



Sunday School - it's for life!

Stewardship and the Sunday School

Making the Connections

The earth is the LORD'S and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.

Psalm 24:1-2, NRSV

These verses are the "Bridgepoint" psalm for all children's classes using the *Exploring Faith* curriculum series by Cokesbury. For those congregations that will be conducting or concluding stewardship campaigns during the month of November, this scripture can be used in worship as a reminder that our tithes and offerings are a means of recognizing the abundance of God's gifts to us, as well as an opportunity for serving as stewards of those gifts. As the pastor, you can also let the congregation know that through the Sunday school children are learning about stewardship.

More Than Money

Whenever we welcome new persons into our congregations, we promise to support these persons as they seek to grow in Christian faith and discipleship. We ask them to make a commitment to the congregation through their prayers, their presence, their gifts, and their service. These mutual relationships of support and encouragement are foundational to congregational stewardship.

In addition to tithes and offerings, congregants are invited to identify spiritual gifts and find places for using those gifts within the congregation and the community (locally and globally). During Advent, the older elementary children in classes using *Exploring Faith* will find an "Advent Checklist." This list includes items such as:

- Invite a friend to come to Sunday School and church
- Donate food or clothing or toys to the needy
- Make cookies and deliver them to someone who is lonely
- Tell the Christmas story to someone

How can my congregation invite children, youth, and adults to share their gifts with those in need? What opportunities for mission and service do I need to promote? How will I remind the congregation that faith is not only a matter of what we believe, but also of how we live?

For the Unison Prayer

We are surrounded by your goodness, O God. We hear you speak through our Sunday school teachers, pastors, families, and friends. We see your compassion in the faces of friends who gather for prayer and Bible study and in those gathered here for worship. We feel your presence in the touch of a childcare giver, a youth counselor, a greeter. Fill us with your spirit, so that others may hear you, see you, and feel your presence by our words and actions. *Amen.*

Resources for the Season

If you use the Revised Common Lectionary in worship, consider offering an Advent study for adults using *Babe in a Manger: Scriptures for the Church Season*, published by Abingdon Press. This study will help participants prepare for worship and/or reflect in more depth on the scriptures used in worship.

If you don't follow the lectionary or you're looking for other study options, offer a study using *The Scriptures Sing of Christmas: An Advent Study for Adults* or *Mary Had a Baby: An Advent Study Based on African American Spirituals*, both of which are published by Abingdon Press.

What Are They Studying?

Here are some of the themes of Cokesbury's most widely used materials for November and December. Knowing these themes might present an opportunity for you or another leader in the church to talk with the teachers or students. Could you find a way to share your own sense of the call of God with them? Or perhaps their own stories might emerge and be shared with the congregation. Sunday School can be a wonderful place of discovery!

In *Exploring Faith* and *One Room Sunday School*, in November the children will see how the Bible reveals God as reliable, fulfilling God's promises to the people, even when we are not faithful, leading up to the beginning of Advent. December's topic will be Hope. Long before Jesus was born, the people hoped for the coming of the Savior that God had promised. During

this season of Advent and Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the promised Savior and the fulfillment of God's promise.

The winter quarter of *Bible Lessons for Youth* focuses on answering God's call using stories of call throughout Scripture. In November youth will study the Gospels and explore the call of Jesus and his followers. In December youth will study Ruth, 2 Kings, and John with an emphasis on overcoming obstacles to doing God's will and following Christ.

The fall quarter of *Adult Bible Studies* closes with the study of New Testament texts that help us think about the new creation that Christ makes possible. In December we turn to the theme of call—looking at various ways God call the community of faith to live out the purpose for which we are created. We will begin by tracing the establishment of the community of faith and look at the calls of Abraham, David, Joseph (the father of Jesus) and Simeon and Anna.

Notes for Newsletters

A Season of Celebration . . .

A Season of Anticipation

The holidays are coming. You have probably already been hearing daily reminders of how many more "shopping days" there are until Christmas. Between the costumes and candy of Halloween and the parties, decorations, and commercials for Christmas, we try and squeeze in holy days, such as All Saints' Day, Thanksgiving, and the four Sundays of Advent. This is one of the most obvious times of the year when the Christian faith is counter-cultural. As the body of Christ, we challenge the consumerism of our culture and invite people to celebrate the communion of saints, the abundance of God's provisions, and the longing for God's promised Messiah.

Mature Years, Fall 2004, includes this scripture meditation for the week of November 22-28:

"Have you been here for our buffet before?" asks the maitre d'. "No," we answer; as we gawk at the opulence and bounty surrounding us. "Well then," he says, "let me show you what we have," as he tells us where all the sumptuous buffet tables are located. I am eager for you to know, Paul says, "what is the breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's bountiful love! (p. 108)

Sunday school is one of the significant settings for

children, youth, and adults to experience the breadth and length and height and depth of God's bountiful love through Jesus Christ! As a congregation, we can encourage individuals and families to participate weekly in a class or small group during the coming holiday season. Together we will discover ways to celebrate God's hospitality in study, worship, service, and fellowship, so that our congregation becomes a living reminder of the "waiting days" before Christmas.

Food for Thought

In *Practicing Our Faith, A Way of Life for a Searching People*, Ana María Pineda writes:

The expectation that God's people are people who will welcome strangers and treat them justly runs throughout the Bible. . . . It emerges from knowing the hospitality God has shown to us.

During Advent and Christmas participants in worship and Sunday school classes will hear the story of Mary and Joseph seeking a place to stay in Bethlehem. How will we teach and preach hospitality as a spiritual discipline? What opportunities to show hospitality to strangers will be included in our congregation's celebration of the season?