



Remember to Thank the Teachers!

Many congregations change their schedule or pattern for Sunday activities when school closes for the summer. The transitional time of year affords great opportunity to thank teachers for their ministry during the year.

Some teachers might like a banquet; others a gift; some recognition in the worship service; a few prefer a letter or card from students and/or parents. Yet others may shy away from any recognition, save a good word spoken in the hallway after class. It is important to find ways that the specific teacher will appreciate to show thanks.

It is not necessary to do the *same* thing for everyone, but it is crucial to *something* for everyone, including volunteers who may work “behind the scenes” rather than with students. Furthermore, it is so important to make a public witness and affirmation of teachers and the teaching ministry. The larger the congregation, the easier it is not to know these valuable volunteers who nurture the congregation’s faith and growth in discipleship. Whether large or small, each church is indebted to its teachers for helping to form, inform, and transform persons as Christian disciples.

Ask yourself: How might we work with our education committee or leaders to find the best ways to acknowledge the contributions of our teachers and leaders?

Prayer of Gratitude for Teachers and Leaders

Most Loving God, who sent the Son, teller of parables: We give you thanks for that example and heritage of learning and teaching. From the earliest days of our faith community, you have raised up leaders who tell the story and model the life of grace. We offer our great thanks for the faithful leadership and shared gifts of our teachers and group leaders. Bless them richly, shower them with the gifts of your creativity, lead them in faith and strength, guard them with all truth. We offer our thanks as well for the

learners in our congregation. Help us to be a community that seeks wisdom and shares our faith with patience and love. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our master teacher. *Amen.*

Food for Thought

The prophet Isaiah had a powerful—and very strange—vision (Isaiah 6:1-8). He was surrounded by the overwhelming appearance of God and the seraphim in the Temple. The image of God was so grand that just the “narrow” hem of God’s garment flowed from the 15 foot high throne and filled the rest of the Temple, which was thirty feet wide and ninety feet long. The sound of the six-winged seraphim’s song was so loud and magnificent that it shook the Temple from its foundation.

In the midst of such grandeur, Isaiah announced himself to be unfit and filthy. Yet when God asked, “Whom shall I send?” it was not the awesome seraphim who volunteered; it was Isaiah. And unless God actually intended that these mighty winged creatures should enter the realm of humanity, Isaiah was the only one who could have responded.

This may give us pause that Isaiah was manipulated into volunteering, but there is another way to think about it. Leslie Weatherhead, in his helpful book, *The Transforming Friendship*, comments that many persons have talked about a call from God as if some divine telegram would just drop on them from heaven. But he suggests that the precise point at which one sees a particular need is God’s call, and that feeling the strong urge to meet it is God’s personal call to the individual.

We might imagine that Isaiah was not looking around, saying, “Who, me?” or “No, YOU go!” Rather, he saw the potent need and felt compelled to say Yes! When God beckons to a teacher or other leader who hears that call, God makes something good happen, even with “ordinary” folks.

Raising Advocates

Our church has a strong sense of social witness. The worship, study, and nurture within the life of the church empowers many of our members to work through the week in secular jobs related to community or personal service and advocacy.

A recent short-term Sunday morning class focused on the morals and ethics that shape our personal foundation for decision-making and action. One result of the discussion over six weeks was the development by the class members of a questionnaire for the entire congregation. As we discussed how to frame the questions, we were reminded that the Christian values we claim may not always square up with the values we practice. The solidarity we espouse regarding the “least and the lost” may look strangely thin when we examine practices of self-care compared to care for others. We may, for example, say we value generosity, but find we really idolize our money and our stuff, either personally or as a congregation.

The function of this inventory is to help each of us look more closely and introspectively at the practices, values, and attitudes that shape our lives and compare them to biblical mandates. It will also help the church assess the direction it may need to move to align practice with claims, as well as to support members in ministries beyond the local church.

Ask yourself: What enduring impact do our Sunday school studies make on our day-to-day values and practices? How can our classes raise up advocates for justice?

Get the Most “Bang” from the Pulpit

In a highly creative, even amusing, clown ministry worship service, the “head pastor” clown, decked out in colorful splendor, approached the pulpit in silent reverence. He walked around to face his “congregation” and made a great show of wordlessly placing the Bible on the pulpit, emphasizing its value and centrality in the community. After an engaging pause, he firmly gripped the sides of the pulpit, pulled it toward himself slightly, then swung it back and forth at the gathered members with a rapid-fire ch-ch-ch-ch-ch sound simulating a machine gun.

Since this was an enactment and not a real worship service, the stunned “congregation” could laugh at themselves for succumbing at times to using the pulpit, or other position of leadership, to shoot, rather than support.

What did we learn? **What is supported in the pulpit shapes the culture and values of the church.** How does your pulpit shape its nurture of teachers and learners and the ministry of education?

What Are They Studying Now?

Here’s a glimpse into what classes using some of Cokesbury’s most popular material will be studying in May and June.

Children’s classes using *Exploring Faith* and *One Room Sunday School* will focus on how the early church began and some of the work that was done by the disciples after Jesus’ death and Resurrection. Special Bible passages include:

- The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19)
- Pentecost; the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-42)
- Peter and John heal a lame man (Acts 3: 1-10)
- Choosing the seven (Acts 6:1-7)
- Dorcas and Peter (Acts 9:36-42)

In June the children will hear stories about Old Testament miracles.

In May, students using *Bible Studies for Youth*, will study “Set Free,” five sessions in Galatians that explore being set free from sin, free for following Jesus and living in the Spirit. In June, youth will explore Jesus’ life by following him through the Gospels and discovering what following Jesus means for their lives today.

During the month of May, *Adult Bible Studies* classes will study the Letter of Galatians. Five lessons explore the topic of being “Set Free.” In June, the first unit of a new quarter, entitled, “Jesus’ Life, Teachings, and Ministry” will begin.

May 1 Hanging on to God’s Good News Gal. 1

May 8 Living on Faith Gal. 2:15-3:5

May 15 From Slave to Heir Gal. 3:19-4:7

May 22 Free to Serve Gal. 5:1-15

May 29 Life Together Gal. 5:22-6:10

June 5 Preparing for Leadership Mark 1:4-13

June 12 Healed to Wholeness Mark 2:1-12; 3:1-6; 8:1-10

June 19 The Prevailing Good Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-5

June 26 Hope in the Midst of Despair Mark 16

Could you or someone in leadership invite others to join these classes in talking about what it means to follow Jesus today? What does it mean for *you*? Find a time to share something about your own walk with Christ.

Other places to go for help.

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