Discover Gifts during Pentecost Season

By Anita Sarah Sherman

Pentecost is a perfect time to consider God’s gifts and discover how the Holy Spirit moves in our lives. As we teach children about the first Pentecost, filled with vivid images of tongues of flame and violent winds, we can draw their attention to the present and how God gives each person unique gifts and talents.

Children at Memorial Church of the Prince of Peace, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, celebrated Pentecost last year by looking at the gifts God had given them. During the gathering circle time several Sundays prior to Pentecost, they examined ways that parishioners in the congregation use their gifts at the church.

The project coordinator compiled a list of the various commissions and ministries at the church to help the children see how people used their gifts and talents to serve God in the church, in the community and in the wider world. The ministries were divided into the following categories: service, worship, evangelism, education, pastoral care, and stewardship.

The next step was designing and making a banner to present to our church family on Pentecost Sunday that celebrated the various ministries of the congregation. The goal was to show how the Holy Spirit inspires and helps parishioners to carry out their ministries. “Prince of Peace Episcopal Church: Sharing the Spirit” was selected as the banner theme.

The children created the banner components in the weeks prior to Pentecost. Drawing upon the traditional Pentecost image of fire that depicts the Holy Spirit, children in the fifth and sixth grades cut out orange and yellow felt flames, one for each church ministry. Younger children cut bright yellow ribbons and with assistance wrote the name of each ministry on the ribbon pieces. The youngest members decorated the ribbons with stickers.

Teachers prepared and assembled the letters, the background and the borders on the bright, red felt banner, which was attached to a large, rolling bulletin board.

The banner was actually assembled during the children’s sermon portion of the worship service on Pentecost Sunday to allow the congregation to watch it coming to life. The Rev. Andrew J. Sherman, rector, gave a brief introduc-
Editorial

Teaching Ministries Can Lead to Healing, Deeper Spiritual Life

The “Wrestling with the Big Questions” consultation in Indianapolis (see story, p. 10) reminded me of how important it is to broaden our concept of the role of education in the Episcopal Church. Present at the consultation—and it was a consultation, not a conference—were college and seminary professors, deans, and staff; teachers and chaplains from Episcopal schools; bishops, diocesan staff and resource center directors; and parish Christian education professionals and volunteers. They represented a wide range of educational ministries.

As I heard keynoter Parker Palmer speak, I thought of how difficult it can be for educators in seminaries, colleges, dioceses and congregations to feel that they are partners within “circles of trust,” spaces where people in the church can discover safe havens to express their struggles and insights about questions of life and faith and be heard deeply without fear of judgment.

It is often hard for people in these disciplines to find the opportunity, funding, and time to gather for dialogue and mutual support. As we wrestled with what it means to create trust circles, I discovered anew the rich network of teachers, learners, and administrators who can communicate with each other across institutional lines.

Circles of Trust

During the consultation we were invited into conversation and to listen to one another’s comments, complaints, and joys. People from a variety of educational ministries could be vulnerable, if they chose to do so, and their concerns could be heard with respect.

The format helped us talk with one another and listen, rather than look at each other with suspicion in an atmosphere of competition and mistrust. We discovered passages of cooperation and common experience along the boundaries that often separate institutions of Christian teaching and learning.

Palmer’s book, A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life served as the text for the three days. In it Palmer notes, “My knowledge of the divided life comes from personal experience: I yearn to be whole but dividedness often seems the easier choice.”

This seems to be true not only in our personal lives and in the life of the church, but also in the field of teaching and learning. Competition often seems easier than cooperation and suspicion easier than mutual understanding.

When I served a small congregation, it seemed easier to develop our own educational ministries—and complain about the lack of volunteers and resources—than to reach across institutional lines and pool resources with other parishes and groups. I have often wondered what we could have accomplished if we had done so.

Finding the “hidden wholeness” (a phrase Palmer borrows from Thomas Merton) does not mean finding perfection. Rather, in Palmer’s words, it means “embracing brokenness as an integral part of life. Knowing this gives me hope that human wholeness…is not a utopian dream, if we can use human devastation as a seedbed for new life.”

The Indianapolis consultation acknowledged the existing lines that often divide educators at various levels of the church’s teaching ministry. At the same time it also enabled participants to live into the belief that God’s call to us as education leaders is not a utopian dream, but a vocation that has the potential to help the church embrace its brokenness.

Through the ministry of teaching we can create circles of trust in our churches where healing can happen and where we can plant the seedbed for a new and deeper life in Christ. —GJK
One of the most joyous parts of the *Episcopal Children’s Curriculum* is the fourth unit in the Preschool/Kindergarten Cross Year entitled, “The Church Sings.” The lessons in this unit are a perfect way to welcome spring and celebrate the season of Easter.

Music affects us in many ways. It can make us laugh, weep or dance. It can energize and stir us. It can arouse every kind of feeling and emotion. Music is one of the chief forms of religious expression.

Some of the most powerful music ever composed declares the glory of God, and proclaims the good news of what God has done for all of us in Jesus Christ.

Words of hymns and service music from the hymnal are connected to our personal experience. Moments of joy—such as baptisms, confirmations and weddings—bring to mind the hymns that were sung on those occasions. Similarly, times of sorrow are frequently associated with music.

Although the activities in the guide are designed for preschoolers, they could easily be adapted for children of all ages. Background material in the “Getting Ready” sections of each lesson could be used in planning activities for children, youth and adults for an intergenerational event about music in the church.

In Session 5, for example, the background provides information about Cecil Frances Alexander, who wrote children’s hymns. The songs were intended to help young learners understand phrases in the Apostles’ Creed:

- “All things bright and beautiful” (*The Hymnal 1982*, 405) was related to the words “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” This hymn helps us remember the beauty and wonder of God’s creation.
- There is a green hill far away” (167) was written to explain how Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate” on Good Friday.
- “Once in royal David’s city” (102) interpreted the words, “(I believe) in Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary.”

We sign hymns, psalms, songs, and anthems that represent the rich musical traditions of Christians in many lands and cultures. In very simple ways, the unit can be used to invite young children along with others in the congregation to enter into the musical heritage of our faith.

—DSL

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**Uncover Fresh Ideas In ‘The Church Sings’**

A four-page scheduling calendar is available to help education directors and teachers schedule sessions when they are most appropriate for the Church year. Originally designed for use with the *Episcopal Children’s Curriculum*, the calendar can be used with any curriculum. It allows educators to take into account local church calendars that have different start dates, intergenerational programming, and Sundays when no programming is scheduled.

The calendar can be downloaded from the Virginia Theological Seminary website. Go to www.vts.edu/cmt/overview. Highlight the box that says: “Published by the CMT” and click on *Episcopal Children’s Curriculum*. Look for the section entitled “ECC Scheduling Calendar.” Click again on the words “ECC Calendar” that are in blue boldface. The pdf file can be opened with Adobe acrobat software.

If you do not have access to a computer or cannot download the document, call 703.461.1885 and we will send you a calendar at no charge.
Pentecost Season Is a Time to Rediscover
The Holy Spirit’s Movement in Our Lives

By Judy Gattis Smith

The season of Pentecost is the longest in actual days of all the seasons of the church year. It begins the eighth Sunday after Easter and continues until Advent. In this season we look at God’s presence with us through the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Christian church.

The core story of this season is Acts 2:1-13. It is a story full of sounds and color. After reading this passage, revisit the story using your imagination.

Consider the sounds you might have heard on the Day of Pentecost from the disciples who were huddled together in that house. There might have been sighs for their lost Savior and friend or muffled sobs and mournful moans. Expressions of grief and cold fear were surely there. Perhaps we recognize in ourselves the discouragement, the lack of courage, the grief, the powerlessness these early disciples must have felt.

Then imagine a moment of reverential silence, a perceivable pause like that split second of sheer quiet before the sun bursts over the horizon of a new day.

Suddenly there is a vibration of energy that seems to shake the very walls—a palpable feeling of tremendous energy. The room cannot contain such Power. It explodes and overflows onto the gathered persons outside. From such force a new star could be created, a mountain could rise from the sea or a church could be born.

Annie Dillard (1) writes that we should wear crash helmets and seat belts when we attend church because of the Powerful Energy of the Holy Spirit.

The coming of the Power of the Holy Spirit is what we celebrate at Pentecost along with the beginning of the Christian Church.

Is it possible to invoke such power again? God’s ways are not our ways and God chooses when and where the Holy Spirit will appear. But, in our classrooms we can create an atmosphere that will be receptive to the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Pentecost is not a practical celebration but is poetic, playful, prayerful. It is a day of great joy and festivity. Don’t be afraid of being too lively, too colorful or too joyous.

- Experiment with sounds. Children can be very creative in making their own vocal wind sounds. Where can you incorporate humming into your story or worship service? Where can you augment a verse by the shaking of tambourines or gourds or even the crunching of paper?
- Is there a way you can use kites? Wind, air and spirit make these useless things alive. Kites remind us that by our selves we can do nothing. They remind us to invite the Wind.

Surprised by God

How will God appear this Pentecost and will we recognize the Spirit when it comes? How long has it been since you have been surprised at the direction some class has gone? Have you ever felt that things moved out of your control in some new amazing direction?

To quicken us to the movement of the Spirit around us consider the sense of sight. As well as rushing wind, tongues of fire were also seen at that first Pentecost.

Pentecost is the most colorful of our seasonal celebrations with scarlet, purples and gold. Are there any more glorious colors in combination?

The mythical bird, the phoenix has been called the Fire Bird. It is as large as an eagle and has feathers of gold, red and purple. According to legend every time the phoenix begins to age it gathers twigs of sweet smelling spices and builds a nest on top of a palm tree. Then it settles inside.

At noon when the sun is hottest the bird flaps its great wings. The twigs burst into flame and the phoenix seems to perish in the fire.

But no. After eight days pass, the ashes cool. On the ninth day, in the morning at dawn, the phoenix rises from the ashes with shimmering plumes of scarlet, purple and gold. And on and on and on (according to the legend) this experience repeats

Continued on p. 5.
In the early Christian church the phoenix was the symbol for Christ’s resurrection. How can the church use this interesting metaphor today?

Those of us who have been part of the church for a long time must constantly sift through our old attitudes, prejudices and self-preoccupation for signs of aging. God constantly leads us, nudging us to let go of the old self, to open our eyes to behold the colorful new arising from the ashes.

As in all liturgical celebrations we seek to maintain the traditional core of each season and to remain true to the biblical story we celebrate. But especially at Pentecost we strive for new ways to make the meaning more vivid and exciting. Consider these suggestions:

- Dress your room in rainbow colors or the scarlet, purple and gold of the phoenix.
- Use bells and banners with dangling red streamers.
- Burn candles in all colors and sizes.
- Sing about the Spirit with a hymn from *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*, such as “Ev’ry Time I Feel the Spirit,” p. 114.

If your class session feels dry or empty of meaning, read the story from *Acts 2* and fervently desire the return of the power of Pentecost. During your celebration stop and give thanks for living in a time when the Spirit has been manifested.

Lesser Feasts and Fasts offers a unique insight into the history of the Episcopal Church and traditions of the Anglican Communion. Combining the heritage of Church founders, such as Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer with newer additions, such as Enmegahbowh [emma-gah-beaux] and Florence Li Tim-Oi, provides a lively way to study church history.

Whether preparing to teach a confirmation class of young teens or older adolescents or creating a seasonal study for adults, the stories of these persons can be woven into a vibrant tapestry of learning. Lesser Feasts and Fasts provides for each entry a brief commentary, a collect, and suggested readings from the Bible.

Using the Calendar of the Church Year is another way to inject interest in church history throughout the year. Adult forums and youth Sunday school classes could study several people during the year by selecting dates on or near a particular feast day.

Because people of faith honored in Lesser Feasts and Fasts represent all walks of life, topics such as racism or the role of women can also be viewed through the lens of the lives of these individuals.

Last June, six congregations and the First Nations Committee of the Diocese of Olympia celebrated the feast day of Enmegahbowh, the first Native American ordained to the priesthood by the Episcopal Church.

The Committee developed a liturgical resource for celebrating Enmegahbowh’s life that was used by the churches. The resource packet was later shared with other churches at the diocesan convention.

During churches’ celebrations, participants were divided into Talking Circles and asked to wrestle with the question: “What should it matter that one bowl is dark and the other pale, if each is of good design and services its purpose well?”

The question (that comes from the Hopi Nation) encouraged participants to reflect on the inclusive and exclusive practices of congregations. Participants were challenged to hear and honor each other’s stories within the “Sacred Hoop” that is the Body of Christ.

Enmegahbowh’s Story

Before tackling tough questions, parishioners learned about the life of Enmegahbowh, whose feast day is June 12. He was born into the Rice Lake band of the Ojibwa, north of Lake Ontario, and his name means “one-who-stands-before-his people.”

As an Episcopal deacon, he established a mission at Crow Wing in the mid-1850s that served both whites and Ojibwa. Two of his children later died trying to escape retribution from the Ojibwa who felt he had betrayed them by warning white settlers of an imminent Sioux uprising.

In 1867 Enmegahbowh (also known as John Johnson Enmegahbowh) was ordained to the priesthood. Soon afterward, the United States government removed the Ojibwa to a reservation at White Earth, Minnesota. Although forced to leave behind his home and the graves of his children, he went on to serve the White Earth community as a spiritual leader.

Lesser Feasts and Fasts is published by Church Publishing Incorporated (2003), $23. To purchase a copy visit www.churchpublishing.org or call 800-242-1918.
Well-Led Discussions Help Participants Put Thoughts into Words

By Elaine Ward

We often learn by putting our thoughts into words in the presence of one or more people who listen and respond, and by listening to what others are saying. We call that give and take discussion.

Through diversity of opinions and ideas in discussion we receive new information and insights. We learn to know one another and establish new relationships with God, creation, and the church.

All church teachers and leaders lead discussions at some point in their ministry. To lead effective discussions keep in mind the following:

1. Before beginning a discussion suggest group rules, such as
   - Privacy and silence will always be respected; not speaking is an option
   - Ideas, not persons, may be questioned
   - There are no “dumb” responses or questions
   - Only one person speaks at a time

2. Affirm responses. The first words heard after someone offers a comment is “Thank you.” Affirmation does not necessarily mean approval.

3. Encourage everyone to speak; avoid having one or two people monopolize the conversation.

4. Remind participants to speak to the entire group rather than to the leader only. When leaders ask questions and actively listen, their leadership is more likely to be regarded as affirmative as opposed to authoritarian.

5. Allow enough time for each question, even if it means you will not have time to discuss all that is planned. Some questions will continue to be explored after class, so indicate your availability if anyone wishes to talk to you.

6. Affirm silence by not moving on too quickly to another question or making a comment. Count to ten silently if you are not accustomed to waiting. If there is absolutely no response, rephrase the question or go on to the next.

7. Place chairs in a circle if possible. If the group is too large to allow time for everyone to speak, divide into smaller groups and have a facilitator present in each.

8. Introduce the discussion by:
   - Asking a question
   - Reading from a book or magazine
   - Listening to a recording
   - Showing a short film of portion of one
   - Displaying a picture
   - Presenting a skit or role play
   - Telling an appropriate story
   - Reading from the Bible
   - Interviewing an “expert”
   - Using guided meditation

9. Be comfortable with the response, “I do not know, but some people think. . .” or “the Church teaches. . .” or “the Bible says. . .” Affirm the question and questioner with “Let’s think and pray about that point together.”

10. If the discussion centers on a biblical passage, spend part of the time relating it to the lives of the participants.

11. Remember that reality is more than facts and figures. In discussing mystery affirm and encourage faith imagination. By establishing an atmosphere of trust and acceptance we can ask questions and ponder our ideas in praise and thanksgiving to God who inspires good thoughts and actions.
Adapting Lesson Plans for Different Ages Is a Challenging and Rewarding Process

By Phyllis Wezeman

Learning doesn’t occur in a simple, straightforward way. It is a layering process that happens over time. Lessons may be visited and revisited with slightly different emphases and tasks, teaching the same story but in a different way and on a different level. Adapting content to various age groups is a challenge, but with practice an educator can “remodel” any lesson plan to fit the needs of all learners.

There are a few basic rules to keep in mind when adjusting plans to fit age groups:
1. Determine any prior knowledge that students may need to know to participate.
2. Begin with what is known and familiar and build a bridge to new ideas and concepts.
3. Move from concrete to abstract concepts.
4. Use a variety of approaches that incorporate different ways of learning.

Use the guidelines suggested above to adapt lessons whether planning for preschoolers or senior high youth. Ideas about teaching the Lord’s Prayer to several age groups illustrate these concepts.

Preschool

Preschoolers raised in the church probably have some familiarity with the concept of prayer, but may not know the words to the Lord’s Prayer. They are not readers, not able to color in the lines, nor are they ready to do activities requiring fine motor skills.

However, they should know about prayer. A preschool lesson might be about talking to God and that Jesus gave us special words to show us how to pray. To help them learn the words, use music. Set the words to a simple tune or look for the prayer in a children’s hymnal. Visit www.kidssundayschool.com/Gradeschool/Songs/ for a children’s song (1song05) of the Lord’s Prayer.

Early Elementary

Early elementary children will recognize that Christians often say the words of the Lord’s Prayer individually and collectively. Reading abilities vary widely in this age group, and so may fine motor skills. Students of this age are now more able to follow rules and work and play together.

They enjoy rhythm and interactive stories where everyone shares the experience. An early elementary lesson might be to create a rebus prayer, substituting pictures for key words. Invite learners to suggest simple pictures to represent specific words, and then make a large display including both the words and the children’s symbols. Use the chart to say the prayer together, letting the children take turns pointing to or holding up the picture symbols.

Upper Elementary

Most upper elementary students have had opportunities to learn the Lord’s Prayer in worship services, home devotions, and class-room situations. Most will be able to read and use language competently and are eager to explore varied interests. They enjoy working in teams and are generally open to new experiences.

An upper elementary lesson might be designed to prepare participants to understand the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer well enough to explain each phrase. Have partners read segments of the prayer from the Bible (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4). Assign each team one petition to discuss, design and illustrate for a mural section.

Talk about each petition as you put the sections together. Display the mural in a hallway or on a bulletin board so that everyone can view the prayer and its interpretation.

Middle School

Middle school youth should be aware of the Lord’s Prayer, but may not be willing to admit it. Their preoccupation with their own personal worlds can be challenging. They like to giggle...
and goof around but are also capable of insight and involvement, especially when they can make meaningful contributions to group projects.

A middle school lesson might be to learn new arrangements for performing a musical version of the Lord’s Prayer. Play various recorded performances of both traditional and non-traditional versions of the prayer. Find a contemporary arrangement and involve the youth in practicing and performing their rendition of the prayer that Jesus prayed.

High School
High School youth will vary in their appreciation for and use of prayer. They have little interest in information that is not related to their own lives. Challenge teens to put meaning in prayer by finding ways to make Jesus’ words come alive.

Brainstorm methods they could use to help God provide someone’s “daily bread” by gathering canned goods for a food pantry or serving homeless people at a soup kitchen.

They could also be actively involved in bringing the healing of forgiveness to others or offering strength in times of temptation. The goal for them would be to make the Lord’s Prayer a part of their daily lives.

Adults
Because many adults have said the Lord’s Prayer so often, they may have lost sight of its meaning. After saying the prayer together, break into small groups of four to six adults and give each group a phrase or section of the prayer to study and discuss.

Provide questions for each group to answer, such as: What do the words or phrase address? Do these words have a special meaning to me? How can we apply these words to our lives?

After about 20 minutes, bring the participants back together and ask each group to share their discoveries or insights about the prayer.

Sharing Bible Stories Together

The Bible is full of riveting stories bursting with adventure, love, daring deeds and miracles. We can get so used to hearing scripture read reverently in church that we often fail to hear or perceive the drama in it.

Sharing Bible stories with your children can be great fun. Try the story of St. Paul, when he was still known as Saul, being knocked off his feet and blinded by the light (Acts 9:1-22). How about when the Aramean general Naaman learns humility in order to be healed (II Kings 5:1-19)?

There are many Bible story books with beautiful illustrations, but you can also read stories straight from Holy Scripture. After all, these stories were told again and again before they were ever written down.

Knowing Bible stories helps us to know our story—the story of being the people of God, beloved, precious and saved. —Anne Kitch

Note: The item above is a regular feature in Episcopal Teacher targeted for families. Feel free to download (www.vts.edu/cmt/overview) or photocopy for church newsletters or bulletins.
Educators Meet to Grapple With the ‘Big Questions’

By Sharon Ely Pearson

Over 300 Episcopalians from 71 dioceses representing all nine Provinces, gathered in Indianapolis in January to begin addressing the “big questions” about theological education in the Episcopal Church. The consultation brought together various stakeholders in the Church who have a passion for Christian education and formation for all ages: bishops, seminary deans and faculty, diocesan and parish Christian educators, clergy, and youth leaders, among others.

Parker Palmer, author of *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life,* facilitated conversations across these varied disciplines, forging new relationships and collaborations for strengthening theological education for all ages in the church and the world.

The big question put before those gathered was, “How are congregations, clergy, Christian educators, seminaries and others involved in theological education called to help people in our congregations and communities engage in the big questions of their lives?” The Rev. Juanita Palmerhall from the Diocese of Minnesota served as the “conference weaver” blending stories about how Christian formation at its best is lived out in community and faithfulness.

Participants met in small groups of 8-12 people, each group representing a microcosm of educational leadership in the Episcopal Church. Following Dr. Palmer’s model of “circles of trust” the groups engaged in personal story-sharing and reflection on poetry and scripture that focused on:

- Learning to live the Christian faith
- Embracing questions, challenges, doubts and diversity: hospitality in teaching and learning
- Looking to the stranger as spiritual guide
- Finding abundance in leadership for community

The discussions of each small group for each topic were summarized and collected. Some of the small group recommendations included the need and desire to:

- Move from a program-based ministry to one that emphasizes building relationships
- Use more personal storytelling in formational ministry
- Train all levels of leadership (diocesan, seminary, parish) by creating circles of trust, safety and listening skills
- Embrace intergenerational learning and multi-cultural diversity
- Build more collaboration between theological schools and congregations
- Develop communities of discernment at all levels for all ages
- Develop a common language of formation and education shared by seminaries, dioceses and congregations
- Respect the gifts and ministry of all the baptized
- Break down the barriers of clericalism and empower laity for ministry
- Reclaim the importance of life-long Christian formation
- Reclaim our identity as followers of Christ and proclaim the Gospel in our churches and the world

Information collected at the consultation was given to the Office of Ministry Development and the Episcopal Council for Christian Education (ECCE). It was also forwarded to a national group, Proclaiming Education for All (PEALL), which is charged with studying and making recommendations about theological education in the church in 2009. PEALL will make its first report at the 2006 General Convention in June.

Resources from the consultation along with a compilation of the find-
ings is available at www.TEforAll.org/news.html, the website for Theological Education for All, part of the Office of Ministry Development at the Episcopal Church Center.

The ultimate goal of the consultation is ongoing: to equip the church on the national, diocesan and local level to fully attend to the formational needs of those who come to the Episcopal Church seeking God and a fuller knowledge of our call to live out our lives as God desires. As we wrestle with the big questions we learn to love God with our mind as well as our heart and soul.

Sharon Ely Pearson, Children’s Ministries & Christian Education Coordinator for the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut, is a member of ECCE and was on the planning team for the Indianapolis consultation.

Prior to the Indianapolis gathering people throughout the Episcopal Church met to discuss the “big questions” that pull at the hearts of people seeking answers from their faith communities. After identifying the top questions, they explored how their faith, church, and the Bible helped them look for answers.

Questions raised by children focused on their immediate surroundings: Why doesn’t God help my Mommy get better? Why are there bullies at school? What is heaven like? Why am I lonely? Why do I do wrong things? Who made me?

Adults throughout the country asked: What is the purpose of life in this world and the next? Why am I here? Does God really exist and listen to each of us? Why does evil, violence, personal suffering and worldwide discord exist? Why did God create such imperfect humans?

While adults seem to be comfortable going to friends and family for help, they also long for spiritual relationships and communities were they can explore and question their faith. Children were more open to asking questions after a story, often expressing their thoughts through art responses.

The format used in these meetings around the country can be modified for parish retreats and intergenerational events. Dealing with the big questions can keep parishioners thinking, talking and listening from their hearts and deepest yearnings.

To learn more about wrestling with “big questions” during a retreat at your parish, contact Sharon Ely Pearson at 860-233-4481x126 or spearson@ctdiocese.org.

Wrestle with Questions
At Parish Gathering

The National Association for Episcopal Christian Education Directors (NAECED) recently held their Annual Meeting in conjunction with the Association of Presbyterian Christian Educators in St. Louis. In addition to attending a wide range of workshops, members elected officers and conducted other business.

NAECED’s next annual conference will be January 25-28, 2007. NAECED provides members with professional support, networking, resources, and leadership development.

Officers:
President: Tracey Herzer
Vice President: Judy Kane
Secretary: Polly Redd
Treasurer/Membership: Laurie Bailey
Board members: Carolyn Chilton, Sharon Pearson, Beth Hammond, Missy Morain, Susan MacDonald, Melissa Neofes-Mishchak, Sally Benfield, Howard Anderson, and Kate Gillooly

To learn more about the organization, visit www.naeced.org.
Youth today can participate in congregations in many different ways. They can provide leadership during worship as lay readers and chalice bearers. Those skilled in music can enhance worship by singing in a choir or playing an instrument or in a bell choir.

Others can support missions activities by collecting and serving food to those in need or joining a work group to build or repair housing for the homeless. To many youth, service opportunities provide the main connection to the church community. In short, they are prime candidates for discipleship in the church.

Churches that give youth the opportunity to serve others and assume real responsibility foster leadership skills that can help youth in all their endeavors. Almost every young person has some leadership ability. It might be used in a way that is highly visible, or it might be behind the scenes. Just as Jesus trained his disciples for different leadership roles, we need to help our youth find their leadership niches.

**Energy and Leadership**

Many youth connect with younger children in unique and powerful ways. Churches have recognized this, but too often have responded by using them only as babysitters. What if we found a way to plug into their energy and leadership abilities in programs like Vacation Bible School (VBS)?

The Bible knowledge and faith development youth have experienced through Sunday school, youth group, and confirmation take on new meaning when applied in teaching situations. As teachers, youth learn to speak about their faith and what it means to be a role model.

Long after Vacation Bible School is over, youth will continue to interact with the children they have led. Younger children will be watching them and learning how they can grow as Christians.

**Involve Youth Early**

Start by inviting youth to participate in VBS in the planning stages. Find out their gifts and interests. Instead of assigning tasks that need to be done (or that no one else wants to do), work creatively with the youth in matching their interests to specific tasks.

Some who are interested in drama may want to be responsible for telling or acting out the story each day. Others may enjoy preparing snacks that complement each day’s theme. Other youth may want to plan games or design a creative craft.

Assign mentors to work with the youth who can appreciate and support their leadership. Consider training adults who are working with the youth to help them be more effective in their roles as mentors. Although it can be difficult, sometimes youth may need to face the natural consequences of failures.

Giving youth leadership roles changes the dynamics of relationships between youth and the adults who work with them. They meet as equals, both responsive and open to ideas the other expresses. Youth learn from their experience and improve their leadership skills when they feel supported in their work.

A Virginia congregation invited a college student to coordinate VBS one summer. Having just left the church, the student had many connections among youth still active in the parish. The result was a success for the program and the youth.

Training youth as leaders encourages them to stay involved in a congregation. The congregation not only gains new leadership, but also new ways of exploring faith together. —DSL
The materials are divided into the following age levels: early childhood (prek), primary (grades 1-2), middler (grades 3-5), and junior (grades 6-8). A music CD is included.

**Strengths:**
- Emphasizes a loving God
- Is creative and theologically sound
- Provides brief Bible backgrounds for lessons
- Is easy-to-use
- Includes an opening and closing worship with liturgy and Bible drama that match daily themes
- Provides simple and lively songs
- Uses sign language to help learners memorize Bible passages
- Offers separate preschool/kindergarten format
- Offers a variety of formats and settings
- Provides mission opportunities at the offertory during worship

**Weaknesses**
- Snack ideas not included
- Game ideas not included

—Lori Daniels, Curriculum Specialist, Center for the Ministry of Teaching
audience. The activities can be adapted for a children’s program, but are probably best suited for older elementary and middle school youth. The basic package includes a music CD to use at the teacher’s discretion.

Strengths
- Explores biblical commands related to mission: sharing the good news, hospitality, prayer, generosity and service
- Teaches geography, history and culture of the five states
- Uses simple mission songs
- Provides one, easy-to-use guide
- Offers option of adult class

Weaknesses
- Requires creative efforts to set up the Dock, the five boats and their stations
- Uses Presbyterian locations; other denominations may need to modify programs to include their own mission work.

Good Life
Continued from p. 13.

Strengths
- Emphasizes a loving God
- Is creative and theologically sound
- Provides simple and lively music
- Created for children or intergenerational groups
- Designed for Vacation Bible School, camps, midweek school, or as a confirmation supplement
- Teaches positive life lessons based on living simply
- Provides upbeat and entertaining drama

Weaknesses
- Geared toward older elementary children
- Snack ideas not included
- Craft ideas not included
- Requires considerable preparation by teachers
- Indoor games not particularly active

—Lori Daniels

Journey into the
Hush Arbor:
Living in the
Imagination of God
Abingdon Press
800.672.1789
www.cokesbury.com
Cost: $52

A unique resource, Hush Arbor combines concepts from the African-American heritage with biblical concepts of journey, freedom and hope. Materials can be used in traditional age groupings or an intergenerational program, in either traditional age groupings or a rotation format. Included are two music CDs featuring spirituals and hip-hop artist Ricky B.

Strengths
- Materials are clear, complete and well-organized and contained in one 3-ring notebook
- Stories inspire faith and hope
- Lively mix of Bible stories, African proverbs, music, snacks and crafts

Weaknesses
- African-American focus may limit its use, although themes and activities are universal

—Mary Jo Detweiler

Website: www.vts.edu/cmt/overview

Online Reviews
Visit the Virginia Theological Seminary website for reviews of more than 20 Vacation Bible School resources. Included in the reviews are many of the latest curricula for 2006 along with old favorites from the past.

Go to www.vts.edu/cmt/overview to read the reviews. Look for the VBS information on the opening page, which can be read or downloaded with Adobe software in a pdf format.
The recent hurricanes that devastated the Gulf Coast and the subsequent relief efforts to rebuild affected areas continue to be a priority of many mission efforts in churches across the country. Individuals and groups have gathered supplies, contributed money, and traveled to the Gulf to help residents rebuild homes, churches and schools.

In an ongoing commitment to the work of caring for the environment, many congregations also do something to build awareness around Earth Day, usually during the week of April 23. A resource for Earth Day Sunday 2006 from the National Council of Churches (NCC) Eco-Justice group focuses on the damage by the hurricanes and rebuilding “just communities.”

### Costliest Natural Disaster

The background materials note that the damage to the coastal regions of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama made Hurricane Katrina the costliest natural disaster in the history of the United States. “As the storm surge breached the levee system that protected New Orleans and flooded 80 percent of that city, illusions about poverty, race, and environmental issues were shattered.”

While the wind and waters battered the Gulf States, the nation was reminded of its dependence on God’s creation and how our actions have weakened the environment. Coastal marshes, which trap floodwaters and filter out pollutants, have been disappearing nationwide. The natural coastal barriers on the Gulf have almost been destroyed through erosion and industrial use.

In addition, the Gospel message to the church calls for us to champion the rights of the powerless as communities are recovered and rebuilt. While the hurricanes damage extended to all classes and races, communities of color and those with low income populations have born a larger brunt of the storms’ impact.

### Christian Response

In a section about the Christian response to the hurricane aftermath is a list of actions to be taken by individuals and congregations. For example, individuals could reduce the need for oil by driving less, carpooling, using public transit, and operating a vehicle that gets high fuel economy.

The resource is available for download from the NCC website at [www.nccecojustice.org](http://www.nccecojustice.org). In addition to background information, it includes a bulletin insert with Prayers for the People, sermon notes, links to additional resources, and questions and activities for group study and reflection.

The materials also have a section that focuses on youth that could be used during Sunday school or youth group meetings. Scripture passages that deal with justice and caring for God’s world are provided with follow-up questions for further discussion, in addition to other activities. —DSL

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Finding and Keeping Good Teachers

As the program year begins to wind down, it’s hard not to start thinking about next year. What programs will be offered in Christian education? How many children and youth will be in Sunday school? Do we have adequate and safe space for all ages? Who will teach?

Answering the last question can bring anxiety to the most organized Christian education leader. How can we change this transition time from uneasiness to joyous expectation?

Begin by personally thanking each person who has taught or worked in any way in the Sunday school or Christian education program. Write a letter that shows you know about the time and effort the person put into the job. Include an anecdote involving that person, if appropriate. This is one time when an old-fashioned letter is more effective than email.

In the letter, ask teachers and other volunteers if they plan to teach or support the program in the coming year. Also ask them to identify others in the congregation who have gifts to contribute to Christian formation programs.

During social and other intergenerational events, observe parishioners who relate well with others. Is there a young person who gravitates to preschoolers? Does an adult enjoy talking to a group of middle school youth?

Working with clergy and a Christian education committee or ad hoc group, identify those in the congregation who might serve as potential teachers or formation leaders. Together compose a letter from clergy inviting parishioners, that the group has identified, to use their gifts for Christian education.

The invitation letter should be specific: describe leadership skills that have been observed and outline the task that the person is being asked to do. Tell each person that you are praying for them as they discern the request. About ten days after sending the letters, follow up with telephone calls.

Teaching all ages requires skill, creativity and enthusiasm. The same qualities should be used to identify new leadership for Christian formation ministries.

—DSL