

2013

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION WEEK

Partners in Faith Formation and Discipleship

Pastors Are Key Leaders in Vital Christian Formation

He established a decree in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded to our ancestors
to teach their children;
that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and rise up and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God
but keep his commandments.

Psalm 78:5-8

The Purpose of Christian Education

Through Christian education we invite people and communities of faith to be transformed as they are inspired and challenged to

- **Know and experience God through Jesus Christ,**
- **Claim and live God's promises, and**
- **Grow and serve as Christian disciples.**

*Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of
Christian Education in Your Congregation*

Once a year, The United Methodist Church encourages congregations to celebrate the influence of Christian education in people's lives. At a time set by your annual conference, your congregation can observe Christian Education Sunday and Christian Education Week. The materials in this leaflet



offer a number of ways to lift up the importance of the church's ministry of teaching and learning.

This year's theme is "Partners in Faith Formation and Discipleship: Pastors Are Key Leaders in Vital Christian Formation."

Christian Education Week is an opportunity for the church to recognize those who teach and to remind everyone that we are all called to be learners.

As people are invited to learn about faith, they continue to grow in their understanding of God and their

place in the world. Through Christian education experiences, people meet the very God they worship, and through the care and support of others in educational settings, they can expand understandings and claim the power of faithful living. People discover the grace of God as they learn the stories of Jesus and faithful witnesses to God found in the Bible. Through Christian education people are invited to know God, to discover internal and community faith resources, and to determine how to live their faith in daily life.

The teaching role of clergy is as important as the preaching role. Both deacons and elders are ordained to a ministry of Word and are charged to preach and **teach** the Word of God.

The teaching responsibility of clergy extends to the whole congregation—children, youth, and adults. The historical questions that clergy answer at ordination include a promise “to diligently instruct the children in every place.” John Wesley taught that whenever a Methodist society had at least ten children, the preacher should establish a group for them and meet with them twice a week.

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* gives pastors particular responsibility for instructing baptismal candidates as well as baptized members who are preparing to become professing members (youth or adults) in the meaning of baptism, the meaning of the Christian faith, and in the history, organization, and teachings of The United Methodist Church.

The *Discipline* goes on to say “Formation in the Baptismal Covenant and in the call to ministry in daily life is a lifelong process and is carried on through all the activities that have educational value. The pastor gives specific leadership that prepares youth for their profession of faith and commitment to discipleship and for the Holy Spirit’s action confirming them in their faith and empowering their discipleship. This preparation focuses attention upon the meaning of discipleship and the need for members to be in mission in all of life’s relationships.” (§216.2b)

The phrase “all of the activities that have educational value” reminds us that faith formation occurs in a wide variety of settings. The pastor is teaching not just when he or she conducts classes or leads studies, but in the way that worship is led, pastoral care is provided, and leadership is exercised.

Think about pastors who have been significant in your own life. What was it that you learned from them, and how has it affected your faith journey? Here are a few responses from a recent survey:

- When I was a freshman in college, the music minister added me into the church’s praise band, even though I did not have good skills at that time. From him, I learned a lot about glorifying God through music.
- My pastor is the most humble and accepting person I know. I have learned from him about the love Christ has for humankind, and I try to live that love in my daily life.
- When I was a child, my pastor addressed me by my name, asked me about the activities I was involved in, and encouraged me to do well in school. I always felt special in the eyes of someone whom I considered “next to God”!
- I learned from my pastor to give as much time to preparation as you will be giving to the actual teaching or leading. By grounding myself in serious and deliberate Scripture reflection, I have enriched my own faith life as I have prepared to enrich others.
- From my pastor I learned the importance of daily devotional time. Through spending time with God each day, I am at peace with life’s ups and downs.
- The pastor who taught my confirmation class encouraged me to ask questions and helped me to understand that there was nothing that could separate me from the love of God. This foundation has sustained me at times when I have had questions about my faith and God’s will for my life.

Nearly all of the survey responses relate to attitudes and practices that empowered the person's discipleship. In most of the responses it was the life that was modeled by the pastor that was as significant as the formal teaching.

In Matthew 23:1-12, Jesus warns his disciples about the scribes and Pharisees who teach one thing by their words and then teach the opposite by the way they live their lives. This word of warning is an important message for all Christians.

Pastors are not the only ones who teach through their actions as well as their words. As partners in faith formation and discipleship, all who are engaged in the teaching and learning ministries of the church are called to live with integrity. May the Word that you teach be reflected in the life that you live.

TEN WAYS TO PARTNER WITH YOUR PASTOR FOR FAITH FORMATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

1. Discuss with your pastor the upcoming themes and Scriptures for Sunday school. Together plan ways to incorporate these into the worship service.
2. Encourage your pastor to preach a sermon series or teach a short-term class on the meaning of baptism, the meaning of the Christian faith, and the history, organization, and teachings of The United Methodist Church.
3. Encourage children's classes to draw pictures or make cards that the pastor can distribute during pastoral visits. This allows children to be partners with the pastor in the ministry of visitation.
4. Work with your pastor to develop a short-term class for parents whose children have been recently baptized to help the parents consider how they will live out the vows they have made.
5. Develop a prayer calendar so that each day a designated church member is praying for your pastor as he or she seeks to be a key leader in vital Christian formation.
6. Invite your pastor to speak about to the youth about his or her own faith journey.
7. Develop a schedule so that over the course of a year, the pastor can visit every Sunday school class (including the nursery). If this is not feasible, be aware of other ways that the pastor can be involved in the ongoing classes and small groups of the congregation.
8. Consider a Faith Questions Box that allows people of all ages to submit questions that the pastor and other church leaders can respond to through sermons, newsletter articles, or other means.
9. Encourage the Staff-Parish Relations Committee or other appropriate groups in the congregation to provide time and resources so that the pastor can participate in continuing education opportunities and model life-long learning for the congregation.
10. Invite the pastor to meet periodically with teachers to participate in Bible study and mutual learning.

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Call to Worship

Leader: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.

People: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all our soul, and with all your might.

Leader: Keep these words in your heart.

People: We will teach these words to our children, talk about them at home, live them in daily life, and proclaim them in worship.

Scripture

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 (We are to teach God's love in many ways and across generations.)

Psalm 78:1-7 (We are to teach others so that they will set their hope in God.)

Matthew 23:1-12 (Jesus warns of those who teach one thing by their words and another by their actions.)

Ephesians 4:11-16 (We are given different gifts and called to use them as partners in faith formation and discipleship.)

Offertory

Gracious God, giver of all good gifts, including that some would become pastors and teachers—we give thanks for those who bear those gifts and pray that they, as well as these monetary gifts, may be used to equip your people for the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Hymns

Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather UMH #552

All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord UMH #554

Forward Through the Ages UMH #555

In Unity We Lift Our Song TFWS #2221

The Servant Song TFWS #2222

UMH: *The United Methodist Hymnal*

TFWS: *The Faith We Sing*

Sending Forth

God has called some to be teachers and pastors that the saints may be equipped for the work of ministry. All have been called to use their knowledge, skills, and abilities to help the body of Christ grow in love. Claim the gifts that God has given, and go forth to live as Christ's disciples in the world.

LITANY FOR TEACHERS AND LEADERS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Leader: Throughout generations God calls people to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the ministry of teaching and learning.

Congregation: **We are grateful that God has raised up dedicated teachers and leaders who help us grow in knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.**

Teachers: *God has called us to the teaching and learning ministries of this congregation. May God grant us the wisdom and ability to guide others as they seek to be formed in faith.*

Leader: Learning is a continuous process. It begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. We never will learn all there is to know about God and how to live as God's people.

Teachers: *We promise to pray for those we teach, to prepare carefully, and to teach faithfully so that our classes and small groups may be places where people learn to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.*

Congregation: **We are all learners. We commit to pray for those who teach, to study the Scriptures, and to seek to grow as disciples.**

Leader: May God enlighten with wisdom those who teach and those who learn so that we may all live as God's people in the world.

A WORKSHOP FOR TEACHERS

Time: About 90 minutes

Purpose

To help teachers think about the characteristics of those they teach and how the church provides faith formation experiences for people of all ages.

Preparation

- Publicize the workshop in ways appropriate to your congregation.
- Title each of eight large sheets of newsprint with one of the following headings: Infants/Toddlers, Young Children, Older Children, Early Teens, Middle Teens, Late Teens, Young Adults, Midlife Adults, Older Adults, Multigenerational. Post these around the meeting room at a level that participants can easily write on.

- Make copies of “Development Through the Lifespan” for each participant. See page 8 of this leaflet for information on how to download the chart. Review the “Faith Development” and “Expectations of the Church” sections so that you are prepared to explain these characteristics to the group. Think about what your congregation offers for people in various age groups that relates to these needs and characteristics.
- Arrange the room so that people can sit in conversational table groupings. Place a sheet of posterboard as well as a variety of art supplies on each table.

CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

Getting Started (About 15 minutes)

As participants arrive ask them to make a nametag and then direct them to the area where you have posted newsprint with the various headings. Using felt-tip markers, ask them to note on the different sheets all of the things they can think of that the church offers for people in the labeled categories. This may include things such as Sunday school, VBS, Bible studies, mission trips, fellowship dinners, UMW, UMM, UMYF, parent’s day out, worship services, and so forth.

After everyone has arrived, gather the group together and offer an opening prayer or use the Call to Worship on page 4 of this leaflet.

Welcome everyone and ask them to briefly introduce themselves by telling their name, what they teach or lead, and

one thing they have learned from the group they teach. If the group is very large, you may need to break into smaller groups in order to complete the introductions in a timely manner.

Read aloud Psalm 78:1-7. Remind the group that as teachers they have a particular responsibility to help people of all ages grow in faith. Explain that the purpose of this workshop is to help them understand the overall faith formation process of the congregation and think more deeply about the people they teach.

Review Age Level Characteristics (About 30 minutes)

Ask the participants to arrange themselves in groups that reflect the age span of the people they teach. If you have a small group, you might only have three tables — children, youth, and adults. If you have a larger group, divide into

more narrow age groupings —infants and toddlers, young children, older children, early teens, middle teens, late teens, young adults, midlife adults, and older adults.

Give each participant a copy of the developmental chart, “Development Through the Life Span,” and provide each table with a sheet of posterboard and a variety of art supplies. Ask the table groups to review the characteristics of the age group they teach and to recall examples from their experience that illustrate the various characteristics.

Then ask them to create a poster that depicts the age group they teach. Encourage them to be creative, using words, symbols, drawings, and so forth to create the poster.

When the groups have finished the posters, have one representative from each group explain the poster to the whole group. Begin with the table that represents the youngest group and then go in chronological order. After each representative has described the poster have them display it on a wall or bulletin board. Arrange the posters in a line, so that when the final representative has finished the group will have created a developmental timeline.

Break (About 10 Minutes)

Take a short break. You may want to provide light refreshments. If people have not had an opportunity to add things to the labeled newsprint posters from the arrival activity or if they have thought of additional offerings, encourage them to add to the newsprint during the break.

Look at Congregational Faith Formation Experiences (About 30 Minutes)

Using the timeline created in the earlier activity, quickly review of the “Faith Development” and the “Expectations of the Church” sections of the developmental chart.

Draw the attention of the group to the labeled newsprint sheets that they wrote on as they arrived and during the break. Ask the group to identify items that have a direct relationship to the characteristics and needs you just described. Underline those items that are mentioned.

Ask the table groups to discuss the following questions:

- Where is our congregation particularly strong in providing faith forming opportunities?
- Are there some groups for whom we are providing very few faith forming opportunities?
- Are we better at providing age-group specific opportunities or multigenerational opportunities?
- Are there ways we might modify or adapt some of the things we currently offer so that they would be more responsive to various developmental stages?

Invite each group to report any insights that they think would be valuable for the whole group to hear. If there are particular ideas mentioned that need follow-up, identify next steps that should be taken.

Closing (About 5 Minutes)

Lead a closing litany, asking each person to complete the following statement:

- I am thankful that my church cares for (*name an age group*) by providing (*name a faith forming opportunity*).

As each person completes his or her statement the entire group will respond with:

- We give thanks that you have accepted God’s call to teach.

Conclude the session with the Sending Forth on page 4 of this leaflet.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The resources listed here can be downloaded at www.gbod.org unless noted otherwise. Many of them are in the section for Christian education and formation at www.gbod.org/education. To quickly locate these resources, go to your favorite search engine and enter the title of the resource followed by GBOD.

Development Through the Lifespan

An age-level developmental chart that includes physical, cognitive, and spiritual development. Download this chart for use in the workshop on pages 6-7.

Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education In Your Congregation

Grounded in “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task” as stated in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, this is a statement of the biblical and theological foundations of Christian education.

Intentional Faith Development: Establishing Standards for Christian Formation and Discipleship

To be used in conjunction with *Foundations*, this resource helps congregations as they develop standards as part of a comprehensive plan for faith formation.

Teacher Development: A Comprehensive Plan for United Methodist Congregations

Assists congregations in identifying what teachers need to know, do, and be. Provides help in developing a congregational plan for development.

iTeach

A free monthly e-mail newsletter for teachers and leaders that provides support for the developmental areas identified in *Teacher Development*.

What Every Teacher Needs to Know

Originally published as a series of booklets, these resources are now available as downloadable leaflets. Each leaflet provides basic knowledge to help teachers reach the “do no harm” level in the areas identified in *Teacher Development*. Leaflet titles include:

Teachers as Spiritual Leaders and Theologians

Understanding and Using the Bible

Teachers Know Their Place in the Faith Story

Classroom Environment

A Short Glossary of Faith and Church Language

Understanding The United Methodist Church

Teachers Live the Faith

A People of God

Who Am I as a Teacher?

Gen2Gen: Sharing Jesus Across the Generations

This 198-page book contains articles about the trends and issues affecting individuals, families, churches, and communities. It can be ordered at <http://tinyurl.com/c605jrs>. Sample articles and other information can be found at www.gbod.org/gen2gen.

Christian Education Week is authorized by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, but its observance is set by each annual conference. Check with your annual conference office to determine if your annual conference has set a specific date.

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