Abundant Life Garden Project:
An interactive Scripture-based instructional program offered to parishes, teachers, families and others who seek to share the ministry of Episcopal Relief & Development

Water

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Reflecting on Water

Water is an essential aspect of our faith. Noah’s voyage with his family and the animals to a cleansed world through the flood is a beloved (if not frightful) story. Moses’ discovery as a baby in a basket floating down the Nile and the parting of the Red Sea as he brings our Jewish ancestors out of slavery in Egypt foreshadows the transformational aspects of Jesus’ baptism by John.

Indeed, the transforming qualities of water suffuse our faith, our Bible and our stories. Water marks the passage from life through death to life again. Water is turned into wine. Wine becomes the blood of Christ. The waters of Baptism transform our lives. We then live in the power of Christ’s resurrection, seeking to serve others as he himself served.

And yet access to clean water and proper sanitation remains one of the singular challenges of people living in poverty around the world. As a faith-based organization, where water plays such a central role, how do we address this challenge? The answer to the question begins and ends with the support of the Episcopal Church.

Thank you for facilitating this learning in young hearts and minds.

Robert W. Radtke, President
Episcopal Relief & Development
Welcome! Abundant Life Garden Project programs are interactive, Scripture-based programs that will introduce you to our work. We hope these program materials will invite you to partner with us in our ministry of healing a hurting world, inform you about our work in many parts of the world we serve, and even transform you and your congregation or community.

This lesson plan, Water, introduces children to the essential nature of water, both for human life—no one can live without water—and as a central element of our faith. In this lesson, children will be introduced to the continuing need for clean water among many people on earth and the use of water to grow crops, raise livestock, prevent disease and even transport crops and other goods to market.

Children also will be reminded of the many images of water in Scripture and our sacraments of baptism and Holy Eucharist. Scripture indeed is full of water images—from the waters of creation and the crossing of the Red Sea and the River Jordan by the ancient Israelites in the Old Testament to the changing of water to wine and the water of Jesus’ baptism in the New Testament to the presence of water in baptism and Holy Eucharist. All these images are related to new life, and often to new life in community.

Even in situations where water takes on a forceful and destruction role - by way of hurricanes, floods, or tsunamis - water ultimately brings to us new life and new possibilities. It is this hope that we want to share with children: Even when times seem dark, we have faith that sorrowful situations will, in Christ, be redeemed and restored.

As children explore these images of water and the Baptismal Covenant to seek and serve Christ in others, we urge you to explore with them and within yourself this concept of new life in community through the gift of water. This gift is life-changing. By providing the gift of clean water for those in need and in sharing the gift of spiritual growth through this program with the children you lead and teach, you can alter the lives of others and join with us in healing a hurting world.

We hope this lesson will be enjoyable and enriching for those taking part in this program. Your feedback and suggestions would be greatly appreciated and will help us serve you better. Please share your experience of these materials by filling out and returning the survey included at the end of this lesson. Thank you!
Introduction

This module of Abundant Life Garden Project focuses on water programs. Water is essential to all human, plant and animal life. One billion people on earth do not have access to clean water within a 15-minute walk of their home. Since water is an essential element of human life, good health and recovery from extreme poverty is not possible without access to clean water.

This unit presents images of water from both the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible, introduces key elements of the Baptismal Covenant to young children, and engages them in linking these stories and concepts to the urgent needs of others near their homes and around the world.
**Objectives**

This lesson will:

- Recall or introduce images of water in the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and the world
- Provide a time of quiet reflection and listening to God in silence
- Provide children with experiential learning in examining the essential role of water in human life and in our faith
- Motivate children to be a part of seeking and serving Christ in others through the gift of water

**The Plan**

This lesson includes several activities from which you may choose for your own lesson plan. While this structure is recommended, you are free to tailor these materials to the needs of your group.

The activities in this lesson include:

- An Opening Question
- A Litany of Thanks
- A Meditation
- A Story from the Field
- A Group Learning Exercise
- Small Group or Individual Studies
- Closing Reflections and Prayer

For more information and tips on using each of these activities, please see Appendix B: Teaching Tips of Abundant Life Garden Project program resources, available at [www.episcopalrelief.org/Children](http://www.episcopalrelief.org/Children).
Materials Needed

» A large bowl (preferably clear glass or plastic) of clean, fresh water
» A large blank writing surface (paper, poster boards or fabric)
» A supply of all-purpose blank white paper (enough for each child to have three to five sheets)
» A plentiful supply of crayons, washable markers or colored pencils (at least three to five writing instruments of various colors recommended for each child)
» At least one bucket of water (several might be used)
» At least one Bible (two or more copies preferable)
» At least one Book of Common Prayer

Using this Program for Summer Camps and Long Term Offerings

You are welcome to supplement this program with additional activities in order to tailor this program to summer programs, Vacation Bible School programs, or other extended or long term programs. Options you might add include:

» Gardening projects
» Healthy snacks
» Arts and crafts
» Songs
» Playtime
» Fundraising activities

For more information and tips on these activities, please see Appendix A: Options for Extended Time Periods and Appendix D: Fundraising Toolkit of Abundant Life Garden Project program materials, all available at www.episcopalerelief.org/Children.
An Opening Question

An Invitation to Share and Learn

“How do we use water?”

Materials Needed

» crayons, markers, or colored pencils
» a large blank writing surface

Activity

» As children arrive, offer them their choice of writing utensils.
» Ask them to draw pictures in response to the question “How do we use water?”
» Allow as much time as needed, so that children may all begin group worship and prayer time together.
» Children may return to this activity as one of their learning center choices.
Litany of Thanks

Ask children to sit in a circle. The leader should also sit in the circle with the children if at all possible.

Place a large bowl of clean, fresh water in the middle of your circle. You may dip your hands in it and ask children to dip their hands in it if you wish.

Leader: The Lord be with you!

Children and helpers: And also with you!

Leader: Lord, thank you for the gift of this time together, and for the gift of water. Bless us in this time together, and bless those in need of clean and more abundant water. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Leader: Now, I will read several prayers about water. Since water is such an important gift, please respond to each of these prayers with, “Thank you, Lord, for the gift of water.”

Litany of Thanks for the Gift of Water

(Leader’s prayers are boldface; children and others’ lines are in italics.)

We thank you, Lord, for your creation that gives life on earth.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water.

We give thanks for rain, snow, fog and dew. We give thanks for water under the ground, above the ground and in the oceans.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water.

We give thanks for vast waters of the oceans, for water in lakes, rivers and streams. We give thanks for waters in glaciers, on the polar caps, for water bubbling out of rocky streams, for aquifers running underneath us and water in the tiniest puddles and buckets.
We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water.

We thank you, Lord, for the many uses of water. We give thanks for water to drink, water for cooking, water for bathing and cleaning, water upon and through with we travel to places far and near, and for water that cools us, warms us, and in which we might play.

We thank you, Lord for the gift of water.

We especially thank you, Lord, for the gift of water to grow our food. We ask you to bless us and all people on the earth with enough water for our farms and gardens, to satisfy the thirst of ourselves and of our animals, and to wash away germs and keep us healthy.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water.

We thank you for the stories of water in the Bible— for the story of the creation of the earth, for the story of new life after the earth was flooded, for the story of water saving your people in the desert, for the story of crossing through water to get to the promised land.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water.

We thank you Lord, for the water in which Jesus was baptized and for the stories of water during his time on earth. We thank you for the water turned to wine, for the water that quenched his thirst, and for the water made into bread and wine during his Last Supper.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water.

We ask your help, O Lord, through all floods, droughts, and storms, to see the new creation that follows each one. We ask you to help us remember that you will be with us always in the gift of water.

Help us to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. Help us to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being.

In Christ’s name, Amen.
**Meditation**

Leader:  *Let’s think about this precious gift of water.*

**Please close your eyes, take three deep breaths, and think about the words I have just read.**

**What pictures of water come into your mind?**

**Which pictures of water give you joy?**

**Which pictures of water make you sad?**

**What might God be saying to you in these pictures of water?**

The leader should close his or her eyes and take deep breaths, in order to model silent meditation for children. For tips and information on the importance of silent time with God and how to lead children in meditation, please see Appendix B, Teaching Tips of Abundant Life Garden Project program resource materials, available at [www.episcopalrelief.org/Children](http://www.episcopalrelief.org/Children).

After a minute or more, the leader might ask children to share any thoughts they have about water. Some of these thoughts will be quite profound. Others might be silly. Some children might not want to share their thoughts at all. All these reactions are perfectly okay, and children should not be forced or pushed to say anything.
**Story from the Field**

After children have had a few minutes to share any thoughts about water, please read “Building Access to Clean Water,” a Story from the Field from the mission work of Episcopal Relief & Development. You might have older children or youth who are good readers take turns reading the paragraphs of this brief true story.

In the village of Bijagua, in Nicaragua, a couple named Maria and Juan had to bring all the household water for cooking, bathing, drinking, and washing themselves from a stream 10 minutes away from their home. They have five children, who were constantly sick with diarrhea – the stream where they got the water was also the stream where the cattle got their water.

Maria said, “Our daughter spent so much time carrying water, she was falling behind in her school work. We always worried about her walking alone in the dark of the early mornings and evenings. There are poisonous snakes around here.”

Episcopal Relief & Development – part of the Episcopal Church in the United States - worked with El Porvenir, an organization in Nicaragua that works to develop water, sanitation and re-forestation projects. The program also provided Maria and her community with education and training on properly maintaining the water system, water hygiene and protecting children and families from preventable, water-related diseases. Instances of water-borne illnesses were also tracked by local health monitors.

Now Bijagua has safe water and residents can stay healthy. “Our daughter is excelling in school now that she doesn’t have to carry buckets of water. And the children don’t have diarrhea anymore,” Maria stated.

After reading this story, children might be asked,

**What do you have to do to get water?**

**What would your family have to do differently if you had to walk 10 minutes to a stream to get water?**

**How would you feel about walking to get water?**

**What could you, your family, your church, or your community do to help people who do not have easy access to clean drinking water?**
Video Options for Story from the Field

If you choose, you may use one of the following videos in addition to or as a substitute for the Story from the Field segment of this lesson:

» Wells in Nicaragua: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0NjSvtKQhY&lr=1&uid=9H4DbjpjmVd3I-1e--txDg

» Water and Sanitation in Nicaragua: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9riTPKTfT4&lr=1&uid=9H4DbjpjmVd3I-1e--txDg

In addition to the discussion questions listed above, you might also simply ask,

“What are your reactions?”

A Group Learning Exercise

The Water Walk

The group work for this unit is an experiential exercise in learning the difficulties of walking up to 15 minutes in order to get water for drinking, cooking and cleaning.

Your group assignment is:

» Carry a bucket (one for each child or ask children to take turns with what is available) to a water source that is about 10-15 minutes away.

» Fill the bucket with water.

» Haul it back to a place where it could be used.

Your field trip will be determined by your physical location, safety considerations, weather and other parameters of your church, neighborhood, climate and terrain. However, we recommend you include these elements in your trip:

» Consider physical abilities and limitations of participants. If some in your group are unable to make the journey, ask them to serve as timekeepers or prayer partners for the rest of the group, or they might help finish up lessons. (And please don’t leave children alone—leave them with responsible adults!)

» Consider a good purpose for the water that is brought back—fill the Baptismal font of your church, water a garden, clean your work space, or simply water a patch of ground when you return. (Please don’t waste it!)

» Determine about how much water you will need. Don’t take more than is needed.
This can be a fun activity. However, please emphasize that this is real life for many people in the world.

Consider beginning and ending your journey at the Baptismal font, to emphasize the spiritual nature of this exercise.

When your journey is complete, take a few minutes to ask the children:

- What was it like to have to walk to get water?
- What was it like knowing that if you didn’t make this walk, you wouldn’t get water?
- Did you treat the water differently, knowing that if you spilled it, you would have to walk back for more?
- What will you think about the next time you need water?

**Small Group or Individual Studies**

The following studies may be used for small group discussion or for individual reflection. Leaders of the program might set up “learning stations” for each of these studies and invite participants to rotate through the stations at their own pace.

Younger elementary school-aged children, particularly those who do not yet read well, might be assisted by adult or youth shepherds and encouraged to draw a picture in response to the questions. Older children and adults might also be invited to draw pictures or exercise their creativity in some way as well as they respond to the questions and material.
Old Testament Study— Water from the Rock

Using a Bible, look up Exodus 17:1-7.

Think about these questions:

- What happens in this story?
- How would you feel if you saw this happening in person?
- Are there people in the world today who may feel like the people in this story?

Draw a picture or write words to describe how God uses water as a gift in this story.
New Testament Study—The Baptism of Jesus

Look up Mark 1: 4-13.

Think about these questions:

• What happens in this story?

• How would you feel if you saw John baptizing Jesus and others?

• How do you think the angels waited on Jesus in the wilderness? What would he need?

Draw a picture or write words to describe how water was used in these scenes from the Bible.
Book of Common Prayer Study—Thanksgiving Over the Water


Think about these questions:

- What Bible stories do you recognize in these words?
- What words are used as prayers in this passage?
- What will the water be used for after these words are said?

Draw a picture or write words to show how this water is a gift to the person about to be baptized.
Kenya historically has been considered one of Africa’s more economically advantaged countries, but the past decade has seen a dramatic decline in quality of life for most Kenyans. With one of the highest rates of population growth in the world and battling recurring drought, Kenya is no longer able to feed itself and imports large quantities of food. Preventable diseases plague parts of Kenya, with an estimated 170 million work days lost annually to malaria.

Episcopal Relief & Development is partnering with the Anglican Church of Kenya and Inter-Diocesan Christian Community Services, the development arm of the church, in four dioceses in the Nyanza province, where frequent droughts, chronic poverty, and lack of clean water prevail. By providing people in this region with roof catchment tanks and community water points, Episcopal Relief & Development helps people in the Nyanza province have access to safe water.

Think about these questions:

- **What is pictured on the website?**
- **For what is water used in Kenya?**
- **What has happened because people in Kenya do not have enough water?**
- **How could the gift of water change life in Kenya?**

Draw a picture or write words to show the ways in which people in Kenya need to use water.
**Closing Reflections and Prayer**

Ask children and adult or youth helpers and leaders to form a circle again around the bowl of fresh water. Ask your group to take a few deep breaths, look at the water and think about what they saw, heard or experienced during their time today.

Going around the circle so that each person (children and helpers or leaders) has a turn, ask each person how they might seek and serve others in Christ through the gift of water. (If someone wants to take a “pass” and remain silent, that's okay.)

Songs* related to water or Baptism may be sung at this time.

*Closing Prayer (to be read by the leader or by one or more children):*

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of water. Through this gift of water, you quench our thirst, feed our hunger, help us to be clean and healthy, and give us the ability to live, to grow, and to serve and be served by others.

Give all people in this world, we pray, the gift of clean water, and help us to do our part in serving others through this gift.

In Christ's name, Amen.
Abundant Life Garden Project program uses materials already on hand to serve others in need. We encourage you to utilize Godly Play® materials to enhance this curriculum, along with materials children already regularly use for creative responses. These materials can be offered as a source of meditative work and creative response in the Small Group and Individual Studies portion of the Water lesson of this program.

More importantly, using Godly Play® materials may increase understanding of contemporary needs all over the world. One goal of Christian formation is to inspire and equip all baptized people to minister to others in the world and to seek and serve Christ in others, especially those in need. We hope these lessons will introduce children to these important aspects of the Christian faith.

Presentations to enhance this lesson:

- Baptism
- Parable of the Good Shepherd
- Desert Box stories including rivers and water
- Parables incorporating water images

The Baptism lesson, of course, could be used to remind children of this sacrament and to allow children to work with materials representing the images presented in the Water lesson.

Various New Testament parables and Old Testament stories include water as an essential element. In the Old Testament Desert Box stories, water is both necessary for life and a force to be crossed to find new life in a promised land. In the New Testament parables, water often is a life-giving element—either literally quenching the thirst of plants, animals or people or in the “background” as an essential but perhaps overlooked element of bread or wine.

In presenting this concept in Godly Play® of water as an essential element of life, the Parable of the Good Shepherd materials are the most vivid. The pool of water to which the Good Shepherd leads his sheep is a wonderful concept to help children reflect on the need for water and the existence of barren places on earth. The parable materials also show the action of the Good Shepherd in finding “the lost” and will lead children in thinking about those in need of assistance in quenching their thirst.
How to Incorporate Godly Play® Materials into lessons of Abundant Life Garden Project program resources

During the Small Group or Individual Studies portion of each lesson of the program, children have an opportunity to think individually and at their own paces about the concepts presented to them. We recommend that leaders of the program set up “learning centers” for children in advance and invite each to choose a station and work independently (or with a youth or adult helper, if needed).

If you would like to use Godly Play® materials within this curriculum, we recommend that you make these materials available to children as one learning station. We anticipate that younger children will choose these materials, while older children may choose activities involving more advanced reading skills.

In Lesson 1: Water, various materials could be used as learning-station choices. You might either:

a) bring the materials off the shelves and set them up on a small table or carpet square as a featured learning station or,

b) if you are using a Godly Play® classroom for this curriculum, ask children what materials include water and let them freely choose materials and synthesize concepts.

If a child already is familiar with these materials, ask him or her to think about the water in a particular story and work with these materials as he or she thinks about the stories and prayers presented in the Water lesson. Additional wondering questions might include:

• Why is water important in this story?

• What would happen in this story if there were no water?

• What could be done if there were no water?

Children also might be encouraged to respond creatively to these questions using materials you already have on hand.
With the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum

Several lessons from the Episcopal Children’s Curriculum (ECC) are linked in concept with this module.

In the Primary Shell portion of the ECC, Unit I, Session 8, “Moses and the Red Sea” could be used to link the images of Water to this important Bible story. If children in your community struggle with issues of damage or catastrophe resulting from water, including segments of this lesson as additional activities might be helpful.

Also in the Primary Shell portion of ECC, Unit III focuses on the sacrament of baptism. Teachers might use the excellent background material for further information and guidance in preparing to teach Lesson 1: Water of our Abundant Life Garden Project program.

The ECC teacher books also have many useful teaching tips that apply to all children’s programs. These materials are free and accessible online through the Virginia Theological Seminary website at www.vts.edu/cmt/published.