

## **A MURAL OF OUR CHURCH --- A PRESENT FOR OUR PARTNER CHURCH**

A Partner Church RE Project for Children and Youth (ages 5-12 or 5-17)

by Mary Tripp

based on a Sunday morning lesson at UU Congregation of Fairfax Virginia June 13, 1999

### **Purpose**

- To personally connect the children (and youth) of both partner congregations.
- To inspire your partner congregation's RE classes to make a similar mural or drawings of their church to send to you.
- To more fully acquaint your overseas partners with their North American partner church's building and layout. It is hoped the mural will serve as a question-provoking item that could lead to further correspondence and connection between the two groups of children.

### **Participants**

- *Children* ages 5 to 12. A multi-age group works especially well for this project.
- *Teachers* who already know the children. One should be the lead teacher for the project.
- *Teens* make excellent helpers, and they can contribute to the mural as well. Just make sure they don't over shadow or take over from the younger children by stressing with the teens the value to them of taking a helping/teaching role.
- *Adult Helpers* for this special project might include people from your Building and Grounds Committee, from your Partner Church Committee, and ideally some who have visited your partner church. Ideally you will have one or two teens and one teacher/adult helper for every eight children aged 5-12.

### **Central Activity**

Drawing a mural of your church with self-portraits of the makers pasted along its border, to send as a gift to the children of your partner church overseas.

### **Scheduling**

If you have one RE session, it will be best to work on the mural for two consecutive Sundays. If you have two services (as Fairfax VA does) continue working on the same mural with the children who come during second service. Look carefully together at everything that has been drawn and decide what still needs to be included.

If not enough children come on the day, even though they finish the basic mural, arrange a way to include other children's self-portraits. Perhaps the later group could write the letter and do something nice with the photos. They could make a computer list of all the children and adults who have helped including email addresses if they are willing to get messages from youth in their partner church congregation. Or they could take photos of all the things pictured on the mural that can be used with the mural as a kind of Matching Game in their partner's RE classes. Another idea would be to add tiny footnote numbers next to the drawn items and then compile an annotated list of them to paste on the back of (and send a separate copy with) the mural.

### **Materials**

Keep in mind that the final product will be folded and carried by suitcase far many days.

If you are going to also send materials for use by your partner's RE classes, simply collect double amounts of everything in the beginning.

Ideally, you will be working in a large room without a carpet, with a large empty floor space and some tables and chairs (for drawing portraits and writing).

- An 8+ x 3 foot length of strong butcher paper. (This is sometimes called "freezer" or "drawer lining" paper.) It should take felt-tip markers and oil crayons without smearing. If there is a carpet, large pieces of cardboard under the butcher paper can make a firmer surface for the children to draw on. If your group is large you may decide to make more than one mural.
- Manila drawing paper cut into 3x6 inch rectangles, and 1x2 inch pieces from light colored paper--one of each for each child, plus plenty of extras. Or you may decide you'd rather have different colors (not dark ones) of the 1x2 to make the mural more colorful when viewed from a distance.
- Good quality washable felt-tip markers and oil pastels or oil crayons (Cray-pas). We used markers and oil crayons because they are less messy to work with than paint and because they travel better.
- Age-appropriate scissors and glue. Rubber cement works; glue stick glue doesn't last over time.

- Plain or scratch paper for making practice drawings.
- Blackboard and chalk or newsprint on an easel for making lists that can be easily seen by all.
- A globe, a world map, and a local map that includes the area of your church so you can mark its location. (You will be giving away the local map.) A local map showing your partner's location, if someone has one.
- Photos of your partner church, letters, handcrafts and other artifacts from there, including presents you have received from them.
- Camera and film (for indoors) for taking photos of people as they are working on the project and looking at the completed mural when it has been hung on the wall.
- Extra stick-on nametags.
- Clean-up supplies.

### **Preparation**

- Gather Materials. You could recruit someone from your Partner Church Committee to gather these for you.
- Decide whether you are going to make one or two murals. For example, if you have a large number of children and helpers it may be better to make one mural showing the overall building and grounds layout and a separate mural showing only the sanctuary and/or another significant indoor space like the RE classrooms. Remember that the finished mural will be hung briefly on the wall of first your own and then your partner church's parish hall.
- With a pencil, sketch in the broad outlines an aerial view of the space(s) showing the general shape of each building and the connecting paths and roads. This may be hard and may take a few attempts. Do not leave it to the children or to the teens or adults to do this during the class.
- Cut manila drawing paper into 3x6 and 1x2 inch rectangles. Or you may decide you'd rather have different colors of the 1x2 to make the mural more colorful when viewed from a distance.
- Unroll the mural paper(s) in the center of the floor with plenty of space around it.
- Arrange a place at a table(s) for making self-portraits.

### **Plan for each One-hour Class**

#### **ARRIVAL--10 Minutes**

- Greet each child as they arrive, making sure they have a nametag.
- Ask each child to draw a picture of him or herself using crayons and markers on a piece of pre-cut 3x6 inch manila paper. Cut it out for the mural.
- Ask a teen who can print well and clearly to write each child's first and last name and age on a 1x2 piece to paste next to their self-portrait on the mural. Then paper clip the child's name piece to their self-portrait.

#### **INTRODUCTION TO LESSON--15 Minutes**

Ask children to bring their self-portraits and sit on the floor around all sides of the mural paper. Greet them with "Hello" in their partner church's language (for example, "Jo napot!" in Hungarian) and help them learn the pronunciation of the name of their partner church village or city.

- Briefly explain that your congregation has a partnership program, and why. Pass around the photos, letters, craft objects and other artifacts from your partner and eventually have the children help you place them safely on display on one of the out-of-the-way of the art work tables.
- Discuss the ways partner congregations use to get to know each other better. Discuss how you and your partner congregation have reached out to and helped each other in the past. Explain that this mural is a way of helping everyone in their congregation them know you better. And if they send a mural to you in return, then you will learn the same things about them.
- Locate your town or city and then your partner's location first on the globe and then on the world map. Mark your city's local map to show where your church is located and say you are going to send this as part of the present to your partners.
- Talk about how to "read" a drawing made "from above, like an aerial map, a bird's eye view."
- Discuss and list what might go on the mural. Use chart paper so children can see and refer back to the list. Ask children to name important things and places special to them in your church buildings or on the grounds that might be pictured on the mural.
- Have individual children say what they are going to draw or work on. Most children will want to draw the thing they have suggested. Help those who are uncertain to choose something new or from the list to work on. Form small groups if appropriate. If it fits what's happening, you can recruit older children (or younger children helped by adults) to draft a letter to send with the mural.

(The letter would tell what you have done and why you are sending it, and ask their partners to make and send a mural about their church in return.)

#### WORK ON THE MURAL--30 Minutes

- Ask everyone to place their self-portrait and name label along the edge of the mural, then to step back and decide together where they will look best (in term of spacing, etc.).
- Help children position themselves around the mural on both sides where they can reach the places where they will be adding their items from the list. Tell them the objects and places they are drawing in can be drawn as if they are looking at them from the side or from above, but there is no sky in this mural.
- Then begin drawing their part of the mural. When they finish they should cross off that item on the list and go on to drawing in another one from the list that has not yet been done.

#### *Some Comments and Suggestions*

- Help the children to work carefully, not sloppily. The clearer children are about the specific thing they are drawing and what it looks like, the more likely they are to be careful. Encourage them to consider scale before they start. Having the building(s) or room(s) already sketched in will help them see the scale. First making a practice drawing on a separate piece of paper can help.
- Help them think about how things on the church grounds actually look. Some may need to go take a careful look (one of the reasons to have a generous number of adult and teen helpers).
- Color in areas solidly and darkly so they can be seen from a distance. Color in the background as much as possible. Outline and color in the major building spaces as solidly as possible. Do take time to do these—or do them later with the older children. They make the mural attractive enough to leave on the wall.
- Help everyone figure out how to do whatever they're attempting. The teachers and helpers need to resist doing it for them. For example, instead of making a drawing for someone, encourage them to try making a practice sketch. An exception: do take dictation for anyone who wants you to if they are writing a message or label, etc.
- A very restless child could be taken to see the things being drawn. Do this quietly and matter-of-factly so you don't create a large group that wants to leave what they are doing.
- The participants of all ages in Fairfax, Virginia became thoroughly absorbed in this project and appeared to enjoy themselves greatly.

#### WRAP-UP—10 Minutes

- Ask children to put away their crayons and markers, clean up the room, and then sit around the mural.
- Ask them to stop and take a good look at it. Identify and name the things they have included.
- Invite everyone to share their hopes about what effect the mural will have when it is received by their partner church's RE children.
- As they depart, you could ask them to sign a "signature sheet" listing all who worked on the mural that will be pasted on the back of the mural. This gives you a chance to speak to each individually as they leave.

#### IMPORTANT LAST STEPS AND FOLLOW UP

- Spray the mural (outdoors!) with hair spray or art fixative to prevent smudging.
- Arrange to display the mural in your own church with a written explanation and photos of the making process.
- Do not try to mail the mural, local map and photos. Such a package will definitely not make it into Transylvania, and it may well have difficulty getting through customs for other countries. The mural needs to be personally delivered by a North American visiting in the area of your partner church.

If no one from your congregation is making a visit, post a message on [pcc-chat@uua.org](mailto:pcc-chat@uua.org) to find a volunteer who will be in the area. Be sure they do not just "drop off" the mural, but actually meet with the partner's children and encourage them to make a similar mural to send back.

The mural can be folded in half lengthwise and rolled around a tube or folded and carried in the bottom of a suitcase by the traveler. In addition to the mural there will be a folder of photos of your church building and grounds, photos of the children making the mural, a map of your city showing the location of the church, and a letter either from you or from the children and you telling about what they have done and why. They might also find a copy of this lesson plan helpful and interesting.

If the traveler is very enthusiastic, or if there is a group going that can share the weight, you may be able to get your traveler(s) to also carry art materials to give to the partner church religious education classes so they can more easily make their own mural.

- Once you've arranged for transportation, be sure to write your partner church minister well ahead of its planned arrival to tell him or her when and how the mural is coming, why you have made it, and your hopes for response from their congregation's children.
- Create an email thank you message to send to everyone who has helped. And keep the Partner Church Committee well informed of and involved in connections and further projects that grow out of this work.

Many significant Partner Church connections and projects will result from courses and projects carried out in our Religious Education classes, so long as those of us interested in deepening our Partner Church connections support, encourage and appreciate the efforts of our RE leaders to be involved with us in Partner Church activities.