

Building Blocks for Children's Chapel: Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday

This service can be used on Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday, the first Sunday in Lent or another Sunday that works in your church calendar.

Worshipping with Children in a Way That Parallels our Early Childhood Development Goals

Episcopal Relief & Development's flagship program partnership for Early Childhood Development is called *Moments That Matter®* ([MTM](#)). This program is founded on a shared community vision of children achieving their potential, fueled by positive, self-reinforcing dynamics taught to parents and caregivers.

This kind of strong parental care and nurturing, developed in early childhood, fosters agency and curiosity by creating secure attachments, providing responsive interactions and encouraging exploration and learning. Ultimately, this builds confidence and a sense of competence in children.

This Children's Chapel resource builds on those foundations. The age-appropriate opportunities for adaptation, celebration and leadership roles, even small ones, affirm children's sense of agency and self-efficacy.

The best Children's Chapel models are those that give children a sense of the rhythm of worship and confidence in their place in the stories, the space and the listening. They are self-aware of their own identity as one who prays, listens and makes confession — and as people who participate in worship in community with friends and strangers.

Creatively Incorporating This Resource

Children's Chapels vary from place to place. Many have music and movement, periods of storytelling, time for silence and responses through art. This resource is designed with a variety of elements. Select those that fit best into the framework of your current Children's Chapel or Liturgy of the Word. If you do not currently have a Children's Chapel, you should be able to craft a service with the provided resources.

You may also find these materials useful as worship elements in your Sunday School and Christian formation offerings.

If you read storybooks during your Children's Chapel at the time when the sermon typically occurs, we offer three recommendations — and trust that you will select the title(s) that make the most sense for your community.

If you prefer an object lesson, we have provided an example along with a sample sermon and recommendations for those who use this element in their worship with children.

What is the Liturgy of the Word?

In the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, the liturgy provided for the principal worship service happening most Sunday Mornings is called “The Holy Eucharist.”

The first part of the service usually includes the entrance rite, scripture lessons, including the psalm and Gospel, sermon, Nicene Creed, prayers of the people, confession of sin and absolution and the peace. This part of the service can be referred to as the Liturgy of the Word. The second portion of the service may be called the Liturgy of the Table. This section includes the offertory, consecration of the bread and wine in the Great Thanksgiving, communion of the people, concluding prayers of thanksgiving, a blessing and dismissal.

Many weekday school chapels and faith communities offer a Liturgy of the Word for children. On Sundays, it's typically held in a designated space separate from the main worship service. Often called “Chapel” or “Children’s Chapel,” this is a time set aside for younger members, typically ages 4-9, to begin to embrace the rhythms and words of the first part of the worship service. Following this Children’s Chapel, which runs between 20-40 minutes, participants normally process to the nave, or wherever the rest of the congregation is worshipping, in time to join them for the Liturgy of the Table.

Tips for Children’s Chapel Implementation

If your children gather in the Children’s Chapel space (rather than being escorted out of a different space mid-worship), recruit children and youth to take on leadership roles as they arrive. Some Children’s Chapels have these leadership roles printed out in large font on cardstock, reusable each week, ready for participants to volunteer, be assigned or choose as they arrive.

In this resource, designated worship leader roles include **Candle prayers, Opening prayer, Statement of faith** and **Prayers of the People**. It is recommended that you print out the text, including the *rubric* (helpful directions). Go over the rubrics and words carefully with the children volunteers so they will feel confident to be ready to lead when the time comes. The leadership of the confession stones requires a bit of gravity, so this role is typically best held by an adult.

You may have several leadership roles for Children’s Chapel already such as vergers for leading the processions, altar guild for setting the space, someone to mark the Sunday on the calendar of the church year, storytellers, a schedule for readers or intercessors, etc. Again, this varies from place to place.

The presider for your Children’s Chapel should have a script of the entire service with notes about the names of leaders for each segment. As with most liturgy, the more familiar and confident the leaders are with the flow of the service, the more welcoming and worshipful it will be for those who gather.

The Calendar of the Church Year

Many Children's Chapels begin worship by marking Sunday's progress. This can be done with calendar blocks, charts or other resources. A popular option is a chart with wheels that has colored tabs for each Sunday, as made popular by Godly Play™.



Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday is recommended for use on the first Sunday in Lent, but you are welcome to observe it on any Sunday of your choosing. Simply point out the Sunday and its formal name (e.g., "the Fourth Sunday in Epiphany"), and then say something like:

"Today, we are observing Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday. We do this (every year) to say thank you to people just like us, all over the world, who are helping their neighbors be safe and to learn more about how we can join them in this work."

Prepare the Space

Claiming the space as holy — and as the children's — is another important element in Children's Chapels. Setting the focus table or altar helps the participants shift from gathering to worship. Seasonal items, colored cloths, flowers and natural items like shells, beach glass or small bits of driftwood and battery candles should be arranged neatly on shelves nearby, within reach of the children. Once everyone is seated, invite a child to apply the fabric that goes with the season on the focus table or altar. Then, starting with the youngest child, invite them one at a time to select something from the shelf to add to the table. If they don't want to, that's fine. Not all items need to be put out every week. If you are doing the Candle Prayer or Confession Stones, make sure those materials are placed on the table within reach of the leaders including the pitcher of water for the absolution.

Light Candles

Once the table is all set and the space is ready, light a long taper candle with a match or lighter. Use that candle to light the first candle on the focus table/altar, then say:

"We light candles to help us focus on God's light, which shows us how to help others. Thank you, God, for this light."

Turn to the person next to you, hand them a lit taper or battery-power candle, and say:

"Now, it is your turn. When you light your candle, say, 'Thank you God, for this light,' then pass the candle on to the next person."

If a younger child needs assistance, help them guide the flame to the wick.

Continue until all candles are lit and placed back on the focus table/altar. Receive the original candle from the last person and place in designated holder on the altar/focus table.

OPENING PRAYER

When the candles are lit, begin the opening prayer:

Leader: Let's gather our hearts and minds together with this opening prayer. Please repeat after me:

God who surrounds us *God who surrounds us*
 God who fills our hearts *God who fills our hearts*
 God who gives us friends *God who gives us friends*
 Thank you for this morning *Thank you for this morning*
 Help us know you more and more *Help us know you more and more*
 Amen. *Amen.*

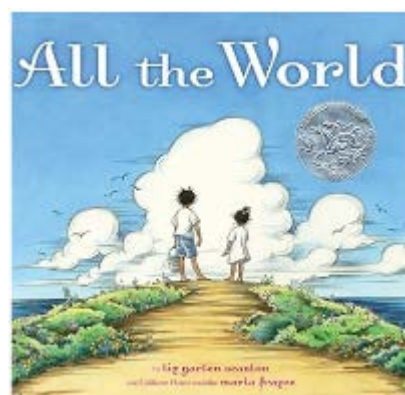
Options for Storybooks, an Object Lesson, a Sample Sermon and Godly Play™ Story Recommendations

Leader: Please be seated. We will begin with a reading from the Bible, followed by a story.

"ALL THE WORLD" BY LIZ GARTON SCANLON AND MARLA FRAZEE

Today's reading is from the very first part of the very first book in the Bible. Because it is Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday, we are thinking about what we can do to make sure families all over the world, including in our own town, have everything they need. Here is the reading:

"God said, 'Look, I have given you all the plants that have grain for seeds. And I have given you all the trees whose fruits have seeds in them. They will be food for you. I have given all the green plants to all the animals to eat. They will be food for every wild animal, every bird of the air and every small crawling animal.' And it happened. God looked at everything that was made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:29-31, International Children's Bible-ICB)



About the storybook: The text in this book is a poem about the interconnectedness of the world and those who live in it. The pictures are large, beautiful and full of wonderful details. Genesis reminds us that God created the world and all that is in it and calls humankind to participate with joy and care in the life that we share with others on the earth. The world is both awe-inspiring in its vastness and also the place where small, quiet acts of connectedness and joy take place.

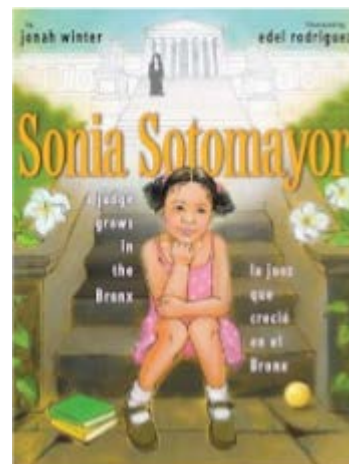
Questions for Discussion:

1. Did you see any pictures that remind you of things you love to do and make you happy?
2. Did you see people doing things that help each other and show God's love for each other?
3. Did you see people doing things that help us care for the earth?

“A JUDGE GROWS IN THE BRONX” BY JONAH WINTER AND EDEL RODRIGUEZ

Today’s reading is from the book of Hebrews. Because it is Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday, we are thinking about how moms and people all over the world take care of the babies and toddlers in their communities. We have learned that adults can learn special ways to take care of very young children, which gives them a better chance to grow up happy and safe. Here is the reading:

“So we have many people of faith around us. Their lives tell us what faith means. So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way” (Hebrews 12:1, ICB).



About the storybook: Before Sonia Sotomayor took her seat as a justice in the Supreme Court, our nation’s highest court, she was just a little girl in the South Bronx. Justice Sotomayor didn’t have a lot growing up, but she had what she needed: her mother’s love, a will to learn and her own determination. With bravery she became the person she wanted to be. With a little sunlight and a modest plot from which to grow, Justice Sotomayor bloomed for the whole world to see.

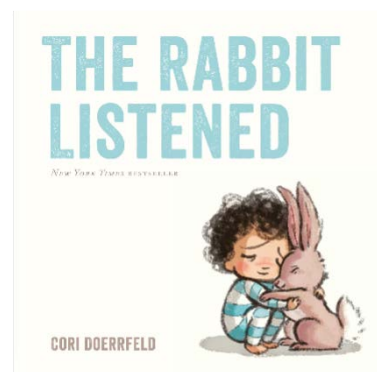
Questions for Discussion:

1. Why did Sonia’s mother work so many long hours at her job?
2. Were there times when you wish someone would have been nicer to Sonia?
3. Who are the grown-ups in your world who help keep you and other children safe?

“THE RABBIT LISTENED” BY CORI DOERRFELD

Today’s reading is from a book in the Bible called Isaiah. It is the story of God’s dream for all of us as understood by the prophet Isaiah. Because it is Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday, we are thinking about people who live in places where things like war or bad weather can make things really difficult and sad for the people who live there. That includes us sometimes! The helpers from Episcopal Relief & Development go to the towns and families that need help and they listen carefully for ways to make a difference. Here is the reading:

“The Lord God gave me the ability to teach, and taught me what to say to make the weak strong. Every morning I wake up and am reminded — I must listen — like a student. The Lord God helps me learn, and I have not turned against God; I have not stopped following God” (Isaiah 50:4-5, ICB).



About the storybook: When something sad happens, Taylor doesn't know where to turn. All the animals are sure they have the answer. The chicken wants to talk it out, but Taylor doesn't feel like chatting. The bear thinks Taylor should get angry, but that's not quite right either. One by one, the animals try to tell Taylor how to act, and one by one, they fail to offer comfort. Then the rabbit arrives.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why was Taylor sad?
2. Have you ever had someone try to help you, but they didn't seem to care about your feelings? How did listening to Taylor help them feel better?

Seeds of Hope: An Object Lesson

This lesson offers a way to teach young children about Episcopal Relief & Development, which helps people who need the right conditions to grow and thrive.

1. Gather your materials

- A small bag or container of different types of seeds (beans, sunflower seeds, etc.)
- Soil or potting mix
- Small pots or cups
- Water
- A small watering can or spray bottle
- Pictures of the work Episcopal Relief & Development does (provided at the end of this lesson for you to download and print)

2. Start the lesson

Begin by asking the children what they know about seeds and how they grow.

Explain that just like seeds need the right conditions (sun, water, soil) to grow, people also need certain things to live healthy and happy lives.

Share the pictures from Episcopal Relief & Development and read the captions. They show people around the world helping each other, providing the things they need to grow and thrive, like clean water, gardens and healthy families.

3. Show and tell

Hold up the bag of seeds and say,

"These seeds are like the hopes and dreams of Episcopal Relief & Development and the people they partner with to make lasting change around the world."

Explain that, just like seeds need the right conditions to grow and things like soil, water and pots, Episcopal Relief & Development works with people, and together they find the things they need to grow: support from their neighbors, education, sometimes even money and always, prayers.

4. Plant the seeds

Time permitting, have the children scoop planting soil into the containers. (You might prepare these in advance to save time.) Then, help the children plant the seeds in the pots and water them gently.

Explain that just like we need to take care of these seeds, Episcopal Relief & Development helps people take care of themselves and their communities.

5. Wrap up

Ask the children what they learned about Episcopal Relief & Development and how they can help.

Encourage them to think about how they can be “seeds of hope” in their own communities by helping others.

6. Closing Prayer

Loving God, guide and strengthen the work of Episcopal Relief & Development, that their service with people everywhere, including us, may bring healing, hope and justice to all in need, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Gospel Reading(s) and Sample Sermon

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT, GOSPEL READINGS

Year A: Matthew 4:1-11: Jesus in the Wilderness, tempted with bread, loyalty and power

Year B: Mark 1:9-15: Jesus is baptized, Spirit drives him into the wilderness, he’s tempted, John is arrested, Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee (shortest reading but packed with events)

Year C: Luke 4:1-13: (After the baptism) Wilderness, Jesus faces three temptations again.

Today’s reading tells us that the Spirit led Jesus out into the wilderness following his baptism. Who remembers being or seeing someone baptized? (hands) What do you think those people who were just baptized did right after the service? (went home, went to lunch, had cake at church)

But Jesus went right out into the wilderness! Who knows where the wilderness is? (a forest, the desert, the woods)

Jesus knew that being baptized meant that he was now claimed by God as a part of God’s family. So now it was time to think about how he was going to live and act. The wilderness Jesus went into was the

nearby desert. Like all other wilderness areas, there wasn't really anyone else out there, and there weren't any buildings or paths or other people around. And because he was in the desert, it was sandy and hot without plants for food and shade. Jesus stayed there for forty days. Stories tell us that even though he was tempted to make choices that sounded like they would help him, he knew they would actually be bad for him. So even though it was hard, Jesus made the right choice. Stories also tell us that he was surrounded by angels and animals who came to help him.

Jesus found out, in a very hard place — the wilderness — that when he spent time alone with God, he could really think and pray about what he was supposed to do. He also found that even in the hardest places, he could always count on the helpers around him.

We usually tell the story about Jesus in the desert on the first Sunday of the season of Lent. That's because between then and Easter morning, there are forty days! Can you believe it? So, just like Jesus did, we have forty days to think about what it means to be a part of God's family. Also, we can use this time to really focus on where we need help loving ourselves and each other. We need to remember that, like Jesus, we are not alone, we are loved and we will be okay — even when we make mistakes.

You might hear people say they are giving up something for Lent. They are choosing to do without something they really like for forty days. They usually give up something like candy, eating meat or video games. And even though what people choose to give up during Lent isn't really hard, they do it to remind themselves that Jesus had a hard time in the desert during those forty days.

Another way people remember the forty days is by doing something differently. People wake up early each day to read or say special prayers. Instead of staying home, they might spend an evening each week at church hearing stories about Jesus, making food for each other or setting aside time to make cards for people who are feeling alone. Or maybe they will decide to be helpers like the angels and animals were with Jesus to people in need.

Episcopal Relief & Development is an organization that helps us be better helpers around the world. They go into the towns and farms and homes of people who need help and listen carefully to their stories. They learn about their schools and favorite foods and the kinds of music and crafts they enjoy making. Then, they help people organize these blessings into things like shops and schools, gardens and farms, so they can continue to help each other grow and be well.

We are all able to do things that help others. Raise your hand if you can do any of these things: sing, paint, cook, pray, read, listen, dance or walk with another person. There might be people you know right now who feel like they are all alone in a sort of wilderness. Let's spend the next forty days thinking about this just like Jesus did. Let's figure out where we can use our ability to love and help others.

Godly Play™ Story Recommendations

Many Children's Chapels use Godly Play™ stories or that type of storytelling method. Here are recommended wondering questions you could add to stories to connect them to the work of Episcopal Relief & Development. The story of Jesus in the Wilderness is the Gospel assigned for the first Sunday of Lent, which is the recommended day for observing Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday. If you choose a different season to observe Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday, here are some wondering questions for different stories.

Jesus in the Wilderness: When we are hungry, getting bread feels really good. I wonder how we can listen to stories about hunger and help ensure that we always have enough bread to eat.

The Mystery of Easter (Lenten Puzzle): Sometimes, even when we are happy and safe and our bellies are full, we see people in our neighborhoods who seem to be lost or hungry or need help. I wonder how we could get to know them so we could work together to help them and others who are in trouble.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan: I wonder if seeing this person receive so much help from a stranger inspires you to join in helping people even if you don't know them.

The Flood: I wonder if you, or someone you know, has been in a place where you were afraid you weren't going to be okay. Maybe you felt underwater or lost or had an accident? How can we remind ourselves and others that God is with us, even when it's scary?

After the sermon, book or story conversation, it's time for the...

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Leader: It's time for us to share our statement of faith.

I will say what we believe about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

You will reply by simply saying after each one with the words, "Thank you, God," then "Thank you, Jesus," then "Thank you, Holy Spirit."

We believe in God, who made everything.

Thank you, God.

We believe in Jesus, God's son, who loves us.

Thank you, Jesus.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, who is always with us helping us to love and are for each other.

Thank you, Holy Spirit.

After the Statement of Faith, it's time for the...

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Leader: It's time to offer the prayers of the people. "The people" means **all** of us, so you are invited to add your prayers, too. When we are praying for our families, you can name your brother, sister, grandparents or anyone in your family. If we are praying for leaders, you can name your teachers, school crossing guards, scout leaders or any other people who help show you the way.

And since this is Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday, we are offering special prayers to help us help others and to make lasting changes for children and their communities all over the world.

So, listen carefully to what we are praying about, and then you can add whatever you would like. When each part is finished, you will hear, "Lord, in your love," and we will all say together, "Hear our prayer."

Leader: God, we pray for the church and for those who lead us, especially our Presiding Bishop Sean, our Bishop ____ and (*local community faith leaders, at your discretion*). Help us all work together to love and care for one another.

Are there other people who lead us here in church that you would like to pray for? (wait)

Lord in your love;
Hear our prayer.

We pray for presidents, mayors, principals, police officers, teachers, parents and all other leaders throughout the world. Help us all work together to find ways to provide safety, shelter and education for everyone. Are there other leaders you would like to pray for? (wait)

Lord in your love;
Hear our prayer.

We pray for anyone who is poor, sick, hungry or sad. We pray for babies everywhere to be taken care of, for women and girls to be safe and for people to be able to find homes when theirs are ruined by fire or weather. Please help all of us in times of need and trouble. Are there people who are in trouble or sad for whom you would like to pray? (wait)

Lord in your love;
Hear our prayer.

We thank you for family, friends and pets who have been our companions and playmates and loved us in our lives who have now died. God, we ask that you continue to care for them. Please help us be loving and kind to ourselves and to everyone in this life. Are there people or pets who have died for whom you would like to pray? (wait)

Lord in your love;
Hear our prayer.

We give you thanks for the many awesome gifts and blessings in this world. For the work of Episcopal Relief & Development, who help people in need. For sunshine and music and toys and food. Are there gifts and blessings and other things you are so happy about that you would like to tell God thank you? (wait)

Lord in your love;
Hear our prayer.

Following the Prayers of the People, it is time for the...

CONFESSION STONES

Leader: Now, it's time for our confessions. Please stand, pick up a stone from the table and place it next to your hearts. The stones help us remember the things we do that hurt those we love or even ourselves. (Wait until everyone is ready, then say)

Leader: Repeat after me. God, have mercy.
People: God have mercy.

Leader: We often hurt those we most love.
People: We often hurt those we most love.

Leader: We will do more to bring kindness to the world.
People: We will do more to bring kindness to the world.

Leader: We are sorry, God. Please forgive us.
People: We are sorry, God. Please forgive us.

Leader: Help us to be as forgiving as Jesus and to love like Jesus.
People: Help us to be as forgiving as Jesus and to love like Jesus.

The community places their stones in the bowl.

Absolution: During the following, the Leader will pour water over the stones.

Leader: Through the water of our baptism, God forgives us and loves us. As this water has washed the stones, God washes away our hurts. God forgives you. Forgive others. Forgive yourself. Be at peace.
Amen.
People: AMEN.

Leader: It's time to go to the second part of our worship this morning. _____ will meet us at the door with the cross and will lead us to (the narthex), where we will wait quietly to enter the Liturgy of the Table. Before we go, let's exchange the Peace. I will say, "The Peace of the Lord be always with you," and you will say back to me, "And also with you." Then, you will share the same words with each other.

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: And also with you.

The people exchange the peace as they make their way to line up at the door.

A Note about Music:

A quick search on the internet can provide hundreds of ideas for short, repetitive songs that work great in Children's Chapel. Here is one fun example:

https://youtu.be/skY_9BGMB_I

God made the sun (raise your arms above your head).

And God made the seas (put your hands in front of you and roll them up and down like the waves).

God made the fishes (put your hands together and move them back and forth like a fish swimming).

And God made me (point to yourself).

Thank you, God for the sun, (repeat from above).

Thank you, God for the seas (repeat from above).

Thank you, God, for the fishes (repeat from above).

And thank you, God, for me (repeat from above).



Tree planting in The Philippines. Episcopal Relief & Development helped congregations with tree planting activities, planting 6,700 seedlings to help stop erosion and grow shade trees.



Healthy children in Malawi. Episcopal Relief & Development partners with the Anglican Council in Malawi to provide health volunteers who are trained to support families.



Savings and food security for families in Honduras. Episcopal Relief & Development partners with the Episcopal Diocese of Honduras' development agency focusing on economic development and education.



Clean water in Ghana. Episcopal Relief & Development partners with the Anglican Diocesan Development and Relief Organization in Ghana to help provide clean water for school children.