



**Episcopal
Relief & Development**

Healing a hurting world

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

Introduction

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Courtesy of Adam Breunig

Introduction

An Offering to Share

An Offering to Learn

An Offering to Engage

The Abundant Life Garden Project is a children's curriculum offered to parishes, teachers, groups, families and others who seek to share the ministry and work of Episcopal Relief & Development with elementary-age children. This resource is a very flexible, low-cost program that can be implemented by any Episcopal parish, no matter its budget or resources.

This resource is based on the work and mission statement of Episcopal Relief & Development, along with the Baptismal Covenants of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church. The goal of the program is that children will become more aware of the overwhelming needs of others in the world, link these needs to stories in the Bible and work towards addressing the needs of the world, both as individuals and in community.



Courtesy of Leanne Cole

The Abundant Life Garden Project has five segments that focus on:

Water, Seeds, Soil, Animals and Harvest.

Each segment is designed as a one-hour session, with several additional options to be used in extended sessions or as a Vacation Bible School program.

We encourage all participants using The Abundant Life Garden Project to share with us what you have done with the program and any new innovations you may have added. Participants are also encouraged to share pictures or videos of their sessions, as well as insights and greetings with others in the Anglican Communion who are also using the program. Please email us at er-d@er-d.org. You

may also join an online discussion group for users of this curriculum and anyone interested in Christian formation for children and youth. Visit www.er-d.org/Formation to learn more.

For what age group may The Abundant Life Garden Project be used?

The Abundant Life Garden Project is designed for pre-school and elementary-school learners. We recognize that many parishes will have mixed-age groups taking the course together. Parishes will probably also have children taking part in this program who are non-readers or are still learning to read. We don't want to exclude or embarrass any child, so we have designed activities to include both non-readers as young as 4 as well as accomplished readers up to about age 12.

Recognizing that different children learn in different ways and are at differing stages of development, The Abundant Life Garden Project offers several activities in each segment of the course for learners to explore topics in ways that “meet them where they are.” Group activities—including group worship, songs and discussion—facilitate and emphasize the importance of community among us all.

What training is required for volunteers?

We want The Abundant Life Garden Project to be as easy to use as possible, and we do not require you to attend a training course before leading this program. We encourage you to seek volunteers and leaders who have a passion for sharing resources with others, who want to share our heritage of giving with the next generations or who want to share the Gospel with children. We provide you teaching tips and background material to complement your gifts and talents.

We recommend that at least two, and optimally three, adult volunteers lead this program. The

following tasks are needed and may be done by one or more adults or youth helpers:

- » Basic materials and a gathering and working space must be set up in advance of the time with the children.
- » One person will lead the group worship, discussion and meditation.
- » One or more adults or youth helpers will lead very doable and straightforward activities with the children.
- » Additional helpers will be needed to act as “shepherds,” assisting children with activities, participating in group worship with them and dealing with any unexpected needs that might arise.

What materials or other resources will I need?

The Abundant Life Garden Project is designed to enable you to “walk the talk” in making the most of limited resources and in being good stewards of resources you might already have on hand. You will find that children themselves are our greatest resources; their imaginations and ideas will be the major “resources” of this curriculum. Many of the materials you will need are items like blank rolls or sheets of paper, crayons and scissors—supplies that might already be available or that you will easily find at low cost.

Photo and video links, Stories from the Field and other resources are provided by Episcopal Relief & Development for your use with this program, to help learners understand the needs of the world and how they might address these needs.

You are encouraged to make this program your own—as elaborate or as “low key” as you like. We anticipate that some parishes may use this program for a children’s chapel or Sunday school program. Others might add snacks, decorations, additional activities or other extras to make this a longer weeknight or summer program. You choose!

Is this a VBS program, a Sunday school program, or what?

Yes! The basic Abundant Life Garden Project program is designed as a series of five one-hour sessions. This one-hour time frame might be scheduled on a weeknight or as a Sunday morning Lenten program. It could also be used as a community outreach program. With a number of additional options, this program might be expanded to a three-hour (or more) Vacation Bible School or other summer program. This could even be offered as an intergenerational experience.

Participants are encouraged to be creative in how they use the information and materials in this program. The main goal is to encourage children to become aware of the needs of the world and to link the Gospel message to those needs. We recognize that every parish will have different time frames and other parameters within which to work.



Courtesy of
Leanne Cole

The Abundant Life Garden Project is not meant to replace an existing Sunday school or Christian education program. Stories presented to children in this program will recall stories of the Bible—which with children may or may not already be familiar—alongside profiles of people living in need right now. The Abundant Life Garden Project is designed to supplement or introduce children to these stories and engage them in exploring the covenants we make as baptized Christians.

For volunteers, teachers or Christian educators already familiar with Godly Play®, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and/or the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum, we have included links or options to incorporate stories or presentations with which you might already be familiar.

What does The Abundant Life Garden Project teach?

The Abundant Life Garden Project engages children with Bible stories focused on water, seeds, soil, animals and harvest. All of these stories and lessons are age-appropriate for young children and are linked to Stories from the Field (found on Episcopal Relief & Development’s website at www.er-d.org/Stories) to show real needs of people throughout the world today.

Children’s engagement and involvement with Episcopal Relief & Development’s mission of “Healing a hurting world” is tied to promises in the Baptismal Covenant. Parishioners make these commitments by responding, “I will, with God’s help” every time a baby, child or adult is baptized and becomes a member of the Body of Christ. These promises are:

“Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

“Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?”

“Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?”

“Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?” and

“Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” (1979 Book of Common Prayer, p. 304-305).

How will these concepts be taught?

The Abundant Life Garden Project is designed for children with various learning styles and levels of development. We recognize that some children learn best through visual activities, others through listening exercises and still others by actually doing or experiencing an activity that demonstrates a concept. This program offers a range of activities to facilitate exploration of concepts in each session by participants who range in age and learning styles.

To accommodate these different learning and developmental stages, we recommend a “learning center” approach. In each session, we provide easy-to-follow instructions for children to further explore and reflect on concepts presented to them during group times. Learners who read well will be able to follow easy-to-read guides provided to them by adult coordinators in advance of the session. Younger learners will need more guidance from an adult or youth helper. All activities emphasize either individual reflection or group team-building, brainstorming or exploration.

Do I have to give a lecture?

No. An adult, older child or youth with a good reading voice will lead a liturgy incorporating the images and stories of the theme for each segment. Children will be asked to sit in a circle and make a short, easy-to-remember response to the prayers. You will then ask them what they heard, what they remembered most and what God might be saying in the images presented to them. You will serve as a calm, peaceful role model for the children in your group and as an attentive and loving listener.

Background notes, guides for leading children in spiritual formation and tips on healthy snacks and playtime are included in this program. We encourage you to read these tips and post any questions you might have to the Christian Formation discussion group (visit www.er-d.org/Formation to sign up).

Music suggestions are provided, but we encourage you to choose the music style and songs that fit your parish and volunteers best.

How can we give back?

Episcopal Relief & Development provides this well-rounded, developmentally appropriate, theologically sound and Bible-based program to further its mission of healing a hurting world, guided by principles of compassion, dignity, and generosity.

If this program “speaks” to you, inspires you to do something to live out the Baptismal Covenant, or just changes the way that you and the children you love and nurture think about the world’s needs, the program will be a success.



Courtesy of St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Medina, Washington

If you would like to join Episcopal Relief & Development in its mission to heal a hurting world, this program is linked to a catalog of unusual and extremely useful gift items for your parish to consider as a response to this program. The Gifts for Life catalog enables you to send a goat, a pig, ducks, chickens, geese or even a cow or two to people around the world who could use help in starting or sustaining a family farm. Visit www.er-d.org/GiftsforLife to learn more.

Other options might include:

- » planting a community garden to provide fresh vegetables to the homeless
- » stepping up recycling efforts at church and at home
- » being aware of water that is wasted
- » reusing clothes a neighbor has outgrown
- » or simply praying daily for the many, many people on this earth without clean drinking water

It's up to you!

We hope the The Abundant Life Garden Project will be enjoyable and enriching for the children in your church. Your feedback and suggestions would be greatly appreciated and will help us serve you better. Please share your experience of the program with us by filling out and returning the survey included at the end of each module. Thank you!