Each year biblical characters light the candles on the Advent wreath at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Southington, Connecticut, as they introduce different aspects of this season of waiting. Parishioners young and old eagerly await the procession to see which biblical character will appear.

After an introduction by the rector, the special guest gives a monologue describing his or her feelings. The cast of characters includes Isaiah, the prophet, Elizabeth, Mary’s cousin, Tamar, the innkeeper’s wife, and Itzhak, a young shepherd.

The first week Isaiah talks about his hopes for the promised Messiah and wonders if he will live long enough to see this blessed child. He lights the candle of Hope. On week two, Elizabeth and Mary talk together about the peace and calm that comes from God’s presence. They light the candle of Peace.

On the third Sunday of Advent, Tamar, the innkeeper’s wife describes the mystery of God’s love for the world; she lights the candle of Love. On the fourth Sunday, the congregation meets Itzhak, a young shepherd boy, who has seen the Messiah; he lights the candle of Joy.

The characters are represented by actors of all ages: usually Isaiah is an adult male, Elizabeth and Mary are younger girls, Tamar is an older teen or woman, and the shepherd is a young boy or teen.

Continued on p. 3.
Editorial

Teaching by Example
Better than by Words

Editor’s Note: This editorial first appeared in the Discussion Forum of the website for the College of the Transfiguration in Grahamstown, South Africa. Readers, including students, alumni and guests, were invited to make comments. Dorothy Linthicum was a guest lecturer at the college for a term in 2006 and during the month of August in 2008. Both trips were supported by grants from the Evangelical Education Society of the Episcopal Church.

A topic in Christian education that is often overlooked by experts in the field is discipline. Many argue that good teaching methods coupled with sound planning make discipline a non-issue. If teachers take into account different learning styles of their students and plan a variety of activities, students will be drawn into the lesson and not engage in bad behaviors.

Perhaps the experts have been out of the classroom too long. Discipline problems are a topic with which teachers still struggle no matter how engaging their classrooms might be. Teachers from churches and schools in different countries and settings often report that classroom management takes too much of their time and energy, deflecting their focus on the content of the material they want and need to present.

At the same time, many parents seem to be at a loss maintaining discipline in the home. Relationships between adults and children that were proscribed by cultural norms and customs in the past often no longer hold sway. Youth are asserting their independence in ways that appear to be disrespectful and disruptive. Music, videos and instant communications seem to have more control over the lives of young people than their parents, teachers and elders.

There is no panacea for this issue. The world is changing and traditional relationships between generations have also shifted. How can parents, teachers, church leaders and young people form a new paradigm for living and working together?

Perhaps we should begin with a mutual respect for others of all ages. If adults model respect for others, young people are more likely to act respectfully in different situations. If parents listen to each other and discuss difficult issues without rancor and animosity, children will be more likely to take the same approach with their peers and elders.

If children know that their ideas are valued at home, at school and at church, they are more likely to share their thoughts and listen to the opinions of others. Youth will be more open to discovering the value of experience and wisdom of their elders who are able to listen first before offering insights.

In classroom settings, both at school and at church, teachers can show their respect of students in a number of ways. Teachers, for example, need to be consistent in their own behavior, whether it’s arriving on time, establishing routines, or having expectations that the learning process is for both students and teachers.

Before we find fault with the young people in our lives, perhaps we need to take a hard look at ourselves. How do we act around our families and friends? Do we treat everyone we encounter with respect? Do we expect our children to “do as we say” or “do as we do”? The way we live our lives, whether we are parents, grandparents, or teachers at home, in school or at church, is much more powerful than any words we might say.

The model for the way we need to treat each other is Jesus. He welcomed people of all ages to his side and always listened to them before acting. He respected authority, but also had affection for children and those who held the lowest places in society. Perhaps the way to begin healing the divide between the generations lies within each of us.

—DSL
Advent is often called a “season of waiting” as Christians prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The prophets who spoke to the Hebrew nations long ago can still guide us on that journey.

The Episcopal Curriculum for Children has resources about the Old Testament prophets that can be used during Advent. The Episcopal Teacher article that begins on page 1 tells about a church using the words of prophets and others as they light candles on an Advent wreath. The author suggests that Sunday school classes research and write their own monologues for this activity.

Unit 1 of the Primary Cross year focuses entirely on the prophets. Children have a chance to learn about the people of God in the Bible who are flesh-and-blood men and women who exhibit every human emotion and whose weaknesses and sins are presented realistically. These figures have noble and brave qualities that shine though their life stories.

Old Testament prophets often spoke harsh messages of judgment that could be frightening for primary-age children. When talking about the stories of the prophets, the curriculum emphasizes the positive aspects of their work—their courage in speaking out against wrong, their promise of a better future, and their image of a Messiah who would initiate the rule of God.

The materials from this unit would be a good place to begin researching Old Testament prophets and their messages. Older children could use background information provided for teachers along with appropriate scripture passages. Younger children could read the Primary Cross book called God’s Prophets. The illustrated booklet is written for primary-age readers.

The children would discover, for example, that Isaiah told the people that Jerusalem, their home, would be destroyed.

“But Isaiah also spoke about hope. He wrote his vision of the future time when God will rule over all things. There will be peace and love among all God’s creatures. The wolf and the lamb will live together. . . A little child will stand right in the middle of the animals and lead them.” (God’s Prophets, p. 9)

Other prophets featured in Unit 1 are Amos, Daniel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Jonah, Nehemiah, Ezra and Esther. The voices of these biblical people can be used to help everyone in the parish enter the season of waiting.

—DSL

Advent Stories
Continued from p. 1


The playkit includes five scripts, four for Advent, and one for Christmas Eve, when the four characters return with Joseph and Mary in a Nativity tableau to reprise their roles and jointly light the fifth candle. Performance rights are granted with purchase of the playkit.

Little or no scenery is needed for the Advent monologues, which are five to seven minutes long. For the Christmas Eve program, a more elaborate staging may be desired for the presentation, which lasts about 15 minutes. At that time an empty manger can be placed on the stage, with two or three bales of hay surrounding it.

Biblical characters can vary from year to year. Sunday school teachers and learners can research and write new monologues each Advent. (See article on this page about resources available in the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum about prophets and other biblical characters.)

Instead of focusing on the commercial side of Christmas, parishioners have an opportunity during Advent to concentrate on getting ready for the birth of Jesus. Nancy Sewell is Christian Formation Director at St. Paul’s.
Godly Play Sets Scene for Liturgy At Christmas

The “Children’s Liturgy for Christmas Eve” by Jerome Berryman in Volume 3 of The Complete Guide to Godly Play (Living the Good News, 2002) offers material for tableaus or pageants that is easy to use but rich in content.

The presentation is designed to be used as either a sermon before or during the main Christmas Eve liturgy or as a brief, separate children’s service. A storyteller tells the story, which is enriched by several familiar Christmas hymns.

During the singing of the hymns, children bring the crèche figures from the back of the church to the empty manger. At the end of the story, all of the children come forward to place stars around and in the crèche as everyone sings “Silent Night.”

Materials needed for the Children’s Liturgy are a large-sized crèche that can be seen by the congregation. The figures can be made from papier-mâché or other material suitable for large-scale modeling.

Members of the National Association of Episcopal Christian Education Directors (NAECED) recently shared ideas on the organization’s list serve about using the liturgy in different ways.

Mary-Eileen Middleton, Director of Children’s Ministries at The Episcopal Parish of St. Barnabas on the Desert, Scottsdale, Arizona, said, “The Christmas Eve liturgy is one of the easiest programs to do in a church setting.” The church has children act out the parts of the nativity scene instead of using a crèche.

The storytellers are high school students who speak into a microphone at the pulpit so they can be heard. Only the narrators rehearse to help them feel comfortable with the microphone, to read the narration appropriately, and to use dramatic pacing. Both boys and girls narrate the story for more variety of voices.

The young children who set up the Nativity scene only have to move and take their places and have no lines to learn. The star of Bethlehem is carried on a pole by one child who stands behind the altar, so the star can overlook the whole scene.

All the children sit in either the back or front rows in the order of how they will come to the Nativity scene in front of the altar. Between scenes while there is movement, the congregation sings traditional carols. All children can participate, because they can place the stars around the manger.

“The Godly Play Christmas Eve liturgy is a very classic, traditional Christmas pageant, made lovely and new by Jerome Berryman’s beautiful language,” said Middleton. Many adults find it moving and meaningful. Children who participate learn the story of Jesus’ birth in an easy, natural way. After they have helped to tell the story, it becomes their forever, she added.

Church of the Redeemer, Cincinnati, Ohio, uses the Godly Play liturgy in a similar pageant that occurs as the Liturgy of the Word in the service. Kelli Jasper, Director of Children’s Ministries, said they use fifth and sixth grade students as narrators with younger children acting out the parts. “We have costumes for everyone who wants to participate from the age 3 and up,” she said. “We have had as many as 80 participants.”

The pageant is easy, she notes. They have one rehearsal for principle acting parts and narrators, which takes two hours and includes a pizza lunch, and a second 45-minute rehearsal for the entire cast.

On Christmas Eve, the magi are still travelling to Bethlehem. Later on Epiphany Sunday the children redo the whole pageant and show the magi arriving in Bethlehem. “We complete the story with Joseph, Mary and Jesus travelling to Egypt,” she added.

—DSL
Gather Children around Advent Wreath

By Elaine Ward

Advent gathers us all together around the story of the birth of a baby in a manger, surrounded by animals, angels, shepherds and wise men. All are connected in the oneness of this event—from people dressed in lavish clothing to those in jeans; from musicians accompanied by magnificent organs to small groups around a guitar; from rich robes of choirs to old bathrobes worn by pageant actors—the paradox of our faith is played out.

On the first Sunday of Advent and each Sunday during Advent, gather the children in an area of the church decorated with Christmas greenery and light candles. In the center on a table or hanging from the ceiling place a large Advent wreath. Play soft Christmas music as the children gather.

The Advent wreath has four purple or blue candles, one for each of the four Sundays before Christmas. Sometimes one of the four candles is pink, symbolizing joy and hope; it is usually lit the third Sunday of Advent. A fifth white candle is sometimes placed in the middle of the wreath and lit on Christmas Day or the Sunday following.

In some traditions the first candle is called the prophet’s candle to signify the hope of Jesus’ arrival. The second is the Bethlehem candle, reminding Christians that God appeared to them in a humble manner. The third is the shepherds’ candle, representing joy; and the final candle is the angels’ candle, symbolizing their peace and message of good news.

The circle of the wreath represents the continuing love of God that never ends. The greenery is a sign of life continually growing.

Begin each session by lighting a new candle. Read an appropriate scripture from the Sunday lectionary and say a brief prayer. The Book of Occasional Services has Advent blessings.

When the fifth candle is lit, read or tell a nativity story. A delightful book called The Nativity, illustrated by Julie Vivas (Voyager Books, 2006), is a whimsical depiction of the nativity story from the King James version of the Bible.

For the remainder of the time, consider the following activities:

- Create a “Christmas Catalogue” offering a variety of gifts from which children and families can select to help others, such as certificate for a week at camp for an inner city child, meals for the elderly, or other volunteer services.
- Purchase for the church school a live tree with roots that can be replanted outside after the holidays.
- Use plastic lids from yogurt and other containers to make Christmas tree ornaments.
- Decorate napkins and cups with stickers for a Christmas celebration or to share with an assisted living facility for the elderly. Older children can make placemats.
- Make a sharing book from typing and construction paper, yarn, crayons and a paper hole punch. Write the words “Love one another” on the construction paper cover. Punch a hole on the folded side at the top. Ask the children to draw pictures of people sharing. Thread a 12-inch piece of yarn through the holes and make a booklet by tying the ends of the yarn together.
- Make Christmas cards for shut-ins and loved ones by recycling old cards.
- Decorate the meeting space with children’s pictures of their Christmas blessings.
- Play a game. Cut old Christmas cards into two pieces. Ask the children to choose one piece and then find the person who has the matching piece. That person becomes their partner for the day.

At the end of each session close with prayer and extinguish the candles.
In the weeks before Epiphany Sunday at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia, Sunday school learners and the church in general learned that the Holy Family would be visiting. They were asked to bring “gifts” for the Baby Jesus.

Gift ideas came from a list of items that the Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry (NOVAM) uses in its care packages to families with new babies. Extra items were purchased to give to children on the day of the visit in case some forgot to bring their gifts.

Sunday school teachers were told ahead of time to expect three wise men to visit their classrooms on this day. They all prepared in their own ways. The younger students were given a little background about the wise men, while older children were armed with some serious questions by the time the visitors arrived.

The idea for the Holy Family to come to St. Paul’s and the subsequent visit by the wise men to Sunday school classrooms came from Pam Blumberg, a veteran Sunday school teacher. She suggested that Mary, Joseph, and the Baby Jesus (a family with a new baby) come down the aisle of the church as someone read the appropriate Bible stories (Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 2:1-12) during the worship service.
During Epiphany

Certain phrases in the story signaled the wise men’s entry. A giant wooden camel on wheels, built by Bill Blumberg, followed them. The camel’s appearance was a big crowd pleaser.

At the end of the story, the children were invited to bring their gifts to the Baby Jesus at the front of the church and put them in a big basket. They came with awe and silence, even older children who recognized the Holy Family as members of the parish. They all craned their necks to get a good look at the baby.

Afterwards the wise men visited each classroom for about five minutes, while the Holy Family got out of costume and attended to their little baby. The three actors portraying the wise men were given basic scripts to work with, but for the most part did a lot of improvising. They also went the extra mile and did some research on the internet so they would know the names of each wise man along with other information.

The next time we do this, we will add some props to the wise men’s treasure boxes. Some of the younger children were disappointed that these were empty. All in all, it was a wonderful experience for our congregation.

Devon Prior coordinated Sunday school at St. Paul’s last year.
Shepherd Enlivens Pageant

Prevented for three Sundays from having Advent worship, first by ice and power outages, then heavy snows, we rejoiced greatly to gather Christmas Eve night. The usual crowd was augmented by guests and offspring who descended upon our central Kansas community from as far away as California.

Some grandchildren were pressed into service at the last minute to become Mary, angels and shepherds. There was not enough preparation, but it would work out. It always does...or so we thought.

The least shepherd, last to take his place on the platform, held his crook proudly – at first. But when the final Magi gift had been placed near the manger, he upended his staff. Each gift in its turn became an imaginary hockey puck as our pseudo-shepherd reverted to his latent hockey player instincts.

Each grandparent, aunt and uncle exchanged delighted wide grins, while the teen aged narrators deftly reasssembled the reverent scene, only a bit skewed now by the misplaced ‘gold, common sense and fur.’

And so, another memorable Christmas pageant told the story that always brings marvel and surprises. What a welcome gift after dreary winter difficulties. We lit our candles, sang “Silent Night” and rejoiced!

Our King is born! — Dee Smith

Chrismons Preserve Season Spirit

Chrismons are handmade Christmas tree ornaments with various symbols of Christianity used in both churches and homes. The name comes from a combination of CHRIsSt and MONogram.

Chrismons can be found in all sizes with many kinds of construction and are used in numerous applications. They are made from various materials ranging from needlepoint to woodwork and metalwork.

Frances Spencer, a parishioner at Ascension Lutheran Church, Danville, Virginia, began making Christmas decorations from a variety of materials and leftover Christmas decorations in the late 1940s. As she became more proficient in ornament making, the church asked her to decorate its Christmas tree.

Rather than using typical secular styles of ornaments, she incorporated traditional symbols of Christianity in white and gold, the liturgical colors of Christmas. In 1957 she coined the term Chrismons for her creations. Ascension has continued the ministry she started and holds a trademark for the name.

The practice of using Chrismons has spread and is becoming an increasingly popular way for churches and families to retain a sense of the sacred amid the secularization of this important Christian holiday. To preserve the spirit of Chrismons they should only be made by hand and given as gifts.

For more information about the Chrismon ministry at Ascension, visit http://www.chrismon.org/site/chrismon.htm. For a list of often used Christian symbols with descriptions and graphics that can be used in making Chrismons, go to http://www.umcs.org/chrismons/patterns/index.htm.
The annual Tapestry Conference of the National Association of Episcopal Christian Education Directors (NAECED) and the annual meeting of the National Organization of Episcopal Resource Centers (NOERC) will be February 4 – 6, 2009 in San Antonio, Texas. The conference will be hosted by St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in San Antonio and the Diocese of West Texas.

The Tapestry workshop model, unique to NAECED, is designed to promote a balance of professional development and spiritual enrichment. Workshops feature engaging speakers well-versed with the challenges and passion of Christian Educators.

The annual Tapestry conferences have become an important ritual in the Christian educator community. The mission of NAECED in its conferences and other support services is straightforward. It provides educators professional support, networking opportunities, resources, and leadership development. In addition, it provides a forum for Christian educators to explore issues of professionalism in ministry.

The NAECED Board of Directors and conference planning team have asked members of NAECED and NOERC to offer their gifts of ministry by leading a workshop at the 2009 conference. Workshops are organized into five areas of wellness: spiritual, physical, financial, professional development and psychological.

Information about the conference, including hotel accommodations and workshop proposal forms, is available at http://naeced.org/conferences.

An epiphany is a moment of sudden revelation or insight. The Feast of the Epiphany commemorates the revelation of the Christ child to the magi, seekers from far away who followed a star to discover this wonder. They did not share the same faith as Jesus’ family, or culture, or political views.

After their encounter with the child, they returned to their own country. We know nothing more about them, or how this revelation affected their lives.

In the Church calendar, we celebrate this feast on January 6. Despite the evidence of manger scenes, the magi did not show up the night of Jesus’ birth. They arrived perhaps two years later (Matthew 2:1-12).

We celebrate the magi’s visit on the 12th Day of Christmas at the end of the celebration of the Nativity. But opportunities for epiphanies are always before us. Sit down with your family and learn a new story. Explore other traditions. Seek the star of Bethlehem and the wonders it might reveal. —Anne Kitch
The Education Committee is one of the most important groups in the church. But its members are often doing several other jobs or ministries in the parish as well as leading full, creative lives when not working with the Christian formation.

Make sure that you take some time together to look back on the year, and look forward to the next. Lives are so rushed and scheduled, meeting in a home with refreshments may help this process along and guarantee a few more participants.

Look Back

Take some time as an education committee along with teachers and interested parents to evaluate this past year. Did your curriculum work to meet your parish’s mission statement? What education goals did you accomplish? Where do you need to change or improve?

Every church and Sunday school class has its own needs and challenges. Help each other honestly and gently to look at difficulties, blessings, and the unexpected moments of God’s grace in the midst of your teaching ministries.

Look Forward

Next, plan for the coming school year. What are you absolutely keeping? Do you need to switch some classrooms around? Do you need to start recruiting more teachers for the spring? Who is continuing as a teacher in the spring?

Take a hard look at the curriculum you are using. Is it working well or do you want to look at some other choices? Contact your diocesan Resource Center or visit the Center for the Ministry of Teaching page at the Virginia Theological Seminary website (http://www.vts.edu/icfl/center/curriculum.asp) to explore other curriculum options.

Resource pages on the Church Publishing website developed by Sharon Pearson (http://www.church-publishing.org/media/2008CurriculumOverview.pdf) also include an excellent overview of curriculum choices. —Amy Cook, Resource Center Director and Christian Formation Specialist, Diocese of Massachusetts

King’s Life Can Challenge Youth, Adults to Confront Tolerance

Martin Luther King, Jr., whose death we commemorate January 19, 2009, dreamed of a world more tolerant than the one he lived in. The celebration of Martin Luther King Day marks the 80th year since his birth and the 41st year since his premature death.

Adhering to his stance of nonviolence in a violent world, Dr. King’s words and actions have inspired millions of people throughout the world. A number of resources are available to help educators plan activities to honor Dr. King and his message of tolerance and acceptance of all people regardless of race, creed, or economic status.

A study of Dr. King and his message of justice could help youth and adults in confirmation classes find concrete ways to answer the final question in the Baptismal Covenant: “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” (Book of Common Prayer)

Committees Keep Watch on New Challenges

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Begin by visiting www.tolerance.org, the website for Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Available at the site are lesson plans for various age groups for different topics, posters, reflections by people who worked with Dr. King, and information about others who were active in the Civil Rights Movement.

Lesson plans for teaching young people about tolerance are also available at http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson294.shtml. Topics include stereotyping, appreciating differences, recognizing how words can hurt (or heal), among others. Each lesson indicates the suggested age group. Links are provided for additional lesson plans, books for different age groups, and activities. For worship ideas, see p. 14. —DSL
Finding the Best Teaching Method For Children Is Not Always Clear

By Judy Gattis-Smith

Whom do we teach? A strange question, yet one every teacher in the church asks, whether outwardly or inwardly.

Is our task as teachers to create a vibrant, lively class where every learning type is acknowledged and experienced? Where efforts are made intentionally to invite and include as many children as possible? This certainly is the norm that is set before us. Would any teacher disagree with this goal?

In such a setting we get satisfying feedback from both parents and students. It is gratifying to hear students talk about having “fun” in Sunday school. And yet, it is sobering in such a situation to discover just how little students ponder or question their faith.

Using the popular rotation method increased our Sunday school attendance dramatically and the children loved it. The rational for this method of study was sound and reasonable. One Bible story would be experienced in a variety of ways, appealing to the different learning styles. One week the story was told through cooking; one week through games; another week through art or computers, and the like. When asked what they learned, the children replied, “To make cookies.”

Methodist educator Ezra Earl Jones once said “If we give children chocolate milk in an attempt to get them to drink milk, they end up loving the chocolate.”

Proponents suggest we leave the understanding for later. Creating a church setting where children feel comfortable and at home is a worthy task. These children will grow up to be churchmen and churchwomen, the backbone of our congregations, with happy memories of their childhood in a setting with peers of similar values. Later the deeper meanings will come. First must be the welcoming community.

Still I am haunted by the one or two children in every class who ask penetrating questions, who challenge the surface explanations, who want more than a video that tells our faith stories. And some of these most challenging questions come from very young children. I fear that if we do not respond well to these children and their inquiries the questions will dry up, and their faith will become homogenized.

How can we know how best to teach? Is our job to push the most probing, perceptive child with difficult lessons, and then live with the almost certain result that our attendance will drop? Or do we choose an inclusive, vigorous method of creating a community of budding Christians? A too easy answer would be “both.” Who has that kind of ability? And what would happen if we alternated approaches?

I wish I knew the answer. Jesus chose 12 disciples for special instructions but he spoke to crowds.

Perhaps it is presumptuous to think we teach at all. God seems to speak to those God chooses. When and where and how are God’s choices. As teachers we study and experiment with a variety of methods and try to create the best setting we possibly can for our students, for this time and place. Then we wait with anticipation for God to appear.
By Emily Perow

By our baptismal covenant, we are called to support the newly baptized in their life in Christ. The entire congregation says, “We will.” What does that mean? How do congregations support young people as they celebrate their daily life as children of God?

I truly believe that in order to teach and guide young people we need to understand and listen to them. I once heard someone say, “Young people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Living out our baptismal covenant within the life of the congregation involves building and sustaining relationships; it is within these relationships we are called by God to live out the Gospel.

Studies can help us better understand this call. Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers by Christian Smith (Oxford University Press, 2005) reports on an extensive survey of American youth about the influence of religion and spirituality in their lives. Some of the findings include:

**Religious Identity:** Four out of 5 teens embrace a religious identity and are affiliated with a religious organization.

**Attitude toward Religion:** Teens are not hostile towards religion—it’s just not worth arguing about.

**Role of Parents:** The single most important influence on—and predictor of the religious and spiritual lives of—adolescents is a parent. Teenagers’ faith mirrors their parents’ faith.

**Religious Understanding:** Teens are incredibly inarticulate about religion, but incredibly articulate on other topics.

Religious language is virtually non-existent in teens, both because they do not know it and because it is not acceptable to use it among their peers.

**The Practiced Faith of American Teens:** Supply and demand matter to the spiritual lives of teens: the more churches invest in youth ministry, the more likely teenagers will practice their faith. Churches that do not invest in young people find that youth do not invest in them.

Most teens adhere to what the study calls “moralistic therapeutic deism” as their unacknowledged religious creed. It includes the following concepts: God exists and watches over life; God wants us to be good; the central goal of life is to be happy; God doesn’t need to be involved in my life unless I need God to solve a problem; good people go to heaven.

**Inviting Youth to a Way of Life**

The report had both good and bad news for those of us doing youth ministry. Teens are not as hostile towards religion as some think, and parents still play vital roles in adolescents’ lives.

But where have young people picked up their theology? The God they describe is not the God we know, the God of relationship, the God of suffering. How much of our ministry could quite easily happen without Jesus? Youth ministry needs to invite young people into a way of life. A success program should be focused on a theology where Jesus matters. According to Kenda Creasy Dean, author and director of the Tennent School of Christian Education at Princeton, if youth ministry embraces a theology where Jesus matters, it must contain:

- **A creed to believe…a God worth worshipping:** Teach the grammar of Christ by surrounding youth with those who talk to God, who speak the faith, who tell the stories, who live baptismal lives.
- **A community to belong to:** Foster faith fluency by immersing youth in a baptismal community where people practice dying and rising in Christ.
- **A call with meaning and purpose:** Create opportunities for youth to participate in the baptismal life of ministry…to claim God’s call for themselves.
- **A hope to hold onto:** Leaders should live Advent lives alongside youth…marked by unanxious, expectant and articulate presence.

A youth ministry grounded in Christian practices where Jesus matters will pay attention to the content and activities of the ministry. It will seek to offer youth tools and give them opportunities to practice life lived in imitation of Christ.

Emily Perow is Coordinator of Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Connecticut.
Playground Rules Apply to Internet

By Jenifer Gamber

If you are the parent of a teen, take yourself back 10 or so years when your teens were 4 or 5. Remember how they loved to go to the playground! They met new friends and played. With their friends they dug for dinosaurs in the sandbox or wheeled into dizziness on the merry-go-round. We watched our children develop friendships, learn to share, and console a buddy who had skinned a knee. Playgrounds were an important part of our children’s developing social skills.

Like any activity, we had rules to keep them safe:
1. Play only in designated areas.
2. Be kind and respectful.
3. Stay where I can see you.
4. I need to meet your friends.
5. Come straight home.
6. Don’t talk to or accept anything from strangers.
7. If you get hurt, tell me, or an adult you trust.

Now, fast-forward 10 years. Our children probably don’t go to the playground, they meet their friends, play, and explore on the Internet. In Facebook they can write on each other’s walls, join groups, invite friends to play scrabble, and grow gardens. Just like playground it can be both safe and dangerous. Just as we wanted to keep our children safe on the playground we want to keep them safe on the Internet. The rules are much the same:

1. Surf only on permitted sites.
2. Don’t say something online that you wouldn’t say to someone in person.
3. Keep the computer in a common area.
4. Don’t answer messages from people you don’t know.
5. Be involved in your teen’s life.

Nearly one-fourth of teens have been contacted online by a complete stranger, most often through instant-messaging. Without visual clues adult predators can pose as teens. But the Internet may actually reduce risks: Teens are at home instead of more risky environments and they can safely choose to ignore strangers. In fact, the majority of teens don’t respond to strangers online.

The Internet is much like a playground—it’s an important tool for exploring and socializing. But like the playground, it can be dangerous. Establishing simple rules can help keep it safe. Even though teens might push back on these rules, having rules lets your teen know that you care about them and they are not alone, something they need as they grow toward greater independence.

For good resources about the safety and the Internet, see Parry Aftab’s website www.wiredsafety.org, Pew Internet & Family Life Project www.pewinternet.org, and Frontline’s “Growing Up Online” (video streamed at www.pbs.org).

One-third of all teenage boys and 40 percent of teenage girls have been bullied online. Watch this youtube video by the AdCouncil with your teen: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYaWNYXpBis. Cyber-bullying invades safe spaces—homes. Ask your teen to tell you when they have received hurtful or inappropriate e-mails or comments on their web pages.
The Africana Worship Book
Years A, B (2007), and C (2008)
Discipleship Resources, 2006
www.gbod.org
Cost: $32 per volume

The Africana Worship is a new worship resource from the United Methodist Church in three volumes designed for Black churches, but filled with ideas that could benefit all worshippers. Volume I is based on Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary, but also organized by worship elements for ease of use. The second volume is based on Year B, and the third volume (due this fall) on Year C.

Each volume includes:
• calls to worship
• liturgies
• prayers
• litanies
• offertory prayers
• doxologies
• choral readings
• creeds
• chants and benedictions

At a 2004 consultation on the liturgy needs of African-American United Methodist congregations, participants concluded that these congregations could no longer think of themselves as being solely African-American. Worshippers of African descent come from such places as the continent of Africa, the Caribbean Islands and the Americas. The title, Africana Worship, reflects this diversity and heritage.

Included is a CD that congregations may use to prepare printed orders of worship. All the resources in the book are available in a cut-and-paste format for ease of use. The second volume added a worship plan for young adults, short dramatic monologues and sound files.

Worship resources for special occasions, such as Martin Luther King Jr. Day, are interspersed in the different volumes. The liturgy for Dr. King in Volume I uses headlines from the Civil Rights Era to mark his life and ministry (see additional information about this holiday on p. 10). The liturgy itself will help participants think about Dr. King’s message in a new way.

The Companion to the Africana Worship Book is a collection of essays, interlacing worship pieces with reflections from prominent leaders and emerging thinkers in Africana life. It is designed to help churches, educators and students reflect more deeply on worship and practice.

Building a bridge of understanding through collective experiences, the Companion to the Africana Worship Book shows the roots and fruits of rich worship. —DSL
Quick & Easy Christmas Programs
Laura and Bob Keeley
Faith Alive Christian Resources
www.faithaliveresources.org

A series of eight easy-to-use Christmas programs, written by Christian educators Laura and Robert Keeley, offers a solid biblical message while promising to be fun and easy to perform. Each guarantee to require little preparation time, as well as minimal costumes and props.

By allowing children to read their lines instead of memorizing them, as suggested by the authors, a normally stressful pageant can be easily performed with just one rehearsal. Unlike a traditional pageant, Quick and Easy Christmas Programs take drama stories from the Old Testament and interweave them into the Christmas story.

The authors come from a perspective that Christmas programs should have multiple purposes. If it is part of a worship service, it “had to have theological integrity and present something meaningful to the congregation. We also came to see the program as an opportunity for the church to demonstrate that it values children by giving them a chance to lead a worship service.”

In one of the pageants entitled More Than a Story, for example, friends gather at a class reunion of Bethlehem High school. They talk about stories of the Hebrew people: of how Moses and Samuel talked to God and the way Josiah and Israel were changed by the reading of God’s word. Finally they hear about changes that occurred to local shepherds who saw the Christ child in the manger in Bethlehem.

A single rehearsal is all that is required to make this half-hour drama come alive for both children and congregations. The materials include Bible readings, songs, and tips for keeping the program fun for kids.

A brief description of each pageant and ordering information is available at http://shop5.gospelcom.net/epages/FaithAlive.storefront/48c82a2102a431ae271d45579e790684/Product/View/001370. The purchase price includes permission to photocopy scripts for all members of the production. —Lori Daniels
Advent Interludes

Perhaps you, too, make wonderful plans for a holy and meaningful Advent, only to find life getting in the way. Then the “guilts” zoom in.

Could we agree to be gentle on ourselves? When those “misdirected frenzies” show up, could we remind ourselves to take a deep breath? Then, we will be in a place where God can, indeed, “awaken us.”

—Helen Barron in CandlePress