

# ROUNDabout

Fall 2007



The newsletter for Gather 'Round leaders

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In my family, as in others, our schedules take us in many different directions. This past year we've discovered a counterforce to that centrifugal pull: each week in our Gather 'Round sessions we all focus on the same Bible story.

A small thing, isn't it? Our drive home from church and our Sunday meal have become times when we check in on a common theme. For us as parents, it's helpful to know what the day's Bible story was before our kindergarten begins to explain it to us. Our junior high son likes to share, but it's easier when we can ask a question out of our experience with the text that day. And even our high schooler will engage when he can tell us how his group's take on the story was different than that of the Middlers I teach.

It doesn't take a lot of time. But we're finding that we are building a family ritual that our kids will remember all their lives. I'm glad for the other events in our lives that bring us together—school activities, family trips, board games, bedtime stories—but I'm very happy that we are also sharing a weekly family spiritual practice. We are building on rock. What a good foundation.

—Anna Speicher, Director and Editor

## Why teach?

As you begin the new Sunday school year, think of your motivation for teaching. Why did you say “yes” to teaching? Whatever the reason, your answer is a “yes” to God as well as the congregation. Teaching is one of the most important ministries in the church. It is right up there with pastoring (see Ephesians 4:11–12). Partnering with God in nurturing faith in others is an awesome privilege.

In preparing to teach, follow the direction of the teacher's guide, which has been carefully constructed. Read it carefully, beginning with the biblical text and the Bible insights. As you review the session plan, remember the people in your class and how this content will feed their spiritual lives. Remember to seek God's guidance in your planning.

You have less than an hour to teach each week. What will you do with this time? How can you help your group experience God and God's word so that they grow in their understanding of God and God's ways? Use the time wisely since, for some children, this is only time they spend with the Bible and talk of spiritual matters. Treat it as holy time – Sunday school is not a craft program or child care, nor a club or school session. It is time with God and the Christian community, where Christian practices and spiritual disciplines shape people into lifelong followers of Jesus.

## Teach with the learner in mind

During the first few weeks of the quarter, follow the session plan closely, because it has been written with the learner in mind. Carefully observe your group members. Who likes to sing? Who can't sit still? Who likes doing things alone? Who is chatty and friendly with you and others in the group? Who is bored, and why?

People have learning preferences. The only way to discover how people learn best is to observe how they respond to the various activities in a session. For example, when you offer more than one response activity, you allow the participants to experience God in a way that truly works for them.

In their own style, learners meet God through conversation, hands-on activities, music, silence, actions, and words. The gift a teacher gives is to provide many different ways to help them connect with God. The icons in the Responding time highlight different ways of learning.

## TEACHING INSIGHT

## EDUCATOR'S TIP

USER  
IDEA

Last year I was looking for a way to help the junior youth in my group consciously make the transition to the Sunday school hour, and to teach them spiritual disciplines. I explained what I wanted to accomplish and told the youth they needed to bring their Bibles each week. I told them that for the first ten minutes of class, they'd be asked to silently reflect on the weekly Bible text and prepare to study it together. I planned this to be before sharing time, which they all enjoy a great deal.

Some people showed up with Bibles right away and others needed many reminders. Each week, I wrote the Bible text on the board, lit a candle, and we settled in. Of course not everything has always gone perfectly, but this routine provides a framework we've grown accustomed to. It has transformed the spirit of our classroom, to consistently follow this simple ritual every week.

—Mary Bradshaw, Zion Mennonite Church, Elbing, Kansas

## A PRAYER OF GOD'S PEOPLE

*God of wonder and joy,  
you are always with us  
and we are amazed by you.  
Give us the courage to admit when  
we fail you and the humility to  
accept your forgiveness.  
Thank you for calling us to be your  
sons and daughters.  
And now, open our hearts to you.  
Amen.*

## Hints and helps for leaders

Check the *Gather 'Round Handbook* for these ideas and more:

**Tip #1: For teachers:** The icons in your teacher's guide can help you understand ways people learn and observe how people in your class like to learn. This information is also found in chapter 4 of the *Gather 'Round Handbook*.

**Tip #2: For superintendents:** Check out how you can lead an effective program as you partner with God, with teachers, with parents and with children in shaping faith. See pages 72–77.

**Tip #3: For church leaders:** There are many ways you can encourage families to use the Talkabout as a way to shape Christian faith at home. The Fall 2007 Talkabout is a colorful map of the exodus that comes with a sticker sheet. Families will read scripture and share stories, and then mark locations on the map with the stickers. Order one per family. See pages 67–69 for ways to promote this unique home-congregation item.

## Boredom busters

Have these items available to keep learners engaged when they are finished with a Responding activity or if the suggestions for the week just won't work for you.

**Use the Talkabout** to reinforce the session. Children's enthusiasm for the Talkabout will spill into their faith conversations at home. Talk to parents about using the Talkabout with their child at home.

**For preschoolers,** set up a small sandbox with story figures or small toy figures. This tactile activity can be a response activity as children reenact the story or create art.

**Keep a supply of hand puppets,** or socks, for children to create dramas or retell the story.

**Set up a mural station.** Using art supplies, pictures, glue, and markers, encourage learners to add poetry, prayers, pictures, and symbols each week when there is time.

**Set up a book corner** with books recommended for the quarter (check the website), commentaries, picture books about the exodus, maps, or other items.

**Provide a CD player** and invite junior youth and youth to bring contemporary songs that tie in with the exodus theme.



[www.gatherround.org](http://www.gatherround.org)

Free sample sessions,  
Bible texts, and more at  
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