

Annual Report to the Parish RE: Christian Formation 2009

St. Mary's Episcopal Church
258 Concord Street
Newton Lower Falls, MA 02462

January 24, 2010

2009 Summary

During this rector transition period at St. Mary's, Isabel Phillips is serving as our Interim Director of Christian Education, working to build our children's community and to ensure effective communication among the Sunday School, Junior Choir and Acolyte branches of Christian Formation for our youth at St. Mary's. St. Mary's now has 24 youth who serve as acolytes (grades 3-11) and 10 youth (grades 2-8) who serve as junior choir members. A total of 30 youth (K-12) participated in our Christmas Pageant on December 20, 2009.

Church and Sunday School Routines

- Sunday School for Intermediate Grades (3-5) and Middle School (grades 6-8) now meet for Sunday School before church at 9 a.m, and continue to attend worship service in church with their respective families.
- Children in grades K-3 attend the beginning of each church service with their families, and leave at the second hymn with their teachers to go to Sunday School (10 – 11 a.m.)

The presence of the younger children in church at the beginning of the service has been well-received by parishioners, and the children report to their parents that they enjoy participating in part of the adult worship service. We have prepared little canvas tote bags for distribution to children who attend church. Each bag includes an illustrated sequence of the service of Holy Eucharist, **GospelGrams** that simplify the lectionary readings, crayons for each child, and the monthly issue of **Pockets**, a mini-magazine for those children who can read. This magazine can be taken home to connect the messages of our Sunday services to daily family activities throughout the week.

Isabel Phillips leads the two Sunday School classes for children K-3 and older elementary youth (Gr.3-6) collaborating with Susan Walko, to ensure continuity across the curriculum for our elementary school-age children. St. Mary's is blessed that Jeffrey Hughes has continued to volunteer to teach the Middle School youth class this year. Susan Butler Walko has been an invaluable co-teaching partner to Isabel. Her affection for the children of St. Mary's and her continuing commitment to us shows her deep affection for our youth.

The change of time this year (2009-2010) from 11 am (2008-2009) to 9 am for older youth (grades 3-8) has been well received by those who attend regularly. Two families have expressed a wish that the 9 am class for grades 3-5 occur during the church service from 10- 11 am, but this would preclude their participation in the worship service. Therefore, older children who cannot get to Sunday School at 9 am are always welcome to participate in the 10 am Godly Play lesson with the younger (K-3) children. This has

worked out well. Children in grades 3-5 can decide with their families whether to attend the worship service or go down to the Sunday School Godly Play Lesson.

Godly Play Curriculum for Children K-5

As many of you know, St. Mary's has re-organized its K-5 Sunday School classrooms and begun a vibrant new Episcopal curriculum called **Godly Play**. **Godly Play** was created by an Episcopal priest and renowned expert in the development of spirituality of children, Jerome Berryman, who co-taught children and youth with his wife for over 20 years. The program teaches sacred Biblical stories, parables and liturgical actions through story-telling with concrete tactile objects and biblical figures. These durable story-telling materials draw children more deeply into the stories, creating a sacred space in which children are invited to wonder and grow in spiritual relationship to God. Isabel Phillips and Margaret Schwarzer attended a Godly Play training in August to get us started, and Isabel and Susan Walko plan to attend follow-up trainings in the Spring of 2010. Any parents who would like to attend are especially welcome. Check with Isabel for the upcoming diocesan training dates.

We adapted the language of Godly Play for our Christmas Pageant on December 20th and again in the Children's Homily on Christmas Eve at the 5 p.m. service. We continue to be most grateful for the Godly Play donations we recently received earlier this year to get us started (a handmade wooden crèche from Haiti, an heirloom quality wooden Noah's Ark, and sturdy wooden story materials to draw the children more deeply into Advent, Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost.) We invite all those interested in viewing the range of story materials more closely to come downstairs and visit our classrooms.

Curriculum for Middle School Youth (Gr 6-8)

In addition to serving on the Search Committee for our new rector, Jeffrey Hughes continues to volunteer his time and his expertise to teach our Middle School youth (grades 6-8). The middle school class meets at 9:00 each Sunday. This class uses the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer as primary texts. Topics are chosen to reflect the lectionary, that is the readings assigned for that day, or other events or happenings in the parish or liturgical calendar. Often we explore the context and background of the assigned readings by reading more of the story, as for example when we had a series of readings from Job. Among the goals is to familiarize the students with reading from the Bible and Prayer Book so that they become more comfortable with using them, and begin to know their way around them. I also like to explore issues the students raise, or that seem important in their lives, so a particular lesson may go in any direction. We were particularly privileged to have John Finley, the Head of Epiphany School, spend some time with us when he visited St Mary's on Oct 25. The students seemed to enjoy discussing Epiphany's mission and how it is different from their own schools.

Plans for a Spring 2010 Confirmation group from St. Mary's have been suspended at the request of parents and given the rector transition. Parents of children who may be approaching this important commitment would like for the new rector to be an integral part of their child's confirmation process.

Christian Education Classes and Attendance Record

Godly Play Introductory Lessons- taught by Isabel Phillips, assisted by Susan Walko
Pre-K-Grade 3; 14 registered children

Godly Play –Intermediate Level – taught by Isabel Phillips
Grades 3-5; 6 registered children

Middle School Class - taught by Jeffrey Hughes
Grades 6 & up (ages 11 and up); 4 children registered

Parish-wide and Diocesan Activities for our Youth in 2009 have included:

- Youth Participation at Cathedral on the Common
- Youth participation in the Reading of the Passion on Palm Sunday
- End of Year Ice Cream Social (June 2009)
- Welcome Back Barbecue in September with magician performance and special “welcoming cake” for Margaret Schwarzer
- Middle School Youth at St. Mary’s hosted the Charles River Deanery Trip to Barbara Harris Camp for Team-Building Day (September 2009)
- Blessing of the Animals Ceremony
- Special Children’s Service (November 2009)
- Deanery Pie-Making Day for Thanksgiving – 11 pies donated by St Mary’s Middle Schoolers to the local Newton Food Pantry
- Christmas Pageant with Rehearsal and Pizza Party (December 2009)
- Advent wreath-making in the Parish Hall on the Sunday after Thanksgiving.
- Youth volunteers at the Miracle Kitchen in Framingham
- Acolyte Training with Tim Green and Margaret Schwarzer (November 2009)

Respectfully submitted,

Isabel Phillips, Ed.D.
Interim Director of Christian Education