

How to Choose Curriculum

Tori Smit, Associate Secretary, The Vine



Choosing the right curriculum for your church can be an exciting and challenging undertaking. Whether the curriculum is to be used by your church school, mid-week Bible study group or small group ministry, there is much to consider. It is not just a matter of walking into the store and grabbing the first thing that strikes your eye. Like the purchase of a new winter coat or a brand new car, you want it to be the right one for your needs; it might look pretty on the clothes rack or dealership floor, but it has to keep you warm, be just the right fit, and ensure you are safe from the elements through good weather and bad.

Who should be choosing the curriculum for your church? Ultimately the responsibility for “the selection and approval of resource materials and programs that will be used in Christian education” rests with the session (Book of Forms 112.3). More than the session, there are other people you want to include in the

discussion. Ultimately, you want the curriculum you choose to be well-received, to meet the needs of the leaders and participants of the specific program with which it will be used, and to be consistent with the theology and practice of your congregation. Ideally, a selection group would consist of the minister(s), elders, Christian education committee, leaders and parents or participants.

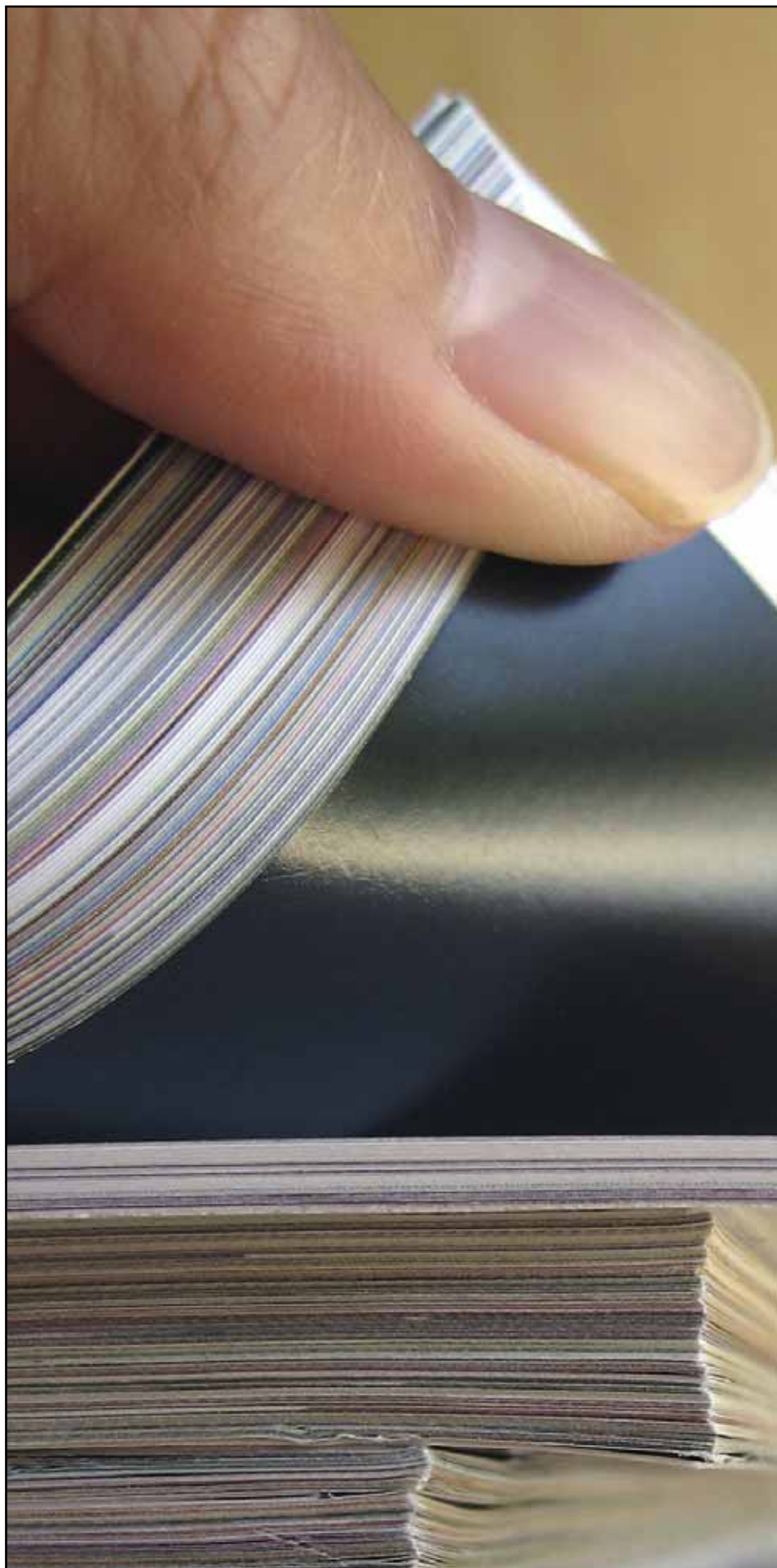
Where can you start your search for the right curriculum? A good place is by referring to the All Ages Curriculum Chart 2009-2011, available online at www.presbyterian.ca/curriculumchart or through The Book Room. This chart compares a wide variety of curricula available for all ages. Each curriculum on this chart has been studied by Presbyterian educators and is consistent with the theology and educational practice of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Once you’ve looked over the possibilities on this chart, you should

be able to narrow your search to perhaps three or four that are suitable for your specific needs. Check out the ones you have chosen to consider. Many publishers have curriculum samples online for you to review.

Finally, contact the regional staff person responsible for educational ministries in your synod. They have samples of these resources for your committee to examine. Your regional staff person can also come and help walk your review committee through the steps needed to evaluate each of the curricula you would like to consider, helping you to find the one that best suits your needs.

Following is a checklist of items you will want to look for as you review each curriculum offering. Gather your review committee together with samples of each of the curricula you would like to review. Photocopy the checklist, one copy for each person, times the number of curricula. Have each person, or small group, pick out one curriculum to begin. With the checklist in mind, ask them to skim the curriculum and then focus their attention on one lesson plan of their choice. Ask them to answer as many questions on the checklist as they can. After 20 or 30 minutes, invite them to choose a second curriculum and with a new checklist follow the same instructions as before. Continue until all of the curricula have been reviewed.

Once each person has a sheet completed on each curriculum, it's time to compare notes. Consider the theology and educational methodology of each, and choose a curriculum that best meets the needs of your congregation.



Curriculum Evaluation Checklist

Name of Curriculum: _____ Publisher: _____

Age group evaluated: _____

Read at least one complete lesson plan in the curriculum you are reviewing. Read, view or listen to any additional materials provided by the curriculum for the specific lesson plan (student book, take-home papers, posters, CDs, etc.).

Theological Stance

What does this curriculum say about God?

(Look for words and phrases that describe God, such as Father, Judge, Creator, involved, distant, and so on. Jot them down.)

What does this curriculum say about Jesus?

(Look for describing words and phrases. Jot them down.)

What does this curriculum say about the Holy Spirit?

(Look for describing words and phrases. Jot them down.)

What does this curriculum say about the church?

(Look for describing words and phrases. Jot them down.)

What does this curriculum say about sin?

(Look for describing words and phrases. Jot them down.)

What does this curriculum say about baptism and communion?

(Look for describing words and phrases. Jot them down.)

What does this curriculum say about our mission? Application?

(Look for describing words and phrases. Jot them down.)

What does this curriculum say about hope?

(Look for describing words and phrases. Jot them down.)

Compare what you find with Presbyterian/Reformed theology. To do this, you may wish to compare your findings with Living Faith/Foi Vivante.

Educational Stance

What is the role of the teacher?

Describe the view of the student held by the curriculum.

Are there a variety of learning styles accommodated in the curriculum? Describe them.

Is it age appropriate?

Are there options for the teacher to choose from?

Are there Bible and teaching background materials for the teacher?

Additional Considerations

Are the student materials attractive and inviting?

How long would it take to prepare a lesson each week?

Are the materials readily available?

What are the costs per student if you were to choose this curriculum? (Add the cost of teaching materials, student materials and additional materials, and then divide by the number of students in your class.)

When you have evaluated each of the curricula in one age group, ask the following questions.

How do they compare theologically? In educational stance?

What are the benefits of each curriculum? The drawbacks?

Which curriculum would best suit our situation?