



Age-old Bible stories ... told in exciting and different ways

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Building a Computer Room

Science, Education and Faith: A
Debatable Trinity

Operation Book Bag 2005

World Hunger Auction

Hospitality: Growing Together;
Discovering Each Other's Needs



By Doris Binner, AiM, St. James Lutheran Church, Coopersburg

Three years ago, St. James Lutheran Church started using the Rotation Model of learning and the Augsburg Fortress Firelight curriculum in Sunday church school.

Firelight materials place the emphasis on the learners by using the different ways children learn at different stages of life. The curriculum draws on Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (verbal/linguistic, musical, visual/spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily/kinesthetic, logical/mathematical, and naturalist).

According to the theory, everyone has varying degrees of all intelligences and these intelligences act in a mix. Rarely is just one intelligence prominent in individuals.

Gardner's theory provides the framework for exploring Bible stories actively by using "deeper learning" activities that tap into varying intelligences so that all kids will learn the Bible stories.

Prior to using the rotation model in Sunday school, we used the method in our vacation Bible school for several years. Learning centers were set up to tell the Bible story and reinforce it through storytelling, games, crafts, and music. Teen and adult crew leaders escorted small groups of children from one learning center to another (or rotated



through them). Children enjoyed the variety of learning techniques so much that, when Firelight was introduced; our Christian Education Task Force worked on ways we could use it at St. James.

A traditional rotation method designates specific rooms or areas for drama, arts and crafts, computer lab, and the like. However, on weekdays our building is used by our nursery school and KidCare, a before and after-school program. None of our rooms could be designated solely for Sunday morning education by setting up activity-specific rooms.

After much prayer, discussion, and planning, we chose to adapt the rotation approach:

The same Bible story is used but a different learning option is chosen for each week. Home Base leaders are recruited to do the planning of four-week sessions. They also usually teach the first and sometimes the fourth week of the four-week cycle.

Skill Area leaders are recruited to teach the other two or three weeks, using their particular God-given gifts and interests. Some people volunteer for specific areas, such as science, art, and games. Others focus on food or storytelling options.

Skill Area leaders not only choose their special passions to teach, but they also can teach when it is convenient for their schedules and select the age group to which they would like to relate.

Our leaders rotate between classrooms and age groups to facilitate the learning experience. Sometimes the children switch rooms, especially when doing an art or science project that might be messy. The church kitchen is used when cooking or baking.

Shepherds are recruited to be with the classes on a weekly basis. Shepherds are guides who help with crafts, take children to restrooms, and are the “constant” presence that some children need to see each week.

With the flexibility of scheduling for Skill Area and Home Base leaders, no one “burns out” by teaching 35-40 weeks of the year. Teachers who were planning to take a year off

when we began using Firelight curriculum and Rotation Method decided to give it a try for just a year. They are still teaching because the teachers, as well as the students, love it! "It's fun!" related one Home Base leader. "Sometimes it's hard to allow other leaders to come in to teach because I like it all and want to do those sessions, too!"

There are five different Bible stories in each Firelight unit. At St. James we used each Bible story for four weeks, but used a different learning option each week.

The first Tuesday night each month we have a Firelight planning night. Home Base leaders do the planning for the month. They choose the learning options they like best for themselves, then Skill Area leaders are called to teach the other weeks.

What a wonderful way to discover the gifts of our congregation members and allow them to develop those gifts, sharing their faith with our children!

Visitors from another congregation who were considering the Rotation Method came to observe our Sunday church school. Their visit happened when we were using the "Surprised by God's Grace" unit and focusing on the first Passover Bible story. The visitors were themselves surprised when they found our grade 5 and 6 class participating in a Seder-like meal, tasting many of the foods. Six months later in confirmation class, our youth got the connection of the Passover and the Lord's Supper. The mental light bulb turned on! The learning was reinforced.

For the Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter seasons, our Learning Ministries team members create our own rotations and class activities. Each year we have been able to come up with different activities, skits, and crafts to teach the children about the life of Jesus.

We are looking forward to our fourth year of Rotation Method at St. James, and have just completed another exciting vacation Bible school with 145 children, preschool through grade 5. At VBS we use the traditional rotation method and crew guides are recruited for every 5-6 children. It was a fantastic week with fun and hands-on learning.

Feel free to come to visit and observe our Sunday church

school. Contact me at St. James at 610-282-3290 with questions.





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By Cheryl Statham, member of Prince of Peace, Johnsonville, and the Worship and Spirituality Ministry Team

(Part 1 of 2 articles; look for Part 2 in the October issue of Partners in the Spirit)

So you're thinking about setting up a computer room to use with your Sunday school?

At first look, this is not a bad idea. Children today are familiar with using personal computers (PCs) and there are some great multimedia programs that can excite the students into learning their lessons. But be careful — there are pitfalls along the way.

The first task is to find a room that can be locked and that has permanent walls.

The second task is getting the PCs. Most churches decide to ask the congregation to make donations of their old PCs. While this is the inexpensive way to start, many of the best Sunday school programs require a PC with at least 400 Megahertz (MHz) operating speed, 64 megabytes of random access memory (RAM), a CD-ROM player, 16 megabytes of video RAM, and a sound card. Many of the PCs that will be donated will not meet all of these specifications. Don't be afraid to turn down a computer if it is too old.

Another challenge will be purchasing the operating system



(OS). While the donated PCs will no doubt come with an operating system already installed, you will want all your PCs to have the same operating system so they are easier to support and maintain. We chose to load Windows 98 Second Edition on all our Sunday school computers. This alone cost the congregation almost \$500.

However, the most important requirement is a technical person who will maintain and upgrade the PCs of your Sunday school. The PCs that you get will need to have the new operating system installed, needed hardware added, Sunday school programs installed, and the PCs repaired quickly if something goes wrong (remember, no lesson can be learned on a broken PC).

This is not a job everybody can do. Ideally, a congregational member who is a computer professional will volunteer to do it, but that is not always possible. Make every effort to find this kind of technical person in-house, because it will cost at least \$50 an hour if you have to pay an outside person. Many churches will find it expensive just to pay for the hardware upgrades that will be needed. Our church has spent over \$1,500 for hardware over a two-year period to update our Sunday school computers.

You can save money by putting off purchases of printers (which we have done) and not getting an Internet connection for the Sunday school. Our PCs only run software from the company/website, <http://www.sundaysoftware.com>. We have invested about \$500 in software for the students and are very careful in checking what hardware specifications are needed to run new software we are considering. This helps us keep costs and upgrades down to a minimum.

Our church currently has eight PCs for the Sunday school students to use. Not all of them can run all the software we've purchased but most of them can. We're proud we can offer the students another method of learning. However, before you start working on your own computer room, make sure you have some dedicated (and technically capable) volunteers to get and keep it up and running.

Want to learn more?

Contact Cheryl Statham at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, PO Box 69, Bangor PA 18013.



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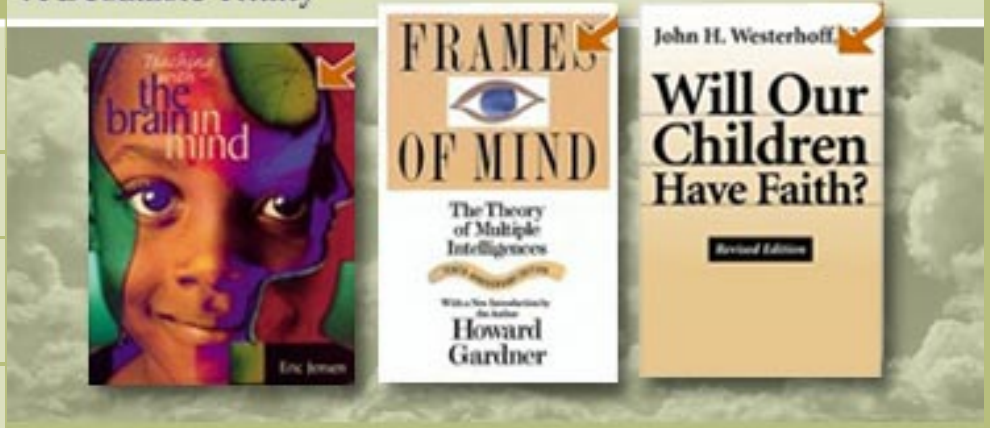
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By Marlane Druckenmiller, AiM, St. Paul, Douglassville

Science, education, and faith are three distinct disciplines.

Will these three disciplines ever work together as one? Can — do — they impact each other in Christian education? Or should we work to keep the three disciplines separate from each other?

Science, education, and faith all study the impact of learning. Through the scientific method, we learn how the brain takes in information and how it then relates this information to new skills. Education studies methods of how we teach to learn new skills. Faith stories tell about interactions between humanity and God and teach new skills to relate to each other.

I believe in God the Father ... creator of the universe.

What do God, the Wizard of Oz, the Continuum, the Universe, and the Brain have in common? They are entities we search in order to find answers to complex questions. We believe each of these has magnificent power.

Eric Jensen, in Teaching with the Brain in Mind, lists the top 10 scientific discoveries of brain research in the last 10 years. Among these discoveries is the fact that the brain



does not remain as it is created at birth. It changes as we grow in age.

Through experiences, the brain can disconnect or reconnect neurons. Active neurons — brain cells — number about 30 to 50 billion. Some neurons are not connected in our early years and may become connected as we learn new skills. One scientific study says “we are born with 150 to 200 billion neuron cells and keep about 100 billion of them.” Music (especially classical music), exercise, emotions, stress, and hormones all affect the connection or disconnection of our brain cells.

The human brain is an amazing and complex work of creation still being explored. Brain science tells us things to which we need to pay attention as educators.

I believe in Jesus Christ ... the great teacher, mentor, and role model.

Jesus told stories in different ways to different people. To the farmer he talked about sowing. To the fishermen he talked about catching fish. To the housewife he talked about yeast and coins. To the women at the well he talked about living water. Jesus gave us a model for education. The kingdom of God was the theme. Stories and parables were the method.

Howard Gardner, in *Frames of Mind*, identifies multiple intelligences, different ways we learn. Some of us can get to our destination with written instructions. Others need a graphic map. Some need a few landmarks to encourage us along the way. Another person may be fine with oral directions.

We all have our best way to get to a destination. Teachers need to keep in mind that we all learn in different ways. For students to learn, the teacher needs to consider several different ways to teach the same story, just as Jesus did when he spoke of the kingdom of God.

I believe in the Holy Spirit ... the means to spread the faith.

God's grace comes to us in baptism — the community of the Church, in communion, in promises of the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. Faith continues as we share our

understanding of God from generation to generation.

John Westerhoff, in *Will our Children Have Faith?*, offers ways children develop in faith understandings of God. Our parents connect us with God. As we mature in faith, we gain broader understandings of relationships with God and others. We begin our faith development with stories learned from Mommy and Daddy. As we encounter more adults in our life we hear more stories. We learn as we hear the Word preached and the sacraments administered. We learn through the questions we ask about God, Jesus, and the Church. Our experiences may be different, but at some point we take on their stories as our story by joining the Body of Christ with our own actions of faith.

Teachers of Christian education can enhance the educational experience of their students by knowing

- how the brain functions (scientific research)
- how to prepare a lesson (pedagogical methods)
- how we know God (faith development)

These are basics for good teaching. Understanding and learning more about each of these areas (science: research on brain functioning, education: methods of teaching effectively, faith: the development of faith) adds to the experience of both the learner and the teacher.

The three disciplines can work together to create one good educational opportunity.

Reading the books listed below and following the suggestions developed from the research of these authors will help with discipline concerns in the Christian education classroom.

- *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* by Eric Jensen
- *Frames of Mind* by Howard Gardner
- *Will Our Children Have Faith?* by John Westerhoff

Indeed, the three disciplines — science, education and faith — can work together to create one good educational opportunity.



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By Dawn Baxter, office administrator, West Berks Mission District

The congregations of the West Berks Mission District are again working together to provide needed school supplies to children in the Reading School District and other children in need. Many families do not have the "luxury" of purchasing the items necessary for their children to succeed in school.

Last year we were able to distribute 324 book bags to four middle schools and eight elementary schools.

The word of this special ministry has spread and this year we expect to have more than 500 bags! More than half of our congregations have participated by collecting school supplies, as did nurses from the Reading Hospital's Pediatric Unit; and CVS Pharmacy has made a very generous donation of supplies to this special ministry. Some individuals and congregations have given monetary donations that allow us to purchase items that run low.

The first day of school can be stressful for all children, but it is especially so for those who do not have the supplies they are expected to bring. The West Berks Mission District's Operation Book Bag is greatly appreciated by both the children and the teachers. The smiles received from the staff, who can now better help their students achieve, and the children, who receive a new backpack and school supplies of their own, are all the reward we need!



PHOTOS: Children pictured are Katherine and Daniel Graf.





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By Bev Breniser, member, Allegheny Lutheran Church

GOING ... GOING ... GONE!

Wow! What a night!

On Saturday, April 9, the congregation of Allegheny Lutheran Church, Knauers, held a goods-and-services auction to raise money for the World Hunger Appeal. In just three hours, with donations of nearly 100 items to auction, the generous folks of Allegheny raised a whopping \$10,301.00!

One of the items in the auction was a wooden bowl made and donated by a young member of Allegheny, Jonas Fiant, age 9. Jonas' bowl was purchased for \$470!

Thrivent Financial for Lutherans supported the event with a supplemental gift of \$1,000, raising the total to \$11,301.00 that will be sent to fight world hunger.

If your congregation would like more information on how to plan a similar event, call Allegheny Lutheran Church and they will put you in touch with the Auction Committee. Or contact Bev Breniser at bevbreniser@frontiernet.net.



PARTNERS IN
the spirit
SEPTEMBER 2005



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Hospitality:
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Sermon preached by Pastor President Alan Eldrid at the Friday evening service at the 2005 synod assembly

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it... Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them. We have an altar from which those who officiate in the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Hebrews 13:1-2,5-16)



It's a beautiful reading [from Hebrews], and I was told I only have five or perhaps two minutes extra to have a reflection on this. So I wondered what part of it we could focus on.

Thinking especially of the relationship that our churches have, I think the first verses about hospitality would be really interesting to talk about. Hospitality is one of the very, very old traditions that we inherited through the customs that came to the people of Israel in the desert. We also have it in our Christian tradition, but it comes from times when hospitality was very, very important. If you're crossing a desert and the people you meet don't receive you, if they don't share their water, their food, the shade, well, you won't succeed, you won't get across. So hospitality was really important for life.

On the other hand, we also have to think, "What does it mean to us nowadays?"

I heard once an interesting little story that a member of my parish was using at a workshop. In this small jungle there was this little monkey playing near the river on the branches that overhang the water. You know in general monkeys can't swim because they become wet and they go underwater. All the elder monkeys of the community had said, "You must be very, very careful of the river, because if you fall in there you'll surely drown."

But the young, little monkey was having a very good time playing in the branches until suddenly he slips down into the water. Finally, and with a lot of effort, he was able to get hold of some roots and get out of that river where he had nearly drowned.

While he sat there on the bank dripping water, he really started to reflect on the teachings of the elders—how important they were. (We normally learn things that way.) The little monkey has the feeling that he must do something for the rest in the jungle. He starts looking and he says, "I'll do my good deed of the day." So he starts putting his hands into the water and taking out all the little fish and putting them on the river bank so they wouldn't drown as he had nearly drowned.

You know that what is good for some is not good for others. Hospitality is not necessarily what we think is best for others;

we have to learn what others need. Hospitality is growing together and discovering the needs of others. Well, if not, we do what this very well-intentioned ape was doing – saving the fishes from the river. And, of course, condemning them to die on the riverbank.

In this relationship, our churches build together, framed in this great space of the grace of our Lord. This that we build together doesn't have on the other side of it the instructions on how to go about building it. We have guidelines, we have ideas, we share the experience, we grow together, we build bridges. But (this is the important part) it's a process that we must do together.

We mustn't sort of beforehand work out what others need. People in Argentina need to learn this also. Many people in our country they think it's great that people come from other parts of the world. Then the people who come over get the mate shoved in their faces. Mate is this Argentine drink where there is one straw and everybody sucks from the same straw. For most people that come over this is quite disgusting; for Argentines, if you're given mate, that's the greatest thing.

All these things that are part of culture, part of the way we see life, must be built into this understanding of hospitality that goes and comes and grows together. The reading [from Hebrews], this beautiful reading we have shared today, stresses this. In this discovering each other, I am sure that we share the presence of angels as the reading said. The most important part is that, in this reciprocal hospitality, we share the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, getting to know each other, getting to understand one another, and then being able to serve one another in this process.

Let God bless us and keep us all. Amen