

WELCOME

to *Seasons of the Spirit!*



Seasons of the Spirit

...is an ecumenical and international resource.

The *Seasons of the Spirit* resources are created through a collaborative process utilizing the creativity, insight, theology, passion, and skills of individuals from a variety of denominations. Representing congregations from many parts of the world, *Seasons of the Spirit* is sensitive to a variety of traditions, faith practices, and cultures. At the heart of *Seasons of the Spirit* is a large ecumenical and international church family that uses these resources in its ministries of worship, education, and service.

...is grounded in tradition, engaged in the present, and envisions the future.

Our biblical ancestors formed their identity as God's people as they heard the stories of faith and participated in rituals associated with them. Early Christians adopted and adapted this practice. The stories and rituals of our biblical heritage also help us form our identity as Christians in today's world. *Seasons of the Spirit* uses the cycle of Bible readings from the *Revised Common Lectionary* and the seasons of the church year to provide a unified structure for worship, learning, and service (see "Being Led by the Lectionary" on p. 3). The lectionary and seasons of the church year help connect our past, present, and future as God's people.

...integrates ministries of the church.

In her book *Fashion Me a People*, Maria Harris outlines five essential ministries that shape the Christian church:

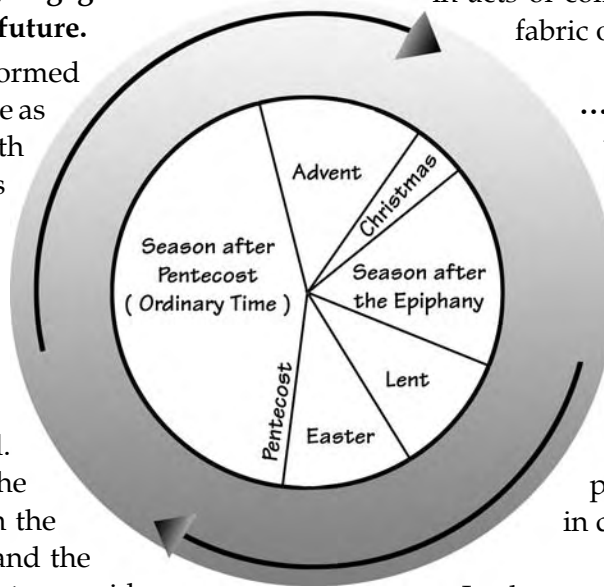
- the ministry of community
- the ministry of prayer and worship
- the ministry of proclamation
- the ministry of teaching
- the ministry of compassionate service

Seasons of the Spirit brings together these five ministries of the church, weaving them into a holistic approach to faith formation and faithful living. As all ages worship, learn, and engage in acts of compassionate service, a strong fabric of faith formation emerges.

...engages with the arts, technology, and science.

Faith formation is not merely a matter of theological discussion. It is also a matter of the heart and soul. The arts, science, and technology stir our imagination and feed our experience of divine mystery. In these experiences, we encounter God in deep and unexpected ways.

In these ways and many more, *Seasons of the Spirit* engages responsibly and creatively the contemporary learning and worshipping environment of Christian congregations and parishes.



Seasons Theological and Educational Foundations

The history of the project...

How do representatives from a variety of church-related organizations from English-speaking countries in different hemispheres find enough common ground to first share an idea, then articulate a vision, and finally develop a product together? The answer is, by the grace of God!

In October of 1996, a meeting took place to explore the question, “Can independent and denominational publishers collaborate to produce a Christian education and worship resource?” The response was a resounding “yes.” At this initial meeting the seed was planted which eventually grew into *Seasons of the Spirit*, an ecumenical, lectionary-based curriculum resource that could be used internationally.

The group began by identifying the hungers perceived in local congregations, such as a need for spiritual renewal, vital and meaningful worship, biblical understanding, faith formation, a life of discipleship, ecumenical partnership in the faith community, and courageous witness and service in the world.

For several years, a group of Christian leaders, representing a wide variety of denominations, spent time in prayer and discernment, exploring what

resources might offer a helpful response to local congregations, respecting their unique faith stories and inviting them into dialogue with one another.

The original publishing partners of *Seasons of the Spirit* – MediaCom Education in Australia; Logos Productions, United Church Press, and United Methodist Publishing House in the United States; and Wood Lake Books in Canada – heard this prophetic call and responded faithfully through this venture.

Over the years, the faces at the development table have changed, but the goal remains unchanged. Through a collaborative writing and editing process, and in the spirit of discernment, the ideals of community biblical exploration, celebration, engagement with the arts and technology, integration of ministries, and transformational living continue to guide the *Seasons of the Spirit* resources.

The vision of the project...

The *Seasons of the Spirit Theological and Educational Foundations Paper* was drafted collaboratively and has guided the project since 1998. The vision of *Seasons of the Spirit* is that each section of the resource:

- invites us to explore meaning and mystery in the Bible through the lectionary.
- encourages us to experience the transforming power of Christ as together worship, sacraments, and education work in our lives.
- calls us into the ecumenical, global, and inclusive heart of the church where these resources are grounded and shaped.
- nurtures faith by engaging the imagination through the Bible, tradition, science, technology, and the arts.

- engages responsibly and creatively the contemporary teaching and learning environment of Christian congregations and parishes.
- sends us into the contemporary world with its current events, issues, knowledge, and discoveries acting as an arena to test, share, and live out our faith.

Each of these foundations finds its grounding in scripture and is lived out through active engagement with local and global communities. As a resource based on the lectionary and focused on the church year, *Seasons of the Spirit* united Christ’s followers around the globe.

You can view the entire contents of the *Theological and Educational Foundations Paper* on the home page of the *Seasons* website: www.spiritseasons.com.

Being Led by the Lectionary

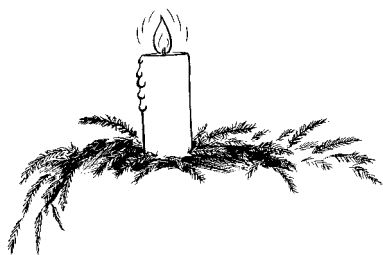
From the earliest days of Christianity, some churches have followed a lectionary for their worship. The revision of the Roman lectionary during Vatican II inspired a renewed interest in lectionary usage by a variety of denominations. This eventually led to the Revised Common Lectionary (1993), which is used in worship books, hymnals, and church calendars throughout the English-speaking world. Using four scripture readings per week, this lectionary provides a structure for reading a large portion of the Bible over a three-year cycle.

Moving through the seasons...

The seasons of the church year, which guide the readings in the lectionary, engage spirituality in a number of different ways. Within the rhythms of the church year and the readings from the lectionary are ample opportunities for the Holy Spirit to lead in a new and holy dance. As an added advantage, the lectionary is both ecumenical and international, meaning that churches around the world explore the same scriptures each week.

Advent, Christmas, Epiphany

In Advent, the mood of anticipation and hope is enhanced by readings from the Hebrew prophets and gospel readings about God being born among us. Church activities focus on preparation for a new birthing of God within our lives,



which is celebrated in the short Christmas season. The Season after the Epiphany celebrates the beginnings of Jesus' earthly ministry. It provides opportunities to explore calls to both individual and congregational ministry. It also invites congregations to examine how they might better invite and equip people to live out their ministries.

Lent, Easter

Lenten readings invite us to examine ourselves, looking within both individual and communal hearts to better understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Some churches concentrate on spiritual growth and development



through additional worship and learning opportunities. Easter is a joyous celebration of fifty days – beginning with Easter Day and culminating with the festival of the Day of Pentecost. In this season, readings from the New Testament epistles examine the life of the early church, learning from their activities, mistakes, and adventures.

Pentecost 1 and 2

Following the festival of Pentecost we enter a long period of time which some churches call "Ordinary Time." *Seasons of the Spirit* divides this long season into two seasonal resources. Stories of Jesus' teaching and healing, set against sweeping



sagas of Hebrew history and prophetic readings, remind us how God is with us in the everyday moments of our lives.

Throughout the year, the Bible readings suggested by the lectionary provide many opportunities to celebrate, learn, grow, and be the Body of Christ. The readings of the *Revised Common Lectionary* can open us to new and exciting ways to live out our faith.

Integrating Music

Seasons of the Spirit resources provide music in several formats: printed music, electronic text files, and recorded music.



In each season, the age-level resource contains a printed music section with words and accompaniment for the music included for that season. Those who purchase *Congregational Life* also receive a seasonal music booklet, plus access to reproducible lyric files on the data CD. Access to reproducible text files for lyrics is also available to all in the Library on the *Seasons* website at www.spiritseasons.com.

An annual *Seasons Music CD* and *Seasons Songbook* offer music for a whole liturgical year, beginning with Advent and moving through to the end of the Season after Pentecost. Congregations may wish to purchase the *Music CDs* for church school and youth groups and the *Seasons Songbooks* for music planners and worship leaders.

Songs included in *Seasons of the Spirit* come from many cultures. Margin notes offer teaching helps, such as performance ideas, accompaniment options, and pronunciation keys for foreign words. Church school groups, youth groups, and congregations are encouraged to try singing the songs in their original languages. Encourage participants not to worry about pronouncing everything correctly; just enjoy receiving the musical ministry of another culture.

Here are some suggestions for ways to introduce unfamiliar music:

- Before teaching a new song, have a choir learn it first; then have them help teach the song.
- Teach new songs prior to a worship service, rather than interrupting the flow of the liturgy later on.
- Sing songs over and over again and learn them over time; everyone needs repetition in order to learn new songs.
- Try not to introduce too much new music at one time; intersperse familiar songs with new ones so that learners of all ages feel “at home again” when they hear a recognized piece of music.
- Listen to the recordings on the *Seasons Music CDs* to learn the rhythm and tempo of the songs.
- Provide context for the songs by sharing background information.
- Use the *Seasons Music CD* in the background as your group gathers, or during respond activities.



Integrating Visual Arts

"The arts (visual, literary, dramatic, musical) nourish religious imagination, and because of that the arts are essential in forming faith."
Maria Harris

As Christian educators we seek meaning not certainty, and we foster the imagination as we strive to make the "Bible come alive, relevant, disturbing, and still capable of taking our breath away." We need to spend time nurturing, awakening, exercising our own imagination, making it possible to enter into the mystery of God's creation and God's realm.

Seasons of the Spirit affirms the role of imagination in helping to break open the scriptures in new ways. Through large full-colour posters and storytelling resources, as well as poetry and other texts, *Seasons of the Spirit* resources help congregations to integrate visual and literary arts into all of their ministries.

So how can leaders and learners make use of these arts resources? Very young learners might be invited to look at a poster and talk about

signs of God's love and care they can see. Older children might observe an image and imagine what might happen next. Worshippers might meditate on an image projected from the data CD (included with the *Congregational Life* resource) during the sermon or in conjunction with Communion. Youth and adults might listen to a biblical passage while reflecting on one of the posters, then write prayers based on what they see and hear. A church committee might listen to words of scripture while meditating on a poster and then brainstorm together how this image might influence their work together.

"Our deepest truths are non-cognitive, rooted in the realm of the imagination."
John Dykstra Eusden and
John H. Westerhoff III,
*Sensing Beauty:
Aesthetics, the Human Spirit and the Church*

The arts encourage us to wonder as they challenge and enrich our faith. In many ways *Seasons of the Spirit* nurtures faith by engaging the imagination through the arts.

Behold: Arts for the Church Year conveys the biblical story of each season of the church year through a diverse and beautiful collection of images, writings, and scripture. This booklet can be used for personal devotions, a sermon preparation tool, or to enhance a gathering worship before committee meetings. It could also be used in pastoral visitation and as a thank you gift for leaders. Copies of *Behold* can be purchased from Logos Productions or from your curriculum distributor.



ENGAGING THE IMAGINATION

By Carol Wehrheim

Imagination is the essential means, humanly speaking, by which faith becomes possible.

Edward Robinson,
The Language of Mystery

In the *Theological and Educational Foundations Paper for Seasons of the Spirit*, the first affirmation is an invitation “to explore the meaning and mystery in the Bible through the lectionary.” Further, these resources will “encourage children, youth, and adults to enter imaginatively into scripture, experiencing the message that transcends the printed words.” Later in the same document, the fourth affirmation encourages us to nurture faith “by engaging the imagination through the Bible, tradition, science, technology, and the arts.” One way that *Seasons* attempts to fulfill that affirmation is by providing “visual and other creative arts to form a pool of images for all to draw upon.”

But what is it that imagination does for us as we study, interpret, or meditate on scripture? Imagination

- ✓ gives us ways to ponder new possibilities
- ✓ sets us on a path to seek hope
- ✓ helps us discover new meanings
- ✓ encourages us to see, hear, touch, smell, and even taste something in a new way
- ✓ places us where we can encounter mystery

It is our imagination that propels us toward the God of all creation. When we bring this gift of imagination to the scripture, it turns ever so slightly in order that it is new for us once more. Without imagination the message on the printed page is little more than ink and paper. Through our imagination, we can step into the world of New Testament Palestine or walk along the mountainous paths as the shepherd takes the sheep to still waters. Our imagination, fired by God’s Spirit, gives us a glimpse of God’s own vision and hope for all creation. Without God’s gift of imagination to each of

us we would be stuck in the mire of each day, unable to look ahead or behind us with awe and wonder.

Easy access to our imagination too often disappears as we mature, so that by adulthood we consider reality and facts the only valid measure of life. The poets and other artists around us manage to hold on to their imaginations. Some of us do too, but we shelter our use of it so much that others don’t know it’s there. In order to regain the use of our imagination, we have to bring it out into the open and use it. Like a muscle, when it is not exercised, the imagination withers and grows weak. Like playing a musical instrument, the imagination needs practice to grow and flourish.

Before you engage your imagination, think about the ways that our imagination is brought forth and made lively.

- ✓ Our imagination may be nudged when we observe or participate in any of the arts: literature, music, visual arts, or dance.
- ✓ Our imagination can be nourished when we play.
- ✓ Our imagination can be brought forth in meditation and prayer, particularly if we allow time for silence.
- ✓ Our imagination can be nurtured as we serve others.
- ✓ Our imagination can be heightened when we spend time with children, allowing their imaginations to feed our own.
- ✓ Our imagination can also be fed when we allow artists to help us see as they see.

As the leader of a group or congregation engaged in studying the Bible with the aid of *Seasons of the Spirit* materials, you are also the lead-

er in fostering the use of imagination to those in your group. To exercise that leadership, begin by spending time nurturing your own imagination, making it possible to enter into the mystery of God's creation and God's realm.

Using visual art as a starting place, here are some ways to begin now to nourish your imagination:

- Select an image of a spiritual subject such as an icon, an image from a book, or a piece of art you own. Choose something with at least one person in it. Place your image flat on a table or the floor. Walk around it and gaze at it from many angles. What is the person in the image saying to you as you move around the image? How does the message change as you move from the bottom to the top? From side to side? As you do this, you are trying out your imagination by looking at a work of art from angles that you couldn't were it displayed in a gallery. Trying out new perspectives prompts our imagination to take hold.
- Sit in front of the image with a child. Close your eyes and try to erase the image from your mind. Ask the child to describe the picture to you and listen carefully. What does the child see? How does the child name what she or he sees? What does the tone of the child's voice tell you about the picture? Seeing the art piece through the eyes of a child can open your eyes to new sights. Our imagination allows us to sit on the margin between reality and mystery and watch and listen.
- Display the image on a wall. Stand in front of it and mirror the pose of the person there. What words come naturally to you in this pose? Our imagination comes into

play not only through what we imagine, but also through how we move. Allow your imagination to grow as you dare to move into new ways of standing, walking, sitting, and resting.

- Gaze at the image. As you do so, imagine the person in a different setting. If it's bright daylight imagine darkness, or vice versa. If the setting is indoors imagine it outside, etc. How does the change of setting change the figure in the art? Place the person in other settings, such as a field of wildflowers or a busy city street, to see what happens then. Our imagination helps us change the background of life and substitute an alternative. Without this part of our imagination, we have no hope in God's future for all creation.
- Place the image where you can sit comfortably and gaze upon it. Slowly look at each part of the picture. Take note of the colours and the use of light and dark. What is included in the picture? What is not? What motions do the lines (solid and broken) of the picture suggest? What gives depth to the picture? What kind of message without words does this picture give you? If the picture were untitled, what would you call it?

Reading a painting or sculpture in new ways takes us into it deeper and deeper. This depth feeds our imagination and grows our ability to enter into the mystery of the work of art.

Keep your imagination alive. Cherish this gift from God. Nurture it in others as you lead and as you live.

Carol Wehrheim is an editor for Seasons of the Spirit, and author of Getting It Together: Spiritual Practices for Faith, Family, and Work. She lives in Princeton, New Jersey, USA.

Integrating Technology

It's hard to imagine a time before the personal computer, access to the World Wide Web, and movies on DVDs. As technology has developed, *Seasons of the Spirit* has integrated these tools into the resources, making possible a wide variety of options for learning, worship, serving, and community life.



Using computers in the sessions

Computer learning offers a multi-sensory experience – sight, sound, touch, and motor skill association – as well as information. Using computers promotes reading, and when learners and leaders gather around a computer they can experience a new kind of community. Online activities help connect participants to the contemporary world – its current events, issues, knowledge, and discoveries – as an arena to test, share, and live in faith.

Computer resources can supplement traditional group learning experiences in many different ways. A congregation's computer capabilities may vary from one single computer that normally sits idle in the church office on Sunday mornings to several computers available for group use. If no computer access is available in the church building, children, youth, and adults can be encouraged to visit the *Seasons* website from home or office. (See the article "Using the Internet in Church School" on p. 29.)

More Information

This section offers links to updates and errata, plus planning information under Looking Ahead. You can also register for Spirit Talk, our e-mail discussion group by clicking on Join Free Discussion Groups. You can select from Learning, Serving, or Worship groups, or join all three.

Info@seasons

Customer service assistance is also available through e-mail. Questions, comments, and suggestions will be responded to within 24 hours.

Help line

A toll-free curriculum help line provides support, answers questions about resources, and offers suggestions for making the most of the *Seasons of the Spirit* resources. Customer service staff will answer questions and offer assistance from 8:00–12:00 noon (Pacific Time) Monday to Friday. Voice mail is available 24 hours a day.



Tip of the week

Free e-mail "tip-of-the-week" for educators, clergy, worship leaders, and outreach leaders. These tips highlight activities and resources included in each week's materials.

Navigating your way around the *Seasons* website

The *Seasons* website offers many options for children, youth, and adults. Some features are constant while others change with the seasons or are updated. Most resources are accessible to all users, but some portions of the Library are password-protected, designed as an added convenience for those who purchase *Congregational Life* (each season's username and password is printed on the inside front cover).

Tabs at the top of the home page give easy access to the many features of the website.

ACTION ZONE

This is the hot-spot for learners, including such features as Ask the Rabbi (providing background information on Jewish rituals and practices), the Prayer and Poem Gallery (where users can post the prayers and poems created during group time), and seasonal interactive options.

LIBRARY

This section contains helpful articles and practical tools for leaders, such as educational articles, patterns, clip art, Recognition certificates, Attendance charts, Church School Registration forms, and Lectionary bookmarks, as well as online access to this resource, *From Start to Finish*. Also posted here are the lyrics for seasonal music and reproducible materials from *Congregational Life*. All information in the Library can be downloaded.

SPIRIT SIGHTINGS

These are weekly postings that make connections between current events and the themes of the lectionary readings. Each posting includes a brief news story, discussion questions, and prayer suggestions. Once a month, this link offers a "Spirit Screenings" which makes a connection between a current film and the themes of the biblical texts for that week. This is a great resource for clergy, leaders, youth, and adults.

YOUR IDEAS

The *Seasons of the Spirit* project has a strong commitment to serving the needs of the grassroots community. Congregations that use the *Seasons of the Spirit* resources are encouraged to share their collective wisdom to guide the development and shaping of future seasons. Ideas, suggestions, and recommendations for the future development of resources can be posted to the "Your Ideas" page of the website.

LINKS

When *Congregational Life* or age-level resources recommend online learning options, the *Seasons* website Links provide quick connection to web pages. On the Links page are also connections to many denominational websites as well as ecumenical and interfaith websites.

ORDERING

Click here to view the online catalogue, ask for free samples, and place orders.

Introducing the *Seasons* Resources

Seasons of the Spirit is a family of resources for the whole congregation. It includes age-level resources for Birth – Age 2, Ages 3–5, Ages 6–8, Ages 9–11, Multiage (Ages 5–12), Ages 12–14, Ages 15–18, and Adult. It also includes Team Teacher Supplements, Coordinator Session Plans, Congregational Life, poster sets, annual *Seasons* Music CDs and Songbooks, and a website at www.spiritseasons.com.



The *Congregational Life* resource

Congregational life – two words that describe the integrated ministry of a faith community at work. This is also the title of the three-in-one leadership resource for *Seasons of the Spirit*, offering ideas and support for leading worship, planning Christian education, coordinating outreach, and more.

Each seasonal *Congregational Life* resource provides

- **weekly planning calendars** to encourage an integrated, team approach to leadership
- **weekly worship resources** that can be copied into worship bulletins; including prayers, litanies, musical responses, song suggestions, and sermon ideas for all ages
- **weekly education information** on art images, holy days, civic and justice observances, holidays in other faiths, and resource suggestions
- **weekly serving connections**, suggesting congregational outreach, and referencing outreach and serving options in each age level
- **leader preparation**, a detailed workshop outline for church school and youth group leaders; clergy, music, and worship leaders; offering information about seasonal themes and activities
- **“This Season at a Glance,”** a quick overview of the activities offered at each age level, week by week
- **weekly materials lists** to help Christian education coordinators manage supplies
- **articles** on educational practice, theological interpretation, service opportunities, worship, and more
- **tips and suggestions** for working with infants and toddlers
- **“This Season...at Home”** booklet providing biblical background and seasonal resources to use at home
- **printed music booklet** with usage ideas
- **six large coloured posters**

The *Seasons of the Spirit* Data CD

Each season’s *Congregational Life* also includes a data CD with seasonal clip art and reproducible text files of worship resources, articles, and music lyrics, for use in bulletins and newsletters. In addition the art images on the data CD can be projected for use in worship, learning, and other congregational settings.

Online access to *Congregational Life*

Some of the contents of *Congregational Life* are available online for those who purchase this resource. Go to www.spiritseasons.com, click on Library, and use the seasonal password on the inside front cover of each season’s copy of *Congregational Life*

A *Seasons of the Spirit* DVD is available and includes an introduction to the *Seasons of the Spirit* resources, an explanation of the vision of the project, seasonal introductions for leadership preparation, and a variety of teaching tips.

Overview of a Session

Woven into each weekly session of the *Seasons of the Spirit* resources is the liturgical rhythm of a worship flow to learning. The session materials guide the leader from initial preparation through the session itself and to a time of reflection. The purpose for each section of a session is outlined below, with suggested times. Sessions have been written with a 40-minute time frame in view, and can be extended to a 60-minute session by incorporating more discussion time during the “Engage” section and offering more options during the “Respond” time.

Even if you have a very limited meeting time with your group, your session plan should include

- an opening worship moment from Gather
- at least one Respond option
- as much of the Engage section as possible
- a brief closing from Bless

Organizing a session

In all age levels, the session fills six pages (except a Multiage session, which has eight pages) including reproducible resource sheets.

A page of **Biblical Background** information is provided each week and is common to all resources.

FOCUS FOR...

Makes connections between the themes of the session and the assets, interests, and abilities of a particular age level.

PREPARE

Outlines supplies, resources, and actions needed to present the learning experience

1 GATHER

Invites participants into the learning experience through worship and offers a life experience that makes an initial connection to the theme for the session. (7 minutes)

2 ENGAGE

Offers creative ways to explore the scripture passage(s), providing opportunities to encounter meaning and mystery. (15 minutes)

3 RESPOND

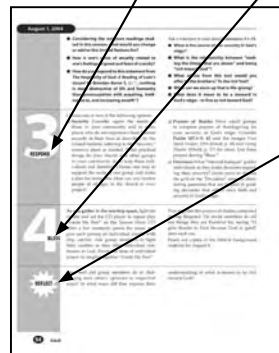
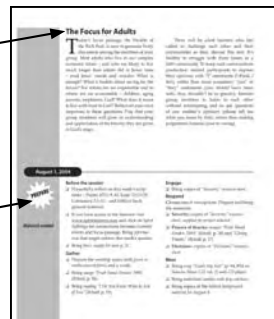
Invites participation and engagement with the world as disciples of Christ, in response to the encounter with scripture. (15 minutes)

4 BLESS

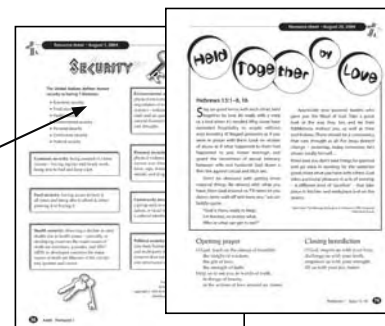
Celebrates new learnings and transformations, sending participants out, empowered by God and the community, to live in the world. (3 minutes)

REFLECT

Invites leaders to reflect on the learning experience and to anticipate the coming weeks.



■ reproducible resource sheets



Overview of Materials

Each age-level resource includes the following sections:

This Season – an overview of the seasonal themes.

This Season, So – age-specific ideas for the season, such as suggestions for opening and closing rituals, descriptions of ongoing activities, and ideas for establishing a learning environment.

Biblical background – supportive background information on all four lectionary passages, with an emphasis on the focus scripture; includes a short prayer related to the overall theme.

Session materials – includes age-level information, supplies, and actions needed to prepare for the session, a two-page session outline, and two reproducible resource or activity sheets. (Multiage sessions have a three-page outline and three resource sheets.)

Music section – printed words and music for the songs recommended for the season.

Resource section – additional resource suggestions for some of the sessions, as well as background information for leaders.

Articles – providing further background on themes related to the season or the scripture readings, or other support for Christian education leaders.

Evaluation form – this can be photocopied to invite feedback from leaders and learners.

NOTE!

Materials that carry this symbol can be photocopied for use within the congregation.



Spirit Talk

Seasons of the Spirit is being used by churches from many different denominations in many different countries. The web makes it possible to be in conversation with other users around the globe. **Spirit Talk** is an online discussion group which has three subgroups: serving, worship, and learning. Christian education leaders, clergy, worship leaders, and outreach coordinators can participate in e-conversations with colleagues in other churches. This forum offers an opportunity to share ideas, ask questions, and offer suggestions. It is a rewarding and effective way to connect with the worldwide Christian community.

To register go to the *Seasons* website at www.spiritseasons.com and click on “Join free discussion groups” at the bottom of the “More Information” section of the home page. Leaders can register for one of the subgroups or for all three.

Using *Seasons of the Spirit* in Rotating Workshops

by Deborah Gline Allen and R. Kenneth Ostermiller

We've been asked: "Can you adapt *Seasons of the Spirit* resources for use in rotating workshops?" The answer is a definite, "Yes!" The churches that have tried it have some good things to share with those who want to try this style of learning.

You can find lots of ideas about how to organize rotating workshops at the website www.rotation.org, maintained by those who pioneered this style of teaching and learning. Participants study the same Bible story or theme for several weeks. Each week they participate in a hands-on, multi-dimensional workshop that involves learning by doing. Workshops are organized around cooking, drama, art, music, storytelling, video, computers, and more. Children rotate in age groups through the workshops over several weeks. This style of learning generally works best with children ages 6–12, although some churches are doing rotations including younger children and older youth.

Susan Huffman, Minister of Education at First Congregational United Church of Christ in Rapid City, South Dakota, told us, "We picked the lesson for one week out of the month and used that material for about four weeks, sometimes longer. The various activities: story, craft, drama, music, etc. were then rotated from week to week. To do this effectively, choose a week that has enough material to work with for several weeks. It works best if there is music and an art project as well as a good narrative story."

We discovered another creative possibility for a small church that has one group of children who meet together each week. In this setting the church had several workshop rotation rooms set up and chose one activity each week which best fit one of their workshop rooms. They tried to use a different workshop room each week, but expanded the activity. This church found the Action Zones in the Multiage resource to be filled with rich and adaptable suggestions for their workshops.

More often, those doing this adapting have found it helpful to have several age-level resources and the *Congregational Life* resource from which to draw ideas for rotations. Nancy Marek, an education consultant in Texas, has presented workshops on how to incorporate *Seasons of the Spirit* into rotating workshops. She has found the process most helpful when there is access to a full set of curriculum, including *Congregational Life*.

At the church in Rapid City, the Department of Education decided to try using *Seasons of the Spirit* with rotations because they wanted to involve more adults as leaders and teachers, and to keep things fresh and new for the children. Susan Huffman added that having the senior minister use the *Congregational Life* materials for worship planning, along with the worship musicians, made the coordination between worship and education quite effective. Another important learning is the necessity of having people with knowledge and experience in lesson planning involved in the adaptation of the lesson materials to the rotating workshop format. As with preparing any quality education program, this process takes some work.

The First Congregational Church in Lorain, Ohio, had been using the workshop rotation model with their children for two years, but they missed the connection with worship. Judy Fischer, Director of Christian Education says, "We wanted to have all of our children, youth, and adults studying and worshipping from the same scripture, so this was a great opportunity for us to try adapting *Seasons of the Spirit* with this method." Judy believes that much of their success in using *Seasons of the Spirit* is due to the fact that they were already very familiar with the rotation model. They use many of the *Seasons of the Spirit* lesson suggestions to adapt to the workshops, but also supplement these with videos, Bible computer software, and other creative suggestions from their educators where appropriate.

One problem we noted is that the lectionary, from which *Seasons of the Spirit* draws Bible stories, doesn't stay with the same Bible story for several weeks. Most churches have chosen the most adaptable *Seasons of the Spirit* session from those available in a given month and then created workshops for the month from that week's resources.

It is important to note that all of the churches we interviewed placed an emphasis on making an intentional connection between education and worship. By combining the educational, worship, and arts resources from *Seasons of the Spirit* with the focus on multiple intelligences in the use of rotating workshops, a church has the potential for building a strong program for Christian nurture.

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Nurturing Christian Education Leaders

What was the name of your favourite church school curriculum as a child? Who was your favourite leader? Chances are if you grew up in the church you did not even know the name of the resource that was used, but you probably remember the name of a person who nurtured you in your faith. Relationships are a crucial part of faith sharing. Quality leaders can make or break the educational ministry of a church. Here are some suggestions for finding and supporting leaders.

Seeking quality leaders

- ❑ **Start early.** Months before your Christian education year begins!
- ❑ **Form a small task group.** Seeking leaders is not a one-person task; invite others to help you.
- ❑ **Decide on the best organizational structure.** What format would best suit your Christian education ministry? Will you use developmental age or multiage grouping? How does Christian education fit in with other congregational activities? Are there new ways of arranging your sessions to better meet the needs of leaders and learners? Consider trying new meeting times and places or different combinations of age groups.
- ❑ **Consider specific Christian education needs.** How many leaders do you need? What kind of leaders are you looking for? Think of individuals in your church who might have the qualities and gifts needed for leadership in Christian education. Don't forget to consider older teens and seniors.
- ❑ **Personally contact possible leaders.** Acknowledge the importance of the gifts they have. It is always better to contact potential leaders in person or by telephone, rather than making a general announcement asking for leaders.
- ❑ **Be specific about expectations.** Describe the task, responsibilities, and time commitment. Include the type of support and training provided for leaders. Do not apologize for the time commitment needed. This is an invitation to engage in ministry.
- ❑ **Have a positive and passionate attitude.** The ministry of teaching can be a wonderful and exhilarating experience. Your positive and enthusiastic attitude and gentle encouragement can build confidence in someone who may be hesitant to share their gifts.
- ❑ **Allow time to consider.** Offer a potential leader some time to think about the invitation. Encourage them to talk with someone who is involved in educational ministries. Give a deadline by which time their answer is needed. If they accept a role as leader, thank them and let them know what will happen next. If the answer is "no," thank them and let them know you hope you may be able utilize their gifts in other ways in the future. Be open to suggestions they may offer for serving in Christian education ministry outside the task they were specifically invited to consider.

Leadership options

Team teaching

Instead of having one teacher per group for the entire year, consider having two or more leaders per group. This team could share the leadership of their group, dividing the Christian education year into sections (perhaps by church seasons or by months) and alternating leadership responsibilities. This method also creates built-in support and possible coverage for times when one leader is absent. (Note: Age-level Team Teacher Supplement booklets can be ordered for those who are sharing the leadership of a single group.)

Mentoring

Provide first-time teachers with a mentor, an experienced leader who can provide guidance and support. New teachers can work alongside their mentors for several sessions or perhaps a full year.



Assistants

Invite people to serve as assistants where needed. This provides leaders with support and help during a session. Assistants could help prepare activity materials, prepare a snack, help young children during activities, and spend one-on-one time with high-needs learners. Older teens, parents, and seniors are among those you might consider for this role.

Volunteering as an assistant can be a good entry into the Christian education program for those who feel under-equipped to take on a full role, or a team teaching role, or for those who have gifts other than teaching. You may find they would like to volunteer for other things as time goes by. Consider the many gifts that members of your church could offer to the ministry. Preparing materials, sewing, woodworking, storytelling – sharing these and other life experiences are some of the gifts that can assist church school and youth group leaders and enhance the Christian education ministry as a whole.



Nurturing and supporting leaders

An essential part of a dynamic Christian education ministry is providing ongoing support, affirmation, and help for volunteer leaders. Church school and youth group leaders need to know they are part of a community that values their ministry. Sharing ideas, joys, frustrations, faith questions, and struggles with each other provides leaders with mutual support. Here are some ways to offer nurture and support.

- ❑ **Leader preparation** Plan a “beginning of the year” gathering for leaders. Begin with prayer and Bible study (see “Meditations for Leaders” on p. 16). Provide a calendar or schedule, plus an overview of the Christian education year. Review the different components of the curriculum and review a session plan together. Visit the meeting areas and storage area for supplies and resources (CD players, computers, materials for activities). Listen to and sing along with some of the music included on the *Seasons Music CD*. Provide time for team teachers to do some preliminary planning
- ❑ **Table fellowship** Consider gathering around a simple meal for some of your leadership preparation meetings. This extended fellowship time can help weave a group together and provide extended time for getting to know one another.
- ❑ **Bible study** Spiritual growth of the leaders is as important as the spiritual growth of those they lead. Consider offering regular lectionary Bible study sessions for leaders using the many devotional and biblical resources available in *Seasons of the Spirit: Spirit Sightings*, the Bible backgrounds, and the Adult study. These can happen weekly, monthly, or seasonally.
- ❑ **Personal contact** Check regularly with individual leaders to see how things are going. Encourage them to share their joys and concerns with you whenever needed.
- ❑ **Technical support** Recruit members of the congregation to help with photocopying, ordering, buying supplies (lists of materials needed for each season are included in *Congregational Life*), fixing damaged equipment, filing materials, and keeping track of expenses.
- ❑ **Evaluation** Evaluation is a crucial element in any ministry. Periodically throughout the year, discuss with the leaders what is working well and what needs improvement. Point out that evaluation forms are printed on the inside back cover of age-level resources and can be downloaded from the website at www.spiritseasons.com. By inviting feedback, *Seasons of the Spirit* seeks to be responsive to the voice of the ecumenical, global, and inclusive heart of the church where these resources are grounded and shaped.

Meditation for Leaders

A litany for leaders

- Voice 1:** We are called to be storytellers, part of the ongoing story of faith. We join our hearts and voices with those who have travelled this path of ministry before us.
- Response:** **O God, help us as we lead and are led.**
- Voice 2:** Like the prophets who carried your light of wisdom, burning brightly in the world,
- Response:** **help us as we give and receive wisdom.**
- Voice 1:** Like the disciples who followed Jesus and then were sent out to be apostles,
- Response:** **help us as we follow and serve.**
- Voice 2:** Like the leaders in the early church,
- Response:** **help us find the courage and care to witness.**
- Voice 1:** Like all seekers of faith who have gone before us,
- Response:** **help us to be open to God's word and live into God's way.**
- All:** **O God, empower us to speak the sacred stories of your love.
Grant us confidence and grace in our leadership. Amen.**

Biblical reflection for leaders

Engaging in biblical reflection together and individually can be a powerful and rewarding experience for those who are part of the teaching ministry of the church. Read one or more of the following scripture passages:

- ❑ Deuteronomy 6:4–9
 - ❑ Psalm 119:97–106
 - ❑ Matthew 28:16–20
 - ❑ Galatians 5:22–25
 - ❑ Ephesians 4:11–13
- What words, images, or phrases particularly stand out for you in each passage?
 - What does each passage say about the teaching ministry of the church?
 - How does each passage encourage you in your ministry of Christian Education?

A blessing for leaders

Gracious God, you have called us to the ministry of teaching. We respond to your call with humility, trepidation, and excitement. Bless us as we prepare for this ministry. Grant us your wisdom and guidance in our study, planning, and leadership. Help us to be caring and responsible leaders of the children, youth, and adults who look to us for Christian nurture. Equip and empower us to be faithful disciples of our teacher, Jesus Christ. Bless us with your grace, with the love of Christ, and with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A “Leadership Preparation” outline is included in each season of *Congregational Life*. It offers worship and ritual, biblical exploration that

reflect the themes of the season, and suggestions for planning the Christian education ministry of the church.

Tips for Leader Preparation

Effective leadership requires adequate preparation. This means time and commitment, though it need not be an overwhelming and time-consuming task! Here are some ideas to help in preparing for leadership.

At the beginning of a season...

Look at the big picture. Skim over the entire season or the sessions you will be leading. This will give you a comprehensive view of how the sessions flow from week to week. Notice any special activities or items that may be needed and plan accordingly. Take note of ongoing projects and activities and consult with previous leaders of the group. If possible, review the information provided in *Congregational Life* for any special days or events during this time.

Read “This Season” and “This Season, So...” and the **articles** found on the last pages of the resource.

Spend time with each of the **six posters**.

Review the music in the **Music section** and, if available, listen to the current *Seasons Music CD*. Visit the **Seasons website** (www.spiritseasons.com) and review activities on the Action Zone.

Early in the week...

Read the scripture readings for that week, inviting the Spirit to open you to a fresh experience of the Bible. Read and reflect on the biblical background provided. If possible, read the weekly posting for *Spirit Sightings* or *Spirit Screenings* at www.spiritseasons.com. Discuss the texts with others, perhaps in a weekly lectionary study group or online through Spirit Talk. Nurturing your own biblical knowledge and spirituality will provide a good foundation for your leadership.

Review the whole session. Highlight, circle, or underline parts of the session plans. Think about which activities you will select from the various options offered. Make notes of supplies and preparations you need to complete before the session.

Review the “Focus for” section. Think about the members of your group and how they might connect with the themes of the session. Keep them in your prayers as you prepare to lead the session.

Later in the week...

Review the session. Read it over again and refresh your memory about the focus of the session. Begin gathering supplies, copying resource sheets, preparing samples, and so on.

Before the session begins...

Arrive early to prepare the meeting space before participants arrive.

Pray, asking God to bless your leadership, and to be with each member of your group.

Review the session once more and make any last-minute adjustments needed.

After the session...

Evaluate the session. Read the “Reflect” section. Ask yourself: How did the children (or youth) respond to the session? What went well? How could the session have been better? What do you need to do when planning the next session?

Share joys, insights, and concerns with other leaders. Remember, you are not doing this alone!

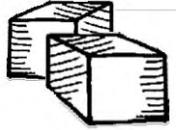


Faith Development

Individual learning styles, group dynamics, outside environment, and personal needs are important elements to consider when planning Christian education ministry. In order to create appropriate learning environments, be aware of variations in development and stages of faith formation. These stages are not rigid and individual development is not always linear.

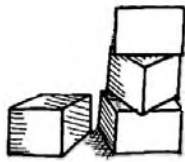
Birth – Age 2

A safe, loving, and trusting environment is as foundational for the growth of faith as is having physical needs adequately and consistently met. Routine and familiarity are important elements in building trust – the first building block of faith. Infants have an awareness of the world around them, even if they cannot articulate this. Creative play that challenges and affirms growing abilities and motor skills, singing songs, and engaging in imitation and repetition – all are important aspects of ministry with this age group.



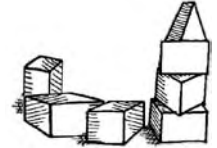
Ages 3–5

Routine and ritual are also important at this age. Motor skills are improving and these little ones are able to accomplish tasks. Fertile and creative imagination is taking hold. Young children have an innate sense of awe and wonder about their surroundings, which is the beginning of spiritual growth. The world is constructed by what they can see and understand, as well as imagine. Allow children to freely share their thoughts, ideas, and creativity. Finger-plays, encouraging a child's own ability to do things, role modelling of behaviour, changes of pace and movement, concrete and simple storytelling, singing, and lots of affirmation are important ingredients of ministry with this age group.



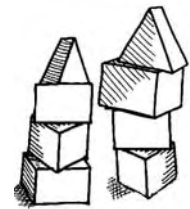
Ages 6–8

The ability to reason and to consider other points of view has begun. Their thinking is quite “rule-bound” where everything is either right or wrong and the word *fair* means equal. Linking Bible stories with real life experiences is vital for these developing disciples. They can be encouraged to ask “how” and “why” although they generally accept most of what they are told about God. Reading skill is beginning to emerge, but abilities vary widely. They have vivid imaginations and enjoy dramatization. Children in this age group are often restless and energetic. Try to use active and varied learning activities to meet the needs of different learning styles. This is the age to consider providing each child with their own Bible and helping them to become familiar with it.



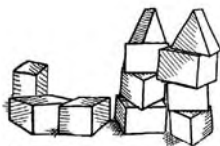
Ages 9–11

Peer group interest is increasing at this age and being a part of the group is very important. Small and large group activities and projects are good ways to engage learners. Reading skills still vary widely and it is important to offer variety when engaging with the Bible. Literal and concrete thinking skills are strong at this age, although learners are also beginning to think abstractly. This age group is often sceptical. These children need to know it is acceptable to ask questions and wonder about new meaning. They need opportunities to begin developing their own belief systems and to make their own decisions. Awareness of a larger world is also increasing, as are feelings about fair play and justice. Learners this age need opportunities to both reflect on justice issues as well as to engage directly and indirectly in the worldwide ministry of the church.



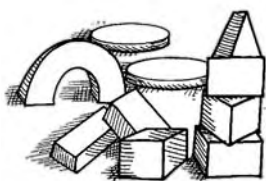
Multiage groups (Ages 5–12)

The multiage setting invites learners of various ages and abilities to engage in self-directed learning, discovery, discussion, and creativity. It is important to set up the space so learners of all ages feel secure and stimulated in their surroundings. Providing activity zones with response options for different age and interest groups allows for individual engagement with the story.



Ages 12–14

Youth of this age are beginning to break away from parental ties and form important ties with peers. They want to “look good” and be part of the group, and they fluctuate between good and bad self-esteem in their desire to be accepted. It is crucial that these youth develop a real sense of belonging in a positive and accepting group. A move from concrete to more abstract thinking skills is taking place. This age group needs faith role models, people who will accept their questions, choices in learning projects, activities that deal with “real” life concerns, and a variety of enjoyable and stimulating group game activities. They also appreciate discussions that deal with their everyday problems and opportunities to participate in church ministry, locally and worldwide.



Ages 15–18

Older teens are moving into owning faith on their own terms. Some begin to inquire more into the faith tradition and stories they have been given. Others accept what has been given them without investigating further. They are moving from the literal and conventional to a more symbolic understanding of faith. They need to be engaged in the ministry of the church at local congregational and community levels as well as with global issues. Adult mentors are important faith companions, guiding as well as struggling with them about life issues. Most older teens can concentrate for fairly long periods of time, although they need a variety of both quiet and active learning opportunities. They appreciate opportunities to discuss the Bible and exchange ideas about what it might mean for their lives.



Adults

Any group of adults contains individuals with a variety of faith stances and different faith stages. Do not presume that all adults think alike or have the same learning needs and styles. The faith formation environment these adults experienced as children and teens will determine in part how they interpret and synthesize biblical heritage and personal faith into their lives. Adults may enjoy “hands on” activities, projects, the arts, and games as well as discussion times. Some adults continue to be literal and concrete in their faith interpretation. Others move to more symbolic and abstract understandings. Consider these various faith stages when working with adults.



Faith timeline

Consider your own faith journey: How did you come to your present understanding of faith? What were the significant stages along the way? Who were the significant influences in your faith development? Draw a timeline from birth to the present. Along this line, mark moments of religious learning, insights, and times when your religious understanding reached a new depth. Name the people or events that encouraged your learning.

Beyond Talking

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences

By Carol Wehrheim

Why don't they have more word puzzles?"
"I think a drama is the best way to present the Bible story."

"We need to sing more songs."

Each person above is naming a preferred way of knowing, one of the multiple intelligences from a theory developed by Howard Gardner, a professor of cognitive psychology at Harvard University. Over two decades ago, his book *Frames of Mind* was published in which he identified seven intelligences, according to his criteria. Since then he has added one more and hints at a ninth. However, Gardner suspects that there are many more intelligences. The good news is that we each have all of them.

The intelligences An intelligence, according to Gardner's theory, is the potential to access information in order to use it to solve problems or create goods that are of value in a culture. Among other criteria, each intelligence has a language or code, is something that you can get better at, and has a specific set of skills or operations.

Linguistic intelligence This intelligence is highly prized in the modern world, where the ability to communicate through the written or spoken word is important. We use this intelligence when we learn a new language, prepare a speech, or tell about something that happened on the way to church. Preachers and lecturers are skilled in this intelligence.

Logical-mathematical intelligence This intelligence, along with the linguistic intelligence, is what most IQ tests measure. Not only do we use this intelligence when we work on a budget, but when we analyze any problem, looking for the solution that makes the most sense. Theologians who approach a subject systematically call on this intelligence.

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence Children make use of this intelligence from early on as they explore the world around them by crawling, touching, moving over it. This intelligence is developed to a high level by athletes and knitters, by dancers and carpenters. When we see a liturgical dance, we see this intelligence in motion.

Musical intelligence This intelligence goes beyond musical performance and includes appreciation and enjoyment of music. It is the intelligence first observed in an infant as the child bounces a foot to the beat of a song; the person sending Morse code also uses it. Congregations exercise this intelligence when they sing hymns together or listen to the choir sing an anthem.

Spatial intelligence Noticing the patterns of light and dark and objects in space are the core of this intelligence. The artist is the obvious high-end user of this intelligence, but so are you when you work a jigsaw puzzle or rearrange your furniture. We ponder with this intelligence as we come to understand the symbols present in sanctuaries.

Naturalist intelligence This intelligence focuses on the ability to recognize and classify the many varieties of animals and plants in our world. Most children exhibit this intelligence in their pre-school years when they can identify every dinosaur. As Christians, this intelligence contributes to our understanding of stewardship of the earth.

Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences Necessary to human interactions, these two intelligences work closely together. The interpersonal intelligence helps us pick up on the motivations and desires of other people. The intrapersonal intelligence allows us to know ourselves. The former is key to how we develop relationships; the latter, to how we make life choices. Both are key to our lives as Christian disciples, as we relate to one another and as we know ourselves as children of God.

Existential intelligence Gardner discusses the possibility of this intelligence in *Intelligence Reframed*, but hesitates to name it as an intelligence according to his full set of criteria. His description, however, is important to religious education. The existential intelligence is what we call forth when we ponder the "big" questions: Why am I here? Who or what is God? What is death? Christians, young and old, wrestle with these questions daily.

Carol Wehrheim is an editor for Seasons of the Spirit. She and Joyce MacKichan Walker wrote a chapter on multiple intelligences for the book, Children Among Us: Foundations in Children's Ministries (Witherspoon Press, 2003).

Multiple Intelligences and Christian Education

By Carol Wehrheim

When church educators began to discover the theory of multiple intelligences, there was a great rush to produce materials that “covered” them. While not an unworthy goal, using an individual intelligence is not so distinctive. I cannot think of an instance when I use just one intelligence. As I write this article, I am using the linguistic intelligence. I am also thinking about the readers, you, and trying to put myself in your place – interpersonal intelligence. Eventually I will look at what I have written and make suggestions for how it might be placed on the pages – spatial intelligence. Our brains just aren’t wired to segregate an intelligence as to use. How we combine intelligences and how we use particular parts of intelligences together is what makes us unique. While I may be a better writer than someone else, all of us

find our niche in each intelligence. We have each one and we use each one, but we have some that we prefer to use above others. These intelligences we develop more highly and use them more skillfully.

So all of this is to say that as you look at your session plan, don’t worry that you cannot find an activity that is strictly bodily-kinesthetic or solely naturalistic. Playing a game of “find the lost coin” as the children imitate the woman in Luke 15 might be identified as a bodily-kinesthetic activity, but there are also potential elements of the spatial and interpersonal intelligences in the game. A role-play between the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18 may look like a linguistic intelligence activity, but it requires using the interpersonal intelligence and maybe something of the logical-mathematical intelligence as well.

Multiple intelligences and entry points A better way to approach your session plans is to look for the ways that you invite the group to encounter and engage with the Bible. In *Intelligence Reframed*, Gardner identified seven entry points as ways to approach subjects. They are

- Narrational, learning through stories
- Quantitative/numerical, learning through numbers and the use of them
- Logical, learning through deductive thinking
- Foundational/existential, learning through examining fundamental questions
- Aesthetic, learning through works of art or the ways materials are arranged
- Hands on, learning through building something, manipulating materials, or carrying out experiments
- Social, learning through assuming the roles of someone else, observing other people, interacting with others, especially in problem solving

As you plan for your group, look back from time to time to see what entry points you have provided. As you find those entry points in Gather or Engage, look at the other activities to see what the spread of intelligences is. It isn’t so much that you want to reach a particular young person or adult, but that you want each one to find her or his way into the Bible through a variety of paths. That variety of paths or ways of knowing will enrich the faith journey for everyone.

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Carol Wehrheim is an editor for *Seasons of the Spirit*. She and Joyce MacKichan Walker wrote a chapter on multiple intelligences for the book, *Children Among Us: Foundations in Children’s Ministries (Witherspoon Press, 2003)*.

Creating Sacred Space

Sacred means “set apart” for a special or holy purpose. It is a space where children, youth, and adults can be more acutely aware of and open to God’s presence.

The way your meeting space is set up – areas for worship, Bible study, visual art, discussion, activities, music, and so on – can give clues to its sacredness. Young children, teens, and adults alike need to know that this space is different. But sacred space relies on more than just the physical. It is a specially created time and community where the divine nature of God can be encountered. Attitudes and actions of leaders also help to establish sacred space. A welcoming and affirming manner, a gracious smile, a reassuring presence, an attitude of joy and delight, a disposition of wonder, openness to questions, and a sense of the holy all contribute to creating sacred space for worshipping and learning together.

Meeting space

Having a warm, inviting, and interesting meeting space can enhance your session and contribute to the learning environment. Take an inventory of the place where you meet – lighting, furnishings, display space.

- How is it arranged? How could it be more inviting and comfortable?
- How could children or youth decorate the area to make it their own?
- If there is no wall space how might you use large boxes or clotheslines to serve as dividers or to display posters and other materials?



Worship space

Worship is integral to the *Seasons of the Spirit* learning experiences. It is important to have space in your learning area that serves as a focus for worship. This is where leaders and group members gather to begin their time together and to close their session each week. The worship area need not take up a lot of space. A small table, a shelf, even a cloth in the middle of the floor or table can serve the purpose.

The worship area also does not need to be a permanent area. Like the ancient tabernacle of the Hebrew people, the worship area can be portable. Consider using a box to hold the items for the worship space. Turn it over and cover it with a piece of fabric to create a worship table.

Include in your worship area a candle (white or in a seasonal colour), a Bible, a length of fabric in the seasonal colour, and an offering basket. Seasonal items such as an Advent or Lenten wreath, a shell for baptism, Easter symbols, and so on, can also be added to the worship area. Session outlines sometimes suggest other visual symbols and art pieces that can be added to the worship space. Consider inviting children or youth to contribute objects to the worship space, helping to create a sacred space for worship and learning.

Ritual Teaches Hope

By Arthur G. Clyde

What is so special about stories and songs around a campfire? Does the care we take to gather the driftwood and prepare the place to kindle it, waiting till dark, getting the marshmallows, sharpening the sticks – does all this somehow contribute to the storytelling and singing? Fond memories tell us that it does. This simple ritual of family and community is like church. From both sources we learn stories and songs to carry home, but we take much more. From ritual we absorb other understandings as we sing in harmony, look into each other's faces, share food – learnings that transcend words and notes.

Ritual is about the next level above the story, the song, the action. In the church, ritual helps us experience not just the facts of faith, but *how* we are to live in Christian community.

One Sunday morning in Advent I had a chance to reflect on the role of ritual in worship. The colour blue was all over the place – the choir and all the vestments in the worship space were in the beautiful colour of the season. On the way into worship I passed by a poster by Judeth Pekala Hawkins called *Magnificat*. This image of a girl reaching up into a starlit sky was echoed inside. As the choir led us in singing a psalm, a little group of girls moved with the music each time we sang the refrain, "My soul gives glory to God my Saviour." Women and girls of various ages lit the Advent candle and read scripture.

After the service in the hall where we have coffee, a staff member proudly pointed out a huge wall hanging of paper with a figure on a blue background like the *Magnificat*. She said, "Everybody in the congregation will get a chance to write down a hope on a white star and we'll fill the sky with them."

"How beautiful," I said, and I was thinking of hope.

Children are gifted by growing up in a church where ritual is not only there for them to

observe, but for them to help create! They are our *Magnificat*. Their hopes are bound up with Mary's, and mine are bound up in their hopes, and for them, too. Imagine how we could be enriched by ritual that touches the whole church family.

Ritual is always part of church worship, even if a church does not consider itself to be very liturgical. What we do when we enter, where we sit, how we take Communion are all parts of ritual. How we do any of these ritual actions always reflects in some way our attitude about them. We might say, for example, "this is the joyful feast," but in fact approach Communion very somberly.

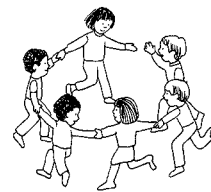
Music, ritual, and liturgy can shape our faith in so many ways, and often we aren't aware it is happening. Not only *Magnificats*, but creeds, scriptures, and ancient texts are often kept alive through the music and ritual of worship. Songs like "Go Down, Moses" have been sung in the oral tradition to make a Bible story the song of a struggling people. Gestures such as kneelings, standings, sittings, handshakes, hugs need no words to express their meaning, but are sometimes as important as words as we learn how to be Christians. Conversely, the more that ritual actions and liturgical songs are absent from worship, the more we depend on text and story alone to keep our attention and tell us how to be a Christian.

Well-crafted ritual doesn't just happen. It takes planning. When pastors, musicians, educators, and mission coordinators get their heads together to plan integrated worship, learning, and serving experiences that relate to the whole church family, everybody is sure to learn more about how to be Christian. And that is a vision filled with hope.

Arthur G. Clyde is Minister for Worship, Music, and Liturgical Arts in the Worship and Education Ministry team, Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ.

Ideas for Building Community

Building a sense of community and trust are crucial foundations to the ministry of Christian education. Because children and youth may be nervous and hesitant about coming to a new group it is important to spend time getting to know each other's names and building relationships within the group. Begin the church year, or each season, with some group-building and get-acquainted activities. In addition to suggestions provided in age-level resources, consider using or adapting the following ideas.



Getting to know you...

Name clap (suitable for very young children)

Sit in a circle. Demonstrate how to clap for each syllable of a name. For example, Sa-rah would have two claps; Jer-e-mi-ah would have four claps. The leader says and claps the first name of the child sitting to the left. Everyone then repeats that child's name with the appropriate number of claps. Repeat for each child around the circle. (Variation: stand and stomp each name around the circle.)

Crayon introductions (suitable for young children)

Materials: crayons

Give children a crayon each and invite them to move around the room and find a partner. Have them introduce themselves to each other by showing their crayons and saying something about themselves that reminds them of that colour. For example, "I like green ice cream" or "I have a red T-shirt." Trade crayons and repeat the activity several times. Collect the crayons. Show each crayon one by one, and invite the group to share something they remember about another person that was related to that colour.

Ball name game

Materials: large, soft ball

Stand in a circle, sit around a table, or sit on the floor in a circle. Take turns rolling or tossing the ball around the circle, taking turns saying your name and something about yourself (such as favourite colour, Bible character, kind of music). Play the game a second time, with each person sharing something different. Very young children might just say their name each time they catch the ball.

Picture name tags

Materials: large sticky labels

Ask each person to draw a favourite item (animal, food, sport, flower) on a sticky label. Youth and adults might like to draw symbols that depict something about themselves instead. Have group members introduce themselves and explain the drawings on their name tags.

Name puzzles

Materials: calendar or magazine pictures, light cardboard

Create a jig-saw puzzle by gluing a large calendar picture onto cardboard and cutting it into interlocking shapes. Print the name of each person in the group on one of the pieces (include leaders' names). Have extra puzzle pieces for new members and visitors. Distribute the puzzle pieces and invite the group to work together to complete the puzzle, noticing how each person is an important part of the whole.

Name that motion

Stand in a circle. One person begins by saying, "My name is _____ (first name)," and makes a motion. The next person repeats the name and the motion and adds his or her name and a motion. Continue around the circle until all are named. The whole group can help remember the names and the motions.

Puppet introductions

Materials: a variety of puppets or a variety of craft supplies, including craft sticks, wooden clothes peg/pins, pipe cleaners, fabric scraps, yarn scraps

Invite children to choose a puppet each, or to create their own puppets, and use the puppets to introduce themselves to the rest of the group, saying one thing about themselves as they do so.

Matching cards

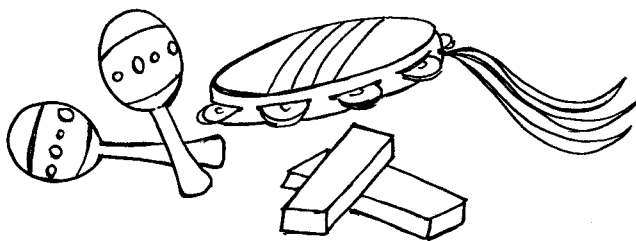
Materials: pieces of card stock/heavy paper

Make two identical sets of cards which list interests such as playing sports, playing a musical instrument, dancing, reading, hiking, snowboarding, surfing, cooking. Invite children or youth to choose a card describing something that they like doing. Then have them find a partner each (one who has a matching card) and talk together about this common interest. Gather again as a whole group and have each partner introduce the other.

Being together...

Mime

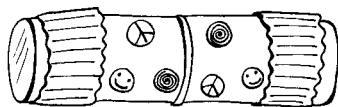
Form several groups. Give each group a scenario (such as making a meal, eating an orange, playing soccer, riding a bus) and invite them to create a mime of their scene. Perform each mime while the rest of the group tries to guess the subject. Do this activity several times giving children or youth opportunities to work with different people each time.



Singing

Materials: music, musical instruments

Music and movement help children release their nervous energy. Choose a song from a current *Music Section* that involves lots of movement. Provide musical instruments and invite everyone to participate.



Group portrait or collage (suitable for older children and teens)

Materials: mural paper and markers or crayons, or magazines and poster board

Distribute sheets of mural paper and invite children or youth to draw self-portraits, doing something that explains something about themselves (kicking a soccer ball, singing, playing with a pet). Join these individual portraits together to create a large group portrait. (Variation: create a group collage. Invite children or youth to find pictures and words in magazines that describe something about themselves, cut these out, and glue them in people-shapes on a sheet of poster board.)

Interviews (suitable for older children, teens, and adults)

Materials: paper, pencils, questions posted on newsprint or chalkboard

Form pairs or groups of three or four. Invite the members of each group to ask one another at least three questions. (For example, What is your favourite thing to do? What is your least favourite thing to do? What is your favourite music group or TV show?) Have the small groups report what they have found out about each person in the group, noticing what everyone has in common as well as the differences.

Consider keeping in touch with children and youth throughout the year through e-mails, phone calls, or notes in the mail. Alternatively, a newsletter can provide information about church school and youth group programs, special activities and services that have been planned, and names and phone numbers of church school and youth group leaders. Include the *Seasons of the Spirit* website address to encourage children and youth to visit the Action Zone.

Ideas for Starting

A liturgy for beginning

Materials: lengths of fabric in seasonal colours (green, blue, purple, red, white, gold); candle, matches, posters from current seasons that convey a sense of community (these can be posted in the meeting area)

Sing a gathering song from a current or previous *Music Section* in an age level of *Seasons*.

Prepare the worship space saying, "These pieces of cloth remind us of the seasons of the church year that we will travel through." Name each season as you lay the fabric in the worship space, beginning with the current season (see p. 3 for a description of the seasons of the church year).

Light the candle and say, "Today is the beginning of a journey into a new year together. The candle reminds us that God is with us and we do not travel alone."

Read Mark 1:16–20 Jesus said, "Follow me" and many people travelled with him, learning from him and sharing in his ministry. Today we are also invited to follow Jesus on our own journey. We will be exploring God's word, learning about each other, and talking together about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. At the beginning of a journey we are often filled with both hope and fear. What are some of the feelings we have at the beginning of this journey? (Allow time for everyone to share thoughts.)

Gather around the posters you have selected. Invite participants to consider what each image says to them about what it means to be a community. What are some of the great things about being part of this community (church school or youth group)? What are some of the challenging things about being together?

Pray Caring God, today we mark the beginning of a journey into a new church year. Bless us and be with us as we learn about the Bible, about Jesus, and what it means to be your people. Help us to become a close and caring community. We pray in Jesus' name, our teacher and our friend. Amen. (As an option, pray together the Prayer that Jesus taught.)

Scrapbooks

Consider keeping a record of your time together as a group. This can be done in the form of a physical record, such as a scrapbook with photos and writings, or as an electronic record, such as a digital slide show, or an audio or video recording. From time to time take pictures or audio or video recordings of the group engaged in a regular session or on a project. For very young children there might be a parent who could be a "record keeper" for the year. At the end of the year this visual or audio scrapbook can be shared with parents and others in the congregation.

Feast

Throughout our biblical and church heritage, celebrations often include feasting. Consider starting your church school year with a feast, as individual groups, with several groups together, or with all the church school and youth groups gathering together for a meal. Have a "potluck" meal where everyone brings a favourite food, a Bible food, an ethnic food representing the diversity in your community, or a seasonal food. Gather in your church building or somewhere else (park, beach, homes). Decorate the area with Christian symbols, banners, and/or *Seasons Music CD*, or sing songs. Make this a tradition for your faith community.

Creating a covenant

Consider beginning your life together as a community by making a group covenant. Covenants are a central concept in our Christian faith. With a covenant, members of a faith community make promises about how they will live and act together.

When a group designs a covenant together, it gives all members of the group ownership of the agreement. Write out your group covenant on a large piece of paper or poster board. Even for children who are not able to read, writing and posting the covenant is important. It serves as a symbol of their life together as a learning community.

Begin the covenant with an opening phrase such as, "As a community of God's people we promise one another and God to..." or "We covenant with one another to..." Ask participants to name standards or guidelines they would like to include in their covenant. When possible try

A prayer for a group covenant

(Invite everyone to hold hands or place hands on the covenant.)

God, maker and keeper of promises, please bless our covenant. Guide us as a learning community. Help us to keep our promises to one another and to you. Help us learn what it means to live together as your people. If we break this covenant, forgive us. Help us care for and respect one another. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

to state the suggestions in a positive phrase. For example: "... keep our hands and feet to ourselves" instead of "... don't hit or kick people." The younger the age group, the more concrete and specific the guidelines might be. Try to incorporate all suggestions, if possible.

When the group has completed the covenant, read it through together to make sure it is understood by all. Sign it together by shouting "Amen," adding everyone's thumbprint or signature, lighting a candle, or saying a prayer (see box). Post the covenant in a place where it will be seen each time the group gathers. From time to time, review your covenant. Ask, "How are we living out our covenant?" Refer to the covenant when the group is abiding well by it, as well as when there are difficulties. Celebrate times when the group is living out its promises.

Group banners

Make a banner as a visible symbol of your group or of the entire learning community. Banners can consist of symbols or pictures as well as words. Consider using the *Seasons of the Spirit* logo (available as a graphic in the Library on the *Seasons* website) as a focal point. Or, choose a Christian symbol, along with a Bible verse. Consider asking a fabric artist in your congregation to work with you to make the background and help create the design. Brainstorm ideas with group members and decide on a theme and design. Very young children could add decorations to pieces that have been cut out ahead of time. Older children, youth, and adults can work together to create the whole banner, or work on individual sections that will be put together later. Hang the completed banner where it can be seen on a regular basis, as a reminder of your community.

Creating a Respectful Learning Environment

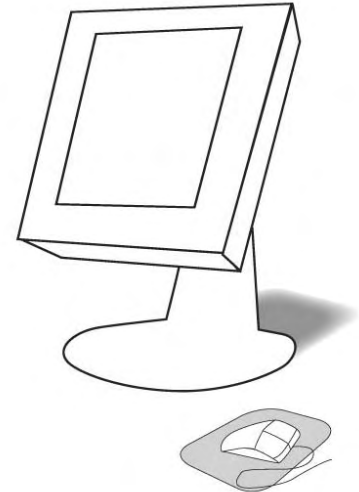
The words “discipline” and “disciple” come from the same Latin word *discere* meaning “to learn.” A disciple learns and follows the teachings and way of life of another person. Therefore, discipline concerns teaching, practicing, and role-modelling conduct about a certain way of living. Often discipline is understood only as punishment for inappropriate or disruptive behaviour. An awareness of how to handle potential problems will be helpful in averting or managing challenging behaviours. The following suggestions can help to develop a respectful learning environment as well as offering strategies for dealing with problems in a positive, non-punitive way.

- ☞ **Be prepared:** review and plan the session ahead of time; many disturbances can be avoided if leaders are well prepared for the session.
- ☞ **Know your group:** discover what their abilities and interests are; use a variety of activities to meet the needs of a variety of learning styles.
- ☞ **Build relationships:** get to know learners as individuals – especially those who are a challenge.
- ☞ **Be affirming:** set a positive tone for the group and the session.
- ☞ **Be flexible:** know when to let go of plans; focus on creating a peaceful session.
- ☞ **Be realistic:** have achievable goals and expectations for yourself and the members of the group.
- ☞ **Listen to the children and youth:** pay attention to their needs.
- ☞ **Create sacred rituals and routines:** comfort level grows when participants can anticipate the rhythm of what will happen each session.
- ☞ **Turn negative words and attitudes into positive ones:** rephrase comments.
- ☞ **Use positive reinforcement:** praise is always more effective than condemnation.
- ☞ **Encourage responsibility:** provide opportunities for all participants to have special responsibilities.
- ☞ **Use humour:** sometimes laughter can help dissipate tension and discord.
- ☞ **Accept a certain amount of noise:** noise doesn’t indicate lack of control; it can mean active learning is taking place.
- ☞ **Encourage positive role models:** invite adults in congregation to act as mentors.
- ☞ **Create a group covenant:** set group standards, hopes, and rules together, encouraging everyone to have ownership.
- ☞ **Arrange for assistance:** an additional leader can offer support and spend time with those who need more attention.
- ☞ **Ask for help:** invite others to help in solving a problem.

Using the Internet in Church School

By Meg Jordan

Although many churches may have computers in their learning spaces, most will probably not have Internet access. Thus making use of the online materials that are suggested in the *Seasons of the Spirit* resources requires some forethought and planning. Even if your group does have access to a computer with Internet access, you may not want to spend a lot of time waiting while the computer connects and downloads web pages. Furthermore, even if speed is not an issue, the very open-ended character of the Internet can be a problem in some settings. You may want to limit the participants' attention to something very particular for a very specific reason. There are a few ways that resources found on the Internet can be used without actually being online during the session.



Printouts The Internet is a great way to access what are called “printables.” Many web pages can be printed at home or in the church office before the session.

Saving web pages on your computer There might be a supplementary visual or even an audio file or video clip that you would like to use in your session. These files can often be saved onto your computer's hard disk and then replayed offline using your browser software or multimedia player software.

Saving interactive pages for offline viewing Some simple interactive sites such as puzzles and games can be saved onto your computer and operated later using your browser software. Sometimes this is the best way to bring an online game or activity into the classroom. Occasionally you need to experiment to find the best way to download and save these activities. Sometimes a web browser will tell you that a page is not available offline while it is blithely loading the game onto your desktop behind the message. Cancelling the message by clicking the cancel button several times usually renders the games operative.

Downloading entire websites for offline browsing There are both freeware and shareware software applications available on the Internet which enable people to download entire or partial websites for offline browsing. This is legal and useful if you are going to spend a long time with the material provided on a single site. In a church school setting, this option can be a good choice. It is a controlled way to bring the interactivity of the Internet into our sessions without all the distractions available through the click of a button with a live connection.

These are some of ways to begin using the Internet in churches where Internet access isn't always available. In situations where Internet access is available during meeting times, the Internet has the capacity for enabling unexpected discoveries, awakening curiosity and, most important of all, providing children with the power and the means to discover more about what they want to learn. The Internet fosters an environment where the learner drives the agenda. As we begin to integrate this powerful medium into our learning about God and God's world, we need to put some effort into finding ways to work with it and take advantage of the way it empowers learners to follow their own questions.

Meg Jordan is an educator and artist from Huntsville, Ontario, Canada. She is a former member of the Seasons of the Spirit editorial team.

Ideas for Finishing

A liturgy for ending

Materials: lengths of fabric in seasonal colours (green [two lengths], blue, purple, red, white, gold or yellow); pillar candle, matches, selection from a current Seasons Music CD (suitable as a blessing song), CD player, tealights, taper

Sing or listen to a closing, blessing song from a current *Seasons Music CD*.

Say, "Today is the ending of a journey. During this past church year we have explored Bible stories about Jesus and other people who have told us about God's love and care for us. We have been part of a community, learning about each other, and learning how to be disciples. These pieces of fabric remind us of all the different seasons of the church year that we have travelled through together."

Ritual Name each season of the church year (perhaps beginning with the season just completed) and lay a length of fabric in the worship space:

The Season of Advent (blue or purple fabric)

The Season of Christmas (white or gold fabric)

The Season after the Epiphany (green fabric)

The Season of Lent (purple fabric)

The Season of Easter (white, gold, or yellow fabric)

The Season after Pentecost (red fabric, and then green fabric)

Light the candle and say, "This candle reminds us that God is with us and we do not travel alone."

Pray Invite children and/or youth to each think of one thing that they enjoyed about the last year (or season) together. Distribute the tealights. One person begins by using a taper to light a tealight from the central candle while offering a sentence prayer. For example, "I give thanks for..." (friends, a certain activity, a highlight of the time together). The other group members take turns lighting their tealights from the person on their right and offering their own sentence prayers.

Blessing Invite children and/or youth to stand in a circle and hold hands, or link arms, or put a hand on the shoulder of the person next to them. Take turns saying the following blessing (or one that is traditional in your community) to the person on the left:

(Name), God loves you.

(Name), God bless and keep you.

(Name), go in peace.

Reflecting on discipleship (for older children and teens)

Preparation: print the following passages on strips of paper: Psalm 16:7–11; Romans 12:15–17; 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Galatians 5:22–25; Philippians 4:4–6; 1 Thessalonians 5:17–22.

Distribute the verse strips among the participants. Invite everyone to read their verses and think about what their scripture readings say about being a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. Invite those who wish to share their thoughts with the whole group.

Arrange the verse strips radiating out like rays around the lit candle in the worship space.

Pray: "O God, thank you for this community of disciples. We have worked and played, listened and talked, written and read together. Be with us and guide us in the days and weeks ahead. Help us to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Amen." (Alternatively, say together the Prayer that Jesus taught.)

Endings around holy days

The church school year may end around the time of a holy day or special celebration, such as Reign of Christ Sunday (at the end of the Season after Pentecost) or Pentecost Sunday (at the end of the Easter season). Plan a church family picnic, catered dinner, potluck, or theme meal on one of these days. Play some intergenerational games together. Review the year in a creative way by having each group present one of their favourite activities, games, songs, or projects to remember the highlights of the past year.

Review covenants

At the close of a time together it is important to reflect on your life in community. If your group created a covenant together take some time during one of the last sessions to review the covenant. Think about the activities, discussions, struggles, and joys during the past year. Then take turns reading aloud each section of the covenant, naming ways it has been reflected in your life together.

Design games

Invite children and youth to design a game to review themes of the past season or past year. Use a television quiz show format or design a board game (perhaps a “human size” board game using masking tape on the floor with people as the “markers”). Children and youth might form two groups to create games to challenge each other.

View the scrapbook

If your group has been able to record the activities of the year in some fashion, take time to review and reflect on the highlights of the past year. Notice some of the favourite activities or projects. Invite parents and others to view or listen to your “scrapbook.”

Outreach festival

At the heart of faith formation is service: serving others on behalf of Christ. Celebrate the end of the Christian education year by having an Outreach Festival. This kind of activity gives learners of all ages an opportunity to teach others about outreach and justice issues that are important to them. Children and youth can set up booths to provide information about service projects or justice issues they have learned about or been involved in during the year. Include carnival-like games and donate the money collected from the games to a service project or special offering.

Keeping in touch

Find ways to keep participants connected with each other while church school or youth groups are not meeting.

- Keep in contact through e-mail.
- Send a “round robin” letter or e-mail that each person reads, adds information to, and sends on.
- Plan a mid-summer event for the group to attend.
- Send a letter or postcard to each person in your group.
- Have each person choose a “mystery” name and match names together. Design a “mailbox” and leave it at the church. Encourage “mystery pals” to send each other mail during the summer, until church school or youth group meets again. Plan a way for mystery partners to meet at the end of the break.



Leader Appreciation

One of the most important responsibilities of a Christian education coordinator is to express appreciation for the role played by church school and youth group leaders. These leaders invest a lot of energy, creativity, and caring throughout the church year. Though their work is one of the foundational ministries of the church, it often goes unseen by many in the congregation. Consider creative and meaningful ways in which to thank leaders for their ministry. Here are some ideas:

- Prepare recognition certificates for leaders, available in the Library on the *Seasons* website at www.spiritseasons.com.
- Send individual notes of appreciation.
- Have a liturgy of thanks during a worship service near the end of the Christian education year.
- Have the church elders or board members present cards on behalf of the whole congregation.
- Have a leader appreciation meal (invite parents to bring the food).
- Invite members of each church school and youth group to make simple gifts (painted flower pots, candles, or cards) for their leaders.
- Give each leader seeds to plant, or a potted plant, with a note saying, "Thanks for planting seeds of faith."
- Give each leader a gift certificate (for example, for a video rental or a movie) as a token of thanks.
- Bake or buy loaves of bread for each leader and thank them for being like leaven.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important step in planning effective ministry. Take time at the end of the Christian education year to meet with leaders and invite them to evaluate their experiences. Plan an evening gathering over dessert and coffee, or a gathering over a lunch after worship on a Sunday.

Use the following questions to guide discussions: In what ways did they feel equipped and empowered in their ministry? What worked well? What needs to be improved? What did they struggle most with? What were the greatest joys? What equipment or supplies did they wish they had had? How did the Christian education ministry with young children, youth, and adults connect with the rest of the congregation's ministries? Record responses in order to help with planning future Christian education programs.

The *Seasons of the Spirit* project also welcomes your evaluation. Encourage leaders to complete the forms that are provided on the last page of all resources. Collect and return these to one of the addresses listed on the forms. The evaluation forms are also available in the Library at www.spiritseasons.com. Your feedback and suggestions will guide the design and content of future resources.

Shalom!

Shalom means both "hello" and "goodbye." This word reinforces the cyclical nature of the church year and our life together. According to Christian educator, Deidre Palmer, those engaged in the ministry of Christian education have the power to shape the church that is becoming. Thank you for your commitment to the ministry of faith formation.

