

death takes a beating

a youth-led service for Easter

a powerful, dramatic, intergenerational
Easter service your teenagers can lead

by dave mcclellan

Easter is on the way. Florists and chicken farmers have a spring in their step. And the church is getting ready for the year's high-water attendance mark. Now's our big chance to make an eternal impact in the lives of all those twice-a-year churchgoers.

This youth-led service for the whole church should do the job. It's not only powerful, it's intergenerational. And the payoff? Your young people will stand a decent chance of staying awake for the whole thing, and your adults will be surprised at how much teenagers can do when given the chance.

Use this program in place of your normal Sunday morning Easter service—or try it on Palm Sunday, Good Friday, or even Easter Sunday night.

Overview:

- 0:00 Prelude
- 0:01 Candle Lighting—Readers 1 and 2
- 0:04 Congregational Song—*Were You There?*
- 0:06 Candle Snuffing—Readers 3 and 4
- 0:08 Quiet Solo or Group Song—*Beautiful, Scandalous Night* (Smalltown Poets)
- 0:11 New Life Announcement—Readers 5 and 6
- 0:13 Congregational Hymn—Your Choice
- 0:16 Voices From the Edge—Readers 7 and 8
- 0:20 Baby Talk
- 0:24 The Last Enemy—Readers 9 and 10
- 0:26 Kernels of Wheat
- 0:29 "Because of Easter" Reading
- 0:31 Devotional
- 0:38 Song—*Buried Alive* (Jill Phillips)
- 0:41 Communion—(Kids Serve)
- 0:55 Teenager Interviews
- 1:02 Candle Relighting
- 1:04 Closing Hymn—Your Choice
- 1:07 Closing—Reader 11

● **Candle Lighting**—Have your kids spread around the edges of the sanctuary, passing out small candles and holders to people as they come in. Play quiet, introspective music in the background, and light a large candle up front.

After everyone is seated, have Reader 1 read aloud John 1:1-4 while standing in an aisle. Then have Reader 2 read verses 5-9 from the other side of the room. When the readers finish, the kids should go to the large candle, light their own candles, and then transfer the flame to the first candle in each aisle. Continue lighting down the aisles until all candles are lit.

● **Congregational Song**—*Were You There?* Sing this old hymn a cappella. It's familiar to most adults, but you may have to teach it to your young people.

● **Candle Snuffing**—Have Reader 3 read aloud John 1:10-11 from one side of the sanctuary, and Reader 4 read aloud Matthew 27:27-35 from the other side. During these readings, have a costumed figure representing death enter from the back. He or she should be dressed in black, holding a candlesnuffer out in front in a determined way. Instruct "Death" to maintain his or her focus on the candle and not be distracted. Death should reach the front just as the fourth reading ends, then snuff out the candle and exit. Have the kids who are scattered around the sanctuary immediately blow out their candles, prompting the rest of the congregation to do the same.

● **Quiet Solo or Group Song**—*Beautiful, Scandalous Night* (Smalltown Poets, from their album *Third Verse*, EMI/Chordant, 2000.) This folksy but haunting account of the Crucifixion is easily learned by your whole youth group, or just a few. Consider projecting the words onto a screen so the congregation can follow along.

● **New Life Announcement**—Readers 5 and 6 announce the Resurrection by reading Luke 24:1-6, alternating every other verse from opposite sides of the sanctuary.

● **Congregational Hymn**—Choose a classic Easter hymn—the mix of new and old should help capture the older crowd.

● **Voices From the Edge**—When the song finishes, bring

illustration by chris dean

voices • from • the • edge

—by dave mcclellan—

1: I'm gonna be born. I don't know exactly when. Doctors won't say. But I know it's coming. Could be a week; could be three weeks.

2: I'm gonna die. It just kind of hit me. Not that I'm planning on it next week. But I know it's coming eventually. Could be a year; could be 80 years.

1: So you've never met an unborn child before? Don't worry. It's understandable. We're not that easy to talk to.

2: So you've never heard me talk about death before? Don't worry. It's understandable. It's not that easy to talk about.

1: It's not a bad life. They take good care of me. Give me everything I need. I even forget, once in a while, that I can't stay here. That I have to leave.

2: I actually have a pretty good life. You might think it's strange to think about death. But every once in a while, it just hits me. Somebody dies in a crash or gets cancer or something. And I remember that we can't stay here. That eventually I have to leave.

1: I'm okay with it. I can talk about it. So don't be afraid to bring it up. I'm gonna hafta be born.

2: I'm really okay with it. I can talk about it. So don't be afraid to bring it up. We're all gonna die.

1: I know it's gonna be hard when the time actually comes. They say it's very scary. All that pushing and pulling—the light, the cold, the noise. Sometimes I'd rather just stay here.

2: I think it must be hard when the time actually comes. They say it's very scary. Like if you knew you only had a few days or weeks left. That would be freaky. I think I'd wanna stay here.

1: What's on the other side? I've thought a lot about that. I used to just think "life." Doing whatever babies do. But then I started to think about it.

2: What's on the other side? I've thought a lot about that. If you asked me two years ago, I would have just said "heaven." You don't really think about it much until you have to.

1: It might be really good. I mean, I think I'm ready to go. As ready as you can be. There are rumors, you know. It's supposed to be really cool.

2: It might be really good. I mean, I think I would be ready to go. As ready as you can be. There are rumors, you know. It's supposed to be really cool.

1: No more darkness or pain. Everything I ever wanted.

2: No more crying or pain or tears. Everything I ever wanted.

1: Some say you go through this long tunnel with a bright light at the end. I don't know. I just want to meet my mom. I hope she's there.

2: Some people say you go through this long tunnel, then there's this bright light at the end. I don't know. I just want to meet Jesus. I hope he's there.

1: I've wondered what that would be like. To be held with real arms and kissed and loved. I hope it's all real.

2: All my life I've wondered what that's like. To meet the one who made you and really loves you. I hope it's all real.

1: Sure, I admit it. Sometimes you wonder... how do I know it's all true? Is life just a nice story, a fairy tale?

2: Sure, I admit it. Sometimes you wonder... how do I know it's all true? Is heaven just a nice fable, a fairy tale?

1: Well, like it or not, I'm gonna find out. And I'm really scared about that. This is the only home I've ever had. Maybe I'll try to just stay here. It's really not so bad. At least I know this place. Who knows what's out there? Yes, I think I'll just stay.

2: Well, like it or not, I guess we'll all find out. And I'm really scared about that. This is the only home I've ever had. I just hope I don't have to face it for a long, long time. I guess we all fight it as long as we can.

1: Birth is just too scary.

2: Death is just too scary.

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up the lights on Readers 7 and 8, who should be standing 10 to 15 feet apart at the front of the sanctuary. Have them read the script "Voices From the Edge" (see the sidebar at left).

● **Baby Talk**—After the script concludes, bring up a real baby from the nursery (make sure you get permission first!) and introduce her to the audience. Have two of your kids explain how we're like this little baby. Just a little while ago she was on the other side of birth. She could never imagine what real life would be like, but now she knows. Since Christ has conquered death, we don't have any more to fear of death than this baby did of being born. Christ will defeat the last enemy!

● **The Last Enemy**—Have Reader 9 read aloud Revelation 1:4-6 from one side of the sanctuary, followed by Reader 10 who reads aloud 1 Corinthians 15:25-26 and 55-57 from the other side.

● **Kernels of Wheat**—Have your kids pass out sunflower seeds to everyone. Meanwhile, have a group member explain Jesus' well-known teaching on the kernel of wheat (John 12:24-25). Unless it dies and is buried, it can't bring forth fruit. But hidden within the seed is new life just waiting to burst out. Instruct the congregation to put their seeds in a prominent place at work or home as a reminder of the new life they've been given.

● **"Because of Easter"**—Have your young people lead the congregation in a responsive reading. Project the words on a screen or print them in a program.

Teenagers: Because of Easter...

Congregation: We no longer have to fear death.

Teenagers: Because of Easter...

Congregation: The last enemy

is vanquished.

Teenagers: Because of Easter...

Congregation: Our sins have been taken away.

Teenagers: Because of Easter...

Congregation: We can grow old without fear.

Teenagers: Because of Easter...

Congregation: We can face sickness and death.

Teenagers: Because of Easter...

Congregation: Every separation is temporary.

Teenagers: Because of Easter...

Congregation: Young and old can celebrate together.

All: Because of Easter we have new life.

● **Devotional**—Have one of your student leaders lead a short devotional on our new life in Christ. Offer to help the person think through the lesson, and give him or her a chance to practice.

● **Song**—*Buried Alive* (Jill Phillips, from her self-titled debut album, Word, 1999.) Play this song as an upbeat reminder of how Christ's new life changes us for good and prepares us to face the grave with confidence.

● **Communion**—Have the pastor lead communion, but have your teenagers serve it.

● **Teenager Interviews**—Likely, your kids will be too

scared to risk sharing personal stories about Christ's impact on their lives. So take away much of the fear by interviewing two teenagers about what Easter means to them, and how that understanding has changed over the years.

● **Candle Relighting**—Have the last young person you interview start the relighting of the candles. Again, pass the flame from the young people in the aisles to the rest of the congregation.

● **Closing Hymn**—Again, choose an Easter classic.

● **Closing**—Reader 11 finishes with this final word of blessing:

"Now may the God of all power sustain you this week with the same strength he used to raise Jesus from the dead. May he remind you that you're new creatures with the gift of eternal life. May he bless you with the comfort of seeing this life as he does—with great hope for the future. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen." ■



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