



Celebrate the Good News

Children's Chapel

Fall Year C

September 4–November 20, 2016

Morehouse Education Resources

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Celebrate the Good News: A User's Guide

We offer you *Celebrate the Good News: Children's Chapel* with the hope that you will find in it just the stories, activities and tips you need to gather children together in joyful celebration. What makes our material different? In a word: *participation*.

We believe that:

- ◆ Children's liturgy is children's play. If the time is mostly spent in children listening to adult readings, adult homilies and adult prayers, there may be liturgy but not *children's* liturgy.
- ◆ Even the best-phrased translations and carefully-planned homilies offer no substitute to the actual participation of children in children's liturgy.
- ◆ Children do not want to be "consumers" of liturgy, but co-creators; *Celebrate the Good News*, combined with enthusiastic adult leadership, offers children this opportunity.

Each session of *Celebrate the Good News* offers the following parts:

Gather Together

- ◆ an entrance rite followed by a quick activity that prepares children to hear the gospel story

We invite children to participate right away through art, imagination or movement. In many sessions, children make an object that the storyteller uses as a visual focus during the gospel proclamation.

Proclaim God's Word

- ◆ the gospel told in story form

Children, like adults, understand the words of the gospel better when they understand something of the setting and context in which the gospel story is placed.

Since children are less served by exposition than by story, we seek to meet their needs by combining these contextual helps with the reading itself in a single gospel story.

In this way children can:

- ◆ hear scripture the way it was first proclaimed in the Church—as oral tradition
- ◆ begin a transition between scripture-based stories and the actual words of scripture

We provide the gospel reading only since we believe that most children are best served by a single, well-prepared reading.

Respond to God's Word

- ◆ reflections on the gospel proclamation

We prefer homilies in which the children participate. Our homilies are planned to:

- ◆ awaken the children's awareness of God's word addressed to their lives
- ◆ deepen the children's understanding of God's word through interaction with their peers and participating adults

We keep in mind that children already have a spiritual life and a relationship with God. Our main concern is to listen to what the children have heard, not to tell them what we think they should have heard.

Pray

- ◆ a brief outline of prayer with which children can respond to the reading before returning to the eucharistic assembly or before participating in supplemental activities

In this prayer response, we draw liturgical phrases from many parts of the liturgy, not only Liturgy of the Word. We link these prayers with the children's spontaneous prayer to help them begin to see connections between their own lives and the language of liturgy.

Celebration Centers

In the Episcopal church, Children's Chapel services might last only for the length of the sermon or extend throughout the entire time of adult worship. We have structured our materials to fit this broad range of needs, especially through the inclusion of Celebration Centers. These centers permit adult leaders to enrich chapel time with artistic, dramatic and faith-sharing activities, maintaining the spirit of liturgical celebration.

If leaders prefer to spend the additional time in religious education rather than liturgical celebration, we suggest our lectionary-based curriculum, *Living the Good News*.

If space, time and staff allow, set up all the centers suggested each week and offer children a choice of activity. If space, time or staff are limited, choose only one center each week.

Preparing for Children's Chapel

Creating a Liturgical Space

Environment is very important to children. They are sensitive to the way a place looks and feels. How often we have seen children's attitudes and behavior change for either better or worse because of their surroundings.

Since children are formed by their environment, the place where they celebrate Children's Chapel is significant. Some churches can provide actual chapel space for children; others must make do with a classroom.

The preparation of the worship space is as important to the overall experience as the session preparation. As you consider the proposed space, ask yourself:

- ◆ Where can children stand and sit comfortably?
- ◆ Can furniture be moved off to the side, especially in a classroom? Could you use pieces of carpet or pillows for seating?
- ◆ Where is the best place to place the children's lectionary or Bible? Can you use one that is particularly attractive?

- ◆ You will need a stand of some sort for the Bible. A table, a desk, a lectern or a music stand covered with cloth, preferably the color of the liturgical season, would be appropriate.

If children will be readers, adapt the stand to the child's height.

- ◆ What about lighting? Are there ways to create atmosphere by softening the lights? Can shades be pulled? Can lamps be used? Can the light of candles or a small spotlight replace fluorescent lighting?

We occasionally offer suggestions for the liturgical environment; many of the children's activities can enrich its appearance.

Preparing Yourself

Celebrate the Good News gives clear directions and easy-to-use ideas. Still it is important to prepare for your specific group and to integrate contemporary and pertinent experiences into the sessions.

In preparing your session, read the gospel of the day and reflect on its meaning. You will find a Gospel Background to help you gain a perspective on what the reading meant in its own time. The Reflection offers an image of what the reading might mean in our time.

Think about the children with whom you will be celebrating—what are their issues and concerns, their joys and hopes? Ask yourself: What do these readings say to these children?

Next read through the Preparation and Session Guide. Ask yourself:

- ◆ Do I need to gather materials or set them up ahead of time?
- ◆ Do I need to prepare the children to do a reading?
- ◆ Will the suggestions given for the homily work with our time frame? our space? our children? Do I need to add to or subtract from the outline?
- ◆ Do I need to let the priest know we will be bringing something back to the worshiping assembly?

On the day of the celebration, be sure to get there ahead of time and prepare your worship space so it will be ready for the children.

Working with Different Age Groups

The age range of 5 to 12 years is sometimes problematic for people. Some suggest breaking children into age or grade groupings.

Since *Children's Chapel* is not an instructional session, the need for age or grade groupings is not as relevant. In ritual celebration, a variety of responses can enrich the participants.

Older children become models for younger children, who learn by imitating them. Younger children's sense of awe and wonder—and raw spirituality—can be formative for adults and older children.

Questions and Answers

I have only 20 minutes each Sunday. How do I use these materials?

Because Children's Chapel is conducted differently from parish to parish, we've designed materials to cover a wide range of uses. Try these guidelines:

20-minute sessions:

- ◆ Gather with the children.
- ◆ Proclaim the gospel.
- ◆ Unfold the gospel in the homily.
- ◆ Respond in prayer.

40-minute sessions:

- ◆ Gather with the children.
- ◆ Proclaim the gospel.
- ◆ Unfold the gospel in the homily and through the use of one or more Celebration Centers.
- ◆ Respond in prayer.

The children in my group range from 5-year-olds all the way through sixth grade. How do I meet their different needs?

Encourage an atmosphere where intermediates see themselves as role models for the younger children.

Suggestions:

- ◆ Encourage intermediates to assume leadership roles (storytelling, leading prayer, etc.)
- ◆ In general, aim the story and homily at your oldest listeners. Younger children who would be bored by adult talk are often fascinated with homily responses from older children.

I'd really rather use a children's Bible for the readings, but your materials look like fun. How could I combine our Bible with your materials?

Some parishes may prefer a Bible or children's lectionary for reading the actual scriptures, but still feel the lack of age-appropriate children's liturgical activities.

You can easily adapt such materials to our program.

Possibilities:

- ◆ Follow the lectionary readings with materials from our Celebration Centers.
- ◆ You may still include the opening and storytelling, as a way of breaking open the gospel for children, or you may follow the readings directly with homily suggestions, prayer response and Celebration Centers.

I don't know how to tell a story!

Sure you do—how about the last time you told a joke? or what happened at the office? or what the cat did that made you smile?

Read the story over **before the session**. Take time to familiarize yourself with our approach, but feel free to use your own words (except when scripture is quoted directly). Tell it to yourself or a friend once or twice.

Inexperienced storytellers should familiarize themselves with the two cardinal rules of storytelling—make eye contact with your listeners and make sure they can hear you! We also suggest that:

- ◆ intermediate volunteers be given the opportunity to share in the storytelling
- ◆ a Bible or lectionary be placed in a honored position at the children's gathering. The storyteller bows to this enthroned word before proclaiming the gospel.

preparation

Preparing for Children's Chapel

Prepare the Gospel Proclamation

- ◆ Read the gospel from Luke.
- ◆ Read today's Gospel Background and Reflection.
- ◆ Read the story from today's Session Guide.
- ◆ Picture the sequence of events in your mind.
- ◆ Memorize the first and last sentences of the story.

Create a Liturgical Space

- ◆ We suggest that you "enthron" the word; that is, create a centrally located space for a *Good News Translation*, other Bible or lectionary. Lit candles may be placed on either side of the Bible or lectionary.
- ◆ Create an open space for the children to gather around the word.
- ◆ Gather supplies; see Materials lists for Gather Together, Proclaim God's Word, Respond to God's Word, Pray and Celebration Centers.

Gather Together

- ◆ If the children attend the opening of the Eucharist, a leader can gather the children by carrying a Bible, a banner or a lit candle that children can follow in procession.
- ◆ The priest may bless the leader and children before they leave the Eucharist.
- ◆ Upon entering the prepared space, the leader can enthrone the word or place the candle carried in procession nearby.

The leader may begin Children's Chapel by leading the children in singing one or more verses of a simple hymn:

- ◆ "Father, we praise you" (#1, *Hymnal 1982*)
- ◆ "Open your ears, O faithful people" (#536, *Hymnal 1982* or #85, *We Sing of God*)

Proclaim God's Word

- ◆ The leader can bow first to the enthroned word before beginning the story.
- ◆ When the actual words from the gospel are read (these words are shown in boldface) the leader takes the enthroned word into his or her hands. At the end of the actual reading, the leader returns the word to its place of honor.

Respond to God's Word

- ◆ This homily is a shared homily; that is, *the children's reflections are invited and welcomed*.
- ◆ Today's homily invites children to reflect on Jesus' counsel that we need to give up our attachments to enter God's kingdom.
- ◆ You can expand the homily by asking children to share stories about times they gave things away or let go of things they loved. Acknowledge the pain likely to be expressed in these stories; affirm that Jesus' teaching is a difficult story for adults and children alike.

Pray

- ◆ Today's suggested hymn invites us to respond to God's constant love with our own constant seeking of the kingdom.
- ◆ Extending arms in a welcoming gesture as the response *Blessed be God's kingdom* is said is an appropriate liturgical gesture for today's prayer.
- ◆ The concluding prayer is taken from the Opening Rite of the Eucharist in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Celebration Centers

- ◆ These centers are provided for leaders who provide sessions longer than 10-20 minutes.
- ◆ Leaders can choose a center to use in extending today's session or set up all three centers, allowing each child to freely choose an enrichment activity.

The Scriptures Together

Today's readings explore the meaning of discipleship. In **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**, Moses challenges God's people to "choose life" by remaining faithful to God. In his personal letter to **Philemon 1-21**, Paul disarms the slaveholder's authority by bidding him to receive the slave as a dear brother. In **Luke 14:25-33**, Jesus describes a disciple as one who knows the cost and is willing to make a radical surrender to Christ.

Gospel Background

Luke 14:25-33

In this reading, Jesus cautions those who accept the invitation into the kingdom too easily. In Semitic idiom, *hate* means to lack commitment or attachment, a point made clear in Matthew 10:37. Coming to Jesus for teaching and healing must be complemented by following him as disciple and servant.

The two brief parables illustrate the point that one must count the cost before undertaking a demanding enterprise. The tower is not a fortification but a farm building, a watchtower or a silo. Verse 33 does not summarize the parable but counts the cost of true discipleship: renunciation.

Reflection

Those who have a hard time accepting sentimental, saccharin portraits of Jesus will enjoy his shrewd practicality in today's gospel. Any wise business person takes initiative for a project, plans ahead, organizes, calculates the costs, anticipates glitches and carefully guides it to completion. So too for government leaders; in countries around the world—ours included—we see the folly of a confidence that is not self-critical, an arrogance that assumes too much, and the price paid by innocent victims.

Before we start nodding too vigorously, Jesus asks, "If this is true for business or military operations, shouldn't it also apply to your lives?" Just as you inventory options or risks, design a business plan and follow through in your work, it's perfectly logical to do so for your spiritual life.

Yet many of us would be embarrassed to admit how much time we take for daily prayer, how often we read something inspiring, how dutifully we seek out guides to the spiritual life, how carefully we guard against possessions encroaching on intangible treasures. Most of us are lackadaisical about the Christian enterprise; we don't take it seriously. When we meet someone who truly lives this life for the next, we remember Jesus' warning—no dress rehearsal—and we try again.

session guide

Liturgical Focus

Blessed be God's kingdom.

Scripture

Luke 14:25-27, 33b

Overview

In today's gospel, Jesus counsels his disciples that following him means being willing to let go of what we love. Today's liturgical prayer:

- ◆ Blessed be God's kingdom.

Gather Together: Stuck

Materials

self-adhesive notes • pencils or felt pens

Children use adhesive memo slips to consider people and things to which they are attached.

Begin by asking children to name things or people they're attached to. Ask:

- ◆ What do you really like a lot?
- ◆ Who do you really like a lot?

Invite children to draw or name these things or people on self-adhesive notes, putting one person or item on each note. Suggest such items as family members, pets, toys, etc.

Help children stick the notes onto themselves. (Invite older children to help younger children with this activity.) Be sure to cover yourself in notes, too. The notes remain stuck to children through today's prayer.

Proclaim God's Word: Love God and Let Go

(It is appropriate for the leader to bow to the enthroned word of God before the story.)

Jesus was talking with a large crowd of people. Some of the people were men and women who traveled with

Jesus and listened to him teach. Some of the people were hearing Jesus for the first time. They wondered if they wanted to travel with Jesus, too.

Jesus loved all the people who were listening to him. He knew they had many questions to ask about following God.

"How much do I have to love God?" asked one woman. "Do I have to love God as much as my own daughter?"

"Do I have to love God as much as my own mother?" asked a boy.

"Do I have to love God as much as my best friend?" asked a girl.

"Doesn't God want us to love our families and our friends?" asked a man.

"God loves you," said Jesus. "God loves all the mothers and fathers and boys and girls and men and women in the whole world. And God wants you to love them, too."

Jesus stopped a moment and looked at the crowd. Then he said, "But you need to love God even more than your family and your friends."

(Leader takes enthroned word in hands for proclamation.)

Jesus...turned and said to them, "Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love their father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well. Those who do not carry their own cross and come after me cannot be my disciples... None of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have."

Respond to God's Word

Materials

potatoes • *Optional*: child's suction toy

Distribute potatoes; each child should have one potato for each adhesive note stuck onto him or her. When everyone—including the leader—is loaded down, discuss:

- ◆ What would we find hard to do loaded down with all these potatoes? (*Running, playing, reading a book, etc.*)
- ◆ How would we feel different if we let all these potatoes go?
- ◆ In today's gospel, Jesus tells us how to be a disciple—how to follow God and how to live in God's kingdom.
- ◆ Jesus tells us that sometimes we have to let go of things so that we can follow God and live in God's kingdom.
- ◆ What good things have we named on our sticky notes?
- ◆ God loves all these people and things, too. But sometimes we have to let them go so that we can move.

You might use a child's suction toy to demonstrate how "stuckness" keeps us in one place.

Invite children to experience the pleasures of letting go in today's closing prayer.

Pray: Blessed be God's Kingdom

Materials

potatoes and adhesive notes • box • large wooden cross or cross drawn on chalkboard, whiteboard or newsprint

Gather children, still holding their potatoes, around the cross. Invite children to let go of their burdens—their potatoes—by placing them in the box.

Sing together "Seek ye first the kingdom of God" (#711, *The Hymnal 1982* or #106, *We Sing of God*).

Leader: Let us pray to God, saying, "Blessed be God's kingdom."

Children: Blessed be God's kingdom.

Invite children to remove their adhesive notes and stick them on the cross. As each child finishes removing notes, pray together:

◆ *Blessed be God's kingdom.*

Leader: Blessed be God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever (p. 355, *Book of Common Prayer*).

All: Amen.

Celebration Centers

- ◆ **Center One—Faith Experience**: Children use natural materials to practice the act of letting go and giving away. (*Recommended for preschoolers or kindergartners.*)
- ◆ **Center Two—Creative Movement**: Children invent movements to accompany hymns about letting go in order to love God. (*Recommended for all ages.*)
- ◆ **Center Three—Creative Writing**: Children write poems about giving away. (*Recommended for primary and older.*)

Center One—Faith Experience: Take and Give Materials

natural materials collected on an outdoor walk: leaves, shells, nuts, seed pods, rocks, etc. • basket or offertory plate • *Optional*: supplies for blowing bubbles

If time, weather and location allow, invite children to collect the natural materials themselves on an outdoor walk. In this case, the entire activity could take place outside. Children could end by blowing bubbles, experiencing the lightness of "letting go."

Indoors or outdoors, gather the children around the natural materials. Encourage children to handle them and talk about what they feel and see.

Invite each child to pick one item for himself or herself to take home. Then place the basket or offertory plate in the center of the group. Ask:

- ◆ Is there one item you can pick to give to God?
(Show what you mean by picking an object yourself. Admire it out loud, then place it in the basket.)

This basket or plate can be brought into the offertory of the Eucharist or placed on an altar or other surface in the children's chapel space.

Center Two—Creative Movement: Let Go

Invite children to recall how it felt carrying around all the potatoes. Encourage children to use their bodies to exaggerate that burdened, weighed-down feeling. Ask children to explore different ways of moving from a burdened stance: walking, crawling, shuffling, etc.

Now invite children to recall how it felt when they let go of all their potatoes and their sticky notes. Encourage children to use their bodies to exaggerate that light, unburdened feeling. Ask children to explore different ways of moving from a lightened stance: running, skipping, leaping, etc.

Children can use the cross and hymn from today's prayer session as a focal point for a dance. Children begin at the opposite side of the room from the cross. They sing "Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God" as they use weighed-down stances and movements to move across the room to the cross. When they reach the cross, they continue to sing, but change to lightened stances and movements as they move away from the cross, in any direction, freed from all their burdens.

Center Three—Creative Writing: Poems to Jesus Materials

chalkboard, whiteboard or newsprint (with chalk or marker) • paper and pencils

Invite children to share stories about giving and letting go. Suggest such experiences as gift-giving, moving to a new home or handing down an old toy or beloved item of clothing.

Do not expect these stories to be positive ones; many children have already experienced the wrenching pain of giving up something beloved in their lives. We acknowledge the seriousness of Jesus' gospel request when we acknowledge the pain that can accompany letting go.

Invite older children to write poems about their experiences of letting go. Encourage children to focus on their own feelings in their poems. Suggest that children might want to write their poems to Jesus.

As an alternative, invite children to work together on a group poem. At the top of the board or newsprint write:

- ◆ When I hear Jesus say, "Give up everything you love," I want to tell him...

Invite children to contribute their own ideas for finishing this sentence. Write all the children's ideas underneath the first sentence. Invite children to read aloud the finished poem.

Ask:

- ◆ When does giving make us feel good?
- ◆ When does giving make us feel bad?
- ◆ What do we want to say to Jesus today about how we feel?