Choosing & Adapting Curriculum Resources

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*Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."*

- Hebrews 12:1c

Curriculum

The word *curriculum* comes from the Latin for running a course. It conjures up images of runners sprinting from the starting line toward the prized goal. Curriculum in a congregation is a course of events, relationships, discoveries, and transformations that congregations experience along faith's journey. When carefully selected, curriculum resources and materials will help your congregation fully experience God, the Bible, and faith along the way.

This guide offers you a step-by-step process to select the curriculum resources that will best help your congregation run its faithful course. Use these steps to guide your planning over a long period of serious educational study, or as a quick help for a one-time selection committee. The questions are helpful even if it is one person's sole responsibility to select and order curriculum materials for his/her congregation.

May God prepare the course ahead of you, that your prayerful selection of resources will enrich your congregation's educational and formational ministries.

Steps for Curriculum Selection
1. *Pray for God's guidance.*
    Throughout the entire planning and selecting process, take time for prayer and prayerful discernment. Your curriculum choices will invite persons into particular experiences with God and with one another. Call on God to help you imagine the appropriate outcomes and experiences for your congregation.

2. *Select a team.*
    Call together a group that is excited about your church's educational and formational ministry. Choose people who are responsible for making resource selections   try to include teachers, learners (children, youth, and adults), ministers, and others who represent the whole congregation. Develop a list of names of people who will make a commitment and note the unique perspective each may bring to the work.

3. *Identify your vision.*
    Determine your congregation's vision of education, outlining the goals and hopes your congregation has for its educational and formational ministry.
    Your vision should state where you want to go and provide an energized focus for how your ministry will look when it is successful. It is not what the ministry will look like, rather it is what will be in place when your mission has been served and your goals have been achieved. It will be the answer to the question, "How will the people we serve be changed?"

Respond to the following questions and craft a one-sentence vision for your congregation's educational and formational ministry:

> What hopes do you have for your congregation?
> What is God calling your congregation to be and do?
> How can education support that hope and calling?

If time allows, test your team's vision with others in your congregation. Make needed changes in the vision statement that will enhance the overall congregation's commitment to the vision. See how it relates to your congregation's mission statement and to the mission of other committees.

4. *Evaluate and select resources.*

Use human and web denominational resources to recommend curriculum resource publishers that will match your vision and needs. Locate curriculum samples and information from publisher websites and catalogs. Use the Curriculum Evaluation Worksheet that follows to record your impressions of each curriculum resource you review. If time allows, test the resources with the persons who will actually use them. The following questions will help determine theological themes and teaching approaches that will match the educational need for each of the identified settings and the needs and interests of learners.

General Review
- How will these resources help you carry out your congregation's vision for education/formation?
- How do these resources relate to the overall life of the congregation   its worship, outreach, mission?
- In what specific ways could these resources be helpful in your setting?
- Which version of the Bible is used/recommended? Is the Bible depicted as inerrant? a treasure in earthen vessels? Is the Bible revered as relevant for life today? Is the Bible an "answer book?" Does it "question one's answers" as well as "answer one's questions?" Is the translation compatible with the Bible(s) used in by your congregation?
- What kind of God do the curriculum materials portray? What is God's relationship to humankind?
- How is Jesus pictured? A teacher of wise sayings and parables? A miracle worker? A magician? Is he portrayed more as Jesus of Nazareth or the Christ of faith? Which images of Jesus are most important to you congregation?
- What is the Holy Spirit in these curriculum materials? How does the Holy Spirit operate today according to these materials?
- Is the language used inclusive and reflect your congregation's beliefs?
- How inclusive are these materials related to images of biblical figures, images of humankind? What color is Jesus' skin? What types of people does this curriculum include (ethnicity, economic status, gender)?
- Are there any other criteria you should consider such as its views toward peace and justice, racism, the environment, etc.?
- How are leaders and teachers supported in ways that give them confidence?

- How do these resources encourage home or parental participation?
- What would be the overall cost   including all required materials   to use these resources in your congregation?

Teaching and Learning
- Which model of teaching (see next page) will serve your congregation best? How will it fit into your church's Sunday morning format? Would you be willing to consider a Sunday morning format change if needed?
- How does education and educational programming relate to worship?
- When the learners have finished using these resources, what new information do you imagine they will know and what kinds of experiences will they have had?
- Are the materials accurate, appealing, and age-appropriate?
- Are the lesson plans easy to use, as well as flexible, for the setting in which they will be used?
- What transforming impact might the resources have for individuals and the whole life of your congregation?

Recommendation
- Why would you recommend or not recommend this resource for use by your congregation?
- What should be done as a result of your recommendation? Order? Check out another resource for a particular teaching approach? Contact a publisher for answers to questions?

5. *Make your selection, order materials, share your excitement with the congregation, recruit and train teachers/leaders.*

6. *Evaluate the materials on a regular basis with the help of your teachers/leaders, parents, pastor, participants (including children), and others who are invested in your educational/formational ministries.*

Curriculum Resources: Four Models

Christian education curriculum materials are published in abundance, and the publishing companies are more interested in selling you their materials than whether or not they are appropriate for use by your particular congregation. Below are descriptions of four teaching models within which most curriculum resources can be categorized. Which model (or adaptation of a model) will meet the needs and goals for your congregation's faith-forming ministry?

Bible Story-Based Curriculum Resources

These curriculum materials cover quarterly Bible story themes over a 3- or 4-year cycle. Each Sunday, children, youth, and adults study Bible stories that follow the theme of the unit. This may or may not be the same story in each age level, as the focus is placed on the choice of Bible stories that are developmentally appropriate for each age group. This style of curriculum generally functions separately from the service of worship, but can be intentionally connected with some effort. *[Examples: Shine (Mennonite), Deep Blue Kids (Methodist)]*

Lectionary-Based Curriculum Resources

The Revised Common Lectionary is a listing of scripture readings for each Sunday which covers much of the Bible over the course of three years. Lectionary curriculum materials allow worshippers and students of all ages to experience the same scripture(s), at their own developmental level, at the same time — the Bible passage that is the focus for worship is the same one being studied in Sunday School and adult Bible Study. Church members of all ages can share their Sunday learnings together after church, at committee meetings, at home, and with friends and neighbors of other Christian denominations throughout the week. *[Examples: Seasons of the Spirit, Feasting On the Word (Presbyterian), The Best of Whole People of God Online]*

Workshop Rotation

This approach uses a variety of media that presents information through transformation. Students rotate each week from workshop to workshop, focusing on a single Bible story for several weeks in lab-style settings such as computer, video, drama, art, puppets, food, Bible skills & games, music, and the like. Classroom space is transformed into theaters, computer labs, replicas of ancient biblical sites, etc. as students learn by doing. *[Example: Big Blue (Methodist), Spark Rotation from Sparkhouse (Lutheran), WoRM (rotation.org)]*

The Montessori Approach

Montessori classrooms provide a prepared environment where children are free to respond to their natural tendency to make meaning. Within a framework of order, the children progress at their own pace and rhythm, according to their individual capabilities. The adult presents the seasonal or topical theme/story, after which the children move about the classroom in a systematic fashion, choosing the learning and art centers from which they wish to learn and respond. *[Example: Godly Play]*

Curriculum Evaluation Worksheet

* Most publishing companies offer free samples of their materials on their websites.

Name of Curriculum:

Publisher:

Denomination(s), if identified:

Age groups:

Setting (Sunday School, youth group, midweek program, etc.):

Purpose of curriculum:

View of Scripture:

Recommended or quoted version of the Bible:

Role of teacher:

Role of learner:

On the reverse side of this sheet, respond to the pertinent questions from Step 4: Evaluate and Select Resources.

Based on materials from Christian Educators' Guide to Evaluating and Developing Curriculum *by Nancy Ferguson*

Howard Gardner's Theory of
Multiple Intelligences

Verbal-Linguistic
Learning through spoken and written words: reading, listening, speaking and writing

Mathematical-Logical
Learning through reasoning and problem-solving: numbers

Existential
Learning by seeing the "big picture". Connects real world understandings and application to new learning

Musical
Learning through songs, patterns, rhythms, instruments, and musical expression

Naturalist
Learning through Classification, categories, and hierarchies: ability to pick up on subtle differences

Multiple Intelligences

Visual-Spatial
Learning visually and organizing ideas spatially: think in images and pictures and "see" things in one's mind

Interpersonal
Learning through Interactions with others: Working collaboratively and cooperatively

Intrapersonal
Learning through feelings, values, and attitudes: understand other people

Bodily/Kinesthetic
Learning through interaction with one's environment: concrete experiences

Curriculum Resource Adaptations to Consider

Adding or replacing material

Examples: adding more background information for teachers, making the art activity more complex, replacing a prayer suggestion with an original prayer, replacing or adding more questions for discussion, etc.

Rearranging the session plan

Example: re-writing the goals/objectives to make them your own and then adapting the activities to fit them, etc.

Changing the scope (content) and sequence (order)

Examples: changing the order of the sessions in a unit of study, reducing the number of sessions in a unit of study, etc.

Changing the session structure

Examples: Re-ordering the activities to follow a service of worship outline, swapping the opening and closing activities, etc.

Evaluating the activities in the session

Example: eliminate an activity or two, etc.

Note

While no curriculum resource will meet every educational need of your congregation, if you find that you are adapting the resource often and in multiple ways, you may consider looking for another resource that will better meet the vision and needs of your congregation.

The Copyright Law

Every curriculum that you purchase has gone through a process of design, writing, and editing, and it has been copyrighted by the publisher. So do not disregard the work of writers and editors or federal copyright laws when you adapt curriculum. That means you cannot copy the words of the curriculum into another document without crediting the passage. And certainly it means you cannot copy the material into another document, edit, and call it your own. Respect the time and creative skills and insights of writers by noting proper credit on your version, something to the effect of "This curriculum resource has been adapted from TITLE, published by PUBLISHER (QUARTER, YEAR) for use by YOUR CHURCH NAME, ADDRESS." [Ferguson, 95]

Selected Bibliography for Choosing and Adapting Curriculum Resources

<u>Books</u>

Christian Educator's Guide to Evaluating and Developing Curriculum by Nancy Ferguson

Becoming Like a Child: The Curiosity of Maturity Beyond the Norm by Jerome W. Berryman

Faith Formation In Vital Congregations by Marian Plant

Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church by Maria Harris

Formational Children's Ministry: Shaping Children Using Story, Ritual, and Relationship by Ivy Beckwith

The Godbearing Life by Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster

Human Development and Faith: Life-Cycle Stages of Body, Mind, and Soul (second edition) edited by Felicity Kelcourse

I Wonder: Engaging a Child's Curiosity About the Bible by Elizabeth F. Caldwell

Leaving Home with Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Our Youth by Elizabeth Caldwell

Making A Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of Your Children by Elizabeth Caldwell

Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People edited by Dorothy Bass

Faith Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives by Karen-Marie Yust

Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens by Don Richter & Dorothy Bass

Will Our Children Have Faith? (Revised Edition) by John H. Westerhoff III

<u>Websites</u>

Curriculum overview charts: https://rowsofsharon.com/2017/04/25/2017-curriculum-overview-charts/

Multiple free webinars and resources for faith formation in the church: http://www.prcli.org

Children's book reviews with connections to scripture: http://storypath.upsem.edu

Evaluating curriculum materials: http://www.buildfaith.org/how-to-evaluate-your-christian-education-curriculum/

Godly Play: http://www.godlyplayfoundation.org

Workshop Rotation Model: http://www.rotation.org

Christian resources for families: http://www.faithink.com

Intergenerational ministries resources: https://www.genonministries.org