



**Episcopal
Relief & Development**

Healing a hurting world

**The Abundant Life Garden Project:
A Program for Children of the Episcopal Church**

Appendix B
Teaching Tips

Copyright 2011 Episcopal Relief & Development. All rights reserved.

A license to print, reproduce, and share these materials is given to those individuals and organizations who wish to use these materials to engage others with the work and mission of Episcopal Relief & Development in healing a hurting world.

An Invitation to Share and Learn

What should I do when children begin arriving?

Hospitality is a key element of the Christian life. Be sure to smile and joyfully greet each child (and her or his accompanying parent or caregiver). Then offer the child a place at the drawing table and a variety of colored pens, crayons or markers. Ask him or her to draw pictures that come to mind in response to the question of the day (e.g., “What does water do for us?”).

Be sure to introduce the children to each other and to any adult or youth helpers. Make sure everyone feels included. Some children will want to chat while they work—that’s good! They are getting to know each other. Other, quieter children may want to work silently. That’s okay, too!

What’s the purpose of this time?

The purpose of the Invitation to Share and Learn activity is to give learners a chance to transition into the time and space of this program. Children often need to “get the wiggles out” and leave behind for a brief time the activities and stresses of their lives outside the classroom or gathering space.

Giving children some time for free drawing will do three things:

- » Provide a comfortable and quiet activity to do as soon as they arrive
- » Begin to engage them in the focus of the day’s program
- » Allow them to settle into the space and time and perhaps get to know others taking part in the activity in an easy, comfortable way

Is there a time limit on this?

No. After all children who are expected have arrived, you will ask them to leave their work until after group time. Assure them that if they have not finished this work, they may return to it after you have had storytelling and prayer time.

What do you mean by “large blank writing material”?

It depends on your space and what you have available. One idea is to use a large roll of plain white butcher paper and tape it to the surface of a low children’s table. You could also use poster board, pieces of typing paper, paper from your recycling bin or any other blank writing service. A chalkboard, a dry erase board, or even a large piece of fabric might do, too. If you don’t have a suitable table, try using fairly sturdy paper or poster board sheets on the floor.

An Invitation to Share and Learn

The point is for children to have a blank surface on which they can freely draw their ideas. There are no “right” pictures for this work—children should be encouraged to draw any of the myriad of ideas that might pop into their heads.

Should I save this work?

Yes! If you use a “permanent” material, such as paper or fabric, consider saving the drawings made by the children and displaying them on a bulletin board or even in your church’s worship space. This may not be “polished” art, but you might be amazed at the profound and deep thoughts reflected.

Litany of Thanks and Meditative Moments

What is the purpose of this section of the lesson plan?

This section is the heart of The Abundant Life Garden Project. In this time, you will present to the children the concepts, images and important points that form the core of the lesson. This section also serves as the main worship and prayer component of the program.

How do I transition from the Invitation to Share and Learn portion of the program to this segment?

» **Ask the children to form a circle.**

When all expected children have arrived, ask them to come join you by sitting in a circle on the floor. We recommend that you sit on the floor with the children as an equal participant in the worship experience. (Making sure everyone can see everyone else often helps focus children's attention better, as well.) Chairs are not recommended; this is a worship experience, not school!

» **Welcome the children to your program.**

Welcome the children to the program. You might tell them you are glad they are here and you are looking forward to exploring The Abundant Life Garden Project with them. Give the children a brief overview, telling them that you will be exploring the basic gifts of water, seeds, soil, animals and harvest and also the needs that people all over the world have for these gifts.

» **Begin with the prayer in your lesson plan for the day.**

At this point, simply read the prayer in your lesson plan. If you know the names of children in your program or name tags are used, you might pray individually for each child, youth and adult in attendance.

» **Continue with the Litany and Meditative Moments**

Continue with the litany and the Meditative Moments for the day. Just follow the lesson plan provided.

Litany of Thanks and Meditative Moments

Using the Litany with Children

Why use a litany instead of a lesson?

- » **The litany encompasses many images and concepts.**

A number of Bible stories and concepts are related to the key images of water, seeds, soil, animals and harvest explored in this curriculum. The children in your program may or may not have heard of these stories and concepts.

For children familiar with this information, the litany will recall key elements and images. For those unfamiliar with the stories and concepts, the “Reflecting and Engaging” activities may be used to introduce certain elements of the litany. In any case, the experience may spark new perspectives and interest in key elements of the Bible and of our faith journeys.

- » **It is a timeless teaching tool, well suited for today.**

We want to make this program as easy to use as possible for the average teacher, volunteer leader or Christian educator. We understand that some leaders of this program will be accomplished storytellers and teachers, while others might not feel comfortable if asked to tell a story or teach a lesson in front of a group of children. By providing a litany written specifically for this program, we provide you with precisely the words and key concepts needed to lead children in exploring how to address the basic needs of human beings worldwide.

We Episcopalians are a liturgical people. Liturgies, such as litanies, have long been used in the Anglican and early Christian church to recall and remember key concepts to guide us in the Christian faith. By using a litany to “teach,” we also introduce children to the rich liturgical history of our church and let them participate in it. This element of the program makes it distinctly Episcopalian and different from other resources you might find in your local Christian bookstore.

How do I use the litany?

One or more adults, youth or children who read well and clearly might take turns reading the main lines of the litany for each session. The response of the children will be the same after each line spoken by the reader. Even young children will be able to participate.

Before beginning the litany portion of the lesson, the leader might give some brief instruction, such as, “I will read a line of our prayer, and you will all respond with ‘We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water.’ Let’s practice that a couple of times.”

Litany of Thanks and Meditative Moments

Be sure to read slowly and clearly. Don't rush. Remember that when reading prayers or scripture in public, we tend to speak more quickly than we realize! Savor each word and enjoy the imagery of the words as you speak them.

Look up, nod or give some other cue to the children for their response. You will likely find that they will listen fairly attentively to you, waiting for their turn to participate.

Where should I stand or sit?

We recommend that you remain in a circle for this portion of the lesson. Feel free to remain seated, or if you feel that children need a chance to stretch their legs after the initial prayers and welcome, you might ask everyone to stand (while staying in the circle).

What if the children make noise or otherwise misbehave?

You will likely find that if children actively participate in the litany and are seated in a circle where everyone can see each other, behavior problems should be minimal. However, if a child is noisy or wiggly, an adult volunteer (NOT the leader) can try gently patting the child's shoulder or whispering, "Let's listen!"

If a child is very disruptive, an adult volunteer (again, NOT the leader) might ask the child to sit outside the circle until he or she is ready to participate and listen.

Meditative Moments

Children sitting in meditation? Really?

Absolutely. Even children as young as 3 are capable of sitting in silence for a minute or more.

Serving as a role model and "setting the tone" are imperative. If you are calm and peaceful, the children you lead are more likely to be calm and peaceful, too.

Is this something new?

No. The practice of silent meditation has been a part of Christianity since its inception. Many saints of the church both practiced and encouraged silent meditation as part of a spiritual discipline.

Litany of Thanks and Meditative Moments

Renewed interest in meditation began in the 1970's, as Roman Catholic monk Thomas Keating wrote of "centering prayer" or "contemplative prayer" and encouraged use of this spiritual discipline. This type of meditation has long been part of Anglican tradition, and many Episcopal parishes now offer groups or programs to guide parishioners in contemplative prayer.

Sophia Cavalletti, developer of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and Jerome Berryman, developer of Godly Play®, have written extensively about the natural abilities of children to listen and wonder about God in silence. In many ways, children are able to contemplate God better than the rest of us!

How do I lead children in meditation?

- » The Meditative Moments will flow naturally from the Litany of Thanks. If children in your group have stood up for the Litany of Thanks, you might ask them to sit down in the circle again.
- » You might light a candle or use a picture of Jesus or some other religious image for children to use as a focal point.
- » You might introduce this technique by asking the children to "see how long they can remain silent." You might ring a small bell or use a chime to signal time to begin.
- » Ask the children to take three deep breaths and close their eyes.
- » Then, ask the children to listen to God in silence. Ask the questions suggested in your lesson plan, then remain absolutely silent and peaceful. Keep your eyes on the focal point or candle to model this technique.
- » If a child is squirmy or talks or whispers, try gently and silently placing a hand on the child's shoulder to signal the need for silent and stillness. This gesture, along with peer pressure, usually addresses the problem.
- » Don't worry about a few whispers, utterances, or squirms. If the children are silent even for a few moments, you have successfully introduced this technique.
- » An ambitious amount of time for children trying this technique for the first time would be one minute at most. Three minutes likely is the longest amount of time you should try. You might use the second hand of a watch to gauge the time. You could also use a small hourglass filled with sand and "set" for one minute.
- » If you rang a bell or chime to signal the beginning of the meditation, ring it again to signal the end of the meditation and time for children to express any thoughts they wish to share.

Engaging and Reflecting

What is the purpose of this part of the lesson plan?

The purpose of this segment is to let children personally reflect on the concepts presented to them in the Litany of Thanks and Story from the Field, “process” these concepts, and make them their own. Another purpose is also for children to think about what they might do in response to the lesson—a very important part of this program.

How do I get ready for this part of the lesson?

Advance preparation is imperative! Although this is a very user-friendly program, some preparation of materials is required. You will need to set up a child-friendly and safe place to work, complete with simple, ready-to-use materials.

You might compare preparing for this program to hosting a dinner party. In order to show hospitality, you need to get ready and have all food and supplies available when your guests arrive. To prepare for a class, you likewise want to be ready to welcome and receive children into your program and work with them as soon as they arrive.

You also might find that your class will run much more smoothly and that children will be more pleasant to work with if your space is well prepared in advance. If you become distracted or stressed from running around for supplies at the last minute, the children will sense this and may react negatively.

Do all the children have to do the same thing at the same time?

No. In fact, children are encouraged to choose an activity and work on it at their own pace. All of us learn in different ways and at different speeds. The activities provided allow children flexibility in working with the materials presented.

How are these activities organized?

We recommend that you provide a “learning center” for the participants. Set up a separate space for each activity, such as one learning station for the Old Testament lesson, equipped with a Bible, paper, and colored pencils, and similar stations for the New Testament, Book of Common Prayer and Story from the Field lessons.

Four lesson sheets are included at the end of each module of this program. The lesson sheets may be as simple or elaborate as you wish. You can just print out and copy the brief text provided

Engaging and Reflecting

for each lesson and use as is. If you wish, you can mount the text on cardboard or heavy paper stock and have the children draw on or decorate the cards. Feel free to use photos cut from the Episcopal Relief & Development Gifts for Life catalog (www.er-d.org/GiftsforLife/) or photo gallery (www.er-d.org/PhotoGalleries/). If time allows, you might ask the children to make the lesson sheet themselves.

After the group worship time, children should be asked to choose one of the lesson sheets. You can hand out the sheets directly or have them available at each station. Each sheet provides clear instructions on a short Bible study or lesson for a child to work on individually or in a small group.

Younger children will need an adult or youth helper to read the Bible, BCP passage or Story from the Field and discuss the passage with them. Children may then continue the lesson on their own by drawing a picture or making another creative response. Older participants who read well will be able to work on the activities by themselves. Many children will elect to work in small groups with friends their own age.

Won't this be chaotic?

You might be surprised! Children tend to behave very well if they have some choice in their activity and can work at their own pace. If a child takes a few minutes to choose an activity, don't fret! Give him or her a little space to decide before suggesting an activity.

If a child does misbehave, ask her or him to "Please choose some work to do." Also, you are the best role model for the children in your program. If you are quiet, calm and peaceful, there is a good chance the children will work with quiet, calm and peace, too.

What is the role of the adult or youth helper?

This time can be a wonderful opportunity to mentor children and work with them one-on-one or in a small group. In this setting, you can have real conversations with children and address any issues that might be on their minds. Some of the best pastoral care you do might take place in this portion of the program.

The issues of thirst, hunger and hardship may spark important and profound questions by the children. Participants may have experienced these hardships themselves. Listen carefully and with compassion. Feel comfortable with responding with "I don't know" or "What do you think?" If a serious issue comes to your attention, you might want to let a member of your church clergy or staff know.

Engaging and Reflecting

As you help children with these lessons, you might find that some do not know how to use and read the Bible. We encourage you to take a few minutes during the program to introduce the Bible to participants, tell them what it is, let them thumb through and explore it, and show them how to look up a verse.

What if we don't finish all the activities?

That's okay. Four individual/small group activities are provided in each lesson plan, along with a group activity. Also, some children may elect to finish work started at the beginning of the class time. They likely will not finish all the work offered during the course of one session.

Lesson sheets are designed to take home for further work and reflection and to share what was learned with parents, grandparents or caregivers. Please make sure children are given all lesson sheets, whether they have completed the lessons or not! Adults usually want to know what children have experienced after attending a program such as this, and the lesson sheets will provide adults both the actual lesson presented and resources for more information.

All of the lessons in the five Abundant Life Garden Project modules are available online at www.episcopal-relief-development.org/Children/. If children do not finish any of them, they may easily go online with an adult to find, download and complete lessons at their convenience.

What is the purpose of the group lesson?

Each lesson provides an experiential exercise for the entire group of children. These group exercises will give children an idea of the conditions faced by those who Episcopal Relief & Development seeks to serve.

We highly recommend that you utilize this option as a means for the children in your program to both truly learn about the needs of others and to experience working in community.

If you are doing these lessons in a family or home setting, we nonetheless recommend that you undertake the group activity as a family or with a neighbor.

Giving Back to the World

What is the purpose of this section?

The purpose of this section is to “wrap up,” close with prayer and transition children back to their daily lives. Although this is a fairly short segment of the program, it is nonetheless important, both to recognize and bring closure to the work done during the session and to end the session with prayer.

What if parents are standing at the door waiting to pick up their children?

By all means, invite them in and ask them to take a place in the circle! Parents and other adult caregivers will want to know what their children have been doing, and this is a perfect way to give them a glimpse of the program and share with them what the children have done.

How do I close with sharing and prayer?

About ten minutes before the end of your session, ask children to join you in the circle again, seated on the floor. Assure them that they are welcome to take home any unfinished work, as well as lesson sheets they did not have time for in class.

Ask each child to briefly share something she or he learned during the activity time. You might begin by briefly sharing something yourself. If a child wants to take a “pass,” that is perfectly fine.

In addition to the closing prayer included in your lesson plan, you might also want to pray individually for each child and for any needs of your community that might be on the children’s minds.

Songs may be sung before or after this prayer time, depending on time parameters.

What if parents or caregivers are delayed in arriving?

Be sure to stay with the children and honor their presence until caregivers arrive. Children might return to lessons or to a group project (such as a mural or gardening project) while waiting for adults to arrive.