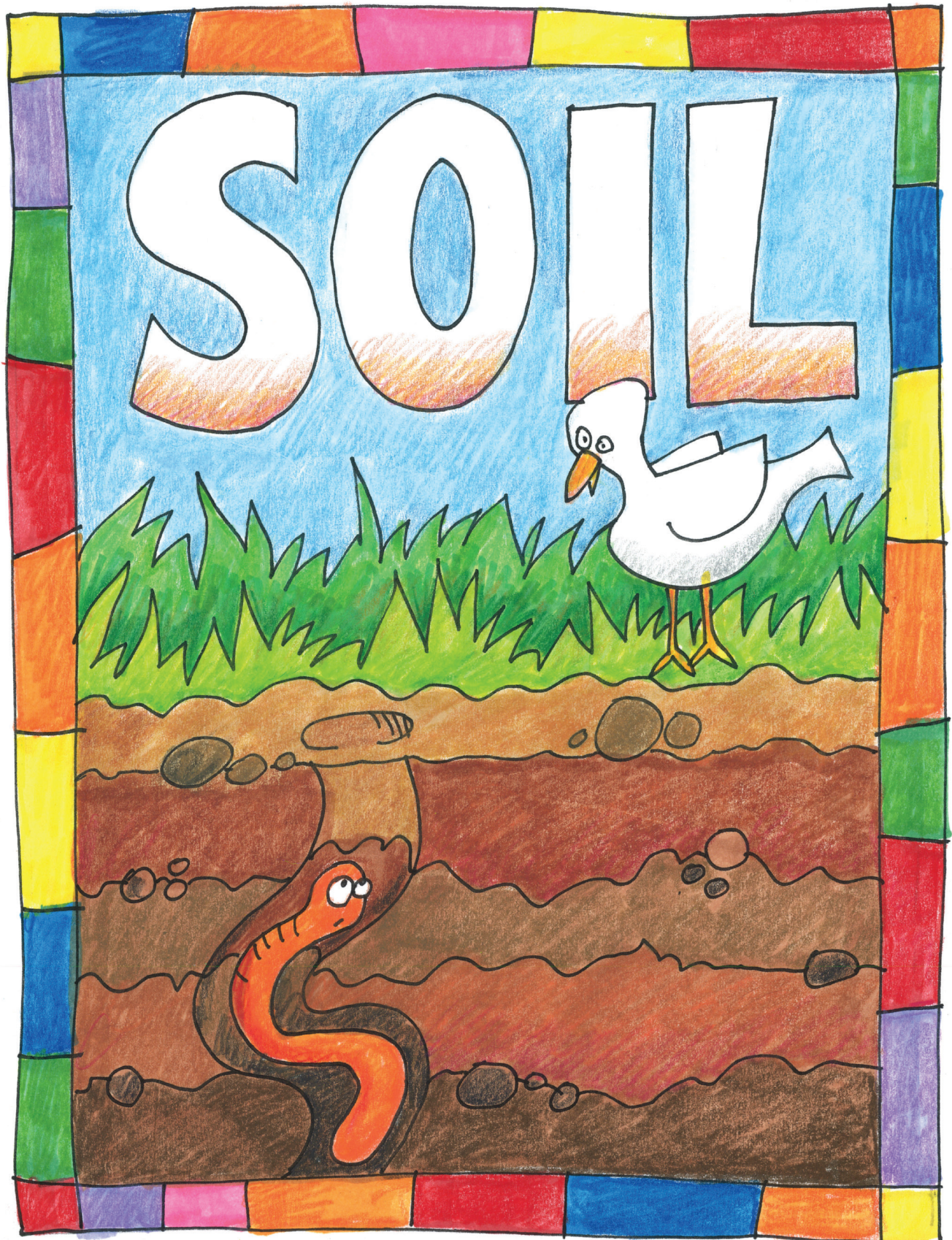


The Abundant Life Garden Project®



Vacation Bible School

The Abundant Life Garden Project®

offered by Episcopal Relief & Development

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Episcopal Relief & Development would like to thank the following for their contribution to

The Abundant Life Garden Project®

Curriculum designers: Cynthia Coe and Jerusalem Jackson Greer

Original artwork and illustration: The Rev. Jay Sidebotham

Design and layout: Bradley Wilson



Vacation Bible School

Day 2

SOIL



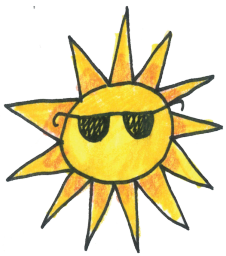
Understanding the Lesson

Gardening Note for Teachers

This interactive, Scripture-based module will introduce you and your class to the work of Episcopal Relief & Development in the area of soil.

The land we tread produces our food, serves as a reservoir for our water and provides a habitat for a vast diversity of organisms—ourselves included. Our use of soil determines whether our crops flourish, whether erosion washes away vital nutrients into our water sources, whether we live in polluted or clean environments and whether we have enough food, clean water and lumber to sustain our lives and those of other creatures on this earth. While seemingly a mundane topic, soil actually masks mysteries of life on earth. Ordinary soil contains a vast array of microbes we cannot see. Seeds, as part of their life cycle, germinate and grow underneath the ground—a mystery of life taking place out of sight—until the plants flourish with new growth. Soil is always changing, always subject to the elements of wind and rain and often subject to being picked up and moved somewhere else. These images might speak to our own spiritual lives as we are moved, inspired and even transplanted by the work of the Holy Spirit, working quietly like soft breezes and gentle rains, or in thunderstorms or flash floods. We might see the mystery of darkness in our lives, where growth and new life may be occurring unacknowledged or even unbeknownst to us. Like the Water module preceding it, this teaching unit addresses its topic on both literal and symbolic levels. In many parts of the world served by Episcopal Relief & Development, farmers experience wide shifts between plentiful rains and drought, famine and relative prosperity. The erosion of soil and the subsequent loss of nutrients in it often are a challenge, as is the lack of effective tools to work the land. Plots of land owned by individual farmers may be small and only effective in producing food for sustenance. Soil is indeed a gift from God. Those who live on land cultivated for crops are mindful of this gift and dependent on God for their livelihood each day. For those of us who do not live and work as farmers, we hope this teaching module will guide children and their leaders in thinking about the labor, tools, knowledge and gifts of nature required to till the soil successfully and produce crops we all need to survive. We also hope children will think about how, in their own lives, they might “till” their environments to best allow the work of the Holy Spirit to sustain and maintain their lives as part of the body of Christ. We hope the Soil unit will be enjoyable and enriching for the children in your church.

- Cynthia Coe & Jerusalem Jackson Greer



Rhythm of Learning

The rhythm of learning for these lessons is based upon the same structure as a Eucharist service, following a simple **Gather, Listen, Do, Go** format. Two of the zones - **Gather and Do are the Large Group Zones, Listen and Do are laid out as Growing Stations** that they children will rotate through. Children are divided into Learning Pods according to whatever formula you feel is best according to the options given in the *Facilitators Guide*.



Gather

This zone includes welcoming activities and the lessons introduction.



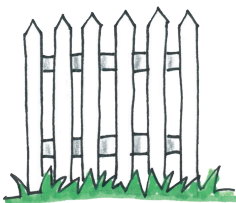
Listen

This zone includes multiple storytelling options. Please choose one "Story from the Field" and one "Story from our Faith" to share.



Do

This zone includes three activities to help children respond to what they have heard in the stories, and dig deeper into the lessons topic. You may want to set up each activity as a Growing Station and have children rotate through in their Learning Pods, or you may choose to do only one or two. This zone also includes an interactive Community Garden option.



Go

This zone prepares children for taking what they have learned back into their everyday lives through prayer and a charge to action.



GARDEN GOALS

Children will learn that God gives us the tools needed to have and share abundant life - including the ability to care for the earth's soil and our own spiritual soil - our hearts.

Growing Accommodations

The theme introduction is written to include questions and answers between leaders and participants. If you are leading a large group (20 or more students) we recommend that you ask for volunteers to join you at the front to engage with you in the Q&A portion. For more group size accommodation ideas refer to the *Facilitators Guide*.



Gather

Large Group

SUPPLIES NEEDED



Garden Trifold (or if you have a large VBS, your Garden Wall) display board with the water layer firmly in place, strips of white paper, "dirt" colored markers and crayons - brown, black, gray, and taupe markers, glue sticks, a large bowl, and soil (potting soil or dirt from your yard or the church yard is fine)

Welcome Activity:

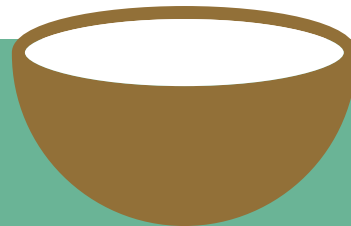
Laying the Foundation

As children come into the learning space, have volunteers help them write or draw any information or ideas about soil on the white strips, using the "dirt" markers and crayons. Have them glue their strips the bottom of your tri-fold board or on your Garden Wall. Once all children have arrived and participated in this activity, began your lesson with the opening prayer.

Early Finishers: Children who finish before the others and need their attention redirected may work on the Soil coloring sheet provided in the *Printables Packet*.

Leader: As you may have guessed, today's lesson is going to be all about the gift of Soil! Let's begin our lesson for asking for God's presence to be with us as we learn and explore this gift. The leader then dips their hands into the soil. Letting the dirt fall through their fingers, back into the bowl, and invites the children to do so as well.

Opening Prayer:



Leader: The Lord be with you!

Children and helpers: And also with you!

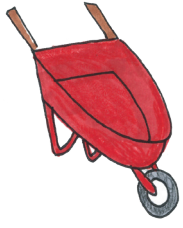
Leader: Please repeat this prayer and these motions after me.

May God be in my mind (using your right hand, touch middle of forehead)

May Jesus be in my heart (using your right hand touch middle of chest))

May the Holy Spirit be by my side (using your right hand first touch the left shoulder, then the right shoulder.)

Amen!



Gather

Large Group



Theme Introduction

Welcome to the Abundant Life Garden Project®

Vacation Bible School Day 2 offered by Episcopal Relief & Development!

Can someone tell me what our first lesson was about?

Yes! We learned all about the gift of abundant life and water!

Do you remember what we it means to have abundant life?

Who gives us the gifts we need to live an abundant life?

What is one thing you remember from our lesson on Water?

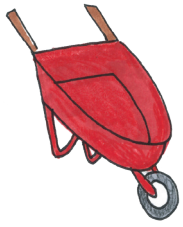
What are some examples of how water helps us and others to live abundantly?

(Baptism, Keeps us alive, Waters crops)



Great! Now today we are going to learn all about how Soil is one of God's gifts for abundant life! We are also going to learn how we can share and care for this gift!

Dismiss Pods one at a time to their first Growing Station in whichever order you have decided on.



Listen

Growing Zones



SUPPLIES NEEDED

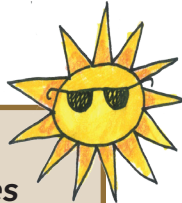
Stories from the Field Booklet or a way to show the digital options, pens, coloring pencils, crayons, and Garden Journals



Growing Zone 1:

Stories from the Field

You will have two options in this zone, one is to read the print story, the other is to use the digital piece. The print piece is recommended if you have a great storyteller. If you choose the digital option make sure that your volunteer assigned to this Growing Station is comfortable using technology.



Print Option:

Homegrown - Returning Refugees Build Communities in South Sudan

(Available in the *Stories from the Field* Booklet)

If you you have older children or youth volunteers who are good readers, have them take turns reading the paragraphs of this brief true story.

After the story is read, take time to review.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- **What do people in South Sudan and other countries need to feed themselves?**
- **What tools might they need?**
- **What information might they need?**
- **How could you or your community help those who are learning about farming for the first time?**

Digital Options:

A New Nation: South Sudan

A video featuring the new nation of South Sudan, courtesy of Episcopal News Service, may supplement this *Story from the Field*:

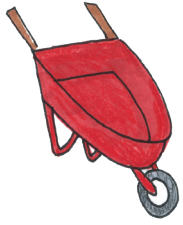


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cki7Vb8QVtl&feature=plcp>

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- **How is agriculture in the film similar to agriculture in your community?**
- **How is agriculture in the film different from that in your community?**
- **How would you know what to grow and how best to grow a variety of foods, if you were given the gift of farmland? What else would you need?**





Listen

Growing Zones

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Stories from the *Field Booklet* or a way to show the digital options, pens, coloring pencils, crayons, and *Garden Journals*



Growing Zone 2:

Stories from our Faith

Room Decor: You might want to decorate this station or room to look like a village market during Bible times, or - if you are studying the BCP option, perhaps decorate this room like a library filled with images of our faith.

You have three options for this Station - *Old Testament*, *New Testament*, or *Book of Common Prayer*. You can choose to stay with one track for your entire VBS program (OT, NT, or BCP) or you can choose a different per day.

After the reading, have the children write about or draw these gifts in their *Garden Journal* or paper provided.

Old Testament Study

Deuteronomy 6:10-12

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- What gift did God give to the people?
- What did God ask the people to do in return?
- What could you do to remember the gifts your family or community has received?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

If you read the *Story From the Field*, "*Home Grown - Returning Refugees Build Communities in South Sudan*," think about the following:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How is this story similar to the description of the return of the ancient Israelites to Canaan after they had lived in exile in Egypt?
- What challenges would both groups face?

New Testament Study

Birds, Rocks, Thorns Luke 8:4-8

Think about the soil seeds fall upon.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How important is the soil for the seeds to grow?
- How can we make sure seeds have good soil in which to grow?
- What are the birds, rocks and thorns that keep seeds from growing today?
- How are seeds trampled and prevented from growing?

ADDITIONAL OPTION FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Read Matthew 7:24-27. Think about the importance of good foundations for buildings.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- What does a builder need to do to keep a building from being washed or blown away?
- As we help others to build good shelters, what do they need?
- As we serve others, what is required of us to provide a solid foundation for our ministries?

Book of Common Prayer Study

Working Together

Read the "Prayer for the Conservation of Natural Resources" in the *Book of Common Prayer*, page 827.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How are we fellow workers in God's creation?
- How can we make sure people in the future may enjoy the earth as we do?



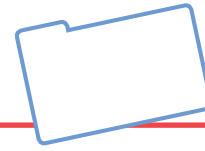


Do

Growing Zones

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Index cards
- Tablet or writing paper
- Writing materials



Growing Zone 2:

There are three options for Do - A learning activity, a creative activity, and a contemplation activity.

If you have time and space we suggest creating Growing Stations for all three. If not, choose two that best fit your children and volunteer capabilities. There is also a fourth option, for those who have a church or community garden.

Learning Activity: Interview a Farmer or Gardener

Invite a local farmer or vegetable gardener from your church or community to come be interviewed by the kids. Have the kids ask these prepared questions and then questions of their own: (You can prepare them ahead by writing them on index cards and handing them to the children who want to help read.)

Interviewer questions:

Why do you farm or garden?

How did you get started?

What do you have to do to your soil to make it ready for growing?

What tools do you use?

If they use a tractor follow up with this:

If you didn't have a tractor, what would you use?

What energy source will you use, and how do you pay for it?

Animals might be suggested as a possible energy source to pull plows to till the soil.

Who does the work in your garden or farm?

How is the work divided up? How do you decide who does what?

How are the workers paid? Where do they live? What do they eat?

What will workers do while the crops grow?

How long does it take your crops to grow?

How are they harvested?

How do the crops get to market?

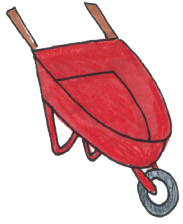
Animals might be suggested as a possible means of transportation.

What is the hardest part of working in the soil?

What is the best part?



Lead the children in thanking the farmer or gardener for visiting and sharing their story.

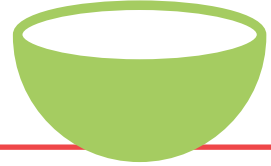


Do

Growing Zones

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Sand, Potting Soil, Local Dirt
- Water, Small Bathroom Cups
- Cookie sheet pans or Plastic trays
- Battery powered hand fan
- Optional 3 large bowls



Creative Activity:

Erosion Experiment - Castles in the Sand

Have children look at and feel the three different types of soil. Discuss the following:

How does the sand feel? How does the soil feel?

Which do you think will stick together better?

If you are using Garden Journals, ask them to record their observations.



Split the class into three groups: Dirt, Sand, and Potting Soil.

Give each child a bathroom cup.

Give each group one large bowl and a cup of water.

Have each group mix some of their soil type with some of the water.

Just enough so that their soil sticks together.

Next, have them pack their cups with their soil.

Turn cups over on your cookie sheets or trays and release the soil mixture (as you would when making a sand castle.)

Next, using the handheld fan or drips of water from a cup, began to "erode" the cup castles.

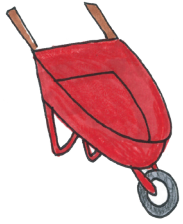
Which castles fell first? Which went last?

Record these findings in the **Garden Journals**.

Continue making castles with different combinations of dirt and water.

Let children mix their dirt samples if they would like and repeat erosion technique.

What combination worked the best?



Do

Growing Zones

Contemplative Activity:

Meditation



Begin by asking the children to sit “crisscross applesauce” or to lie flat on their backs, next, ask them to take three deep breaths and then, if they comfortable, to rest their hands on their stomachs and to close their eyes. The leader should close their eyes and take deep breaths, in order to model silent meditation for the children.

Next, ask them to listen closely with their imaginations as you read the story about Jesus.

After a moment for children to reflect on the parable just read, ask the following questions:

How are we like the soil in this story?

How well do we receive the seeds thrown at us?

What are our birds, rocks, thorns and our water?

What do we grow from the gifts we are given?

Repeat the first two steps. Have the children assume their meditation position, and ask them to listen once again to the passage of scripture. After a minute or more, the leader might ask children to share any thoughts they have. 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.

Finish this time by having asking the children to open their hands, palms facing up, and to repeat this prayer after you:

May I know the love of Jesus in my heart.

May I plant the love of Jesus in the world.

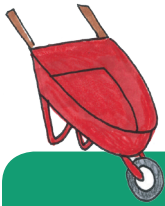
May I grow the love of Jesus in my home.

Amen.

Listen to a story about Jesus:

When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable: ‘A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.’ As he said this, he called out, ‘Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’”

Luke 8:4-8



Local Garden Activity

If you have a local garden in your church or neighborhood, here are three interactive and intergenerational activity options:

1

Work with your garden coordinator to determine if this is a good time to work on tilling or preparing the soil of your community garden. If so, have the children assist in soil preparation - weed pulling, tilling, and raking.

While you are working ask the kids:

- **What are some of the weeds in our lives that might need pulling?** (bad habits such as lying, cheating, selfishness, not sharing, laziness etc.)
- **What faith practices can help us take care of our hearts so that weeds don't grow easily?** (prayer, confession, Eucharist, meditation, serving)

Intergenerational connection: Invite the youth group to join you. Pair one youth and children in working teams. Encourage everyone to share a story of a time when they made a mistake but were forgiven while they work.

2

If this is not a good time to work on the soil, consider testing your garden's soil.

Directions

1. Give each child two cups. Using the masking tape and sharpies, label one Vinegar and one Baking Soda.
2. Fill each cup 1/4 of the way with soil.
3. Mix a little distilled water into each cup, and have kids stir until the the soil becomes mud. Add more water if needed.
4. Next, have kids sprinkle baking soda into the appropriate cup and mix. If it fizzes, the soil is acidic.
5. Pour a little bit of vinegar to the bowl. If it fizzes up, the soil is alkaline.

Have children record their findings in their Gardener Journals. Also, have them write a brief report give to the community gardener coordinator. **Ask the children the following questions as you end your time together:** God calls us to be faithful people, people who work hard to love God and others with our whole heart. Sometimes life puts our faithfulness to the test, and how we react - just like our soil experiments - will tell how our heart is doing.

- **What are some of things that test your faithfulness?** (being bullied, not wanting to share, being annoyed)

Intergenerational connection: Invite some Master Gardeners from your church to come and participate in this activity.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Distilled Water (because it has a neutral pH. You can use regular water, but it could affect the outcome)
- White vinegar (an acid)
- Baking soda (a base or alkaline)
- Two clear plastic cups per child
- Plastic Spoons
- Soil from your community garden
- Masking tape
- Sharpie Marker

3

Contact your local gardeners, co-op, or other resources to see if someone has a worm composter they could bring for show-and-tell. Want to dig deeper? Work with your garden coordinator and local handyman to build a wormery or worm tower composting farm for your community garden! For great resources on how to build these, simply visit [Pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com) and search "Worm composter DIY"

While you work ask the children:

- **Did you know that worms don't have eyes?** They move and find their way by following vibrations and light.
- **Do you know what in our life helps us lead that way?** The Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit leads us by moving us to act lovingly, to fight for justice, and to show mercy. The Holy Spirit is the light of Christ, sent to us to help us live.

Intergenerational connection: Invite some Master Gardeners from your church to come and participate in this activity.

Nutrients - Snack Activity:

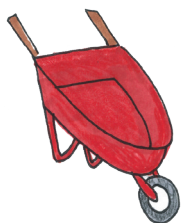
Dirt Cake Cups

In small punch cups layer the following ingredients in this order:

Vanilla Pudding or Yogurt

Finely Crumbled Oreos or Chocolate Graham Crackers (use gluten free if needed)

Top with small fruit such as whole strawberries or blueberries, a sprig of mint, or a gummy worm.



Go



Closing Zone Gathering

All pods should re-assemble at this time in the large space. Open this time with a song. Suggestions include:

Thank You God for Water, Soil and Air
Praise Ye the Lord

Connecting the Lesson

Leader: In the bible, Jesus tells two stories in the bible about the importance of Soil. One was about the soil that the seeds fall on, and one was about the soil that a house is built on. If we think about our hearts as the soil of our lives, what can we do to make it a healthy place for God's love and wisdom to grow?

Gardeners and Farmers have certain practices to take care of their soil, in fact that is part of what the workers for Episcopal Relief and Development do - they help struggling farmers and gardeners learn ways to care for their soil.

I wonder what practices we can do to take care of our hearts like a farmer takes care of her soil?

What ideas do you have to take care of your heart?

Ideas: tell the truth, be kind, share, be patient, be humble

What are some of the practices we learn at church that can help us prepare for God's love to grow in our hearts?

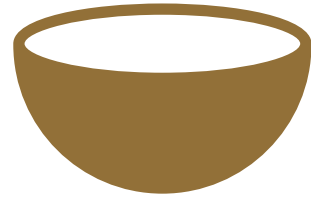
Ideas: prayer, Eucharist, reading the bible, singing songs, confession, meditation, giving tithes and offerings, loving our neighbors

Using their **Garden Journals**, ask kids to record their answers to these questions. Ask them to write or draw one practice that they will do this week to care for the soil of their hearts.



Go

Large Group



Closing Reflection

Ask children and adult or youth helpers and leaders to form a circle around the bowl of soil again. Ask your group to take a few deep breaths, 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 the following questions (or just the last one). (If someone wants to take a “pass” and remain silent, that’s okay.)

What did you learn during our time together?

Do you think about anything differently now?

What might change in your life as a result of this time together?

How will you share the gift of abundant life this week?

Closing Prayer:

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of soil. Help us to know how best to use the gifts of land given us, and bless those who work the land to grow food. Help us use our land generously and to be mindful of those in need of land. Help us to always use our land in peace, and to remember You who gave it to us. Please guide us in preparing our hearts for your love to grow within us. In Christ’s name, Amen

Charge:

Leader: Let us go into the world with grateful hearts, sharing the gifts of abundant life with everyone we meet!

Children: Praise be to God!

Closing Song: *The Doxology*

Home Activity

Send the **Abundant Life Garden Project® Handout Good Dirt** home with the children, either by hardcopy, or by sending the project home digitally.