

Part A

The agenda for the upcoming Christian Education (CE) committee meeting in my congregation includes several “regular” agenda items and one item that occurs annually. These agenda items include reviewing the CE budget and recent/upcoming spending, reviewing the schedule of Sunday School teachers for the coming two weeks, reviewing the Sunday School curriculum for the coming Sunday and nominating two senior high youth to serve on the CE committee. The nomination of two senior high youth is an annual event, and often lacks the spiritual reflection and discernment appropriate for such an important decision. The CE committee is solely responsible for the educational programs directed at the young people of the church, so the youth on the CE committee have an especially important role as the representatives most directly impacted by the decisions of the CE committee. For this reason, I am developing a Bible study that will focus the group on the spiritual significance of these nominations and the importance of the contributions these youth will make to the direction of the church’s Christian education.

To begin, I take several minutes to reflect on the spiritual significance, as I see it, of including youth on the church’s CE committee. Reflecting on the youths’ role on the CE committee leads me to discern the importance of inviting God’s Spirit to direct us towards youth who will be sensitive to the needs of all the church’s young people, mature in their leadership roles on the committee and faithful to God’s guidance as church leaders. From this reflection, several biblical stories and texts come to mind concerning the Bible study/meditation. Specifically, Jesus’ command to his disciples to let the children come to him in Mark 10:13-16 is relevant. Also, Isaiah 10:33-11:9 is valuable in its depiction of a post-exilic life of perfect harmony, led by children. Finally, passages from the Hebrew Bible that reflect the importance of including children in the festivals and ceremonies of the Israelite faith are valuable to this study because they portray the importance of including young people in the life of faith so that they will learn and continue it; I am thinking specifically of Exodus 12:21-28—the story of the first Passover.

As I continue to reflect, I take note of the significant themes emerging from these relevant scriptures. Notably, “youth/children,” “generations,” “learn” and “tradition” appear to me to be key words that will be especially helpful for locating a passage of scripture on which to base this Bible study/meditation. Using *Oremus Bible Browser (OBB)*, I begin an online word search to locate specific

passages of scripture that will be valuable to this Bible study/meditation.¹ *OBB* is an internet-based search engine that functions like a concordance. *OBB* is specifically helpful because it searches biblical texts in the *NRSV*, which is the translation of the Bible I will use to facilitate the bible study/meditation.²

I begin my word search with “youth” and find several passages containing this word. As I browse through the results, I am looking for stories and passages that portray youth as leaders, or specifically valuable members of the faith community. I repeat this process with the word “children.” However, the *OBB* search for “children” yields over 700 scriptural references, which would be cumbersome to sort through. So, I use the concordance in the back of my New Oxford Annotated Study Bible to search for “children.” This search yields a much more manageable result. From the results of these word searches, I choose two biblical passages that have the greatest potential for the Bible study/meditation. Next, I continue my word search using the *OBB*. My search for “generations” yields several results, from which I choose one passage. From this word search I am looking for a passage that emphasizes the importance of multi-generational leadership in the faith community. “Learning” also yields two promising passages that speak specifically to the importance of adults teaching young people to participate in the faith community. Finally, “tradition” does not yield any passages that appear to be valuable for this Bible study/meditation.

The texts I have collected for this Bible study/meditation, then, are Mark 10:13-16, Isaiah 10:33-11:9, Exodus 12:21-28, 1 Samuel 17:31-40, 1 Timothy 4:11-16, Exodus 40:1-15, Deuteronomy 4:9-10 and Deuteronomy 31:9-13. Because I have such a large collection of texts, it is necessary for me to next consider the advantages and disadvantages of each text for this Bible study/meditation. Mark 10:13-16 demonstrates Jesus’ care for and inclusion of children. Jesus goes so far as to identify children as model citizens of God’s Commonwealth (Kingdom). However, this passage does not identify the specific qualities that make young people so important to the faith community.

In Isaiah 10 and 11 children are the ones who will lead in the post-exilic life. The author portrays a time of true harmony even between the most opposing creatures, and children are the ones who will lead in maintaining this harmony. Because we are preparing to nominate young people

¹ <http://bible.oremus.org>

² *New Revised Standard Version*

to become leaders in our congregation, this passage seems especially appropriate. Still, the passage is full of prophetic metaphors that may make it difficult to discern the full impact of the text for our situation.

The story of the first Passover in Exodus 12 is a familiar passage to most church members, and the story is engaging and readily accessible to persons with little biblical knowledge. In addition, the story reveals the importance of “passing down” the stories and traditions of the faith community so that young people will learn and continue them. However, the story of the Passover makes only a brief mention of the traditioning process and presents little material that will be relevant to this Bible study.

1 Samuel 17:31-40 is the story of David and Goliath, which is a very familiar story to most church members. This familiarity allows the Bible study/meditation to move beyond the simple facts of the story to more central and pertinent issues of interpretation. The story presents David, a young person whose ability to do this great deed is doubted by everyone around him. David’s success in the face of this doubt presents a platform for the committee to reflect on the importance of youth as leaders of the congregation. One must be cautious, however, not to assume that the members of the committee doubt the ability of young people to serve faithfully on the CE committee. Still, an appropriate interpretation presents the opportunity for the committee to reflect on the unique skills and qualities youth bring to the task of leadership.

1 Timothy 4:11-16 is a commonly used text to support the importance of including youth in church leadership. The text calls for youth to set the standard for Christian living and to exercise the gifts within them for the good of the community. This text might be an important reminder of the gifts and abilities youth bring to leadership and the importance of including youth in leadership roles. However, this text is so commonly used to support the inclusion of youth that it may be more valuable to invite committee members to reflect on another part of the Bible that calls for the inclusion of youth in church leadership.

This passage in Exodus 40 describes the installation of the Tabernacle for Israelite worship. The passage describes the preparation of the Tabernacle and is especially relevant to this Bible study/meditation because of its description of the inter-generational leadership of the Tabernacle. The passage spends a great deal of time describing the ritualistic preparation of the Tabernacle,

which may not fully resonate with modern Christian readers, and might distract the committee members from the real relevance of the passage for our task of nominating youth to serve on our inter-generational committee.

Deuteronomy 4:9-10 urges adult Israelites to remember what God has done for them and to teach their children so they too will be faithful to YHWH. This text, like others, is relevant because of the exhortation to teach young people the faith tradition so they will learn and preserve it. However, this passage is brief and gives little context from which persons can discern the true significance of raising children in the stories and practices of the faith tradition.

Much like the preceding text, Deuteronomy 31:9-13 is an exhortation to include children in the traditions of the faith so that they will learn to participate and live faithfully. This text gives more context than the preceding passage, but the mentioned “year of remission” and “festival of booths” would most likely be unfamiliar to modern Christian readers and present a distraction from the real significance of the text for our Bible study/mediation.

After reflecting on the many passages relevant to this Bible study/meditation, I have decided to use the story of David and Goliath from 1 Samuel 17:31-40. The description of David’s readiness for service, in spite of his community doubting his capability, is an important reminder to the committee that God is at work preparing persons for service and leadership in ways that we do not always recognize or appreciate. Not only that, young David’s faith in the face of a tremendous test is an important testimony to those of us who often doubt God’s presence when life (or the life of the church) threatens us. Finally, David’s ineffectiveness when wearing Saul’s armor teaches us that the youth we invite to serve the church may not find the “usual” ways of serving on a church committee effective or attractive, and we must find ways to accommodate our methods to incorporate these new leaders, their gifts and their insights into our ways of serving the church.

Part B

Now that I have chosen the passage of scripture on which to base this Bible study/meditation, I read it thoroughly, several times through, in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). With the exception of one word, “wadi,” the language in the New Revised Standard Version translation should be familiar to modern readers with at least a high school education. I consult the New International Version (NIV) translation as well to determine whether or not the

language of this translation might add to the effect of the story, but I find that it does not. However, the NIV translation does reveal the meaning of the word “wadi.” The committee I will lead this Bible study/meditation for consists of highly educated persons who will be comfortable with all of the language used in the NRSV translation, and since this translation is considered to be the most accurate to the original text and another translation will not add anything to effectiveness of the story, I will use the NRSV translation. After the reading of the passage during the Bible study/meditation, I will share the meaning of the word “wadi” with the group.

I also consult the New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary (NIB) to see if scholars who have studied this text might contribute valuable insights for this Bible study/meditation. I have chosen to consult the NIB commentary because the aim of this series is pastoral and intended specifically for use as an aid to preachers and teachers in the church. The language of the NIB commentary series should be entirely familiar to persons with theological education, and largely familiar to lay persons without formal theological training. The NIB commentary is useful in that it confirms my initial interpretation of the passage and its usefulness for this Bible study/meditation. It also develops and deepens some of the insights of my own interpretation.

To this point, I have reflected on the spiritual nature of the agenda item for which I am planning this Bible study/meditation, considered key words that will guide the content of the lesson, collected a broad pool of scriptural passages and evaluated their advantages and disadvantages for use in this Bible study/meditation. I have chosen to use 1 Samuel 17:31-40 as the passage of scripture on which to base this Bible study/meditation. Lastly, I have read the passage several times through in the translation I plan to use for the Bible study/meditation and consulted the NIB commentary for further insights into the relevance of this passage to the situation of our CE committee.

At this point, it is necessary to develop questions that will help the committee members ascertain the full impact and relevance of the biblical text for our situation. I begin with *clarifying questions*, which will help the committee members “explore the biblical author’s intent in telling the story.”³ The clarifying questions I develop for this Bible study/meditation are as follows:

1. Why is it necessary for David to prove he is capable of fighting and defeating Goliath? What evidence does he give?

³ Karen Marie Yust, *Attentive to God: Spirituality in the Church Committee* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001) 25.

2. Is David's inability to use the armor given to him by Saul evidence of David's weakness or inferiority?

The first question is intended to help the committee members consider the reasons that Saul might have for doubting David's ability to defeat the Philistine. In addition, the second part of the question prompts persons to consider the ways David justifies himself before Saul, and whether or not David ought to need to prove himself to the others. The second question prompts persons to realize and identify David's uniqueness from Saul and the other warriors and leaders before him. Both of these questions ask committee members to consider the information presented in the story and to realize the more subtle themes of faith and difference.

Next, I develop *experiential questions*, which will help us realize and name some of the connections between the biblical text and our own situation. The experiential questions are as follows:

1. In what ways will we expect the youth we nominate to prove themselves as capable leaders in the church?
2. What customary "reparations for service" do we value as a committee that may not be effective for the youth we nominate to serve on this committee.

The first question is intended to help committee members identify the roles we will expect the nominated youth to fulfill and both the ways in which we might hold these youth accountable to appropriate standards for leaders in the church and the ways in which we might demand more of these youth than is appropriate or that we demand of ourselves. The second question prompts committee members to identify the "usual" means by which committee members fulfill their leadership roles and to be proactive about identifying some methods that may not be effective or valuable to the youth joining the committee.

The final questions that will guide the content of the Bible study/meditation are *responsive questions*. These questions are as follows:

1. In what ways will we empower and equip the youth we nominate to be faithful and effective leaders in the church?

2. How will we make space in our hearts and minds, as well as our committee meetings and leadership roles, in order to identify the unique gifts and abilities the nominated youth will bring to this committee?

Again, both these questions challenge committee members to be proactive about identifying the ways in which the committee and individuals can prepare themselves for the addition of the nominated youth. The first question asks committee members to identify the information, customs and responsibilities that the youth must be taught in order to be successful at their leadership roles. This question also places the responsibility for the youths' success on the current members of the CE committee and charges them to look to Saul's declaration in the biblical passage, "Go, and may the LORD be with you!" as a model of the need to authorize the youth to lead in the name of God. The second question calls for the current committee members to identify ways in which they might prepare themselves for youth who may perform their leadership tasks differently and may even ask for committee meetings to function differently.

Now that I have developed questions that will aid the committee members to draw out the significance of this biblical story for our context and situation, I develop an activity that will assist the committee members to begin to embody the learning and reflection that has occurred during the first part of this Bible study/meditation. In order to develop an activity that is relevant to the biblical story and also engaging for committee members, I spend more than a few moments reflecting on creative and meaningful ways to engage the material. After this time, I return to the text and read it again so as to confirm the relevance of my idea to the biblical text.

For this activity, I will invite the committee members to join me outside the church and ask each of them to locate a rock on the church grounds. Once everyone has found a rock we will move back inside the church to our meeting area. Here, I will remind the committee members that David used rocks to defeat the Philistine and that, while our goal as a committee is not to "defeat" certain persons, tasks or concerns, it does often feel like we are facing giants. I will invite committee members to spend some time reflecting on their own service on the CE committee and to identify the lessons and insights that have been most valuable to them in their service to the church. I will then collect the stones and place them in a pouch topped with a drawstring. Once I have collected all the stones, I will give the committee members a small piece of paper and ask them to write down

their insights on the paper given to them. I will then collect the pieces of paper in the pouch and this will be our gift to the nominated youth when they join the CE committee.

This activity will provide the committee members with an opportunity to reflect on their own service to the church and to recall the insights that have been most crucial to their success as leaders in the church. In addition, the activity prompts committee members to begin thinking about the ways in which they can teach the youth who join the committee the customs and lessons necessary to be successful leaders, as well as beginning to think of themselves as the ones responsible for the young people's success. Finally, this activity prolongs the significance and meaning of the Bible study/meditation beyond this one night by creating a gift to be given to the new members of the committee as a sort of initiation, and also has the potential to create a ritual by which the existing CE committee members welcome and initiate new members each year.

Part C

During the Bible study/meditation, it will be important for me to model good listening skills and to promote a comfortable and safe environment for each person to offer their insights. To do this, I will remind the group in the beginning of our meditation that not every person needs to share their thoughts and reflections with the group, but that we must work together to promote an atmosphere in which there is respect for every person and conversational space for every person's ideas. I will share with group several steps suggested by Karen-Marie Yust for promoting this sort of atmosphere. She says, "We contribute to this kind of environment by practicing the basics of good group communication: stating our own thoughts as personal ideas rather than universal claims ('I think' rather than 'everybody knows'), paying attention to who has spoken and who has yet to speak, allowing one individual to finish a statement before others begin to speak, and permitting differences of opinion to be shared without fear of condemnation."⁴ As the facilitator, it will be important for me to remain "in the moment" with the group, "rather than fiddling with [my] notes or rushing on to the next 'point' to be covered."⁵

I will also attempt to create a physical space that is comfortable and conducive to sharing and spiritual reflection. Firstly, the room in which we meet is furnished with comfortable couches and chairs, and I will arrange these furnishings into a circle, which will allow the committee

⁴ Yust, 27.

⁵ Yust, 28.

members to make eye contact with each other as they share and also establish an equality among the members. None of the committee members are physically disabled, so I will not have to make special arrangements that allow persons to go outside during the Bible study/meditation. The lighting in the room provides ample light for reading and seeing each other, so special lighting arrangements will also not be necessary. However, I will place a candle at the head of the room and light this candle at the beginning of the meditation to symbolize God's presence with us. This candle will remain lit throughout the committee meeting. I will also place a Bible at each seat so that persons can use them as necessary.