HEIFER®
INTERNATIONAL

FEEDING 5,000

ENVIRONMENT WORKSHOP

OVERVIEW

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 22:35-40, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:25-28

CONNECTION

Jesus clearly shares the importance of loving our neighbors as ourselves in the Great Commandment. Heifer calls everyone to help a neighbor, whether next door or across the world. The recipient of an animal also has the honor of passing on the offspring, continuing to be a good neighbor. The human side of self-reliance goes hand-in-hand with respect for the environment, its sustainability and its indigenous culture.

MAIN IDEAS

- God created the Earth in a way to sustain all forms of life
- Personal choices we make can affect our environment
- Discuss ways Heifer promotes agroecology
- Agricultural practices that respect the environment and promote its sustainability
- Trainings combine the best local practices with new technology
- Project members Pass on the Gift by giving animals and sharing knowledge
- The gift of an animal can create lasting change

HIGHLIGHTS

- Read the Great Commandment in Luke 10:25-37
- Do an experiment to learn about being good ecological neighbors
- Learn how Heifer trains people in sustainable agriculture practices, including organic gardening

SUPPLIES

- Bibles
- White board or large sheets of paper
- Markers
- For the activity
    - » Six small aluminum trays, all the same size
    - » Kitchen sponges, enough to cover the bottom of approximately four of the trays
    - » Potting soil, enough to have about a half an inch of soil in each pan
    - » Large pitcher of water
    - » Measuring cups, for both liquid and dry
    - » Scissors to cut the sponges

LESSON

Share the story of the Great Commandment and explore the concept of loving God and being a good neighbor. One day Jesus was in the Temple in Jerusalem answering questions from Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes. As recorded in Matthew 22:35-40 and Mark 12:28-34, Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was. He responded with the scripture we called the Great Commandment.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

The Gospel of Luke recorded this incident in a different way. A lawyer asked Jesus about eternal life. The lawyer is the one who recites the Old Testament scripture from Deuteronomy and then Jesus goes on to explain about neighbors by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan.

DISCUSSIONS

- Pass out the Bibles and invite students to look up Luke 10:25-37.
    - » How would you answer the lawyer?

- Create a class definition of **neighbor** on either a white board or poster paper. This can look like a dictionary definition or a list of characteristics of a neighbor.
    - » How would Jesus define a good neighbor?

- Work with students to expand their definition of who their neighbors are until they see that we have local, regional, national and global neighbors.
    - » How can we be a good neighbor? (This list could be drawn in concentric circles starting with local in the center and working out to the impact of being global neighbors.)
    - » Start thinking locally with the people who live right next door to you.
    - » Expand to the community and then to surrounding communities.
    - » Expand further to consider countries as neighbors.
    - » Consider what it means for countries on other continents to be neighbors.

ACTIVITY

When people are desperate to survive, they often make poor choices. This happens when farmers cut down trees and other plants to grow gardens in poor soil. The trees and plants hold the soil in place and cutting them down can cause erosion. Erosion is when water washes away the soil. Heifer works hand in hand with communities to train farmers to use better farming practices so they can maximize the yield from their land in a way that restores the balance in the environment.

The following experiment will help the students see the value of vegetation in soil maintenance. When there is little vegetation in the soil, it is more difficult to maintain stability, particularly when the soil becomes wet. There are both natural and man-made causes for lack of vegetation. Man-made causes include deforestation, poorly engineered construction projects and urbanization.

WHERE HAS ALL THE DIRT GONE?

Lay out six containers in a row.

- In tray #1 put about one-eighth of a sponge in the container.
- In tray #2 put about half of a sponge in the container.
- In tray #3 put one full sponge in the container.
- In tray #4 cover about half of the container with sponges.
- In tray #5 cover about three-fourths of the container with sponges.
- In tray #6 cover the bottom of the container with sponges.
- Put equal amounts of soil over all the trays.
- Pour equal amounts of water into each tray. Use enough water to make the soil completely wet.

Wait several minutes and see which tray absorbs the most water.

- » Which tray has the "soupiest" soil?
- » What happens when you tip each container?
- » Does the soil move in all of them equally?
- » Which is the most stable? Least stable?

The sponges in the experiment act as vegetation, plants and trees that absorb the water and keep the soil in place.

- » What happens to soil when there is little or no vegetation? (Container #1)
- » What is the difference when there is a lot of vegetation? (Container #6)

Heifer works with farmers to maintain the stability of their soil by encouraging tree planting, contour plowing, terrace farming and zero- or managed-grazing. Explore the way Heifer helps people around the world be good neighbors to each other and to the Earth. (View a video on how Heifer promotes climate-smart agriculture here.)

DISCUSSIONS

- What do plants use dirt for? (Growing, holding their roots, getting food.)
- What kind of dirt would you want in your garden? (Hard, dry dirt? Sandy dirt that water goes right through? Rocky dirt? Moist, rich dirt?)
- If you don't already have good dirt, what can you do?

NOTE:

Good dirt has natural or organic material in it. This material helps keep the soil loose enough for the roots of the plant to grow. It also helps hold moisture in the soil. As the organic material decomposes, sometimes with the help of earthworms, there are more nutrients in the soil, which help plants grow big and strong.

WHY ORGANIC GARDENING?

The word "organic" simply means related to living organisms. Organic gardening takes advantage of natural processes to maintain a healthy growing environment for plants and animals.

Organic gardeners frequently use compost (decaying natural material) to feed the soil. This natural material is either worked directly into the soil or used in a liquid form, made like a tea. Organic farmers also boost fertility by embracing diversity. They plant vegetation that attracts certain bugs, birds and animals who pollinate crops and eat common garden pests. They also plant a diversity of vegetation together, with each needing something different from the soil.

Livestock plays an important role in organic farming. Heifer encourages keeping animals in designated areas, a technique called "zero-grazing," which means keeping livestock in an enclosed, shaded area and carrying fodder and water to them, instead of letting them wander in the open where they are more likely to catch diseases or damage the environment by overgrazing. Zero-grazing makes it easy for farmers to collect manure and compost it to use as fertilizer for their fields. Compost is a vital component of organic gardening practices.

COMPOST BIN BASICS

You can make your own nutrient-rich, soil-boosting compost with food waste and other organic materials. If local regulations allow it, set up a basic compost station in your yard using just a garbage can.

Here's how:

1. Drill large holes in the bottom of the can.

2. Fill the bottom of the can with dirt or compost.

3. Drop kitchen scraps (excluding meat and bones, which take too long to break down and can get quite smelly) into the garbage can, and cover with grass clippings or leaves.

4. Repeat step 3 over weeks or months,until the garbage can is full. Keep the cover on the can throughout the process. After two or three months, the food scraps will have decayed, leaving you with compost for your garden.

You can also create a small compost bin in your classroom using a plastic container. The facilitator should take it home during the week and add layers of food scraps and grass clippings or leaves. The class will be able to see the transition from scraps to compost over the course of the Feeding 5,000 program.

To boost your soil even more, you can set up a worm bin and collect the casings (worm poop) to use for fertilizer. The worms will need proper housing, feeding and care. Learn how to build and care for your worm habitat here.

EXPANDING YOUR GLOBAL VIEW

Heifer works with people around the world and promotes agricultural practices that honor the Earth and create a sustainable environment. One of the key elements in its approach to sustainable agriculture and ecology is called agroecology.

Through trainings:

- Families learn how to keep their farms, fields and forests healthy and renew the soil for future generations by planting trees and using natural fertilizer.
- They learn to practice zero- and managed-grazing techniques which seeks to protect both the animals and the environment.
- They learn contour planting and terracing, which are techniques that resist erosion.
- They discover how to use biogas units for cooking and heating their homes.

Wherever Heifer helps, it works with the local communities. By respecting the values of every local community, Heifer starts each project by helping the community understand its strengths and future goals. This is an important first step to the success of a project that everyone—men and women of all ages—have a say in the project's development and implementation.

NOTE:

The animals Heifer supplies are used to provide food for hungry families. Some working animals are used to help produce food. Water buffalo and oxen help farmers plow fields and take produce to market. Some farmers gather the manure from their draft animals and put it in tanks underground where it decays. When this kind of manure decays, it produces methane gas (biogas) which can be used for cooking and lighting homes. This is great because the family doesn't need to cut down trees for firewood, which is healthier for the environment and people.

FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITIES

1. Consider challenging the congregation to contribute $10 for a share of seedlings or $60 for the full gift of seedlings. View the gift catalog here.
2. Consider ways your congregation works to preserve the environment.
3. Invite every family that recycles regularly to make a donation to Heifer.
4. Collect cans and recycle them for money, and donate the money to Heifer.
5. Work with a local nursery to host a plant sale. Sell native plants that work best in your environment, and donate the profits from the sale to Heifer.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for your provisions and giving us the means to care for our environment. Help us, Lord, to take good care of the Earth as we care for our neighbors. Amen.