

WOOD LAKE

Imagining,
Living and Telling
the Faith Story.

THEORY & PRACTISE

**CHRISTIAN EDUCATION TOOLS
FOR COMMUNITIES OF FAITH**

EXPLORING

Seasons of the Spirit



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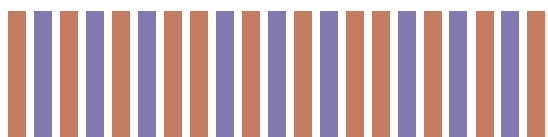
Christian Education and the
Imaginative Spirit

■ Susan Burt

Engaging the Imagination
and Beyond Talking

■ Carol Wehrheim

Intentionally Intergenerational
The Structure



Nurturing an Imaginative, Inquiring Spirit

Susan Burt

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THEORY & PRACTISE

— Exploring
Seasons of the Spirit

2

We live in exciting times, times that are variously described as postmodern, postcolonial, post-Christendom, peri-emergent, liminal, and transitional. This is a restless time of radical change of all kinds – cultural, political, social, spiritual, environmental. Inundated with information about global climate change, environmental catastrophes, and economic crises, people are looking to build a better world – from the grassroots up. New ways of being in the world, in community, with each other, and with the environment are emerging. Within the Christian faith, where there are concerns for diminishing numbers and the relevancy of faith and church for new generations, we are motivated by an emerging vision that embraces search and meaning rather than certainty; questions rather than answers.

“There is a new story emerging in consciousness, one that evokes awe, wonder, and reverence as it expands our notion of God.”¹ The power of imagination can take us to this place of awe, wonder, and reverence.

When I watch TV, it’s just some show that you just...pretend. But when you explore, you get more

imagination than you already had, and when you get more imagination, it makes you want to go deeper in so you can get more and see beautifuller things. Like...if it’s a path it could lead you to a beach or something, and it could be beautiful...²

Imagination, not passive engagement, opens the world to this young girl, takes her deeper into it, and leads her to things not yet discovered. How might imagination in children be awakened, nurtured, and nourished so they “enter imaginatively into scripture, experiencing the message that transcends the printed words”?³

The human imagination is awakened, nurtured, and nourished in many ways: when we play and explore; when we practice hospitality, stillness and silence, care and compassion; when we observe or participate in the arts (literature, music, visual art, dance, drama); and when we enter the world of the story and the world view of the storyteller. While much can be said about any of these ways, I set my gaze on how we might nurture the imagination of young people by breathing new life into familiar stories. As we consider the power of imagination and story to build and liberate, or destroy and oppress, we are reminded that words, images, didactic teaching, and closed answers can stifle, diminish, shut down, and impoverish imaginative, inquiring spirits and bring harm rather than life and good news. When we learn to use our imaginations, we experience new life in the old stories of our faith.

When did a story provoke your enquiry, engage your senses, stir your imagination, take you deeper into something “beautifuller”? What made it so? When was enquiry suppressed, senses dulled, imagination wounded, paralyzed, or diminished? What made it so?

I was once asked to exegete Mark 7:24–30 and Matthew 15:21–28, which tell the story of Jesus’ encounter with the Syrophoenician/Canaanite woman. My first reaction to this request reminded

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me how this story had impacted my childhood emotions; how it had shut down, silenced, and diminished my imaginative, inquiring spirit.

When I was a child, I did not like the story and I did not want to spend time with it. My life experience of being on the receiving end of name-calling shaped how I imagined this story. To me, calling the woman a dog made Jesus seem mean and uncaring. How different my first experience of this story would have been if the questions and wonderings it raised in me were welcomed, and if I had been encouraged to focus not only on Jesus, but also on the woman and her actions and words, her power and tenacity. Instead I had been boxed in by barriers and boundaries set by poor attempts at didactic teaching, teaching that had distilled everything down to one meaning, providing an answer, and closing the text to the imagination. We all enter story from the known – our life experience – and it takes skill, care, and understanding to help us move into the unknown, uncover new truths, and recognize how our own life experiences/stories intersect and connect with the stories of our faith.

It is crucial that those of us who seek to nurture young imaginations frame our questions so they don't suggest there is a right or wrong answer. Questions or wondering that might be offered for the story of the Syrophonecian woman might include: What surprised you about that story? I wonder why Jesus changed his mind? I wonder what gave the woman such power to speak? I wonder what the woman's expression was? I wonder how she sounded? I wonder what the disciples said to Jesus after the woman left? What do you think the disciples learned that day? I wonder what Jesus learned? I wonder what the woman said to her friends, to her daughter? I wonder what the daughter said and thought?

Without encouragement to wander around the story, to wonder, to pull back the layers and look, children can be led on a straight, narrow, and soul-

stifling path. But stories are not straight and narrow paths.

A story is like a labyrinth into which we step and move at whatever pace we choose; listening, wondering, questioning, reflecting, circling back and then forward as we discover new truths. We reach the centre, wait, and find meaning for ourselves in a particular time and place. As we travel back to engage in the world, we find praxis changes as well, influenced by our engagement with the story. The story becomes our own, and we live it. But the story does not remain the same, for we will enter the labyrinth again and the story will speak to us in new ways. Like ripples of water, a story is not contained. Drop a pebble into water and ripples move out and out and out. There are circles within a circle, stories within a story.

Jewish tradition says that the Torah is written “black fire on white fire.” The black fire refers to the words, the writing; the white fire refers to the space, the gaps between the words, what is not written. Some say that what the writer does not say matters more than what is written. Words are limited and fixed; they might be dissected, discussed, highlighted, defined. But others believe that an “aha moment” is more likely to come when what is between the words – what is in the spaces and silences – is questioned and imagined.⁴ In these moments, the fires give heat and light, warming the spirit and illuminating the imagination.

The Bible is full of characters who seem to exist within the gaps of the written word. They want and need a voice. They want to be embodied and liberated. They want their stories told.

Drawing Fresh Water from Old Wells

A child once asked a storyteller, “Every time you tell us a story, you have to put it inside your own head first, don't you?” Wise words. There are no shortcuts in educating children in matters of faith, in sharing stories with them. First and foremost, the story-

teller needs to experience the story, to exercise and nurture her or his own imaginative spirit.

But how do we do this? How do we experience a story through our own imagination so that we can in turn offer the gift of the story to young people? The following process of hearing, wondering, and imagining can help to move the story out of literalism, factuality, certainty, and fixed answers and into the realm of the imagination.

1. Prepare.

Read the text (the “black fire”).

Let go of any preconceived ideas or notions about the text. Try to hear it as if for the first time.

Look for as much context as possible: geographical setting, characters, symbols/objects that are keys to the story (for example, the stone at the tomb, the water jars at the wedding, the loaves and fish in the story of a multitude fed). Look for who is at the centre of the story, keeping in mind that the centre will shift as the story progresses. This is the “known” part of the story and it prepares us to imagine the “unknown.”

2. Move about in the gaps, the spaces between the words, in the silences, and bring questions and wonderings to the text, such as:

What’s going on in the world of the story? What anxieties seem present in the story?

What’s going on in the world of the storyteller or writer?

What anxieties seem present in this world?

What special knowledge does this text require (back-story, words, phrases, proper names, theology) in order to enter the story?

What is missing from the story? What has the storyteller or writer not included? Why might the storyteller or writer be silent on these matters?

What details are missing?

Who gets to speak? Who does not? Why?

What are the characters thinking? What are they feeling?

What hovers and lives beneath, around, and behind the words on the page, waiting to be discovered, waiting to break free, waiting to be liberated?

What questions arise when considering “the other” – people of differing backgrounds, cultures, socio-economic statuses, abilities, ages, stages, orientations?

3. Consider what’s going on in the lives of children who will interact with this text.

Imagine what might emerge in their lives through interaction with it.

How will the story be told so young people enter into it and engage all their senses as they also imagine it?

Jesus offers us a pattern for nurturing the inquiring, imaginative spirit in the story of his encounter with a lawyer who asks, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What do you think?” Jesus asks.

The lawyer offers a response. “Good answer,” replies Jesus, which prompts yet another question from the lawyer: “Who is my neighbour?” Jesus tells a story, a story that sparks imagination and takes those present (and those of us reading today) deeper. The lawyer might have entered that story as any one of the characters – priest, Levite, injured one, innkeeper, Samaritan, even the one at home who is waiting for the traveller to return. I imagine that the story continued to unfold for the lawyer as more questions bubbled up and led to something deeper. But for now, Jesus asks, “Who do you think is the neighbour?”

Jesus facilitates a discovery that goes beyond the set lines or boundaries, and with a simple commission says, “Go and do the same.” We can only imagine where the lawyer went from there, and we can only imagine to what extent he embraced “the other” as neighbour. He leaves the story, and we enter it.

As New Stories Take Shape

This is how narrative works. It allows us to move in and out in different roles and thereby learn what it means to walk in another's shoes and gain perspective. However, narrative is not the only way to tell, engage, and enter a story. The Bible offers many examples of ways to enter a story of our faith imaginatively; ways we might share, tell, and embody these stories as we nurture the imaginative, enquiring spirit in young people.

Stories are observed.

In Mark 12:41–44, we read that Jesus sits down opposite the treasury box and watches. A widow comes out of the shadows and gives all she has. While her action might demonstrate sacrificial love, it also exposes the oppressive nature of a system that takes all she has to live on. The temple and scribes have abdicated their responsibilities to care for the widows and instead “devour their houses” (Mark 12:40). A story of injustice and oppression is played out right there in the temple. It reminds us that the “hidden curriculum” is our own story, how we live our faith. Children learn about faith from observing our living and lived faith. As people are called to the ministry of educating in matters of faith, we are called to be advocates and prophets, challenging any behaviour that is not life-giving.

Stories are ritualized.

Jesus broke bread, shared it, and said, “Remember me.” Key faith stories are ritualized, embodied, imagined, and remembered at various times in the church year. For example: red vestments, flowers, invitations to wear red, calls to worship in many languages, bubbles and balloons on Pentecost; putting away our alleluias at the beginning of Lent and releasing them on Easter Day; removing elements and items from the Communion table and covering the worship furniture with black on Good Friday; and transforming worship space with

flowers and open windows on Easter Sunday. These rituals embody the stories we hold dear.

Stories are sung and danced.

Through imagination, we hear Miriam and the women of Israel breaking into song after the people cross the Jordan. We see David dancing uninhibitedly as the Ark of the Covenant is brought home into the city. However, the power of liturgical song or interpretative dance to move us into a deeper experience of the story can be limited by our preconceived notions that such movement is for professionals or people with training in dance. Lindsay McLaughlin shares this story by way of encouraging us to move beyond this thinking:

The elderly woman in the seventh pew slowly, hesitantly, lifted her left arm. The gesture was tentative, but the expression on her face was intent. She was absorbed in the drama unfolding before her, that of the death of Lazarus and the desperate pleas from his sisters to his dear friend Jesus to come to his side.

It was Lent, and the church was making an extra effort to make the scripture readings meaningful and alive. In this instance, dancers were interpreting the words as they were read, using simple, clear movements that the congregation could “echo” (mirror, really) from their seats. Standing on the wide step before the altar, caught up in the synthesis of the gestures I was making and the anguish and fearsome joy of the story, I faced the people in the pews. It was evident that by using more than just their ears, those in the church that morning were accessing the story and its meaning at a deeper, inner level. I had only to glance at the woman in front of

me to confirm this.⁵

Stories are painted.

It is well documented how Rembrandt's painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, impacted the life of

Henri Nouwen, provoking inquiry, engaging his senses, stirring his imagination.⁶ He imagined himself as each of the characters in the painting, and the story was born again, and again, and again. It set him on his path toward ministry with the L'Arche community in Toronto. Nouwen calls us to stir the imagination through visual art.

We can invite reflection on an art image by saying something as simple as, “I wonder why the artist chose these colours.” We can continue by asking people to place themselves in the painting and explore where they find themselves in the story it evokes. If children ask about the story of the painting, we can suggest that they make up their own story from what they see. We can encourage them to notice their inner thoughts. As the viewers think about the artwork closely, they begin to separate their personal responses to the art from the artist’s intentions. In this, they recognize many layers of the art: their personal responses, the artist’s story, and the places where the artist’s story and their stories intersect.

Stories are acted or pantomimed.

Stories are invitations to share the emotions, thoughts, feelings, and choices of the characters. They are invitations to experience where the story connects and intersects with our own lives.

Interpretive play, role-playing, and improvisation offer opportunity to include both “black fire” and “white fire” characters. They can include nonhuman characters, places, and objects (the donkey that carried Jesus into Jerusalem, the tree that helped Zacchaeus to see). We can begin with a question or activity that connects with our own lives, and then move into the story by setting the scene. Is it by the sea/lake, wilderness, in a home, on the road, in a garden? We might describe the view, but also the context (the community, what happened before this story), and ask what the young people see in this setting.

For example, sharing the story of Zacchaeus might begin by asking about young people’s experiences of meals. A brief conversation about meals or unexpected guests prepares them to hear the story of Zacchaeus from a point of view other than his height and enter the story from an identified life experience. Having set a focus, the story from the Gospel of Luke might then be introduced as a story about a meal that changed relationships and the way people saw things. We might say something about the gospel storyteller wanting to give an “orderly account” about Jesus of Nazareth, a devout Jewish man, an itinerant preacher, a teacher who welcomed the outcast and marginalized, bringing them from the periphery to the centre.

Setting the scene/context might include a comment about the gospel’s theme of journey, with Jesus teaching and healing as he travels with his disciples toward Jerusalem. In this story, we join Jesus and the disciples as they enter Jericho, the last town before Jerusalem. We might offer words about tax collectors and what it meant to be a chief tax collector, providing background that does not have people assume Zacchaeus was a deceitful thief. As we read Luke 19:1–4, we might invite people to imagine they are Zacchaeus and ask them to consider why they want to see Jesus. As we move to Luke 19:5, we might invite them to imagine they are Jesus and ask them to wonder why they must stay at Zacchaeus’ house. We might invite young people to imagine they are Zacchaeus again and to reflect on what he is thinking and feeling. Moving forward to verse 6, we might invite them to imagine they are a person in the crowd – what are they thinking and feeling? Reading verses 7 and 8, we might ask what the young people are thinking and feeling now and what they would want to say to Zacchaeus. And the list of characters in whose sandals we can imagine ourselves goes on and on – Zacchaeus’ family, servants, friends... After imagining the scene, the

characters, and the conversation, the interpretative play or role-play might end with verses 9 and 10 read in unison.

Another practice is to invite a child to sit in a “character” chair within the circle. He or she then role-plays the story character as the group asks questions like, “What would you (in your role) like to say about the situation?” Alternatively, the young people might ask questions of a character. Or children can divide into pairs and choose to be two characters of a story and engage in dialogue in their roles.

After an interpretative role-play or meditation, it is important to have a way for children to step out of their roles and become themselves again. This can be done by debriefing and inviting their thoughts about the story and what the community might have learned that day. We may ask the group to imagine Zacchaeus meeting with the other tax collectors later that week and wonder what they may have talked about.

Stories are poetic.

Stories engage all our senses. Consider how the unspoken action of a woman pouring out perfumed oil enlivens senses. As one teacher was discussing the anointing at Bethany (Mark 14:3–9) with a group of which I was part, he brought a small bottle of pure nard, opened it, and handed it around. The aroma filled the room, overwhelmed us, jolted awake our senses. We experienced and truly sensed the extravagance of a gift that filled the room and touched everyone. While senses can be engaged by introducing aromas, tastes, sights, and sounds, we can also describe the environment and setting of the story and help the listener engage all senses as he or she imagines the scene. We can describe some sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures, or ask children to imagine what they see, hear, smell, taste, and touch in this story.

Stories are imagined.

Prophets imagined a highway through the wilderness, predator and prey together, and a child leading the parade toward God’s reign of justice, peace, and love. Sometimes we need do no more than present a story to young people and invite them to imagine it into being. What do they see, hear, and feel? What do they smell and taste? When we imagine in this way, we begin to live the vision. God-given, Christ-motivated imagination catapults us into practices and creative acts that transform and build the world. Imagination, as displayed in the prophetic vision of Isaiah, will lead to acts of peace, justice, and mutual respect.

The Journey Within

In entering a story, each person will find herself or himself at a different place on the path, and the different points on the path will invite exploration. Different truths are revealed at different times for different people and in different ways. “Imagination,” said the young child in the film *Gratitude*, “could lead you to a beach or something and it could be beautiful...”

For some, the path will lead beyond the beach, perhaps to an island. Others will stop before the beach, at a sand dune. And some may settle on the beach with shells that are waiting to share their stories.

The challenge for each of us, in our different contexts, is how we travel that pathway with children. Do we hurry them along to a destination, or do we stop, explore, take side-tracks, and scratch and crawl under the bushes? How do we travel the pathway with young people? Do we allow them to take risks, to go to the edges, explore, find their own way home? Or do we haul them back to what we think is a “safe” theology?

As companions on the path that leads children to something “beautifuller,” do the words we choose leave opportunities for more than one response,

depending on where people are on their journeys? If they do, we extend an invitation for explorations that can lead to a new understanding and faith growth. Open-ended questions provide openings for us to see anew how God is in the world and to imagine new ways of being in the world. As we gather around story we might ask and discuss questions and wonderings such as these: The Bible does not tell us what happened next in the story – I wonder what the older brother did next? I wonder what the ten who were cured of leprosy said when they arrived home? I wonder if the disciples did as Jesus asked? What questions does this story raise for you? What truths did you discover in this story? What do you think it reveals about who God is? ...about who Jesus is? What does this story/vision suggest about the way we might live as disciples following in the way of Jesus?

In an interview about her book *Hunwick's Egg*, Australian children's writer Mem Fox was asked what children might feel about Hunwick's relationship with the egg. "Whatever they want to feel," she said. "Sad, happy, full of hope, comforted, or encouraged. The beauty of this story is that children will take from it whatever they need, depending on their own loneliness and when they read it, or their own friendships, or their need for good friends in their lives."⁷

Young people will take from a story whatever they need. That should be enough for us, as well.

An animated cartoon by Australian cartoonist, poet, and philosopher Michael Leunig depicts a lonely figure sitting on a simple stool and holding a book titled "Book of Butterflies." As the character leafs through the book, it slowly begins to come alive and literally take flight. The room brightens as the illustrations in the book fill with colour, and the butterflies are liberated from the page. Butterflies fill the room, delighting the reader. How might this be an image of the stories of our faith? How will the word be liberated for new generations and new kinds of Christianity?

May we journey also with a vision that will bring us into something "beautifuller."

Notes

1 Michael Morwood, *Praying a New Story* (Melbourne: Spectrum, 2003), 6.

2 Chicago: Louie Schwartzberg: Nature. Beauty. Gratitude. I Video on TED.com, http://www.ted.com/talks/louie_schwartzberg_nature_beauty_gratitude.html (accessed January 21, 2013).

3 Seasons of the Spirit, *Theological Foundations Paper* (USA, 2011), 9.

4 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, *The Torah: Black Fire on White Fire*, http://www.hir.org/a_weekly_gallery/8.16.02-weekly.html (accessed January 15, 2013).

5 Lindsay McLaughlin, "Moving Spirit," in *Creating Change: The Arts as Catalyst for Spiritual Transformation*, edited by Keri K. Wehlander (Kelowna, BC: CopperHouse, 2008), 82.

6 Henry J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Image, 1992).

7 Hunwick's Egg - Mem Fox » Welcome!, <http://www.memfox.com/hunwicks-egg.html> (accessed January 15, 2013).

Engaging the Imagination and Beyond Talking

Imagination is the essential means, humanly speaking, by which faith becomes possible.
- Edward Robinson, *The Language of Mystery*

In the Theological and Educational Foundations Paper for Seasons of the Spirit, the first affirmation is an invitation “to explore the meaning and mystery in the Bible through the lectionary.” Further, these resources will “encourage children, youth, and adults to enter imaginatively into scripture, experiencing the message that transcends the printed words.” Later in the same document, the fourth affirmation encourages us to nurture faith, “by engaging the imagination through the Bible, tradition, science, technology, and the arts.” One way that Seasons attempts to fulfill that affirmation is by providing “visual and other creative arts to form a pool of images for all to draw upon.”

But what is it that imagination does for us as we study, interpret, or meditate on scripture? Imagination ...

- gives us ways to ponder new possibilities
- sets us on a path to seek hope
- helps us discover new meanings
- encourages us to see, hear, touch, smell, and even taste something in a new way
- places us where we can encounter mystery

It is our imagination that propels us toward the God of all creation. When we bring this gift of imagination to the scripture, it turns ever so slightly in order that it is new for us once more. Without imagination, the message on the printed page is little more than ink and paper. Through our imagination, we can step into the world of New Testament Palestine or walk along the mountainous paths as the shepherd takes the sheep to still waters. Our imagination, fired by God’s Spirit, gives us a glimpse of God’s own vision and hope for all creation. Without God’s gift of imagination to each of us

we would be stuck in the mire of each day, unable to look ahead or behind us with awe and wonder.

Easy access to our imagination too often disappears as we mature, so that by adulthood we consider reality and facts the only valid measure of life. The poets and other artists around us manage to hold on to their imaginations. Some of us do too, but we shelter our use of it, so much that others don’t know it’s there. In order to regain the use of our imagination, we have to bring it out into the open and use it. Like a muscle, when it is not exercised, the imagination withers and grows weak. Like playing a musical instrument, the imagination needs practice to grow and flourish.

Before you engage your imagination, think about the ways that our imagination is brought forth and made lively.

- Our imagination may be nudged when we observe or participate in any of the arts: literature, music, visual arts, or dance.
- Our imagination can be nourished when we play.
- Our imagination can be brought forth in meditation and prayer, particularly if we allow time for silence.
- Our imagination can be nurtured as we serve others.
- Our imagination can be heightened when we spend time with children, allowing their imaginations to feed our own.
- Our imagination can also be fed when we allow artists to help us see as they see.

As the leader of a group or congregation engaged in studying the Bible with the aid of Seasons of the Spirit materials, you are also the leader in fostering the use of imagination to those in your group. To exercise that leadership, begin by spending time nurturing your own imagination, making it possible to enter into the mystery of God’s creation and God’s realm.

Carol Wehrheim

THEORY & PRACTISE

Exploring
Seasons of the Spirit

9

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Imagination at work

Begin now to nourish your imagination. Select an activity below to do today.

- Get the common poster for Advent-Christmas-Epiphany 2003/04, Magnificat, by Judeth Pekala Hawkins. It is also in Behold. Place it flat on a table or the floor. Walk around it and gaze at it from many angles. What is the person in it saying to you as you move around the poster? How does the message change as you move from the bottom of the poster to the top? From side to side?

As you do this, you are trying out your imagination by looking at a work of art from angles that you couldn't were it displayed in a gallery. Trying out new perspectives prompts our imagination to take hold.

- Sit in front of Magnificat with a child. Close your eyes and try to erase the image of the poster from your mind. Ask the child to describe the picture to you and listen carefully. What does the child see? How does the child name what she or he sees? What does the tone of the child's voice tell you about the picture? Seeing the art piece through the eyes of a child can open your eyes to new sights. Our imagination allows us to sit on the margin between reality and mystery and watch and listen.
- Display the poster on a wall. Stand in front of it and mirror the pose of the person there. What words come naturally to you in this pose?

Our imagination comes into play not only through what we imagine, but also through how we move. Allow your imagination to grow as you dare to move into new ways of standing, walking, sitting, and resting.

- Gaze at Magnificat. As you do so, imagine the person in bright sunshine. How does the change of setting change the figure in the art? Place the person in other settings, such as a field of wildflowers or a busy city street, to see what happens then.

Our imagination helps us change the background of life and substitute an alternative. Without this part of our imagination, we have no hope in God's future for all creation.

- Place Magnificat where you can sit comfortably and gaze upon it. Slowly look at each part of the picture. Take note of the colours and the use of light and dark. What is included in the picture? What is not? What motions do the lines (solid and broken) of the picture suggest? What gives depth to the picture? What kind of message without words does this picture give you? If the picture were untitled, what would you call it?

Reading a painting or sculpture in this way takes us into it deeper and deeper. This depth feeds our imagination and grows our ability to enter into the mystery of the work of art.

Choose another activity tomorrow. Repeat the same activity the next day, if you like, or select a new one. Devise your own activity to activate your imagination another day.

Keep your imagination alive. Cherish this gift from God. Nurture it in others, as you lead and as you live.

Beyond Talking: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences

Why don't they have more word puzzles?"
"I think a drama is the best way to present the Bible story."
"We need to sing more songs."

Each person above is naming a preferred way of knowing, one of the multiple intelligences from a theory developed by Howard Gardner, a professor of cognitive psychology at Harvard University. Over two decades ago, his book *Frames of Mind* was published in which he identified seven intelligences, according to his criteria. Since then, he has added one more and hints at a ninth. However, Gardner suspects that there are many more intelligences. The good news is that we each have all of them.

The intelligences

An intelligence, according to Gardner's theory, is the potential to access information in order to use it to solve problems or create goods that are of value in a culture. Among other criteria, each intelligence has a language or code, is something that you can get better at, and has a specific set of skills or operations.

Linguistic intelligence This intelligence is highly prized in the modern world, where the ability to communicate through the written or spoken word is important. We use this intelligence when we learn a new language, prepare a speech, or tell about something that happened on the way to church. Preachers and lecturers are skilled in this intelligence.

Logical-mathematical intelligence

This intelligence, along with the linguistic intelligence, is what most IQ tests measure. Not only do we use this intelligence when we work on a budget, but when we analyze any problem, looking for the solution that makes the most sense. Theologians who approach a subject systematically call on this intelligence.

Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence

Children make use of this intelligence from early on as they explore the world around them by crawling, touching, moving over it. This intelligence is developed to a high level by athletes and knitters, by dancers and carpenters. When we see a liturgical dance, we see this intelligence in motion.

Musical intelligence

This intelligence goes beyond musical performance and includes appreciation and enjoyment of music. It is the intelligence first observed in an infant as the child bounces a foot to the beat of a song; the person sending Morse code also uses it. Congregations exercise this intelligence when they sing hymns together or listen to the choir sing an anthem.

Spatial intelligence

Noticing the patterns of light and dark and objects in space are the core of this intelligence. The artist is the obvious high-end user of this intelligence, but so are you when you work a jigsaw puzzle or rearrange your

furniture. We ponder with this intelligence as we come to understand the symbols present in sanctuaries.

Naturalist intelligence

This intelligence focuses on the ability to recognize and classify the many varieties of animals and plants in our world. Most children exhibit this intelligence in their pre-school years when they can identify every dinosaur. As Christians, this intelligence contributes to our understanding of stewardship of the earth.

Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences

Necessary to human interactions, these two intelligences work closely together. The interpersonal intelligence helps us pick up on the motivations and desires of other people. The intrapersonal intelligence allows us to know ourselves. The former is key to how we develop relationships; the latter, to how we make life choices. Both are key to our lives as Christian disciples, as we relate to one another and as we know ourselves as children of God.

Existential intelligence

Gardner discusses the possibility of this intelligence in *Intelligence Reframed*, but hesitates to name it as an intelligence according to his full set of criteria. His description, however, is important to religious education. The existential intelligence is what we call forth when we ponder the "big" questions: Why am I here? Who or what is God? What is death? Christians, young and old, wrestle with these questions daily.

Intentionally Intergenerational: The Structure of Seasons of the Spirit

Seasons of the Spirit is one inclusive program for the whole congregation. *Seasons of the Spirit* supports faith communities and families in their life together by

- exploring meaning and mystery in the Bible
- being grounded in thoughtful theology
- empowering children, youth, and adults to be transformed in Christ
- inspiring and equipping leaders
- nurturing the imaginative spirit
- offering resources for all ages
- integrating worship, learning, and serving ministries

SeasonsFUSION for Congregational Life

SeasonsFUSION combines worship materials for clergy and other worship leaders with Christian Education materials that can be used with the entire congregation. SeasonsFUSION provides a thoughtful balance between practical planning, biblical background information and worship outlines as well as pages that can be used along with a Christian education team.

SeasonsENCORE Age-Level Resources

These resources are designed to meet the needs of a leader working with a group of approximately 12 learners (15 learners for Multiage). SeasonsENCORE offers the tried and much-loved Age-Level resources that congregations around the world appreciate.

Seasons' vision is for an authentic Christianity lived in our culturally diverse and religiously pluralistic world; to be signs of God's liberating, compassionate, and inclusive love, and to grow in our relationship with God. Seasons continues to nurture faith through liturgy, ritual, imagination, and to encourage Christian growth through worshipping, learning, and serving together. Our true curriculum is how we live our lives together.

— SUSAN BURT, Coordinating Editor, *Seasons of the Spirit*

FEATURES

Seasons of the Spirit is a tool that can add inspiration to your Worship and Christian education and outreach because it:

- Offers resources for 52 weeks of the year
- Supports & encourages stewardship & care of the earth
- Connects faith to life
- Nurtures imagination & creativity through the arts (music and images)
- Offers flexibility, choices & ease of use
- Includes leader support & training
- Includes resources from birth to adult & multi-ages
- Offers Bible stories that are age appropriate
- Addresses what it means to be Christian in a pluralistic world
- Includes resources for worship leaders, Christian educators, outreach leaders, & parents
- Provides great value for your money spent
- Is contemporary & current

Lectionary Based – 4 Seasons per year

Seasons of the Spirit resources are divided into four seasonal packages, following the cycle of the seasons of the Church year. Each year's materials begin with Season of Creation, Pentecost 2 (the second half of the "Season after Pentecost").

- **Season of Creation, Pentecost 2*** (1st Quarter, September—November)
- **Advent, Christmas, Epiphany**** (2nd Quarter, December—February)
- **Lent, Easter** (3rd Quarter, March—May)
- **Pentecost 1** (4th Quarter, June—August)

(Note: monthly designations are approximate as specific dates for each season will vary each year)

* For the first four weeks of September, *Seasons of the Spirit* users can choose to follow the *Revised Common Lectionary* or celebrate the Season of Creation.

** Note: Southern Hemisphere congregations begin with Advent, Christmas, Epiphany.

Seasons ENCORE

FAITH FORMATION RESOURCES

SeasonsENCORE resources are designed to meet the needs of a leader working with a group of approximately 12 learners (15 learners for Multiage).

SeasonsENCORE offers the tried and much-loved Age-Level resources congregations around the world have come to appreciate so much!

SeasonsENCORE follows the semi-continuous stream of the Revised Common Lectionary, and the Season of Creation cycle of readings, and can easily be used in conjunction with SeasonsFUSION.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

WEEKLY

- A Biblical Background page
- A Focus & Prepare page
- A two-page Session Outline (three pages in Multiage)
- Two pages of reproducible Resources (three pages in Multiage)

QUARTERLY

- Articles including About This Season, This Season for the particular Age-Level, and Connecting with the Art
- Six extra Resource pages (eight pages in the Multiage resource)
- Two-page Evaluation Form
- Two art posters

FREE on the website

- Planning
- Library, including the From Start to Finish booklet, replacement resources for All Saints Day and Reformation Day, Virtual Resource Booklet with crafts, patterns, recipes, etc., and more
- Links
- Spirit Sightings
- Support
- Sign up for "Tip of the Week"

AGE-LEVEL RESOURCES

ADULT

Adults enter Bible study from a variety of backgrounds and beliefs. Sessions invite adults to deepen their spirituality and explore their faith through activities and articles that encourage a rich engagement with all four of the weekly lectionary readings. Art images, contemporary writings, and consideration of current issues offer meaningful ways to link faith and life.

The SeasonsENCORE Adult is a great resource for your next study group!

AGES 15-18

This resource promotes the development of leadership skills and encourages young people to serve in the local and global ministries of the church. A "Digging Deeper" section offers groups that enjoy discussion a chance to explore some themes in greater depth. Leaders will find the Ages 15-18 resource perfect for mid-week gatherings, retreats, worship leadership, and outdoor ministry programs.

AGES 12-14

Young teens enjoy self-directed learning. Friendships are important to them and they are beginning to explore a variety of viewpoints within their community and the world. The weekly resources provide opportunities to actively explore the Bible and encourage the development of communication skills. Varied activities meet the needs of different learning styles, and service projects introduce ways to connect with the church and the community.

AGES 9-11

These children enjoy making new friends and typically have the confidence to work in groups. The weekly resources encourage them to use their imaginations and life experiences as they develop biblical knowledge, ask questions, and explore the faith traditions of others. Group projects introduce them to issues of justice and fairness.

AGES 6-8

Weekly resources begin to address the more abstract thinking skills of children in the early grades of school. Leaders will find easy-to-use dramas, stories, and

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THEORY & PRACTISE

—
Exploring
Seasons of the Spirit

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13

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THEORY & PRACTISE

—
Exploring
Seasons of the Spirit

—
14

activities that connect with real life and the eager minds of this enthusiastic group. Spiritual development is nurtured through ritual and encouraging relationships with peers and adults.

The SeasonsENCORE Ages 6-8 Poster Set includes special Story Props posters exclusive to this age group for each quarter.

AGES 3-5

Children in this age range learn through hands-on activities and enjoy routines and rituals. Their developing motor skills are encouraged in the sessions with songs, fingerplays, group activities, and simple craft projects. The weekly material uses interactive storytelling, puppets, drama, and art images to explore Bible stories.

For each season, the Ages 3-5 Poster Set also includes special Storytelling Resource posters exclusive to this age group. And, we provide a free online Age 3 Supplement, for those leaders with a group of mostly 3-year-olds!

I have enjoyed using Seasons of the Spirit for several years. I usually read through the materials for several weeks, or a season together with Gathering (United Church of Canada). Then I have some ideas by the time I get to each individual Sunday. Both my congregations follow the lectionary most of the time, so being prepared is helpful. I like the format - with a page to make notes on first read-through, followed by the notes about each scripture reading. I use the questions from Reflecting on the Word to help me dive more deeply into the scriptures. I often use one or more of the prayers provided, and also appreciate the various suggestions for presenting the scripture reading. I also appreciate the extra readings/articles that pertain to the focus scripture. Although my churches use a traditional style of worship I read through the Living, Learning, Growing ideas to supplement my own sermon preparation, and occasionally find an option to include in worship. Thank you for this great worship leader resource.

— MARY FAITH BLACKBURN, Recognized Designated Lay Minister,
Clairmont United Church

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES

MULTIAGE

The SeasonsENCORE Multiage resource is uniquely designed to meet the needs of a leader with a single group of up to 15 children between the ages of 5 and 12. The Multiage resource offers different age-appropriate options for engaging with the biblical stories and provides additional reproducible resource sheets. The Respond section includes “activity zones” that address different ages, interests, learning styles, and abilities. For example, children can choose between an Art zone, Music zone, Outreach zone, or Quiet zone. This group will also experience storytelling scripts, self-directed learning, and relationships with children of different ages as they create community, sharing time and space each week.

Seasons By the Week

Seasons of the Spirit now offers SeasonsENCORE age-level materials by the week. These weekly resources can be conveniently downloaded in a PDF format. These weekly resources are reusable. There are no copyright restrictions.

Pageants, Dramas, & Worship Outlines

Pageants and Dramas range from minimal preparation (1 scene, few props, smaller cast) to more elaborate productions (3-5 scenes, more props, larger cast), as well as from traditional to modern retellings. Special worship outlines for Advent, Holy Week, Good Friday and Easter are also available.

Season of Creation

Seasons of the Spirit offers the Season of Creation as a downloadable, stand-alone, four-week resource. This resource contains all of the background information, ideas, and suggestions needed to celebrate the Season of Creation in congregations. Season of Creation is available in Years 1, 2 and 3.

Seasons FUSION

FOR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

Worship and Christian Education Resources

SeasonsFUSION = The Perfect All-In-One Resource

SeasonsFUSION is based on the semi-continuous stream of the Revised Common Lectionary and combines worship materials with Christian education materials that can be used with the entire congregation. Everything needed to integrate the worship, learning, and serving ministries of your congregation is provided.

SeasonsFUSION = Cutting Edge and Unique

SeasonsFUSION is developed in partnership with congregations located around the world, which means it is international, ecumenical and grassroots all at the same time.

SeasonsFUSION = Flexibility

SeasonsFUSION is designed for

- Clergy who want worship resources
- Congregations with lay worship/preaching teams who want extra worship resources
- Large congregations that use ENCORE for their age-level classes and want additional resources for intergenerational Christian education or to use with other mixed-age groups
- Smaller congregations that no longer have or want age-level classes
- Congregations that want to provide at-home resources for their families.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

WEEKLY

- A Planning page
- A Biblical Background page
- A Reflection and Focus page
- A three-page Worship Outline
- A Poetry and Prose page, containing articles, poems, and stories
- A Bible Story page
- Stations (activity centres) pages
- Children's Activity Leaflet

QUARTERLY

- Articles – including About this Season, Connecting with the Art; Communion Prayers for the season; and articles that support the theme of the season(s)
- Living the Seasons – connects congregation members to what is happening in church. Contains suggestions for how to use SeasonsFUSION within and beyond the group that gathers for worship, including individuals and families at home
- Gatherings for All Ages – outlines for all-ages worship events that include a meal and that are appropriate for people with no church background. Perfect for community outreach.
- Special Worship Outlines – including a Christmas pageant, Christmas Day, Blue Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Thanksgiving
- Two art posters
- FUSION resources in Word, poster images for projection, the Bible Stories in MP3, and more
- Music resources integrated into FUSION materials
- Downloadable bulletin covers for church use

FREE on the website

- Planning
- Library, including the From Start to Finish booklet, replacement resources for All Saints Day and Reformation Day, Virtual Resource Booklet with crafts, patterns, recipes, etc., and more
- Links
- Spirit Sightings
- Support
- Sign up for “Tip of the Week”

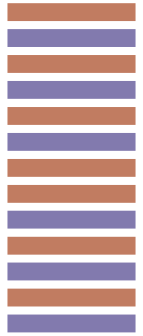
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15

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