



Notes for Newsletters

1. Telling Stories

Not long ago, our Seekers Sunday School class studied Psalm 34. We were talking about what a personal testimony it contains—a memory of hard times and of God’s continuing presence. One member of the class is an aspiring singer-songwriter who is scrambling to address the basics of life and wondering what to make of his sense of calling in the midst of struggle. He shared that this conversation reminded him that it would not always be this way and that God would be with him even at the lowest times. Another member of the class joined in to say that this was true in his experience—after surviving the amputation of a limb and returning to health in the past several years, he could testify. Other class members, a couple whose family struggles were well known to the group, were able to say that “even at the lowest point, God is still present.” What a wonderful sharing of praise and of hope we had that day!

Is your Sunday School class a place where you hear stories of faith—your own stories and stories from the biblical writers? Why don’t you tell one? You just might hear 2 or 3 others in response.

2. From one church newsletter to another

The Bethel Bell, the newsletter of the Bethel UMC in Bethel, North Carolina, reported in October on a project started by their new Sunday School class, the Wide Eyed Wonderers. Their Sunday School lesson in *Exploring Faith* for the week after Hurricane Francis hit their area suggested taking up a mission project for children abroad. This group of 4 first and second graders, with their teacher, Celeste Moore, decided to take on a mission project with children whose families were displaced by the flood. While the planning was on-going, Hurricane Ivan hit.

Working through the guidance counselor at the children’s school, Ms. Moore reached someone who was working

with 7 Hispanic families who had been displaced by the floods. Bethel UMC, which has 60–65 persons in worship on a regular basis, has donated furniture from a former parsonage that was being held in storage and purchased needed bedding and other furniture for these families, while church members responded with clothing and other items, large and small. The members of the Wide Eyed Wonderers class see the children of these families at school and know the difference that sharing clothing and support makes every day.

The *Bell* reports that the Hispanic community has invited the church for a meal and fellowship as a way to express their gratitude and to build relationship. The newsletter concludes: “What a lesson in Christian love these young children are receiving.” You might add: what a lesson this class is giving to their congregation and community and perhaps ... also to us. Since then, the congregation and these families have had a wonderful evening of food and dancing, laughter and sharing. The two groups of youth are now planning a joint project. Meanwhile, the Wide Eyed Wonderers class is working on a plan to respond to people devastated by the tsunami.

What’s going on in the classes in our church that might be shared with the congregation? One thing we’re sure of: God is at work. It’s up to us to notice and to share the story.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious God, you continue to display your work in the world. Help us to see your care and yearning for each person, and for all of creation. Thank you for teachers and classes who help us to see you at work, and to share what we have heard and seen and felt. Help us to connect our stories to the stories of the Bible, and to connect our own desire for wholeness with the needs of others. We ask that our study will impel us to action—even if our actions seem small in our own eyes—and that you will bless the faithfulness of your people. We make this and all our prayers in the strong name of Jesus, the Christ. *Amen.*

Food for Thought

Carol Krau, who is now the team leader for the Congregational Leaders Team at the General Board of Discipleship recently shared some of what she had learned about Christian Education at the Healthy Churches event in Houston, Texas. She reports that, upon arriving at GBOD as a Christian Educator with 14 years of experience in local churches in several Annual Conferences, she began a research project focused on listening to teachers. "What sort of support do teachers feel like they need?" she wondered. She found that it was easy to get teachers to talk about their experiences and about their hopes and dreams. What she heard them say, over and over, was that they would be better teachers if they were better disciples. They weren't asking about teaching tools or curriculum or planning skills or any of the many things we try to provide. They were confessing what they saw as their own shortcomings as believers. "I'd be a better teacher if I were more comfortable talking about my own faith. I'd be a better teacher if I prayed for my class more, if I read the bible more, if I were comfortable praying out loud"...the list went on.

No doubt some of these folks are learning and growing in faith and they need chances to tell their own stories and see the work of God in their own lives. Some of these people were pleading for help in their own spiritual formation so that they would feel more equipped at the task of leading others. How are the teachers and leaders in your congregation being spiritually nourished? Are they in small groups that they don't lead, just for the health of their own souls? What could you do to support and challenge this group to delve into that old, old story. As Carol Krau said, "Those who know Scripture best seem to be hungering and thirsting to hear it, like the rest."

What Are They Studying Now?

Here's a glimpse into what classes using some of Cokesbury's most popular material will be studying in March and April.

Children's classes using *Exploring Faith* and *One Room Sunday School* will be learning about rejoicing in March. Christians rejoice in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through this great gift, we can know and receive the new life and hope that are available for us because of God's love and Jesus' selfless gift. Our Bible focus will be the account of Holy Week found in the Gospels.

- Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! (Mark 11:9)
- Do this in remembrance of me. (1 Corinthians 11:24)

- Father, not what I want, but what you want. (Mark 14:36, adapted)
- This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)

In April these classes will begin a unit called "Alive!" As Christians we believe that Jesus is alive and because of this we want to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. The Bible passages we will be studying include:

- Luke 24:13-35 (the Emmaus Road)
- John 20:19-31 (Thomas believes)
- John 21:1-14 (Breakfast on the beach)
- John 21:15-19 (Feed my sheep)

In March classes studying *Bible Lessons for Youth* will explore Jesus' baptism and temptations, miracle stories, and triumph. Then in April, classes will follow Jesus as he begins his teaching ministry. Students will delve into the Beatitudes, learn about practicing the faith, wrestle with the meanings of parables, and discover Jesus' teaching about the final judgment to find what Jesus might be saying to them today.

Beginning March 6, in *Adult Bible Studies*, classes will begin a unit entitled "God's Project: Effective Christians." All lessons during March and April are based on readings from Romans. Unit 1 (March) is "Saved by God." Unit 2 (April) is "The Christian Life."

March 6	None is Righteous	1:16-20; 3:9-20
March 13	God Judges All People	2:1-16
March 20	Justified by Faith	5:1-11, 18-21
March 27	Victory Over Death	6:1-14; John 20:1-10
April 3	Power for Living	8:1-17
April 10	Affirming Christ as Lord	10:5-21
April 17	Living the Christian Life	12:1-21
April 24	Living in Harmony	14:1-3; 15:5-6

These are the same texts that are used in all of the ILS based studies, including *Lecciones Cristianas* and *Lecciones Cristianas para jovenes*.

What are the classes in *your* church studying? Can you find a way to connect with them, either as you visit classes or talk with teachers and students? What about relating to the themes of these lessons in your teaching or preaching or in the bulletin or newsletter? Both in small groups and as a congregation, your church is a learning community.

Other places to go for help.

www.sundayschool.cokesbury.com

www.cokesbury.com/teachinghelps