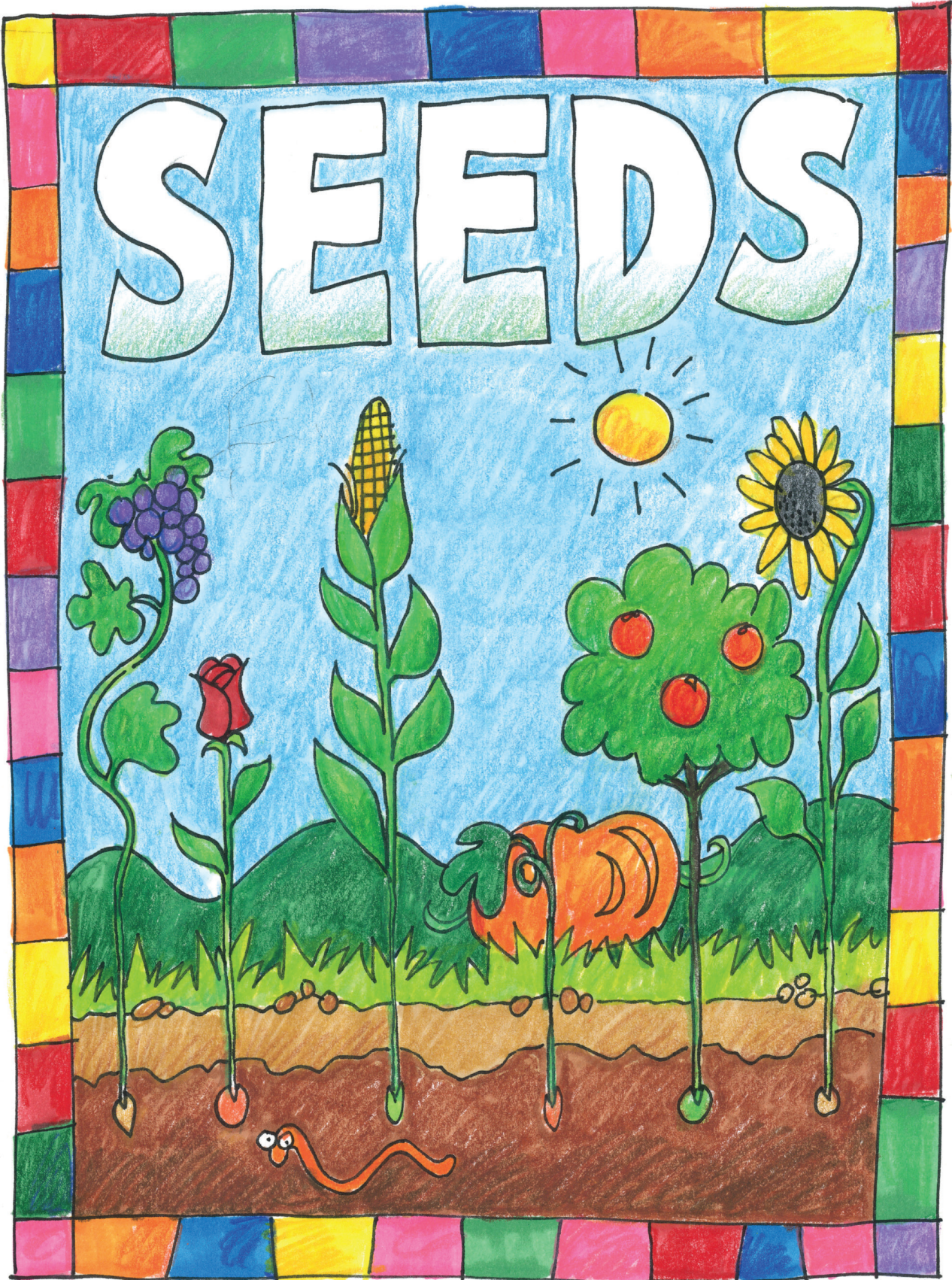


The Abundant Life Garden Project®



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 3

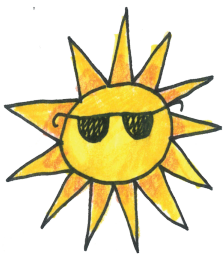
SEEDS

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 seeds. Seeds are the “babies” of the plant world, containing the embryos of new plants and coming complete with their own stored food for the journey of growth and development. Some seeds will grow to immense heights, as the mustard seed described in the New Testament parable. Others may not flourish at all. Still others grow right where we plant them and exactly as we expect, while some are blown by the wind to flourish in new and unlikely places. These seeds become fruits and vegetables to nourish us, fibers to cloth us and trees to provide wood for homes. The earth is filled with a vast variety of seeds we use for a vast variety of useful human purposes. The Seeds lesson of the Abundant Life Garden Project® focuses on seeds in both literal and mystical senses. People in need in developing nations, like the sunflower growers in Kenya profiled in this module’s Story from the Field, need a variety of seeds to provide for their own families’ nutrition and to sell crops for income. Those served by Episcopal Relief & Development also need “seed money” to enable them to start small businesses, purchase tools, install clean water systems and “grow” other projects that help them to become self-sufficient. We all need the “seed” of the Holy Spirit to sustain us in God’s love, to help us grow in faith and to fuel us in our ministries to others. The parable of the Mustard Seed, found in all three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), beautifully illustrates the notion of something small growing to amazing heights, offering shade and shelter to other creatures. The actual mustard seeds Jesus speaks of are so small, they appear as barely visible black specks, yet they grow as tall as a house. They are highly invasive. Like these “specks,” even small acts of kindness, small donations of cash, small words of wisdom or tiny verses of the Bible can have huge impacts in our lives and the lives of other and help us to grow to new heights. This notion of the “seed” of God’s work within us also is reflected in the New Testament several times to illustrate basic Christian concepts. Before germination and growth into a viable plant, seeds must soak up water and go through a period of dormancy, followed by a time of “emergence.” This cycle correlates with our Christian concept of baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit (symbolized by water), with the seed’s burial and later emergence correlating with our concept of death and resurrection. The varying “dormancy” of seeds—periods of dryness, darkness within the soil and what appears to be stagnant growth—also might be seen as symbolizing periods of spiritual struggling and dryness as we might wait for God’s own perfect timing to provide the conditions most favorable to our spiritual flourishing and continued ministry. Like seeds, the Gospel is meant to be “broadcast”—spread—to our own gardens, to new gardens and perhaps to unlikely places. Seeds, by their very nature, are designed by God to be carried elsewhere: by wind, by water, by humans and by animals. The seeds we plant by teaching this concept may result in spiritual growth in our own children, in support for local community gardens or food banks, or in help so that strangers thousands of milesaway receive the boost needed to diversify crops or buy supplies to start a new business. We don’t know—and that is both the beauty and the mystery of the work of the Holy Spirit.

- Cynthia Coe & Jerusalem Jackson Greer



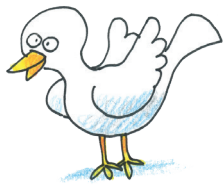
Rhythm of Learning

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.



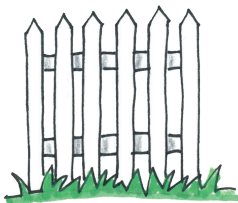
Listen

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

The third session in the **Abundant Life Garden Project**[®] program, offered by Episcopal Relief & Development, focuses on seeds. This unit presents images of seeds 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.

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 Tri Fold display board with the water and soil layers firmly glued in place.
- Sticky notes, markers, crayons or coloring pencils.
- Large bowl of seeds (can be grass seed, sunflower seeds, or bird seed if needed.)

Welcome Activity:

In the Greenhouse

As children come into the learning space, have volunteers guide them in drawing on the sticky notes pictures of seeds and “plant” them on the dirt layer on the tri-fold display board. Place a large bowl of seeds in the middle of your circle. 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 Seeds 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 Seeds! Let’s begin our lesson by asking for God’s presence to be with us as we learn and explore this gift. Can I get three volunteers to help me lead today’s prayer?

Once the volunteer children have come up front, the leader then dips their hands into the seeds, scooping up a small handful, then letting the seeds fall back into the bowl, inviting the children to do the same.

Opening Prayer:

Leader: The Lord be with you!

Children and helpers: And also with you!

Leader: Everyone, 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!



Opening Song: *This Pretty Planet* is recommended.

If you have the capabilities, display the lyrics to this song so everyone can follow along.



Gather

Large Group



Theme Introduction and Review:

Welcome to the Abundant Life Garden Project®

Vacation Bible School 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? God!

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)*

Next we learned about the gift of Soil.

Can someone tell me something we learned about Soil?

And does anyone remember some ways we can help prepare the soil for growing?

What part of our lives is like soil? Our hearts!

What do you think today's lesson is about? Yes, you guessed it Seeds!

Today we are going to learn the very important role in the garden that seeds have and how they are a tool that God gives us to share abundant life with others!

Songs may sung here. **River of Life** is recommended.

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:

Sowing Seeds of Stability



Available in the *Stories from the Field Booklet* from the work of Episcopal Relief & Development. After the story is read, take time to review together.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- *What gifts were Beatrice and her grandchildren given?*
- *Was the money given to her a kind of seed?*
- *Was the training to learn about sunflowers and beehives a kind of seed?*

Digital Option:

Beekeeping in Kenya



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBIWT7toK7M&lr=1&uid=9H4DbjpmVd3l-1e--tXDg>

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- *How did the small business loans described in the film serve as "seeds" in this community?*
- *How could these "seeds" grow and provide food and shelter to people in this community?*
- *What could you do to provide "seeds" to others?*



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

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. If you want to expand your time you can offer more than one of these of each night. Ask for a volunteer to read. After the reading, have the children write about or draw these gifts in their Garden Journal or paper provided.

Leader: We are now going to make the connection between what we have seen through the work of Episcopal Relief and Development, and our faith.

Old Testament Study

Receiving the Gift of Seeds

Genesis 1:11-12

This is one of the creation stories of the Bible.

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?*

New Testament Study

Seeds of Growth

Matthew 13:31-32

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- *Who is the Sower in this parable?*
- *How can we be like the Sower?*
- *How can we do something small that could make a huge difference in the life of someone in need?*

Book of Common Prayer Study

Serving Seeds as Food Turn to page 305 in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Ask someone to read the three questions at the top of the page, followed by the responses we make every time a child, young person or adult is baptized in an Episcopal church.

Close this session with: *"Let's think of these promises as seeds planted in us, seeds that will grow into the fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

What would it be like to share these seeds with others?" Next, talk about how seeds are sent to new gardens and new soil by wind, water and animals such as birds and even humans.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- *How might the Holy Spirit work to spread seeds of hope and nourishment to others?*
- *How might we spread the seeds of hope and nourishment planted in us?*
- *How is everything we do a "seed"?* • *How is every person a "seed"?*



Do

Growing Zones

Learning Activity:

What Shall We Do With Seeds Given Us?

Ask children to form a circle, standing. Ask one or more children to pass the bowl of seeds around the circle. Instruct each child to “take some seeds”. Some children may get more than others that is okay. After each child has some seeds, divide children up into “families” and of “work cooperatives”. (One easy way to divide children up randomly is to give each child an office supply color coding label sticker as they come into the classroom. Then as you begin this activity group kids according to their sticker color.)

Next, instruct the children to work together in their family’s or cooperatives to fill out the questions on the **What Shall We Do With Seeds** printable page. The point of this exercise is not to reinvent the global economy, but to get children thinking about the needs of the world and especially those who have very few resources.

Once everyone is done, come back into a circle, adding all the seeds back into the large bowl. Have one person from each group share their answers.

Creative Activity:

Bird Feeder

Begin by sharing with the children the first three questions and answers from the Catechism on page 846 of **The Book of Common Prayer**. Talk about what it means to be a good caretaker of creation. Ask **“How is taking care of creation a way that we can spread the seed of God’s love to others?”** (When we care for creation, we care for each other by making sure that everyone has enough to eat, drink etc.)

One way we care for creation is by making sure that all God’s creatures are fed - including the birds of the air! Which is why, today, we are making bird feeders out of bird seed. As it turns out, seeds are good for many things - not just growing plants! Seeds are an important food source for many animals, like birds and insects. Just like we were created to share God’s abundant life in many different ways (with our words, our actions, and our attitudes) seeds were created to benefit many living creatures in many different ways. Today we are going to make bird feeders in order to be good caretakers of the birds around around our church and homes.

- One pinecone or empty toilet paper roll per child (believe it or not you can buy empty toilet paper rolls online.)
- One sticky substance such as peanut butter, almond butter, cookie butter, or shortening.
- Paper plates, plastic knives and small plastic cups.
- Bird seed • Cornmeal
- Yarn and scissors



Directions:

1. Give each child a paper plate and plastic knife.
2. On their plate place a large scoop of the sticky substance, a pine cone or empty toilet paper roll, and a piece of yarn.
3. Have everyone tie their yarn to their pine cone or through the hollow part of their toilet paper roll (string the yarn through the roll, then tie the ends together forming a triangle shape).
4. Next, have them spread their sticky substance all over their pine cone or roll.
5. Hand each child a small plastic cup of bird seed and a new plate.
6. Have them pour their seeds over their pinecone or roll. Keep working until all of the sticky substance has been covered.
7. Weather permitting hang the bird feeders around the church neighborhood or send them home with the children. Remind them to say a prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of seeds!



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 a story about Jesus.*

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

How are you like the mustard seed?

In what ways could you grow to provide homes and shelter to others?

In what ways could you help to do something that seems small but could grow into something huge?

Listen to a story about Jesus:

The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

Matthew 13:31-32

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.

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 what sort of seeds need to be started indoors or planted directly in the garden. Have those supplies on hand (seeds, potting soil, starter pots, water, spades etc.) **Once you are finished planting, close your time at the garden by praying the Prayer 29 For Agriculture on page 824 in *The Book of Common Prayer*.**

Intergenerational connection: Invite your Daughters of the King, Brotherhood of St. Andrew's or other prayer-centric group to join you. Ask them to share how prayers are like seeds that we plant.

2

If there is no planting to be done, show the kids sample seeds for each plant currently growing in your garden. Let them tape or glue one of each seed into their Garden Journal. Next, have them draw a replica of each seed underneath. Finally ask them to make a notation under the drawing of the seeds name and location in the garden.

Example: Arkansas Traveler Tomato, northwest corner of far-right garden bed. **Close your time together by discussing what area or skill in their life they would like to see grow (a talent, an attitude, their faith.) Ask them to make a note about this "seed" desire of theirs in their journals, and to write one thing they would like help with as they grow. If they feel comfortable ask them to share with the group.**

Intergenerational connection: Do you have local artist, biologist, or natural scientist in your parish? Consider inviting them to help with this project.

3

If the garden bed has been freshly planted, have kids create Garden Markers for each bed and plant. Use inexpensive wooden spoons, craft paint and permanent markers to create your signs. Coat the top half of the spoons with the paint, allow to dry. Once the paint has dried, you can use the permanent markers to write and draw the names and shapes of the plant they will be marking.

While you are working engage the children in a discussion about that the ways we mark our growth (birthdays, graduations, new belts in martial arts, advancement on teams etc.) Talk about how we mark our growth at church as well through the act of Confirmation. Discuss the importance of Confirmation and build excitement for the process among the kids.

Intergenerational connection: Ask your Altar and/or Flower Guild to join in this project. Have them talk about what they do to prepare the altar for Eucharist, just as you are preparing the garden for growth.

Nutrients - Snack Activity:

Nuts and Seeds Dippers

Apples Slices

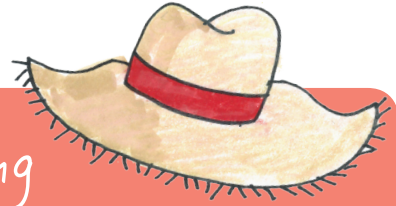
Dips such as chocolate, hazelnut spread, cream cheese spread

Seeds such as sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, poppy seeds.

Allow kids to dip apple slices into the dips, then top with a sprinkle of the seeds.



Go



Closing Zone Gathering

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

For the Fruit of All Creation

God's Got the Whole World in God's Hands

(insert different types of seeds at each verse)

This Pretty Planet

All things Bright and Beautiful

For the Beauty of the Earth

Connecting the Lesson

Leader: Gardeners and Farmers have certain practices to help them when planting seeds, in fact that is part of what the workers for Episcopal Relief and Development do - they help provide seeds and growing lessons for struggling farmers and gardeners.

I wonder what practices we can do to make sure that the seeds of abundant life are planted in the soil of our hearts and the hearts of others?

How do you think we can make sure that we are planting seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

Ideas: tell the truth, be kind, share, be patient, be humble, ask for forgiveness, use loving words, always try to be a good caretaker of the earth, share Christ love with others, attend church, invite others to church.

What are some of the practices we learn at church that can help us plant seeds of abundant life?

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

Ask kids to choose one "seed" that they want to plant in the soil of their heart this week.

Next, have them write or draw what they think that seed looks like in action as it grows. If you want to dig deeper, ask them to also write about or draw one spiritual practice that they want to practice at home to help plant their chosen seed.



Closing Reflection

Ask children and adult or youth helpers and leaders to form a circle around the bowl of seeds. Give each person a small amount of seeds to hold. Ask your group to take a few deep breaths, hold the seeds given them, and think about what they saw, heard or experienced during their time today.

Ask the class:

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 scatter the seeds of Christ love and share the gift of abundant life this week?

Closing Prayer:

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of seeds. Through the gift of the amazing variety of seeds on earth, you feed our hunger, give us shelter and clothing, help us to wisely use our soil and give us beauty and pleasure. Through these gifts, you 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 seeds of hope and nourishment, and help us to do our part in serving others through this gift. In Christ's name, Amen

Closing Song: **The Doxology**

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!

Home Activity

Send the **Abundant Life Garden Project®** Hearth and Home Engagement Sheet *Seeds of Faith* home with the children, either by hardcopy, or by sending the project home digitally.