



**Episcopal  
Relief & Development**

Healing a hurting world

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

**Session Three**  
***Soil***

**Copyright 2011 Episcopal Relief & Development. All rights reserved.**

*A license to print, reproduce, and share these materials is given to 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.*

# Notes for Parents and Teachers

*By Cynthia Coe*

Soil is an essential, though often overlooked, part of our lives. The land we tread produces our food, serves as a reservoir for our water and provides a habitat for a vast diversity of organisms—ourselves included. Our use of soil determines whether our crops flourish, whether erosion washes away vital nutrients into our water sources, whether we live in polluted or clean environments and whether we have enough food, clean water and lumber to sustain our lives and those of other creatures on this earth.

While seemingly a mundane topic, soil actually masks mysteries of life on earth. Ordinary soil contains a vast array of microbes we cannot see. Seeds, as part of their life cycle, germinate and grow underneath the ground—a mystery of life taking place out of sight—until the plants flourish with new growth. Soil is always changing, always subject to the elements of wind and rain and often subject to being picked up and moved somewhere else. These images might speak to our own spiritual lives as we are moved, inspired and even transplanted by the work of the Holy Spirit, working quietly like soft breezes and gentle rains, or in thunderstorms or flash floods. We might see the mystery of darkness in our lives, where growth and new life may be occurring unacknowledged or even unbeknownst to us.

Like the Water and Seeds modules preceding it, this teaching unit addresses its topic on both literal and symbolic levels. In many parts of the world served by Episcopal Relief & Development, farmers experience wide shifts between plentiful rains and drought, famine and relative prosperity. The erosion of soil and the subsequent loss of nutrients in it often are a challenge, as is the lack of effective tools to work the land. Plots of land owned by individual farmers may be small and only effective in producing food for sustenance

Soil is indeed a gift from God. Those who live on land cultivated for crops are mindful of this gift and dependent on God for their livelihood each day. For those of us who do not live and work as farmers, we hope this teaching module will guide children and their leaders in thinking about the labor, tools, knowledge and gifts of nature required to till the soil successfully and produce crops we all need to survive. We also hope children will think about how, in their own lives, they might “till” their environments to best allow the work of the Holy Spirit to sustain and maintain their lives as part of the body of Christ.

We hope the Soil 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!



Courtesy of Harvey Wang for Episcopal Relief & Development

## The Abundant Life Garden Project

## Session Three

### Soil

#### Objectives

This lesson will:

- » Recall or introduce images of soil in the Bible, in the Book of Common Prayer 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 fertile soil in human life and in our faith
- » Motivate children to be a part of seeking and serving Christ in others through the gift and wise use of soil

#### Scripture References and Other Sources

- » Genesis 1:9-12, 2:9
- » Luke 5:4-8
- » Book of Common Prayer, Baptismal Covenant, pages 304-305; Prayer for Conservation of Natural Resources, page 827
- » Episcopal Relief & Development Stories from the Field, “Alleviating Hunger and Improving Food Supply in Malawi” (included on page 9 of this unit) and “Hope for Tomorrow” (available at <http://www.er-d.org/stories/programs/HopeforTomorrow/>)

## *Materials Needed*

- » A generous scoop of soil, dug from the ground of your neighborhood or meeting place (purchased potting soil may be used if you live in an urban area)
- » An attractive plate, serving tray or other vessel upon which to display the soil
- » 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)
- » Masking tape or string
- » At least one Bible (two or more copies preferable)
- » At least one Book of Common Prayer
- » Printed copies of the Episcopal Relief & Development Stories from the Field, “Alleviating Hunger and Improving Food Supply in Malawi” and “Hope for Tomorrow”
- » If a computer is available, a YouTube video of farming, teaching and sharing projects in Burundi is an excellent audio-visual addition to this module. Visit <http://www.youtube.com/user/EABBurundi> and click on “Agricultural Projects in Makamba diocese” to see the video, narrated by the Rt. Rev. Martin Nyaboho, Bishop of Makamba.

## *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](http://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 third session of The Abundant Life Garden Project focuses on soil. This unit presents images of soil used for agriculture from both the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible, introduces key elements of the Baptismal Covenant to young children, introduces prayers for agriculture from the Book of Common Prayer and engages children 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](http://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*

**“How do we best use soil to provide what we need?”**

### *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 **“How do we best use soil to provide what we need?”**
- » 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 generous scoop of soil 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: **Thank you, Lord, for this time together. Bless us as we give thanks for the gift of land of all varieties, and bless those who work the soil to provide food for themselves and for us, Amen.**

Leader: **Now, I will read several prayers about soil. Since many important gifts of life come from the land itself, please respond to each of these prayers with “We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.”**

(The leader might ask children to practice “We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil” 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 soil that we have life on earth.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**We thank you for the creation of rocks, topsoil, clay, silt, sand, peat, chalk and loamy soil. We thank you for the wind and the rain to transform rocks into soil for our use and nourishment.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**We thank you for valleys and mountains, for deserts, rain forests and tundra. We thank you for prairies and swamps, savannas and coastlines, canyons and riverbeds.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**We thank you for the soil that nourishes our crops, soil that filters our groundwater, and soil that holds water for our future use in creek beds, lake beds and river beds.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**We thank you for soil that allows us to grow our food and upon which we build our homes.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**Help us, Lord, to make wise use of the gift of soil.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**Be with those who work the land, cultivate it, and grow food for themselves and for us.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**Help us, O Lord, to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, just as soil receives the free gifts of water and wind.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**Help us O Lord, like the soil, to weather the storms that change us, that turn us into something different, that may even displace us.**

*We thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil.*

**Help us, O Lord, to always stay firmly rooted in You, our foundation and our source.**

**In Christ's name, Amen.**

## ***Meditative Moments***

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

**“When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ‘A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.’ As he said this, he called out, ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’” (Luke 8:4-8)**

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

**How are we like the soil in this story?**

**How well do we receive the seeds thrown at us?**

**What are our birds, rocks, thorns and our water?**

**What do we grow from the gifts we are given?**

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](http://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 soil, please read excerpts from “Alleviating Hunger and Improving Food Supply,” 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.

Malawi is a small country in Southeastern Africa. Most Malawians rely on subsistence farming to survive. The country is prone to natural disasters, from drought to heavy rainfalls. These extremes mean that Malawi typically must import thousands of tons of food every year to keep its people from starving.

Six communities in northern Malawi are being provided with improved seeds, equipment and training in farming practices to increase crop production and harvests. A tree-planting program reduces erosion and improves soil quality.

People are learning how to create and maintain vegetable gardens, which help increase the nutrition in their diets.

Model farms are created for trainers to learn and then teach to surrounding communities the benefits of mulching and composting, crop rotation, terracing and drought-resistant plant varieties.

After reading this story, children might be asked,

**What do people in Malawi and other countries need to feed themselves?**

**What tools might they need?**

**What information might they need?**

**How could you, your family or this community help those who do not have fertile soil available to grow crops?**

If a computer is available, a YouTube video of farming, teaching and sharing projects in Burundi is an excellent audio-visual addition to this module. Visit <http://www.youtube.com/user/EABBurundi> and click on “Agricultural Projects in Makamba diocese” to see the video, narrated by the Rt. Rev. Martin Nyaboho, Bishop of Makamba.

If this video is viewed, children might also be asked:

**How did the soil in the church community gardens provide food and other benefits to the whole community?**

\*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 well 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:

- » Remembering Our Gifts—Page 13
- » Working Together—Page 14
- » Birds, Rocks and Thorns—Page 15
- » The Gift of Soil—Page 16

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

- » Episcopal Church Curriculum—Page 17
- » Godly Play®—Page 18

\*Options for Extended Times such as Healthy Snacks\*, Playtime\* or Songs\* maybe added here.

## ***Group Project—What Shall We Do With Our Soil?***

This group experiential learning exercise is similar to that offered in the previous Seeds module. In that unit, children were given seeds and asked to imagine what they might do to support themselves with the seeds. The Seeds module involved “big picture” questions of resources necessary to successfully run a family farm.

In this unit, children will be asked to think about the actual labor involved in working the soil. If available, you might hand out seeds used in the previous unit and a bucket of water from the Water module.

Using the open space you have available in your meeting place, use masking tape or string to mark off a “plot” of land. If weather, safety and other logistical factors allow, you might do this exercise outdoors on actual soil. If your “plot” of land is not ideal, that is fine—many people in the world do not have ideal plots of land, either.

After the children have gathered at their plot of land, ask the following questions:

- » **What will you need to do to make this soil produce food, lumber or something useful?**
- » **What tools will you need?**
- » **What energy source will you use, and how will you pay for it?**

(Note: Animals, the subject of the next module in this curriculum, might be suggested as a possible energy source to pull plows to till the soil.)



- » **Who will do the work? How will the work be divided up?**
- » **How will workers be paid? Where will they live? What will they eat?**
- » **What will workers do while the crops grow?**
- » **How will the crops get to market?**

(Again, animals might be suggested as a possible means of transportation.)

Notes:

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 sheets 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.

\*Options for Extended Time such as Community Garden\* 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, 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 what he or she 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):*

**Thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil. Help us to know how best to use the gifts of land given us, and bless those who work the land to grow food.**

**Help us use our land generously and to be mindful of those in need of land. Help us to always use our land in peace, and to remember You who gave it to us.**

**In Christ’s name, Amen.**

## The Abundant Life Garden Project: Soil

# Old Testament Lesson—Remembering Our Gifts

Look up and read Deuteronomy 6:10-12.

Think about these questions:

- » What gift did God give to the people?
- » What did God ask the people to do in return?
- » What could you do to remember the gifts your family or community has received?

Write about or draw these gifts.

## **The Abundant Life Garden Project: Soil Book of Common Prayer Lesson—Working Together**

Read the “Prayer for the Conservation of Natural Resources” in the Book of Common Prayer, page 827.

Think about these questions:

- » How are we fellow workers in God’s creation?
- » How can we make sure people in the future may enjoy the earth as we do?

Draw or write about how we could work the soil so that people in the future will be able to give praise for plenty of food.



## The Abundant Life Garden Project: Soil

### New Testament Lesson—Birds, Rocks and Thorns

Look up and read Luke 8:4-8.

Think about the soil the seeds fall upon.

Think about these questions:

- » How important is the soil for the seeds to grow?
- » How can we make sure seeds have good soil in which to grow?
- » What are the birds, rocks and thorns that keep seeds from growing today?
- » How are seeds trampled and prevented from growing?

Draw or write about how we can provide “good soil” where seeds can grow.

#### *Additional Option for Older Children*

Look up and read Matthew 7:24-27.

Think about the importance of good foundations for buildings.

Think about these questions:

- » What does a builder need to do to keep a building from being washed or blown away?
- » As we help others to build good shelters, what do they need?
- » As we serve others, what is required of us to provide a solid foundation for our ministries?

Draw or write your responses.

## The Abundant Life Garden Project: Soil Story from the Field—The Gift of Soil

Read the Episcopal Relief & Development Story from the Field “Hope for Tomorrow,” available at <http://www.er-d.org/stories/programs/HopeforTomorrow/>.

Think about these questions:

- » How did the family’s gift of land to its neighbors benefit them both?
- » How was everyone better able to use his or her own land?
- » What gift could you, your family or your community make to benefit others?

Draw or write about how you could give something away to help others use their own gifts better.

### *Additional Option for Older Children*

Read “Home Grown—Returning Refugees Build Communities in Southern Sudan,” a news story from the Episcopal Relief & Development website at <http://www.er-d.org/PartnershipsDec2010>.

Think about these questions:

- » How is this news story similar to the description of the return of the ancient Israelites to Canaan after they had lived in exile in Egypt?
- » What challenges would both groups face?

## **The Abundant Life Garden Project: Soil Episcopal Children's Curriculum Option**

An excellent teaching tool to use with the Soil module is found in Parables, a supplementary book in the Episcopal Children's Curriculum. An age-appropriate re-telling of this parable, along with others, is found on page 5.

To access a free copy of this book, visit the Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) website at <http://www.vts.edu/podium/default.aspx?t=122320> and click on "PRI Chalice Learner's Book, Unit II." (If you have a print edition of this book, the Parable of the Sower is found on pages 14-16.)

This book might be made available to children using the New Testament lesson included in this module, "Birds, Rocks and Thorns."

Children who read well might read the other parables in this book to look for additional images of soil, dirt and earth.

## The Abundant Life Garden Project: Soil Godly Play® Lesson

The Parable of the Sower 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 stations in the Engaging and Reflecting segment of this lesson. If you are planting a community garden as part of this project, these materials could introduce children to very literal aspects of plant growth. For more information on Godly Play® or to order materials, please visit [www.godlyplayresources.com](http://www.godlyplayresources.com).

The Soil module is a natural continuation of the previous module, Seeds. The focus remains on the concept of plant growth (and—figuratively—on growth in ministry), though the focus is shifted to the environment in which seeds for new growth are planted. The environment for growth might be seen as our communities, our congregations or even our own hearts. We receive the teaching of the Gospels—the “seeds”—yet what thorns, rocks or birds might thwart the germination and flourishing of these teachings in our hearts? How might new ministry get trampled? How do we keep our soil watered by the Holy Spirit? What growth may be taking place now, hidden from view?

### *Presentation to Enhance this Lesson*

#### » Parable of the Sower

The Parable of the Sower materials may be used during the meditation portion of the Liturgy of Thanks and Meditative Moments for the Gift of Seeds. If you wish to focus on the actual soil on display or believe that Godly Play® materials would be used better individually, however, feel free to do so. These materials also may be used as an additional “station” in your learning-center options.

Whether these materials are used individually or as a learning station, children might be provided (either in writing or by an adult or youth shepherd) with these wondering questions for response:

- » How important is the soil for the seeds to grow?
- » How can we make sure seeds have good soil in which to grow?
- » What are the birds, rocks and thorns that keep seeds from growing?
- » How are seeds trampled on and prevented from growth?

Children may use the creative materials you already have on hand to write or draw responses reflecting on how the concept of good soil applies to those in need around the world.

## 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](mailto: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 \_\_\_\_\_
4. a) In what forum did you use these resources?  
☐ Sunday School                      ☐ Vacation Bible School (VBS)  
☐ Youth retreat (lock-in)           ☐ Adult forum/class  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Where was the event held?  
☐ Church                                  ☐ Diocese  
☐ School                                  ☐ Camp  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. 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 \_\_\_\_\_

6. a) Did you create additional resources or otherwise enhance the program?

☐ Yes      ☐ 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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Did 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 \_\_\_\_\_

8. 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 \_\_\_\_\_

9. Let us know what other kinds of resources you would like to use or if you have additional comments or questions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_