

Act Out

Empowering Youth to
Heal a Hurting World

A stylized graphic of a hand holding a globe. The globe is light blue with black latitude and longitude lines. A large red cross is superimposed on the globe. The hand is black and positioned at the bottom, holding the globe from underneath.

A Program for Youth in the Episcopal Church

Methodology

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Act Out: An Episcopal Relief & Development Youth Program Methodology

Overview

With a goal of inviting youth to cultivate a prophetic call to justice, in the midst of a lifetime involvement with Episcopal Relief & Development, the staff of Episcopal Relief & Development convened a consultation of clergy, Christian formation, and youth ministry specialists in October 2009. Consultation participants developed plans for an intensive educational program for middle/high school students that would bring the needs and hopes of the world together with the lives of youth in a context, framed by liturgy and filled with prophetic stories of Scripture.

Linking Episcopal Relief & Development's community-based development methodology with an inductive pedagogy, a unique youth program was created, which enables youth to ponder pervasive global concerns in a community of peers and to plan a concrete course of action. The primary format consists of an intensive youth event centered on Episcopal Relief & Development programmatic areas. Initial modules will include malaria, clean water and hunger. The program includes videos and stories from the field and invites young people to respond to their learning through public action, including raising funds for Episcopal Relief & Development.

Statement of Purpose

Engaging youth with the ministry of Episcopal Relief & Development, the initiative will

- Explore the needs and hopes of the world, through storytelling, analysis and global connections
- Equip youth to respond in faith, through Scripture, liturgy and discernment of their gifts
- Empower them for prophetic voice and action, in local communities and beyond that they may be the voices of prophets and hands of Christ for healing a hurting world.

Methodology

Drawing upon the impetus and structure of the Eucharistic liturgy, *Act Out* invites youth to actively participate in the creation of a new world of possibility. Like liturgy, *Act Out* is a work of the people: it is a sacred drama of the human encounter with God in the midst of community. This program expands the imagination of what it means to be a person in this globalized society while retaining a dual citizenship in the Kingdom of God. *Act Out* creates a space for young people to develop an incarnational public theology that reflects their own sensibilities and idioms.

To facilitate this, the consultation established six standards, which committed *Act Out* to: (1) view youth as agents of change, in their daily decisions as consumers and their capacity to be part of a world transforming movement; (2) engage the creativity of youth and avoid underestimating their potential; (3) empower youth for action both now and in their unfolding vocations;

(4) approach fundraising as a faithful response to learning, rather than a prerequisite; (5) link this initiative to theological sources and liturgical experience; and (6) connect youth in meaningful ways to people and issues around the world.

Rather than a single program or curriculum, *Act Out* is a toolkit of resources suitable for a variety of contexts (including large and small congregations, diocesan events, and summer camps). These open-source resources are organized around themes that parallel Episcopal Relief & Development's areas of work, and the educational event follows a common liturgical pattern, whether conducted as a 24-hour overnight or over several days at a school or camp. *Act Out* avoids other youth paradigms that are merely a one-time fundraising event, opting instead for a methodology that fosters a sustainable, ongoing movement, in which an annual intensive youth event would be one feature among many efforts at education, prayer and action in support of Episcopal Relief & Development's mission.

Educational Opportunity

Act Out is an important opportunity for Christian formation, nurturing in young people practices and commitments for a lifetime of justice work. For example, instruction about the Eucharist could focus on the Table as a place of encountering God and each other; a spirituality of Christ as the stranger in our midst could evoke a longing for justice; a focus on food and water as common physical and spiritual needs could be a basis for global connections; and scriptural texts of the prophets and parables could encourage young people to make their voices heard.

Intensive Event

The focus of an intensive youth event would be on "youth and the world encountering one another," as they listen to stories of the world and scripture, analyze facts and statistics about global issues, come to voice and action through discernment and then witness publicly in projects in the church and community. The event would follow this general liturgical pattern:

(1) Gather: Come together at a Table, at which the theme (such as malaria, clean water or hunger) is represented and where there is an empty place at the table, for the "stranger" whose stories we will hear. Consider Christ as stranger, hear about Episcopal Relief & Development's work, establish community norms and take on a shared practice such as simple eating or going off the grid. Offer prayers in the words of youth and words of people around the world. Take on physical activity such as walking the distances that children around the world have to go to find clean water, and carry it back to the space of the event. Use that water for drinking, worship.

(2) Word: Participants share some of what they know already about the theme, then listen to stories of people from around the world, through videos or storytelling by local experts. Youth learn to listen and honor the other as holy. Then they read, discuss, and engage with scriptural texts in creative ways related to the theme. Show videos of youth from around the world reading and reflecting on those same texts. Analyze the facts, statistics, and other data about the theme and its impact on people's lives (What are the consequences of unsafe water? On how much water do people survive?).

Interpret and respond to this learning through creative projects like art, dance, cartoons, movie, etc. that can be shared with a congregation or wider audience.

(3) Confession: Youth examine their personal connections with the theme issue, both their complicity with the problem and how individual and community changes can make a difference. (What can we do differently, as a congregation, diocese, or camp?) Then focus on the Examination questions of the Baptismal Covenant in relation to the theme.

(4) Commitment: Youth are invited to become part of something bigger, through a discerning response about their own call to ministry, in light of what they have learned. Youth name the needs and hopes they have heard from the world and the gifts for ministry they see in themselves and each other. Connecting their lives to stories of young prophets from the Bible and present-day leaders, they name the call they have discerned to offer their passions and gifts for the healing of the world. Close with a ritual of anointing, in which youth publicly claim their prophetic call. This continues with projects youth design and execute together, possibly in cooperation with young people beyond the church. These would include (but not be limited to) raising funds for Episcopal Relief & Development. Youth help plan and lead the rest of the Eucharistic liturgy, incorporating the theme of the intensive experience, whether at a service for the youth.

Curricula Writers:

David Creech (Director for Hunger Education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Ph.D. candidate in New Testament at Loyola University)

Luke Fodor (Consultant for Episcopal Relief & Development and Assistant Rector of St John's Church, Cold Spring Harbor, NY)

Julie Reishus (Intern, Hunger Education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)

Melody Shobe (Associate Rector of Christ Church, Lincoln, RI)

Josh Thomas (Dean of Olympia's Diocesan School of Ministry and Theology, Executive Director of Kids4Peace, and Ph.D. candidate in Christian Education at Emory University)

Contributors:

Devon Anderson (Executive Director of Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation)

Mike Bond (former Episcopal Relief & Development Diocesan Coordinator and Director of Operations, Diocese of Chicago)

Jessica Creech (Youth Minister at Church of the Holy Spirit, Lake Forrest, IL)

Sue Cromer (Canon for Youth & Young Adult Ministries Coordinator in the Diocese of Chicago)

Scott Gunn (Rector of Christ Church, Lincoln, RI)

Shannon Ferguson-Kelly (Bishop's Assistant for Christian Formation in Diocese of Milwaukee)

Missy Harrison (Director of Christian Education at Christ Church, Winnetka, IL)

Lisa Kimball (Director of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching and Professor of Christian Formation and Educational Leadership at The Virginia Theological Seminary)

Rebecca Roberts (Youth Minister at Church of the Holy Spirit, Lake Forrest, IL)

Jay Sidebotham (Rector of Church of the Holy Spirit, Lake Forrest, IL and Episcopal Relief & Development Board member)

Bronwyn Skov (Program Officer for Lifelong Christian Formation and Youth at The Episcopal Church Center)

Benedict Varnum (Assistant, Youth Ministry, Diocese of Chicago and Seminarian at the University of Chicago Divinity School)

