

Becoming a Disciple-forming Congregation

Note to Leaders: This workshop is based on the book *Learning the Way: Reclaiming Wisdom from the Earliest Christian Communities* (Alban, 2009). Workshop leaders will need a copy of the book. You may want to purchase additional books for participants. The book can be purchased from www.alban.org (\$18.00 plus \$5.60 shipping and handling) or from www.judsonpress.com (\$18.00 plus shipping and handling). Discounted copies (signed by request) are available from the author with a minimum order of five. Contact cassandra.williams@abc-usa.org or 1.800.ABC3USA, ext. 2459. You may want to treat this as a book study with participants each having a copy of the book and reading the identified sections in advance of each session.

Purpose

The premise of this workshop is that Christian identity is formed through all aspects of church life and only *authentic Christian communities* can nurture true followers of Jesus. In this five-session workshop participants will:

- explore marks of authentic Christian community
- learn about practices that sustain authentic Christian community
- develop practical steps for improving their Christian education/discipleship endeavors

Time Frame

Each of the five sessions is designed to take 60 minutes. The workshop can be used for five weekly sessions, as the basis for a weekend retreat, or for five sessions in the course of a week, for example for adult VBS.

Preparation

Content for the sessions will be drawn from chapters 4 through 7 of *Learning the Way*. You may want to read chapters 1 through 3 as background and consider sharing some of that information as an introduction to the study. As you prepare for each session, review the session carefully, read the identified pages of the book and prepare any additional materials as outlined in the “Session Preparation” section.



Workshop Outline

Session I What is Christian Discipleship?

Session II Discipleship Formation, Part 1: Marks of Authentic Christian Community

Session III Discipleship Formation, Part 2: Practices of Authentic Christian Community

Session III Discipleship Formation, Part 3: The Role of Tradition

Session V How Shall We Proceed?

General Materials List (additional session-specific materials are listed in the “Session Preparation” sections):

- Bibles
- pens or pencils
- means to display key points (white board and markers, chalk board or Power Point set up)
- blank paper
- newsprint
- markers
- colored pens, pencils, or fine point markers
- children’s story Bibles and Sunday school and VBS curriculum samples (for Session 4)
- name tags (if participants are unfamiliar with one another)
- Refreshments (optional)

Session One: What is Christian Discipleship?

Session Preparation

- Review the session in its entirety.
- On newsprint or white board, print the word “discipleship” and cover it until the appropriate time in the Opening Activities.
- Make copies of Handout 1 Statistics on Church Participation.
- Review pages 59–70 to prepare to present III A: A Way of Being.
- Review pages 77–87 to prepare to present III B: Grounded in Vocation.
- Consider developing a closing ritual that will be used for each session.
- Note that each session has an “Optional Home Assignment.”

I Gathering (5 minutes)

As participants gather, ask them to put on name tags and be seated. Welcome everyone and express appreciation for their interest in helping their churches become disciple-forming congregations. If the participants do not know each other, invite sharing of names and where they are from. Offer an opening prayer of your choice or you may use the following:

God of life and grace,

We are filled with gratitude for those persons, churches, and other groups that helped us to come to know you and continue to nurture our discipleship. It is our sincere desire to nurture others in the Way of Jesus and to help our churches become vehicles for creating and nurturing true followers of Jesus. Help us discover ways to make that dream come true. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Explain:

This five-part study builds on several disparate pieces toward the final session in which we will pull together the parts and design a lesson plan for Christian education and disciple-formation.

II Opening Activities (15 minutes)

A. Free Association: Explain that you are going to say a word and they are to shout out, “popcorn style,” whatever comes to mind. Encourage them not to censure their thoughts—there are no right or wrong answers. Say “discipleship” and let them respond for about a minute. When they are done, uncover the

newsprint or board and write down some of what you heard. Ask for help remembering their responses.

B. Identifying Formative Moments: Ask the participants to close their eyes and let come to mind a person, a moment, an experience, or a place that had a positive impact on their understanding of and/or commitment to following Jesus. Give them 3 minutes to ponder and then invite sharing from 2 or 3 participants.

Next ask them to respond the following questions by a show of hands:

- 1) How many of you became Christians through participation in the church?
- 2) Have you ever questioned the faith because of experiences in the church?
- 3) Do you think your church is doing a good job of nurturing disciples?

C. Exploring the Current Situation: Distribute copies of Handout 1 “Statistics on Church Participation.” Review the statistics and then discuss the questions.

III. Defining Christian Discipleship

Explain:

In order to know how to form disciples of Jesus, we have to have a clear understanding of discipleship. The operative definition of discipleship in this workshop is: “Discipleship is a way of being, grounded in vocation.”

A. A Way of Being (15 minutes)

Drawing on pages 59–70 of *Learning the Way*, present a summary of the following points:

- Discipleship is a way of being . . .
- made possible through God’s love (pp. 59–62);
- defined by the resurrection of Jesus (pp. 62–64); and
- that issues forth graceful lives (pp. 64–67) and gracious lives (pp. 67–70).

B. Grounded in Vocation

Drawing on pages 77–87 of *Learning the Way*, present a summary of the following points:

- Discipleship is grounded in the call to relationship with God, which makes possible transformation that affects all other relationships, including:
 - recovery of our authentic identity as children of God (pp. 77–79);

- renewal of the call to be the presence of God (79–83);
- reclamation of the vocation of exercising our power within creation in line with the will of the Creator (84–87).

IV. Exercises

A. Options for those who prefer to work alone:

- Think about how you first connected with Jesus. You may want to express your memory of that experience through writing or drawing. What does your experience tell you about nurturing discipleship in others?
- Think of a time when you heard the language of grace. What were the circumstances? Who spoke it to you? What was the impact on you?

B. Group Activity (20 minutes)

Note: if you have participants from different churches, have them work in groups according to the church they represent.

- 1) Discuss the ways your church does and doesn't show grace to the community around them.
- 2) Make a list with two columns. In one column, list gracious words, phrases and actions that are heard/experienced in and around your fellowship. In the other, list ungracious words, phrases and actions.
- 3) List of practices that might help you and your church family increase in grace internally and in relationship with the community around you.

V. Closing (5 minutes)

If each participant has a copy of *Learning the Way* and is reading in preparation for the sessions, assign pages 93–101.

Optional Home Assignment: Invite participants to pay attention to the ways they feel “driven”: what pressures do they put on themselves; what interferes with their experience of the grace and unconditional love of God?

If you have planned a closing ritual, explain that you will be closing each session in this way. The following prayer may be used to close the session or ask for a volunteer to offer one:

God of grace, give us graceful lives and make us gracious witnesses. Amen.

Session Two: Discipleship Formation, Part 1

Marks of Authentic Christian Community

Session Preparation

- Review the session in its entirety.
- On newsprint or white board, print the following definition: *“Christian Education” refers the ways in which Christian identity and lifestyle are formed, nurtured, and developed.*
- Make copies of Handout 2 “Christian Education in Historical Perspective.”
- Review pages 93–101 of *Learning the Way* to prepare the presentation for III: The Marks of Authentic Christian Community
- Print out the discussion questions for IV B “Group Activity” on newsprint or white board.
- If participants do not have copies of *Learning the Way and you choose the* Optional assignment: make copies of Handout 3 “Curriculum.”

I Gathering (5 minutes)

Welcome everyone and invite them to share any thoughts on the material presented so far or on the Optional Home Assignment. Review the definition of discipleship from Session One. Explain that today you are going to begin to look at how disciples of Jesus are formed. Offer the following opening prayer or invite a volunteer to lead the group in prayer:

*God of life and grace,
Open our eyes and our hearts. Help us to set aside our assumptions and expectations so we can learn anew what it means to follow Jesus and lead others in that way of life. It is in his name that we pray, Amen.*

II Opening Activities (15 minutes)

A. Free Association: Explain that you are going to give them a phrase and they are to shout out, “popcorn style,” whatever comes to mind. Encourage them not to censure their thoughts—there are no right or wrong answers. Say “Christian education” and let them respond for about a minute. Note the most common responses.

B. Putting Christian education into perspective: Distribute Handout 2, “Christian Education in Historical Perspective,” and review it together. Stress to

participants that Sunday school, Vacation Bible school, and youth groups are very recent phenomena, historically speaking. Review the definition of Christian education as the ways in which Christian identity and lifestyle are formed, nurtured, and developed. Explain that, while the Christian church, following its Jewish roots, has always done intentional teaching, the most powerful force in forming—or not forming—followers of Jesus is the life of the Christian community itself.

III. Defining Authentic Christian Community (15 minutes)

Explain as follows:

Authentic discipleship can only be nurtured within authentic Christian community. So the critical question for us today is “What is authentic Christian community?”

A. Drawing on pages 93–94 of *Learning the Way*, present the following points:

- Authentic Christian Community *practices* the presence of Jesus—
 - *experiences* the presence of Jesus in its midst
 - *embodies* the presence of Jesus for the world

B. Drawing on pages 96–101 of *Learning the Way*, present the following marks of authentic Christian community:

- Responsiveness
- Gratitude
- Grace
- Communion
- Witness

IV. Exercises (20 minutes)

A. Options for those who prefer to work alone:

- Think about a time when you felt the presence of Jesus and consider how your faith community can nurture those types of experiences.
- Select one of the marks of authentic Christian community and recall or write about times you have experienced that mark present in the church.

B. Group Activity

Note: if you have participants from different churches, have them work in groups according to the church they represent.

Divide participants into 5 groups and assign each one of the marks to discuss, using the following questions:

- 1) In what ways does my faith community reflect this mark of authenticity?
- 2) In what ways does my faith community fail to reflect this mark of authenticity?
- 3) What factors enhance or hinder this mark of authenticity in faith communities/
- 4) How might church leadership (pastors, teachers, board members, officers) help congregations move toward authenticity?

After about 10 minutes, invite the groups to share highlights of their discussions. Ask participants to be aware of the marks of authentic Christian community this week and how they are or are not present in their congregations.

V. Closing (5 minutes)

Explain that next session you will be looking at practices that promote authentic Christian community. If each participant has a copy of *Learning the Way*, assign pages 102–117.

Optional Home Assignment: Distribute Handout 3 “Curriculum” (or if participants have copies of the book, *Learning the Way*, direct them to page 94) and ask them to identify the types of curriculum as they exist in their local congregations and what those curricula are teaching.

If you have a regular closing ritual, close session in this way. The following prayer may be used to close the session or ask for a volunteer to offer a prayer:

God of authenticity, make us real in our faith and help us to nurture authenticity in our congregations so that all those who dwell with us may know the presence of Jesus. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Session Three: Discipleship Formation, Part 2

Practices of Authentic Christian Community

Session Preparation

- Review the session in its entirety.
- Review pages 102–112 of *Learning the Way* to prepare the presentation for III: Practices that Create Authentic Christian Community
- Make copies of Handout 4 “Practicing for Authenticity.”

I Gathering (5 minutes)

Welcome everyone and invite them to share any thoughts on the material or assignment. Review the definition of Christian education from Session Two. Explain that today you are going to look at practices that nurture authenticity in the church. Offer the following opening prayer or invite a volunteer to pray:

*God of life and grace,
Help us to experience this gathering as a safe place—a place where we can be honest about our experiences, both good and bad, and trust that it is in truth that we find freedom. It is in the name of the Way, the Truth, and the Life that we pray. Amen.*

II Opening Activities (15 minutes)

A. Reflection: Invite participants to spend some time reflecting on their experiences in childhood, bringing to mind times that they felt truly safe, accepted, and loved.

B. Free Association: Explain that you are going to give them a word and they are to shout out, “popcorn style,” whatever comes to mind. Encourage them not to censure their thoughts—there are no right or wrong answers. Say “worship” and let them respond for about a minute. Note the most common responses.

III. Creating Authentic Christian Community (15 minutes)

Explain:

Effective formation of disciples depends largely on the Christian community’s capacity to communicate the presence of Jesus in its internal life and in its relationships with the world. Last session, we identified responsiveness, gratitude, grace, communion, and witness as marks of

authentic Christian community. Being an authentic Christian community doesn't happen by magic, so in this session we will explore five practices that can help us experience and embody the presence of Jesus.

A. Drawing on pages 102–112 of *Learning the Way*, present the five practices:

- Celebrate
- Love
- Serve
- Travel Light
- Trust the Spirit

IV. Exercises (20 minutes)

Distribute Handout 4 “Practicing for Authenticity.”

A. **Option for those who prefer to work alone:** Select one of the items on Handout 4 “Practicing for Authenticity” to reflect on.

B. Group Activity

Note: if you have participants from different churches, have them work in groups according to the church they represent.

Divide participants into 4 groups and assign each one of the items on the handout.

After about 10 minutes, invite the groups to share highlights of their discussions.

V. Closing (5 minutes)

Explain that next session you will be looking at role of tradition in nurturing discipleship. If each participant has a copy of *Learning the Way*, assign pages 119–137.

Optional Home Assignment: See Handout 4.

If you have a regular closing ritual, close session in this way. The following prayer may be used to close the session or ask for a volunteer to offer a prayer:

God, we celebrate your love. Help us in our times of gathering to truly know your presence and to share that presence with the world. In the name of the One who is ever-present, we pray. Amen.

Session Four: Discipleship Formation, Part 3

The Role of Tradition

Session Preparation

- Review the session in its entirety.
- Review pages 119–137 of *Learning the Way* to prepare the presentation for III: Some Thoughts on Scripture
- Make copies of Handouts 5, 6, and 7.
- Gather children’s Bibles and curriculum samples for adults, teens and children.
- Note that the opening activity is limited to 5 minutes to allow more time for the later exercises.

I Gathering (5 minutes)

Welcome everyone and invite them to share any thoughts on the material or assignment. Offer the following opening prayer or invite a volunteer to pray:

God of history,

The story of your participation in the world is our story. It has shaped and guided us. Help us to find new ways to bring that story to new generations and places. In the name of the Master Storyteller, we pray. Amen.

II Opening Activity (5 minutes)

The goal of this activity is for participants to identify the many traditions that formally and informally influence the life of the church and its members.

Begin by offering this simple definition:

An authoritative tradition is anything that explicitly or implicitly defines and guides us.

Ask the participants shout out, “popcorn style,” the traditions that are authoritative in the life of the church. Encourage them to think both in terms of formally authoritative traditions, such as Scripture and creeds and informal ones, such as unconsciously held assumptions about how things are done.

Summarize their suggestions and add as necessary: Scripture, ways of treating Scripture, confessions, creeds, denominational decrees, mission statements, and church constitutions.

III. Some thoughts on Scripture (20 minutes)

Explain:

While a number of sources serve formally and informally as authoritative traditions in the church, in this session we will focus on the Bible as the most widely attested to authoritative tradition in the church. It is because the Jewish people and the first followers of Jesus preserved and passed on the traditions of the faith that we are able to stand here today as Christians. It is, therefore crucial that we understand the history of this book and explore ways of approaching it with integrity.

Distribute Handout 5 “About the Bible” and review it together.

A. Drawing on pages of *Learning the Way* that are noted in parentheses, present the following points:

- This is a live tradition through which Jesus was made present (pp. 119–120).
- Scripture is authoritative *story* (pp. 120–122).
- The power of story and the storyteller demands caution as seek to teach the tradition (pp. 125–126).

B. Drawing on pages of *Learning the Way* that are noted in parentheses, present the following practices required for preserving and sharing the tradition:

- Trust the story (pp. 131–132).
- Apply the Story (pp. 132–134).
- Proclaim the story (pp. 135–136).
- Surrender the story (pp. 136–137).

IV. Exercises (25 minutes)

Note: those who prefer to work alone may select either of these exercises to do privately rather than in a group.

Present the two options below by reading the instructions on Handout 6 and 7 and ask the participants to form several groups according to which exercise they select. Exercise A readily accommodates several groups between among children’s Bibles and different age level curriculum materials.

A. Review the Use of Scripture

Distribute Handout 6 “Common Uses of Scripture” and review the instructions.

B. Proclaim the Story

Distribute Handout 7 “Retell the Story” and review the instructions.

Give the groups 15 minutes to do their activity and then reconvene and have them present to the larger group. Monitor presentation time according to how many groups you have.

V. Closing (5 minutes)

Explain that next session you will be developing a lesson plan for discipleship formation together. If each participant has a copy of *Learning the Way*, assign pages 139–144 for next session.

Optional Home Assignment: Invite participants to make note of the rituals of their churches and the ways in which those rituals are—or are not—coupled with the stories that give them meaning.

If you have a regular closing ritual, close session in this way. The following prayer may be used to close the session or ask for a volunteer to offer a prayer: *God, we celebrate the tradition that came down through the centuries to make you known to us. Help us to be transformed by that tradition, to live out that tradition and entrust it to others. In the name of the One who is Your Word, we pray. Amen.*

Session Five: How Shall We Proceed?

Session Preparation

- Review the session in its entirety.
- Review pages 139–144 of *Learning the Way* and make notes for your presentation for III “Developing a Plan.”
- Make copies of Handouts 8 and 9.
- Note that the closing time is extended to 10 minutes to allow for a dedication activity.
- You will need stones and a basket for the closing dedication.
- Decide how best to receive feedback from participants. You may want to provide paper and a box for them to submit anonymous comments. Note that time is not provided for during the session to evaluate the study.
- Consider planning a way to touch base later on to see how things are developing and to assess the effectiveness of this workshop.
- It would be greatly appreciated if you would pass along any feedback (participants’ or yours) to cassandra.williams@abc-usa.org.

I Gathering (5 minutes)

Welcome everyone and invite them to share any thoughts on the material or optional home assignments so far. Share the following quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*:

The way is unutterably hard, and at every moment we are in danger of straying from it. If we regard this way as one we follow in obedience to an external command, if we are afraid of ourselves all the time, it is indeed an impossible way. But if we behold Jesus Christ going on before step by step, if we only look to him and follow him, step by step, we shall not go astray. . . . For he is himself the way, the narrow way and the strait gate. He, and he alone, is our journey’s end.

Offer the following opening prayer or invite a volunteer to offer a prayer:

*God of life and grace,
Help us to see the ways in which we have denied grace in our own lives and to others. And then help us to repent and find new, gracious ways to share the walk of faith. In the name of the one who revealed the depth of your love we pray. Amen.*

II Opening Activity ((20 minutes)

Distribute Handout 8 “It Begins with Repentance” and explain:

In order to make changes in how we approach discipleship–formation, we have to first admit our mistakes and then seek new ways of doing things. This handout provides a list of some common and ineffective ways of nurturing discipleship as a way of being and their positive counterparts. Your task is to work alone or in groups and identify 2 paired items to explore. First you will identify ways in which you and/or your faith community has participated in the ungracious approach and then develop and list of specific ways you can repent from that approach and embrace a positive, gracious approach instead.

Ask the participants to form small groups, for those who want to work in groups. It would be good if people from the same churches work together, however, one church can have more than one group. As an alternative, people can form groups around the paired items they wish to discuss. Give them 15 minutes to do the activity then reconvene and invite sharing.

III. Developing a Plan (25 minutes)

Distribute Handout 9 “Components of a Lesson Plan” and review the components.

Referring to pages 141–143 of *Learning the Way*, briefly summarize the suggested lesson plan for discipleship, using the components as a framework:

- Who
- Where
- Goal
- Objectives
- Methods and Materials
- Assessment

Invite the participants to gather into groups, keeping those from the same congregation together if different congregations are represented. Review the activity instructions on Handout 9 and give the groups 15 minutes to complete the activity and then reconvene for the closing.

V. Closing (10 minutes)

Thank the group for their participation in this workshop. Explain that this workshop is just a beginning point and the real work lies ahead. Allow a few minutes for comments and invite anonymous written feedback.

Lead the participants in the following dedication ritual:

Place the basket on a table. You may wish to decorate the table with a pretty cloth, candle, cross, or other symbol. Distribute one stone to each participant. Read aloud Matthew 16:13–20. Explain:

Greek has two words for rock: one refers to loose stones that roll and the other to solid rocks on which we can safely stand. The stone you are holding represents your plan for changing how your church seeks to nurture followers of Jesus. In a moment, I will invite you to place your stone in the basket as a symbol of your commitment to making this stone a solid rock for your church—helping it become an authentic community that nurtures authentic followers of Jesus.

Invite participants to hold up their stones and share one hoped-for change that their stone represents. Assure them that repeats are welcome.

When all who wish to have shared, invite them to place their stones in the basket as they feel led. You may then lead the participants in your chosen closing ritual or in the following dedication prayer:

*God of hope,
Remind us that the smallest of steps make for profound outcomes. We commit to you our hopes and dreams for our personal discipleship and for our churches' disciple-nurturing activities. Help us to believe in the very presence of Jesus and trust in the power of that presence to transform us, our churches and our world. In his name and for his Kingdom we pray. Amen.*

Statistics on Church Participation

- In 1958, 80% of the population regularly attended worship, and raised their children (the Baby Boomer generation) in church and Sunday school.
- Of the 80% of U.S. Baby Boomer children who were raised in church and Sunday school, only 20% remained active in church.
- In the 1970s, with the rise of the evangelical movement/attractational church model, 20% of Boomers returned to church, raising participation to 40%.
- Boomers currently have the fastest drop out rate of any group in churches today; their attendance is down to 30% and dropping fast.
- The children of the Baby Boomers had more money invested in church programs for them, such as youth group, than any other generation.
- Less than 2% of those children of Boomers attend church.
- The WWII generation (average age 91) & the Builder generation (average age 76) are the last 2 generations to regularly attend church and tithe.
- In 2008, 17% of the population attended church and the percentage is expected to drop to less than 5% in the next 15 years.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What factors do you attribute the decline in church participation among those who were raised in the church?
- 2) What might these statistics suggest about the effectiveness of traditional discipleship programs like Sunday school and youth groups?

[Statistics from *Leadership for the Future of the Church in America*, Rev. Glynis LaBarre, Transformation Strategist, American Baptist Home Mission Societies]

Contemporary Christian Education Practices in Historical Perspective

Vacation Bible School	Began in the 1890s
Youth Group	Came out of the Sunday School Movement in mid 1800s
Curriculum	Sunday School materials were first printed in 1824
Sunday School	Began in 1780 in England and in the 1790s in the US
Bible Study	1500–1600s the Bible was made available to lay people
“Christian education”	Phrase is used in the 1st Epistle of Clement, written in 95 C.E.
Christian Discipleship	Began around 27 CE when Jesus issued the call “Come follow me.”

People had been doing Christian education and effectively nurturing followers of Jesus for a century and a half before the rise of programs we generally associate with Christian education today.

Let's be reminded of the following statistics:

- Of the 80% of U.S. Baby Boomer children who were raised in church and Sunday school in the 1950s, only 30% are active in church today and that number is rapidly declining.
- Less than 2% of the children of Boomers, who had more time and money invested in programming for them (E.g. youth group) than any other generation, currently participate in church.

Curriculum

While we often use “curriculum” in reference to printed instructional materials, the word has a much broader meaning, which includes both what we intend to teach and what we inadvertently teach. Below is a summary of some of the curricula identified by educators. The power of church life to form Christian identity—or not—requires that we attend to the entire range of curricula that are at work in the community of faith.

Explicit or intended curriculum refers to what is consciously presented as part of an intentional educational agenda. Explicit curriculum in the faith community includes such things as Sunday school lesson plans, Bible texts, belief formulations, descriptions of rituals, and membership requirements.

Implicit, hidden, or covert curriculum refers to what is learned by the very nature and design of a group. Hidden curriculum in the faith community is found in its structure and routines and in the behaviors, attitudes, and relationships of its members.

Null curriculum consists of what we choose not to teach. In faith communities, the null curriculum might include books of the Bible or individual texts that we choose not to study or topics that we avoid. The “why” behind these choices becomes part of our implicit curriculum.

Concomitant curriculum refers to what is taught or emphasized at home outside the primary educational site. Venues for concomitant curriculum of the faith community also include denominational and ecumenical life.

Received or learned curriculum refers to those things that participants actually take from the experience. Received curriculum provides a measure of effectiveness for our discipleship enterprise, because it reflects the actual results of our efforts.

Practicing for Authenticity

Celebrate

Discuss together the following:

- Has your church ever had disagreements about worship? If so, what was the source of those disagreements? Was the word “should” used?
- What aspects of worship as you currently experience it help you to feel Jesus’ presence and know God’s love?

Love

- Read 1 John 4:1, Corinthians 13:4–7, and Mark 10:17–22 and develop a practical definition of love.
- Contrast what is commonly referred to as “love” to this definition.
- Compare your church’s interior and external life to this definition.

Serve

Discuss your church membership’s attitude toward service. Do members expect to be served or do they see themselves as a community of mutual service and of service to the world around them?

Children

Consider the place of children in your church and your church’s families:

- Does your church welcome and accommodate children as children?
- From a child’s perspective (to the extent you can imagine a child’s perspective), how interesting, comfortable, and enjoyable is church life?
- What expectations do the parents in your church place on their children?

Optional Home Assignment: Referring to your church’s bulletins, newsletters, and constitution, map how your energy, time, and other resources are utilized. How many activities, groups, and beliefs support your mission to the world? Do you see any excess baggage? What emotional attachments might make it difficult to lighten their load? How might your church begin to listen to the Spirit and discern which activities to keep, lose, or add?

About the Bible

The stories of Scripture began as oral traditions, some of which were passed down for centuries before taking written form. The first written forms of stories, songs, and prophecies that would become part of the Hebrew Scriptures were written around 1800 B.C.E., and the remainder were written and collected over a period of centuries. The determination of an official version of the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures, was not completed until nearly 100 years after Jesus at the Council of Jamnia.

The earliest written documents of our New Testament are the early letters of Paul. It was not until about the year 65 that the stories and sayings of Jesus began to be gathered and written down. For three centuries, church leaders argued about which writings should be treated as Scripture—a debate that continued into the 16th century. Because the earliest manuscripts have been lost to history, our current Bible rests on copies of copies of copies.

The official translation of the Bible in the Western (Roman Catholic) church since the fifth century had been Jerome's Latin Vulgate. While several scholars translated select books of the Bible from the Vulgate into English, it was not until the fourteenth century that an entire English version was completed by John Wycliffe.

The invention of the moveable type in 1455 by Johann Gutenberg and the Protestant Reformation, which began in Germany in 1517, laid the groundwork for having Bible translations in modern languages, based not on the Latin, but on older Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. While early translators, such as Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and John Wycliffe were persecuted and even martyred by the Church, some English versions were developed and distributed by the Church. The most influential of these was *The King James Bible* (1611). The discovery in the nineteenth century of many biblical manuscripts more ancient than those on which the King James Version was based led to the development of numerous modern translations. The process of translating the Bible continues today, helped by ongoing discovery of ancient manuscripts.

Common Uses of Scripture

Instructions: In this activity, you will be reviewing the use of Scripture in one of three ways: cites and quotes in curriculum materials; retelling in curriculum materials; or retelling in a children's Bible.

Curriculum/Children's Bible Name_____

Age level_____

Use of Scripture:

Step One: Read your session and identify the places where Scripture is cited.

Step Two: Review the usage of the texts and answer the following questions:

- 1) What does their use of Scripture suggest about their understanding of the Bible, E.g. what type of material it is; how it informs discipleship.
- 2) Does the use of Scripture demonstrate respect for history and nature of the Bible?
- 3) Does the sacred story come to life in this usage of Scripture?
- 4) How does or doesn't this usage help to communicate God's grace?
- 5) How does or doesn't this usage nurture discipleship as a way of being?

Retellings of Scripture Stories:

Step One: Have one person to read the actual Bible text aloud.

Step Two: Have one person read the retold version from the curriculum session of children's Bible.

Step Three: Compare the two versions and respond to the following questions:

- 1) Does the retelling accurately present the story?
- 2) Are there embellishments that detract from or add to the actual Bible text?
- 3) Does the retelling suggest a particular agenda on the part of the story teller?
- 4) Is the selected story appropriate for the age level?
- 5) Is the retelling presented in an age-appropriate manner?
- 6) How might the retelling be adjusted to improve it?

Retell the Story

Instructions: in this activity, you will prepare a retelling of a Bible story for a particular age-level. Please keep in mind that stories can be retold in a variety of ways—through words, song, art, or activities in which participants experience the story, for example. You will be sharing your retelling with the larger group.

Step One: Identify your choice of age level (multi-age is an option).

Step Two: Identify your choice of Bible story.

Step Three: Develop your retelling of the story

It Begins with Repentance

Instructions: Discipleship is a way of being that depends on experiencing the grace of God. Many of us have both a personal and a church history of ungraciousness, so repentance—turning from and turning to—is necessary. Select two of the paired items. Identify ways you and/or your congregation has embodied the approach in the left-hand column and then identify specific, practical ways you can move toward the more positive, gracious, and effective approach in the right-hand column.

Turning from:

Turning to:

discipleship imposed from the outside	→ discipleship growing from within
discipleship dependent on human will	→ discipleship dependent on Jesus
magic, pretense, rigidity	→ relationship, authenticity, responsiveness
self-justification	→ grace-filled and gracious lives
elitism, protectionism, and discord	→ authentic community
coercion, manipulation, and judgment	→ being the presence of the Kingdom
biblical illiteracy and misuse	→ knowing and honoring the sacred story
marginalization of children	→ organizing the congregation around children

The way is unutterably hard, and at every moment we are in danger of straying from it. If we regard this way as one we follow in obedience to an external command, if we are afraid of ourselves all the time, it is indeed an impossible way. But if we behold Jesus Christ going on before step by step, if we only look to him and follow him, step by step, we shall not go astray. . . . For he is himself the way, the narrow way and the strait gate. He, and he alone, is our journey's end.
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Components of a Lesson Plan

Lesson plans presume the who and where of the educational enterprise and include the following main components:

- A goal, which presents the broad purpose of the educational enterprise
- Objectives that describe intermediate aims in service to the goal
- A description of methods and materials that will be used
- A plan for assessing whether or not the goal and objectives were met

Activity instructions: Working in groups, identify the following:

1) Specific discipleship formation objectives that you would like to your congregation to adopt:

2) Methods and materials for meeting those objectives:

3) A plan for bringing these hopes to your congregation: