

He, She, We and God – Frequently Asked Questions

What is He, She, We and God?

He, She, We and God is a weekend workshop for fifth graders and their parents, taught by Jenny Beaumont in collaboration with small group leaders from St. Paul's. Jenny is an Episcopal educator, a trained facilitator and teacher currently on staff at Christ Episcopal Church, Charlotte, NC. She brings 15 years experience in education and ministry to the dynamic conversation that connects the experience of faith with our sexuality. She leads workshops on Christian Faith and Human Sexuality throughout North Carolina.

The focus of our event is a comprehensive faith and human sexuality seminar taught over a Friday afternoon and Saturday. The program is based on universal needs of tweens (older elementary children) and their parents. To honor and lift up parents as the primary sexuality educators to their children, the program involves parents as an integral part of the program.

The program is a developmentally appropriate, creatively interactive, faith-based approach to sexuality that lays human sexuality in the context of faith. Direct and indirect teachings around God's creation, scripture and sexuality as a gift from God are intertwined throughout the workshop. Conversations and teaching around the stewardship of gifts, responsible behavior, and God's grace and love abound in this workshop.

Topics of discussion include:

For Youth: sexuality as gift of God; changing relationships (family and friends): media, peer & family pressure; male and female reproductive systems & processes; prenatal development & birth, physical and emotional changes of puberty; and assertive behavior.

For Parents: sexuality as a gift of God, young adolescent development and need of tweens regarding sexuality; examination of parent attitudes regarding sexuality; value clarification to empower parents to effectively share their values with their teens; and communicating with tweens about sexuality.

My child has a class in school. Why would we want to do a workshop at church?

Although most 5th graders are taught "body parts and mechanics" in school, we as a Christian community have a unique responsibility and opportunity to place the gift of sexuality within our Christian faith. Jenny and the leaders for this weekend are all deeply committed to making a connection with our "tweens" (not young children and not yet teens – they are in be"tween") and helping them see that our parish community is interested in and supportive of them during these important and often confusing years of growth and change.

He, She, We and God aims to go far beyond just a basic sharing of information about sex. We hope to demonstrate to tweens that their faith community is a trustworthy place to grow and mature and learn about the faith connection between their developing sexuality and God. The best way to do this is by inviting kids and parents to learn and share at church. As a parent, it can be very difficult to address issues around puberty, development, and sexuality in a few conversations. The issues kids face and the questions they have are biological, social, spiritual, and cognitive and emotional. The weekend context gives tweens and parents the time and space to explore a range of issues together.

Jenny Beaumont

427-A South Sharon Amity Road ♦ Charlotte, NC 28211 ♦ 704-364-8083

How does the facilitator handle questions?

We honor all participants by answering all the questions that the tweens ask. The workshop leaders model the openness that we hope tweens will find at home. We talk about how all questions are good questions. Asking questions helps everyone learn. The questions are answered factually and a connection between God and sexuality is made whenever appropriate. We seek to offer both knowledge and skills when answering questions. We emphasize how we, as followers of Christ, view the world and creation. We talk about how our Christian viewpoints can sometimes differ from the way that our modern culture may view people, behavior, creation, sexuality, stereotypes, gender roles, etc. If the tweens ask for a value clarification (is this right or wrong?), we ask them to think about how the culture, God and parents would view that topic and encourage them to discuss the issue with their parents.

In keeping with the goal of empowering parents as the primary educators of their children, Jenny shares age-appropriate information and encourages tweens to ask their parents questions and enter into conversations with their parents about the thoughts, feelings and questions that they have. We recognize that there can be a wide range of beliefs and opinions about some controversial topics even at church, and we seek to empower *all parents* to effectively teach their children about faith and sexuality.

A portion of the parent program is devoted to helping parents clarify values and communicate those to their children, as they answer questions about difficult or sensitive topics. Keep in mind that the questions parents and other adults raise about sexuality are usually *not* the questions that our fifth and sixth graders will ask.

How are the volunteer leaders (small group leaders) from our church selected?

Volunteer leaders within the parish are trained to help facilitate the weekend's activities, and they are a crucial part of the *He, She, We and God* weekend. They help connect the program to our parish, and demonstrate to our tweens that there are people at the church who care about them enough to lead and guide them as they grow and develop. We look for leaders who feel comfortable with their own sexuality and who feel comfortable talking to middle school age children.

Do boys and girls hear all information together, or separately?

Most of the teaching and learning in *He, She, We and God* takes place with boys and girls, together. There are some opportunities to separate to deal with gender-specific issues, but most of the learning is in a co-educational setting because a key skill for kids at this age is learning about the gift of Christian community and our life together—both male and female. Most of us live with and love those of the opposite gender—we are brothers, sisters, wives and husbands. Learning about the experience of the opposite gender helps us to be more compassionate to each other and inspires us to be supportive of the changes everyone goes through.

Why is parent participation required?

A key goal of *He, She, We and God* is to empower parents as the primary educators of their children, and parents consistently learn as much or more from the program as their kids do. It is a positive family bonding time: the weekend includes opportunities for listening and talking to each other, laughing together, playing together, and worshipping together. The workshop is also a good opportunity for parents of fifth graders to get to know each other and strengthen bonds within the church community.

What about children who are shy or easily embarrassed?

A major goal of *He, She, We and God* is teaching careful respect for others, and Jenny presents in a way that helps those who may be quiet or easily embarrassed to feel more comfortable. Before the weekend, tweens will receive a postcard from Jenny to help them prepare for the program. During the weekend, group norms are established that ensure that all members of the group are cherished and respected. Activities like the anonymous question box and breaking up into smaller groups help all children become comfortable in the workshop and with their peers.

My child has sports/homework/other obligations that weekend. Can we miss part of the program?

Past experience has taught us that it is very disruptive for youth or parents to attend only part of the program. Please plan around other obligations so you and your child can attend the entire event.

Can people sign up who are not St. Paul's members?

Yes. Jenny has facilitated *He, She, We and God* at churches of many denominations, including Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopal churches. Christians from many different backgrounds will be comfortable at *He, She, We and God*. We have had visitors from other churches attend the program, and they report feeling welcomed at St. Paul's, and in the workshop. We are always glad to have guests join us.

How do I sign up?

Registration forms may be found on our website, at <http://www.stpauls-ws.org/heshewehandgod>

The registration deadline is Sunday, January 15, 2012. Register sooner to hold your space!

For more details, contact Stacy Holley, St. Paul's Christian Formation Minister for Children and Youth, at 336-723-4391 or sholley@stpauls-ws.org