

P r e s e n t a t i o n o f t h e

Bible



A guide for strengthening congregational practice

Place in their hands the Holy Scriptures. A recent survey shows that over 80 percent of ELCA congregations place the Holy Scriptures in the hands of children. Some congregations present Bibles to third graders during worship on Reformation Sunday after a Bible survey class. Other congregations hand a Bible to students on the first day of confirmation camp. Some congregations involve children and parents in a family Bible study. Other congregations help parents select a Bible to give their child as a first communion gift. Whatever the practice, congregations and parents are finding ways to honor what is promised at baptism and to pass on to their children this chief symbol of the faith.

“Presentation of the Bible” is a guide for congregations with an existing Bible giving practice as well as congregations considering one. The ideas, resources and approaches presented here offer a variety of possibilities to consider. “Presentation of the Bible” can be used by an education committee, congregational council, special task force or group of parents looking to create or improve an intentional Bible giving tradition.

Invite a group of adults to read this resource (You have permission to photocopy and distribute these pages) and respond to the following questions:

- *What is our current practice of Bible giving?*
- *What does our practice teach children and adults to think, feel and wonder about the Bible?*
- *What kind of experience do we want our children to have to foster a lifelong use of the Bible?*
- *How will we create the experience we seek?*

The book

Bear his creative and redeeming Word. The Bible is the living word of the living God. It is where Christ’s disciples go to ask what God has done, is doing and is yet to do. It witnesses to God’s gracious activity in the world, and to the faith of God’s people over time. It shows us a God who loves us and helps us see our own need for God. As such, it is fitting that congregations help children to read, study and meet God. The presentation of the Bible is a powerful congregational practice that can lead to a lifetime of Bible reading, study and revelation.

The children

Provide for their instruction in the Christian faith. Children do not understand the Bible as adults do. They understand the Bible in ways characteristic of children. Even so, God meets children as they read the Bible. Children think, wonder and feel about this meeting and this God. The church’s task is to guide children so they continue to engage the Bible both now and as adults. The presentation of the Bible can be an occasion when we call children with their abilities, limitations and experiences to consider what we cherish. It can equally be an opportunity to call the whole congregation to continue to engage the Bible throughout life.

The adults

You have presented these children with the Holy Scriptures, do you intend... "There is no greater or nobler authority on earth" than the teaching office of parents, wrote Martin Luther. Parents are the first and primary teachers of their children. How adults use the Bible sets forth not only biblical content but a way of thinking, feeling, exploring and wondering about the Bible. The presentation of the Bible can help turn the home into the first church; a place of mutual conversations between adults and children about matters of faith. Classes preparing for the presentation of the Bible can offer adults opportunities for their own Bible study, as well as providing skills and resources to share the Bible with their children.

Presenting Bibles to youth in your congregation

The presentation of the Bible can be an occasion for children, adult, family and congregational education. Consider the following possibilities for your setting:

Before Invite parents and other interested adults to a class, a series of meetings, or a retreat. You might also consider a meeting or series of meetings with children and parents. Another option is to gather a class with just the children.

At the class Provide a brief overview of the Bible. Review Bible reading, devotion and study resources for individuals, families and small groups. Provide a Bible study and family devotion experience that can be done in the home. Ask families to frame a Bible verse that reflects their understanding and commitment to God. Demonstrate similarities and difference between various Bible translations. Discuss the Bible's role in worship and Christian education. Invite parents to write their own dedication or words of encouragement to be spoken when the Bible is presented. Create a devotional reading chart for the entire congregation. Involve children and their parents in writing a Presentation of the Bible blessing or litany than can be used at worship.

For a class model and a list of resources to assist with these suggestions go to the Web site for this guide: www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners/2001CEProgramPlanner

On the day Invite families forward for the presentation of the Bible. Include children as lectors and other assisting ministers. Ask children and adults to share their favorite Bible story with the congregation. Have families write commitments to set aside time to read the Bible together, and include such promises in the offering. Invite the congregation to follow a daily or weekly Bible reading schedule.

The presentation of the Bible can take place in a variety of ways with a variety of words. Consider the following as you create your own practice:

A representative of the congregation (parent, teacher, pastor) presents a Bible to each child with these or similar words:

"As disciples of our Lord Jesus, we acknowledge the Holy Scriptures as our source of truth and life. They open up for us the heart of God. On behalf of (name of congregation) receive this Bible. Hear God's word with us. Learn and tell its stories. Discover its mysteries. Honor its commandments. Rejoice in its good news. May God's life-giving word, sweeter than honey, inspire you and make you wise."

P r e s e n t a t i o n o f t h e B i b l e *continued*

When to present the Bible

Customs vary from place to place. Some of the most common include:

- When the child begins to read
- Entering first grade
- As part of preparation for Holy Communion
- At the beginning of confirmation instruction
- Whenever a child is welcomed into membership
- At public affirmation of baptism (confirmation)

Appropriate times to present Bibles during the church year

Again, customs vary. Consider the following possibilities in your preparation and planning:

- Rally Day—the Bible as the source of all Christian education
- Reformation Sunday—the Bible as sola scripture (word alone)
- Pentecost—the Holy Spirit brings the written word to life
- Lent—Bible study as preparation for baptism or affirmation
- Easter—the Bible as the book for Easter people
- Anniversary of Baptism—the Bible as a tool for fulfilling baptismal promises
- Anniversary of the Congregation—the Bible as a primary symbol of faith community

Resources to support a Bible presentation emphasis

Go to the Web page for this planning guide, www.elca.org/christianeducation/programplanners/ for more information that may be helpful to you in your planning efforts. Articles and resources include:

- Tips for reading the Bible together at home
- Tips for selecting a child-friendly Bible
- A book and resource list to enhance your Bible presentation program 

