



## Giving and Receiving Hospitality

### About this Faith Practice

Hospitality begins when we perceive ourselves and others as strangers in a community of welcome. Seeing Christ's presence in the other enables us to welcome Christ into the midst of the community, with all of the costs and joys of discipleship. Gentle, attentive, patient, and consistent care is required to create a community where members are intentional about seeking and welcoming all, especially those whose abilities, experiences, and cultural traditions are different from the mainstream of the current community. A community of hospitality is aware, sensitive, and open to divergent cultural practices. It reaches far beyond the limits of the familiar in a highly mobile world, transforming both the newcomer and the established community.

### Let's Begin...

Now that you've downloaded the files for your faith practice and age group or setting, you can get started planning one or multiple sessions:

- 1 **Open the .pdf file for your age group or setting. Choose an Exploration, the approach you think will help your group to best experience the faith practice. Choose any one of the following Explorations to use for one session:**



**Discovery**



**Scripture**



**Discipleship**



**Christian Tradition**



**Context and Mission**



**Future and Vision**

**Note:** If you're planning multiple sessions, you can follow the order suggested above or feel free to use any order that fits the needs of your group. Some groups may choose to start with Scripture and then see where that leads them. Others may be more ready to act in their community and might want to start with Context and Mission.

- 2 **Locate the Exploration you've chosen**

### 3 Look through all 9 activities and select the ones you would like to do with your group.

- If you're planning a 30–45 minute session, choose 3 activities.
- It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving.
- For 45 minutes to 1 hour, choose 4 or 5 activities.
- For a 1½ to 2-hour session, you can use all 9 activities.

**Tip:** Look for this symbol  to find activities designed for Easy Preparation (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church).

### 4 Make copies of any handouts () related to your activities. Order posters () if using art (see "Ordering Posters," below).

## Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

Faith Practices activities include many opportunities to grow in faith through the use of scripture, music, and art.

### Ordering Posters

If you choose activities that use an art image, you or your church will need to purchase posters of the art by clicking on the link provided in the activity. If you wish to use art, you will need to plan ahead, since it takes 1 to 2 weeks for the posters to arrive after you place your order.

### Art

Six posters are used with the faith practice Giving and Receiving Hospitality and may be ordered by clicking on the links provided.

#### **From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:**

"The Peaceable Kingdom" by John August Swanson (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"The Public Fountain" by Manuel Alvarez Bravo (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"Embrace of Peace" by George Tooker (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

#### **From AllPosters.com:**

"Barber Shop" by Jacob Lawrence (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1>)

"The Luncheon of the Boating Party" by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters2>)

"Vendedora De Pinas" by Diego Rivera (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters3>)

### Music

Three music selections are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality. We have selected music which is easily found in many hymnals. A web link is provided to give more information about each music selection.

Come All You People, Tune: Uyai Mose (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>)

Wade in the Water, Tune: African-American Traditional (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong2>)

Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant, Tune: Servant Song (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>)

### Scripture

Twelve Bible passages are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality, two with each Exploration.

Discovery	Luke 19: 1–10	Hebrews 13: 1–8, 15–16
Scripture	Genesis 18: 1–15 (21:1–17)	Isaiah 25: 1–9
Discipleship	John 13: 1-17, 31b–35	Acts 2:42–47
Christian Tradition	Mark 14: 22–25	1 Peter 4:1–11
Context and Mission	Romans 12: 9–18	John 6: 1–21
Future and Vision	Luke 14: 15–24	Mark 10: 13–16

## Writing Team for Giving and Receiving Hospitality

**Arthur Clyde**  
**Ginna Minasian Dalton**  
**Barbara Rathbun**  
**R. M. Keelan Dowton**  
**Karen Wagner**  
**Lori Keller Schroeder**  
**Sandi Marr**  
**Donna Hanby**  
**Barbra Hardy**  
**Martha Brunell**  
**Melinda Campbell**  
**Debbie Gline Allen**  
**Ted Huffman**  
**Patrice L. Rosner**  
**R. Kenneth Ostermiller**

*Worship, Music, Arts, and Story*  
*Adults*  
*Seekers and New Church Participants*  
*Young Adults*  
*Older Youth*  
*Youth*  
*Older Children*  
*Young Children*  
*Multiage and Intergenerational*  
*Living Practices in Daily Life*  
*Workshop Rotation*  
*United Church of Christ Identity and History*  
*Editor*  
*Managing Editor*  
*Project Coordinator*

# Giving and Receiving Hospitality



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

Adult learners encompass a rich, full, diverse spectrum of humanity. In this resource, adults are defined as people who are older than 18 years of age. This includes people with diverse life experiences and differences in disability, ethnicity, education and economic empowerment. Adults are able and are motivated to participate in learning. Not everyone in the group will read, hear, move and think in the same ways. Stay focused on the point of the session and engage the group in sharing with one another as much as possible. The life experiences of learners form a rich foundation for teaching and learning. Each adult carries a story and needs to be enabled to tell that story.

### About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and gathered community with its diverse and ever-changing hopes, dreams, fears and needs. Extending God's extravagant welcome requires expansion and adjustment of the physical space and the interior space of individuals. To be truly hospitable, individuals must be personally centered in God's grace for themselves and others. While respecting boundaries, hospitality requires suspending territories, prejudices and judgment to establish welcome space for all. Hospitality is a radical broadening of individual worldview to welcome people outside of current experience. Receiving hospitality can be more challenging than offering it. Hospitality must be experienced, modeled and practiced as a continuing expression of faith.

## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Luke 19:1–10**  
**Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16**

## Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Bridges and Barriers to Hospitality (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on the description of hospitality offered in “About This Exploration.” Read through the activity, and gather the supplies. Consider additional questions for discussion. You may want to use examples specific to your setting. Hospitality involves both inward and outward dimensions. This activity is designed to provide an opportunity for each person to examine personal thoughts and then share them to gain a sense of the wider community. Pray that you may lead your group into a deeper understanding of hospitality and that your group will be opened to many views and expressions of hospitality.

#### Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard
- markers
- masking tape

Use the following process to invite the participants to discuss the concept of hospitality offered in “About This Exploration.”

List each sentence of “About This Exploration” on a separate sheet of newsprint. Briefly discuss each sentence. Circle the words or phrases in each sentence that capture the attention of the group.

If your group is large enough, form small groups and assign a sentence to each group. Ask the groups to respond to the following questions and be prepared to report back to the entire group. Otherwise, discuss each sentence using the following questions as a guideline: What do these words mean to you? What bridges do these words offer to you to help you incorporate a sense of hospitality into your mind and heart or into your community? What barriers do these words create that hinder your sense of hospitality? Where are the challenges? What in your personal history or that of your community helps you to explore these words? What hinders?

Reconvene the group, and invite each small group to name three primary discoveries from their discussion. Record the responses from the groups for future discussions.

### 2 Picturing Hospitality

**Leader preparation:** This activity invites participants to use visual images as well as words to explore hospitality. Read through the exercise and gather the supplies. Adults often feel intimidated by an invitation to draw. Create a comfortable and supportive atmosphere and make sure that sharing is optional. Encourage simple thinking and line drawings. Prepare your space with posters, drawings and other images that invite a creative response. Make sure that art supplies are simple and readily available. Pray for yourself and for the members of your group that your imaginations may be freed to express your faith.

#### Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- 8½” x 11” sheet of white paper for each participant
- markers, colored pencils, and/or other drawing supplies

- posters or drawings that show scenes of hospitality
- projector with images of hospitality or the challenges of hospitality (optional)

The participants will take some time to picture in their minds scenes or symbols that represent their view of hospitality. After a moment of reflection each will draw a picture. There will be an opportunity to share these pictures.

Invite your group to sit quietly for a moment. Take some deep breaths to relax. Explain that you will offer a few words that you hope will inspire an image or two in each of them, with a pause between each. Invite the participants to draw as you speak the words. Offer these words: hospitality, welcome, barrier. Pause between each word. Allow time for drawing. Invite the participants to title their drawing if they wish.

Invite those who are willing to show their image and tell the group about their image. After everyone has had an opportunity to share, invite the group to reflect on the images they have seen. What are the common elements (if any)?

Record the visual elements expressed on newsprint or marker board using words or simple line drawings. If time permits, invite the group to collaborate on a single large drawing that incorporates the images of hospitality that you have been discussing.

Discuss the experience in light of the definition of hospitality in “About this Exploration” above.

### ③ A State of Hospitality

Leader preparation: This activity invites participants to explore how other faith traditions make themselves ready to receive God. Often, some traditions take a more tentative approach to welcoming God. Read the *Smithsonian* article, “Faith and Ecstasy,” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/429664> (December 2008, volume 39, number 9 p. 36). Prepare a brief summary of the article to share with your group. You can assign this task to a participant if you choose. Gather the supplies and prepare the space for your group.

The article “About This Practice” can be found in the file named “Getting Started.”

#### Supplies:

- copy of “About this Practice” on newsprint or a poster, or make copies for participants
- provide one or more copies of the *Smithsonian* article to display; if possible gather and display photos of the Sufi community
- copy the following Rumi poem, “There is a way,” on newsprint, a poster or handouts:

“There is a way between voice and presence  
where information flows.

In disciplined silence it opens.

With wandering talk it closes.”

(from *The Essential Rumi*, translation by Coleman Barks with John Moyne; Castle Books 1995)

Discuss the following questions: How do you prepare for hospitality? What does that look like? Why do you prepare? What makes it possible to prepare? What gets in the way? What effect does preparation have?

Share the highlights you gleaned from reading the *Smithsonian* article, “Faith and Ecstasy.” If possible, distribute copies for each person to read. Allow time for reading.

Ask the participants to imagine how dance would help them prepare for God or get in the way. Why might or might not this be helpful, even if they do not prefer this approach?

Direct the group’s attention to the prayer poem by Rumi, a Sufi spiritual sage. Invite the group to make general comments. Then ask them to describe the connections they see that speak in a helpful way to them. Discuss: How does the prayer poem connect with the idea of being prepared to receive God or to be hospitable to God? How are the prayer and the dance described in the article related? What can we learn from this?

Invite the group to make a list of ways each person could enhance the practice of God’s presence in their lives and in community. How can they be hospitable to welcome God’s presence, to get ready to receive God in order to be able to authentically practice God’s presence?

Offer a prayer or invite a member of the group to lead a prayer.

### Discerning & Deciding Activities

#### 4 Hospitality Ethics (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity opens the conversation about hospitality beyond the institution of the church. If possible, arrange for a professional in the hospitality industry to visit your group. Consider the hospitality your group will offer to your guest. If you are unable to arrange for a guest, use a computer and projector to explore Web sites that focus on hospitality ethics. As you prepare for this activity, perform an Internet search with the keywords “hospitality ethics.” Take time to consider the difference between how your congregation entertains guests, visitors and strangers and the way these people might be treated at a hotel, restaurant, casino or resort.

#### **Supplies:**

- refreshments (optional)
- computer with Internet access and projector (optional)

Lead your group and your guest in a discussion of how guests, visitors, tourists and strangers are received by hotels, restaurants, casinos and resorts. How are the values of those institutions similar to and different from your congregation’s in terms of how guests are treated?

If your group is using a computer, visit a variety of sites that offer instruction or information about hospitality ethics. You can Google or Yahoo for “hospitality ethics.” Discuss the values and ethics that your congregation has in regard to hospitality.

Present the following definition and invite discussion: “Hospitality ethics refers to the various values and beliefs that guests and hosts exhibit in hospitality relationships and settings. The notion of hospitality ethics occurs in a variety of areas and disciplines.”

Invite the participants to name the values and beliefs that guests and hosts exhibit to one another in such relationships. Discuss these values and beliefs.



### 5 A Jewish Midrash: The Robe

Leader preparation: Read the story of David and the visitation robe. Learn it well enough to tell without reading it, if possible, or invite someone from your congregation with storytelling skills to tell this story. Consider your own values around hospitality and what it would take if you were challenged to change.

#### **Supplies:**

- copies of the story “The Robe,” Attachment: Activity 5

Tell the story “The Robe,” or distribute copies to the group for them to read. Then invite the group to tell the story from memory. Invite one person to begin. After that person has offered one or two sentences, the next person tells part of the story. Repeat the process going around the circle until the story is completed. If your group feels they have forgotten some details, invite them to repeat the process. Remind them that it takes practice for a group to learn a story.

Invite the group to share their reactions to the story and to the process. What values do they share with the characters in the story? What do they wish could be changed in the lives of the characters? What values do they hold and which might they want to change?

Invite the group to retell the story with an alternate ending. Repeat for several endings as long as group members have suggestions for different endings for the story.



### 6 The Barbershop: An Arts Experience

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the poster “Barber Shop” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1> by Jacob Lawrence. Spend time examining the poster until it becomes familiar to you. Imagine the lives of the characters portrayed. Offer a prayer of blessing for each character in the poster.

#### **Supplies:**

- poster: “Barber Shop” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1> by Jacob Lawrence

Arrange the room so that all participants will have a clear view of the poster. Invite participants to take several deep breaths and then to sit quietly looking at the poster. After several moments of quiet, invite the participants to share their reactions and responses to the poster. Remind them that there are no “right” or “wrong” opinions. Encourage them to share their own reactions without judging the reactions of others.

Use the following questions to discuss the image: Where do you see intentional and respectful care? What community is gathered? Is there potential for more community? Who is extending God’s extravagant welcome? If you were in this picture, where would you be? How might this image inspire your congregation to expand their practice of hospitality?



## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Bread and Salt: Giving & Receiving Hospitality (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the story “Bread and Salt.” Look closely at the photo and get to know the people pictured. This will help you personalize the story. Review the suggested process to help your group develop a ritual of welcome for your congregation based on their learning from the story.

#### Supplies:

- photo, Attachment: Activity 7
- story “Bread and Salt”

#### **Bread and Salt**

*At the School of the Disabled in Yerevan, Armenia, a visitor is greeted with a beautifully presented loaf of fresh baked sweet bread nestled beside a dish of coarse salt and a warm smile spread across the face of a young woman. The young woman has mental retardation. In 1991, when Armenia gained independence from the former Soviet Union, there was little hope for this young woman who had been discarded to live on the streets. Then along came a woman with a vision to open her arms and welcome children abandoned by the system. She gave them a place to go each day, a place to learn and to develop a skill so they could be independent like their country. She struggled to create a center for learning in an impoverished circumstance. In a climate where there was little infrastructure during the transitional government, her sensibilities and hospitality became a refuge for many. So often during times of upheaval, she would tell visitors, we lose sight of our stories. Our stories shape our reality when our stories include the incitation of faith. We find inspiration to forge ahead. To lose them can shatter our faith journey and our lives.*

*The photo captures the qualities of courage and faith embodied in this ancient ritual of welcome. To offer bread and salt to a visitor is a symbolic act of offering sustenance for life in the salty tearful times of life. The visitor is invited to dip the moist sweet bread into the salt, take and eat, and then enter the home. Together the host and the guest share life between them, the most holy of holies.*

Tell or read the story “Bread and Salt.” Pass the photo around the group. Invite the group to imagine such a ritual adapted for your congregation. What would that look like? What steps would be needed to implement a ritual of welcome to people when they enter your church building or the sanctuary? How would you tell this story to others?

Examine your congregation’s rituals of welcome. Invite the group to recall the first scene or moment a stranger finds when entering your community. In what ways is hospitality obvious? How can hospitality be made obvious in these moments of first entry?

### 8 God Is Still Speaking: Extend Hospitality to Strangers

Leader preparation: Obtain copies of the brochure for participants. Read the brochure and become familiar with its contents.

### Supplies:

- brochure “Extend Hospitality to Strangers,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2dket46> produced by the God is still speaking campaign
- newsprint or erasable board and markers

Distribute copies of the brochure and allow time for participants to review its contents. If your group is large, form smaller groups of three or four and assign one section of the brochure to each group. Invite discussion of which practice in the brochure is part of your congregation’s life. What ideas or suggestions in the brochure seem like new ideas for your congregation?

If you formed small groups, invite the groups to report. Discuss how your congregation might become better at the practices outlined in the brochure. Use newsprint or an erasable board to record suggestions.

Develop a plan to share the suggestions of your group with leaders in your congregation.



### 9 Receiving God

Leader preparation: Practice the movements on the handout so that you are comfortable demonstrating them to the group.

### Supplies:

- copies of Attachment: Activity 9
- recorded music to accompany the movements.

Practicing hospitality is practicing the presence of God. One way to practice God’s presence is with full body prayer. Have the group practice each movement.

Invite the group to write a simple prayer. Consider inviting each participant to contribute a line.

Using the body prayer movements, the music, and the prayer the group created, invite participants to pray. Repeat the process a few times until the group is comfortable with the movement.

After you have shared the prayer a number of times, invite the group to talk about how you can share this with the congregation.

## Reflect

Take a few moments to rest in the gift of being a leader. Explore highlight moments in this session, perhaps a touching story a person shared or a change of heart around the ability of another to extend hospitality. Offer a prayer of thanks to God for those moments. Reflect on some of the challenges. If you were to repeat this session, what would you do differently? Give thanks to God for those insights. Pray to God for yourself and all participants that each of you has been transformed in some vital way and more able to welcome others and be welcomed yourself when stranger is the robe that is worn.

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Attachment: Activity 5

## The Robe

One day David was finding himself overwhelmed with tasks at the bakery. Feeling pressured for time, he clumsily spilled a sack of flour that covered his clothes beyond his apron. He took out his pocket watch and discovered that he was late for his neighbor's banquet. He knew that above all things, to be a good guest he had to arrive on time. So he brushed himself off, ignored the remaining work, grabbed a fresh loaf of bread as a gift for the host, and ran across the village as fast as he could.

Breathlessly, he knocked on the door. The host answered and said, "Oh my, David, look at you. Is this any way to honor your invitation? Your clothes under your visitation robe are a mess."

David thought for a moment. Then he took off his robe, handed the bread to the host and said, "Here, my friend. Since it is my robe you value as your guest, enjoy!" And David walked away.

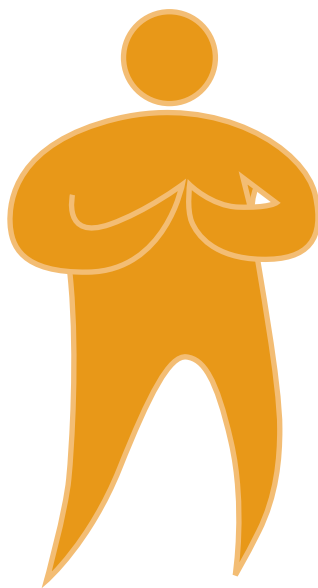
Attachment: Activity 7



Attachment: Activity 9



Praise



Pray



Kneel



Head bowed



Eyes upward

# Giving and Receiving Hospitality



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

Adults have many different experiences with scripture. Some members of your group may have extensive Bible study experience. Others may have little or none. Each person brings certain assumptions about the Bible to the group. Adults need to establish trust before they are able to make connections between the biblical story and their personal stories. As with other spiritual disciplines, scripture study requires practice. Reassure learners that even when activities seem awkward, they are opportunities to grow in faith.

### About this Exploration

As hospitality and scripture intersect, we acknowledge the many ways people enter and encounter sacred story. Multiple intelligences, cultural experiences, social locations, and life experiences impact the reading and interpretation of scripture. This invites dialogue, mutual learning, and broadened understanding. Hospitality requires a commitment to multiple expressions of the story. We honor one another and one another's viewpoints. We are called to embody scripture in the context of a diverse world with many sacred texts. At the intersection of hospitality and scripture, the sacred story challenges and changes all.

## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Genesis 18:1-15**

**(21:1-17)**

**Isaiah 25:1-9**

## Leader Preparation

Create an opportunity for yourself to reflect on scripture as you prepare for others. Use a particular sound or musical piece to set the time in space for you to rest in the scripture. Read each scripture and imagine yourself as one of the characters in the texts. What is a bridge that allows you to cross into the words and find meaning? What are the barriers? Explore both ideas each time you settle for a moment to plan your group's learning activities. If you are keeping a journal, create a section for your personal reflections on your preparation as well as reflection on the progress of the group.

*Prayer: Gracious and inviting God, you send messages to your children in ways that may be masked by my sight. Bring me to a sharper awareness of you that I may see the stranger and the message as your grace. May I hear your word in my heart for guidance in my interactions with everyone. Amen.*

## Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church).

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Joys and Pains of Hospitality (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 18:1-15 and 21:1-17 and consider the questions for discussion. Pray for the learners and yourself to gain insight according to God's presence.

#### Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- Bible for each participant

Invite a member of the group to read aloud Genesis 18:1-15. On newsprint or marker board, list the events that unfold in this story. Be sure to capture as many details as possible. Underneath each event, name the feeling or intensity that colors the sentence. You may wish to use different colors to indicate different feelings.

Discuss the relationship between the events and emotions. Invite the participants to note what emotions bring surprise or stir an emotional reaction.

Present this background to the group: It was tradition for the people of Abraham and Sarah, as it was for ancient people around the world, to welcome strangers as today we welcome those we love. Life was hard and food was difficult to obtain in the desert. It was understood that hospitality included all the behaviors Abraham exhibited. That wasn't anything unusual. However, the story seems to capture a sense of urgency in Abraham. As the story develops, there is a stark contrast between Abraham's reaction, the calm visitors, and Sarah's laughter. After all, we understand that at varying years of the lives of women the capacity to conceive and bear a child passes. The strangers bring a message of dramatic proportions to Abraham and Sarah that will change their lives. Abraham and Sarah are rewarded for their hospitality to strangers in keeping with the relationship they have with God. The storytellers of Genesis want to make the point that faithfulness to the laws of God bring reward.

These questions may foster group discussion: Why was it important that the messengers from God were the first to know of the child? How else could Sarah have gotten the message? What would be the implications if they had not visited and she had given birth later? Would she have given birth later, or was her pregnancy dependent upon their hospitality? What does that say to us today about giving and receiving hospitality?

Have the group reflect and then list the ways extravagant hospitality gives birth to new life. Discuss the labor pains involved.

### 2 A Hymn of Praise

Leader preparation: Read Isaiah 25:1-9. Compare this passage with Psalm 145. Ask yourself the questions in the activity. Consider how your discussion may assist the transformation of destruction into hospitality.

#### Supplies:

- Bible for each person
- copy of song "Come All You People" <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1> (tune: Uyai Mose)

Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Invite the group to read aloud the passage together just as hymns are sung together. After reading, explain that these verses are known as a thanksgiving hymn or a hymn of praise written by Isaiah, the prophet who was son of Amoz. Some believe Isaiah was a priest in the Temple. His name means “Yahweh gives salvation,” and he lived between 742 and 687 B.C.E. when the Southern Kingdom from which he came was under the domination of Assyria. These verses are part of a collection of prophecies from a section focused on end times. He preached that faithfulness to God means acting on social justice and will be rewarded by communion with God. So the people give thanks and praise to God in this hymn.

Invite the group to identify words that refer to destruction. Then invite them to identify words that refer to hospitality or inclusiveness. Ask: What was destroyed? How was destruction an avenue to hospitality? What was the human cost? How could one rethink this to move from human cost? Is that possible? How can powers and principalities that divide and destroy be transformed without human cost?

Invite people to share words that retell the story for today. What situations divide and keep us from faithfulness to God and others?

Sing the song “Come All You People” <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>. If you are not comfortable with leading singing, invite someone in your congregation who is musically inclined to lead singing.

### 3 Genesis Speaks to Isaiah

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 18:1–15 and Isaiah 25:1–9. Review the activity design.

#### Supplies:

- Bible for each person
- notepaper and writing instrument for each person

Form two groups. Invite one group to read Genesis 18:1–15 and the other to read Isaiah 25:1–9. Ask each group to explore the role of “nation” and “other” in the passage. Have each group select one person to present a summary of the group’s passage and be prepared to defend its point of view. After allowing time for preparation, have the two reporters make their presentations. Ask: What similarities and differences do you see in these two passages? How is each passage connected with the idea of hospitality?

Have each person write a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God based on this experience. Invite people to pray their prayers.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Inside Las Posadas (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review the activity and consider your reactions. Gather materials and print words on newsprint or an erasable board.

#### Supplies:

- script of Las Posadas, Attachment: Activity 4



- hymn “Dear God, Embracing Humankind”

<http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/d/d030a.html> (tune: REST)

Distribute the Las Posadas script. Print the simplified dialogue on an erasable board, or project it. Follow the instructions for the Las Posadas observance.

Discuss together what it felt like to be rejected, to be the ones who rejected and then accepted, and to be the ones accepting. Why is it significant to our story that Jesus was born under such circumstances of inhospitality and then hospitality?

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 18:1–15. Ask: What would have happened if Abram had shut the door on the visitors? How does this sense of welcoming a stranger inspire an understanding that God may be a stranger to us at times? What does it take for us to welcome God by our welcome of others?

Discuss the threat to us, if any, when a stranger approaches. What is a realistic response? Why? How can we distinguish between a legitimate caution and one that creates a barrier to the genuine presence of God in another person? How can we deal with the notion of threat in a creative and productive fashion?

Draw the attention of the group to the hymn “Dear God, Embracing Humankind.” Read or sing the fourth verse and ask the group to remain quiet and reflect:

“Drop your still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess the beauty of your peace.”

### 5 Which Side Are You On?

Leader preparation: Read through the activity and imagine how each participant in your group might respond. To prepare a two-colored ball, use markers or paint to color one half of a ball one color and the other half a different color. Print the following quote on newsprint or a whiteboard. Review the questions to consider any adjustment you want to make for your group.

“...even if we do not reduce hospitality to kindness to family and friends, it may still be too tame a virtue; the worry is that hospitality is not subversive enough. It leaves the powerless powerless and the powerful in charge. Like charity, hospitality is a poor substitute for justice and the rights of strangers among us. ...Hospitality can sometimes be used to salve the conscience of the rich and powerful, while it leaves the community unchanged and injustices unchallenged.”

—Allen Verhey in “Hospitality Remembering Jesus,”

<http://www.tinyurl.com/23e5jtg>

#### Supplies:

- two-colored ball
- newsprint or whiteboard with the quote printed on it
- Bible for each person

Form two groups: one on your right and the other on your left. Hold the ball in one hand high enough for everyone to see. Cup your fingers around the ball so that the dividing line of color isn’t visible. In effect, one group will see one color and the other group will see the other. Then ask: What color is this ball? Use this as an illustration to point out that even a concept like hospitality needs to be examined from different points of view.

Invite the participants to choose one of the characters in Genesis 18:1–15. Form three groups, one for each character: Abram, Sara, and Visitors. Direct attention

to the quote printed on the newsprint or marker board. Ask each group to consider these questions relative to its chosen character: Who has power? Who does not? Who has limited power? What are the limits? Who is extending hospitality? What is motivating the hospitality? Give time for the groups to discuss the questions, and then invite each group to report to the entire group.

Discuss these questions in the same three groups: How could this situation translate into our culture? What situations can you imagine where the relationships would be as they are in this story? What national or international situation could you see resembling Sara and Abram welcoming strangers who bring a message that calls for their faith or confidence or that turns their world upside down? Imagine that you had a family member imprisoned by a political regime. What if you received news from a stranger who came to your home and told you that person would be freed? How would you respond? Would you be like Abram or Sara? What if you were the stranger?

Reconvene the entire group and discuss: What about hospitality is there to be suspicious of? Why are people suspicious? What do we do in our community life to honor the possible reality that someone may enter carrying a message?

### 6 Refugees in Our Land

Leader preparation: Prepare to tell the story of the McClures and the McGuires, or arrange to have another storyteller present the story. Read through the activity and be familiar with the process. Think about your experience with refugees. If you have a film clip from a movie that you feel describes the circumstance of refugees, consider sharing it with your group. You may want to invite a group of teens to join your group for this activity and to share the experience of learning from other generations on equal footing. To create such a neutral experience, you may need to offer this session in a setting that does not belong to either group. If your group meets in a different location, discuss what it is like to be somewhere that is not your place.

*In Scotland there is a story about the McClures and the McGuires. The families feuded with one another for generations—long after the cause had failed memory. One day a McClure found himself in McGuire territory, hungry and injured from a fall. Scottish tradition called for the host to care for anyone in her land who was in need. The tradition required taking them in and caring for them until they could be on their way. This is what happened. In spite of the tension of their family loyalties, McGuire did as his duty required. Then on the day when McClure was well enough to leave for home, McGuire walked him to the end of the territory to be sure he had safe passage home. REPEAT: He walked him to the end of his territory until he had safe passage home.*

#### Supplies:

- copy of the story of the McClures and the McGuires
- Bibles

Invite the group to offer words that describe refugee. Then read Matthew 2:13–16. Invite the group to share stories from their own lives or from current news articles they have read that relate to the lives of refugees. What is the sense of the group related to the comfort a refugee feels in a foreign place?

Tell the story of the McClures and the McGuires. Invite the group to imagine what life would have been like if Mary, Joseph, and Jesus had been in a culture of such hospitality. What difference would it have made in the story?

Discuss: What would be different if your congregation adopted this thinking?

How would you approach a newcomer? What would the conversation look like? What sensitivities would you need to be aware of and how would you honor God's presence in the midst of a possible enemy or threat? Consider how you would share this story with your congregation. Discuss how you can work together to make your church more welcoming.

## Sending & Serving Activities



Invite the group to name refugees in your community. Be as inclusive as possible. Challenge the group to go beyond naming people from other countries.

### **7 Follow Me ... or not! (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read through the activity. Reflect on the questions as they may apply to your life. Prepare an opening prayer and a closing prayer to offer.

**Supplies:**

- a gong or cymbal
- Bibles
- copies of the following quote

“The love of God, together with human potentialities, has led to the love of the neighbor, as indeed should happen according to Jesus’ ministry of the law and the prophets (Mark 12:30). People tend to forget how deeply their cultures and conduct have been influenced by the biblical message. ‘You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life’ (John 5:39). God’s message addresses us, God’s image transforms us, and the chief actor in the drama of salvation engages us. Yet even so Bible study will soon become difficult and sometimes threatening. For long stretches of the way it will seem to fall short of our demands for immediate relevance, because the God who meets us in the Old Testament is not one of our beloved idols, but a God from afar; and in the New Testament we come face to face with Jesus on the way to the cross. Sooner or later he will say to us also: ‘Follow Me.’ ”

—Hans Ruedi Webe from *Experiments with Bible Study* (Westminster Press)

Gather the group with a prayer. Invite the group to sit quietly. Ring the gong or cymbal to mark a time of silence for preparation. After a few moments, direct the attention of the group to the quote. Have a volunteer read the quote to the group. Allow a few moments for reflection. At the end of the reflection time, ring the gong or cymbal. Discuss the experience and the quote.

Repeat the process of ringing the gong or cymbal and then allowing silence. This time have a volunteer read Genesis 18:1–15. Allow more silence and then ring the gong or cymbal.

Discuss the experience. Invite the participants to identify connections between the scripture and their everyday lives. Ask each person to identify one change in behavior for his or her own life.

Ring the gong or cymbal for a final time of silence. Ring it again to indicate the end of the time of silence. Close the activity with a prayer.

### 8 Hospitality as a Tool for Deliverance

Leader preparation: Invite the moderator or the leader of the governing body of your church to meet with your group as an observer. Explain that this person is not to interfere with the discussion, simply listen.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles

Read Isaiah 25:1–9. Have the group count off from 4 through 9. The numbers correspond to verses from Isaiah 25. Have each person or persons with the same number read the verse and name ways their congregation lives out this verse. Ask them to imagine new ways the congregation could live out the assigned verse. Have each group report and discuss the experience.

### 9 Unlikely Messengers

Leader preparation: Read through the activity.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles

Ask each person to identify an unlikely messenger that appeared in various places in her or his life. Have the participants close their eyes and remember with as much detail as possible as you name these places: your first school room; your childhood home; your teenage hangout; your first adult home. Ask: How was the message presented and received? What impressions were you left with about hospitality?

Ask participants to read Genesis 18:1–15, and repeat the questions used above.

If your group is large, form smaller groups of 3 to 5 persons. Have each group prepare a skit that demonstrates hospitality. After allowing time for preparation, have the groups present their skits.

Discuss the experience, including how your group might communicate their concepts of hospitality to the wider congregation.

## Reflect

If you have taken notes or kept a journal, review your writing to check your memory for changes in attitude or new enlightenment expressed by members of your group. Determine what seemed to be meaningful and what might have been ineffective. How would you do things differently? In what ways did these activities bring your group closer to an understanding of scripture related to the faith practice of hospitality? Where did their faith overcome natural tendencies? When did they let their faith speak through the scriptures even if it was difficult?

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Attachment: Activity 4

## Las Posadas Reenactment

Distribute candles to those in the group who represent the crowd that travels with Mary and Joseph. The roles of Joseph and the innkeeper can be played by a number of people at the same time.

Mary is pregnant and weary, as is Joseph who stops at designated places and knocks at the door to ask:

**Joseph:** En nombre del Cielo, buenos moradores, dad a unos viajeros posada esta noche.  
(*Translation: In the name of God, we ask those who dwell here to give some travelers lodging this evening.*)

**Innkeeper:** Aquí no es mesón sigan adelante; yo no puedo abrir no sea algún tunante.  
(*Translation: This is not an inn. Move on. I cannot open lest you be a scoundrel.*)

As Joseph progresses through the designated sites of shelter (posada), the crowd of innkeepers becomes angrier. The couple grows even more weary, and Joseph begins to beg.

**Joseph:** Venimos rendidos desde Nazareth, yo soy carpintero de nombre Jose.  
(*Translation: We are tired traveling from Nazareth. I am a carpenter named Joseph.*)

Finally, hoping for compassion, Joseph reveals Mary's identity as the Queen of Heaven (la Reina del Cielo). But this does not inspire a welcome.

**Joseph:** La Reina del Cielo está conmigo.  
(*Translation: The Queen of Heaven is with me.*)

Have the group move around the learning space 8 times to represent 8 days and nights, and repeat this scene. Finally, on the ninth evening (Christmas Eve), Joseph reached an innkeeper who gives the couple the stable. Because of the love and the compassion of this innkeeper, this place becomes not only the birthplace of Jesus, but is gloriously lit to be a place of beauty. In celebration of the birth of Jesus, the crowd breaks into song and dance and festival. Treats of all kinds, including the fun of a piñata, are enjoyed by all. This reminds the children that the stranger at the door can be God in disguise.

# Giving and Receiving Hospitality



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

Adult learners have had some experiences and formed opinions about the meaning of discipleship. Their associations with the term are likely to come from the traditions of specific faith communities rather than from biblical sources. Expanding their understanding of discipleship may involve assisting them with sorting through preexisting assumptions. Adults learn best when they are given responsibility for their own learning. Think of the members of your group as fellow disciples with gifts and insights to offer to you and to other members of the group. Be prepared to welcome a wide variety of assumptions about discipleship.

### About this Exploration

Hospitable disciples see God in each encounter with the people in our daily lives and those who lie beyond our usual circles of experience. The distinctions between other and self decrease when other living creatures and the earth are encountered as a sacred system of interrelationships.

We practice hospitality in cultures with habits of expected interaction. However, Jesus calls us to habits of attentiveness that go beyond our own cultures, needs and experiences. As disciples, all can be encouraged to see the face of Jesus in every experience of hospitality.

Hospitality encompasses giving and receiving. Receiving the gift of hospitality from another, even when uncomfortable, embodies receiving God's many gifts to our world.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**John 13:1–17, 31b–35**  
**Acts 2:42–47**

## Leader Preparation

As a leader in a discussion of discipleship you will find this a challenging concept to explore. Crucial to your leadership and for the group's ability to reach depth of action is your investment in a look at your own patterns of hospitality in action. Take five minutes a day to ask yourself: How am I a disciple of Jesus? How can I be focused enough on my authenticity of action in order to encourage others? You may want to keep a journal this week. Consider sharing your insights with your group.

## Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Challenge and Invitation (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read through the activity, and try out your own response to the process. Gather supplies and prepare the space.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- a copy of the dialogue version of John 13:1–17 and 31b–35 for each person or a system to project the dialogue, Attachment: Activity 1

Select volunteers to read the dialogue version of John 13:1–17. Read aloud "About This Exploration" and invite the participants to recall things a disciple does or qualities a disciple of Jesus displays related to hospitality. Ask the group to recall places in the story where those behaviors or qualities were represented. Have them identify the challenges and invitations that are present.

Read together John 13:31b–35. Invite the group to respond to the same question: Where are the challenges and invitations in this passage as it relates to the previous discussion?

Invite members of the group to share a sentence prayer. Offer this prayer: May we go in the peace of our journey toward discipleship. Amen.

### 2 Awe Struck into Hospitality!

Leader preparation: Gather the supplies and prepare the space. This activity draws heavily on imagination and your group's willingness to share personal stories on some level. If you find that the group needs a jump-start to the conversation describing awe and devotion, consider using the dictionary.

Make a footprint by tracing around your own shoe.

#### Supplies:

- newsprint or erasable board and markers
- Bibles
- paper
- pencils

Invite individuals to describe a time of awe in their lives and a time of devotion. Read Acts 2:42–47. Then read the passage two more times. Ask the group to connect their personal experiences of awe and devotion to the Acts passage.

Invite participants to choose a partner. Invite each pair to identify moments in the life of your congregation where awe and devotion have been experienced. Invite the partners to share their ideas with the group. List the thoughts on an erasable board.

Read and discuss the description of hospitality from "About This Exploration."

Distribute paper to the group and have everyone trace their foot to make a footprint. Invite the participants to write on their footprint one step they intend to take to live as disciples. Allow members of the group to share their footsteps.

### 3 Year-Round Easter Hospitality

Leader preparation: While Faith Practice resources are not lectionary based, you may find it helpful to draw on the idea of church seasons at this time. If your congregation uses the lectionary for worship, this will be a teachable moment for your group to reinforce that practice. Read through the activity and consider ways you might enable connections between the activity and the practices of your congregation.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- papers and pencils

Invite volunteers to read John 13:1–7, 31b–35 and Acts 2:42–47. Ask the group to identify the ways hospitality is given or received in each passage.

Form two groups. Assign one scripture passage to each group. Challenge each group to create a presentation that convinces the other group that their passage makes the best case to view hospitality as a legitimate year round practice for any disciple. If time permits, reverse the passages and have each group make a case for the other passage.

Ask each group to create a bulletin announcement to be used at the beginning of each church season that lifts up hospitality based on scripture as a practice of faithful discipleship. Reminder: The church seasons are Advent (blue or purple), Christmas/Christmastide (white), Epiphany (green), Lent (purple), Holy Week, Pentecost (red), and Ordinary time (green). Plan how these announcements might be used in your congregation.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Bulletin Makeover Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reflect on the connections among fun, joy, and play to creating a spirit of hospitality. Gather sample worship bulletins from your congregation and other congregations.

#### Supplies:

- recent worship bulletins from your congregation and other congregations
- scrap paper and pencils for each group

Form at least two groups. Inform the groups that they will be given five minutes to examine the worship bulletins to find as many examples of hospitality as possible. Give each group at least one bulletin from your congregation and one from another congregation. Start keeping time as you distribute the bulletins. After five minutes have the groups report.

Invite participants to name the ideas they think are most creative. Discuss what changes your group might suggest to church leaders to make your worship more hospitable. Explore how your group might help initiate some of those changes.

### 5 Looking for Public Hospitality

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the poster and spend time studying the image. Read through the exercise and identify opportunities for discipleship.



Ask yourself what biases this image evokes. Consider what biases it might evoke in your group.

### **Supplies:**

- a sign that says: "SILENCE Please"
- scrap paper and pencils
- camera
- poster: "The Public Fountain" <http://www.tinyrul.com/UCCResources> by Manuel Alvarez Bravo

Display a sign that requests silence as the group gathers. After everyone is seated, direct attention to the poster. After two minutes of silence, distribute paper and pencils and invite the participants to again sit in silence to write a brief description of the image. Encourage them to write a word or feeling responses as well as content descriptions, i.e., first impressions. Invite those who are willing to share their responses with the group.

Ask the following questions to the group for discussion:

- a. Given that the name of the photo is "The Public Fountain" <http://www.tinyrul.com/UCCResources>, what message could be discerned in the fact that the boy is the only person pictured?
- b. Manuel Alvarez Bravo (1902–2002), at the age of 13 became the sole support of his family after his father's death. He worked in a textile factory in his home country of Mexico and later was able to work for the Finance Ministry and earned enough money to purchase his first camera at the age of 20. By 1928 he gained favor with the Mexican people for his art that told the story of his country. What do you imagine hospitality would have looked like for him at each of these ages?
- c. What place does water have in human life?
- d. What connections can be made to discipleship related to stewardship of creation and water?

Invite the group to think of how they might create a similar photo in your community. Consider what public resource is valued in your setting. Discuss who is welcome and who is excluded. Ask for volunteers to stage and take the photograph. Display the photograph in your church.

## ⑥ Statement on Discipleship of Hospitality

Leader preparation: Refresh your memory on the concept of covenant by checking out:

<http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-are-a-people-of-covenant.html>.

Read the essay and take note of your own questions raised by the essay.

### **Supplies:**

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- copies of statement on Christian Hospitality, <http://www.tinyurl.com/24udf8g>:

Distribute copies of the statement on Christian Hospitality and allow time for people to read it. Have the group identify questions the essay raises about hospitality.

Form two groups. Invite each group to interview the other group to answer the questions the group created on the basis of the essay. Bring the two groups together and have them develop a statement of discipleship of hospitality. Remind them to recall the interviews. Encourage the group to be true to themselves.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### **Still Speaking Resources (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation:

Review the resources at

<http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/church-resources>.

Make a plan to share the resources with your group by ordering resources, projecting the Web site, or printing samples.

**Supplies:**

- selected resources from:

<http://www.ucc.org/god-is-still-speaking/church-resources/>

Present the “still speaking” resources to your group. Ask the group to determine how these resources might be used in your congregation. Review the Bible Study sections and discuss some of the questions suggested.

### **Hospitality with LGBT Sisters and Brothers**

Leader preparation: Review the website of People of Faith for Equality in Virginia at <http://www.faith4equalityva.org>. Review the resources and consider how they might be used in your group and in your congregation to provide opportunities for dialogue and increased hospitality. Review the history of the Stonewall Rebellion so you are comfortable leading a discussion.

**Supplies:**

- <http://www.faith4equalityva.org/Devotion/tabid/10126/Default.aspx>
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Share with your group the resources from the Equality Virginia Web site. Ask: Where were you on June 28, 1969? Were you aware of the Stonewall Rebellion? Why or why not? What difference, if any, does knowing the story make for you? What actions would be indicated if one is to be a disciple of Jesus when you consider the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered) community and the Stonewall Anniversary? What are some appropriate ways your congregation could prepare for Gay Pride Week next year?

### **Open Wide Your Home**

Leader preparation: Hospitality to the poor and to those in need of all kinds is central to the faith practice of hospitality. The Rabbi Yose ben Johanan said in the Avot 1:5, “Let your home be wide open, and treat poor people like members of your household.” When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, they were seated around the table of home for them for the night. Home is presented as one’s intimate setting.

Look through magazines and newspapers to find pictures of homes with open doors and windows. If possible, find homes from countries around the world.

**Supplies:**

- images of homes with open doors, windows, roofs
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Scatter pictures of open homes around the learning space. Invite members of the

group to select one that reminds them of their sense of openness of mind and heart. Have each person identify how he or she is closed or open to others.

Remind the group that the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith claims the cost and joy of discipleship. What are the costs and joys of discipleship when we are open and when we are closed to others? Record the ideas on newsprint or whiteboard.

Discuss your church, the building and the people. How do you demonstrate discipleship as openness? In what ways does your discipleship meet the description of the community in Acts 2:42–27? What might it take to open up your home, your church, or your community to serve those who are poor in spirit or poor in treasure?

Invite someone in the group to present to the governing board your group's ideas about being open to serve the wider community.

### Reflect

Discipleship is about taking action. The common thread in this section has been about taking action. Was your group able to move beyond discussion to action? What made that possible? What hindered the process? Remember that it is far more comfortable to discuss possibilities than to actually embody them. However, it may be that for your group just having the discussion on some of these topics is a major step. Give thanks to God for your risk-taking and willingness to call yourself and others into accountability as followers of Christ.

Attachment: Activity 1

## Dramatic Dialogue of the Washing of the Feet —John 13:1-7

**Narrator:** Now before the Festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciple's feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter.

**Peter:** Lord, are you going to wash my feet?

**Jesus:** You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.

**Peter:** You will never wash my feet.

**Jesus:** Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.

**Peter:** Lord, not my feet only but my hands and my head!

**Jesus:** One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.

**Narrator:** Jesus knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean." After he had washed their feet and had put on his robe, he returned to the table.

**Jesus:** Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

# Giving and Receiving Hospitality



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Tradition can have a negative connotation for adults. Most have encountered organizations that are bound up in “the way we’ve always done it.” Many are eager for change. Teaching and learning about the traditions of the church offers an opportunity for a fresh look at the history and heritage of the church. There are many layers of tradition in the church. Unpacking those layers can be a joyous journey of discovery and may open the possibility for your group to add their own layers to the traditions of hospitality in the church. Your attitude as the leader makes a great difference as your group approaches the story of our faith and of the traditions of the church.

### About this Exploration

God continually invites us to extravagantly welcome others into abundant life. We are not the first to experience questions, failures, accomplishments, joys and sorrows. Our Christian tradition gives us ancestors in faith whose stories and life experiences inform our own. Every drop of water reminds us of Christ’s baptism. Shared meals recall Jesus’ breaking bread and sharing the cup. Grounded in Hebrew tradition, Jesus displayed radical commitment to the poor. Love for the poor continues to characterize Christian community. God invites us to welcome those whom we encounter in daily life, and those we might not otherwise encounter, to see them as God’s beloved people, and treasure the diversity of humanity. We are called by God to create a safe, welcoming environment for all. We join the family of all time.

## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Mark 14:22–25**  
**1 Peter 4:1–11**

## Leader Preparation

As you begin to think about leading your group in an examination of the tradition of hospitality in practice, you may want to examine:

“What Matters to You Matters to Us”

<http://www.tinyurl.com/28cr9ux>,

part of the United Church of Christ Church Vitality initiative. These materials may offer insights into stories and exercises that provide an option for your group. Be aware that this Exploration looks not only at the tradition of hospitality of the United Church of Christ, but also of other traditions. The aim is to help your group move more deeply into an understanding that traditions shape all of us and that in order for us to be truly hospitable to one another we must look into our own ways of having been nurtured as well as the ways in which others are nurtured.

## Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church).

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Sleuthing for Hospitality (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Explore the historical records of your church for ways your congregation has shown hospitality. Learn where the archives or history are kept and set up an opportunity for the group to examine them. Consider inviting members from your congregation who represent many generations to visit your group. Arrange for your group to visit the archives or storage area. Be sensitive to people with mobility challenges. If the church archives are in an inaccessible place, consider moving items to provide easier access.

#### Supplies:

- church history
- historical photographs

Invite your group on an expedition to the archives to find evidence of ways the church has shown hospitality in the past. They may also discover evidence of ways the church was not as hospitable as it could or should have been. Discuss what you found, and talk about the influences these discoveries have on the congregation today.

### 2 Hidden History of Hospitality

**Leader preparation:** Barbara Brown Zikmund has collected stories that shaped the United Church of Christ in her two volumes of *Hidden Histories of the United Church of Christ*, available at <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories>. Invite individual members of your group to volunteer to read one or more chapters and prepare a brief report for your group on their assigned story.

#### Supplies:

- copies of *Hidden Histories of the UCC*, <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories>, by Barbara Brown Zikmund assigned to participants in the group
- erasable board or newsprint and markers

Welcome the group and thank participants for their advance preparation. Invite volunteers to share their assigned stories and insights about hospitality for their reading. As people share, invite a person in the group to be the scribe and list either on a dry erasable board or on newsprint the facts about hospitality that are reported. Have the group discuss the reports and draw conclusions about the history of hospitality in the United Church of Christ. Together, identify places where those stories are present today.

### 3 Sing a Song of Welcome

**Leader preparation:** Gather a variety of hymnals. Check your church library or ask the minister for resources. If possible, include ones that have been used by your congregation. If you have a musical instrument available and someone who can read music well, invite him or her to the session so that the group can sing with confidence.

#### Supplies:

- hymnals

## Giving and Receiving Hospitality

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Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Invite the participants to look through the hymnals to find hymns that offer welcome or hospitality. If you have a variety of hymnals, ask the group to describe the differences they see in the hymnals with regard to welcome, inclusivity, or hospitality. Where are signs of welcome? How is hospitality conveyed in a song or a book of songs? Discuss the historical and cultural influences that may have shaped the differences. What seems to remain the same, if anything?

Have the group select one hymn from each hymnal. Sing them together.

Close the session by singing “You Are Welcome Here”

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3a> or “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?”

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Lectio Divina

Leader preparation: *Lectio Divina* is an ancient Christian tradition of meditative reading of scripture. You can explore some of the modern forms of the practice by doing a simple Internet search. You may discover additional resources through conversation with your congregation’s worship leaders. Read the simplified instructions below so that you will be comfortable leading the exercise. Prepare the room with ample comfortable space for all participants.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles

Invite the participants to sit in a comfortable position. Tell them that you will be reading the same scripture passage multiple times with periods of silence between. Ask them to open their hearts and minds to fresh insights that may come from the scripture.

Allow for a minute of silence. Read 1 Peter 4:1–11 in a clear voice at a moderate tempo. After a few minutes of silence for reflection, invite the participants to listen for key words or phrases that have special meaning to them as you read the passage a second time. Read the text again, and again allow time for reflection. Invite the participants to speak aloud their key words or phrases.

As you read the text a third time, invite the participants to listen for a special meaning or direction that they might gain from this passage of scripture. After time for reflection, invite them to share their thoughts.

Ask the participants to join with you as offer the text as a prayer. Read the passage a fourth time. Discuss the experience with the group.

### 5 Multiple Traditions

Leader preparation: Obtain copies of the two posters. Arrange the room so that both posters are displayed in prominent locations and so that the participants will be able to see both posters at the same time.

#### Supplies:

- poster: “Barber Shop” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1>

by Jacob Lawrence

- poster “The Luncheon of the Boating Party,”  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters2>, by Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Invite the participants to look at the two posters. Then ask, “Which of these images seems to represent a more ‘traditional’ form of hospitality to you?” Remind the participants that the church is a blending of many different traditions and paths. Some traditions are more familiar to certain congregations than others. Ask about traditions of hospitality that are observed in the families of participants. Which traditions have been adopted from outside the family? Which traditions have been observed for generations? Allow for general discussion of the multiple traditions of hospitality in the church.

### 6 Racism Undercover

Leader preparation: Prior to the session, recruit one or more volunteers to read and be prepared to report on *The Curse of Caste or The Slave Bride: A Rediscovered African American Novel* by Julia C. Collins. It is available at many libraries and can be purchased new or used from booksellers. You might also read one or more reviews of the book that are available through an Internet search.

#### Supplies:

- a copy of the novel

Ask for those who have read the book to give a brief description of the story and their reaction to it. Ask: Are we in a post-racism culture? How would a blended family be accepted in our church, community, or state? What other issues does this book raise?

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Exploring Other Traditions

Leader preparation: Read the article from Faith in Action coalition and pray for your own readiness to invite your group into looking at the tradition of hospitality through other faith tradition practices.

#### Supplies:

- copy of “Overview of Selected Faith Communities,”  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/23y5r2g>

Distribute sections of the article to individuals or small groups. Ask each to read looking for traditions of hospitality. Invite individuals or group to report their findings.

### 8 How to Be a Perfect Stranger in Your Denomination

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the book *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: A Guide to Etiquette in Other People's Religious Ceremonies*. There are now two volumes of this book. The first will work for this exercise. The book is available in many libraries and booksellers. If possible, obtain a copy for your congregation. Read the chapter on your denomination.



### Supplies:

- book *How to Be a Perfect Stranger*, by Arthur Magida

Introduce the book to your group. If possible, arrange for members to read different sections of the article on your denomination. Ask the participants to finish this sentence: “Did you know that in our denomination they ... ?”

Invite the participants to list all the incorrect assumptions that could mislead a newcomer to the congregation. Then ask them to correct the assumptions about their traditions.

Suggest to the group that they could submit their corrections to the publisher Jewish Lights for future reference. They may also want to check your church Web site, if possible, to be sure that other such information is clear to a newcomer. In other words, help people learn what to expect about the way you practice your faith and hospitality in order for them to find a comfort zone and be welcome at the table.

### Sing a Hymn of Long Time Welcome

Leader preparation: Each congregation has a set of favorite hymns. Yet, the words we sing must have meaning for newcomers as well as long-term members. Such sensitivity was obvious in Jesus’ welcome to all those around him to the table (Mark 14:22–25). Their welcome wasn’t dependent on their understanding, but rather on the host being able to convey acceptance of each person’s journey. Jesus followed a ritual of tradition and reclaimed it for his new generation of followers. We are invited to do the same.

### Supplies:

- hymnals
- newsprint or an erasable board and markers
- paper and pencils or pens

Distribute the hymnals, and have the group select hymns that are favorites of your congregation. Have them choose one that best exemplifies the spirit of your church.

## Reflect

If you have been keeping a journal of your time as the leader of your group, reread your entries. Ask yourself: When did I extend the kind of hospitality to all those in the group that is in keeping with our tradition? Where would I like to improve? Thank God for the story that grounds you in the table of welcome extended to all Jesus’ followers. Give thanks for all those who nurtured you in the tradition of your faith to be free to encounter the stranger and the strangeness that each of your human beings carries in story.

Together write a new verse to the hymn to welcome newcomers. Invite the participants to brainstorm thoughts that each person wants to express to a newcomer. Write the key phrases on newsprint or an erasable board for all to see. Use these phrases to compose a new verse. You may need to adjust the words to fit the rhythm and the tune. As a gift to the congregation, a service to the community, ask the pastor if the new verse can be sung by the congregation in a service of worship.

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# Giving and Receiving Hospitality



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

Some of the adults in your group may think of mission as something that is done by other people in faraway places. The idea of hands-on activities that directly involve them in the work of the church may be new. Most adults, however, are eager to become involved when the task is clearly defined and the commitment is known. Introducing experiences of mission might start with short-term commitments and tasks that can be achieved in short amounts of time. As adults gain more experience, they begin to understand the importance of partnerships and relationships in accomplishing the mission and ministry of the church. Seeing mission activities as places to experience and practice hospitality can be challenging and exciting for your group.

### About this Exploration

Hospitality marks the identity and inspires the action of a welcoming community. Discerning needs of the local community and expressing compassion for the global community call individuals and congregations to respond to the real need. Each individual brings unique gifts to the community and extends opportunities to share. Mission partnerships are never one-way streets. Risking outreach to others creates opportunities to receive. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison are ways of welcoming Christ into the community. Those sent forth in mission are uniquely able to return with lessons of hospitality offered by those who have been served. Looking to God for guidance, the open hearts and serving hands that reach out to the world are the same hearts and hands that welcome.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Romans 12:9–18**  
**John 6:1–21**

## Leader Preparation

Given that it is all too easy to discuss, reflect and suggest ways to be hospitable to others as an expression of our faith, this Exploration will impress upon your group that Jesus called us to action. The very nature of faith practices means we will take in what we need to know and act upon it as an expression of our faith. We will stand and move on what we believe. Read through the activities with your group in mind. Remember that our technologically advancing culture requires us to face new challenges. While individually we may hesitate, together we can find the resources to act. Allow yourself the opportunity to step out of your comfort zone and receive the hospitality of others.

## Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Mission Impossible? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 6:1–21 looking for connections between your life and the characters in the story. What similarities do you see between those characters and individuals in your group? Some stories raise Jesus as an example for behavior. This story offers a young boy as an example. Consider how the boy in the story offers a connection with Jesus.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Ask for a volunteer to read John 6:1–21. Invite the participants to listen closely to the story. This passage may be familiar to some participants and new to others. Invite the group to identify examples of hospitality in the story. Then ask them to name any inhospitality and the person with whom it was identified. Ask: With which characters or behaviors in the story can you identify? How are the actions of Jesus and of the little boy similar or different? On newsprint or a whiteboard, make a list of the actions named by the group. Invite each person to select one of the behaviors to practice during the week.

### 2 Roadmap to Genuine Hospitality

Leader preparation: Read Romans 12:9–18 and note your initial reaction to the passage. Consider how you translate those words to your life. What challenges do you face when reaching out to others? Be prepared to encourage your group to be as honest as possible as they examine the ways of hospitality as a genuine practice.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Have everyone find Romans 12:9–18 in their Bibles. Remember that among the members of your group there may be a variety of skill levels in using the Bible. Invite the group to listen as you or one of the participants reads the passage. In the newsprint or whiteboard, have the participants list the commands in this passage. How would you restate that command in contemporary language appropriate to your setting? Form teams of two and challenge them to create a role play that describes what one new command looks like in real human life. Invite each pair to present their role play to the group.

### 3 Recognizing a Two-way Street

Leader preparation: Read the stories of hospitality. Think of stories you have heard or examples from your life that you might add.

#### Supplies:

- stories of hospitality, Attachment: Activity 3

Invite the participants to recall a moment in life when they extended hospitality and describe how it was received. Then ask each to share a story of a time when

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

hospitality was received and not recognized. Tell the stories of hospitality on the handout, or distribute copies of the stories for the participants to read. Discuss the stories. Look for examples of hospitality as a two-way street where both parties receive grace.

### Discerning & Deciding Activities



#### 4 Hospitality Tour (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Walk around your church building paying careful attention to the learning spaces and other spaces that are used by children and youth. Consider any barriers that may exist for persons who use wheelchairs, walkers or other devices for mobility. Plan a route for a tour of the building that is appropriate for your group.

##### Supplies:

- paper and pencils or pens

Distribute paper and pencils or pens to participants. Tell them that you are going on a tour and they are to play the part of investigative reporters. Have them take notes of examples of giving and receiving hospitality. Invite them to look at signs that hospitality is being extended. Lead the group on a tour of the building. Walk slowly enough and pause often to allow time for the participants to observe and make notes. Weather permitting, include the parking lot and outside space around the building as part of the tour. Return to your learning space and invite the participants to share their observations. As investigative reporters, what kind of news release would they write for the congregation?

#### 5 Odd Couples

Leader preparation: Visit with the youth leaders in your congregation and arrange for a joint meeting between the youth your group. Tell them that their perspective on hunger in your community is valued, and that they are being invited as a resource to help your group learn. To be hospitable, look for a place to gather that is neither your space nor theirs, but is a neutral zone.

##### Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of recent editions of your local newspaper

Welcome everyone to the group. Introductions are in order just to make everyone feel comfortable. You might even consider name tags. Invite one adult and one youth to take turns reading aloud John 6:1–21. Invite the group to listen for words or phrases that stand out, that catch their attention.

Form small groups of three or four persons. Each group needs both youth and adults. Give each group a copy of the newspaper, and ask them to scan the newspaper for articles about hunger in your community. Note which stories were about programs and which ones were facts. Invite each small group to report their findings to the total group.

As a group, choose one story or circumstance from the reports that seems like a situation they might be able to address. What are the issues involved? What strategies are needed to address this concern? What resources might they need for this task? How might they involve the rest of the congregation in their plans?

Invite the group to reflect on how they worked together. When did they notice people giving or receiving hospitality from one another?



### 6 Neighbor Hospitality

Leader preparation: Become familiar with the global ministries Web site for your denomination. You may want to visit <http://www.globalministries.org>. Arrange for a computer and projector to share this site with your group. If you are not comfortable with the computer, invite someone else to lead the exploration of the Web site.

#### Supplies:

- computer with Internet connection and projector
- poem “The Sigh,” Attachment: Activity 6

Project the Web site and give a brief tour of its links. Discuss the relationship between Global Ministries and the practice of hospitality. Ask the participants to give examples of hospitality they saw as you looked at the Web together.

Read the poem “The Sigh” by Julia Esquivel. In light of this poem and what we learned about our church’s global ministries, who is my neighbor? What does that mean for my faith practices as it relates to practicing hospitality?

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Benediction of Welcome (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Look in your congregation’s hymnal or *Book of Worship* for examples of benedictions. Reflect on the power of benedictions, and be prepared to help your group to do the same.

#### Supplies:

- copies of hymnals
- copy of a *Book of Worship*

A benediction is a blessing often given at the end of a service of worship. Some congregations use the same benediction each week and even recite the blessing together. In other congregations, the minister gives the benediction. Invite the participants to look through hymnals and the *Book of Worship* to locate samples of benedictions. Have individuals read several different benedictions.

Invite your group to write a benediction for use in worship that inspires the practice of hospitality when the congregation is separated one from the other. Use the benediction to close this session. Offer the benediction to worship leaders for use in your congregation.



### 8 We Are Hospitality in the World

Leader preparation: Gather information on the mission programs of your congregation. Think of activities that are done collectively as a congregation and of outreach programs in which individual members participate. If available, gather photographs of your church in mission activities.

### Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- materials to make a poster such as poster board, markers, photographs, glue sticks, etc.

Pose the question, “What do we do that makes the world a better place?” Be prepared to offer examples from the mission programs of your congregation as well as from the lives of individual members. On the newsprint or whiteboard create a list of ways members of your church make the world a more welcoming place for the sick, hungry, homeless, lonely, and rejected of the world.

As a group, design a poster that illustrates the mission activities of your congregation. The poster could include photographs of individuals engaged in mission activities. You may need to make more than one poster. Be sure to make this poster invitational so that other members of the congregation may become interested in participating in this mission work. Display the poster in a prominent place in the church.

This activity may lead your group to think about a mission project that the church could undertake, such as working on a Habitat for Humanity project, volunteering in a local food pantry, etc.

### **Blogging Hospitality**

Leader preparation: Identify the person or persons who are responsible for the maintenance of your congregation’s Web site. Determine how to create a blog site where visitors to the Web site can leave comments and read the comments of others. Invite the Web designers to meet with your group.

### Supplies:

- computer with Internet access and projector

As a group review your congregation’s Web site. If your congregation does not have a website, visit another church’s site. Make a list of questions that a visitor to the Web site might have about your congregation. Invite the participants to imagine creating a blog about your church. List items they would like to see included on the blog. Design a plan to create and maintain a blog for your congregation. Assign responsibility for regular reading and responding to posted questions.

## Reflect

Did your group get energized about taking action? Reflect on the moments when your group connected with embodying the practice of hospitality. How does this inform you about any further activities you will initiate with your group? How were you inspired? How will this exploration change your life?

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## Stories of Hospitality

In the Middle East and parts of the Pacific, there is a custom of giving away admired items. When someone admires a possession, the owner offers it to the admirer as a gift. This is seen as a gesture of hospitality and presence. For people from other traditions and cultures, this can be an uncomfortable experience. If one is unfamiliar with the custom, one may not know how to respond. One way to show graciousness is to refuse the gift three times. This allows the owner to keep the possession.

For many years, many clergy received small wages. They often were paid with items such as chickens, eggs, and other food. During the Great Depression in the United States, a pastor was confronted with a family offering their last chicken. Should the pastor accept or refuse the gift? The story that is told of Pastor Goode of St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church in Richmond, Virginia, is that when confronted with such a dilemma, he asked the family to cook it for him and eat it with him because he was lonely and didn't enjoy eating alone. His response showed grace in the receiving of hospitality.

Attachment: Activity 6

## The Sigh

*By Julia Esquivel, Guatemala*

When it is necessary to drink so  
much pain,  
when a river of anguish  
drowns us,  
when we have wept many tears  
and they flow like rivers  
from our sad eyes,  
only then  
does the deep hidden sigh of our  
neighbor  
become our own.

*From Gifts of Many Cultures: Worship Resources for the Global Community by Maren C. Triabassi and Kathy Wonson Eddy, © 1995 by Maren C. Tirabassi and Kathy Wonson Eddy, published by The Pilgrim Press, ISBN 0-8298-1029-3.*



# Giving and Receiving Hospitality



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

Chances are pretty good that the adults in your congregation have mixed feelings about the future. They have collected enough experiences that they know that some things need to be laid aside in order to make way for new possibilities that emerge. There is genuine grief in saying good-bye. As adults look back they also can become swept up in nostalgia. There is a bittersweet feeling in realizing that the present is not like the past. As a result, adults sometimes greet the future with fear. Will there be more losses? Will there be more that I will miss? Allow the adults in your group to express their grief, nostalgia, and fear, but do not allow these to dominate your time or to dampen the excitement about the new things that God's Spirit is doing in your church as the future unfolds.

### About this Exploration

Pursuing hospitality invites self-examination and even criticism. Where are we as individuals and where is the community in the complexity of protecting, tending and making space for self, God, others and all creation? Where are the points of giving and receiving hospitality? How do we discover the courage to reach beyond the familiar? What growth is required as individuals and as a community? What practices, events and experiences are worthy of celebration? What sustains a continuing journey? Living into God's future calls forth a dance of individual and communal points of view, commitments, passions and understandings. God welcomes all into this future.

## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Luke 14:15–24**  
**Mark 10:13–16**

## Leader Preparation

Reflect on your group's previous experiences with hospitality activities. Which activities energized your group? Review the other activities on hospitality so that you are comfortable discussing hospitality with your group. Read the Faith Practices Foundation paper <http://tinyurl.com/FPpaper> to examine the definition of hospitality.

## Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving. The first activity in each category is designed for "easy preparation" (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

\* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

\* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Scripture Past to Practice Today (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Luke 4:15–24 and Mark 10:13–16. Reflect on the passages and what they say about the future and the practice of hospitality.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles

Form two small groups. Assign Luke 4:15–24 to one group and Mark 10:13–16 to the other group. Allow time for the groups to read the passage and reflect on this question: What does this passage say about hospitality and the future? Invite each group to report its findings to the whole group.

### 2 What About the Future?

Leader preparation: Consult with church leaders to make sure that your congregation has a license for legal showing of home video. Obtain a copy of the movie "Back to the Future" and decide whether your group will watch the entire movie or clips from the feature.

#### Supplies:

- video clip from the movie "Back to the Future" from a DVD or the stream from the movie at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088763/>
- projector

Show a video clip from the movie "Back to the Future." To facilitate a group discussion, ask: What is the future? What do we know about it? What can we know about it? How is it helpful to think about the future?

### 3 Prayers for the Future

Leader preparation: Reflect on your hopes and dreams for the future of your congregation, especially with regard to its practice of hospitality. Write a prayer for guidance for your congregation.

#### Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils

Invite the participants to name their hopes and dreams for the congregation, especially hopes and dreams for its practice of hospitality. Distribute writing materials and invite the participants to write a prayer for guidance. Read your prayer as an example. Some people may prefer to work with a partner. Form a prayer circle and invite those who are willing to offer the prayer they have written.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 What's the Hope? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review “About this Exploration.” Read through this activity and think through the questions for discussion. Pray for your own discernment as you guide the conversation within your group.

**Supplies:**

- copies of “About this Exploration” for participants, or a copy of the statement large enough for all to read
- newsprint or erasable board and markers

Read “About this Exploration” to the group. Allow a moment for silent reflection. Then invite the participants to call out words that have special meaning or significance. List the words on newsprint or an erasable board.

Use these questions to facilitate discussion: What is your reaction to this statement? What questions does the statement raise? What response might we make to such a statement? Where do you see hope in the statement?

### 5 Plotting a Course

Leader preparation: Gather the supplies and prepare the space for your group. Take time to think about the future of your congregation and how it might grow in hospitality.

**Supplies:**

- mural paper (any inexpensive paper, such as the table covering paper that comes on a roll)
- markers

Invite the participants to think of how your church might practice hospitality in the future. Ask them to think of specific times: one month, one year, five years, ten years, etc. What image comes to mind? What is your vision of our congregation’s hospitality in the future?

Create a timeline on the mural paper with the present at the left of the paper and the most distant time at the right. Plot the group’s ideas on the timeline. If time permits, put intermediate steps on the chart. For example, if part of the hospitality plan includes physical changes in the church such as accessible restrooms or water fountains, indicate when design work is completed, when fund-raising begins, and other steps that will lead to the goal. Display the completed timeline where other members of your congregation can see it.

### 6 Visiting Grandma

Leader Preparation: Think of your life and your stories about visits to elders. Recall how it felt as a child to visit the home of grandparents or other elders. Be prepared to share your stories with the group.

**Supplies: None**

Invite the participants to sit in a comfortable position and think of times when they visited grandparents or other elders as children. After allowing time for

reflection, tell a story from your personal experience, and then invite others to share their stories.

Ask: Who are the grandparents in our church? Discuss how the grandparents of your church might be enlisted in making your church a place of hospitality for all ages.

### Sending & Serving Activities



#### 7 Welcome Children (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather hymnals. Decide whether you will read the statement and questions or duplicate it for distribution. Arrange the space for welcome and for comfortable discussion.

##### Supplies:

- hymn “Little Children, Welcome” (tune: SAIPAN), The New Century Hymnal, page 323 <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResourcesTNCH>
- Bible
- statement on Children in the Church, Attachment: Activity 7

Read aloud Mark 10:13–16. Have the group sing the hymn “Little Children, Welcome” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResourcesTNCH>.

Read or distribute the statement on children in the church. Discuss the questions in light of Mark 10:13–16 and the hymn. What commitments would you like your congregation to make for children with special needs?

Invite the participants to write an additional verse for the hymn. Encourage them to work as individuals, in pairs, or as small groups.

#### 8 A Ritual of Hospitality

Leader preparation: Think of the rituals that are a part of your congregation’s service of worship. Imagine the addition of a new ritual that focused on hospitality and welcome. Go through the activity and design a simple ritual that you can offer as an example to your group.

##### Supplies:

- copies of the worship bulletin
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Invite the participants to review the worship bulletin to identify ways the congregation demonstrates hospitality during a service of worship. Make a list of their discoveries on newsprint or whiteboard. Some congregations have greeters at each door. If these persons are not listed in the bulletin, be sure to include that act of hospitality in your list. Help the group recall other acts of hospitality that happen but may not be listed in the bulletin.

Invite your group to create a ritual of hospitality to be suggested as a practice to be implemented in your congregation’s service of worship. First, identify the components of a ritual:

- a. Beginning—an identifiable shift to indicate the start, words or sounds
- b. Activity—behaviors that are understood by the congregation for their

meaning including words, sounds, smells that are easily taught and recognized

- c. Ending—words, sounds, motions or other elements that indicate the end of the ritual

Work in small groups to create a ritual, and then share it with the group. Determine as a group which ritual(s) you will suggest to the worship committee to be tried for at least a month. It takes several practicing moments before a ritual becomes comfortable and the meaning can grow.

### Sent to Serve

Leader preparation: Read Luke 4:15–24 and reflect on its message for you and for your group.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Invite your group to read Luke 4:14–24, and pose the question: What if the people had welcomed Jesus differently?

Have the participants close their eyes and imagine a place where they might go to share their gifts and their faith. Where would it be? How far away from home? Why would you go to that place? Who would go with you? Why? Who would be there? What kind of reception might you receive? Invite those who are comfortable to share their vision.

Ask: What would it take for us to move out in action to extend hospitality? Create a plan to go out and serve in the spirit of giving and receiving hospitality in the situation you chose.

Lead the group in prayer for guidance in the future to ask on the call to use rejection of our ministries as opportunities for service and hospitality in practice of our faith.

## Reflect

Reflect on the moments that transformed you. What did you learn about the practice of hospitality? What will you incorporate into your faith practices from now on? Give thanks for your group, and name the people with whom you learned.

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Attachment: Activity 7

## Welcoming Children

Welcoming children is an idea familiar to all of us all, especially in the church. For many, the thought of welcoming children is a warm, fuzzy feeling; for others it is a mythical guarantee that the church will live on and the budget will be sustained. And for others, the idea of welcoming children brings a vision of chaos, noise, mess, and disturbance.

But what if?

What if the child you welcome now will someday develop needs beyond the usual?

What if the child becomes an adult with needs beyond the usual? What then?

Examine your conscience, biases and fears.

How will you welcome a child with learning disabilities or physical challenges that require major adaptations of you or your church? Would you be willing? Would your congregation be willing to make the adjustments?

Does God expect that we make what might be extraordinary adjustments in space or finances to accommodate the situation? What's it like to ask the hard questions?