Old Stories Come to Life During Easter Vigil

luminous: aglow(p): softly bright or radiant; “a house aglow with lights;” “glowing embers;” “lambent tongues of flame;” “a sky luminous with stars”

Luminous is the word that best describes the Great Vigil of Easter celebrated last year at St. Paul’s, Alexandria, Virginia. It began with the light that radiated from the Paschal Candle to fill worshippers’ hands, dispelling the darkness of the long, sad Holy Saturday.

Into air still ringing with the haunting tones of an ancient chant came the old story, traveling through time and space to greet listeners once again. Five Old Testament lessons and the Gospel reading came to life through texts performed by parishioners who had been studying the texts during the Lenten season.

Embodying the words that had been taken into their hearts and minds, the performers spoke from the balcony, strode down the center aisle, surprising listeners with a new telling of stories about the Creation, the Flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, Isaiah’s promise of salvation, and Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones.

Between each lesson, a narrative thread and short hymn illuminated the connections between the stories. The narrative continued with the baptisms of four new Christians who brought the ancient story into the present.

Still in semidarkness, the Good News of Christ’s resurrection rushed in, enfolding and accentuating all that went before into the one Great Story.

Preparations

The telling of the Great Story began with the vision of the rector, the Rev. Oran E. Warder. He said, “I have a dream of that liturgy [the Great Vigil] being alive with the telling of sacred sto-

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Editorial

Relationships Key To Meeting Needs Of Generation X

As I write it is Advent and the Christian community is preparing to enter the mystery of Christmas, the celebration of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. In these seasons we remember that God became flesh and entered more deeply into relationship with humankind.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry he encountered opposition, injustice, deep questions, and rigid institutions that were out of touch with the lives of everyday people. At no time did he offer quick or easy solutions.

What he invited people to do was very hard: to love those who hated them and to forgive the people who wounded them. To live out this difficult mandate meant that people had to create and sustain relationships with authenticity.

Recently groups of church educators and students, seeking ways to reach out to Generation X (to use a label many of them dislike), came looking for programs and curricula to assist their ministries among this age group. (See story on p. 12.)

They looked at books, teaching resources, and DVDs, hoping to find the magic program that would solve the riddle of reaching young men and women who grew up in latchkey homes, saturated with media, and shaped by popular culture. Nothing seemed sophisticated or “cool” enough to draw a 20-something seeker to the threshold of an adult education class.

Reaching Generation X

Since the mid-90s churches and scholars have been trying to unlock the mystery of reaching the 79 million Gen Xers. Many have simply given up on them.

To be sure, ministries among Generation X are being accomplished creatively and successfully in many congregations. Spirit Garage, in St. Paul, Minnesota, has designed an adult education program that appeals to a range of needs and desires among its urban Gen-X parishioners. They stage classes in places where young adults congregate—coffee shops, restaurants, even a tavern. Their topics resonate with what Gen Xers say they want: plumbing the mysteries of God, coping with suffering and injustice, and forming relationships, among others.

An Episcopal church in New York City discovered that significant numbers of young adults were attending services of Evening Prayer and Eucharist because the church offered a quiet retreat where traditions were still alive and celebrated.

What seems to work is what God initiated at Christmas: relationships with God and others. Rather than do the hard and rewarding work of building relationships, many of us prefer to buy a program that claims it will do the work for us.

Don’t get me wrong. Programs and curricula can be excellent tools to help create and sustain interaction. Generations are too complex, however, to expect a one-size-solves-all resource.

Sometimes I wonder if we hide behind them and avoid building the relationships that form the core of the teaching ministry.

Healing Brokenness

In an article in U.S. Catholic, Dr. Tom Beaudoin, author of Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X recalled that he was asked to name the traits of his generation. Fittingly, he pulled out a Starbucks napkin and composed a list on the spot.

Four of the ten characteristics he wrote down had to do with relationships. All of them were related to brokenness: latchkey experiences, divorce, ambiguities about identity, and suspicion of or indifference to institutions, including the church.

No program or curriculum can heal these wounds. Only authentic relationships grounded in God’s grace will welcome and embrace members of a maligned generation of wonderfully “irreverent” seekers.

—GJK

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Eastertide Gives Youth Time to Explore Faith

The Church Year can sometimes be confusing. The feast days of Christmas and Easter, for example, are clear and coincide with any commercial or religious calendar. But how do we celebrate the seasons following those feasts?

The *Episcopal Curriculum for Youth* leader’s guide “The Episcopal Church Year” was designed to help younger youth who are in middle or junior high school learn about the richness of the Christian calendar and traditions.

Consider tapping into some of the ideas and activities from Session 7 called “Christmas & Easter: Celebrating the Seasons” for church school or youth group in the weeks after the principal feast day of Easter.

Youth will learn about “Eastertide” as a period of time between Easter Sunday and Pentecost. Coming after a long season of soulful preparation, Easter season is in essence an intense extension of the Passover feast.

In the fourth and fifth centuries when most baptism occurred on Easter, the Easter season was a time of instruction about Christian life and being a part of the Church for the newly baptized.

Gospel readings during Easter focus on Christ’s post-Resurrection appearances to his followers. These are important examples of how Christ, though transformed, is still connected with us through his human form and yet one with God through his miraculous ascension. The joy of the season is echoed in *Alleluia*, a word that is ever-present in Easter worship and hymns.

Activities in the curriculum challenge youth to think “outside the box” about celebrating the seasons of Easter and Christmas. Discussion questions will help the youth dig a little deeper into their understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus. How can they be “year-round” Christians celebrating Christ’s resurrection in their lives?

The scripture passage for Session 7 is *Philippians 2:5-11*, in which Paul articulates some of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith. In the Personal Views section of the guide, youth leaders are asked to think about making their faith concrete enough to be comprehensible, yet abstract enough to remain holy.

“Tips on the Topic,” part of every session in the younger youth curriculum, remind leaders that many learners may not be ready developmentally to deal with abstract ideas. Young people can, however, discuss the mystery of faith and understand that all questions may not have answers.

The ECY curriculum provides a variety of activities that offer groups a wide range of choices. The interests and strengths of youth and leaders should guide choices that seem best suited to local time and talents. Activities include games, music, media interaction, art responses, discussion and outreach opportunities within and without the parish.

Each session of the ECY younger youth series is supported by a Session Leaflet. Designed to carry the lesson into the rest of the week, the leaflets include a key verse, youth-written prayer and commentary, related quotes from famous people and daily Bible readings.

To order “The Episcopal Church Year” leaders guide ($11.95) or Session Leaflets ($3.50 per set), contact Morehouse Publishing at 800.877.0012.

—DSL
Ascension Day is observed on the fortieth day after Easter and commemorates Christ's bodily ascent into heaven after the resurrection. The narrative for this amazing event in Acts 1:1-11 says that Jesus “was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.”


The earliest recorded observance of Ascension Day by the Church was in the fourth century. Throughout history the holy day has been celebrated with activities such as processions, blessing of crops and wells, cloud gazing, mountain climbing, picnicking on hilltops, worship, and quiet meditation.

Here are forty suggestions of ways to commemorate Ascension Day in worship, education, and outreach programs for your congregation.

1. Look up the word ascension in a standard dictionary and in a Bible dictionary. Compare the definitions.
3. Compare descriptions of the Ascension in several versions of the Bible. Discuss which words give a clear visual image.
4. Act out the story of the Ascension by role-playing or creating a simple script from the biblical account.
5. Design a presentation about the Ascension, portraying the story in mime or sign language.
6. Make or use simple puppets to share the story with young children.
7. Create Ascension symbols such as clouds, uplifted arms, crown, balloons, sunburst, mountain, disciples, and make a mobile.
8. Construct a screen and figures for a shadow puppet show. Check local library for “how-to” instructions.
9. Fashion a bulletin board display or mural depicting the sequence of events about Jesus and his disciples at the time of the Ascension.
10. Assemble figures and materials for a diorama.
11. Look up "clouds" in a concordance and find other passages that feature clouds as a sign of the presence of God.
12. Finger-paint a picture of clouds with fluffy, whipped soap flakes or shaving foam.
13. Enjoy a "cloud" treat such as pudding with whipped topping or baked meringues.
14. Study a cloud-filled sky or make clouds to hang on the classroom ceiling. Cut two matching clouds, staple around the edges and stuff with newspaper before stapling the open end.
15. Locate a beautiful hilltop setting and plan a picnic for Ascension Day.
16. Fly kites to celebrate the Ascension.
17. Launch helium balloons in a large hall or sanctuary with a vaulted ceiling. Refrain from outdoor balloon launches to avoid harming God’s creatures and to prevent littering.
18. Imagine how the disciples felt when they said “Goodbye” to Jesus. Illustrate with pictures or words what they may have said and done.
19. Consult with a children’s librarian or check the internet for stories about saying goodbye.
20. Write a “goodbye” note or poem to someone who has gone away. The separation may be due to moving, divorce, or death. Allow the writer the option to share the message or to keep it private.

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Ascension Day
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21. Look through the hymnal for songs with the theme of Ascension, King, or Ruler.
22. Compose a “piggyback” song—new words to a familiar tune. Scan children’s songbooks or listen to cassettes for ideas.
23. Look for information about the time between the Resurrection and Pentecost. Check curricula from years past.
24. Research how Christians in other congregations and denominations observe this feast day. Invite someone from another faith tradition to share with the group.
25. Inform participants about mission projects sponsored by the church. Organize a fundraiser or prayer vigil to show support for programs and missionaries.
26. Design a banner or display to emphasize missions, including maps and pictures.
27. Write a paragraph or two for the church newsletter or bulletin explaining the significance of Ascension Day.
28. Write a litany to use in the worship service.
29. Start a small group study on “The Kingdom of God.”
30. Organize a field trip to see artwork featuring representations of the Ascension at local galleries, museums and churches.
31. Devise an acrostic or other word game using words that appear in the scripture.
32. Tell the Ascension story using words that begin with the letters “ASCENSION.”
33. Discuss and list all of the emotions the disciples must have experienced from the celebration of Palm Sunday to the despair of the crucifixion and then the hope of the resurrection. Jesus was with them and then gone again.
34. Explore the Psalms to find passages of hope and assurance.
35. Read Psalm 30 and memorize verse 5b: “Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”
36. Plan activities to help people remember their baptism and to learn about its observance in different faith traditions.
37. Make a commitment to tell at least one person about Jesus and the love of God before Ascension Day next year.
38. Read Matthew 28:16-20 to recall what God expects and promises: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Print the words on a bookmark, key chain, or other item to carry at all times.
39. Assemble a collage of gold paper crowns and other special materials depicting one kind of “kingdom.” Print selected verses along each edge of the collage as a reminder of the “kingdom of God.”
40. Form a contract of ways to share the message of peace and joy. Brainstorm ways to carry out the agreement from day to day.

Lenten Mite Boxes Remind Us to Share God’s Blessings

The tradition of the “mite box” helps parishioners of all ages remember those in need during the season of Lent. The origin of the designation mite comes from the story of the widow’s mite in the King James Version of Luke 21:1-4. (Newer Bible versions refer to the widow’s offering as small, copper coins.)

The word mite came to be used for small gifts, often loose change, that are placed in an alms box in which people deposit money for the poor. These gifts are to be given above and beyond regular offerings given to the church body or congregation.

Today the term “mite box” refers to mission or other special collections as well as for offerings to the poor. The box is a reminder to share blessings from God, to pray for mission projects, and to thank God for opportunities to do mission work.

A church school class, youth group, or entire congregation can select a mission project to support with collections from mite boxes. Even the youngest parishioners can make contributions.

Boxes can be created from materials on hand or purchased from Christian book stores or web sites. The Lutheran Women’s Missionary League provides free mite labels designed to fit around 1.75 oz. snack cans, 16 oz. frosting cans, or 10 oz. baking powder cans.

To get the labels, visit www.lwml.org/catalog/mission_mites.html, select the appropriate size, and download. Print on sticky backed paper and cut along the edges of the design. You can also print the design on regular paper and glue or tape it to the container.

Every time someone drops a coin in the mite box, they are sharing God’s love, mercy and grace with the world.

—DSL
World hunger is a topic that many young people can’t really comprehend. What is it like to go to bed threatened by starvation? Is there anything we can actually do to make a difference?

Two interactive programs are designed to help children and youth grapple with world hunger. Both provide teacher supports and background information about the problem and how young people can be a part of the solution.

30 Hour Famine
Activities that are part of the "30 Hour Famine" event can help older youth discover first hand how to live a life of Christian compassion. The national famine dates are set for February 26-28, 2006 but can be scheduled at any time.

Participants from previous years note that the event can unite youth groups and that the impact lasts long after it is over. For some young people, it is the spark that makes them aware of the needs of others—both in the community or around the globe.

Thousands of groups in more than 20 countries representing over a million teens will work toward the goal of helping children who live in some of the most desperate conditions in the world.

Information about planning a 30 Hour Famine is available at www.30hourfamine.org. Through the website, churches can get materials, free of charge from the sponsoring agency, World Vision. Youth begin working before the local event to raise money to help children throughout the world.

During the event, the group will go 30 hours without food, so they can begin to understand what hunger is like. During this time, they engage in different activities, from community projects to volunteer work to study, depending on the group’s interests and needs.

As with any event involving a fasting period, leaders should use caution. If a young person in the group suffers from an eating disorder, for example, leaders should modify activities to insure that no one is placed at risk.

After the event, money raised by the group is sent to World Vision, which puts it to work in areas like Sudan, Kenya and Pakistan as well as the United States.

Food Force
Younger youth, age 8 to 13, can learn about world hunger through the virtual world of “Food Force,” a humanitarian video game about global hunger produced by the United Nations World Food Programme.

While on the game’s six different missions alongside the “Food Force” teams of emergency aid workers, such as Joe Zaki (see below), players are faced with a number of realistic challenges to quickly feed thousands of people in the fictitious island of Sheylan. They pilot helicopters on reconnaissance missions, negotiate with rebels, and help rebuild villages.

The video game is available as a free internet download in English from www.food-force.com. Versions are available in both PC and MAC. It is a stand-alone game and requires just over 200 megabytes to download. Players can post their high scores on the site.

A “How to Help” section provides ideas about fundraising and community involvement. Each of the six “missions” include background summary papers with facts, definitions and brief explanations about world hunger.

Links are provided for teachers for complete lesson plans at various learning levels. Also included is help in using the game to enrich lessons and reinforce learning.

Based in Rome, the World Food Programme is the world’s largest humanitarian agency. It is active in more than 80 countries, providing food for about 90 million people each year. —DSL

Joe Zaki
Nutritionist
For the first time, they understood the context of the story—what came before and after. They identified with a people in bondage, asking hard questions about the death of the firstborn children and the drowning of the Egyptians.

Conversation around each story continued as the group met and worked together in the months before Easter. Extra work went into the Isaiah scripture to elicit the mood and meaning of the prophet’s message.

Meanwhile, the congregation also prepared for Easter Vigil. On Palm Sunday in adult forum, Beales offered a taste of the event itself, focusing on the Vigil rite in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 333) rather than the texts. During that time, the group lit candles, poured water and engaged in the service in other sensory ways.

When the church gathered for Easter Vigil, the rector’s dream of combining the “telling of sacred stories, the excitement of baptism, and a joyous celebration of resurrection” came true.

The Rev. Rosemary Beales, who is now assistant rector at St. Johns, Ellicott City, Maryland, prepared this article as part of an independent study at Virginia Theological Seminary.

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**Tips for Performing an Easter Vigil**

- **Find a coach.** Ask someone not involved in the production who can be a sounding board to help you design the process and plan the performances.
- **Start early.** Give yourself enough time to take advantage of studying each of the Bible stories in the liturgy.
- **Connect personally.** While email is a useful tool, it is not a substitute for a face-to-face personal invitation to try a new venture.
- **Schedule regular meetings.** Set a time when most participants are available. If you meet on Sundays between services, you may lose some Sunday School teachers and choir members who want to be involved. Other times during the week may bring their own scheduling conflicts.
- **Stay organized.** Write down decisions the group makes immediately after it meets and distribute updated scripts and other information each week. Keep others informed about your progress and reserve meeting space ahead of time.
- **Value the group’s time.** Even when rehearsals get off to a slow start, end promptly unless the group agrees to extend the time.
- **Cue the music.** Keep the music director or organist informed during the process. Provide an outline of the service that includes the last few phrases of each text as a prompt to begin the music.
- **Celebrate the performance!** Plan to get together after the performance to rejoice in its completion. Set aside some time to talk about strengths and weaknesses of the process and what to do “next time.”

—Rosemary Beales
Renew Tired Spirits with Training and Rest

By Elaine Ward

When church school teachers begin to feel burnout, they often start to lose the ability to give or to pray. Instead of staying with the task, perhaps they need to hear Jesus’ invitation in Matthew 11:28 to rest:

“Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Sometimes teachers feel like Elijah who entered the wilderness and sat “under a solitary broom tree,” weary with the task of serving God (I Kings 19:4). God’s angel ministered to Elijah with food and water to restore his body and spirit.

What do teachers need to restore their spirits? Perhaps they need a “spark” to counter burnout and discouragement. Encourage teachers to make time for the following:

- Intentional prayer and worship
- A walk in nature
- Accepting support from others
- Reading the Bible
- Knowing when to say “no”
- Reexamining gifts and ways to share them

Managing Behavior

Sometimes burnout comes from the behavior of some children, especially those who demand attention. Their out-of-control behavior is often contagious in the classroom. Teachers might change this pattern of misbehavior by experimenting with some of the following:

- Clarify rules, expectations and consequences so that children know what to expect
- Affirm positive behavior
- Provide a range of activities that appeal to various learning styles

- Ask for additional adult support to help out in the classroom
- Keep communications with parents open to be aware of events, such as a death or divorce, which often affect children’s behavior
- Pray together as a group: find time for quiet each time the group gathers
- Observe an experienced teacher work with children. Look for techniques that would work in any setting
- Establish trust within the group by giving children choices. Even the simplest choices—blue or green?—give children positive ways to be in control of their situation
- Attend a teacher training event

Taking a Break

Teachers can help each other recognize the signs and symptoms of burnout. Humor, for example, can help individuals get perspective on their tasks and the children they serve. Just talking about a situation with other teachers can be therapeutic.

But sometimes even the most dedicated people who serve God need a break. Just as clergy take sabbaticals for renewal, lay leaders and teachers may also need to take some time off to recharge their spiritual batteries.

Attending a forum series with adults can give teachers a spiritual boost. Even attending worship is refreshing when those pop-up thoughts about church school don’t keep interrupting the flow of the liturgy.

A church school teacher may be the only person in a child’s life to illustrate God’s love and compassion. It is important to protect and nurture this valuable servant of God.
Reflection Helps Youth Find Meaning in Mission Trips

This summer thousands of young people from different denominations and faiths will embark on mission trips within and without the United States. Already youth leaders and ministers are making arrangements for appropriate settings, transportation, room and board.

Danny Hall, a youth minister who is completing his studies in the Virginia Theological Seminary’s Master of Arts in Christian Education/Youth Ministry program, recently took the youth from St. Francis, Greensboro, North Carolina on a mission trip to do construction work in a neighboring state.

Hall found that making the logistical arrangements and scheduling fundraising events to be very challenging. However, he also felt that fundraising “gave the youth an opportunity for teambuilding,” adding that “they also got to see that other people were behind them and supported them in their efforts.”

Although selecting sites, making budgets and raising money are important parts of a mission experience, the more challenging aspect can be laying the spiritual groundwork for both youth and adult sponsors.

Before any planning is done, leaders need a clear concept of the goals and desired outcomes of the mission trip. Is teambuilding for the youth the focus, or would an intergenerational group fit better with parish needs? Is it important to help youth understand different cultures? Is challenging youth’s faith, thinking and values a goal? What is the best way to emphasize God’s call to help others?

In an article in the Fall 2005 Christian Education Journal, Terence D. Linhart, assistant professor of youth ministry at Bethel College in Mishawak, Indiana, argues that mission trips should be centered on what youth can become as a result of their experiences, rather than on gaining knowledge about a particular place and culture (1).

Linhart followed a church group of high school youth who went to Ecuador to do mission work. He discovered that the focus of the trip ended up being the youth’s personal growth, “on what they would do and become because of the trip.”

The group began meeting monthly seven months before the trip praying together and setting behavior standards and spiritual formation practices for themselves. Adults shared information about the culture and staged role plays for youth to engage new ideas. Homework focused on spiritual growth.

The spiritual emphasis continued throughout the preparation period and the trip itself. The purpose of the experience was to develop the youths’ ability to respond to God’s presence in their lives. They were encouraged to seek God’s wisdom and discover what God wanted them to do.

Youth were encouraged to reflect on each activity and encounter through the lens of their own experiences. While this worked well on the trip itself, support from adult leaders after the group returned faded quickly. Youth received only minimal help in transferring their experiences from the trip to their lives and home communities.

Linhart believes that youth leaders should focus more attention on transferring learning from short-term mission trips into the lives of the youth after the trip of over. He concludes, “The disconnect from their own culture, combined with the surreal and experiential nature of the trip, works against effective transfer and integration into students’ lives without continued support and feedback of adult leaders post-trip.” —DSL

By Judy Gattis Smith

What is the best way for a church school class or youth and adult groups to respond when one of their members is ill or in the hospital? One way to involve everyone is making and sending “Get Well” cards.

While the cards might provide moments of cheer for the person who is ill, they can also be times for the group to think more deeply about God and the topic of pain and suffering. How do we decide what cards are to say?

As a group activity, make “dummy” cards with the following four messages. Talk about each card, using the questions provided to start the discussion with the group.

1. Card 1 says, “Wouldn’t it be nice if we could fast forward to better times?” Ask how this might make the recipient feel. The present is the life that the person has to live. Is it of no value or use? Is there any place for suffering in a person’s life?

2. Card 2 says, “Hurry back.” A person with a serious or terminal illness will not be hurrying back and links with the wider world are weakening. Does this expression convey the idea that the group is getting along fine without him or her? Put yourself in the person’s place. Is he or she letting the group down by not hurrying back?

3. Card 3 says, “God wants you to feel better.” This suggests a negative power against the person who is ill. Should the person feel guilty because of the illness? Did the person do something wrong for which he or she is being punished?

4. Card 4 says, “We are praying for you to get well.” What is the place of prayer in sickness? Does this mean that we can tell God what to do? If the person doesn’t get well, is it possible we said the wrong prayer?

Asking Why

The question of the place of pain in life and why people suffer is an ancient one. There are no simple answers. Before we rush in with easy assurances and glib words of comfort, we need to think about the question and how we encounter the Mystery that is God.

As you design this lesson for your class members, keep in mind their age and level of understanding as well as the needs of the one who is ill.

• Suggest that pain and suffering are a part of every life. This may be a new and even frightening thought to those who are healthy. Others may already have experienced pain in their lives. We might say, “We pray that God will strengthen you and use you.” While offering support, we understand that illness is not easy to bear.

• Simple objects can be significant to people who are ill. Consider including a small gift that incorporates the senses: a picture of beauty, something soft to touch, a scented candle to smell, or a music tape to hear. Ask the group to come up with their own ideas.

• Older youth might want to read parts of the Book of Job in the Bible in light of their concern about a friend’s current illness. How are our reactions sometimes like those of Job’s friends? Discuss the responses of the friends.

Even if the making of cards is done as part of a larger activity, be sure that the cards don’t include thoughtless words. The cards should be a way of sharing theology: God is in control. Life is good and we can trust God whatever happens.

With a little planning, cards and gifts can be more than cheerful remembrances. They can be a statement of our faith and belief in a loving and compassionate God.
Older Adults Often Overlooked When Planning Ministries

Senior adults are living longer, staying healthier and remaining more active than earlier generations. While they are aware of the realities of aging, they also expect to lead rich and full lives.

Many parishes need to revamp their impressions and expectations of seniors. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) recently reported that adults 65 years and older represent one out of every eight Americans, over 12 percent of the population. In the future that percentage is going to increase dramatically.

Congregations have a tendency to “free” older parishioners from positions of leaderships and responsibility as a reward for past service. But many seniors look at retirement as a time for continuing education, travel, service and exploring their faith.

Parishes can support members in this stage of life in a variety of ways. They can affirm, empower and engage seniors by helping them explore meaningful ministry and service opportunities.

• Just as we have begun to recognize “coming of age” of youth through programs such as Rite 13, consider blessing those who are entering retirement during a worship service. Include a time of recognition and prayer for help in discerning God’s will in creating a new pattern for living. Celebrate afterwards with a reception.

• Identify people moving into retirement and invite them to meet together in small groups for fellowship and support. Ask seniors who have been retired for some time to talk about their journeys and how they dealt with their new freedom with its joys and anxieties.

• Honor their wisdom and experience by tapping them as mentors for youth, young adults, and first-time parents.

• Engage seniors in leadership and service roles, finding creative ways to use their personal and professional gifts.

• Identify older members who maintain different summer and winter residences. Keep them connected to the congregation by sending them regular emails, letters, and parish newsletters.

• Meet with seniors regularly to identify their needs and to discover how they would like to serve and be served. Don’t make assumptions for them. Recently, an active 90-year-old noted that every person on her regular flower delivery list was younger than she. Her gift of companionship was prized by parishioners of all ages.

For a list of resources for a variety of topics related to older Americans, visit www.aarp.org.

Ideas for this article came from Mim Campbell, associate director for Christian education, children and family ministries for the ELCA in their publication, Seeds for the Parish.

Saving Coins Reminds Parish Of Riches and Needs of Others

Lent can be a time to remind many of us of the privileged lives we lead as Americans. Parishioners at Christ Church, Canon City, Colorado, participated in a project to remind them of this while raising money for a medical ministry in impoverished communities in the Caribbean.

Each week coins were put aside each time families or individuals completed certain activities or actions. The first week, a coin was put aside every time someone opened a refrigerator. The second week, a dime was set aside for every magazine, newspaper or book read.

During the third week, a quarter was given every time someone in the household logged onto a computer or played a video game. The fourth week, participants counted the number of shirts in their closets and contributed a coin for each. At the end of the fourth week, the coins were collected at the church and a check was send to the medical mission.

Parishes designing similar projects might consider scheduling one or more adult forums about the mission area during the collection period. The ingathering could be celebrated during the Easter season.
Curriculum Review

Materials Encourage Theological Reflection Among Young Adults

Since the 17th century, American churches have sought ways to invite teens and young adults into congregations. The problem became acute in the 1920s as more youth attended college, moved away from home, and participated in a revolution in sex and morals not unlike our own times.

But not until after World War II did pundits start labeling generations. The first ones to be tagged were the “Baby Boomers,” although no one seems to know when the term was first applied.

One of the latest generations to be singled out for comment, debate, and commercialization is Generation X. The term, which emerged in the 1960s and popularized in a 1991 novel, has been applied to people born from about 1965 (or 1961) to 1981.

For the past decade, churches have been trying to define them and appeal to their interests. Perhaps the best-known translator of the age group’s complex character is Tom Beaudoin, a Roman Catholic Gen-Xer and doctoral candidate at Boston College whose book Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X is a must-read for anyone working with members of this community.

In a 1999 article for U.S. Catholic, Beaudoin noted seven Gen-X attitudes:

• Popular culture is important.
• Pluralism is a virtue.
• We try to work with what we have, doing more with less.
• Suspicion of institutions can be a good thing.
• Family is redefined as shared commitment, not shared blood, reflected in TV shows such as Friends and Seinfeld that featured ad hoc communities whose members banded together to meet life’s challenges.
• Humility is the center of all ministry and teaching authority. The fall of TV evangelists in the 80s (Gen-X’s formative decade), the successful marriage of mega-church pastors, parishioners, and politicians, and recent church sex scandals have led to diminished religious expectations.
• "Generation-sensitive" ministry is vital.

While all seven attitudes are important, the last point on Beaudoin’s list is particularly relevant for parish teachers. Several church publishers have attempted to reach Generation-X with materials designed to encourage free thinking and engagement in genuine theological reflection.

20/30: Bible Study for Young Adults
Abingdon Press
www.cokesbury.com
800.368.3756

20/30 Bible Study for Young Adults is produced for “post-modern adults who want to participate in and help structure their own discoveries—i.e., life, in relationships, in faith.” The series focuses on key issues such as community, spiritual life and living with life’s demands.

The book in the series that explores the mystery of God helps young adults voice their fascination with God’s “otherness” and to articulate and ground their curiosity in theological expression. Tapping into their commitment to blending faith with action and their identification with suffering are “Service Learning Options” at the close of each of the sessions.

While 20/30 can be lauded for including a range of experiential learning techniques, such as role play, debate and discussion, the curriculum is still largely teacher-directed.

Push It!
United Church Press
www.ucpress.com
800.537.3394

The United Church of Christ bases their Bible Quest series Push It! on Beaudoin’s Virtual Faith. Rather than dictate doctrine, this curriculum invites young adults to “test something’s truth and its relevancy for life.” The authors pay close attention to the “cynicism, irreverence, and attitude that may characterize this push” to know God more deeply and personally.

Borrowing from Beaudoin’s work, they acknowledge that society and the church teach about religious meaning through the media, technology, sciences, and tradition. Suggestions abound for

**Hurt: inside the world of today’s teenagers**

Chap Clark  
Baker Academic, 2004  
www.bakeracademic.com  
Cost: $16.99

*Hurt: inside the world of today’s teenagers* holds up a mirror to high school culture and the problems youth face. It reflects the experiences of author Chap Clark, associate professor of youth, family and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, who spent six months as a participant/observer at a public high school in north Los Angeles County.

The book reveals the loneliness, angst, and pressure high school students feel. By spending time with teens, asking questions and showing concern about their world, Clark was able to uncover their honesty and vulnerabilities.

The author points a finger at a society that he finds to be more adult-centered than concerned about the needs of adolescents. For example, he finds that many sports programs are driven by the desires of adult coaches to win rather than play and enjoyment. Academically, pressure from parents and society to succeed drives teens to isolation, stress, and fears of failure.

Other aspects of teen culture that Clark observes in *Hurt* include peers, family life, sex, ethics, and the party scene. Readers who may be out of touch with teens may find some of his observations shocking.

The strength of the book lies in the author’s observations about the state of today’s teenagers. If the Church is to reach them with the hope of the gospel message, youth leaders must know and understand the world adolescents live in.

Strategies offered by Clark to turn attention to the problems and issues of adolescents are weaker. Adults cannot address the issues Clark raises without the support and involvement of youth themselves.

*Hurt* provides vital insight into teen culture for anyone working or living with youth, including professional and volunteer leaders and parents. It is the first book in the Youth, Family and Culture series that “is dedicated to the preparation and vocational strengthening of those who are committed to the spiritual development of adolescents.”

—DSL

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**Connecting Families with Stories**

What stories do you tell in your family? Which stories about yourself do you share with your household? Storytelling connects family members to each other and helps them understand one another.

Telling about when you first met your partner, or how grandmother grew up on a farm, or what a child’s first sentence was, helps to form and express family identity. When parents tell stories about their own childhood, their children begin to understand that parents were children once. This allows children connect to parents in new ways.

Parents honor their children by encouraging them to tell their own stories. Stories do not need to be analyzed or acted upon to be powerful. But all stories do need good listeners.

Storytelling itself builds community. Sometimes we forget that one of the most important places to build community is in the very households in which we live our daily lives.

—Anne Kitch
The Resurrected Life
Understanding the Meaning of Easter
Office of Communication, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 1999
Distributed by Vision Video
www.visionvideo.com
Cost: $15.99
60 minutes, VHS

The Resurrected Life: Understanding the Meaning of Easter enables people to engage the mystery of the Easter story through stunning images, sound and scholarship. The resource provides reflections on the Easter story in four, 15-minute easy-to-use segments that can be incorporated into a Lenten or Easter program for adults.

The content allows people to reflect on their own experiences and see how those experiences are shaped by the Easter story. Each part opens with a scripture reference that can be used to shape an adult forum or Bible study.

Part one, “Crucifixion,” provides viewers an opportunity to examine life’s experiences and look for God in the deep and dark moments. It emphasizes the suffering that comes before the resurrection that is essential to the Christian faith. The video points to ways that God desires relationships with all people through the experience of Jesus. This, in turn, enable them to explore their own relationships with others and with God.

Part two, “Resurrection,” looks at living with the presence of Christ in daily life and how to live as an Easter People. The segment explores how God’s love enables people to do things that they could not do on their own, such as facing the death of a loved one, fighting poverty and injustice, and loving their neighbor.

Part three, “Transformation,” reflects on how lives can be transformed when they are part of the Christian story. This segment examines how people must give up false-ness and egos in order to live into God’s promises. This part can be used in a discussion about different types of spiritual practices.

Part four, “Reconciliation,” explores the hope that is present for all of humanity through the Easter experience and how Christians can live into the fullness of life. It illustrates God’s intentions for the church and its responsibility to minister to the world. The video encourages viewers to examine the gifts that will enable them to take the Good News into the world together.

—Laura Derkits, Video Specialist, Center for the Ministry of Teaching

Young Adults
Continued from p. 12.

using film, music, and other media to uncover the meaning of scripture and its relevance to life.

Push It! offers a broader range of teaching and learning approaches than 20/30, allowing young adults to direct more of their own group learning and offering more choices for teaching strategies. Serious engagement with biblical text permits participants to dig deep into the narrative to uncover multiple meanings.

—GJK
Episcopal Teacher Wins ACP, Polly Bond Awards

Episcopal Teacher, a quarterly newsletter of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching at Virginia Theological Seminary, was recently honored at the Associated Church Press conference in Nashville as a winner in the Awards 2004: Best of the Christian Press contest.

More than 1,000 entries were received from contemporary Christian and ecumenical publishers throughout the country. In awarding the newsletter third place for Best in Class, the judges noted that the publication provides “in-depth coverage of the subject matter.”

Episcopal Teacher also captured two Polly Bond Awards at the annual Episcopal Communicators conference in Salt Lake City in June. The newsletter received an honorable mention for special achievement in church communications for the Spring, Summer, and Fall 2004 issues.

Judy Gattis Smith, a regular correspondent for Episcopal Teacher, received a Polly Bond Award of Merit for a feature article directed to teachers. The article, “The Challenge for Church’s Teachers: Inspire Reflection, Welcome Uncertainty,” encourages teachers to trust in “the holiness God brings forth—often in our children.”

Episcopal Teacher is edited by Dorothy Linthicum, Amy Gearey Dyer, and George Kroupa. “We are honored to receive awards in general excellence from both the Episcopal Communicators and the Associated Church Press,” said Linthicum. “Recognition like this encourages us to continue our coverage of education in the Episcopal Church with more depth and creativity.”

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During an adult forum one Sunday, we were talking in small groups about what we liked about our church. Some mentioned the music program that enriched our worship, while others talked about the warmth and kindness of parishioners.

Then one woman in the group volunteered that her favorite times at church were at the major holiday services at Christmas and Easter, especially when the church was packed to overflowing. Silence greeted her response.

Another person grumbled about coming to church all year and then not being able to find a seat at either holiday service. But, countered the woman, isn’t it wonderful that God brings us all those people who otherwise wouldn’t be in our church? Again, we responded in silence as we mulled over her question.

Helen Barron, educator and founder of Candle Press, asked these questions just after Easter last year: “What if we did a bit of strategizing for next Easter Day? Could some of us who attend regularly hover at the back of the church—instead of sitting where we usually do—look for visitors, sit next to them, strike up a conversation, welcome them?”

She continued, “What if each of us printed up a few cards with our name and email address to give to visitors we connect with, inviting them to email us with any questions they have? Maybe we could begin an email conversation with them that would yield an opportunity to invite them back.”

If we carried out her suggestions, perhaps we would say with even more enthusiasm: “The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.” —DSL

Welcoming Strangers in Our Midst at Easter

Center for the Ministry of Teaching
Virginia Theological Seminary
3737 Seminary Road
Alexandria VA 22304