

**A. JOURNEYING FROM EASTER TO PENTECOST**

Easter is the high point of the Christian year. At the center of this special season of 50 days stands the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the return to life of the Human One who suffered innocently and was killed, we see God’s love overcoming the power of sin and evil in a broken world. At Easter we are reminded that God is likewise present with us today, despite the suffering and struggle many of us may face. Easter proclaims that God can overcome those things which prevent us from being the caring, loving community God calls us to be. Easter reminds us that destruction and death are not the final word—now or for eternity.

In the scripture readings for the Easter Season we hear about the joy and discovery experienced by Jesus’ followers as they encountered the resurrected Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Good News of Easter comes as a gradual dawning, (hence a season of 50 days) with the disciples experiencing Jesus’ presence with them in various places. Jesus emphasizes the commandment that they are to love one another and have faith in God. He promises to send them the Holy Spirit to be with them to guide and strengthen them.

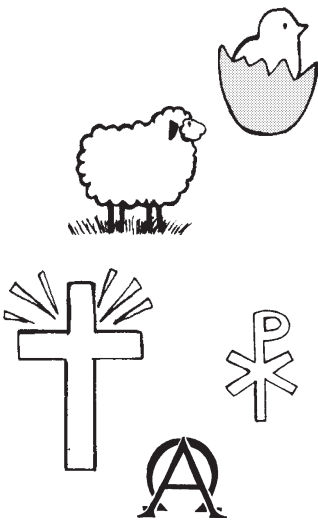
On the fortieth day after Easter, (Ascension Day according to Luke’s chronology) Jesus tells the disciples that they will see him no more and the responsibility which he had—to witness to the great power of God—is transferred to the disciples. (Remember that 40 is symbolic of a significant period of transformation) Ten days later, at Pentecost, the pain and emptiness which followed Jesus’ departure are swept away by the joy of their encounter with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes to the disciples as their promised “helper,” and the Christian Church is born. This does not mean that they have finished struggling, however. Our Epistle readings for the Easter Season describe letters of encouragement being sent to early Christian communities. They reveal a young church that needed reassurance, like the church today, by the Easter message of God’s presence and all-encompassing love in the midst of difficult times.



**B. EASTER SYMBOLS**

Throughout the lessons in Unit VI, we include suggestions for the use of Easter symbols in lesson activities. The following are descriptions of some Easter symbols:

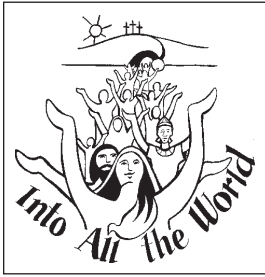
- a) **Butterfly:** The butterfly symbolizes resurrection and new life as it emerges from the cocoon transformed into a new being.
- b) **Chick, Egg, Lamb, Flowers:** Each of these symbolizes new life. An egg looks lifeless, but new life emerges out of it. An egg can also symbolize the stone that was rolled away from the tomb.
- c) **Lily:** The lily is a sign of life coming from death, as a bloom comes from a dry seemingly lifeless bulb. A lily looks like a trumpet sounding the Good News of the Resurrection.
- d) **Sunrise:** The women came to the tomb at sunrise on the first day of the week, to anoint Jesus’ body, only to find that Jesus had risen. Sunrise can likewise symbolize resurrection and a new dawn in our own lives.
- e) **Cross of Glory:** The empty cross with rays symbolizes the glory of the risen Christ.
- f) **Chi Rho:** Chi and Rho are the first 2 letters of the Greek word meaning “the Christ.”
- g) **Alpha and Omega:** The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, symbolizing eternity and the joyous message that Christ has risen and reigns forever—based on Rev. 1:8 “I am the first and the last... who is, and was, and is to come.”



**C. UNIT THEME—INTO ALL THE WORLD**

The first Easter was filled with movement right from the beginning. From the boulder which was miraculously moved away from Jesus’ burial place, to the women running from the tomb in fear and awe, the Easter story is about journeying from one place to another—about spreading the Good News and being transformed by it. In scripture readings for the Easter Season, we see God reaching out to humanity through the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit. Doubting, despairing individuals like Thomas and Peter have their faith renewed through the Resurrection. Thomas—the doubter—believes once again. Peter—the one who denied Christ 3 times—is given courage and vision. He responds to God’s inclusive love by reaching beyond himself to others (including Gentiles), no matter what their background or where they are from.

He heals a lame man in the name of Christ, proclaims the Good News in front of the Sanhedrin and reaches out to Gentiles like Cornelius, the Roman centurion. Like Peter and Thomas, we can also move beyond the injustice and pain of the cross to resurrection, transformation, and healing. We can begin again.



The Unit VI logo expresses Christ's call to share God's love with others. In the logo, people are moving from the cross, through the tomb and out into all the world, led by the Holy Spirit. We see Mary Magdalene, the first person to witness the risen Christ, at the front of the crowd. Peter and the Ethiopian leader, whose stories we explore, are also recognizable. Of course the spreading of the gospel message was not dependant on the disciples alone. It took many, many people who, hearing the good news, went out to share the resurrection story with others—people in Jesus' day and throughout time. Not all in the group are adults—children play an important part in spreading this message too.

In the Acts reading for the Fifth Sunday of Easter, the disciple Philip shares the Good News with an official of the Ethiopian government. In so doing, he is sharing the Good News with people outside the limits of the Roman Empire. Like Philip, and the people moving forward on our logo, we have a responsibility to express God's love and justice in the wider world. We do not have to do this work of transformation alone—the Holy Spirit will continue to guide and empower us as we share and live out our faith.

Music is a powerful way to celebrate the Good News of Easter. In Unit VI, the song on which we focus are "Clap Your Hands" and "Jesus Put This Sing into Our Hearts" which are found in the *Rainbow Songbook* and on the CD. The song "God Is So Good" is also used at all levels on May 6<sup>th</sup> (Philip and the Ethiopian story), as it includes a second verse in Swahili to listen to or to sing.

#### D. TWO SPECIAL INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP SUNDAYS

There are 2 special Intergenerational Sundays in this Unit—Easter Day and Pentecost. These are such important festivals of the Church Year that we feel strongly that children should be present in worship to celebrate them with the whole congregation. For those congregations that have Sunday School before or after worship, we have also included an "All Ages Lesson" for those Sundays.

#### E. MOVING THROUGH UNIT VI WITH CHILDREN

Many special activities are included in the Unit VI lessons for children. These include:

##### a) Easter Candle-lighting Ritual

Ritual enables children to experience and gain insight into the mystery of their faith.

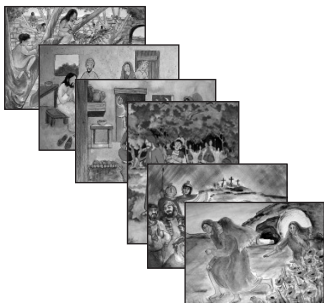
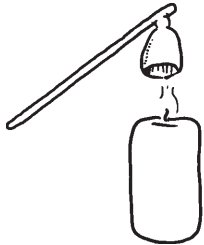
Throughout Unit VI, the Nursery, Beginner and Primary and Junior classes will participate in an Easter candle-lighting ritual at the beginning of their class time. The candle acts as a reminder that Jesus is risen and with us, while the smoke that rises from it when it is snuffed out represents the Spirit of God that goes out over all the world. (In the past we have asked that the worship candle be a votive on inside a class container, but for this unit we ask that the candles be large pillar candles and they are snuffed out during the opening ritual so are safe.

##### b) Community Visitor

In Unit VI we reflect on how the disciples spread the Good News and helped establish the early Church. During this time it is appropriate that children be given an opportunity to become more familiar with their own church community. That is why we suggest that a new visitor be introduced each week to the Beginner and Primary classes. This person should be someone who is comfortable with young children and is able to stay for the entire class. See the Preparation sections of each lesson for suggestions of people to invite, and ideas for how they might participate in the classroom activities. The Nursery class has a visitor on April 29 and the Junior class has visitors on April 29 and May 6<sup>th</sup>. Check these lessons out right away so that you can be prepared and invite your visitors with lots of notice.

##### c) Teaching Aids from Unit V

It is important to help children make the transition between the events of Holy Week (Unit V) and those of Easter (Unit VI). That is why we have suggested that in week 2 of Unit VI, teachers "re-cap" the events of Holy Week, using the set of 6 teaching pictures from Unit V. These include "Waving the Palm Branches" (#53), "A Gift for Jesus" (#54), "Sharing a Meal" (#55), "In the Garden" (#56), "The Three Crosses" (#57), and "The Empty Tomb" (#58), for Nursery, Beginner, and Primary children have "By the Fire" (#59), and "On the Hillside" (#60) in place of "The Three Crosses" (#57), and "The Empty Tomb" (#58)



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## F. TEACHING ABOUT FORGIVENESS

The title of the lessons for Week 2 (April 15) is “Forgiving and Restoring.” In Junior and Youth lessons we explore the feelings of remorse that the disciples experienced after Jesus died. We also reflect on Jesus’ statement to the disciples “if you forgive people’s sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Before you address the issue of forgiveness with young people, it is important to reflect on the scriptural understanding of forgiveness first. As Christians, we believe that forgiveness is an important part of being a member of a healing and loving community. And it is important to remember that forgiveness is often the final step in a long process of healing from brokenness. It takes place after there has been an open acknowledgment of the hurt that has been done, true repentance has occurred, and the offending behavior has ended. Depending on the nature of the rift, forgiveness can be a process of reflection and action that can take a short time or many years. Yet when people pass through this process successfully, at their own pace, it can be a rewarding, healing act for both the person who was hurt and the one who had done the hurting. If people are pressured to forgive before they have gone through a process that may include naming their anger and pain, it can be harmful for them.

When we discuss forgiveness, we have to be careful to remember that there may be young people in our church school classes who have been or continue to be the subject of abuse. We may also have participants who have treated others in anti-social or violent ways. That means that it is especially important that we convey to young people that forgiveness is not a “quick fix” solution, nor is it a denial of wrongdoing. Jesus gave us the responsibility to choose to forgive. We must each choose to do so when we feel it will truly be an act of healing, reconciliation, and justice.



## G. THE GOSPEL OF THOMAS (Youth lesson, Week 2):

Little is known about the activities of Thomas, the “doubting disciple.” However, Thomas has traditionally been named as the author of an apocryphal gospel, known as the Gospel of Thomas. This gospel consists mainly of sayings attributed to Jesus. Discovered in 1945 among a collection of ancient religious texts known as the Nag Hammadi Library (named after the city in Egypt near which the collection was found), the Gospel of Thomas was likely written at the same time as the canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), around 70-100 CE. Although Thomas is named as its author, it is probable that it was written by someone else, and then attributed to Thomas so that it would be seen as reliable and authoritative.

## H. EATING CODES IN OTHER RELIGIONS (Youth Lesson, Week 6)

According to custom and law, Jewish people eat kosher foods. Kosher, derived from the Hebrew word *kasher*, means “proper.” Kosher meat is from an animal killed by a rabbi according to a prescribed ritual, or food prepared with the approval of a rabbi. Ancient Jewish law forbade the eating of certain animals such as rabbits, pigs and shellfish (Leviticus 11) which were considered “unclean.” Many Jews around the world continue to adhere to these laws and will eat only kosher foods.



Many other religions have eating codes which include foods that are prohibited, times of fasting and festivals that include special foods. For example, Muslims do not eat pork. They also fast from sunup until sundown each day during the month of Ramadan to show their devotion to Mohammed who fasted and prayed while he waited for Allah’s words about how he and his people should live. Some Christians today still fast, giving up meat or other rich foods during the 40 days of Lent, symbolizing the 40 days Jesus fasted, prayed and was tempted in the desert.

## I. DEMOGRAPHICS (Youth Lesson, Week 6)

In the youth lesson for May 13, youth are invited to create a “social profile” of their community. There are many ways that this can be done. Your local library can provide you with statistics describing your country’s population (i.e. age distribution, income, racial-ethnic diversity, etc.). You can also gather recent issues of neighborhood and community newspapers, flyers from local community organizations (particularly multicultural centers, social service clubs and anti-poverty groups), and church newsletters. Invite students to sort through these materials and identify social concerns in your community. Finally, ask youth to share their own understanding of the situation of youth in your area.

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## J. CHRISTIAN FAMILY SUNDAY—MAY 13, 2012

Many churches have chosen to recognize the second Sunday in May as Christian Family Sunday—a day when the emphasis is placed on the loving relationships between all of us as members of God’s family (rather than Mother’s Day which for some causes feelings of loneliness and exclusion.) This celebration is not part of the Christian Year, but has become a tradition in many denominations. It reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters, daughters and sons of God, called to love and nurture one another like family.



## K. PENTECOST—May 27, 2012

The Easter Season culminates in Pentecost, the festival of fire, wind and the Holy Spirit. The color for this day is a vivid red, signifying the “tongues of fire” which rested on each disciple, transforming the learners (disciples) into those who are sent forth (apostles). At Pentecost we recall that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples. We celebrate the gifts of the Spirit we have each been given, and that God’s Spirit continues to be present among us. Finally, we remember that there is often a cost to discipleship. The red of Pentecost is also the color of martyrdom, a symbol of what was in store for the early Christians and so many who would come after them. The color red reminds us that sharing and living out the Good News involves struggle and suffering as well as transformation and joy.

The celebration of Pentecost did not begin with Christians. Fifty days after the Jewish festival of Passover comes the Spring harvest festival of “Shavuot” or “Feast of Weeks.” The word “Pentecost” is the Greek word for fiftieth and was the name given to the festival by Greek-speaking Jews. In ancient times, Jewish farmers brought an offering of barley, called an omer, to the Temple on the second day of the Passover festival. According to Jewish law, on the fiftieth day after the bringing of the omer, the festival of Shavuot was held to celebrate the wheat harvest.



Later, when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, people could no longer bring their gifts of grain to the temple, so they decided to use Shavuot as a time to remember how God gave the 10 Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. When Jews celebrate Shavuot in worship today, they recite the 10 Commandments. They also read the Book of Ruth because Ruth—the heroine of the book—supports her mother-in-law by gathering the grain left along the edges of the fields by the farmers, during the harvest. Today Jews also put decorative baskets of fruit and flowers on display in schools, homes and temples to celebrate the harvest and remember Ruth’s faithfulness and God’s love.



## L. PENTECOST SYMBOLS

- a) **Wind:** The coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples at the Pentecost festival is described as a noise from the sky like a strong wind blowing.
- b) **Tongues of Fire:** Fire is a symbol used in Hebrew Scriptures to represent God’s presence. In the Acts story about Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit is also described as tongues of fire spreading out and touching each one in the room.
- c) **Dove:** At Jesus’ Baptism, the coming of the Holy Spirit is described as a dove descending, so it is also used at Pentecost
- d) **Ship:** Symbol for the church, which began at Pentecost. The large assembly part of a church building is sometimes called the “nave” which means ship. The church is seen as the means by which we journey together in faith on the sea of life. The wind of the Spirit fills the sails of our ship.

## M. AS UNIT VI DRAWS TO A CLOSE...

### a) Birthdays

Since this unit is the last one with graded classes you may want to celebrate all those who have birthdays between May 20 and September when graded classes begin again.

### b) Presentation of Certificates

We think it is important to recognize the participation of our children and youth (and perhaps adults too) in the *Whole People of God* program. We have included a special Certificate of Participation that you can use, or you may prefer to make a special card of your own. The *Whole People of God* certificate is located on the website with the Unit VI materials.



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**c) Class Photos**

As a reminder to participants that they belong to a church family, we encourage teachers to take a class photograph. You will likely need to take a picture for several consecutive weeks to ensure each child is included. The photographs may be handed out on Week 7.

**d) The Beginning of Summer Sessions**

For the Sundays in June and throughout July and August the age-graded lessons give way to a simpler format. At this time of year (in the Northern Hemisphere) as summer begins, families are often away on the weekends and the numbers of children attending is lower. None-the-less it is important to provide good Christian Education resources for those families who do attend, and to encourage those who might stay home saying that there is nothing for the children.

**e) Evaluation Feedback and Ordering Materials for Next Year**

Please contact us with your evaluation of these materials so that we can continue to refine and reshape the curriculum to meet your needs. We especially want to know about the kinds of things you did in church school this past year, including information about alternatives you used as you adapted the material in your situation. It is also time to be placing your order for next year's materials.