

CELEBRATING

the Word with All Ages



By Michael G. Bausch

Celebrating the Word with All Ages” offers an outline for opening or closing assemblies or children’s sermons—times when all the ages are together. These suggestions are based on the lectionary readings for the day. Sometimes you will need to locate resources to be used for the celebration, as indicated in the section called “Getting Ready.” In addition to the suggestions for sharing that are included here, you may wish to incorporate a time of welcome, prayer, and singing into the celebration. The welcome could be a greeting or responsive words to center the group’s attention. The prayer could be shared at the beginning or the close of the celebration to underscore the theme from the focus experience. (See “Seasonings” at the center of the magazine for a complete listing of focus scriptures and focus experiences.) A time for singing could include selections from the *Word Among Us*, *Year One* audiocassette or other songs your group enjoys. As you prepare for the celebration, feel free to shape this outline to suit your church’s format.

June 4, 1995

Pentecost, “Pentecost’s Many Voices”

Getting Ready: Obtain a large fan (or several small fans) and position it near where the group will be seated.

Read from the scripture (Acts 2:1–4): “When the day of Pentecost had come, all were together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.”

Explain that the word “Pentecost” means “fifty.” Pentecost was the fiftieth day after the Jewish Passover, and it was a time when the Jews gathered to remember Moses’ receiving the Ten Commandments. At the time the events recorded in Acts happened, Pentecost was about seven weeks after the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Ask the group to sit quietly for a moment and imagine they were the people sitting together on Pentecost. Turn on the fan(s) and let the air blow directly and forcefully onto the group. Ask, “What happens when a strong rush of wind blows on us?” It blows our hair, it feels funny on our faces, and it shoots paper all around.

Turn off the fan(s). Have you ever seen the effects of a forceful wind—tree limbs fallen, garbage can lids in the street, paper blowing across yards? Wind can be very powerful. Is it possible to capture the wind? People capture the wind in order to use its force to make work easier. Windmills once generated power to grind grain and today are used to generate electricity. Wind surfers catch the wind in their sails in order to sweep across the water. Have any of you ever been on a sailboat? The sails use the wind to propel the boat across the water.

What happens to a sailboat when there is no wind? It sits on the water. That’s what happened to the disciples in our Bible story today. They were “dead in the water.” They didn’t know what to do now that they had experienced Jesus’ resurrection. So God sent the wind—the wind of the Holy Spirit—to get them moving again. On Pentecost we remember how a strong wind sent from God got the little boat of the church off to a good start.

June 11, 1995

Trinity Sunday/Pentecost I, “Hope Given”

Getting Ready: Find photographs in which someone is enduring hardship or suffering and is being assisted by another person. Examples could be medical workers with sick children; firefighters rescuing someone; a passerby lending a helping hand to an injured person. The photograph below shows volunteers helping to clear a logjam from the Rouge River in Southfield, Michigan, in the annual river cleanup sponsored by Friends of the Rouge. The river runs through Detroit’s northern and western suburbs and was once heavily polluted. Alternatively, you might invite to your assembly someone who has worked with people who have endured hardship and have not lost hope.

Option 1: Read the scripture from Romans 5:1–5. Show your picture and ask group members to describe what they see. Next, ask them to describe what their feelings are as they look at this picture. Invite the group to call out specific situations where people suffer. Examples are warfare in various nations of the world; malnutrition; illnesses caused by air or water pollution; homelessness. How do you think God brings those people hope even in a time of suffering?

Option 2: If you have invited someone to speak to the group, ask this person to tell about an experience working with people who have not lost hope in difficult circumstances. How has their faith and hope sustained them in their trial? Be sure to ask your guest how his/her faith provided hope and strength. Ask how the church provided

The Worship Service

The Sunday service can include everyone as well. Plan on participation from as many groups as possible. Some suggestions for your planning:

- ☞ Ask the congregation to bring pictures of themselves and of groups in the church, mounted on squares of posterboard. Take additional pictures. Set a deadline of two weeks before Pentecost for receiving the pictures. Supplement with pictures cut from a pictorial directory of church members, if you have one. Decorate the halls of the church with these pictures.
- ☞ Have the church school leaders decorate the walls of the meeting rooms with posters made from a line drawing of a church, filled in with pictures of people from their groups.
- ☞ Make mobiles with tongues of fire (streamers) and doves, and hang them in various places in the sanctuary and around the church. Decorate the church with yards of red netting, available at fabric stores. It can be gathered in billowing bunches and placed around the altar, pulpit, lectern, and other places in the sanctuary; take care not to create a safety hazard.
- ☞ Make banners for worship. Look through the learner's guides for the various age levels for Pentecost and the Sundays following Pentecost to find visual images such as symbols, graphics, and word phrases that would make an attractive banner for your worship space.
- ☞ A sacred dance could be used effectively for the introit. An interesting audio accompaniment called "Improvisation for Pentecost" can be found on the *Word Among Us, Year One* cassette. Consider using red costuming for a dancer representing the Spirit. Red glitter, sequins, or some other material to signify tongues of fire could be strewn over other dancers representing the disciples. This audio selection could also be used in the worship service following the reading of Acts 2:1–21 or as a meditative moment prior to the close of worship. Listen to the selection and decide how it might best be used in your congregation.
- ☞ Have children, youth, and/or adults enter the worship space with red streamers during the opening hymn.
- ☞ This is a great Sunday for echo pantomime, youth choirs, scripture reading ensembles, and the like. Consider using some of the ideas in "Scripture Splash," the leadership training article from the winter 1994–95 issue of *In Season*, vol. 1, no. 2. A self-narration story or a skit based on the Pentecost texts, performed by a youth and/or adults, could add much to the service.

The Prayer of Jesus (Aramaic)

Abwoon d'bwashmaya

Nethqadash shmakh

Teytey malkuthakh

Nehwey tzevyanach aykanna d'bwashmaya
aph b'arha.

Hawylan lachma d'sunqanan yaomana.

Washboqlan khaubayn (wakhtahayn) aykana
daph khnan shbwoqan l'khayyabayn.

Wela tahlan l'nesyuna

Ela patzan min bisha.

Metol dilakhie malkutha wahayla

wateshbukhta l'ahlam almin. Ameyn.

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☞ Use the Aramaic "Prayer of Jesus" on the *Word Among Us* cassette at the time in your worship when this prayer is used. A phonetic version is printed here. Teach the congregation the chant that follows the prayer on the tape. The first phrase, "Abwoon d'bwashmaya," is the first line of the prayer in Aramaic. The second phrase is "Alaha, Allah, Elohim, Elot," four names for God, in Aramaic, Arabic, Hebrew, and Canaanite. Then invite the congregation to join in the prayer, in whatever language or version they prefer. If you know people who speak a language other than English or the predominant language of your congregation, you might invite them ahead of time to prepare for this part of the service.

- ☞ If you have someone in your congregation or community who raises homing pigeons, an effective sign of the Spirit's presence can be part of the benediction. Invite the congregation outside, and following the benediction, release the birds. Close by singing a favorite hymn and move to coffee hour—a great time to use up any leftover cake from the night before!

Neil Douglas-Klotz, *Prayers of the Cosmos:
Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus*
(San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990).
Used by permission.

There are many ideas that can make this festival special. Plan ahead, involve the whole church, and most important, pray for the Spirit to be present with your congregation in your planning and in your celebrating! 🕯️

hope, strength, and support for that person's work. Read the passage from Romans 5:5, "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Perhaps your guest could lead the closing prayer. Or you might pray: "We rejoice that your love is always poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and we pray especially that your Spirit sustain those who endure hardship in this hour and those who stand with them in their pain. Amen."

June 18, 1995

Pentecost 2, "An Alabaster Jar"

Getting Ready: Try to find an alabaster jar, or a jar of any kind, to use as a symbol.

Read the scripture from Luke 7:44–48. Show the jar and suggest that the jar reminds us of this scripture story. If you have a copy of *Imaging the Word*, you may wish to show the painting *Sins Are Forgiven* by Wu Yuen-kwei on page 219, or the detail on page 220. Ask, "What are other examples of someone sharing great tenderness and kindness with another person?" (Possible responses: A person sharing a candy bar with another;

someone visiting an elderly person and helping give that person a bath; mowing someone's lawn or picking up garbage that may be blown against the house.) In our story, the woman who showed the kindness to Jesus was declared "forgiven." The things she had done that she was not proud of were not remembered.

Have you ever done something wrong and then felt terrible afterwards? Has anyone ever said to you, "I forgive you"? How does it feel to be forgiven?

Use a story from your own experience or one like the following. There was a child who did something very wrong and who told her mother she was sorry. The mother hugged the child and said she loved her. How do you think that child felt? Good! Do you think the child felt tired afterwards, or full of energy? When we ask forgiveness of others we receive great energy and want to help other people. The jar reminds us that we show tenderness in different ways when we feel good about ourselves and the others we live with.

Invite the group to join in a prayer: "Forgiving God, we have all said and done things we regret, and have not said and not done things that could have made a positive difference in someone's life. Grant us the new life and energy that come from confessing our sins and feeling your forgiveness. Amen."

June 25, 1995

Pentecost 3, "One in Christ"

Tell those gathered that you will need their cooperation, as you will be separating them into different groupings as a way to understand today's scripture.

First have all the people with blue eyes gather in one area, brown eyes in another, and other color eyes in another. Ask if the brown-eyed group is better than the blue-eyed group? Next, separate those wearing red from those wearing green and those wearing brown. Ask if the green group is better than the red group or the brown group? Separate the boys/men from the girls/women. Ask if one gender is better than the other?

While they are in their gender-separated groups, read the scripture from Galatians 3:27–29. Read again, "for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." What does this mean? There are no physical qualifications for being joined with Christ. There are no mental qualifications. There are no gender or racial qualifications. There are no religious qualifications. Ask the learners to come back together as a whole group.

Why do you think it is important that we are all together as a single group? (Possible responses: We're able to accomplish more when we work together; we respect one another and it's more fun to be in a whole group; we feel better because we haven't been separated because of our clothes, the color of our eyes, or any kind of barrier we could create.) Christ breaks down barriers among persons, genders, classes, and nations.

For the closing prayer, invite the entire group to hold hands, then say the following: "Creator God, you have made us uniquely different from one another in many ways. You also have shown us that we are one in Christ. Help us to live and work together in the power of your love. Amen."

July 2, 1995

Pentecost 4,

"Freedom to Love and Serve"

Have you ever asked someone to stop doing something, and the response was, "I can do this. It's a free country"? Or have you ever asked someone to stop talking and the reply was, "I can talk if I want to. It's a free country"? Our country is based on the idea of freedom of expression—that we are able to speak freely and act freely. But are there any limits to what we can say or do?

We might have the freedom to act and speak as we wish, but when we say or do something that is against the law, then we encounter those limits. What we can do as individuals is limited by



what our society, or our grouping of individuals, will allow.

Read the scripture from Galatians 5:13–14. The writer wants us to use our freedom not for our own selfish reasons, but for what? To love and “serve one another.” The Christian uses personal freedom for what is good and positive. The Christian does not use freedom to speak or act in negative ways, in ways that do not help others or the community.

Close with the use of hand motions to part of the Great Commission. Ask all to stand. Do the actions as you speak the words:

- *You shall love* (place right hand over your left hand and press to your heart)
- *your neighbor* (move arms and hands outward toward others as if to embrace)
- *as yourself* (place right hand on left shoulder and left hand on right shoulder).
- Do the actions again as you say the words together.

July 9, 1995

Pentecost 5, “As a Mother Comforts Her Child”

Getting Ready: Locate pictures and photographs that show mothers comforting their children. If you have a copy of *Imaging the Word*, there are two on pages 231–32. Also, the cover of this issue of *In Season* could be used, as well as the photograph above.

Show your pictures and ask the group what they see happening in them. Invite the group to share stories of times when they felt a special comfort from their mothers, or from a grandmother, or from a special female friend or relative. Ask the group to call out the kinds of things loving mothers do for and with their children.

Read the scripture from Isaiah 66:13. The prophet Isaiah compares God’s love to that of a loving mother. How does it feel to consider God to be like a mother,



loving and comforting us? Does it feel different, familiar, uncomfortable, reassuring? Read the scripture Isaiah 66:13 again. Note how similar your list of mothering activities may be to the ways God loves us.

Invite the group to join in prayer: “Mothering God, you comfort us when we need your loving care, you shelter us when we need protection, you listen to us when we speak, you give us challenges and hope. We are thankful for the ways you mother us. Amen.”

July 16, 1995

Pentecost 6, “Hard Words”

For these next two assemblies, we will be learning about Amos and his work as a prophet, announcing God’s justice to the people. Amos came from a very humble background, being a herdsman and a “dresser of sycamore trees,” which meant he punctured the fruit of this figlike tree to make it more edible. Today we’re going to learn about his challenging work as a prophet.

Read the focus scripture from Amos 7:14–15. Ask for three groups of volunteers to help act out the passage. The first group will need several persons to be animals, and several to be tenders of the herd. After they have acted a moment, ask, “What kind of work do you think the tenders of the herds do?” (Possible responses: They watch the animals, making sure none stray from the herd; they make sure the animals have plenty to eat and drink.)

Part of the second group will be a “tree,” and they should stand together to make the tree branches and fruit. The rest are to pretend they are doing the kind of work Amos did, which was to

punch holes into the developing fruit so it would be more edible. After they have acted for a moment, ask, “Do you think this is difficult work?”

Invite some of the third group to pretend they are stealing land from the poor, taking bribes, and treating people unfairly. Have the rest portray prophets who sternly rebuke these people and ask them to be honest and respectful of others. What kind of work do the prophets do? They speak the word of judgment to the people who are doing wrong. They ask people to repent and turn from their evildoing.

Which job do you think is the most difficult: herding animals, dressing trees, or being a prophet?

It took a lot of courage for Amos to leave his comfortable work as a herdsman and tree dresser to go and speak truth and repentance to the people of Israel.

Invite the group to join in prayer: “God of the prophets, we are thankful that you call people to action and that there are people of courage who encourage others to do what is right. Amen.”

July 23, 1995

Pentecost 7, “Justice for the Poor”

Getting Ready: This assembly emphasizes God’s call for justice for the poor, and invites us to examine our response to that call. There are many faces of poverty in your community, around the country, and across the seas. Who are those poor? Pictures cut from magazines, a short videotape or excerpt depicting poverty and the church’s response, or a recording of someone telling what it is like to be homeless and poor could be very useful in this assembly. Other pictures depicting wealth and abundance could be used to offer a contrast to the economic realities of our world.

Show pictures of poverty, play a video excerpt, or play a brief audiotape. With or without these materials, ask the group how they have noticed poverty in your community. How have they

witnessed it in their state? What have they noticed about poverty in our nation? What forms does poverty take in other nations?

Read the scripture epigraph from Amos 8:4, 6–7.

As you hear the words of God, how do you think God feels? Tell the group you will read the scripture in short phrases and will ask them as a group to repeat each phrase after you—and to say it with feeling!

“Hear this, you that trample the needy!”

Ask the group to repeat this phrase with feeling (encourage anger and righteous indignation!).

Continue with each of the remaining lines, having the group repeat them after you: “You who bring to ruin the poor of the land”/“Buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals”/“And selling the sweepings of the wheat.” Explain that this means the rich were selling the wheat left lying in the fields after the harvest, wheat that by religious law was supposed to be left for the poor to take as they needed, free of charge.

Do you think God wants a change in behavior of those who are harming the poor? Certainly!

What are some ways our church can respond to the needs of the poor? Ask your group to call out suggestions. Some examples: special offerings; food programs; working through governments to effect change; speaking out for justice; talking with the poor to find out how we all might work together; supporting your denomination’s hunger or child sponsorship program.

Invite the group to hold hands and pray together: “God who angers at injustice and unfairness, open our eyes to poverty and to the way people are harmed by others. Turn our anger into a powerful force for hope and change, that our church might ease poverty in the world. Amen.”

July 30, 1995

Pentecost 8, “The Prayer of Jesus”

Read the scripture from Luke 11:1–4.

Invite the group to recite the Prayer of Jesus (the Lord’s Prayer) together, using the form customary for your church. Ask the group to stand, and invite them to pantomime or dance the prayer phrase by phrase. As leader, offer suggestions or ask for suggestions from the group before participating in each action. Say the phrase together, then decide on your action, doing it all together. For instance, for the opening phrase, you might join hands as a group, raising them upward, and then lower them to waist level. For “Hallowed be thy name,” put your own hands together as if praying, and move them upward. Work out ahead of time some motions that you are comfortable with, in case the group has difficulty with any phrase.

Close by inviting the group to join hands and say the Prayer of Jesus one more time.

August 6, 1995

Pentecost 9, “In God’s Arms”

Getting Ready: For this assembly it would be helpful to have arranged for an infant to be present with a parent or sibling, and a child who is just learning to walk.

Ask the infant and his or her caregiver to stand with you. Ask the caregiver to show affection to the infant (carry it gently, stroke its cheek, feed with a bottle, etc.). This will illustrate the scripture.

Ask the toddler and his or her caregiver to join you, and invite the child to walk with the help of the caregiver. This too will illustrate the scripture.

Read the scripture from Hosea 11:3–4.

Thank the children and their caregivers and have them return to their seats.

There are some tender phrases in the scripture where God compares caring for Israel with raising a child. Ask the group to call out what they remember: “I taught Ephraim to walk”; “I took them up in my arms”; “I healed them”; “I led

them with cords of human kindness”; “With bands of love”; “I was like those who lifted infants to their cheeks”; “I bent down to them and fed them.”

God is speaking very tenderly, treating the people as a loving mother or father would.

Yet God is disappointed, for the people have turned away from God’s way and rebelled. While angry about this, God knows that loving tenderness is all God can show: “I will not come in wrath.”

Invite the group to pray together: “Patient Caregiver, you love us with tender affection even when you become discouraged by our actions. Thank you for standing with us and never separating us from your love. Amen.”

August 13, 1995

Pentecost 10, “By Faith”

Getting Ready: Advance preparation for this assembly could include fashioning simple hand puppets out of old socks; drawing characters on paper, cutting them out, and gluing sticks to the backs; or borrowing puppets. For the puppet “stage” you could turn a table on its side and have your puppeteers sit behind it.

You will need to recruit people for each of the parts, and make or find puppets for the following characters as listed in Hebrews 11: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, with additional women provided by Rahab and the women (verse 35).

Following are speeches for each of the characters, paraphrased from the scripture. After each character speaks, the rest will repeat a refrain in unison, the verse from chapter 11:1. Here are the speeches:

ABEL offered God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain. God approved of Abel’s gifts, and though he died, through his faith he still speaks.

Refrain: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

ENOCH had pleased God, possible only because of his faith. Like Enoch, when we approach God we must believe

God exists and that God rewards those who seek God. Enoch was taken by God.

Refrain.

NOAH was warned by God about events as yet unseen. He respected the warning and built an ark in accordance with his faith.

Refrain.

ABRAHAM obeyed God when he was told to set out for a new land, and he departed not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised. By faith he received many descendants.

Refrain.

SARAH longed to have a child, and through faith in the promises of God she was able to bear children. Through her, many descendants were born, as many as the stars in the heavens.

Refrain.

RAHAB received the Hebrew spies and sheltered them from the king of Jericho, and because of her faith she and her household did not perish when the king of Jericho was defeated.

Refrain.

WOMEN of faith received their dead by resurrection, and with the men endured many trials for the sake of their faith.

Refrain.

After your opening greeting, tell the group that the day's focus scripture comes from Hebrews 11:1–11, and that it is a lesson about faith and the courage to keep faith even when we do not see the object of faith. Teach the group the refrain and lead them to respond with the refrain following each "character's" speech. Begin the puppet program, and follow it with a prayer.

August 20, 1995

Pentecost 11,

"The Cloud of Witnesses"

Invite the group to think about people they know who give them strength and encouragement. Ask the group to share the names of these people if they wish, and to name the kind of strength they receive when they think of that person. You as leader might begin by sharing the name of

a friend or relative, living or dead, who has given you inspiration or courage. Take time to allow any and all to speak.

Read the scripture from Hebrews 12:1–2.

Invite the group to think for a moment about some of their favorite Bible characters, and ask them to call out the names of these characters. Invite specific individuals to explain what they appreciate about the characters.

As the scripture says, "We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" that we have the ability to keep moving forward in life. All of us share the stories of the biblical characters, and each one of us may look to the example of Jesus, the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith," as one who gives us strength and courage when we need it.

Close with a prayer, giving thanks for those who surround us, who have been and continue to be special to us.

August 27, 1995

Pentecost 12,

"All That Is Within Me—Bless God"

Psalm 103:1, 8

In the first part of this assembly, invite the group to join you on a guided meditation in order to feel the renewing power of God's goodness. You may wish to use the *Word Among Us*, Year One cassette selection "Neptune" or "Ocean Surf in a Hidden Cove" as a musical backdrop for this experience.

Ask the group to close their eyes; those wishing to keep their eyes open are asked to focus on a single object, like a candle flame or something else in the room.

Ask everyone to take several very deep breaths, breathing in slowly and then exhaling. Make sure the breathing is deep.

Invite them to pay attention to their breathing, inhaling and exhaling, and to keep their minds free from thoughts that might intrude. The breath is given by God as a gift, and we breathe in and out in recognition of that precious gift.

Ask the group to imagine a very pleasant place—a sunny meadow, a pool of water, a high mountain, a beautiful park. Tell the group the reason for their visit to this beautiful place is to rest and

to find renewal. There is nothing there to make them afraid; their special place is very safe. It is a place where the peace of God dwells.

Make sure everyone is breathing in and out and relaxed as you speak.

Ask the group to find a comfortable place to sit in their imaginary place. As they picture themselves sitting in this pleasant place, ask them to be aware that God is listening to them. They can silently tell God anything they want, anything they wish to say that will help them feel the peace of God and feel relaxed.

Say: "Continue to breathe in and breathe out. In a moment I will ask you to open your eyes, when you are ready, and to come back into the room."

Ask the group to slowly open their eyes.

Read the passage, "Bless God, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name."

Ask how the group feels after the meditation experience. Do they feel a peace and a renewal?

The second purpose of this assembly is to praise God for all God's goodness. For this brief exercise, ask the group to stand and sing the Doxology several times. The first time sing it very quietly, the next time sing it a bit louder, and the third time sing it as loudly as possible. Feel the praise, feel God's goodness:

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God all creatures here below,
Praise God above ye heavenly host,
Creator, Christ, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Invite the group to join you in a closing prayer: "God of Peace, we are thankful that you renew us with your gift of breath and quiet, and we are grateful that we can give you happy praises for all your goodness. Amen." 🌸

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