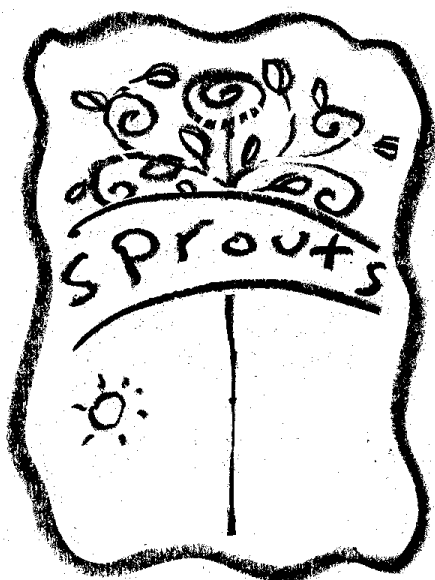


Cultivating Sprouts

Edie Harris

A Growing Guide for Planting & Nurturing Sprouts

April 2000



To witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

Sprouts in the "Garden State" of New Jersey

recently received a delightful letter from Donna and Wayne Sierocinski of Mantua, NJ. Although they are not able to get a year-long commitment from the parents, they lead a 10-week session of Sprouts each year and are working with their fourth group. They have had great success in incorporating non-church children into Sprouts, then into the church (bringing their families with them). The children created an acrostic of **Sprouts**:

Spirit filled
People
Recruiting
Others
Under
The
Spirit

They have also been busy doing many acts of kindness; they:

- Collected canned goods for a food bank;
- Wrote to missionaries;
- Raised over \$750 in CROP WALK;
- Collected and gave 436 pairs of socks (with spiritually uplifting cards in them) to prisoners;
- Did yard work for church and parsonage;
- Helped out at local "Seeds to Trees" project;
- Earned money to send to UMCOR;
- Made cards and church banners for Columbine High School;

- Made cards and cookies for refugees from Kosovo at Ft. Dix, NJ;
- Made ornaments for an orphanage destroyed in a hurricane in Honduras;
- Made cookies and brownies for local firefighters and police officers as thanks for justice work (they are planning to work with a local school to prevent violence).

Congratulations to Donna and Wayne for their hard work and faithfulness. And thanks for sharing with us.

Unleash That Creativity

I love the acrostic the Mantua group created. This is a fun traditional way to work with words. Did you know that Psalm 119 is an alphabetical acrostic in which each stanza consists of eight lines, all beginning with the same Hebrew letter? The 22 stanzas use all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order.

Why not try an acrostic with your group? Tell them some common acronyms, which are a kind of acrostic. Some have even become accepted words, such as SNAFU (Situation Normal, All Fouled Up) or words we use so often we hardly realize they are acronyms, such as NASA. See what your group can do with SPROUTS; your church name alone or with Sprouts; the words, FAITH, CARING, KINDNESS, JUSTICE, WORSHIP, DEVOTION; words or phrases related to the acts, e.g., *prayer, communion, Bible, giving, jubilee, tithe, helping others, love God, or love neighbor.*

Consider using books of the Bible with the acrostic describing elements of that book. Or have each child use his or her own name and use words that describe the child. There are a lot of possibilities for creativity here. These creations would make a wonderful bulletin insert, bulletin board display, or newsletter article to let the church see what the Sprouts are doing.

Two for One

Everyone loves a bargain. And what could be better than getting credit for an Act of Kindness and an Act of Devotion by doing only one thing? It has occurred to me that, when we pray on behalf of others, we are not only doing an Act of Devotion, we are also doing an Act of Kindness. We are caring enough about someone else that we go to God to ask for help, healing, intervention, or God's presence and support on behalf of that person. Prayers on behalf of others are "natural" to children. They care about their families and friends, and are often touched by the troubles of persons unknown to them as well.

Most Sprouts groups include a time for prayer requests; Sprouts probably request prayer for others more often than for themselves. One Sprouts group has an adult volunteer who writes down these prayer requests, then types and photocopies them quickly so the children have a copy to take home with them. (This could be especially helpful for children with learning disabilities who find writing difficult.) Many churches have prayer chains of various

kinds; why not include the children? Our church emails the prayer requests from each Sunday. Perhaps your children (or at least the older ones) would be able to participate in such a prayer chain (or create their own email prayer chain). Perhaps the Sprouts could organize and "run" a children's prayer chain with prayer requests from not only Sprouts but also children in Sunday school, daycare, or after-school programs. Prayers of intercession keep us focused on our need for, dependence on, and relationship with God. And prayers of thanksgiving follow. Offer your Sprouts a bargain—two acts for one prayer.

Keeping in Touch

It has been exciting to hear from some of you about your Sprouts ministry, such as Donna and Wayne. I look forward to hearing from more of you. Only by sharing ideas, innovations, questions, variations, problems, solutions, comments, issues, and even frustrations, will we be able to help each other grow strong Sprouts. Write, call, or email Edie with responses: SPROUTS, Edie Harris, 641 NE 6th St., Pompano Beach, FL 33060, (954) 942-7522, sproutsedie@juno.com. If you know of churches that are doing Sprouts or are interested in learning more, they too can receive a free subscription to the *Quarterly*. Just send their name and address to Mary McDonald, General Board of Discipleship, P. O. Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003, (toll-free) 877-899-2780 Ext. 1760; mmcdonald@gbod.org.

THE GENERAL BOARD OF
DISCIPLESHIP
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
P.O. Box 340003
Nashville, TN 37203-0003

General Board of Discipleship
General Secretary: Ezra Earl Jones

Unit Administrator: Karen Greenwaldt

Accountable Discipleship

Director:

Steven Manskar

Tollfree: (877) 899-2780, Ext. 1765

E-mail: smanskar@gbod.org

Covenant Discipleship Quarterly ©

Director:

JoAnn Eslinger

Tollfree: (877) 899-2780, Ext. 7144

E-mail: jeslinger@gbod.org

Editor: Grace Bradford

E-mail: gbrad5137@aol.com

Staff Assistant: Mary McDonald
Tollfree: (877) 899-2780, Ext. 1760