Greetings as we collectively breathe a sigh of relief after the busy seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. The “between” weeks after a rush of activities before Ash Wednesday and the penitential season of Lent are a time to regather our strength and our thoughts.

In this issue Lisa Kimball, Director of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching (CMT), has written an article describing her sabbatical this past fall. It was a busy time of travel, and learning, and listening.

While she was gone, the CMT staff carried on their regular work while filling some of the gaps left by Lisa’s absence. As acting director I learned about the tasks small and large that she manages to juggle so well.

Most of us are in positions, paid and unpaid, that don’t come with sabbaticals, especially work we do for the church. But maybe we need to take time and look closely at how we spend our time, who we allow to make demands on us, and which part of our schedule and workload is most stressful and sometimes unrewarding.

The Season of Epiphany might be a good time to take a mini-sabbatical from our workloads to rediscover the parts of our lives that give us joy and allow us to embrace God’s abundance. It is easy to get caught up in daily and weekly demands that there’s no time to see the bigger picture.

Although a sabbatical may look like a vacation, it is designed help people go deeper in their respective fields and rethink priorities. What could you let go of to open time for reflection and study? Maybe you’ve wanted to explore digital ministry, but it seems too overwhelming when you are in the midst of programs and events. Check out the website for the e-Formation conference held each summer at Virginia Theological Seminary (http://www.eformationvts.org/). Maybe this is the year you set aside time to attend the one- to three-day event.

Maybe you want to take a closer look at the way you prepare young people and adults for confirmation. Read the review in this issue of the book _Signed, Sealed, Delivered_, compiled by Sharon Ely Pearson, which discusses the theology and traditions around this sacrament, and helps you frame the questions your church needs to be asking about its current programs.

Maybe you want to find out what others have to say about the future of faith formation. Begin by joining a series of webinars on this topic offered by Vibrant Faith. Look for information in this issue of _Episcopal Teacher_ about registering for the first session with film producer Joani Schultz at no cost.

Look in your own heart and find a way to honor an Epiphany sabbatical that will refresh and renew your spirits. I will be joining you!

—Dorothy Linthicum

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Lisa Kimball and Dorothy Linthicum, editors
Kate Siberine, graphic designer

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Each week children at All Saints–Sharon Chapel in Alexandria, VA, encounter Christ the Good Shepherd in presentations created by carefully trained teachers through Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). It is a Montessori-based program set in a specially prepared environment that calls children to explore the life of Christ through stories and liturgy. The sacred space where this occurs, the atrium, is a place of prayer and celebration. Amid our busy culture the atrium remains both a place of joy and quiet contemplation.

All Saints–Sharon Chapel has a full CGS program for children from 3 to 12 years of age. The youngest children, ages 3 to 6 years, discover the heart of faith by following the church year. Older children, 6 to 12, learn about the history of the kingdom of God and their place in it. A recent weekday outreach program targets toddlers between 18- and 36-months-old and their parents. Children 7 and older are also invited to participate in an eight-week communion preparation and retreat.

On a typical Sunday morning in the atrium at All Saints, younger children may be carefully preparing cruets—filling one with water, and the other with wine—practicing the gestures and prayers of the Holy Eucharist; polishing a brass candlestick, arranging flowers, or setting a model altar. In the geography corner some may be exploring the land of Israel through puzzle maps or a model of the City of Jerusalem. Elementary children may be using calligraphy materials to copy or trace scripture, while others are pondering the many gifts of God through samples found in creation: Hubble photos of the cosmos, rocks, minerals, flora, fauna, plants, animals, people like ourselves and the greatest gift of all—Jesus.

The oldest children may be engaged in a typology study of an Old Testament text, learning about the Jewish roots of Christian liturgy, or engaging in discussions of social justice and ways they may further the work of the kingdom of God. At the end of each atrium session in all corners of the room, children lead prayer sessions for their group for which they have selected prayers, music, artwork, a shiny candlestick, or lovingly prepared flowers. Afterward they join the main liturgy in the church. Liturgy is emphasized to be the work of the people every week in the atrium.

Mindful of the unique personal relationship each person has with God, weekly presentations are developmentally appropriate to the age of the child. As the children grow, the presentations grow with them to emphasize the gifts of God, the unity of the kingdom of God, and their place in the plan of salvation history. Each presentation is an invitation to reflect on the liturgical or biblical text through quiet work with related materials.

Adults prepare the atrium environment, proclaim the Gospel, and work with the children to allow an exploration of the meeting of two mysteries: God and child. Teachers honor and give time and space for each child’s personal relationship with Jesus to blossom and grow.

The content and rhythm of the Catechesis program has a deep impact on the adults who journey with the children. Formation training offers adults an opportunity to explore liturgy and the Bible, and learn about the work and theories of Sofia Cavalletti, Gianna Gobbi and Maria Montessori. Training takes on a retreat atmosphere.

Among the adults, there are moments of transformation and expressions of wonder and joy that are so often seen with the children. Children and teachers learn quickly that being in the atrium together is a very special experience.

“Mindful of the unique personal relationship each person has with God, weekly presentations are developmentally appropriate to the age of the child.”

“As the children grow, the presentations grow with them to emphasize the gifts of God, the unity of the kingdom of God, and their place in the plan of salvation history.”

“The sacred space where this occurs, the atrium, is a place of prayer and celebration. Amid our busy culture the atrium remains both a place of joy and quiet contemplation.”

Davette Himes is Christian Education Director at All Saints Episcopal Church—Sharon Chapel in Alexandria, VA.
Hacking Curriculum for Busy Parishioners
Second in a series about different ways to study the Bible
By Becky Zartman

If your church is like my church, you’ve got a few years’ worth of discarded curricula hanging around in your Sunday School closet. And if your church is like my church, you’ve also got a population of harried, overworked adults, with or without kids, for whom clearing out a weekday evening every week for Bible study is simply out of the question. So what is a modern Christian educator to do? Consider a “curriculum hack”: take good, but maybe old materials, and hack them into new formats. Here’s a short list of ways to take curricula you’ve already got, and make it work for you.

1. TRY A SHORT-TERM APPROACH
If folks won’t commit to 32 weeks (and who can blame them?), try classes in series as short as two or three, or for that matter, even one. Pick a small subset of scripture, such as Genesis, the Samuel/Saul/ David/Solomon saga, or the story of Paul, and go for it. Draw your material from one or more of those dusty curricula on your shelf.

2. PICK A THEME
Wondering what to do for Lent this year? Gather up the materials you already have, but focus on one topic. How about passion narratives in the four Gospels? Or reading through Mark, using different supplementary materials? Or taking a good look at the importance of the Passover narrative? You’ll find all of these topics covered a few times in different curricula—consider making your Lenten series a kaleidoscope of different approaches.

3. HAVE A BIBLE QUESTIONS INGATHERING
Wondering what your parishioners actually want to know about the Bible, but too afraid to ask? One Sunday, hand out paper and pens and invite parishioners to write down any question they’ve ever wanted to ask about the Bible but have been too embarrassed to ask. Pass around a collection plate to collect the questions anonymously. Address a question per week in your newsletter, hold a Q&A Forum on a Sunday morning featuring the questions, or be exceptionally brave and answer the questions without preparation. The questions will be interesting and the answers entertaining no matter which format you choose. You might also find a cluster of intense interest around a certain topic, which could serve as a jumping-off point for short series of thematic classes. You also might discover in-service educational opportunity.

4. PILOT AN ONLINE GROUP
The stay-at-home dad with two toddlers might not be able to get out much, but he might be able to squeeze in a comment or two on a message board during nap time. Other folks may travel during the week for work. A Facebook group is a great way for a small group to stay connected and plugged in. Be sure to have the group meet in person to set up the page, set ground rules, and establish a firm start and end date. This would be a great opportunity to dig deeper into a subset of Epistles, a Gospel, a group of lesser prophets, or anything that interests your group.

5. PUT AN EDUCATIONAL SPIN ON DINNERS THIS YEAR
Pick one week in a dinner series and devote it to a biblical topic to get people talking and learning. This might be a great opportunity to use an online video resource, one that is fun and engaging.

6. SLIDE BIBLE TOPICS INTO OTHER CHURCH GROUPS
That parent support group for difficult teenagers might have a lot to say about David’s and Absalom’s relationship, or the older and wiser group might connect with Elizabeth and Zechariah—but you’ll never know unless you try. You’ve already got the background materials sitting around, so why not?

7. BE RESPONSIVE TO LOCAL SITUATIONS
Outside groups being particularly feisty lately? Try a one-session class about what Revelation really says. Promise to reveal who the Whore of Babylon actually is to entice people in the community to come. They’ll be disappointed to discover it’s actually a personification of second-century Rome, but they’ll learn a lot.

8. BE RESPONSIVE TO WORLD EVENTS
Conflicts in the Tigris and Euphrates river valley didn’t start in the 20th Century; they have been going on for millennia. Provide the back story of the rise and fall of empires in the Fertile Crescent to help parishioners understand what’s going on today in Iraq and Syria, or with the Israel/Palestine conflict. This would be a great opportunity to team-teach with a local imam or rabbi (if you have one) or someone who is up-to-date on current events.

9. TRY A “BIBLE BLITZ”
Take a biblical topic—either a person, a place, a theme, an historic event—and boil it down to a five minute presentation that’s offered during coffee hour. Even the most mundane biblical topics can be interesting in this format. Start with the resources that are already on your shelves. Keep it to five minutes, offer five minutes of Q&A, and then send participants back out to coffee hour. If the presenter is engaging, you’ll have them begging for more.

By Becky Zartman

Sabbatical Brings Clearer Focus to Life
By Lisa Kimball

On three occasions in the past, I served as a sabbatical coordinator in congregations. As the rectors prepared for, took, and returned from a sabbatical, I worked with the lay leadership to minimize disruption and support the ongoing life of their parishes.

More importantly, I focused on the rich opportunities for discernment and learning about baptismal theology and congregational identity when the principal ordained leader is away. I insisted on the congregations realizing their fullness as the body of Christ with gifts to exercise and the freedom to be creative. While the car was away, the mice did play!

This model stood in stark contrast to a more common polarizing experience of church sabbaticals in which rectors disappear for what is perceived as extended vacation while their congregations hunker down, hold their collective breath, and wait for the royal return—often fearful of change a rested leader may impose on their weary souls.

I knew my efforts had been worthwhile watching the quality of mutual exchange between revived rectors and more theology-confident lay leaders. Their reunions were marked by deep listening and celebration. And, I am proud to say, all three congregations experienced a period of spiritual and numerical growth following their season of mutual sabbath.

The word ‘sabbath’ has its roots in Latin, Greek and Hebrew and in all three languages means, literally, “ceasing.” Sabbaticals are most commonly associated with a privileged
“Letting go and stepping away requires mutual trust and a measure of self-discipline, a willingness to set aside one’s care for and curiosity about daily life.”

period of paid leave from academic appointments and to a lesser extent from clerical leadership and other human service positions. An individual is scheduled and approved to cease working on certain contractual duties in favor of something else. At its best, a church-based sabbatical is not about addition or subtraction but rather an invitation to the baptismal promise of transformation in response to intention.

I have just returned from a three-month special leave from my academic and management responsibilities at Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS). It was my first sabbatical as the leave-taker. The Faculty Handbook reads, “The purpose of such special leaves is professional development, study, and/or research … During a special leave, a member of faculty is released from all regular Seminary responsibilities.” So it was a peculiar experience to sit on the back porch sipping morning coffee on Tuesday, September 2, as the seminary began a new program year and my faculty colleagues lined up for the academic procession that marks the beginning of a new term. VTS is more like a local congregation than many institutions of higher learning.

It is an intimate place, more like a local congregation than many Episcopal seminaries, led in-depth consultations and workshops in two dioceses, had immersions in Episcopal schools and camp/conference centers, and made a site visit for The Confirmation Project research.

Through this activity, I became more convinced than ever that discipleship, the intentional lifelong and life-wide formation of Christians, is at the core of being church. To join in God’s mission of redeeming and renewing the world through Jesus Christ requires knowing how our individual and corporate lives connect to the sacred story we have inherited.

I saw first-hand the distinction between ministries built around devotion to the institution and ministries drawing from the well of Word and Sacrament. I witnessed courageous and imaginative acts of faith that shaped tangible programs and built vital congregations. Wherever my hosts made explicit connections between the work of the Spirit and their response to it, I witnessed new life.

I have returned to VTS road-weary and vocationally exhilarated. I am more committed than ever to the teaching, research, and writing I am called to do as the Director of the CMT and as Professor of Christian Formation and Congregational Leadership.

Equipping church leaders to live into their baptismal covenants and the Great Commission is essential, urgent work. How appropriate that it is the season of Epiphany. I invite you to join me in renewing your commitment to proclaim the good news that Jesus revealed God to all humanity.

When Jillian Flom began looking at colleges, at the top of her list of priorities was a college with an active Episcopal Campus Ministry. After visiting schools in North Carolina, she chose the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) for its academic discipline and established Episcopal campus ministry.

In the middle of her sophomore year, the situation changed. Due to a shortfall in the overall budget for the Diocese of East Carolina, funding for the campus minister’s position had to be cut, leaving the program hanging. The program has since been rebuilt with the re-establishment of the Campus Ministry Advisory Council and the hiring of a part-time campus minister.

In the interim, Jillian found she was a better fit at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCp), transferring there at the beginning of her junior year. After discovering that there was no Episcopal campus ministry, Jillian got to work. She began networking with another Episcopalian student, and soon they were meeting and inviting friends. By the beginning of spring semester of 2014 the campus ministries merged to form the Episcopal Lutheran Ministries (ELM) at UNCP.

ELM at UNCP is rooted in Episcopal and Lutheran traditions, helping students grow in their faith and outreach to others. ELM has been making an impact at UNCP in ways no one could have imagined. Robeson County, where UNCP is located, is among the state’s poorest. In addition, it has a large Native American population with deep, wide-spread Pentecostal roots. It is a challenge to be different.

ELM seeks to change that. It is the first campus ministry at UNCP, for example, to offer programs in conjunction with the Gay Student Alliance (GSA). ELM is the first group to offer Eucharist on campus and the first campus ministry to co-sponsor an event with the Secular Student Alliance.

These open partnerships have come with their own challenges. ELM has been excluded from gatherings of other campus ministries because of their policy of radical welcome and desire for diversity. ELM members have been invited to other campus ministries that try to “convert” them or disparage ELM’s acceptance of diversity.

These challenges have not thwarted ELM students. Charlie Jackson, the first President of ELM, was invited by The Episcopal Church to speak at Kindling, a gathering of Campus and Young Adult Ministries that met in Minnesota over the summer. Charlie talked about the grass-roots student-led ministry that has quickly grown at UNCP; his presentation is available on YouTube. The ELM ministry is valued by both denominations. The Lutheran Synod of North Carolina provides support through Pastor Vidiey Hansen, who works directly with students and the Diocese of East Carolina which provides funding and staff support. The center of the ministry are the students themselves who are committed to each other, spreading the radical welcome of God’s love and making a difference on campus and in the Pembroke community.

ELM at UNCP is leading a new way for campus ministries at other colleges and universities. Recognizing its work, The Episcopal Church gave ELM a grant in 2014 to further its ministeries and provide a sustainable model for other campus ministries.

ELM is already finding new ways to engage and involve younger students in campus ministry, moving those who are interested into leadership roles. Growing faithful young adult leadership will provide the vibrancy The Episcopal Church needs.

Recently a group students active in campus ministries shared an afternoon of coffee and conversation with Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori. She was visiting the Diocese of East Carolina for the consecration of the Rt. Rev. Robert Skirving as bishop.

Bishop Schori began the conversation with a question to the students about their relationship with LGBT communities. Students from ELM had a lot to say. They talked about their passion for inclusion, their desire to reach out to those who are different, and their interest in other faiths and religious backgrounds. When the students asked the Bishop Schori how they could support the overall ministry of the Church, she smiled and told them to keep doing what they were doing. Students like Jillian and Charlie show by their actions the love of Christ that they share with others.

Emily Gowdy Canady is Program Officer for Youth, College Campus and Young Adult Ministries for the Diocese of East Carolina.
Easter Arrives with Alleluia Butterflies

By Nancy Eubanks

Each year well before Epiphany ends, the parishioners at St. James Episcopal Church in Marietta, GA, begin asking, “Are the children going to make their Alleluia butterflies this year?” I always answer, “Absolutely!” Our Alleluia butterflies are weatherproof creations that parishioners of all ages make and place all around the grounds of St. James to herald the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning.

Early in Epiphany, I gather colorful art foam sheets, templates of butterfly shapes—both large and small—religious and springtime art foam stickers, jewels, craft glue, circle hole punches, black chenille stems, and welding rods. In addition, I locate our symbols of Christ, which are from the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum (ECC).

During the Church School time on the last Sunday of Epiphany, everyone gathers for the much-anticipated making of Alleluia butterflies. We begin by talking about the meaning of Lent before discussing the symbols of Easter and of Christ. Illustrations from the ECC cards showing these symbols are displayed around the room. Then it is time to begin tracing, cutting, and decorating the butterflies. Older elementary children draw symbols with black pen or permanent marker, then adorn them with foam stickers for additional color. A thorax (the midsection of a butterfly) is cut from a coordinating color and glued between the wings for extra strength. Holes are punched at the top, and chenille stems are threaded through and curled to mimic antennae.

The preschool teachers usually precut two butterflies for each child, one to decorate with the Easter symbol stickers, and one to design and take home. The second is wrapped in tissue to form a “cocoon.” At home the cocoons are hidden under beds or in closets until Easter morning. The children are so delighted with their creations that they did not want to leave without taking a cocoon home.

The teens and adults are certainly not left out. A butterfly-making station with all the needed supplies plus directions awaits them in the Parish Hall. Even though children make their own creations in Church School, families often enjoy fashioning another butterfly or two together.

After allowing time for the butterflies to dry, they are gathered for a procession through the church accompanied by the sounds of a recorded Gregorian Chant. The procession ends at the Parish Hall where they are “buried.” As the end of Lent approaches, the butterflies are brought out for volunteers to cut two horizontal slits in each to accommodate the welding rods. After trying wooden dowels, we found welding rods to be a strong, yet flexible mounting—one that would allow the butterflies to sway in the wind suggesting flight.

We use 2.4 mm rods that are bent back in a 45-degree angle, about 8 inches from one end. The angled end of the rod is threaded through the slits in the butterfly and secured at the back with wide, clear tape. After the rods are added, the butterflies are returned to their hiding place. Late in the afternoon on Easter Eve, volunteers gather to “plant” the butterflies around the church grounds. Because St. James is at the corner of two heavily traveled streets, there is much ground to cover and lots of exposure for the creations.

During the set-up time, we often have walkers or drivers roll down car windows and ask us questions. Through our explanations, we proclaim the Good News of Easter. Although some parishioners and visitors see the butterflies at Easter Vigil, the best time to admire the butterflies is Easter morning. The newest butterflies are placed just outside the main church entrance, so that the children can more easily find their art, a tradition that for St. James is much like an Easter egg hunt.

Youth and families are often found looking for older butterflies made when they were younger. It is a beautiful time in many ways as the congregation gathers to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection.

I cannot imagine Easter at St. James without Alleluia butterflies. They have become a tradition that is meaningful for the entire congregation—a creative way to “bury our alleluias” during Lent, and to experience the joy of Easter in a truly intergenerational way.

Nancy S. Eubanks is Director of Christian Education for Children at St. James Episcopal Church, Marietta, GA.

(Editor’s note: Art for cards from the ECC curriculum with the symbols of Christ are available for free download on the Virginia Theological Seminary website at http://www.cts.edu/cm/published/ ecc. Look for the symbol cards in the Intermediate section.)
Daily Prayer for All Seasons
Office of the General Convention
(Church Publishing, Inc., 2014)

Drawing from the ancient monastic tradition of “praying the hours,” the Daily Prayer for All Seasons offers eight short, simple services for praying at various times throughout the day: Lauds (dawn/waking up), Prime (morning/start of day), Terce (mid-morning), Sext (mid-day), None (afternoon), Vespers (dusk/end of day), Compline (night/bedtime), and Vigils (late night). In addition, a particular “labor” is assigned to each of the services as a way to assist readers in developing a healthy pattern of work and prayer.

The book comes out of the Office of the General Convention and was compiled by a diverse team of people throughout the Episcopal Church. In the introduction the writers encourage readers to use the book within their own context:

“Don’t be intimidated by the hours as we’ve labeled them. Maybe your day starts at the crack of noon or your bedtime comes after the night shift; maybe the end of your workday marks only the beginning of meetings for another part of your life. It’s all right to adjust the prayers to the day as you live it, no matter how topsy-turvy it seems.” (p. x)

To enrich the experience of the reader, the services are spread over the seven seasons of the liturgical year (Advent, Christmas, the Season after Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and two sets for the Season after Pentecost—one focusing on the theme of Creation and the other focusing on a theme of rest).

Each seasonal service offers meditations, prayers, and seasonally appropriate readings from scripture. For example, the scripture reading offered for the mid-morning service in the season of Advent is Isaiah 40:3-5: “A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God....’”

The scripture reading for the same service time during the Christmas season is John 1:14, 16, 18: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth....”

This resource might be particularly helpful for those who have difficulty reading the longer forms of the Daily Office in The Book of Common Prayer. Although most of the services included in the book are intended for group use, they may easily be adapted for private use.

The Rev. Eric Mansil, is a senior at Virginia Theological Seminary and a deacon from the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast.

Oracion Diaria Para Todos los Tiempos
(Churc publishing, Inc., 2014)

Este texto de oraciones lo mas que me gusto e impresiono es la forma en que se encuentra dividido por los Tiempos Liturgicos de Adviento, Navidad, Epifania, Cuaresma, Semana Santa, Pascua, Tiempo Ordinario (Creacion) y Tiempo Ordinario (Descanso). Estas divisiones ayudan al orante a penetrar en el espíritu de cada Tiempo Liturgico y poder conectarse con Dios y consigo mismo en una vida de oracion continua en su diario vivir. Otro punto que me llama la atencion es las explicaciones e introducciones de cada Tiempo Liturgico, la division de como poder comenzar la oracion diaria, las meditacion y discernimiento son muy sencillas y con un vocabulario entendible para cualquier persona que desee vivir un momento intimo de oracion con Dios.

Estos textos de oracion estan muy bien escogidos y facil de rezar o orar, las personas pueden hacer sus oraciones ya sean individualmente o en compania de otras personas y hasta en las mismas Celebraciones Liturgicas en las diferentes Iglesias y grupos comunitarios de oracion. Este texto esta hecho para que sea utilizado tanto por adultos, jovenes y niños.

Otra de las ventajas que puedo compartir es el tamaño del texto, ya que es muy conveniente de llevar, es util para llevarlo en los maletines, carteras, bolsos, etc... es muy conveniente para utilizarlo en el bus, el auto, en el train, en la oficina del medico, en el hogar o en el momento del cafe en los lugares de trabajo, etc... Este texto en un instrument excelente por todo lo antes dicho, es un texto de muy simple e entendible vocabulario que nos ayuda a todos a podernos concentrar a una vida de oracion dia y de crecimiento espiritual. Todos necesitamos un momento intimo con Dios. Necesitamos instrumentos como esta guia de oracion para poder estar dia a dia en comunion con Dios y con nosotros mismos. Tambien es un instrumento de cercania a los demas, ya que podemos invitarlos a que oren con nosotros diariamente y esto nos ayudaria a ser mejores seres humanos y cristianos.

Este texto esta muy bien adaptado a nuestro diario vivir, ya que todos estamos muy cargados de trabajo, ocupaciones del hogar, familiares y comunitarios. Este texto por su contextura y comodidad lo podemos llevar a todas partes como llevamos todos los dias nuestro celular. El ser humano del siglo 21 no podemos vivir sin nuestro celulares asi tambien ahora podemos cagar con nuestro Texto de Oracion Dia y poder estar siempre conectados con nuestra vida de oracion y comunion con Dios.

Roberto Soto is a parishioner at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Miami, FL.
Signed, Sealed, DELIVERED
Compiled by Sharon Ely Pearson
(Morehouse Publishing, 2014)
www.churchpublishing.org

Many clergy and educators say that the rite of Confirmation in the Episcopal Church today is a sacrament in search of a meaning. Some believe it is an essential rite of passage for adult leadership in the governance of the church. Others believe it is a rite that no longer has a place in the life of the church, understanding the importance that Baptism now holds in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer’s ecclesiology.

Sharon Ely Pearson, continues the conversation. In her Master of Arts thesis written at Virginia Theological Seminary, Pearson began a serious study of the history and theology of Baptism now holds in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer’s ecclesiology. Pearson also explores the role of the catechumenal process that came from ancient traditions and how Christian initiation for adolescents is one part of a lifelong journey of faith formation.

Much of Part I grew out of Pearson’s initial thesis work. She ties together the role of the rites of initiation in the Christian tradition, and how the framers of the 1979 prayer book reemphasized the liturgy of initiation in the early church. Pearson also explores the role of the catechumenal process that came from ancient traditions and how Christian initiation for adolescents is one part of a lifelong journey of faith formation.

Pearson taps into a wide range of voices in the Episcopal Church today, including bishops, liturgical scholars, seminary professors, confirmation leaders, and youth themselves. Writers like Ruth Meyers, James Mathes and Victoria Garvey grapple with the issues of re-imagining confirmation (Meyers), finding a place for it in the “messy middle” (Mathes), and contemplating it through the lens of “one wild and precious life” (Garvey). Round up Part II are views of confirmation from other cultures.

Coming from a Catholic context in the Hispanic community, for example, the first questions parents ask are how long does it take and how much does it cost. The first lesson for all ages is learning that “sacraments are part of an ongoing process of formation, discipleship, and salvation.”

Writers in Part III tackle the practical side of preparing people for confirmation. Jennifer Gambler, who has authored two books on the topic, gives readers 10 recommendations for building a program for preparing youth to own the Baptismal Covenant and give their hearts to God. Lisa Kinball envisions confirmation as “an established base camp on the Christian journey.”

A strong advocate of the “Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation,” which was adopted at the 77th General Convention in 2009, Pearson argues that the Church must equip its members to experience, proclaim, and invite others to share the Good News. Part IV of Signed, Sealed, Delivered proposes a theology to support an emphasis of lifelong faith formation.

This book raises many of the issues congregations need to explore as they seek to make confirmation preparation a meaningful part of lifelong formation. It should be required reading for anyone who has a role in that preparation.

—Dorothy Linthicum

Vibrant Faith is offering a webinar interview series led by Nancy Going called the Future of Faith Formation. It will focus on such questions as: “How is faith transmitted from one generation to the next, and how can families, congregations, and faith communities align themselves with the ways God is active in the world today?”

The first interview is with Joani Schultz, executive producer of “When God Left the Building,” who will be discussing what she’s learned about the future of faith formation through the process of making the film and screening it across the country. The session is at 1 p.m. on February 11, 2015, and is free (register at bit.ly/vfmdifference).

Subsequent interviews will be conducted with Vern Bengston, Phyllis Tickle, Gene Roebikepartain, Rollie Martinson, and Kyle Oliver. The cost of these webinars is $20.
SAVE THE DATE!

e-Formation
eformationvts.org
June 1-3, 2015