

NARRATIVE BUDGETING CHRISTIAN PRACTICE, PURPOSE AND NARRATIVE

A how-to guide to a Narrative Budget
A 2004 TeamWorks Article updated by Judith Johnson,
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There are three sections to this guide:

1. *How to develop a narrative budget – PAGES 1-5*
2. *A narrative budget handout template with complete budget break-out, including a narrative spreadsheet, including income and expenses (formatted to print back-to back) – PAGES 6-9*
3. *A narrative budget handout template without specific dollar break-outs (formatted to print back-to-back) – PAGES 10-11*

If you wish a Word format for the handout templates, contact Judith Johnson at email above

“Every month I try really hard to understand the financial statement review at our Church Council meeting, but I get lost in a sea of numbers.”

“I hear the presentation of our church budget every year at our annual meeting, and I still don’t know where all the money goes.”

Every congregation has financial statements (or line item budgets) but if you have heard comments similar to these, consider telling in a new and expanded way the story of how the church’s money is spent for ministry programming.

WHAT IS A NARRATIVE BUDGET?

- A narrative budget is vision-driven, providing glimpses of how you as a congregation are living out in practical ways the broad brush strokes of your vision statement. This narrative of who we are as a church unfolds in Scripture, in the life of Jesus, and in the world.
- A narrative budget tells a story or narrative of the ministry and programming that integrates dollars, people and mission into one portrait.
- A narrative budget includes salary, building and office expenses as part of the cost of individual ministry programming categories, or Christian practices as they are called in this article, I have chosen the four practices of Worshipping, Learning, Caring and Reaching Out.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN PRACTICE?

The narrative of the budget of our congregation unfolds within the context of Christian Practices. Diana Butler Bass offers this explanation of practices, which we are committed to upholding: “Christian practices are both individual and corporate. Christian practices embody belief, and conversely, beliefs form practices. Christian practices are the constituent parts of a larger Christian way of life, as revealed, modeled, and taught by Jesus Christ. Christian practices necessarily involve reflection, imagination, repetition, attention, and intentionality. Practices imply practice, repetition, craft, habit, and art. Christians engage these actions for their (i.e., the practices) own sake – because they are good and worthy and beautiful – not because they are instruments to some other end...”
(From *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*, c2004.)

- The spreadsheet includes both the expenses and income to support the narrative flyer. The expenses spreadsheet includes areas of Salaries and Benefits; Congregational Expenses; Administrative Expenses; and Building Expenses. The income example shows three sample designated areas of offering Commitments (both through PAR (Preauthorized Remittance) and Envelope givings) building fees and fundraising.
- A narrative budget does **not** replace the financial statement. It builds upon it and reshapes the same information within a story, a narrative.

WHY DO IT?

In many churches, the program committees share full and exciting visions of ministry – worship services, educational opportunities, congregational events and outreach projects. These committees, once a year, present a budget request to the finance folks asking for the amount of money they think they need. Finance prepares the money picture and others prepare the ministry programming pictures – two separate activities.

I have come to realize that working at the preparation of a narrative budget is the key to overcoming this separation of money and ministry by integrating dollars and ministry programming.

Narrative budgeting encourages church leaders to highlight the theology of giving and receiving – a theology that emphasizes the abundant gifts given to us by God and the abundant gifts we in turn want and need to give to God. This is why you exist as a congregation! This is what you have to celebrate! Your time! Your money! Your whole selves given as a gift to God!

There is a basic stewardship understanding that each of us has an innate need to give. When you tell your story, the reader, the “giver”, will want to respond by giving. Often, this natural desire to give will lead to other forms of commitment and transformation.

Yes, you have a story to tell, you have dollars attached to your story, you seek a response from those who need to give, developing a commitment **not** to a financial statement, but to the Christian Practices of Worshipping, Learning, Caring and Reaching Out – Practices lived out and celebrated in a particular way in your congregation.

Question for discussion: Why do we want to do this?

WHO IS INVOLVED IN PREPARING THE INFORMATION?

There is one simple word and image here:

EVERYONE

When you are creating a narrative budget, involve as many people as possible:

- ✦ The treasurer, finance committee and Trustees provide financial data.
- ✦ Committees need to develop the narrative story of their work.
- ✦ Members of your staff, including ministry personnel, highlight how they spend their time in each program area.
- ✦ Members and adherents can share “testimonials” of their commitment to particular areas of ministry programming.
- ✦ Individuals who like to write and compile stories from all these sources of information can be asked to create the narrative document.

Question for discussion: Who needs to be involved in creating your story? Think together about who that “everyone” is in your own setting.

WHEN AND WHERE DO YOU USE IT?

Remember those two quotes at the beginning of the article? What opportunities do you have in your congregation to share this narrative to help add clarity to the financial picture?

Let me name four occasions. You will think of others.

1. The administrative work of the church that is carried out by the Board/Council can be enriched by the existence of a narrative budget. There are often long conversations over money matters. Creating a narrative budget pamphlet that parallels the financial statement integrates finances and budgets with ministry programming so that the programming isn't forgotten in the concerns over money.
2. At an annual meeting, hand out the narrative budget information pamphlet along with the financial statement. This provides both a complete overview of the ministry programs and a detailed account of the finances of the church at the time you are asking the congregation for its approval of the upcoming budget. Consider making a power-point presentation as a visual way of telling your story. What about someone taking slides/digital pictures all year and showing them at the annual meeting to enhance the words in your pamphlet?
3. Narrative budgets are integral and necessary pieces in any well-developed stewardship program. How important it is to help each member and adherent in your congregation develop a picture of the whole mission of your church, particularly when you are asking them to give both their time and their money. You are so much more than buildings; you are so much more than staff; you are so much more than office supplies. You are a people of God continuously searching and unfolding responses to God's call. Tell the story of how that response takes shape through the ministry programming of your home church. In this way you focus your stewardship program on that core message of celebrating God's gifts to us and your opportunity and obligation to celebrate and offer in return your gifts to God.
4. A narrative budget is a key communication tool in a packet of information for visitors and new members, connecting the need for both their giving and their commitment to ministry programming. It is never too early to begin telling a story that draws people into wanting to know more and to become more involved.

Question for discussion: *When and where can we effectively use a narrative budget document?*

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

There are many formats you can use. I have mentioned creating visual components (power-point presentations, slides, photos). Many churches use a format that can also be posted on their web site. In this article, I have included a sample of a pamphlet format, along with a sample of a full narrative spreadsheet (Pamphlet A). For congregations who cannot complete a full break-out of finances, I have included a sample pamphlet that still connects narrative and budget in a more general statement. (Pamphlet B).

Whatever the format, there are 4 basic steps:

1. Review your mission statement/purpose statement and see if the statement (a brief one, hopefully!) can be used on the cover.
2. Explore the context of understanding ministry programming as Christian Practice as you create profiles of ministry programming. As noted, I have used four Christian practices – Worshipping, Learning, Caring and Reaching Out to highlight the four core areas of ministry and mission in congregational life.
3. Work with the financial statements. Your narrative has the same totals as the financial statements, just shaped into a different configuration. (Example in income/expense spreadsheet with pamphlet A)
4. Allocate expenses to each ministry area.

Creating profiles of ministry programming within the four Christian practices

The writing of the narrative takes some skill. As with any communications tool, make sure the facts are right and that the style is one that draws people into the story. Pictures, personal comments and quotes can add interest to the presentation.

I have found the recent research and resources on Christian practices to be meaningful in adding context to the words “ministry programming”, so you will note that the sample narrative budget handout builds on this for churches that are committed to recapturing ministry programming as practice. See two resources listed at the end of this article.

The enclosed sample is a straightforward narrative that includes a description of the area of ministry programming (e.g., worshipping) and then adds in a list of specific examples of events. You will notice with worshipping, the list includes baptisms, weddings, funerals as well as ushers and greeters and worship bulletins – a combination of ministerial duties, volunteer activities and office supplies.

In each ministry program area, you can highlight your understanding of that ministry as Christian Practice and then include how you live it out in practical ways. This generic pamphlet samples are simply one format.

Allocating expenses and income to each ministry

So now, you need to move on to the preparatory steps that are taken to arrive at those expense totals.

Expenses:

You will see the spreadsheet insert presents the same budget of \$192,900.00 for Anywhere United Church that is in the narrative pamphlet. Column 1 is the annual budget as it would appear on the financial statement. It is from this annual budget that you allocate figures to the narrative columns for the four Christian Practices – Worshipping, Learning, Caring, and Reaching Out.

Example 1: An example where \$ are assigned in all four columns

When you look at the first line item, ministry personnel, you will see that the total expense (salary, benefits, travel, etc.) is \$65,000. In conversation with the minister, the Ministry and Personnel committee would ask the minister to determine a rough estimate of time spent in each category of programming. This example indicates approximately 40% spent in matters related to the practice of Worshipping; 35% related to the practice of Learning; 15% related to the practice of Caring; 10% related to Reaching Out. Once percentages are figured out, it is easy to determine the dollars to allocate and you can see in line 1 that 40% of \$65,000 is \$26,000 and is assigned to worship and 35% of \$65,000 is \$23,000 and is assigned to learning. Similar calculations provide the figures for Caring and Reaching Out.

Example 2: An example where \$ are assigned in one or two areas only.

The third budget line item under salaries and benefits lists the organist salary at \$17,000. In this congregation, the organist has responsibility in two areas: 80% in worshipping and 20% in learning. The dollars entered are \$13,600 for worshipping and \$3,400 for learning and 0 is recorded in the other two columns.

The same deductive process is used with each budget line item. **Approximations are all that is expected.** The final picture emerges when all the calculations are done. In this example, you can see at a glance that Anywhere United Church spends 33% in the Practice of Worshipping, 27% in Learning, 15% in Caring and 25% in Reaching Out.

“What can we do? No-one in our congregation can do this detailed figuring for our church!”

Don't give up the process! Pamphlet B offers you an example of developing the narrative in each of the Christian Practice areas and indicating in a general statement that part of the total budget supports each particular area of ministry programming. Money and ministry are still connected and that is a key outcome of developing narrative budgets.

IN CONCLUSION

Leaders in congregations have a responsibility to share the story of the mission of the congregation and how you live out your life together as the church. As Christian communities, every congregation has an exciting faith story to tell. I believe a narrative budget can be one central piece in this process, reshaping what seems to be simply an administrative task – the understanding of your money – into an integrated story of congregational life and Christian practice. How you raise your money and how you spend your money are defining characteristics of who you truly are. How you worship, learn, care and reach out offer more defining moments. In connecting all these characteristics and moments, you can keep before your members, your adherents and your communities a picture of money and ministry offering faithful mission.

Everyone loves a story! Have fun developing and telling your narrative!
Discover the richness of re-engaging with Worshipping, Learning, Caring and Reaching Out as Christian Practices.

RESOURCES

Celebrate Stewardship, by Warren and Judith Johnson

This resource book for planning and carrying out a stewardship program includes information on preparing a narrative budget, available through UCRD (United Church Resource Development)
Order number: 200000190 Cost: \$11.95

To order:

Email: UCRD@united-church.ca

Phone: toll-free 1-800-288-7365
or locally 416-253-5456

Mail: Attn: Order Desk
United Church Resource Distribution
25 Connell Court, Unit 2,
Toronto, ON M8Z 1E8

Note: As one of the co-authors of this resource, I would suggest you consider updating the narrative budget in Celebrate Stewardship with the resource in this document.

Butler Bass, Diana. Practicing Congregations: Imagining a New Old Church (Alban Institute, 2004)

Butler Bass, Diana. Christianity for the Rest of Us: How the Neighborhood Church is Transforming the Faith (Harper, 2006)

Note: Both of Diana Butler Bass' books provide extensive and exciting reading on Christian practices.

THE PRACTICE OF CARING
\$28,875.00 - 15% OF OUR \$192,900.00 BUDGET

We offer ongoing care and support to all members and friends of our congregation and to any with whom we cross paths as we live out our faith.

We respond to individuals in times of crisis, such as illness or bereavement. We keep in touch with members who are housebound or who live in seniors' residences and can no longer come to church. Our ministry personnel and volunteer visitors want to make this church a caring community where each person is able to feel the love of God being shared with one another.

Some practical examples that are part of the Practice of Caring:

- staff time (*include parish nurse, if applicable*), travel expenses,.
- visits to hospitals and seniors' residences
- premarital and marital counseling; bereavement counselling
- letters & care packages to university students & armed forces personnel
- milestone ministries to mark significant life occasions
- new member visits and newsletter distribution to all families
- social gatherings throughout the year, including community dinners.

THE PRACTICE OF REACHING OUT
\$48,275.00 - 25% OF OUR \$192,900.00 BUDGET

Living our faith continues as we live our lives in the world. . We provide time and money for God's work beyond our church walls. This work takes place in our city, in our country, and in countries all around the world. We also support the work of the United Church through Presbytery and Conference assessments. Our congregation has a strong ministry of outreach both locally and through the Mission and Service Fund of the United Church. We are called to seek justice and equality for others.

Throughout the year, we reach out beyond this budget and provide additional support and funding to special projects as needs are identified. These projects may be in our local community or farther afield.

Some practical examples that are part of the Practice of Reaching Out:

- Mission and Service Fund support and support for Presbytery and Conference work
- local initiatives for justice and care for the earth
- special projects
- staff time, supplies, and space

Living God's Transforming Love

MINISTRY AND PROGRAMMING: ANYWHERE UNITED CHURCH 2010



Together, we give to financially support the ministries and programs of our church. How much money is spent? How is it spent?

The narrative of who we are as a church unfolds in Scripture, in the life of Jesus and in the world. We live out this story in many ways, including through the Christian Practices of:

- ✦ Worshipping
- ✦ Learning
- ✦ Caring
- ✦ Reaching out

These four practices give us sacred containers within which we can place our financial resources so that this congregation will be able to offer ministry and programming as we continue to live out God's transforming love in so many faith-filled ways. This folder offers you a broad story and the insert provides a narrative spreadsheet of income and expenses for those who want to have more financial details.

We thank you for your generosity
Please read this story and prayerfully consider how you want to respond on

Celebration Sunday, (date)

when you indicate your Estimate of Givings for next year, 2011

CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

The narrative of the budget of our congregation unfolds within the context of Christian Practices. Diana Butler Bass offers this explanation of practices, which we are committed to upholding: "Christian practices are both individual and corporate. Christian practices embody belief, and conversely, beliefs form practices. Christian practices are the constituent parts of a larger Christian way of life, as revealed, modeled, and taught by Jesus Christ. Christian practices necessarily involve reflection, imagination, repetition, attention, and intentionality. Practices imply practice, repetition, craft, habit, and art. Christians engage these actions for their (i.e., the practices) own sake - because they are good and worthy and beautiful - not because they are instruments to some other end..."(from *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church*, c2004.)

THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIPPING

\$62,725.00 - 33% OF OUR \$192,900.00 BUDGET

Our church celebrates the vibrancy of its worship, offering holy space for experiences of God. We gather as a community of faith to celebrate God's presence and where we listen for God's call to service in our world. Our ministry personnel, working with our organist and Worship Committee, prepare the weekly worship services. We have a strong tradition of involving lay members in leadership in our worship. We offer worship each week at 10:30 a.m. and special worship services at other times.

Some practical examples that are part of the Practice of Worshipping:

- ministry leadership in worship/preaching
- instruments, choir, music, and staff
- funerals, weddings, baptisms, and records
- banners and decorations
- scripture readers
- supplies: bulletins, offering envelopes, etc.
- ushers, greeters, counters
- space for worship and preparation
- worship resources, hymn books, projections

THE PRACTICE OF LEARNING

\$53,025.00 - 27% OF OUR \$192,900.00 BUDGET

Through faith formation, each of us grows in our knowledge of what it means to be the people of God in our world.

We provide education for children and youth, preschool to Grade 8, at church school each Sunday during the church service hour at 10:30 a.m. A nursery is available for babies and toddlers up to age 2. We also support the midweek work of Scouts and Guides. Weekly youth group gatherings encourage High Schoolers and teenagers to spend time together here.

Adult study and reflection happen throughout the year through Bible study, speakers' series, women's spirituality gatherings, and men's breakfasts. In our adult gatherings, we seek to experience the mystery of God's presence in our lives as we explore, question, and talk together. Special classes throughout the year bring together adults who want to become members and reaffirm their baptismal vows, parents who want to have their children baptized, and teenagers who want to reaffirm their baptismal vows for themselves.

Some practical examples that are part of the Practice of Learning

- church school curriculum and children and youth programs
- small group ministries, Bible study, speakers' series, and discussion groups
- adult membership classes and baptism orientation classes
- teen confirmation classes
- sponsorship of Scouts and support of Guides
- staff time (*include youth worker and paid childcare*), space, and supplies

THE MINISTRY AND PROGRAMMING
AT ANYWHERE UNITED CHURCH

A NARRATIVE SPREADSHEET - EXPENSES
A SAMPLE

EXPENSES	ANNUAL BUDGET	Worshipping		Learning		Caring		Reaching Out	
Salaries & Benefits	122,000.00								
- Ministry Personnel	65,000.00	26,000.00		23,000.00		9,500.00		6,500.00	
- Admin Assistant	25,000.00	6,250.00		6,250.00		6,250.00		6,250.00	
- Organist (part-time)	17,000.00	13,600.00		3,400.00		0.00		0.00	
- Custodian (part-time)	15,000.00	3,750.00		3,750.00		3,750.00		3,750.00	
Congregational Expenses	35,400.00								
- Worshipping	3,000.00	3,000.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	
- Music	1,500.00	1,000.00		500.00		0.00		0.00	
- Church School	2,000.00	0.00		2,000.00		0.00		0.00	
- Youth Ministry	2,000.00	0.00		2,000.00		0.00		0.00	
- Adult Faith Formation	2,000.00	0.00		2,000.00		0.00		0.00	
- Resource Library	2,000.00	500.00		1,000.00		500.00		0.00	
- United Church Observer	400.00	0.00		0.00		0.00		400.00	
- Mission and Service Fund	17,500.00	0.00		0.00		0.00		17,500.00	
-Assessments – Conference & Presbytery	5,000.00	0.00		0.00		0.00		5,000.00	
Administrative Expenses	15,000.00								
-Equipment and supplies	2,000.00	500.00		500.00		500.00		500.00	
-Printing & Stationery	5,000.00	1,000.00		1,500.00		1,250.00		1,250.00	
- Postage, phone, web	8,000.00	2,000.00		2,000.00		2,000.00		2,000.00	
Building Expenses	20,500.00								
- Utilities	6,500.00	1,625.00		1,625.00		1,625.00		1,625.00	
- Upkeep	8,000.00	2,000.00		2,000.00		2,000.00		2,000.00	
- Insurance	6,000.00	1,500.00		1,500.00		1,500.00		1,500.00	
TOTALS \$	192,900.00	62,725.00	33%	53,025.00	27%	28,875.00	15%	48,275.00	25%

**THE MINISTRY AND PROGRAMMING
AT ANYWHERE UNITED CHURCH**

**A NARRATIVE SPREADSHEET – INCOME
A SAMPLE**

INCOME	ANNUAL BUDGET	Worshipping		Learning		Caring		Reaching Out	
Building Use Fees	30,000.00	2,375.00		2,375.00		2,475.00		22,775.00	
Fundraising	10,000.00			2,000.00				8,000.00	
Offering Commitments	152,900.00	60,350.00		48,650.00		26,400.00		17,500.00	
- by PAR (pre-authorized)*	91,740.00	36,210.00		29,190.00		15,840.00		10,500.00	
- by Envelope*	61,160.00	24,140.00		19,460.00		10,560.00		7,000.00	
TOTALS \$	192,900.00	62,725.00	33%	53,025.00	27%	28,875.00	15%	48,275.00	25%

Notes explaining the income allocations:

- Building User Fees
 - 80% of building use fees supports continued use of the building by those outside the congregation – the Christian Practice of Reaching Out
- Fundraising
 - Annual Meeting voted to support Christian Practices of Reaching Out (80%) and Learning (20%)
- Offering Commitments
 - Split between PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) at 60% and Envelopes at 40%.
 - Givers have designated \$17,500 to Mission and Service Fund
 - All other income is allocated to support the percentage of Expenses in each of the Practices of Worshipping, Learning, Caring and Reaching out as determined by the expenses.

Income:

In allocating the income, there are notes on the income narrative spreadsheet to indicate samples of decisions a congregation and its Board/Council may make to allocate specific income. The remaining income is allocated to meet the expenses determined in developing the expense narrative.

THE PRACTICE OF CARING

Part of our \$192,900 Budget supports the Ministry of Caring

We offer ongoing care and support to all members and friends of our congregation and to any with whom we cross paths as we live out our faith.

We respond to individuals in times of crisis, such as illness or bereavement. We keep in touch with members who are housebound or who live in seniors' residences and can no longer come to church. Our ministry personnel and volunteer visitors want to make this church a caring community where each person is able to feel the love of God being shared with one another.

Some practical examples that are part of the Practice of Caring:

- staff time (*include parish nurse, if applicable*), travel expenses, .
- visits to hospitals and seniors' residences
- premarital and marital counseling; bereavement counseling
- letters & care packages to university students & armed forces personnel
- new member visits and newsletter distribution to all families
- social gatherings throughout the year, including community dinners.

THE PRACTICE OF REACHING OUT

Part of our \$192,900 Budget supports the Ministry of Reaching Out

Living our faith continues as we live our lives in the world. . We provide time and money for God's work beyond our church walls. This work takes place in our city, in our country, and in countries all around the world. We also support the work of the United Church through Presbytery and Conference assessments. Our congregation has a strong ministry of outreach both locally and through the Mission and Service Fund of the United Church. We are called to seek justice and equality for others.

Throughout the year, we reach out beyond this budget and provide additional support and funding to special projects as needs are identified. These projects may be in our local community or farther afield.

Some practical examples that are part of the Practice of Reaching Out:

- Mission and Service Fund support and support for Presbytery and Conference work
- local initiatives for justice and care for the earth
- special projects

Living God's Transforming Love

MINISTRY AND PROGRAMMING: ANYWHERE UNITED CHURCH 2010



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- ✦ Worshipping
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- ✦ Reaching out

These four practices give us sacred containers within which we can place our financial resources so that this congregation will be able to offer ministry and programming as we continue to live out God's transforming love in so many faith-filled ways. This folder offers you a broad story that connects our \$192,000 budget to the mission and ministry we offer as Anywhere United Church

Please read this story and prayerfully consider how you want to respond on

Celebration Sunday, (date)

when you indicate your Estimate of Givings for next year, 2011

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THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIPPING ***Part of our \$192,900 Budget supports*** ***the Ministry of Worshipping***

Our church celebrates the vibrancy of its worship, offering holy space for experiences of God. We gather as a community of faith to celebrate God's presence and where we listen for God's call to service in our world. Our ministry personnel, working with our organist and Worship Committee, prepare the weekly worship services. We have a strong tradition of involving lay members in leadership in our worship. We offer worship each week at 10:30 a.m. and special worship services at other times.

Some practical examples that are part of the Practice of Worshipping:

- ministry leadership in worship/preaching
- instruments, choir, music, and staff
- funerals, weddings, baptisms, and records
- banners and decorations
- scripture readers
- supplies: bulletins, offering envelopes, etc.
- ushers, greeters, counters
- space for worship and preparation
- worship resources, hymn books, projections

THE PRACTICE OF LEARNING ***Part of our \$192,900 budget supports the Ministry of*** ***Learning***

Through faith formation, each of us grows in our knowledge of what it means to be the people of God in our world.

We provide education for children and youth, preschool to Grade 8, at church school each Sunday during the church service hour at 10:30 a.m. A nursery is available for babies and toddlers up to age 2. We also support the midweek work of Scouts and Guides. Weekly youth group gatherings encourage High Schoolers and teenagers to spend time together here.

Adult study and reflection happen throughout the year through Bible study, speakers' series, women's spirituality gatherings, and men's breakfasts. In our adult gatherings, we seek to experience the mystery of God's presence in our lives as we explore, question, and talk together. Special classes throughout the year bring together adults who want to become members and reaffirm their baptismal vows, parents who want to have their children baptized, and teenagers who want to reaffirm their baptismal vows for themselves.

Some practical examples that are part of the Practice of Learning

- church school curriculum and children and youth programs
- small group ministries, Bible study, speakers' series, and discussion groups
- adult membership classes and baptism orientation classes
- teen confirmation classes
- sponsorship of Scouts and support of Guides
- staff time (*include youth worker and paid childcare*), space, and supplies