

Healing a hurting world

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

Session Two Seeds

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Notes for Parents and Teachers

By Cynthia Coe

Seeds are the "babies" of the plant world, containing the embryos of new plants and coming complete with their own stored food for the journey of growth and development. Some seeds will grow to immense heights, as the mustard seed described in the New Testament parable. Others may not flourish at all. Still others grow right where we plant them and exactly as we expect, while some are blown by the wind to flourish in new and unlikely places. These seeds become fruits and vegetables to nourish us, fibers to cloth us and trees to provide wood for homes. The earth is filled with a vast variety of seeds we use for a vast variety of useful human purposes.

This module of The Abundant Life Garden Project focuses on seeds in both literal and mystical senses. People in need in developing nations, like the sunflower growers in Kenya profiled in this module's Story from the Field, need a variety of seeds to provide for their own families' nutrition and to sell crops for income. Those served by Episcopal Relief & Development also need "seed money" to enable them to start small businesses, purchase tools, install clean water systems and "grow" other projects that help them to become self-sufficient. We all need the "seed" of the Holy Spirit to sustain us in God's love, to help us grow in faith and to fuel us in our ministries to others.

The parable of the Mustard Seed, found in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), beautifully illustrates the notion of something small growing to amazing heights, offering shade and shelter to other creatures. The actual mustard seeds Jesus speaks of are so small, they appear as barely visible black specks, yet they grow as tall as a house. They are highly invasive. Like these "specks," even small acts of kindness, small donations of cash, small words of wisdom or tiny verses of the Bible can have huge impacts in our lives and the lives of other and help us to grow to new heights.

This notion of the "seed" of God's work within us also is reflected in the New Testament several times to illustrate basic Christian concepts. Before germination and growth into a viable plant, seeds must soak up water and go through a period of dormancy, followed by a time of "emergence." This cycle correlates with our Christian concept of baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit (symbolized by water), with the seed's burial and later emergence correlating with our concept of death and resurrection. The varying "dormancy" of seeds—periods of dryness, darkness within the soil and what appears to be stagnant growth—also might be seen as symbolizing periods of spiritual struggling and dryness as we might wait for God's own perfect timing to provide the conditions most favorable to our spiritual flourishing and continued ministry.



Like seeds, the Gospel is meant to be "broadcast"—spread—to our own gardens, to new gardens and perhaps to unlikely places. Seeds, by their very nature, are designed by God to be carried elsewhere: by wind, by water, by humans and by animals. The seeds we plant by teaching this concept may result in spiritual growth in our own children, in support for local community gardens or food banks, or in help so that strangers thousands of miles away receive the boost needed to diversify crops or buy supplies to start a new business. We don't know—and that is both the beauty and the mystery of the work of the Holy Spirit.

We hope the Seeds unit 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 this module. Thank you!

References

Seeds in creation:

Genesis 1:11-12 Genesis 1:29-30

Seeds as symbols of redemption:

Psalm 126:6

Parable of the Mustard Seed:

Matthew 13:31 Mark 4:31 Luke 13:19

Mystery of seeds:

Mark 4:26-27

Death and resurrection:

John 12:24

Growth and sustenance:

2 Corinthians 9:10





The Abundant Life Garden Project

Session Two

Seeds

Objectives

This lesson will:

- » Recall or introduce images of seeds in the Bible, in the Book of Common Prayer, in our spiritual lives and in the world
- » Provide a time of quiet reflection and listening to God in silence
- » Provide children with experiential learning in examining the essential role of seeds in human life and in our faith
- » Motivate children to be a part of seeking and serving Christ in others through the gift of seeds

Scripture References and Other Sources

- » Genesis 1:11-12, 29-30
- » Matthew 13:31-32
- » Book of Common Prayer, Baptismal Covenant, page 305
- » Episcopal Relief & Development Story from the Field, "Sowing the Seeds of Stability" (included on page 10 or online at http://www.er-d.org/stories/programs/SowingSeeds/)



Materials Needed

- » A variety of easily obtainable seeds for display during the worship time
- » An attractive plate or other vessel or surface on which to display the seeds (examples might be seeds from produce like apples, squash or cucumbers, along with sunflower seeds, beans, coffee beans, pinecones, nuts, grains or coconuts)
- » A large blank writing surface (a large piece of paper, poster boards, or fabric)
- » A supply of all-purpose blank white paper (enough for each child to have three to five sheets)
- » A plentiful supply of crayons, washable markers or colored pencils (at least three to five writing instruments of various colors recommended for each child)
- » At least one Bible (two or more copies preferable)
- » At least one Book of Common Prayer
- » A printed copy of the Episcopal Relief & Development Story from the Field, "Sowing the Seeds of Stability"

Options for Extended Time Periods

For practical tips and suggestions on each section of this lesson plan, please refer to the following pages of Appendix A, Options for Extended Time Periods (available on the Episcopal Relief & Development website at www.er-d.org/Children). Points at which these options might be added are denoted with an asterisk (*) throughout this lesson plan.

- » Songs*—Page 2
- » Healthy Snacks* Page 9
- » Playtime*—Page 10
- » Planting a Community Garden*—Page 11
- » Share Save Spend*—Page 14



Introduction

The second session of The Abundant Life Garden Project focuses on seeds. This unit presents images of seeds from both the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible, introduces key elements of the Baptismal Covenant to young children, and engages them in linking these stories and concepts to the urgent needs of others near their homes and around the world.

The Plan

For teaching tips and the "hows and whys" for each of the following sections, please refer to the following pages of Appendix B, Teaching Tips, available on the Episcopal Relief & Development website at www.er-d.org/Children.

- » An Invitation to Share and Learn* (children arrive)—Page 2
- » Liturgy of Thanks and Meditative Moments* (group worship and prayer time)—Page 4
- » Engaging and Reflecting* (children work on activities)—Page 8
- » Giving Back to the World* (group projects and closing worship)—Page 11

An Invitation to Share and Learn*

Question of the Day

"What kinds of seeds give us life?"

Materials Needed

- » crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- » a large blank writing surface

Activity

- » As children arrive, offer them their choice of writing utensils.
- » Ask them to draw pictures in response to the question "What kinds of seeds give us life?"
- » Allow as much time as is needed, so that children may all begin group worship and prayer time together.
- » Children may return to this activity as one of their learning center choices.



Litany of Thanks and Meditative Moments*

Ask children to sit in a circle. The leader should also sit in the circle with the children if at all possible.

If possible, put a variety of seeds on an attractive plate or other surface in the middle of the circle, visible to everyone.

Leader: The Lord be with you!

Children and helpers: And also with you!

Leader: Lord, creator of all things, we thank you for the gift of this time together, and for the abundant gift of all varieties of seeds. Bless us in this time together, and bless those in need of seeds to grow food to feed themselves and others. In Christ's name, Amen.

Leader: Now, I will read several prayers about seeds. Since seeds are such an important gift, please respond to each of these prayers with "We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds."

(The leader might ask children to practice "We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds" before continuing.)

Litany of Thanks for the Gift of Seeds

(Leader's prayers are **boldface**; children and others' lines are in *italics*.)

We share this time to remember that is it through the gift of the awesome variety of seeds, providing and continuing life, that we have life on earth.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds.

We thank you for the creation of plant life on earth, to give us food, to give us shelter, to give us clothing and to give us shade, pleasure, and beauty.

We thank you, Lord, Lord, for the gift of seeds.

We thank you for wind, rain and animals, and for people to send seeds to new lands, to new gardens and to those who need them to provide new sources of food and sustenance.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds.

We thank you for the cycle of life, leaving seeds dormant until they might grow and flourish in favorable conditions.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds.

We thank you for the mystery of seed growth, taking place underground, buried and in the dark, then springing forth in new life.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds.

We thank you for the stories of seeds told by Jesus, helping us to understand the Kingdom of Heaven.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds.

We thank you for the spreading of these stories, like seeds blown by the wind, to those who seek to understand you.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds.

We thank you for all the seeds of growth and life in our lives, helping to begin the cycle of growth and of life in ourselves and others.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds.

Help us, O Lord, to participate in the sharing and spreading of seeds of hope, of life and of nourishment so that we may seek to serve others in You.

In Christ's name, Amen.



Meditative Moments

Leader: Listen to a story told by Jesus....

"The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." (Matthew 13:31-32)

(After a moment for children to reflect on the parable just read, ask the following questions.)

How are you like the mustard seed?

In what ways could you grow to provide homes and shelter to others?

In what ways could you help to do something that seems small but could grow into something huge?

The leader should close his or her eyes and take deep breaths, in order to model silent meditation for children. For tips and information on the importance of silent time with God and how to lead children in meditation, please see pages 6-7 of Appendix B, Teaching Tips (available at www.er-d. org/Children).

After a minute or more, the leader might ask children to share any thoughts they have about seeds. Some of these thoughts will be quite profound. Others might be silly. Some children might not want to share their thoughts at all. All these reactions are perfectly okay, and children should not be forced or pushed to say anything.

Options For Extended Time such as Healthy Snacks, Playtime* or Songs* may be added here for longer time periods or if you feel your group of children needs to move a little or take a break.





Story from the Field

After children have had a few minutes to share any thoughts about seeds, please read "Sowing the Seeds of Stability," a Story from the Field from the mission work of Episcopal Relief & Development. You might have older children or youth who are good readers take turns reading the paragraphs of this brief true story.

The future looks brighter today than it has for a long time, according to Beatrice, a resident of Palaka, a small village along Lake Victoria in western Kenya. Like many women in the region, Beatrice lost children to AIDS and is now responsible for the care of her grandchildren. For years, her only asset was two acres of land, which she and her husband cultivated for their income. However, they simply couldn't earn enough to feed all the children and make ends meet.

Through a partnership with the Ecumenical Church Loan Fund, Episcopal Relief & Development provided Beatrice and a group of women in her community with training and seed money. They were encouraged to grow sunflowers, as sunflower oil is a daily staple in the region, and the process for extracting the oil requires only a small investment in a simple machine.

Half of Beatrice's land is now devoted to growing sunflowers. She can sell both the sunflower oil and the sunflower seeds for income. Together with the other women in her group, she learned to place beehives in close proximity to the sunflower fields, allowing them to extract flavorful honey and sell it locally. For Beatrice, Episcopal Relief & Development's assistance has brought financial stability, progress and hope for her grandchildren's future.



After reading this story, children might be asked,

What gifts were Beatrice and her grandchildren given?

Was the money given to her a kind of seed?

Was the training to learn about sunflowers and beehives a kind of seed?

What could you do to provide "seeds" to others?

Options for Extended Time such as Healthy Snacks, Playtime* or Songs* may also be added here.

Engaging and Reflecting*

Children are now asked to choose one of these simple activities you have set up in advance.

Lesson sheets are provided at the end of this module with a brief lesson from the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Common Prayer or a Story from the Field. Children may select or be given a sheet with a lesson on it. Children who read might do the lessons by themselves. Younger children who do not yet read well will need help from an adult or youth shepherd.

After completing a lesson at his or her own pace, a child may take an additional lesson sheet. Children may take any unfinished lessons home or complete them at another time (particularly in extended time programs). Don't worry about rushing or trying to complete a certain number of lessons – Christian formation takes time, and we all work on formation at different paces.

If children finish all of the lessons, they might be asked to draw a picture showing all of the lessons they completed (to synthesize the concepts presented) OR assist other children with their lessons.

You may print the lesson sheets and mount them on cardboard or paper stock of your choice. If time allows, children might draw a picture on the back of the sheets or decorate them with photos. You may wish to use photographs or other graphics from the Episcopal Relief & Development website (http://www.er-d.org/PhotoGalleries/) or the Gifts for Life catalog (http://www.er-d.org/GiftsForLife/) to decorate or help provide a visual aid for these lessons. Children are encouraged to take the sheets home to make a mural or mobile for their own homes or to use for further reflection with other family members.

For each lesson sheet, please refer to the following pages of this module:

- » Receiving the Gift of Seeds—Page 14
- » Serving Seeds as Food—Page 15
- » Seeds of Growth—Page 16
- » Seeds Spread Around the World—Page 17



Additional Options and Enhancements from the following programs are also included at the end of this module:

- » Episcopal Children's Curriculum—Page 18
- » Godly Play®—Page 19

Group Project-What Shall We Do With Seeds Given Us?

After children have had a chance to work in small groups or individually, we recommend they work on an activity as a community. The group work for this unit is an experiential exercise in putting together a plan to use the seeds given them.

Follow these steps:

- » Ask one or more children to hand out the seeds displayed in the middle of the circle to others in the group.
- » Some children may get more than others. The variety of seeds may seem random. That's okay.
- » If there are not enough seeds to go around, ask the children what they might do about this situation. (You might suggest they form teams or share.)

After the seeds have been distributed, ask the group to imagine they have nothing but these seeds and the water they walked to obtain during the last session. Ask:

- » What else will you need to support yourselves?
- » What seeds will grow into food? Into shelter? Into clothing?
- » If you don't have the right seeds to provide food, shelter or clothing, what could you do?
- » If some in the group do not have seeds, what will they do? What will you do?
- » What tools will you need?
- » What will you need to know?
- » How will you buy items you don't have or sell items you have too much of?
- » How will all these things get to the people who need them?



^{*}Options for Extended Times such as Healthy Snacks*, Playtime* or Songs* may be added here.

If you have time and space, you might ask children to draw or make lists of how they would answer these questions. You might let the discussion take its course as long as the energy level or allotted time allows. If differences of opinion arise, you might take another look at the lesson cards from the Old Testament, New Testament and Book of Common Prayer, along with thinking about other scriptures that might have a bearing on the discussion.

Children might need to form "teams," "families" or some form of "work cooperatives" to make plans as they answer these questions.

The point of this exercise is not to reinvent the global economy, but to get children thinking about the needs of the world and especially those who have very few resources.

Options for Extended Time such as Community Garden projects, recycling projects or Share Save Spend* group projects may be added here.

Giving Back to the World*

Ask children and adult or youth helpers and leaders to form a circle again. Ask your group to take a few deep breaths, hold the seeds given them, and think about what they saw, heard or experienced during their time today.

Going around the circle so that each person (children and helpers or leaders) has a turn, ask each person how she or he might "spread the seeds" of what they learned today. (If someone wants to take a "pass" and remain silent, that's okay.)

*Songs may be sung here.

Closing Prayer (to be read by the leader or by one or more children):

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds. Through the gift of the amazing variety of seeds on earth, you feed our hunger, give us shelter and clothing, help us to wisely use our soil and give us beauty and pleasure. Through these gifts, you give us the ability to live, to grow, and to serve and be served by others.

Give all people in this world, we pray, the seeds of hope and nourishment, and help us to do our part in serving others through this gift.

In Christ's name, Amen.

The Abundant Life Garden Project: Seeds Old Testament Lesson—Receiving the Gifts of Seeds

Read Genesis 1:11-12.

This is one of the creation stories of the Bible.

Think about these questions:

- » What gifts from God are described in these two verses?
- » What does the Bible say about these gifts?

Read Genesis 1:29-30.

This is another, older creation story in the Bible.

Think about these questions:

- » What are we to do with the gifts from God described in these two verses?
- » Are these gifts given just to a few people or to everyone on the earth?

Optional

- » Draw a picture of the creation of these gifts.
- » Draw a picture of those to whom these gifts are given and what they are supposed to do with them.

Additional Option for Older Children

Read Genesis 12:1-3.

Think about these questions:

- » How was Abram's travel to a new land like planting a seed?
- » How can we likewise "plant seeds" by doing something new or going someplace we've never been before?



The Abundant Life Garden Project: Seeds Book of Common Prayer Lesson—Serving Seeds as Food

Turn to page 305 of the Book of Common Prayer. Read the three questions at the top of the page, followed by the responses we make every time a child, young person or adult is baptized in an Episcopal church.

Think of these promises as seeds planted in us, to be served to others.

Seeds are sent to new gardens and new soil by wind, water and animals-including humans.

Think about these questions:

- » How might the Holy Spirit work to spread seeds of hope and nourishment to others?
- » How might we spread the seeds of hope and nourishment planted in us?
- » How is everything we do a "seed"?
- » How is every person a "seed"?

Optional

Draw a picture of how the Holy Spirit might help us to seek and serve Christ in all persons through the gift of seeds.



The Abundant Life Garden Project: Seeds New Testament Lesson-Seeds of Growth

Read Matthew 13:31-32.

Think about these questions:

- » Who is the Sower in this parable?
- » How can we be like the Sower?
- » How can we do something small that could make a huge difference in the life of someone in need?

Draw or write your responses to these questions.



The Abundant Life Garden Project: Seeds Stories from the Field Lesson—Seeds Spread Around the World

Read "Growing Vegetables—And Profits" from Episcopal Relief & Development's website at http://www.er-d.org/stories/countries/GrowingVegetables/.

Think about these questions:

- » What kind of "seeds" did Mariama and her neighbors receive?
- » Were the gifts they received just plant seeds, or did they receive other kinds of "seeds" that could grown into something bigger?
- » What kinds of growth came from these seeds?
- » How could you or your community spread more seeds like those sown in Ghana?

Optional

- » Look through the Episcopal Relief & Development website at www.er-d.org for other examples of "seeds" sown in countries across the world.
- » Make plans to sow seeds like those sown in this story.



The Abundant Life Garden Project: Seeds **Episcopal Children's Curriculum Options**

Several lessons from the Episcopal Children's Curriculum (ECC) might be added to the options in this curriculum. All materials are free and available online through the Virginia Theological Seminary website at http://www.vts.edu/podium/default.aspx?t=122314.

Additional Lesson Material

The "Patrick of Ireland" lesson (page 159 in the Primary Cross year materials) is an excellent added option to link missionary and "planting seeds" work in church history with contemporary mission work of the church. In particular, the following segments of this lesson might be used as additional exercises in this module:

- » Storytelling (the story of Patrick), page 160
- » Bible Search, a study of Matthew 28:16-20, page 161
- » Talking it Over, page 162
- » Inquiring, page 162

This lesson might be reframed slightly to include these questions:

- » How might we, like Patrick, reach out to those in lands other than our own?
- » How might we, like Patrick, seek and serve Christ in all persons in countries other than our own?

ECC materials are available for Preschool/Kindergarten, Primary and Intermediate age groups and are organized into three years of lessons by topic:

- » Shell Year (focusing on Baptism)
- » Chalice Year (focusing on Eucharist)
- » Cross Year (focusing on Worship)

For more information on the Baptismal Covenant, the materials in the Primary Shell year book, Session 4, "Baptized People Make Promises," will be helpful.

For more background on the role of all laity in service to others, the materials titled "We Are All Ministers" on page 113 of the Primary Cross year book likewise will be helpful.



The Abundant Life Garden Project: Seeds Godly Play® Lesson

The Parable of the Mustard Seed is featured in the Meditative Moments section of this module. Presentation of this Scripture using Godly Play® materials would be an excellent aid to meditation. These materials also might be used for one of the learning-center stations in the Engaging and Reflecting segment of this lesson. For more information on Godly Play® or to order materials, please visit www.godlyplayresources.com.

In this lesson, we hope to introduce the concept of "seeds" of all kinds to children as an important concept of ministry in serving the needs of people living in extreme poverty. Used with The Abundant Life Garden Project, these materials will help children reflect more deeply on the concept of "seeds"—both literal seeds used for planting vital crops in developing nations and figurative "seeds" of ministry, small acts that might make a huge difference in the lives of others.

Presentation to enhance this lesson:

» Parable of the Mustard Seed

The Parable of the Mustard Seed materials may be used during the Meditative Moments portion of the Litany of Thanks for the Gift of Seeds. If you wish to focus on the actual seeds on display or believe that the Godly Play® materials would be better used individually, feel free to do so. These materials may be used as an additional learning station whether you use them as part of the meditation or not.

If you use these materials individually as a learning-station option, you might provide children (either in writing or by an adult or youth shepherd) with these wondering questions for creative response:

- » What "seeds" have been planted in us?
- » What could these "seeds" grow into?
- » How could our growth serve others?

As children reflect on how the concept of seeds applies to those in need around the world, they might respond in creative ways using materials you already have on hand.





Survey Questions for Christian Formation Programs

Thank you for your interest in this Episcopal Relief & Development Christian formation resource. Your opinions are valuable and will enable us to better serve you and your church. Please take a few minutes to fill out and return this brief survey. The form can be completed online by typing directly into the PDF file, or by printing it out and completing it manually.

Online survey forms may be returned by email to churchengagement@er-d.org. Please mail printed surveys to Episcopal Relief & Development, Church Engagement Office, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017.

We greatly appreciate your time and feedback.

1.	Name of organization			
	(church, diocese, school, camp or other institution)			
	Address Phone		Email	
2.	Please provide the name and contact information of the leader: Name			
	Address			
	Phone		Email	
3.	Which Episcopal Relief & Development curriculum or program did you use? ☐ The Abundant Life Garden Project (children's curriculum) ☐ Act Out (youth curriculum) ☐ NetsforLife® Adult Education Study Guide (group discussion guide) ☐ Other ☐ Other			
4.	a) In what forum did you use these resources?			
	□ Sunday	School	☐ Vacation Bible School (VBS)	
	□ Youth re	etreat (lock-in)	☐ Adult forum/class	
	\square Other $_$			
	b) Where was the	e event held?		
	\Box Church		□ Diocese	
	\square School		□ Camp	
	□ Other			



How did you organize your events?			
a) Number of sessions			
b) Duration/length of time			
c) Number of children/youth			
d) Number of teachers/leaders			
a) Did you create additional resources or otherwise enhance the program? $\hfill\Box$ Yes $\hfill\Box$ No			
b) If yes, what other resources or options did you include?			
c) Please share any creative activities that were particularly successful or enhanced the education experience for participants.			
id you use any of the following resources in conjunction with your program? □ Episcopal Children's Curriculum □ Journey to Adulthood (J2A) □ Godly Play [®] (Stories for Children's Faith Formation) □ Other			
a) Would you recommend these materials to others? □ Yes □ Possibly □ No			
b) If you would like to share these resources and programs with others, please provide their names and contact information below.			
Name			
Address			
Phone Email			