

Episcopal Teacher Article

By Klara Tammany, Missioner for Christian Education, Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

SOME STARTING THOUGHTS FOR THOSE WHO COORDINATE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Years ago when I was new to the field of Christian Education, a wonderful mentor of mine, Bette Pollock, gave me a sheet titled “Ten Commandments of Being Your Own Best Resource.” Neither of us has any idea of from whence it came (tell me please if you know), but it has served me well as a nitty-gritty guide to doing this work well. Here is the list, with some adaptations and additions of mine:

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR EDUCATORS IN THE CHURCH

- I. Get in touch with a diocesan resource person. If there isn't one in your own diocese, consult with one in nearby dioceses in your Province.
- II. Network with other educators in surrounding congregations for program ideas and support, as well as cooperative planning. Connect with Provincial networks and be willing to be ecumenical.
- III. Find resource centers and use them, your own or someone else's, near or far (CMT for example). Also, get to know your local Christian bookstores (they can order almost anything for you).
- IV. Keep up to date. Read at least one key book in Christian Education yearly and see where it leads you. Subscribe to at least one Christian Education magazine or journal.
- V. Develop a system for organizing yourself and your education materials – filing systems, bulletin boards, mailboxes for teachers...
- VI. Get on mailing lists (conference/retreat centers, publishers, film distributors etc.).
- VII. Make and keep lesson plans with notes about successes and failures (so you can repeat great things, and don't make the same mistake twice).
- VIII. Be a learner. Go to at least one education retreat, conference or training program of substance every year.
- IX. Pray regularly – for yourself, with other teachers, for those who teach in your church and for those whom you teach.
- X. Prepare, plan ahead. Try to spend at least 2 hours preparing for every hour you are to lead. You might get away with 20 minutes before a session once or twice, but learners will eventually catch on that you don't care enough and they will respond similarly, losing interest. Prepare your teaching space with care too.

And the greatest commandment? For me it is (in the words of Maria Harris) “The church does not HAVE and education program, it IS one.” Christian Education is not defined solely by programs. Notice that there is nothing in these commandments about choosing and using the right curriculum or resource! I often share this list with people who call to complain that their curriculum isn't working, and ask if I could recommend another. No matter how good a curriculum, it is only a tool and not a magical fix-it. Nothing in canon law says we have to have a Sunday School (i.e. traditional age graded classrooms, for 45 minutes on Sunday, with a curriculum.) We must however, always do Christian Education, faithfully form our people in faith. That means holistically, and it is cradle to grave. It is inclusive of, but more than curriculum and classrooms. Everything we do in our communities teaches something, explicitly and implicitly, in the positive, the negative, or in the void.

Having said all that, let me suggest some basic resources for preparing the year ahead and organizing, and training and supporting teachers. They will give you everything from inspiration to concrete ideas to start the year.

Two basic manuals on the theory and practice of Christian Education:

Called to Teach and Learn: A Catechetical Guide for the Episcopal Church

Also the study guide Discovering Called to Teach and Learn. Published by the Episcopal Church, Available from Episcopal Parish Services 1-800-903-5544

I Love to Tell the Story: An Episcopal Handbooks on Christian Education by Lois A. Stephens.

Available from Leader Resources 1-800-941-2218, www.LeaderResources.com

Two guidebooks for coordinators:

God, Kids, and Us: The Growing Edge of Ministry with Children and the People Who Care for Them

By Janet Marshall Eibner and Susan Graham Walker, published by the Anglican Book Center

Available from Forward Movement 1-800-543-1813

The Nuts and Bolts of Christian Education: Practical Wisdom for Teachers and Leaders by Delia Halverson. From Abingdon Press.

The following two are produced by, and are intended to be used with companion curricula.

However, they both have very helpful general information on program and teacher development.

Director's Guide Developed by Virginia Theological Seminary for the Episcopal Children's

Curriculum, Available from Morehouse Publishing, 1-800-877-0012

Leading the Way: An Educator's Handbook by Anna Wadsworth. Available from Living the Good News, Inc. 1-800-824-1813

Two classic and one newer teacher training books:

Teaching Teachers to Teach and Basic Skills for Church Teacher by Donald Griggs

How to Train Volunteer Teachers: 20 Workshops for the Sunday School by Delia Halverson

All three available from Abingdon Press, 1-800-251-3320

An old favorite revised and updated:

Help! I'm a Sunday School Teacher by Mary Duckert

Available from Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1-800-227-2872