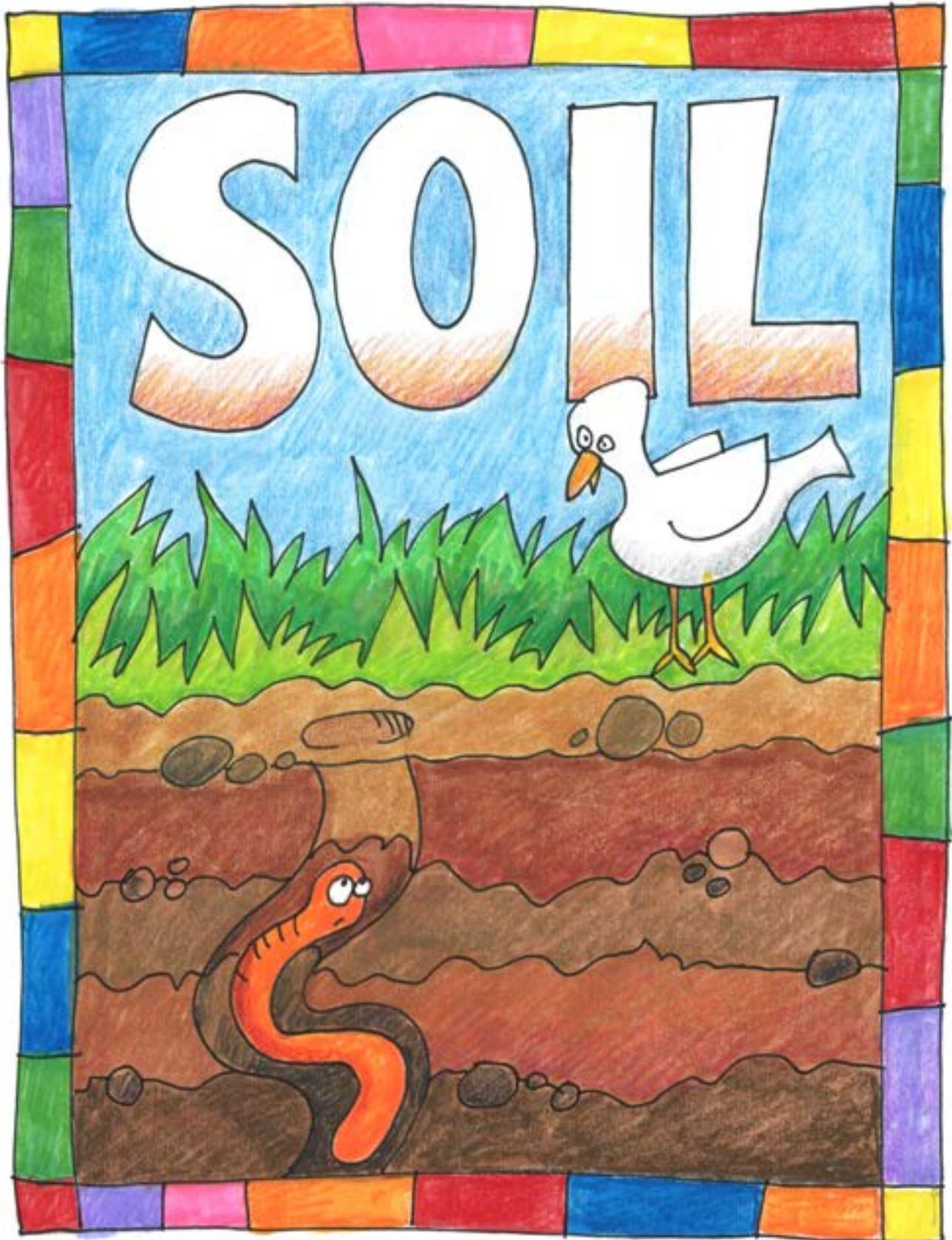




Episcopal
Relief & Development
Working Together for Lasting Change

ONE THOUSAND
DAYS OF LOVE ♥





VIRTUAL VBS DAY 2: SOIL

The Abundant Life Garden Project® VBS offered by Episcopal Relief & Development

Notes for Leaders

Today's interactive, Scripture-based module will introduce your VBS kids and volunteers to the work of Episcopal Relief & Development in the area of soil. Episcopal Relief & Development hopes that these materials will invite you to partner with us in working towards lasting change, inform you about our work in many parts of the world we serve, and even transform you and your congregation or community. We have adjusted the directions to be compatible with a virtual VBS gathering and allowed for you, the leader, to make additional adjustments as needed.

Understanding the Lesson

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

Garden Goals: Families 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.

Zone #1: Gather – Large Group Digital Opening

Welcome Activity:

Supplies Needed: Your Garden Wall, earth colored sticky notes or strips of white paper, “dirt” colored markers and crayons (brown, black, gray, and taupe), glue sticks, a large bowl, and soil (potting soil or dirt from your yard is fine)

Home Supplies Needed for Families: Drawing paper cut into strips or earth-colored sticky notes, “dirt” colored markers or crayons, an empty bowl, and a small cup with dirt (potting soil, or dirt from your yard is fine).

Why Soil Matters...

Preparing:

Ask kids, with the help of an adult if needed, to gather an empty bowl and a small cup of soil or dirt. Ask the children to carefully place their bowl and their cup where they will be able to use them for your prayer time.



Opening Activity

As you began to gather on your digital learning platform, ask kids to write about or draw an image, on paper or sticky notes, that represents how soil is used. You can be drawing on your sticky notes as well. Each child may write or draw as many representations as time permits. Add your sticky notes on top of the water layer on your Garden Display Board or the Garden Wall. If there is time, ask children to show their drawings to the group, then encourage them to add them to their Garden Wall Display at home.

Opening Prayer:

Place your clear bowl where the kids can see. Pour your soil into the bowl. Ask them to do the same.

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. Encourage the children to notice the texture and feel of the dirt.

Leader: The Lord be with you!

Children and adults: 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!

Theme Introduction and Review

Leader: *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? (pause for replies, then continue)

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

Do you remember what 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!

Note for Leader: Here you will want to introduce the day's activities. Go over what will you be offering digitally and what families will be doing on their own, at home.

If you are offering any additional instruction or if one of the stories is presented live, this will be the time to offer that lesson.

Zone #2: Listen

Stories from the Field Lesson

You will have two options in this lesson: 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 who is comfortable sharing the story over a digital platform or recording their story.

Leader Supplies: Stories from the Field booklet, or a way to show the digital story

Home Supplies: pens, coloring pencils, crayons, and Garden Journals; Stories from the Field booklet; or way to show digital stories.

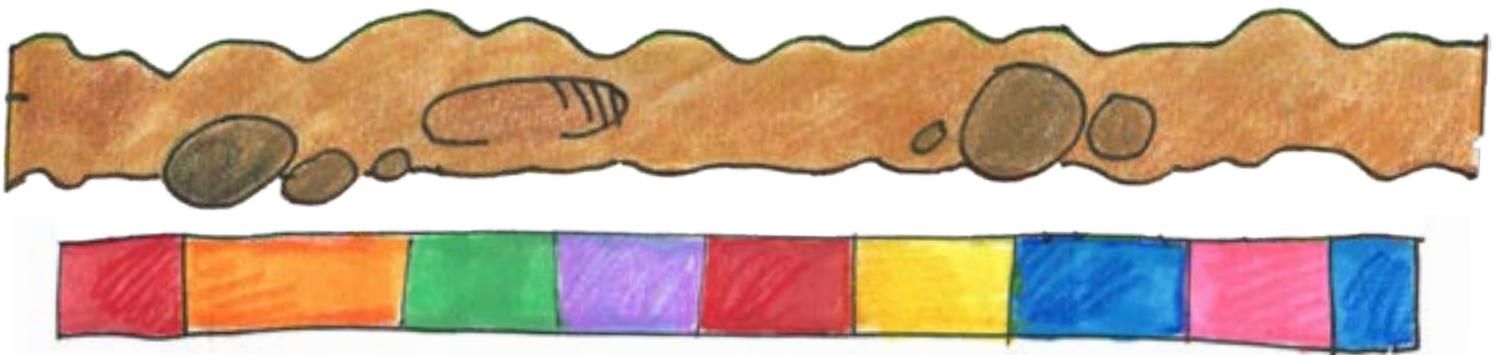
Print Option

Read: "Homegrown – Returning Refugees Build Communities in South Sudan" from the Stories from the Field booklet (make sure families have a copy.)

After the story is read, take time to review together

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 Option

Watch: [A New Nation: South Sudan](#)

A video featuring the new nation of South Sudan, courtesy of Episcopal News Service

Reflection Questions:

- *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?*

Stories from Our Faith Lesson

You have three options for this zone: 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 track per day. If this will be a home-led activity, make sure to send each family their own printed copy of the Stories from Our Faith booklet.

Home Supplies needed depending on the track: Bible or Book of Common Prayer, blank paper or Garden Journals, markers, and printed copy of the Stories from Our Faith booklet.

Old Testament Study – Gifts

Ask for a volunteer to read Deuteronomy 6:10-12.

Reflection Questions:

- *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?*

Write about or draw these gifts in your Garden Journal or on the paper provided.

Additional Questions

If you read the “Stories from the Field: Home Grown – Returning Refugees Build Communities in South Sudan,” think about the following questions:

- *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

Look up and read Luke 8:4-8.

Think about the soil the 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?*

In your Garden Journal on the paper provided, draw or write about how we can provide “good soil” where seeds can grow.

Additional Option for Older Children

Look up and read Matthew 7:24-27.

Think about the importance of good foundations for buildings.

Think about these questions:

- *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?*

Draw or write your responses in your Garden Journal or on paper provided.

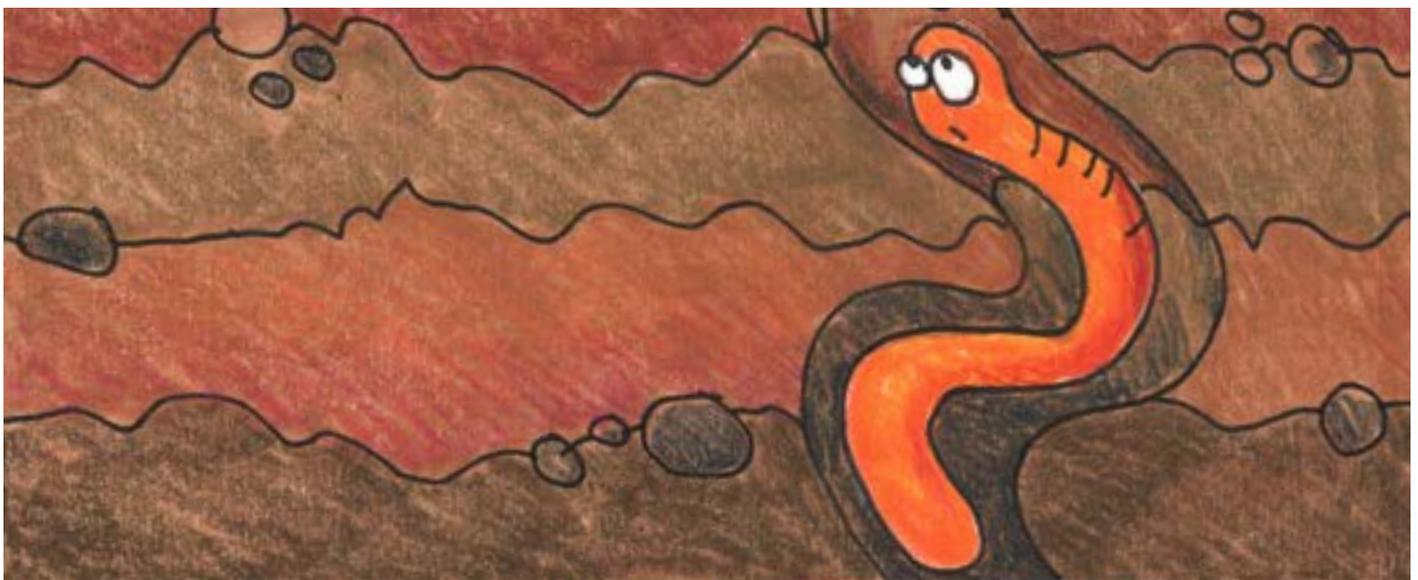
Book of Common Prayer Study – Working Together

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?*

In your Garden Journal or on the paper provided, draw or write about how we could work the soil so that people in the future will be able to give praise for plenty of food.



Zone #3: Do

There are four options for Do: A learning activity, a creative activity, a contemplation activity, and a garden activity. If you choose to include one of these activities, make sure to send supply list and instructions to families ahead of time, or include the list and instructions in your VBS-in-a-Box kit.

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. (*This interview could be recorded ahead of time and sent to the families or done live during your Opening Gathering.*)

Have the kids ask the following prepared questions and then ask 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.)

Why do you farm or garden?

How did you get started?

What do 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? Would it take you a lot longer?)

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

(Note: 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 be divided up? How do you decide who does what?

How are the workers be 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?

(Again, 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.

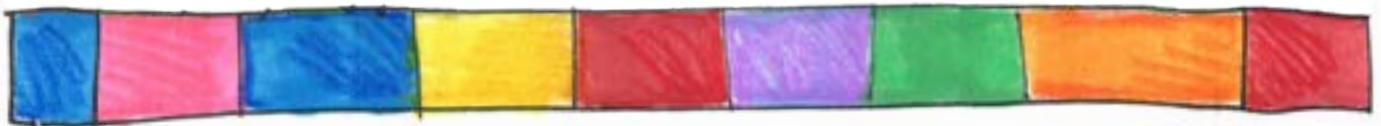
Creative Activity – Erosion Experiment

(Materials Needed: Sand, potting soil, local dirt, water, small bathroom cups, cookie sheet pans or plastic trays, battery-powered hand fan (optional), 3 large bowls)

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.



Try three experiments: Dirt, Sand, and Potting Soil.

- Mix some of each soil type with some water. Just enough so that their soil sticks together.
- Next, pack small paper cups with the soil.
- Turn cups over onto a cookie sheet or tray and release the soil mixture (as you would when making a sandcastle.)
- Next, using the handheld fan or drips of water from a cup, began to “erode” the cup castles.
- Note which castles fell first? Which went last? Ask children to record these findings in their 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?

Contemplation Activity – Meditation

Begin by asking family members to sit “crisscross applesauce” or to lie flat on their backs. Next, ask them to take three deep breaths. Then, if they are comfortable, ask them 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:

Listen to a story told by 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)

After a moment as everyone to reflect on the parable just read by asking 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 everyone assume their meditation positions again and ask them to listen once again to the passage of scripture. After a minute or more, the leader might ask children or other family members 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 asking everyone 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.

(For tips and information on the importance of silent time with God and how to lead children in meditation, please see Abundant Life Garden Project® facilitators guide, offered by Episcopal Relief & Development.)

Local Garden Activity

If you have a local garden in your church or neighborhood, or if families have gardens at home, here are three interactive (optional) activity options. For home gardens the “garden coordinator” would be an adult in the home. If you have a church or community garden option and you need to practice social distancing, consider creating a schedule where each family could visit the garden at a different time.

1. Determine if there is a good time to work on tilling or preparing the soil of your community garden, church garden, or personal 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)

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

Supplies:

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

Directions

1. Give each child two cups. Using the masking tape and sharpies, label one Vinegar and one Baking Soda.
2. Fill each cup ¼ 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.
6. Have children record their findings in their Garden Journals. Also, have them write a brief report give to the community gardener coordinator.

As you end your time together, discuss the following: *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)*

3. Contact your local gardeners, co-op, or other resources to see if someone has a worm composter they could share for show-and-tell over your digital learning platform. 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.*

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.

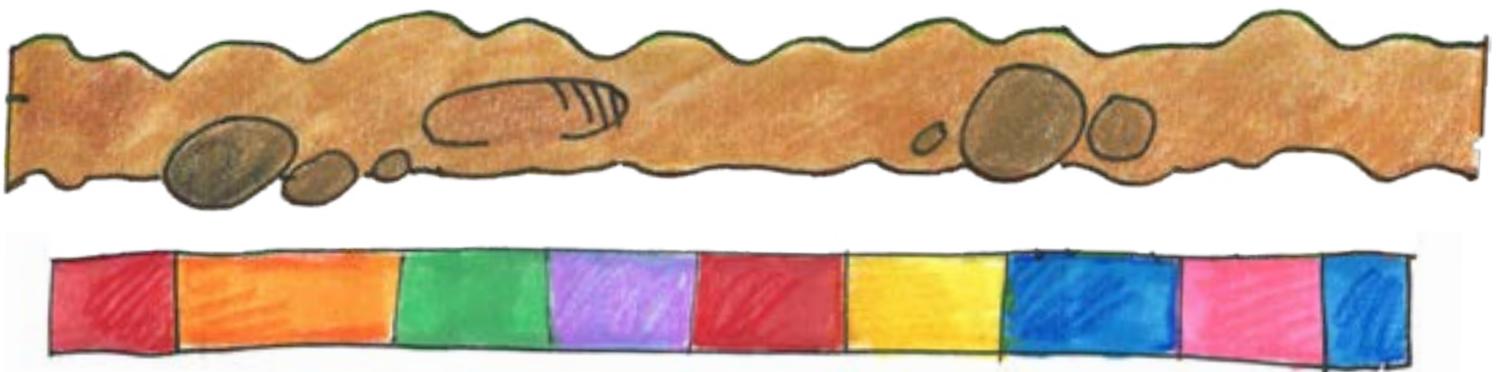
Nutrients (Snack) Activity

Dirt Cake Cups

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

1. Vanilla Pudding or Yogurt
2. Finely Crumbled Oreos or Chocolate Graham Crackers (use gluten free if needed)
3. Top with small fruit such as whole strawberries or blueberries, a sprig of mint, or a gummy worm.

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



Zone #4: Go – Closing of the Day

Connect the Lesson: You might consider sending the following paragraphs to families by email or text to help them wrap up the day with intention.

Dear Families, At the end of today you will have learned a lot about what it means to have and share gifts of abundant life. We have also learned the importance of the soil – in our physical lives and in our spiritual lives. We encourage you to use Home to Hearth Sheet to continue your discussion about the gifts of the soil and to use this prayer to close your day together:

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.

Home Activity:

Send the Abundant Home & Hearth handout Good Dirt to each family – either printed in the VBS-in-a-Box kit or digitally in order that they can continue to learn about soil.

