

## **In-Betweeners: What to do with Pre-Teens?**

By Klara Tammany

*(With special thanks to Margaret Sipple and Henry Carnes in the Diocese of PA, for their networking help on this project!)*

Confirmation is considered to be a time when a person makes a mature affirmation or re-affirmation of their baptismal faith. In most cases today, the average recommendation is that someone be at least 15 years of age. The current thought is that older is better, which fits with faith and developmental stages of life.

But wait! Confirmation used to happen automatically at about 11 years of age. Usually, parents pressure clergy and educators not to change. Some standard arguments for the earlier age go like this: "If we don't grab them and confirm them now, before they are in high school, we will lose them!" "I was confirmed at 11, my child should be also!" "There is nothing else for my child now... They are too old for Sunday School, and too young for Youth Group."

So, if we are going to urge a later age for confirmation, what do we do now with the young people in-between? What about the pre-teens? How do we keep them in the church and help them grow to reach a mature faith commitment that impacts their lives? It is a great time of transition. Let's take advantage of it! Here are some ideas and resources from various educators, youth ministers and resource center people, collected through the education network. Most of these materials can be borrowed from our diocesan Resource Center. If you have other suggestions or ideas, please share them and we'll pass them along!

**Sharon Ely Pearson** (Children's Ministries & Christian Education, Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut) There is a great resource published by Cokesbury called "**LinC**" (Life in Christ). It is an e-mail or fax resource that comes out weekly. It follows current events: movies, world news, music, etc. and finds a theme, then matches it with scripture. I believe they have a free sample on their website that is downloadable. You purchase it by subscription.

**Amy Cook**, (Resource Center Coordinator, Cathedral Crossing Books & Resources)

I like the Augsburg materials like "**Firelight**," a theme-based curriculum which uses multiple intelligences theory in the activities. This would be a great curriculum for very active preteens. Augsburg also has a RCL based curriculum called "**Life Together**" which has a component for youth, grades 7-12. This is extremely affordable and uses a lot of popular music and movie clips to teach the lesson. There isn't a lot of "stuff" with it - simply the teacher's book for \$11.99 a quarter.

Cokesbury publishes a traditional style of dated curriculum called "**Exploring Faith**" which is story based and really teaches Bible literacy. Though the style is more traditional, the lessons have a large social justice aspect, are written in inclusive language, and have a lot of activities.

Abingdon publishes a fantastic series for junior high called "**Faith in Motion**" divided into units of 7 lessons a piece. The units come out on a regular basis and alternate between presenting an inward look at faith, and then an outward focus. The lessons are well-planned, easy to use, and contain choices of material. The leaders' book not only contains the 7 lessons, but also a worship service and a retreat for teens. I'm enclosing the write up from the publisher but check out their website for all the themes.

**Linda Grenz** (Leader Resources)

We have a couple of new things you might consider... One is the **Mustard Seed Series** (which we just acquired). It's written by a UCC minister as a non-denominational program and biblically based (7th grade does a good overview/review of the Bible). It is quite didactic in style (focused on teaching the Bible) but the activity section generally connects to contemporary issues.

A second program is currently in the "edit" stage is a confirmation curriculum called "**Sealed and Sent Forth**" that was developed by the Diocese of East Carolina. It has 15 2-hr sessions (which could be a year long with 1 hr. sessions) that cover: the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, the Hymnal, Anglican Worship, Church History, and Anglican Theology. We plan to have it ready by this summer for fall use. That info will be on the website in a couple of months once we get enough edited to post sample pages. [www.LeaderResources.org](http://www.LeaderResources.org)

**Dorothy Linthicum** (Center for the Ministry of Teaching at Virginia Seminary)

One other resource could be the **Episcopal Curriculum for Youth**. For a lot of kids the younger youth materials are appropriate. I particularly like the books that deal with saints that range from Clare of Assisi to Desmond Tutu. I would also focus on the Service and Sharing sections that encourage youth to do things for others. Outreach seems to really appeal to young people despite our culture's claims on their time and energy. However, for more sophisticated kids from suburban settings some of the older youth materials work. While the older youth guides were developed to be led by the youth themselves, I have used them in Sunday School settings as teacher-led.

**Linda Nichols** (St. David's, Wayne, PA)

The "summer" units from (younger youth) **EYC (Episcopal Youth Curriculum)** are excellent. Most don't know they were written to be used as confirmation pieces. I wrote an article for Episcopal Teacher suggesting the units on sacraments, church year, spiritual life as core pieces. I know a couple parishes using it with success.

We've used "**I Will With God's Help**" Mary Lee Wile (Moorehouse). We ended up putting our own spin on it -- taking the questions from the Baptismal Covenant & overlaying it with the primary Gospel from the lectionary. We're 2 years into the 3 year cycle w/ excellent feedback.

And a "homegrown" idea from **Caroline Black** (All Saint's Episcopal Church, Frederick, MD)

Sixth grade confirmation is such a part of the culture here that I decided to use the 5<sup>th</sup> grade as a lab class for the transition between children's formation and youth ministry. This became more important when we decided to honor the 16 year old Confirmation date of the diocese. In talking with those who work with youth, plus my own experience, I decided to do a collaborative classroom experience, where the children were a part of the planning for their class. I received a donated computer and printer, acquired an email address for the class, had several meetings with the teachers where we talked about goals we might have for these young people before they went to Middle School. Tops on the list were learning to articulate their thoughts about God, their faith and their worldview. This is tough – hence the computer's aid is invaluable.

We are using the questions in the Baptismal Covenant as a guide, talking about social justice issues, designing and implementing outreach projects (one so far), participating in the liturgy – Children's Sabbath and now some scheduling as lectors and ushers, in addition to choir, acolytes, etc. A goal is to have every child in the class (21) involved in some ministry in the parish. We also plan to take field trips and meet at alternative times in the winter and early spring, rather than on Sunday morning. We plan to visit other parishes in the diocese. Then we will move out into the community.

My idea is really about creating a Mini catechumenate for 5<sup>th</sup> grades and beginning to help them develop skills that they will need in the coming few years – particularly theological reflection. This is tall order for 10 year olds but we can begin to plant the seeds. We do the best we can to make

the time as little like traditional Sunday School as we can. There's lots of energy and independent study going on. This Sunday, for instance, an 84 year old parishioner is coming to talk to the class about his 5<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday school class in 1936 here at All Saints'. He's bringing his Sunday school books, which he still has and the class will hear his story and then tell him their story. Last week we had a guy who makes stained glass give them some hands on experience and he talked about how he expresses his faith artistically.

There really is not any particular resource for this (BCP and experience)– this has grown out of my conversations with the children over the summer and talking with Andy about what he sees as the biggest gap in formation when the kids “arrive” in youth ministry (the general inability to clearly communicate a sense of their faith).

And from my own searching...

Look at **Living the Good News**. This is a lectionary curriculum ([www.livingthegoodnews.com](http://www.livingthegoodnews.com)).

There is an intermediate component (for grades 4-6) and a young teen one (grades 7-9). They also have “Age Level Handbooks” that explore faith development characteristics and approaches appropriate for each age level. Look at the Intermediate and Young Teen booklets.

And remember these comprehensive programs for youth, **J2A/Rite 13** (from Leader Resources) and **FINK** (Faith Inkubators) Both have components for pre-teens.

Here are a few other general resources specific to “Tweens,” available through Cokesbury:

### **Tween Time: Fellowship and Service Projects for Preteens**

(2 volumes from Abingdon Press)

Recommends fellowship programs and service projects geared for 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> graders, and includes reproducible forms.

### **Between Everything: Teacher Helps for Transitioning Tweens**

by Ed Trimmer and Patty Meyers (also from Abingdon Press)

A book to help Sunday School teachers work with 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> graders, offering description of pre-teen growth and development, and giving specific help for teaching them – what to do and what to avoid.

### **Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul** (2 volumes from Health Communications, Inc.)

Includes stories like all the rest of the popular Chicken Soup series – but this one deals with preteen concerns and issues.

However, a CAUTION! The next step is to work on life long commitment. Truth is, most youth usually disappear after confirmation, no matter what age it takes place. Doing better with our pre-teen and youth programs, and improving how we include youth in the life of church will help mitigate that hemorrhaging of young people. But we best not stop here, and look at how we help nurture faith so that it becomes a life-long, life and world changing endeavor for all.

