

Illuminating the Forgotten Parts of the Church
A Lesson on the Belhar Confession
By Charlie White

Audience

This lesson is oriented toward children in a Sunday school setting. Ideally, it should be offered to children of adults engaged in a study of the Belhar Confession. It is written from a North American perspective, but can easily be adapted for your local context.

Purpose

This lesson's purpose is to help students understand how people can be prejudiced without knowing it and to encourage them to embrace a more holistic view of the church.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will:

- Be able to name an often-forgotten group represented in the church.
- Worship God through visual arts and non-Western music.
- Pray for unity in the church.

Material and Space Requirements

The group leader will need a surface to write on that all students can see. Also needed is a bulletin board or some other blank surface on which art projects can be mounted.

All students will require a work surface and art supplies. The art supplies can be as simple as white paper and markers but, in the spirit of creativity and inclusivity, the instructor is encouraged to use construction paper, glitter, or other media with color and texture. Color will likely be very important to this lesson—be sure you have enough materials so that every student has access to a “full palette.”

A song and prayer are part of this lesson. Both will work best with the students arranged in a circle. To minimize having to move furniture while the lesson is going on, arrange tables so students can work, sing, and pray in one place.

Print a copy of the song used in the lesson for each student. (“Bambelela” is available for purchase on the GIA Publications website: www.giamusic.com.) Encourage your director of worship or another musically talented individual in your congregation to lead the song using a variety of instruments.

Lesson Outline

Introduction and Statement of Purpose (5 minutes)

Welcome students and give them time to settle down and get in place. Clearly state the purpose of the lesson: tell them that you are going to spend the time thinking about what the church is and, more importantly, who the church is.

Ask the students to join you in prayer as you ask for God's wisdom to help you understand together what the church is, and who the people in it are. Ask for God's help to worship as one community, and to remember who all the members of the church are.

Reflect (15 minutes)

Ask students to identify some people in the church. You'll likely start out with names, then roles (the minister or organist). Write roles down on the board, and when ideas start running out, encourage the students to identify "groups" of people—identify the students by the name of their group, and remind them of the youth group. Encourage them to name some other groups, and write the group names on the board when they are mentioned.

When students run out of ideas, look over the board. Ask if they have forgotten anybody, and write down any more responses that come up. Continue this until the students think they have listed all the possible groups.

Point out who they have forgotten (or congratulate them on a good list!). Add more groups to the list, and then ask the students if they think another church in your city belongs on the list. Let them talk about it, and make sure they say why that church should or shouldn't appear. Encourage them to acknowledge that you all worship God together, even if you do it in different ways or different buildings. Ask about other churches that you can add to your list.

Finally, ask about the church in Africa, if you don't have something that covers that on your list. Add the church in Australia, the church in Asia, the church in Europe, the church in South America, and even the church in Antarctica if your students suggest it!

Ask your students these questions:

- What do these people look like?
- What do these people believe?
- What would you do if someone from each of these groups was going to be with you all day next Sunday?
- What would you feel like if you were with one of these groups all day next Sunday?
- Do you think all these people sing the same songs we do?

Connect (15 minutes)

Conclude the discussion of the last question by inviting students to sing a new kind of song. Tell them that they will worship God with a song that comes from a group of people from South Africa called the Xhosa. Spend some time letting the students pronounce Xhosa. Explain that it sounds like “kaw-sah,” but that they should make the first consonant sound by touching their tongue quickly to the roof of their mouth—almost like they are trying to remove a stuck popcorn kernel.

Pass out a copy of the song sheet while students are pronouncing Xhosa. Have your worship leader introduce the song and the tune, and explain how to pronounce “Bambelela” (bum-bah-lay-luh). Sing the song in Xhosa, repeating the printed words four times.

Tell the students that slaves would sing this song while they were being moved around the United States on railroad cars. The cars were packed so tightly that some people had to hold on to the cars on the outside, and if they fell off, they’d die. The words mean “never let go,” and all the people sang the song together and as loud as they could as a prayer that God would give them strength.

Sing the song again, in English this time, repeating the verse four times. After that, sing in a round, having half the group start in Xhosa, and the rest of the group respond in English.

Respond (15 minutes)

Pass out art supplies, and explain that you are going to try to draw a picture of the church. Remind the students of everything they have learned, and encourage them to draw a picture that is big enough for all the groups you’ve identified on the board.

At the conclusion of this time, have students share and explain their pictures, if they wish. Ask them if their pictures represent absolutely everybody on the board. Ask if they think putting all the pictures together does a better job of representing everyone on the board. Help them hang their pictures on the bulletin board.

Prayer (10 minutes)

Have students join hands and say, “God, watch over my sister/brother _____,” where “_____” is the name of the person sitting to their right. Go around the circle in this way. Then, step out of the circle, joining the hands of the people to your left and right, and move to the board where you have written various groups in the church. Have students continue their prayers by saying, “God, watch over _____,” where “_____” is now a group written on the board. Circle the groups when they have been mentioned. When all groups have been mentioned, rejoin the group and conclude the prayer by asking God to give us love and wisdom so that we may unite with our brothers and sisters across the world to build one church that celebrates all people in the spirit of Christ.