of the centers that are available. If there are no empty spaces, ask them to select another place and come back later.
2. Encourage participants to work at any of the centers as long as they like. They do not need to visit all of the centers.
3. Specify a time that the group will gather for a closing activity.

Learning Centers

Below are suggested learning stations from the Teacher’s Guide. Feel free to adapt other activities or create your own ideas.

**Storytelling:** Select two or more saints from Unit 9, beginning on p. 151 to relate at the storytelling center. Use the background information and storytelling ideas to prepare. Saints featured in Unit 9 are: Agnes of Rome, Athanasius of Alexandria, Patrick of Ireland, Benedict of Nursia, Hilda of Whitby, Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi and Julian of Norwich.

**Creating in Clay:** Provide enough clay or playdough (a recipe is available on p. 70) for all participants. Invite them to close their eyes and hold the clay in the palm of their hand allowing it to warm and soften. While music is playing—you might want to use music composed by Hildegard of Bingen (see amazon.com)—ask participants to close their eyes and think about images of saints. With eyes still closed, allow the clay to take shape. After a time, they can open their eyes and see their creations.

**Saints Among Us:** Cover a bulletin board with white paper and set it on an easel. Invite participants to make small drawings of themselves to hang on the board, using precut paper, crayons, and markers. Some may want to draw stick figures with their characteristics, such as curly hair. Underneath the picture write “(Name), a saint of God.” Display all of the drawings on the white paper.

**Saints Sun Catchers:** Using Poster No. 14 in the Primary Cross Teacher’s Packet, duplicate patterns of the symbols for each of the saints. Invite participants to color the symbols with wax crayons. When they are finished, lightly rub the paper with baby oil on a cotton ball until the medallions are translucent. The symbols can then be hung with string or taped to a nearby window. Encourage participants to take their symbols home and hang them in a window.

—DSL
Create Classrooms that Welcome Children

A child’s first impression of classroom space can make the church school experience either inviting or intimidating. Before children arrive this fall, take a tour of your facilities to see if classrooms meet the test.

Because preschoolers are small, sometimes they are assigned the smallest spaces. This age group, however, needs room to use their big muscles during songs and other activities. They need extra room to stretch, roll and spin.

Children need to feel that God is close to them in ways that cannot be explained. When they enter a classroom, they should be able to sense that it is sacred space. Being welcomed into a room allows every child to know that he or she belongs.

Ideally spaces for children should be big and bright, welcoming and comforting. Any furniture in the room should be child-sized with low tables and chairs that allow the children’s feet to touch the floor.

Instead of chairs, you may want to use carpet squares or pillows for seating. These can be easily moved to make space for large movement activities. If there is room for shelves, make sure they are low enough for children to reach. The space should encourage children to explore and use their emerging skills.

Using Available Space

While large, well-lit rooms are the ideal, many churches have to work with the reality of shared space, small rooms, limited equipment and flimsy room dividers. You can still make your space inviting with the warmth of your greeting and creative décor that is personal and can be easily stored from week to week.

- If lighting in the room is inadequate, bring in several lamps to lighten dark corners and provide a sense of warmth and welcome.
- Place a greeter at the door to meet each child before they enter the room. Take time for a brief conversation—you may discover something important to pass on to other teachers.
- Near the door hang a welcome banner that includes each child’s name and picture. If photos are too difficult to take or if your group changes from week to week, ask the children to draw self-portraits to display on the banner.
- When children enter the room, set aside a gathering place that is used every week. The teacher can be sitting on the floor in this area ready to greet the children at their own level. It’s much easier to feel comfortable with someone who looks you in the eye rather than having them bend over you.
- Use carpet or carpet squares to delineate a special “storytime space.” When everyone has arrived, begin with a story. Find a place to store props or small figures for telling the story that the children can use later when they have time to explore the story for themselves.
- Don’t be limited by the walls of the classroom. After a story about baptism or the Eucharist, take a tour of your worship space with a member of the altar guild. Ask a choir member to show the children where the choir rehearses and learn a new song together. Then let the children process down the aisle.
- If the weather allows, take a walk to look at God’s creation. After the children hear the story of creation, they can feel the warmth of light, sense the touch of wind, and see plants and insects.

With careful planning, classroom space can be used to reflect God’s love and acceptance for the youngest members of God’s family. —DSL
On a grassy area on church grounds, families were invited to write the names of loved ones who had died on 200 crosses and to stake them into the ground. A three-year-old girl looked intently at a cross marked “Grandpa.” She bent over, kissed the top of the cross and ran to her mother. Parents and children are still talking about their experience during Trinity Church’s All Saints’ Family Liturgy. A new generation of saints is marching in. Hallelujah!

The Rev. Kent Schneider directs Children’s Christian Formation at Trinity Church.

Editor’s Note: The shield pattern used to make nametags is in the Primary Cross Teacher’s Packet of the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum.

HAPPY BAPTISM TO YOU!

Few of us would leave our child’s birthday uncelebrated. But what about a baptismal anniversary? Celebrating a child’s baptism can become an important family ritual.

Children love to hear stories about themselves, and many parents tell their children the stories of their birth or adoption. Why not retell the story of their baptism at its yearly anniversary? Light a baptismal candle, look at pictures from the occasion, call godparents who live far away, and say a prayer for your child (see “For a Birthday,” p. 830 in the Book of Common Prayer).

As a godparent, consider sending a gift on the baptism date instead of the birthday. All of us grow and change each year. Celebrating baptismal days can remind us that we grow spiritually as well. As we consciously mark the rhythm of our life in Christ, we become more intentional about living into our baptismal promises. —Anne Kitch

All Saints’ at Trinity

Continued from p. 1.

Saints were defined as ordinary people who love and serve God in extraordinary ways. In small groups, the congregation named the “saints” they knew. Rejoining the group, they identified the qualities of people who had touched their lives as living “saints.”

Another family led the Prayers of the People that they had written. The prayer gave thanks for new babies, and expressed concern for pets, the earth, a lost baseball hat, the safety of whales and more. Sharing the Peace linked the congregation to Christ and one another.

At the Lord’s Table

The children gathered at the altar for an instructed Eucharist. Their faces revealed wonder as they witnessed the sacred mystery. The Rev. Lee Winter came in front of the altar and knelt before the children, offering each child the bread at eye level. The moment transformed the congregation to a new people in Christ.

Marching to a New Spirit

After the final prayer, the congregation moved from the church into the world to remember those saints who have died. The band led them around the outside of the church as they sang “When the Saints Go Marching In.”

On a grassy area on church grounds, families were invited to write the names of loved ones who had died on 200 crosses and to stake them into the ground. A three-year-old girl looked intently at a cross marked “Grandpa.” She bent over, kissed the top of the cross and ran to her mother.

Parents and children are still talking about their experience during Trinity Church’s All Saints’ Family Liturgy. A new generation of saints is marching in. Hallelujah!

The Rev. Kent Schneider directs Children’s Christian Formation at Trinity Church.

Editor’s Note: The shield pattern used to make nametags is in the Primary Cross Teacher’s Packet of the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum.
Creating All Saints’ Shrine Helps Learners, Parish Celebrate the Lives of God’s People

Building shrines to honor the dead has been a part of Christian spirituality for many centuries. When disasters strike people often erect temporary shrines at the sites to remember those who perished. Flowers, teddy bears, religious symbols and photographs are among the mementos left at the site of the tragedy.

In many Christian communities around the world, shrines are constructed on All Saints’ Day to recall the lives of loved ones who have died in the previous year. Items to decorate the shrine might include photographs, food, offerings from the local harvest, and Christian symbols of new life.

Consider making a shrine in your classroom or community space to help learners and parishioners remember people who have died. In addition to family members and friends, the shrine can help them recall people in the news or community who have died.

Following are suggestions for assembling a shrine in a single classroom or as a larger church-wide project.

Making a Shrine
To build a shrine, clear a space a few weeks before All Saints’ Day and begin talking about people that will be included. This is a good time for the group to talk about loved ones who have died and to share stories about their lives.

Place a tree branch in a bucket filled with stones to display symbols and photos. Decorate the cover of a book with blank pages for group members to write the names of loved ones and others in the community or world who have died. Ask learners to bring photos or other items for the All Saints’ shrine that recall the lives of friends or family members who have died. Parents may want to scan photos into a computer and print copies rather than send precious photos and artifacts.

Suggest that learners also bring photos and short articles from newspapers about the deaths of people in the wider community to put in the book or on the shrine throughout the weeks leading to All Saints’ Day.

To adorn the shrine, hang decorations created by learners and parishioners from the tree branch with symbols that are signs of God’s gift of abundant life, drawings of candles or lanterns, along with images of the heavens such as stars or the moon.

Shrines in some countries are sometimes decorated with images of angels and St. Michael, one of four angels given a name in the Bible, who is celebrated September 29.

In other cultures migrating birds symbolize the movement from life on earth to eternal life with God. The Celtic Christian tradition uses the goose for this purpose. In Mexico, the arrival of migrating ducks reminds Christians of new life. These symbols can also be added to the classroom shrine.

When the shrine is finished, use it as a focal point for prayer. Pray for the people listed in the book. Light a candle or place a flower in the shrine each week.

On the Sunday closest to All Saints’ Day, carry the book of names into the church and include them as part of the Prayers of the People, reminding everyone in the congregation of God’s care for people in this life and the next.

(Adapted from School Year, Church Year: Customs and Decorations for the Classroom by Peter Mazar, available at www.ltp.org.)
Children’s Sabbath Activities Highlight Needs of Children

The National Observance of Children’s Sabbath is an opportunity for people of all ages and all faiths to learn more about the urgent needs of children. Through worship services, religious education classes, and congregational outreach and advocacy activities, people of faith learn more about the problems facing children and commit to responding to them.

The goal of the Children’s Sabbath is to generate new, long-term efforts to meet children’s needs by raising awareness, serving children directly, and advocating for children’s needs.

The Children’s Sabbath begins across the nation on Friday, October 14 with services in synagogues and mosques, and continues through Sunday, October 16 with church and interfaith worship services. Many Children’s Sabbaths are held by individual congregations, while in other communities congregations unite for ecumenical and interfaith celebrations.

The Children’s Sabbath is an intergenerational event that engages people of all ages in planning, participation and follow-up activities. In this respect, it is different from a traditional “Youth Sunday” that is planned and led by the young people. The focus on serious problems facing children also sets it apart from traditional children’s days.

Many communities of faith hold Children’s Sabbaths celebrations throughout the year. Materials to help plan a celebration are provided by the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF). The 2005 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths resource manual is scheduled for release in May. Visit the CDF website, www.childrensdefense.org, to download individual sections.

The easy-to-use manual helps churches promote a Children’s Sabbath with activities for all ages, and with worship and educational materials for Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and multi-faith traditions. The manual contains planning tips, worship resources, lesson plans, activity ideas, resources and follow-up activities for all faith communities.

Elders Give Gifts of Wisdom

Summer gives many of us a chance to catch up on unfinished work on our “to-do” lists, try something new, or just rest. Instead of taking a vacation from faith-building activities at your parish this summer, find ways to stay connected while serving one another in love.

The adults at Saint Andrews, Milford, Connecticut, reflected on their own youth to create a book for children in the parish. Parishioners were asked to submit “words of wisdom” written to the young person they once were.

The reflections were collected and made into a booklet called “Words to Myself: A Gift to Our Children from the Elders of Saint Andrew’s Episcopal Church.” Each child in the parish was presented a copy of the booklet in early September.

If you create a similar booklet for your parish, consider scheduling a parish-wide picnic to celebrate its distribution. Set aside time for writers to read or talk about the “words of wisdom” they contributed.
Recent Graduate Takes MACE to Africa

By Dorothy Linthicum

Graduation at Virginia Theological Seminary last year launched one of the Master of Arts in Christian Education (MACE) students into a new world of service and ministry. Annie Cooper is now serving God in Tunisia, working with the people of St. George’s Anglican Church.

On a recent visit to the United States, Annie talked about the differences and similarities of children’s ministry in Africa. She said it is valued and supported, but children are still expected to “give way to the adults.”

Because the children have lived through wars and famine, she said, “they desperately need to feel the love of Christ.” She added that they sometimes ask, “Where is God? Does he love us less?”

For many of the children strength does not come from God, but from “the power of the gun... Many people are hurting and disappointed. They feel the church has let them down. Most children have nothing to hold on to.”

Annie believes her primary job is to show the people, especially the children, how God loves them. She hopes “to liberate the children with Christianity” by living the message that God has given us.

Life at the Seminary

Annie was drawn to the MACE program because she wanted to take her gifts of teaching back to Africa. “I saw that [loving Christ] could be shared with my people,” she said.

At first she was skeptical that she could tackle the masters program. “I asked myself: Do you know what you are doing?” She called the director of the program, Dr. Amy Gearey Dyer, who invited her to visit that same day.

“That was the turning point,” said Annie, “I realized after I talked to her that I could do it.” However, her apprehension quickly returned as she finished applying to the program from Africa.

“I had been out of school for more than 25 years,” she said. Coming into a program that was fast-paced and rigorous was her biggest challenge. Completing the volume of reading before classes began, then doing the research and papers forced her into a balancing act between school, living overseas, and her family responsibilities.

The most rewarding part of being in the MACE program, Annie said, was being in class with other Christian educators from around the country. “They had experiences that I could draw from,” she said. “Learning from others gave me the strength to do things myself.”

The seminary experience changed Annie in many ways. “I have become a lot more sensitive to people from other cultures,” she said. “I try to find God in people.” She has become more aware of her relationship with God, she said, and how to transfer that relationship to others.

“I am trying to live a more Christ-centered life,” she said, “by being more loving to others, not just those who are Christians.” In Tunisia Annie now lives among Muslims “who are very good people with very good hearts—I see God in them.”

“As a Christian educator I must practice what I teach,” she added. That means, Annie said, she

Continued on p. 9.
Annie’s Story
Continued from p. 8.

must be willing “to forgive those who cross me. I need to go out into the community and listen to God’s call.”

Back to Africa
The skills and experiences Annie had in the MACE program have been recognized by the Christian community in Africa. Although her work at St. George’s is voluntary, she has been asked by her bishop to work with other churches in the Diocese of Northern Africa serving the countries of Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Liberia, Tunisia, and Nutria.

Annie grew up in Liberia where, she said, “my heart is and will always be. I still want to go back.” She noted that most of the children there only know war. “We have a responsibility to correct some of these ills,” she added.

Her successful completion of the MACE program, Annie said, was due in large part to the support of her family. Her husband, she said, “made the biggest sacrifice of all.” From the very beginning, he kept encouraging her. “My children,” she said, “drove me and kept saying that I could do it.”

When graduation ceremonies and parties got underway last May, the family, including Annie’s mother, gathered to celebrate this important passage in Annie’s life. In many ways, it was their triumph as well.

---

Take a New Look at
Master of Arts in Christian Education (MACE)
at Virginia Theological Seminary

- Designed to meet today’s needs of Christian Educators
- Offers on-campus experiences
- Fully accredited
- Available during summer months
- Flexible scheduling
- Reduced credit hours
- Revised options for electives

Center for the Ministry of Teaching
Virginia Theological Seminary
3737 Seminary Road
Alexandria, VA 22304
Families at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Cary, North Carolina, were invited last fall to enter a cake decorating contest at the Faith, Family, and Frosting Church School Kick-Off. Families were challenged to find creative ways to depict and “frost” their best time together.

Families were asked to make and decorate a cake before coming to the church school kick-off. The cakes, which came in different sizes, shapes and colors, were displayed on tables with the family’s name and description of the theme.

The contest was followed by a brief slideshow and session with parents that featured ideas about helping children in their faith development. Parents also received tips on how to connect spiritually with their children in spite of everyone’s busy schedules.

The point of the event, according to education director Pam Huff, was to help parents include their children in their journeys to live Christ-like lives. “When the children get to church school, we will be the icing on the foundation that the parents have laid.”

“Families today are faced with many challenges and one of them is maintaining closeness,” said the Rev. George Adamik, rector. “We hope to offer programs and events to help busy families connect with the Holy even in the carpool line.” —Pam Huff, Director of Children’s Education

**Questions Help Teachers Examine Their Ministry**

Sometimes it is a good idea for teachers or Christian educators to take a break from over-busy schedules and get some perspective about what they are doing. Share these questions with teachers at a fall training event or other appropriate time. Encourage them to contemplate their answers alone or with other teachers.

1. How did you get started in Christian education? By what process did you come to this place? The answer may go back to your childhood or it may be a recent development. It may arise from a positive experience or a negative one. Stay with these thoughts. Trace your history in Christian education up until this present moment.

2. In general, what are you doing now in Christian education? Where do you spend most of your time? If you are a teacher, is it in lesson preparation? Getting to know your students? Studying? If you are a Christian educator, which job elicits most of your time? Is this where you would like to spend most of your time? If not, what hinders you?

3. What do you do (or teaching) all about? What do you hope to accomplish? What do you think about as you work?

4. What are your major accomplishments? What are your successes, literal or emotional? What have you done that you can point to with pride? What excites you about this work?

5. What is your study history? (Classes taken, books read, other teachers consulted, conferences attended.) What inspires you most?

Close with a moment of gratitude. How fortunate you are to be in this place, at this time, with these persons, with this work to do.

—Judy Gattis Smith

**Church School Year Begins with Faith and Frosting**

Families at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Cary, North Carolina, were invited last fall to enter a cake decorating contest at the Faith, Family, and Frosting Church School Kick-Off. Families were challenged to find creative ways to depict and “frost” their best time together.

Families were asked to make and decorate a cake before coming to the church school kick-off. The cakes, which came in different sizes, shapes and colors, were displayed on tables with the family’s name and description of the theme.

The contest was followed by a brief slideshow and session with parents that featured ideas about helping children in their faith development. Parents also received tips on how to connect spiritually with their children in spite of everyone’s busy schedules.

The point of the event, according to education director Pam Huff, was to help parents include their children in their journeys to live Christ-like lives. “When the children get to church school, we will be the icing on the foundation that the parents have laid.”

“Families today are faced with many challenges and one of them is maintaining closeness,” said the Rev. George Adamik, rector. “We hope to offer programs and events to help busy families connect with the Holy even in the carpool line.” —Pam Huff, Director of Children’s Education
Discovery Centers Invite People to Examine Resources and Share Their Spiritual Insights

By Sharon Pearson

A Discovery Center is a new way for children, youth and adults to learn together. Introduced at the 2003 Episcopal conference *Will Our Faith Have Children?* the new format allows participants to see new resources, experience creative activities and share spiritual thoughts.

Since its introduction, the concept has sprouted in dioceses and national formation events across the country.

In May 2004, it traveled to Camp Allen (Texas) for a national conference of missionaries and Christian educators. Each display area in the Center focused on a different part of the world, including the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America. Needs of children from these geographical areas were featured in each of the displays.

In November, a Discovery Center came to Tempe, Arizona for the Ecumenical Resource Center gathering. Faith formation resources for all ages from many denominations were displayed in a small area at the back of a conference room. At each of these events, the Discovery Center drew participants in with colorful interactive displays.

Several dioceses have also made use of the Discovery Center concept at meetings and conventions. Resources, including banners, books, candles, and Baptismal font from the 2003 conference, can be borrowed from the national Office of Children’s Ministries and Christian Education. The dioceses of Pennsylvania, Chicago, West Texas and Connecticut are among those that have used the concept for diocesan conventions or other events.

Make Your Own Center

Developing your own Discovery Center for a diocesan or parish event takes planning and teamwork, but is well worth the effort. Before you start the planning process, find out how much money is budgeted for this activity.

The next step is selecting a theme, such as a passage of scripture. Be sure to find enough volunteers to plan, set up, monitor and disassemble the display each day.

Use a variety of activities and displays during the event to provide people new opportunities each day. Changing displays daily in a Discovery Center keeps participants coming back over the life of an event.

In planning activities, try to provide materials in languages other than English and that highlight other cultures. Choose interactive activities that can be completed with little supervision by using written instructions.

Determine the kinds of furniture, equipment and resources needed, such as tables, pillows, easels, computers, TV/VCR or DVD player. Make a list of supplies for activities, such as crayons, construction paper, origami paper, glue sticks, scissors. If you plan to borrow items from the Episcopal Church Center, allow enough time for shipment.

In April 2004, the Diocese of Connecticut used a Discovery Center for an intergenerational faith formation event. Using carpet, the Baptismal font, Paschal candle and print resources borrowed from the Episcopal Church Center, the theme was “Take Me to the Water.” The displays explored baptism and how God calls and names us to proclaim the Word and serve others.

For a step-by-step planning process for developing your own Discovery Center, contact Jeffri Harre in the Office of Children’s Ministries & Christian Education at jharre@episcopalchurch.org or 800-334-7627x1212.

Preparing, Including Children in Worship Is Sacred Vocation for Parents and Congregation

Editor’s Note: This is the second article about children in worship. The author provides suggestions for embracing the inclusion of children to enrich everyone’s experience.

By Anne Kitch

Native American wisdom says: “Grant that I may never judge another until I have walked a mile in his moccasins.” Before we pass judgment about the behavior of others in church it might help us to ask ourselves:

What is it like to be hungry for the words of the Gospel, but not be able to hear them because someone sitting behind you is talking or kicking the pew at the same time as the sermon?

What is it like to yearn for the community of the Body of Christ, but to be told that you do not really belong?

Manners are not a given. There is no common expectation about church behavior in our culture today. What is acceptable in one parish is not somewhere else. Parents bringing children to worship may not be churched themselves and have no idea about expectations of others.

Children are in church to worship, just like everyone else. Children are a part of the community, formed by the community, and responsible to the community. In order to participate lovingly in the life of the community, children need to learn about it. Part of the ministry of a parent, then, is teaching children how to participate as a member of a worshipping community.

Put simply, parents have to parent in church. Children will not know how to behave if they are not told. We tell our children at a young age the difference between an “inside voice” and an “outside voice,” we tell them not to throw balls in the house and to wipe the mud off their shoes before coming in the door.

We need to tell children what is expected of them in church. Expectations of children will vary from parish to parish, but some basic guidelines can be used in almost every setting.

Be Prepared

It helps to come to church prepared. When bringing an activity to keep a young child engaged during worship, think about tools instead of toys. Blank paper and crayons allow a child to respond creatively to worship, while a Superhero Comic Book distracts them.

Don’t bring snacks into the pew that will cause a mess and a distraction. When your child’s behavior becomes disruptive to others, be willing to leave the pew to give a child a needed break or to calm an upset.

At the same time, parishes need to engage children intentionally and lovingly in the community. What does your parish provide for children?

Nurseries need to be available and staffed consistently by caring and trustworthy adults. Greeters should greet children and ushers need to offer them a bulletin.

Children know they are welcome when they see other children participating in the service. Even young children can be greeters, oblation bearers, and choir members. Children who are comfortable and capable of reading aloud can be part of the regular lector rotation (and not just invited to read on special Youth Sundays).

Providing “Kid Packets” containing resources that engage young children in worship is very helpful. These can include children’s bulletins that reflect the Gospel of the day (such as Gretchen Pritchard’s The Sunday Paper Junior), blank paper and crayons, and Bible story books. Coloring books and stories featuring popular TV characters distract children from worship and are not that helpful. To be useful, these packets need to be easy to find and well maintained.

Finally, understanding and acceptance of the wiggles and giggles children bring with them is vital. With mutual respect and commitment from parents and parishes, children can be fully recognized and included as members of the Body of Christ. It is simply what we are called to do.
Support Youth Who Are ‘On the Move’

As summer ends, young people, especially those who just graduated from high school, are on the move. Some are going to college, some are starting new jobs, while others are entering military service. Congregations can help them during this time of transition by responding as a community or as individuals.

Too often we lament the number of young people who leave the church without giving them a reason to be a part of a church community. Here are some suggestions to keep in touch with your young people:

- Recognize the importance of this transition time by honoring them at a worship service. A “Blessing for Those Graduating from High School” in Blessings and Rituals, by Susan Langhauser (Abington Press, 2000) could be adapted for young people going to college, starting new jobs or entering military service. After the service, gather for a special meal to celebrate this time of “moving on.”
- Present each young person a gift book of devotions, prayers, or reflections that are relevant to his or her new situation.
- Stay in touch with young people by setting up a “pen-pal” system connecting parishioners with young people.
- Occasionally, send out care packages to everyone on the list with cookies, candy, notes, and the like.
- Set up a chat room through your church website where young people can stay in touch with each other.
- Invite them to special events scheduled during holiday breaks when they are more likely to be in the area.
- Send emails to share news about church events and people in the congregation.
- Give print or email subscriptions to Forward Day by Day, a quarterly collection of devotions based on the daily and Sunday lectionaries. (To order, visit www.forwardmovement.org.)
- Pray for them. Remember them as a group or individually during the “Prayers for the People.”
- Distribute a list of their names and ask the congregation to pray for them regularly.

—DSL

Practicing Discernment with Youth

By David F. White
The Pilgrim Press
800-537-3394
thepilgrimpress.com
Cost: $24

Recently I worked with a group of high school students about discernment—Christian discernment. To begin, we listed the issues and decisions they would be facing in the next five years. College was high on the list: should I go? where should I go? what tools will I need when I get there? am I ready? Just as important were decisions about relationships, the changing nature of old friendships, the highs and lows of romance, and finding their place in different pecking orders at school and in the community.

Practicing Discernment with Youth, by David F. White, would have helped all of us on this journey. White suggests ways youth can bring “their lives more fully into partnership with God’s work in their particular place.”

The model White proposes taps into historic discernment practices of Christian communities. He says discernment “requires relationship with diverse others across the globe, with our broken creation, and with our communities in which we seek wholeness. . . it simultaneously requires integration with the individual, or between one’s heart, soul, and body.”

This book is not designed to be used at a weekend retreat or a few weeks of Sunday School. White envisions it as a theological vision for congregational youth ministry.

“This approach to discernment prepares youth,” says White, “to move into adulthood in a more active and reflective way by engaging them in habits of raising questions and making connections. . .they are less likely to simply attach an impotent faith onto an unreflective life.”

This is a valuable book for those working with youth that is challenging and yet practical. Practicing Discernment is the first book in a new series entitled Youth Ministry Alternatives: Resources of Theological Integrity Rooted in Real Congregations. —DSL
Children’s Activities for the Christian Year

By Delia Halverson
Abbingdon Press, 2004
800-251-9591
www.abingdonpress.com
Cost: $15

Children’s Activities for the Christian Year uses the seasons of the Church year to help children grow in faith and know God. Activities are designed for children age 8 through 12, but many can be used with younger children or in a mixed group setting.

The book can be used by teachers and leaders of children’s ministry for Sunday School, in chapel settings, or for special seasonal programs. Each section includes:
- Brief information about the season or celebration, its origin and meaning
- An introduction of symbols and colors
- Learning activities such as art, writing, crafts, drama, stories and music
- Reproducible pages with puzzles, song, and readings
- Active game suggestions
- Worship ideas

In addition to chapters about the seasons (Advent/Christmas, Epiphany, Lent/Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost) are sections about the Christian year, Sundays (mini-Easters) and other special days, such as All Saints’.

The introduction to each chapter includes a “Simple Explanation” that captures the most important aspects of each season or celebration. Some of the activities call for advance planning, such as a “Tree of Gifts” for Advent/Christmas. Teachers will have to determine their own list of resources needed for the various activities.

Children’s Activities is a good reference book on Church seasons that would complement most education programs for children. —DSL

EPISCOPAL TEACHER

Complimentary Subscription and Information Request Form

Your Name: ____________________________________________
Organization: __________________________________________

Address: ______________________________________________
City: __________________________________________________
State: ________ Zip: ________

☐ Please send me Episcopal Teacher
☐ This is my PARISH address
☐ This is my HOME address

Please send information about the following:
☐ Youth Ministry Degree Program
☐ MACE Degree Program

E-mail Address: _________________________________________

Mail this coupon to: Episcopal Teacher
Center for the Ministry of Teaching
3737 Seminary Road
Alexandria, VA 22304

Or email the above information to: cmtcirc@vts.edu
Even the best teachers sometimes forget to include God in their planning and preparation. We get so busy focusing on the teacher’s guides, gathering materials for a craft, or getting snacks ready, God gets pushed off to one side.

As you begin to prepare each week’s lesson, stop and give yourself the gift of prayer. Sit quietly and let your muscles relax. Set aside the daily demands on your time from work and family. Breathe deeply and open your heart to hear the message God has for you in this week’s lesson.

As you begin activities on Sunday morning, allow time for prayer requests from the learners. Pray aloud for each child by name in addition to the concerns the learners bring. Follow up in subsequent weeks to find out how God has answered your prayers.

When learners come to you with questions or stories, listen carefully and help them see how God is speaking in their lives. Don’t worry about getting everything done in your lesson plan.

Because younger children are not capable of abstract thinking, they may find it difficult to see God’s actions in their lives. God’s message can be revealed to them, at least in part, through the words and actions of teachers.

For some of the children with whom you work, you may be the only example of unconditional love and forgiveness in their lives. God can help you with this important job if you stay in touch through prayer. —DSL