



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

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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
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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Multiage groups consider Jesus' ministry of hospitality in an intentional and concrete way. As you and your group discover this practice, older learners are encouraged to assist younger learners, while younger learners' opinions are valued. We prepare ourselves by practicing hospitality in our own midst, by practicing active listening, from oldest to youngest. Jesus shows us in the story of Zacchaeus that hospitality can happen any time, anywhere—when the heart is open. For that reason, the faith practice of hospitality models and teaches us ways to open our hearts to each other's differences, no matter what our background and age, as we listen and work together.

About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and the 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 include 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

Leader Preparation

As you prepare to lead the hospitality activities, make opportunities during the week to seek a period of quiet. Pray for all of the learners you encounter in your particular setting. Picture their names and faces.

When you greet each learner at the beginning of your time together, bring to mind details about each life. If possible, plan to seat the group in a circle. Take time at the beginning of each lesson to reconnect with one another. Modeling hospitality is fun and simple when working with a small group! Everyone in the group can share in a word or a sentence how they feel in that moment. Invite each one to speak. You might say, "I would like to invite you to share a word or sentence about how you are feeling right now." Encourage the group to listen without crosstalk and comment. Wait for each participant to be invited before another speaks again. No matter what the age of the learner, each one has the opportunity to speak if he or she chooses to do so. Inviting everyone to share in the circle creates hospitality for all cultural groups. Continuing to invite participation is key since some people are more reticent to speak out than others and might need several invitations over a period of weeks or even months.

After several weeks of modeling, you may ask another person in the group to join you in greeting and leading. Careful modeling with consistent fo-

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 "Be My Guest" (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies that are readily available in your home or at your place of worship. Read Luke 19:1-10, the story of Zacchaeus. Consider that children ages 5-9 are most likely to ask "why," while children ages 9 and up will more readily express their thoughts and opinions. Encourage the older participants to answer the questions of the younger while you observe. This is more likely to insure engaged participation with a multiage group.

Supplies:

- pillow, mat or blanket
- plate, cup, fork, spoon
- chopsticks
- flower vase
- book
- glass of water
- other items that may represent different cultures' family spaces for hospitality

Greet learners, seat them in a circle if possible, then "check in," modeling behavior described under Leader Preparation. Tell the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) in your own words. Remark that Jesus invited himself over for dinner. Explain that God expects us to be prepared for the "unexpected guest." Ask: Has anyone ever invited themselves over to your house for dinner? Have you ever had a friend spend the night? How did you prepare for your friend before he or she arrived? Tell us about a time when you spent the night away from home. Accept answers that include family visits with older siblings and grandparents, divorced children who go from one parent's house to another, and friend visits. This is an opportunity to model the diversity in family configurations. Children from blended and divorced families, children with same-sex parents, as well as children from single parent families have much to offer children with more traditional families in regard to understanding hospitality.

Show the group your props. Choose two people to prepare for an unexpected visitor right in the setting where you are meeting. Encourage them to make the place as hospitable as possible. This encourages creative response to less-than-perfect circumstances. Give the learners a three-minute time limit. When the time is up, ask: How do you feel when you are preparing for guests? Ask the observers: What did you notice about making preparations? Accept all answers, moving to each member of the group to invite him or her into the discussion. Remember, a person does not have to answer and can pass. If time permits, gather up the props and invite two more learners to prepare for a guest until all have an opportunity.

cus results in new behaviors that can be depended upon over time. After awhile, each person in the group leads, actively listens, and observes, creating a visible practice of hospitality in your midst.

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.

2 Bean Bag Hospitality

Leader preparation: Read the rules of the game. Consider that children ages 5–8 enjoy playing, but have less eye-hand coordination than older children. The differences in ability will model hospitality for those less capable than others. Not all games need to be individually competitive to be fun!

Supplies:

- up to four bean bags (soft balls can also be used), depending upon size of the group

Explain to the learners that God requires us to be hospitable to one another. We are going to play a game and afterward pay attention to how we were hospitable to others within the rules of the game.

Choose three or four people from the group. Have them sit in a circle with everyone seated on the floor. The remaining people are to watch. Begin with one person naming another person in the circle followed by a throw of the bean bag. It is important to catch the bean bag. Repeat the throw until the bean bag is caught. After that person catches the bean bag, she/he then names another person and throws the bean bag to that person. The third person repeats the pattern, naming another person and throwing the bean bag. Include everyone in the circle as one who throws and one who catches. Repeat the pattern so that everyone throws to the same person every time. Everyone catches from the same person without dropping the bean bag. Repeat this pattern three or four times.

If the throwing and catching has been repeated several times, add another bean bag into the game. Repeat the same pattern of naming and throwing and catching. You can add more and more bean bags, as long as people do not drop them.

At this point you can form other groups (if you have enough bean bags), or you can start adding people to the first group. If possible, stop playing while things are going well, before everyone is cranky or tired.

End the game with the following questions: What made this game fun? What made the game difficult? Everyone in this game got to throw AND to catch the bean bag. How is that similar to the way hospitality works? Remind the learners that hospitality is about give and take, just like throwing and catching. If the giving is careful and considerate, then the catching will be complete. If the giving is rushed and not consistent, then the other player drops the bean bag, which slows down the game and decreases the satisfaction and fun for everyone. In order to offer hospitality, it is important to adjust the gift with the receiver in mind.

3 Hospitality Bars

Leader preparation: Review food safety instructions for your age group. Safe food handling tips for children is available from <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ascbtg>. Arrange ahead to use the kitchen. If a kitchen is not available, you can also use a small toaster oven. Make certain you have a list of the learners who are allergic to nuts, chocolate, wheat, or any other additive in a box mix. Choose a mix according to the needs of your group. Some stores have mixes without food additives. Gather large dish towels and aprons for the learners to wear to catch spills.

Check out the Web site “What the World Eats,” which shows photos of people from around the world along with the kinds of food they eat:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/23xtt3>.

Supplies:

- bar cookie box mix (you may need more than one box of mix depending on the size of your group)
- eggs, water, and any other ingredient required for the mix
- mixing bowl, measuring cups, baking pan, wooden spoons
- oven
- a map of the world or globe

Tell the children that many of the stories in the Bible are about food. Ask them to recall stories where food is mentioned. Some answers might include fish and bread. Remind the learners that God's abundance includes food and that people of every culture include food when they offer hospitality to others, even if the food choices are quite different. Ask the children: What kind of food does your family offer to guests? Tell us about some of the restaurants where you have eaten. What kind of food was on the menu? What might be the ethnic variety of the food (such as Mexican, Japanese, Thai, German, Italian, etc.)? Point to places on the map where the food may have come from.

Then ask: How does our congregation use food as a part of hospitality? Many churches encourage children to mingle and eat with others either before or after the worship service. Talk about their experience. Ask if they wait for other people to have a turn before they take their food. Ask if they take small or large amounts. Discuss the importance of having enough so that everyone gets some. You may include the story of Jesus and the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:30–44) in this discussion. Afterward, explain to the learners that they are going to bake cookie bars to share with the congregation next week. You can bake them ahead and freeze them. Bake enough so that everyone who works gets a small sample. This is an opportunity for the children to give to their family of faith, rather than only receive.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Song Weavers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Many songs of the church are handed down by one generation singing to the next generation. Find people in your congregation who know the song “Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man,”

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2g8xtg5>.

You can ask the week before, or put a short message in the bulletin. An example would be, “Wanted: someone who remembers the song about Zacchaeus who would be willing to sing it for others. Please see me at the coffee hour.” You will be surprised at the unlikely people who will step up and offer to teach! This will hopefully be the beginning of many “Song Weaver” opportunities. People can volunteer for fifteen minutes on an occasional Sunday. They can come and share their songs and stories with your young group of learners. This is an opportunity that does not require preparation or a lengthy time commitment, which may make it inviting to older church members. Make certain you ask your volunteer about the hand motions! If they don't remember, then make some up as you go along and have fun.

You can find the lyrics and music to the song at: <http://www.tinyurl.com/2g8xtg5>.

Supplies: None

Gather the children in a circle. Introduce your guest speaker who will teach them the song “Zacchaeus.” When they have sung the song with the hand motions, see if the children know any other songs. Keep a book of songs that you learn. Write “Song Weavers” on the front of the book. At the conclusion of the singing, ask the learners, “How did you feel inviting a guest to our group? How do you think our guest felt? In what ways did we show hospitality to our guest? What went well? What could we improve next time?” These are all questions that encourage discernment of hospitality situations that will increase the awareness of all participants. In the following session, have the children write a thank you card to your volunteer song leader. When confidence is attained, offer to have the children sing during the service of worship. They will be a great hit!



5 Entering the Icon

Leader preparation: In the days when few people could read, icons were one way of telling the story of faith. Religious icons (Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian) hold the faith narrative of a religious community. A quick Internet search will provide you with examples of icons to show to your group. The work of John August Swanson conveys a colorful humanistic view of God’s realm in the Latin American folk art tradition. Study the print “Peaceable Kingdom.”

Supplies:

- poster: “The Peaceable Kingdom” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> by John August Swanson
- paper and pencils

What is an icon? Some answers may include sports figures and/or computer images as icons. Explain that many religions — including Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity — have a rich history of religious icons that can be used to understand our relationship with God. In fact, during the fifteenth century, religious art in two and three dimensions was not signed because many believers understood the icon to be created by God.

Show the poster “The Peaceable Kingdom” and invite the learners’ participation in the art. After each statement or question pause for a period of quiet and then a short time of sharing the group’s responses without crosstalk. All responses are honored.

1. Take time to observe the bold colors (Pause, then ask for responses).
2. Notice the depictions of animals (Pause, then ask for responses).
3. Think about a cultural context. Where might this picture take place? (Pause, then ask for responses.)
4. What Bible story does this art remind us of? (Pause, then ask for responses.)
5. What part of this art “speaks” to you? (Pause, then ask for responses.)

After question 5, pass out paper and pencils and invite the children to write down what that particular image says to them. Encourage an imaginary dialogue between the image and the viewer. If there is time, divide into groups of two to share responses.

Close with this or your own prayer: *Holy Creating God, thank you for approaching us in the symbols and pictures of your diverse people. We are grateful for your Presence this day and always. Amen.*

6 Check It Out

Leader preparation: Learners ages 9 and older begin to make distinctions between rational thought and ideas they believed when they were “little.” One way to encourage rational thinking along with faith practice is to research scripture stories on the Internet. If your church does not have public Internet access, you may want to print a search for the learners to read. If your church has access, encourage some of the older learners to bring a laptop to do the search within the group. Many churches now have computer labs for education. This is a wonderful opportunity to type in “Zacchaeus” and have it come up with several listings. You may then discuss together what looks reasonable and what isn’t relevant to the understanding of this particular text.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- printed pages of Internet searches for the story of “Zacchaeus”

Invite the children to think about the story of Zacchaeus. Ask the children what they know about this story, keeping in mind that not everyone in the group may have even heard the story. Have the children find Luke 19:1–10. This is an opportunity to teach or reinforce Bible skills. Invite those who are willing to read the story. You could have different children read the parts for a narrator, Jesus, and Zacchaeus.

Show them the information you gained from your Internet search, or, if the Internet is accessible in your meeting space, have the children do an Internet search. Compare what they find with what they read in the Bible.

One part of the story that is not told is what happened when Jesus went to Zacchaeus’ house. We don’t know what happened inside. We only know that Zacchaeus was changed and that he offered to give money back to the poor. Ask: What do you think happened? Invite the children to act out that part of the story. Encourage them to think of more than one scenario.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Peace Out! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Younger children are naturally interested in learning about people who are different from themselves. Older learners (ages 9–14) take on new tasks and challenges with more confidence. Both of these qualities can be encouraged as the group explores how they can serve others inside and outside the worshipping community.

Supplies:

- paper, crayons, markers

There are many ways to greet people and pass the peace in our lives. Our congregation passes the peace in and out of worship. One way to pass the peace is to shake hands and smile. Have the children count off by twos. Have those who are a Two reach out their hand to a One, smile, and say “Hello, my name is ...” Then exchange places, while number One repeats “Hello, my name is ...”

Choose two people, or ask for volunteers, to stand in front of the group to pass the peace: First person: “The peace of Christ be with you.” Response: “And also with

you.” Encourage giggles and fun. Children can be uncomfortable with shaking hands. Laughing is what we are about after all, even if they find it too hard to do the hand-shaking part. After this formal instruction, ask: How do you greet people at school? At home? When you have been away for awhile? When family visits from out of town? How do women greet each other as opposed to men? How do men and women greet each other? Do different cultures greet each other the same way? How can we be sensitive to people who come from cultures other than our own when we greet them?

Afterward, have the group fold a paper into quarters. Encourage them to illustrate at least four different ways of greeting and passing the peace. If your church has greeters for the service of worship, ask if learners in your group could help them next week.

8 Fill the Ark

Leader preparation: Younger children love to talk about their pets. Older learners often have responsibility for animals in their homes. Learning compassion happens when children of different ages recognize their feelings for their pets. The more complicated idea of compassion for other human beings may follow this first connection. Moving from the self to the other begins with small steps. Heifer International provides an opportunity for these steps to be made. Download information about Heifer International: <http://www.heifer.org>. Select a video called “The Promise” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/27r4d4>) to show to your group.

Supplies:

- video “The Promise” by Heifer International
<http://www.tinyurl.com/27r4d4>
- offering basket
- newsprint or white board and markers

Before viewing the video ask if anyone in the group knows about Heifer Project. Let the learners share anything they already know and then fill in what they did not realize. Show the video. After the film invite the learners to describe the most interesting part of this video for them. Discuss what caught the attention of the group. Lead them to think about what they could do to help people in a place they most likely have never visited. Connect the idea that we are all God's children with the idea that we are able to help other people. On a big piece of paper (to be kept for other discussions) list their specific ideas about what that help would look like. Pray for the people in the video while asking God for assistance in this new mission project.

9 Connecting with Our World

Leader preparation: Read “The Birds’ Peace” by Jean Craighead George. This story is part of an anthology titled *The Big Book for Peace* edited by Anne Durell and Marilyn Sachs (New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1990), is readily available at your local library or online. The story is about a small girl who has to say good-bye to her father who goes off to war. This story is particularly relevant for children in military families. It may bring up a lot of emotion and disquiet in some of the youngsters, depending upon how verbal they are about their families. Be prepared to listen and to bring the entire group to a place of compassion for our military families whose loved ones are in harm's way.

Supplies:

- *The Big Book of Peace*, available from amazon.com at
<http://www.tinyurl.com/2dq6r8q>.

Read aloud the story “The Birds’ Peace.” Ask them if they have ever listened to the birds outside. What do they hear? Ask them to imitate some of the birds’ calls. Connect the group to how God created the entire world and that we are an integrated part of that creation. In this story Kristy finds comfort when she listens to the birds. Ask the group if they have ever been sad or angry and found comfort in God’s creation. What did that comfort feel like?

If weather permits, take a small walking trip outdoors around your building. Ask the children to walk without talking and to notice what they hear. Return to your meeting area and discuss your experiences. End your time together by asking God to increase awareness for all of creation. Pray for those who serve in military forces, the families who wait for their safe return, and for peace in the world.

Reflect

When your time together is over, it is most important to think of the surprises. Plans sometimes go awry, but God surprises leaders in small ways through the smile of a child, the spontaneous laugh, the connection of children with one another, watching an older child help a younger one, just to name a few. Be prepared to be surprised each session. Noting the small moments of God’s hospitable work in community brings immense satisfaction and energy for the ongoing work of the worshiping community.

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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Multiage groups approach faith stories from vastly different perspectives. Younger learners encounter scripture with new eyes, finding the stories filled with intriguing and sometimes disturbing imagery. Older learners begin to understand that our ancient scriptures include stories of people that do not all end “happily ever after.” To include all perspectives, we prepare ourselves by practicing hospitality in our own midst, by practicing active listening with observation, and by giving each one, from the youngest to the oldest, an opportunity to share an opinion.

The story of Abraham and Sarah includes adult themes. The adult theme of age-related pregnancy must be addressed if brought up by the learners. However, other themes including hospitality can also be emphasized. Abraham’s response to strangers, his adherence to the ancient Hospitality Code (which includes screening of strangers), his extended hospitality—these are all models of hospitality for all believers. Sarah’s laugh? This faith story classic continues to teach us today. God never stops surprising God’s people. This text and the faith practice of hospitality model and teach us ways to open our hearts to one another’s differences, no matter what our background and age, as we listen and work together.

About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and the 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 include 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:

Genesis 18:1-15
(21:1-17)
Isaiah 25:1-9

Leader Preparation

As you prepare to lead the hospitality activities, make opportunities during the week to seek a period of quiet. Pray for all the learners you encounter in your particular setting. Picture their faces and say their names. Ask God to connect you to each one.

When you greet each learner at the beginning of your time together, bring to mind details about each life. If possible, plan to seat the group in a circle. Take time at the beginning of each lesson to reconnect with one another. Modeling hospitality is fun and simple when working with a small group! Everyone in the group can share in a word or a sentence how they feel in that moment. Invite each one to speak. You might say, "I would like to invite you to share a word or sentence about how you are feeling right now." Encourage the group to listen without crosstalk and comment. Wait for each participant to be invited before another speaks again. No matter what the age of the learner, each one has the opportunity to speak if he or she chooses to do so. Inviting everyone to share in the circle creates hospitality for all cultural groups. Continuing to invite participation is key since some people are more reticent to speak out than others and might need several invitations over a period of weeks or even months.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Getting to Know You (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Hospitality requires an attitude of "Getting to Know You." Understanding people's differences requires coming to understand your own thoughts and then to inquire into another's. This ongoing lifetime practice of self-inquiry and reaching out to the other begins in small steps. Begin by centering yourself and your group by reading Genesis 18:1-15.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- blank sheet of paper for each learner
- markers, crayons, pencils

Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read Genesis 18:1-15. Ask the listeners to describe Abraham. What do we know about Abraham from this story? Some answers may include that he is resourceful, he cares about strangers, he protects Sarah (she is not asked to interact with the strangers), he anticipates people's needs and fills them by offering shelter, water, bread, and a dinner. Abraham also includes other people from his family and group in the preparations, and Abraham connects his actions and behavior with what God wants from him. What do we know about Sarah? Some answers might include that she supports her husband's acts of hospitality by cooking, she keeps her distance from the strangers, she is connected to God, and Sarah is surprised by God, which is indicated by her laugh. The same question may be asked about the strangers in the story. Some older learners may associate the three strangers and the announcement of the birth of a baby with the Wise Men and the baby Jesus in the New Testament. Encourage learners to connect similar themes in our stories of faith, explaining that the narratives were handed down by word of mouth long before they were written. Our faith stories frequently include strangers and babies/children. See if the older learners know more faith stories with strangers and babies.

Invite the learners to write their first name in large bold letters vertically along the side of the paper. Older learners can help young ones space out the letters. For each letter think of an adjective that describes "you," that states a positive thing about you. Some examples are: nice, energetic, athletic, musical, artistic. Write the words by the letter. There may be more than one adjective for each letter, but make sure that there is at least one adjective per letter. Then decorate the page. At the end of the activity, have the learners exchange their paper with a neighbor. Invite everyone to share their neighbor's paper. Conclude that in getting to know ourselves, we can then get to know our neighbor as we ask God to create hospitality among us.

2 Ways We Show Hospitality

Leader preparation: Review the story of Abraham's and Sarah's hospitality to the three strangers (Genesis 18:1-15).

After several weeks of modeling, you may ask another person in the group to join you in greeting and leading. Careful modeling with consistent focus results in new behaviors that can be depended upon over time. After awhile, each person in the group leads, actively listens, and observes, creating a visible practice of hospitality in your midst.

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.

Supplies:

- black felt-tipped markers
- crayons
- 8½" x 11" white construction paper for each learner
- staples
- paper punch

Make a group book titled “Ways We Show Hospitality.” Invite each person to make one page. Connect ways we show hospitality with the story of Abraham and Sarah. Some examples are: Abraham ran to greet his guests. Do we greet our guests by running, or do we show our hospitality by other gestures? Abraham bowed to his guest. Do we bow to our guests? What other ways do we connect with new people? Abraham offered water and rest for his guests. How do we feed and offer rest for our church guests? Abraham asked everyone in his family to participate in offering hospitality. How do we ask our entire church family to participate in offering hospitality? Sarah prepared special food for the guests. How do we feed our church family guests?

Create one page for each character in the group, including a book cover and title page. The learners may include illustrations of how Abraham and Sarah were hospitable as well as illustrations of how their congregation is hospitable. Pages may be divided into two sections, or creatively combined with images from past and present.

When organizing the book, list the names of all the participants on the title page under the word “Author.” Older learners may assist younger ones with the printing. Use the book when discussing hospitality. Leave room to continue to add pages. Perhaps the book can be displayed in the church narthex or other public area.

3 Song Weavers

Leader preparation: Invite a congregation member to come to the group to sing the hymn “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?” (tune: SERVANT SONG):
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>.

Supplies:

- copies of the hymn “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?”
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3> (tune: SERVANT SONG)
- paper for card making
- markers or crayons
- pencils
- glitter

Engage the learners in retelling the story of Abraham and Sarah. Ask: Which acts of hospitality do you remember most vividly from the story of Genesis 18:1–15? Explain that the song they are going to learn talks about being “pilgrims on a journey and travelers on the road.” Ask the group if they have ever traveled on a road to a place unknown. Reflect upon how that would feel and how important a welcome is at the end of a long day’s journey. Conclude the introductory discussion by connecting God’s call for us to be servants to one another as Jesus was to those he met along the road. Explain that the new song is about connecting with other people through being open and inviting while sharing the human feelings of sadness, fear, and joy.

Ask the musical guest to sing the hymn. Before the guest begins, ask the children

to listen for words that are other names for “servant.” Some answers may include: pilgrim, Christ, traveler. Ask the presenter to sing the song again. This time listen for words that are connected to feelings. Some answers may include: fear, weep, laugh, joy, sorrow, harmony, agony. Listen to the song a third time. Ask the group to listen for what we can do to be one another's servant. Answers may include: pray, help each other, bear the load, hold the Christ-light, hold hands, speak peace, weep together, laugh together, share joy and sorrow, sing to God. After the third time hearing the song, many will be able to sing along the fourth time.

When the guest leaves, make cards to thank your visitor for sharing a song of faith. Ask the worship leader of your congregation to include this song when the children can sing along in a worship setting.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Tell it Again! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the story of how Abraham met the strangers. Tell the story with props as dramatically as possible. Include Sarah's part of the story and, of course, her laugh! Then tell the story from a stranger's point of view. Since our text does not include their dialogue, make up some that might have happened. Be creative and include humor. Dramatizing the different characters helps learners see the faith practice from different points of view, which enhances the practice of discerning hospitality.

Supplies:

- Bible
- pitcher of water
- bowl to wash feet
- towel for drying
- a small loaf of bread
- flour
- little cookies or cakes
- picture or piece of meat

Dramatically place on a table a Bible open to Genesis 18. Describe all the available props. Tell the story of Abraham and Sarah being hospitable to the three strangers. Tell the story from three perspectives, including the points of view of Sarah, Abraham, and a stranger. Use the props vigorously. Ask children to participate. As you tell the story the first time, “become” the character you have chosen. After you have told the story from one character's perspective, encourage a listener to tell the story using the props and adding his or her own words and actions. It is important to model imperfect dramatization for children so that they do not feel intimidated telling faith stories with improvised words and actions. Many of our young people think dramatization needs to be memorized and polished, like a media show. No wonder young people become observers rather than participants in the day-to-day world! Leading a fun, less-than-perfect, improvised version of the faith story shows young people that they are living a faith that includes interaction and that God continues to speak to us through the ancient stories.

When the group grows tired of retelling the story, ask questions about each character and what he or she may have been experiencing. What does it feel like to be the stranger? What does it feel like to be the provider (Abraham)? What does it feel like to be vulnerable while working very hard (Sarah)?

5 The Ancient Hospitality Code of Sarah and Abraham

Leader preparation: Research “Travelers and Strangers; Hospitality in the Biblical World” at www.crivoice.org. Reflect on cultural differences with regard to hospitality. If there are learners in your group who may know other cultural expressions of hospitality, consider calling them ahead of the session to invite them to share that practice with the group. Read Genesis 18:1–15.

Supplies:

- Bible
- newsprint or white board and markers

Explain to the children that during the time of Sarah and Abraham, there was a hospitality code. The code provided guidelines to protect people from strangers. The code involved behaviors that would encourage strangers to depart as friends. The process included four phases: 1. Invitation; 2. Screening; 3. Provisions and protection; and 4. Departure. Outsiders were often suspect in historical time, and they needed to be approached cautiously. This is a good time to discuss with children how all strangers are not alike. When a stranger approaches you, how can you determine your response? When is it safe to talk to a stranger? When is it not safe to talk to a stranger? Connect Sarah’s and Abraham’s careful behavior with the three strangers to the hospitality code of their time. Ask if that code seems relevant for today’s circumstances. Have the children talk about greeting strangers in their worship setting. The message of hospitality can confuse young people who are taught not to approach strangers. This is an excellent time to consider what is safe practice for children.

On newsprint or a white board, make a list of safe hospitality practices that can be illustrated and added to a book at a later time. Include other cultural practices of hospitality.

6 Hospitality Cake

Leader preparation: Choose a simple box cake at your local grocery store. While gathering the ingredients, reflect on all the decisions necessary to make hospitality happen, including choice of ingredients, planning the preparation, utensils necessary, people to do the work. Review safe food-handling procedures. Additional safe food procedures for children can be found at: <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ascbtg>.

Supplies:

- cake mix and other ingredients specified in the package instructions
- cupcake pan
- measuring cups and spoons
- wooden spoon for stirring
- plastic spatula for scraping
- plastic gloves for those handling ingredients
- aprons or large towels for the cooks
- oven (either in kitchen or a portable toaster oven)

Recall the story of Genesis 18:1–15. Abraham asked Sarah to help him prepare food for hospitality. She made small cakes. What ingredients are necessary for baking a cake? Ask the children to reflect on baking at home or if they have baked in the past. Read over the ingredients and measurements. Mix together, choosing different participants for each step of the process. Bake at the required temperature. Discuss how it takes many hands to make light work. Reflect about how

hospitality in the story of Abraham and Sarah involved many people, including those who worked in the field. Ask: Does God want us to work alone or together when we offer hospitality? There is no correct answer to this question. Use the question to ponder various individual experiences.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Greetings! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Contact a member of your congregation who serves as a greeter and invite him or her to visit your group to discuss the importance of greeting people when they come in the door of your church. Discuss the difference between greeting someone you already know and greeting a stranger. Locate a copy of the poster “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker.

Supplies:

- materials for making cards, including paper, pens, crayons, markers, glue and glitter
- poster: <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker

Introduce your guest. Explain how you are engaging the faith practice of hospitality. Ask the guest about being a greeter for your congregation. How long have you been a greeter? How often do you greet people here? What are some ways that you greet strangers? Do those ways differ with people you already know? What advice would you give young people if they wanted to be greeters for the congregation?

Invite the group to study the poster “Embrace of Peace.” What do they observe in the art? In what ways are the people greeting one another? What feelings do these images bring up? Where might these people be? What might be the situation of these people? Conclude by asking how each one in the group would like to be greeted when they come to worship. Be willing to accept that some may not want to be greeted or recognized. A quiet smile without touching is another way of honoring each one’s different need.

8 Special Delivery!

Leader preparation: Reflect on the story of Sarah and Abraham in Genesis 18:1–15. Pay particular attention to how you feel when you read that Abraham does not eat along with the strangers. The text specifically states, “... and he stood by them under the tree while they ate” (NRSV). Think about how you will introduce this aspect of hospitality to your learners (who will surely want their own piece of cake!). Bring a simple cake from home or the store. The cake may be made by learners in a previous activity. Pray for the recipient of the hospitality cake that their need be made known to the group.

Supplies:

- Bible
- a prepared cake
- supplies for making a card

Retell the story of Abraham, Sarah and the strangers (Genesis 18:1–15). Emphasize how Abraham did not share in the hospitality offered to the strangers. Show everyone the cake you brought. Explain that you are not sharing with them. Ask the learners how they want to share this cake, since it is not for them. Some suggestions might be: with another group in the church, at the coffee hour after worship, with a congregation member who is ill. Decide together where the cake might be shared. Go as a group or send one person to deliver the cake. Invite the children to make a card to go with the cake.

Afterward discuss how it felt NOT to have any of the cake for themselves. “It’s not fair” may come up in the conversation. Discuss fairness openly. Younger children may have a lot more trouble with this than the older ones. Reflect on God’s plan for creation. God’s idea of fairness may not be our own. This may be the first time in some young lives that justice does not include their getting a piece of the cake! It is important to ask God for justice, but also to realize that it may not be your turn.

9 Lights, Camera, Action!

Leader preparation: Practice telling the story of Abraham and Sarah and the three strangers. Include members of your group in the story. Find costumes (at least simple head ties and fabric) for the actors. Your drama may be narrated (pick an older learner to read or tell) or the actors may have specific parts.

Supplies:

- simple costumes such as head scarves and ties
- Bible
- props: pitcher of water, small loaf of bread, a backdrop or photo of a tree, a sheet for a tent, a stuffed animal for the calf, paper plates and utensils
- video camera

Invite the children to act out the drama of Genesis 18:1–15. Have one or two learners narrate the story while the others act out the parts. Include props. Practice several times, and then record a performance. Show the video to the whole congregation during a fellowship time or a service of worship. This will help connect the entire congregation to the young people in a new way!

Reflect

Think back on your group’s experiences. To what kind of activity do they respond most favorably: storytelling, drama, art, active play and imagination, or quiet time including prayer? As you note the strengths, interests, and abilities of each learner, consider using their skills in a leadership capacity. As you identify those areas of least strength, consider planning your sessions in ways that build confidence in the neglected areas. We are not all leaders in every area. However, a well-rounded group is one model of hospitality and an example of God’s diversity.

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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Multiage groups experience discipleship from different perspectives, depending largely upon their individual psychosocial development. When we turn to scripture to understand the role of discipleship, younger children (ages 5–8) understand discipleship in the stories of Jesus. Older learners (ages 9–14) begin to question the validity of the stories of Jesus, especially if they have been raised with the stories since birth. As a leader of a multiage group, you must retell the stories to the satisfaction of the younger ones while providing opportunity for the older learners to ask questions and even express doubt. One way to embody discipleship is to prepare ourselves by practicing hospitality in our own midst, by modeling active listening with observation, and by giving all learners an opportunity to share their opinion from youngest to oldest without offering negative judgment. Along with prayer, these activities of inclusiveness open the heart to experiencing God.

The story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples brings up a lot of emotions for those watching and listening. Jesus teaches and models the role of servant leadership. Jesus offers hospitality to the disciples in a surprising way. He teaches, through word and action, that it is in caring for the other that we will come to know and love God more fully. Jesus' act of washing the feet of the disciples embodies the give and take faith practice of hospitality. Jesus and the disciples model and teach us ways to open our hearts to each other, no matter what our background and age, as we pray, listen, and work together.

About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and the 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 include 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:
John 13:1-7, 31b-35
Acts 2:42-47

Leader Preparation

Hospitality invites us to be both the one who gives and the one who receives, as we discern from the Holy at each opportunity. Consider your own life, especially the times when you have been asked to lead and when you have been asked to follow. Recognize in Peter's surprised response to Jesus times when God has surprised you. It is important to realize that servant leadership confuses most children. They are just beginning to find the confidence to lead, and yet Jesus asks them to serve. This is a counter-cultural message that requires life-long consideration. The faith practice of hospitality offers all of us an opportunity to serve and to be served in our ongoing faith journey. Pray for God to continue to teach you and your group the meaning of serving and being served.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Praying with a Bounce (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 13:31b-35.

Supplies:

- a large rubber or plastic ball

Jesus came to give us a new commandment. That commandment is to "Love one another" just as Jesus loves us. He explained that his disciples would be known by how they love one another, not by what they wore, or where they were born, or how much money they did or did not have, nor how pretty they were, or how smart or reliable. To be Jesus' disciple, he asks us to love as he loves us.

Have the children stand in a circle. Bounce the ball to a child saying, "Love one another." The person catches the ball, and everyone shouts, "Because Jesus loves us." That person then bounces the ball to someone else in the group repeating, "Love one another," and the entire group responds as before, "Because God loves us." Continue until everyone has a turn.

2 Foot Prints

Leader preparation: Breathe deeply; this may be a bit messy! Invite several older youth or adults to help with the painting and water supplies. You will need a continual supply of fresh water. Mix dry tempera paint with dish soap and water to see which you think would work best.

Supplies:

- tempera paint in bright colors
- paint brushes
- water
- towels for cleanup or baby wipes
- soap
- chair
- newspaper
- shallow cookie sheets, one for each paint color
- 12" x 48" white paper

Line up the mixed tempera colors in a row. Invite the children to each remove one shoe. Paint the soles of their feet with a tempera color of their choice. It tickles! Have them place their foot on the white paper to make a footprint. Clean up the feet with soap, water, and towels. Baby wipes may work as well! After the foot-

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.

print dries, have the children write their names on their print and title the print “Disciples Walk With Jesus.” Hang the prints together in a banner.

3 Foot Washing

Leader preparation: Read John 13:1–17. Read an “Order for Foot Washing” in your denomination’s book of worship, or find an order for foot washing on the Internet.

Supplies:

- Bible
- a large bowl
- sponge
- large towels
- snack (optional: cut up apples or grapes; something to munch on while others are having their feet washed)

Read or tell the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples in John 13:1–17. Explain to the group that in order to follow Jesus and be his disciples, we serve other people because no job is too unimportant for us to do. Further explain that in the time when Jesus lived, people wore sandals and when they entered houses their feet were dusty from the dirt on the roads. Part of the hospitality of that time and place was to wash your feet to remove the dust. Usually a servant washed people’s feet. The owner of the house would consider washing the guest’s feet “beneath” him. The disciples were shocked when Jesus, their teacher, washed their feet.

Connect Jesus’ washing of the feet with the church’s worship service of foot washing. Discuss the order of worship from your denomination’s book of worship. With the group, decide which aspects of the service they want to include in their foot washing act of hospitality. An alternative method of food washing is to use disposable hand sanitizer wipes.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Do I Really Need a Bath? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 13: 1–17.

Supplies:

- bowl
- pitcher of water
- towel to wrap around your middle
- chair for Peter

Tell the story of Jesus washing Peter’s feet. Use props and exaggerated motions to get the attention of your group. Choose someone to play the part of Peter who gets his feet washed by Jesus.

Jesus: (*puts the towel around his waist*)

Peter: (*sits in a chair*)

Jesus: (*pours water in the bowl*)

Peter: (*looks frightened*)

Jesus: (*bends over to take Peter’s foot*)

Peter: *(pulls his foot away)*

Jesus: *(takes the foot again, places it in the water, washes the foot, lifts it up, dries the foot with the towel from around his waist)*

Peter: Why are you doing that, Jesus? I don't need a bath.

Jesus: Peter, don't you understand what I'm doing? I am washing your feet to show you how to be my disciple.

Peter: Oh! Okay. Then you can also wash my hands and my head and my neck and my ...

Jesus: You just don't get it, do you? I know you don't need a bath. But if you don't get this lesson, then you will never be part of me, nor be my disciple.

Ask the group questions about this small play. How do you think Peter felt? Why was Peter so confused? Did Jesus explain himself very well? Do you think Jesus was patient or impatient with Peter? When have you been the teacher? When have you been the student? Is a student necessarily a servant? If time permits, ask two other people to play Jesus and Peter.

5 Wade in the Water

Leader preparation: Acquire a recording of the classic song "Wade in the Water." There are several examples on the Internet. Many hymnals also include the song. Write the words of the refrain on newsprint or a whiteboard. If possible, invite a member of the congregation to sing the song for the group.

Supplies:

- song: "Wade in the Water" <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong2>

Teach the chorus to the group. ("Wade in the water. Wade in the water, children. Wade in the water. God's a-going to trouble the water.") Have them sing with a recording or with the invited singing guest. Read each verse before going on. Explain that this is an African American spiritual that tells stories from scripture. Many historians believe that the song is also about African Americans escaping slavery. Within the verses the song has instructions for slaves to avoid capture. Dogs would be used to track down slaves, so by wading in the water, their scent would be lost.

For older learners, continue the discussion by explaining that water is an important Christian symbol used in baptism. Water is an essential element to life, whose meaning is universal to all people. Scholars agree that water was especially important to the Hebrew people because they lived in a region where water was scarce. Without water, people die. Ask the group if they have ever been really thirsty. Describe how that feels. Ask if they have ever been in a circumstance where water was not available. Explain that many children of the world do not have an adequate source of water. As disciples of Jesus, how can we help those who do not have enough water? List their suggestions on newsprint or a whiteboard. Pray for the children of the world who do not have enough water.

6 Disciple Visualization

Leader preparation: Collect images of young people helping other people that would encourage your group to visualize themselves as disciples. You could take photos of your own congregation a week before and display them on a laptop computer. Photos could include people helping one another, various cultures working together, various age groups working together, people at sporting events enjoying themselves, people at work, pulling together.

Supplies:

- images of young people including people from cultures other than your own

Display the pictures and invite the children to examine them. What do they see in the pictures? In what ways might these pictures illustrate being disciples of Jesus? No matter where or who we are, there are qualities that make us good disciples, such as being joyful, helpful, sharing, respectful of others, truthful, patient, faithful, thankful, loving, and even holy.

Invite the children to visualize themselves as disciples. Use these directions: Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Now exhale. (Practice breathing a couple more times.) Then pray: *Holy Creating God, we visualize (see) ourselves in the following roles, We see ourselves and we observe our thoughts, words, and actions as: a joyful person (pause after each example to give the group a chance to visualize), a helpful person, a sharing person, a person whom other people respect, a truthful person, a patient person, a person with strong faith, a thankful person, a loving person, a holy person. We ask your help, O God, to be all of these things as disciples of Jesus. Amen.*

Sending & Serving Activities



7 We Are Disciples (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Look over the words of the song and sing it several times. Or, find someone to sing with you!

Supplies: None

Teach the children the following call and response song. The leader sings one line; the group repeats the same line. If you are not confident singing, remember that many children sing naturally, and they are really non-critical when you try. Your example allows those who lack confidence in singing to try anyway. This song is sung to the Old French canon "Are You Sleeping?"

We are disciples (*repeat*)

Sharing our love. (*repeat*)

We follow Jesus (*repeat*)

Glorifying God! (*repeat*)

After learning the tune and the words, the song can be sung in a round. Other leaders can be chosen. Ask your worship leader if the children could lead the congregation in singing this for a benediction. Discuss with the learners that when they are going about their daily lives, remembering songs can help keep them acting like disciples in difficult situations.

8 Benediction

Leader preparation: Think about services of worship where the benediction informs the congregations of ways to be good disciples. Recall what “going forth” into the world feels like. Be prepared to ask questions that identify this sense of moving forward with energy for your group.

Supplies:

- newsprint or white board and markers

Write the following on the newsprint or white board:

Go forth, sharing your love for everyone.
Be open to yourself and to your neighbor.
Be the love of Jesus Christ each and every day.

Make a list of these example phrases: Christ came for all of us. Share love and peace. Praise Creator God! Share the love of Jesus. Share your gifts with all. Serve God with gladness. Be of good courage. Hold fast to goodness. Support the weak. Help the sick. Honor all people. Love and serve God. Rejoice in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Invite the children to read together the printed benediction. Explain that a benediction is the part of the worship service that sends us out into the world to be disciples of Jesus. Talk about how we can take our discipleship “on the road” wherever we go. Discuss how you can be like Jesus without necessarily talking about Jesus. Discuss what that might look like in actions.

Encourage the group to write their own benedictions! Write phrases on the chalkboard or on a piece of paper. Let the learners choose some phrases to create a benediction for worship. Encourage them to add or change words. Younger learners may copy the benediction on the paper and then illustrate. Older learners may want to work more with the words. Benedictions can be shared in worship at a later time. You can also use their benediction to close the session.

9 Understanding Water Facts

Leader preparation: Research facts about water from the Web site www.water.org. The UCC documentary, *Troubled Waters*, <http://www.ucc.org/troubled-waters>, also gives a good overview of the issues. Remember that the facts may alarm younger members of your group. However, older learners respect facts and yearn to know how to best help other people as disciples of Jesus. Faith becomes relevant for older learners when there is a fact component and a social justice application. If possible, have the younger learners draw while you discuss facts and concerns with the older learners.

Supplies:

- disposable plastic water bottle
- refillable water bottle
- 8½" x 11" paper for drawing
- markers, crayons, pencils

There are many people in the world who do not have an adequate supply of drinking water. Ask one of the older learners to read this list of facts about our world and its water supply:

- 884 million people lack access to safe water supplies, about one in eight people.

- Each year, 3.575 million people die from water-related disease.
- Every 15 seconds, a child dies from a water-related disease.
- Millions of women and children spend several hours a day collecting water from distant, often polluted sources.
- At any given time, half of the world's hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from a water-related disease (statistics from www.water.org).

Reflect

Notice during your time together where you feel the most energy and where you feel the least energy. Do you enjoy planning more than executing lessons? Do you appreciate each learner for his or her individual differences? Find something in each learner that you appreciate. Note what you appreciate in a weekly journal. It is not necessary to compliment youngsters, since often compliments create an atmosphere of competitiveness in your group. However, noting what you appreciate in others, even to yourself, supports an atmosphere of hospitality in your time together.

Questions: Why do we care about other people in the world? As disciples of Jesus what can we do for those people? How can we pay attention to the importance of water in our own lives? Show the children the disposable water bottles and a refillable water bottle. Ask them which water bottle is better to use. Discuss playing in water during the summer, along with the use of water in bathing. Ask the children to make posters about conserving water. Help them write a slogan on each piece of paper. Begin each slogan with: Good Disciples _____. Display the papers in a prominent location for the rest of the congregation to see.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Hospitality practice for multiage groups includes the study of scripture and reflection upon Christian tradition. Understanding the shape of tradition from the past helps learners participate in faith practice in the present, with eyes to the future. The rich history of Christian tradition provides a deeper understanding of how people behave when showing hospitality, reminding us that what we do speaks as well as what we say.

The practice of hospitality in Christian tradition is an opportunity to reintroduce the importance of abundant hospitality within a congregational setting, along with groups of friends and family. Mark 14:22–25 includes reflection upon a farewell meal, a Christian sacrament, and an abundant feast with friends, to name only three themes of the Last Supper. When we participate in communion we remember the Passover tradition of the Jewish people and we look forward to the Heavenly Banquet, which is our combined expectation of God's plan for the future.

About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and the 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, preju-

dices and judgment to establish welcome space for all. Hospitality is a radical broadening of individual worldview to include 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:

Mark 14:22–25
1 Peter 4:1–11

Leader Preparation

Reflect upon when you first observed communion and then when you first participated in communion. Bring to mind family gatherings, where food was shared with community. Ask God to give you the words to describe communion in a way younger children can understand, communicating the sense of sacrament, God's presence in the life of Jesus, and also the idea of the extravagant community feast we anticipate in God's realm.

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 A Family Meal Tradition (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Nearly every family has some familiar pattern for celebrating the holidays and birthdays. Interview your friends to learn of their family traditions.

Supplies: None

Invite the children to tell you about how their families celebrate birthdays. Who gets to choose the meal or the kind of cake? Does the family celebrate in the morning, in the evening, more than one time? Is the celebration different for the adults than it is for the children? Talk about family traditions related to some holidays such as Thanksgiving or Christmas. Do they travel to someone else's home, or do people come to visit them? Who usually says the prayer at these family meals? Allow time for each child to have a turn to speak without interruption.

Talk about your congregation's fellowship dinners. What traditions do you follow? Do you use paper or china plates? Who cleans up the kitchen after the meal? What kind of food do you have? Is it a served dinner or a buffet? Is it a potluck dinner or a dinner with a menu? In the Christian church there is another traditional meal that we celebrate during a service of worship. That meal is called communion. While this is not a meal with all the different dishes like at Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays, or fellowship dinners, this meal is a very important tradition in the life of the church. With the communion meal the church remembers what Jesus did and what Jesus said.

2 Guess Who Is Coming to Supper?

Leader preparation: Read Mark 14: 22–25.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- cup and plate, bread (optional)
- drawing paper
- pencils and markers or crayons
- water color paints or tempera paint or colored pencils (optional)

Have the children find Mark 14:22–25 in their Bibles. You may need to help the children by telling them how to find the New Testament, the gospels, the chapters, and the verses. Encourage the experienced readers to assist the beginning readers. Most children will be able to find the numbers for the chapters and verses. Tell the story of the Last Supper. Provide a cup and plate (including bread) if easily available. Props are helpful but not necessary! Explain that Jesus was celebrating a Passover meal, one of the important Jewish festivals. Part of Jewish tradition was to gather with family and retell the story of the Jewish Passover, while eating symbolic foods. Describe how the Last Supper was Jesus' goodbye to his closest friends. It is important to note that people of Jesus' time usually ate three meals a day. The first two were small and did not necessarily happen with family and friends. The third meal was a lengthy meal with family and friends

that included eating and good conversation. This meal was also considered a reward for having accomplished a hard day's work. That is why the Last Supper evokes so many images that bring up complex human feelings. People feel sad for Jesus' goodbye. People feel a sense of satisfaction for having worked together for so long and for completing the day's work. People experience happiness at being with friends. Some people also experience a longing for a time when they can be together with friends and family who are no longer available.

Some of the children in the group may participate in communion. Talk about how communion is different from and similar to a meal with family at home. Emphasize the importance of the cup of wine and the bread in Jesus' Last Supper. Jesus used the bread and the cup to help his disciples remember him. Explain that communion is a meal where these elements carry important symbolism as the body and blood of Christ.

Have each child draw a picture of a communion table. Encourage them to place people around the table who they would like to invite. Encourage them to include a place for Jesus at their table. Discuss and share drawings while at work.

③ Name that Sacrament

Leader preparation: Understanding communion as one of two sacraments helps ground the learners in the traditions of the Protestant church. Review the two sacraments of baptism and communion.

Supplies:

- pitcher of water
- bowl
- communion supplies: plate, cup, grape juice, small loaf of bread
- cloth for table

Explain to the children that a sacrament is an important or sacred Protestant ritual. There are two sacraments for churches in the Reformed tradition: baptism and communion. Different churches follow different traditions related to these two important rituals. In some churches, babies are brought by their parents for baptism. In other churches, children and adults make a decision about when they are ready to be baptized. Invite the children to tell about baptisms they have seen or, if they have been baptized, their own baptism.

Different churches celebrate communion in different ways also. In some churches everyone is welcome to participate in communion. In other churches children may not take communion until they have been baptized or confirmed. Invite the children to talk about their experiences of communion.

Hold up each of the sacrament items one by one. Ask the group which sacrament uses which item. Separate the items on the table in front of the group. All churches use water for baptism. Some churches sprinkle, some dip, and some fully immerse into the water. Talk about how your church practices baptism. If possible, take the group to the place in the church where the communion elements are stored and where the communion preparations are made. Also visit the baptismal font or baptistery. Encourage their curiosity about both places.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Saying Goodbye (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Consider times when you have said goodbye in your own life. What were the emotional implications? Gather pictures or photos of seasonal changes. An old calendar may have lots of examples

Supplies:

- pictures or photos of seasons
- large white paper and markers

Take a walking trip around your building. Ask the group to notice how nature says goodbye. Point out plants that have died, or those that have disappeared for whatever reason. Take note also of new growth, nature's way of saying "hello." Note how the sun says goodbye and hello every day, as does the moon. Consider the rain or snow. Where does it go? How does it return?

Return to the learning area. Invite the children to illustrate the four seasons. Divide into four groups and assign one season to each group. Encourage each group to think carefully about their season and to draw activities, and plants and scenes specific to that season. Combine all the papers with seasonal labels. Tape them together and display under a sign: "God's World—Ever Changing."

Saying goodbye acknowledges God's ever-changing design of the world. The tradition of the church emphasizes the importance of goodbye, which is shown in Jesus' Last Supper. This is a good time to discuss when and where young people have said goodbye. Some in your group may have family members in the military, some may have had grandparents or a family member die, others may have lost pets, or some may have had people move away. Point out that without Jesus' goodbye, the church may not have begun. Within every goodbye there is a hello waiting to happen. That is how the world works under God's plan.

5 What Does Jesus Do?

Leader preparation:

Supplies:

- poster: <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> "Christ Among the Children," by Emil Nolde

Display the poster "Christ Among the Children." Invite the group to describe what they see in the picture. Perhaps they will distinguish the adults from the children or notice that we do not see the face of Jesus, only his back. Encourage them to describe the colors and the texture of the picture. What might it feel like to be in that picture? What would you want to say to Jesus?

Jesus sets an example for our practice of hospitality. Describe another group gathering. Use this description or one of your own. A group of children were gathered to pick teams for a soccer game. Everyone wanted to be chosen first. One child, who was smaller than the rest, stood in the back. Who would be the first to get Jesus' attention in this situation? Continue to describe circumstances relevant to your group where one person or a group of persons might otherwise be ignored and forgotten. Explain that Jesus comes to the least of us and that is what we are called to do in any circumstance. Sizing up a situation takes discernment, but it is our call to discipleship.

6 Feelings

Leader preparation: Prepare a piece of paper for each participant that has six to eight drawn ovals.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers
- pencils
- papers with ovals

Read or tell the story of the Last Supper from Mark 14:22–25. Invite another person to read and/or tell the story. Choose learners with various voices to retell the story. God speaks to us through different voices! After each telling, ask the group to share something they heard that time that they didn't hear before. Perhaps it was a particular word or phrase. Perhaps a different image came to their mind. Invite them to describe the feelings elicited by the story. List these on newsprint or a white board. If someone says "sad," ask for other words that mean sad, such as unhappy, down, discouraged. Let the words describing emotions be abundant, none of them better or worse than another. After listing the emotions, invite the children to describe how a feeling makes their body act. Have them stand and demonstrate sad or joyful or angry. For instance, connect anger with tightness. This gives the children the opportunity to be active.

Give each child a piece of paper with the ovals. Ask them to illustrate at least six emotions they have felt this morning since getting out of bed. Close this activity by thanking God for the wide range of human experience, including feelings.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Bring a Friend (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Recall a time when you were invited to worship with a friend. What did that feel like? In what ways were you welcomed? What was different about that church from your home church?

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pencils

Remind the children that Jesus said, "When you do this for the least of these, you do it for me." That's a helpful reminder that however we treat someone else, we are actually serving Jesus. That kind of hospitality is an important part of our Christian discipleship.

In ancient times people practiced hospitality for several reasons. One primary reason was that strangers found it very difficult to find safe lodging in foreign lands. Read Hebrews 13:1–2. We just never know when God might visit us! Hospitality, as an expression of our Christian faith, is a response to God's ultimate hospitality offered to every living thing. Hospitality is also an expression of the one body of Christ explained by Paul in the New Testament. Finally, hospitality is how we "love one another as God loves us."

Invite the children to prepare for “Bring a Friend to Church” day. Organize groups for snacks, prayers, tours of the building, games, name tags and other activities that the group enjoys. During the preparations, use these or similar questions to promote discussion: Why do we bring friends to worship with us? Who will we bring? How can we prepare for our guests to have a good experience here with us? What do you think is the most important thing we can do to help our guests feel at home here with us? Let the congregation know of the plans, and perhaps others will also invite friends on that day.

8 Who Is Missing?

Leader preparation: Gather a supply of alphabet letters. Prepare a set of index cards for each group with the names of the twelve disciples, each disciple’s name on a separate card.

Supplies:

- plastic or punched out letters from the alphabet, punched out alphabet letters, or alphabet flash cards (you could make these on your computer, print them, and cut them out)
- index cards for each group with the names of the twelve disciples

Form groups of two or three. Give each group a set of letters. Have one person in the group pick one of the index cards. The group then searches for the letters from the alphabet to spell the disciple’s name. This is not a race! When they are finished, pick another card. Continue until the group has spelled out all the names of the disciples. When the names of the disciples have all been spelled out, ask the group if anyone has the same name as one of the disciples, or if they know anyone with the name. Ask if anyone has a name that was not in the list of the twelve disciples. While we know the names of the twelve disciples, there were other people who followed Jesus who are not named in the list of the twelve. Several women were named as followers. Remind the group that some people can be left out for many reasons, but that the disciples of Jesus look at every circumstance and make an effort to include those who are on the margins or invisible, the way Jesus did.

9 Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors

Leader preparation: Read 1 Peter 4:8–9

Supplies:

- Bible
- newsprint or white board and markers
- magazines
- white poster board
- black marker

Read 1 Peter 4: 8–9. Talk about how to be hospitable to one another without complaining. Ask the group how they welcome people into their own homes. Let each describe the traditions of their family. List on newsprint or a marker board all the traditions they name. Compare the list to welcoming people in the worshiping community. Look for ways to identify the traditions as open hearts, open doors, open minds. Ask the group for more examples of each. Divide into three groups. Have each group cut out magazine pictures that show open heart, open mind, or open door and glue them to the poster board to create a collage. Assign the open mind category to the older learners because finding those pictures may be more difficult. Encourage the children to draw pictures if they are inclined. Title each poster. Display the collage in a public place in the entry way of your building.

Reflect

Observe your group as you work on the faith practice of hospitality. See how they respond to one another within the group and in the larger community after your gathering. Name something in each one that you appreciate. See if you can connect with a family member of each person in your group, perhaps picking one per week to meet during the fellowship time or to call on the phone. Make the connections necessary to model good discipleship and to encourage God's work in your community.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Multiage groups find context and mission in family, school, and the surrounding community where they live. Discovering how God works in these contexts may require additional articulation of spiritual practice. God calls us to connect with one another, no matter what our age. The activities for context and mission emphasize group discussion and interaction as ways to love and serve one another.

About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and the 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 include 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:
Romans 12:9–18
John 6:1–21

Leader Preparation

Read Romans 12:9–18. Circle or underline the words love, rejoice, hope, patience, perseverance against hate, giving up, lagging behind, and impulsive. Make a list of these words. Beside each one, write an opposite characteristic. See these characteristics with their opposite so that in holding them in tension you may view yourself and your group more clearly. Welcome new insights, and pray into the possibilities of hospitality.

Learning groups differ in how they interpret Bible stories. There is no one meaning for any Bible story. Keep multiple levels of meaning a possibility in your group by listening for the truth in each participant's comment. Remember to highlight God's love, presence, and protections in each story, especially for the younger children. This will best prepare the group for their ongoing understanding of faith as they grow into the people God calls them to be.

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Hold On! The Spiritual Practice of Sacred Pause (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Romans 12:9–18. Familiarize yourself with the tune "London Bridge" at <http://www.tinyurl.com/27op369>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and markers

Someone, if not all of the group, will be familiar with the song "London Bridge." Sing the song together. Then form a line where two learners form a bridge. Sing the song again and have the rest of the group walk under the bridge in a single file. When someone is caught in the bridge, stop the game. Ask: The song says "take the key and lock them up." How would that feel if it really happened? (Affirm all responses.)

Have the children find Romans 12:9–18 in their Bibles. Jesus wants us to get along with one another. He asks us to love one another, to hate what is evil and to keep doing what is good. If we follow Jesus' advice, we will stay out of trouble and we will begin a spiritual practice of compassion by pausing before we take the wrong action. The rule before crossing a street is "Stop, Look, and Listen." A good rule for treating others kindly might be to "Stop, Think about Jesus, Speak or Act." Another word for stop is pause. Think of the pause button on a DVD player. A spiritual practice of pausing keeps our heart open for hospitality for ourselves and everyone else. Invite the children to name some times when they have a choice about loving someone or not liking that person, treating that person kindly or badly. Perhaps they have been teased at school. How might they react if they followed the rule to "Stop. Think about Jesus. Speak or Act.?"

The best place to begin this spiritual practice, making good decisions to hold on to what is good, is at home with your family. Invite the learners to give an example of a personal decision for the good that they made at home with their family. You can also make decisions that hold on to what is good at school with your classmates, and in your community where you are a part of a soccer team, Scouts, or a community choir, just to name a few. Even when you feel angry, Jesus asks that we hold on to what is good.

Invite the children to make bumper stickers with the rule "Stop. Think about Jesus. Speak or Act." If they make extra copies, they can distribute these to other people in the congregation.

2 Signs Up!

Leader preparation: Read John 6:1–21. Gather a picture of a variety of signs, such as traffic signs, direction signs, the handicap logo or other logos, signs for exit and enter, etc.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- pictures of signs
- poster board
- paint, markers, and crayons

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.

Display all the pictures of signs that you gathered. Invite the children to look at them and tell what each sign means. Children who are beginning readers will be able to describe the signs for Stop, traffic signals, restroom, exit, etc. Signs help us know where to go and what to do. Talk about how we know it might rain or snow. Those indications are also signs: big dark clouds, wind, cold, etc. They are signs of what is to come.

In the story about Jesus feeding five thousand people, we hear the word, “sign.” As you read the story ask the children to raise their hand when they hear the word “sign.” The NRSV text uses the word “sign” twice. After the story, ask: What do you think the story meant when it said that the people “saw the signs”? What might these signs point to? Talk about Jesus and his healing people who were sick. People thought that was a sign that Jesus was important. When Jesus was able to feed so many people with so little food, again people thought that was a sign that Jesus was very special.

The signs in this story occur when people see something and then anticipate that something else is going to happen, like storm clouds indicating that it might rain. In the life of your congregation, there are probably signs that indicate that people are welcome. Invite the children to name some of these, such as hand shaking, smiles, hugs, laughter, offerings of food and drink, guest registers, signs that tell where things are located (restrooms, nursery, office, sanctuary, etc.).

Invite the children to create welcome signs to post around the church. Make signs of different sizes. Perhaps the children would like to draw pictures of bread loaves and fishes and write John 6:1–21 on their signs. Post the signs all around the church.

③ Testing One, Two, Three

Leader preparation: On index cards write the names of places in your community: laundromat, grocery store, movie theater, soccer field, library, school, place of worship, art studio, museum, convenience store, fast food restaurant, any community location that might be a context for children.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- index cards

Tell the children that you are going to play a game, something like a test, but there won't be any grades. Give the following descriptions and ask the children to tell who the person is. The children may give specific names, such as their teacher or their doctor. Instead of calling out the answer, have them stand up when they think they know. Then call on several children for the answer. Be sure that you call on everyone at least once.

- A person who works with children in a classroom at school (teacher)
- A person who helps you get well (doctor, nurse)
- A person who cleans and fixes your teeth (dentist)
- A person who cuts your hair (barber, hair stylist)
- A person who brings the mail (mail delivery, mail carrier)
- People who put out fires (firefighters)

Invite the children to add other descriptions for the group to name.

Have the children find the story of Jesus and the disciples feeding five thousand people in John 6:1–21. Read verse 5 where Jesus tests the disciples. Jesus won-

dered if his disciples could solve a problem. They had been traveling with Jesus for some time, observing how he helped people. What are some ways that Jesus helped people? If you had seen Jesus do all that, who would you assume Jesus was? A hair stylist? A firefighter? Jesus wanted us to see God's love in his actions of healing and helping. Invite the children to name times when the actions of others have showed God's love. Encourage the children to think of their lives in community.

Divide the group into pairs. Give each pair an index card and have them think of three examples of God's work in that setting. When the pairs have completed this task, call the group back together. Have each pair reach their three examples and see if the rest of the group can identify the setting.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Jesus Feeds Thousands! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation:

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers
- copy of the newspaper with interesting headlines
- paper, pencils, crayons or markers

Introduce the children to the idea of a headline. Show them a newspaper. The bold print in big letters is called a headline. A headline gives a hint about the content of the article. Invite volunteers to read some of the headlines. Which of these headlines do you think is the most important? Sometimes the more important headlines are written in larger and bolder print.

Have the children find John 6:1–21 in their Bibles. This is a story of something amazing. If this story happened today, television news people would be on the scene with cameras. The next day newspapers would carry the story on the front page. Invite the children to make a list of the facts in the story. Write these on newsprint or a white board. Which of these facts would make an interesting headline? Divide the group into smaller groups and have each small group choose one or more of the facts from the list. Write a headline using catchy phrases to draw attention to that fact. Create a collage of these headlines. Write John 6:1–21 at the top of the collage. Display the collage in a prominent place in the church.



5 The Examen

Leader preparation: Research the examen prayer of Ignatius of Loyola. The examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence. A helpful book to explain this spiritual practice is *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press: 1995), available from amazon.com at <http://www.tinyurl.com/4o2v7g>. Some people follow this prayer practice twice a day. As you plan for this activity, try using the examen at least once a day. Consider writing a note to the families to encourage the use of the prayer at family dinner time.

Supplies:

- poster: <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> “Embrace of Peace,” by George Tooker
- copies of “A Prayer of Ignatius of Loyola,” Attachment: Activity 5

Display the poster “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker. Invite the children to study the picture quietly. After several moments, offer questions for reflection, such as: What colors, shapes, and lines do you see in this picture? Who are these people? What are they doing? Where are they? How do you think they are feeling? Are any feelings brought up by looking at the hands reaching outward? What emotions do you see in the faces of the three people? Affirm all the responses. Assure the children that it is OK if people see different things in the picture. Each person who looks at a piece of art brings him or herself to that picture.

Distribute copies of the handout “A Prayer of Ignatius of Loyola.” Tell the group a little about Ignatius, who he was, when he lived. Ignatius provided this prayer to help people look for God in each day. Read each of the five questions. Ask: If you were one of the people in the poster, how might you answer that question? Pause after asking the question to allow time for reflection. Encourage each child to contribute, but also allow them to pass. Discourage crosstalk and evaluating.

Encourage the children to share the handout with their families. The prayer could be used by the family at dinner time for conversation, reflection, and prayer. You might want to send a note home with the children encouraging the use of the prayer.

⑥ Gathering Up

Leader preparation: Read John 6:1–21. Look up information about recycling centers in your community. Do the schools provide bins for recycling newspapers? Where do people take cans for recycling? Does your community support recycling? What is your congregation’s policy for recycling?

Supplies:

- Bible
- art paper
- crayons, markers, pens, pencils

In the story of Jesus feeding five thousand people (John 6:1–21), verse 12 tells us that Jesus asked that the remaining loaves and fish be gathered up so that nothing would be lost. Invite the children to think about our world for a moment. How do we gather up things so that nothing will be lost? Discuss reduce, reuse, and recycle with the group, noting as many different examples as possible. How do you gather up at your house, so that nothing is lost? As disciples of Jesus we are called to take good care of what is left over. This is a way to practice good hospitality in our families, our schools, and our community. God uses everything and everyone so that nothing is lost. Perhaps your congregation has a “going green” policy. If so, describe that for the children. What commitment has your congregation made to “gather up”?

Fold a paper into six squares. Invite the children to draw a picture in each square of something that is reduced, reused, and recycled. Some examples may be: cans, bottles, plastic containers, newspaper, plastic bags, compost bins. Share ideas with one another. Encourage the children to take their pictures home to discuss with their families.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Prophet or King? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 6:1–21. Make a card for each of these statements: Jesus is a prophet. Jesus is a teacher. Jesus is a king. Jesus was born in a hospital. Jesus died and was buried in a grave. Jesus didn't like children. Jesus was allergic to fish. Jesus is God's son. Jesus left praying to other people. Jesus is called savior. Jesus had no enemies. Jesus died on a cross.

Supplies:

- Bible
- cards with statements about Jesus
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Review the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, with an emphasis upon verse 1–15. The people in this Bible story watched Jesus turn five loaves and two fish into enough food to feed five thousand people. Many people were confused about who Jesus was. Some thought that this was a sign that Jesus was unusual and that he was a prophet. Some people wanted to make Jesus the king. Why do you think they wanted him to be king? Why did Jesus go away to the mountain to be by himself instead of letting them make him a king?

Tell the children that you are going to show them some cards with statements about Jesus. See if they can decide which of the cards best describes Jesus. Hold up a card and read the statement so that beginning readers will feel included in this activity. As disciples, we are asked to serve God by imitating Jesus. Make a list of things the group can do to serve God like Jesus in our families. Write this list on newsprint or a white board. Make a group decision about one of these examples to do this week.

8 Do Not Be Afraid

Leader preparation: Look up Christian Centering Prayer at www.centeringprayer.org. Practice a breath prayer, adapted from the Buddhist practice of Tonglen. For more information see <http://www.shambhala.org>. Read John 6:16–21.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- one or more fans

Have the children find John 6:16–21 in their Bibles. Tell the story of Jesus walking on the water. Ask the group to act out the part of the disciples. Turn off the lights in the room for darkness. Start the fans up to produce a wind effect. Crouch down low and then begin standing and walking, telling the story of how Jesus frightened the disciples because he was walking on water. Encourage the group to act afraid. Then say in the loudest voice, "Do not be afraid!"

Ask: Why were the disciples so frightened? Make certain the group understands that the boat was safe near land at the end of the story. Talk about how no matter where they are, at home, in community, at school, God is with them. Invite the children to describe a time when they felt afraid. Affirm that yes, there are times when we are afraid.

Teach the group a breath prayer. When you feel afraid, breathe in your discomfort, name what you are afraid of; hold onto that feeling and then breathe out relief and peace saying “God is here.” Do this three times. How does your body respond when you breathe this way? What are your feelings? How is God with you in this breath prayer?

9 Hide and Seek

Leader preparation: Gather pictures of Jesus. Include those from the education files, old greeting cards, as many images of Jesus as possible. Try to find pictures of Jesus that come from various cultures. Search the Internet for some pictures. If you run out of images, write “Jesus” on a small slip of paper to give the group more opportunities to find him in the game. Hide the pictures around the room or around a large space such as the fellowship hall.

Supplies:

- pictures of Jesus

Sometimes we are so busy trying to act like Jesus when we are in our family or our school that we forget to look for Jesus all around us. Looking for Jesus is kind of like hide and seek. Tell the children that you have hidden pictures of Jesus all over the room (you could hide them in the fellowship hall or other places, depending upon your church setting). Divide the group into pairs and give them time to find as many pictures as they can. Call out “Follow Me” when the time is up. Have the children bring the pictures and spread them out on a table. What do they notice about the different pictures? We don’t really know what Jesus looked like because there were no cameras when he was alive. Every culture has images of Jesus that reflect their own physical characteristics. Everyone wants to be able to see Jesus in themselves and others. It is important for us to be able to see Jesus in many different ways.

Reflect

Reflect on the spiritual practices included in this Exploration: the Examen, the Breath Prayer of Compassion (Tonglen), Taking a Spiritual Pause, and Gathering Up (a practice of reduce, reuse, recycle). Which of these will you incorporate in your own spiritual life?

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Attachment: Activity 5

A Prayer from Ignatius of Loyola

1. Thanksgiving

God, I realize that all, even myself, is a gift from you.
Today, for what things am I most grateful?

2. Intention

God, open my eyes and ears to be more honest with myself.
Today, what do I really want for myself?

3. Examination

God, show me what has been happening to me and in me this day.
Today, in what ways have I experienced your love?

4. Regret: I'm Sorry

God, I am still learning to grow in your love.
Today, what choices have been weak responses to your love?

5. Hope

God, let me look toward the future with hope.
Today, how will I let you lead me to a brighter tomorrow?

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Jesus' life as a teacher and healer chronicles many references of hospitality. God invites us to say "yes" to our relationship with Jesus and we explore this invitation in the story of the Great Dinner in Luke 14:15-24. As we look to the future of our faith, we keep in mind that we are taking our inner sense of hospitality outward into God's world. This requires the faithful to anticipate a vision of God's world for the future. Creative exploration with words, art, and movement cultivates our minds and hearts for this vision that can be implemented with all age groups.

When we have a vision for the future, we can then ask, "Who or what have I left out?" The story of Jesus and the children in Mark 10:13-16 reminds us that in the time of Jesus, children were marginalized. In our time, in many places in the world, children are still neglected and discounted. This story requires us to pray and think further about those who are pushed to the edges in our faith community and our world. We can then intentionally include them in our picture of the realm of God, acting on their behalf.

About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and the 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, preju-

dices and judgment to establish welcome space for all. Hospitality is a radical broadening of individual worldview to include 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 14:15–24
Mark 10:13–16

Leader Preparation

Take time to visualize your own picture of God's realm. Take several days to journal or draw to bring up your ideas from the place within. Sometimes writing words in clusters activates imagination. After several days review your work and ask yourself, "Who or what have I left out?" Ponder your exclusions in the light of your personal faith journey.

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.



① Faith Memories (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about examples of how God has been active in your life. Prepare to share those with your group. Sometimes when we look back at events we see God at work more than we do in current events.

Supplies:

- newsprint or white board and markers

Explain to the children that the connections and relationships we build in our faith community extend outward to our families and everyone we meet. Through our relationships we come to know ways to see God at work in our lives. Share your examples with the group. Then invite the children to name a way that God has been present with them. Maybe it was during a family prayer time, or when they lit the Advent candles at home, or at school when they were doing a difficult assignment or test, or when they had an argument with a friend. Make note of each response on the newsprint or white board. Some answers might include times when they prayed, times when other people acted kindly, times when they felt safe. This creative activity encourages the learners to explore their own contexts. Sometimes hearing the stories of others sparks a thought or idea.

Take the group on a tour of the church to find examples of God's work. Help the children think about God at work in relationships, in the way the church carries out mission and outreach, in study and prayer groups, in fellowship. Take note as you go so that you can record the children's observations on the newsprint or white board in your learning area. Keep the list for follow-up discussion. Encourage the children to continue looking for God's activity in the words and actions of others as well as in their own words and actions in the coming week.

② Come, All Ye People

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with www.globalgiving.com, which discusses the plight of young girls in Zimbabwe. If you are not familiar with the song, invite a congregation member to come and teach "Come, All You People" (tune: Uyai Mose Iona Community), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>.

Supplies:

- information from the Web site <http://www.globalgiving.com>
- song "Come, All You People" (tune: Uyai Mose Iona Community) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>

After greeting the children, begin a discussion about girls who live in Zimbabwe based on the information you gained from the Global Giving Web site. Invite the learners to compare their educational opportunities with those of the girls in Zimbabwe. Talk about how we sometimes complain about our circumstances, which for others would be a welcome opportunity. Invite the children to brainstorm ways to provide assistance to the efforts of Global Giving. Which of their ideas might they be able to implement? Help the children identify steps to take to put such a plan into action.

Invite a member of the congregation to teach your group the song, "Come, All You People" (tune: Uyai Mose), a song from Zimbabwe, Africa. After learning the song, ask everyone what they notice about the music and how they respond to

its rhythm and content. Perhaps the group can lead the congregation in singing this song.

③ Faith Milestones

Leader preparation: Check with the minister or the chair of the worship committee about any upcoming milestones that may be celebrated by your congregation in a service of worship. Arrange for families to worship together on that day.

Supplies:

- picture of a highway milestone or mile marker
- a baby book
- paper and pencils

Talk with the group about milestone signs along the highway. If available, display a picture of a highway mile sign. Some of the children may have taken long trips and helped others in the car take notice of signs that help you know how much farther it is to your destination. Milestones indicate places of importance during a journey. They are reference points that people use to look back and remember how far they have come or look forward to where they are headed.

Sometimes parents or grandparents make a baby book to record the milestones of their children's first years. Show them the baby book you brought. What milestones are recorded in this book? What are some other milestones that people record? What are some milestones that the children look forward to experiencing (high school, driver's license, confirmation or baptism, graduation, etc.)?

Our faith lives have milestones that we celebrate together, usually in baptism or profession of faith. Other milestones are also celebrated, such as the birth or adoption of a child, first day of school or religious school, beginning a new congregational program, completing a year of school, weddings or anniversaries, years of service to the church, becoming an elder or deacon, death of a loved one. Invite the children to describe some of these milestones in your congregation.

Form groups of two. Ask each pair to choose a milestone and to think of ways to celebrate it in the life of the congregation. Some ideas might include taking photos with a disposable camera, writing letters of encouragement, drawing pictures of the event and giving them to the one being celebrated, writing a prayer.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ Welcoming a Visitor (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Bring a stuffed animal and create a story about the animal that includes name, why he is new to your group, where she lives, where he is from, why she is there, how she is feeling. Emphasize in your story that your stuffed animal feels shy because she doesn't look like everyone else, she has no money, no parents, and no friends.

Supplies:

- stuffed animal and a small blanket

Greet the children. Welcome and introduce anyone who is with the group for the first time or who is a returning visitor. Then pick up your stuffed animal while removing the blanket. Ask: Does anyone know who this is? Introduce the stuffed animal using the story you created. Invite the children to name ways to welcome this new addition to the group. Accept all answers. Implement the good ones. For example, everyone can say, “Good morning.” Invite the children to tell about times when they have been a visitor in an unfamiliar place. How did that feel? How were they treated? What would have helped them feel more comfortable?

Offer a prayer for everyone who is a stranger and for all those who offer a welcome.

Heaven on Earth

Leader preparation: Try this activity on your own so that you will know what to anticipate as the children create their drawings.

Supplies:

- crayons
- blue and black watercolors
- paint brushes
- 2 water color stations (a table covered with newsprint or butcher paper) and a bowl of water at each station
- newsprint or white board and marker

From the very first story in the Bible, the story of Creation, we learn that God is a Creator. And since we are made in the image of God, we can be creative also. Sometimes God speaks to us and through us in our creative ideas. Some people keep a daily journal where they write or draw their thoughts about God.

No one knows what heaven is like. There have been books and movies and paintings that give a variety of opinions, but no one really knows. That might be a good subject for a journal: “What does heaven look like?” Invite the children to express their ideas. Record their thoughts on newsprint or a white board. When the children seem to run out of ideas, step back and use different colored markers to cluster words that seem to go together. Explain that the same question can be asked for a series of days, and each day might produce a different response.

Invite each person to use the crayons to draw a picture of what heaven looks like. Encourage them to use their crayons thickly. When their crayon drawing is finished, have them cover their drawing with a wash of water color, either blue or black. The crayon drawing will show through the color wash. As the papers dry, explain to the group that heaven is like the crayon resist painting. It shows through in our lives every day if we have the eyes to see. Encourage the learners to begin to look for God’s realm (heaven) in their world, one peek at a time. They may want to begin a journal in which they write a list of words or drawings over several days.



Jump for God

Leader preparation: Copy “Trinity Jump Rope Rhymes.” Find a place in the church where the children will be able to play jump rope, such as the fellowship hall or outside, weather permitting.

Supplies

- copies of “Trinity Jump Rope Rhymes,” Attachment: Activity 6
- long jump rope big enough for three jumpers and two rope turners

In the Bible we learn that God has many names, such as Creator, Father, Holy One, Yahweh, I Am Who I Am (Exodus 3:13), Jehovah, Maker, Fortress, Refuge. Each of these names helps us know a little bit more about God. If we always use the same name for God, we may forget that God is bigger than that one name. When we pray, we can use some of the different names for God.

Distribute the “Trinity Jump Rope Rhymes.” “Trinity” means a group of three closely related persons or things. In church, the Trinity refers to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Invite a volunteer to read each rhyme. In each rhyme, have the children identify the different names. Go to an area outside or a fellowship hall with a high ceiling. Pick two rope turners. Ask some to jump who already know how. As they jump rope, the rest of the group can recite one of the rhymes. See if the jumpers follow directions. Let everyone have a chance to turn, jump, and recite.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Jesus and the Children (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Mark 10:13–16.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers
- supplies to make cards

As you greet the children individually, tell them how important they are to you, to the group, and to the church. Invite them to name ways the church pays attention to children. Write their list on newsprint or white board. Their list might include: VBS, Sunday school, child care, acolytes, the nursery, children’s bulletins or children’s moment, drinking fountains at their level, chairs their size, high chairs for young children choir, film night, lock ins, etc. Now invite the children to name some of the people who work in the church to welcome children in these ways. Write these names beside the items on the list. You may need to help with some names. Ask: Why, do you think, do the church and these people do all of this for children?

Invite the children to find Mark 10:13–16 in their Bibles. Encourage a volunteer to read the passage. Again ask: Why, do you think, do the church and these people do all of this for children? In Jesus’ time children were not important. When he called the children to him, he surprised many people, including his disciples. Jesus calls all of us to serve the children.

Invite the children to make cards to say “Thank You” to the people whose names are on the list. Encourage the children to deliver the cards in person.

8 Everything Is Ready!

Leader preparation: Read Luke 14:15–24. Recall from your own experience excuses that you have heard (or used!), such as: I don’t have time. I have too much

work to do. Nobody ever helps me. I don't feel well. Could I get back to you on that? Think about why we use excuses and what they accomplish. Consider how not all activities are the same. Some are very important and some are not. Ask yourself, "Is my relationship with God a priority, or do I make excuses not to pray or participate in worship? Do I make excuses about being unkind to people? How does helping other people make God my highest priority?"

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pencils

Ask the group to recall stories about Jesus eating with other people. Some answers may include Jesus eating with Mary and Martha, Jesus going home with Zacchaeus, Jesus eating with the disciples. Explain that Jesus' ministry was one of ultimate hospitality. He ate with all kinds of people. However, God wants us to receive hospitality too. If we can receive hospitality from other people, then we are prepared to receive God's love through the life of Jesus.

Have the children find Luke 14:15–24 in their Bibles. Read or tell the story of the Great Dinner. Ask: Why, do you think, did the dinner guests make so many excuses? Discuss times when the group might have made an excuse. Relate excuses to making priorities for what is important. Ask the group to write down at least five important activities they do during the week. If they hesitate, remind them about personal hygiene routines, chores, playing, spending time with friends, homework, practicing, eating, sleeping, going to school, etc. Have them write a number from 1–5 beside each activity, with 1 being the very most important and 5 being the least important. Then ask them to number their activities according to how they think God might number them.

Return to the Bible story and ask: How did the host respond to the excuses being offered? Who did the host invite next? Who are the "poor, crippled, blind, and lame" in our community? Why did the host invite someone else? Do you think the host agreed with the priorities of the guests who made excuses? Why or why not?

9 Walk with Hope

Leader preparation: Research the Web site <http://www.hopenetwork.org>. From your school or local library, borrow one or more books about children with disabilities.

Reflect

Creating a future and vision for the faithful community takes brainstorming, implementation, and follow up. Make note of at least one group plan that has been implemented. Also make note of individual plans that have been implemented. Carry the discussion over several sessions so that the learners see how accountability looks when one makes a plan and sticks to it. Being accountable includes understanding what works and what does not work. Help the group understand that God requires our efforts, even if some of them fail.

Supplies:

- Bible
- book on disability

Tell the story of Luke 14:15–24 emphasizing that the "poor, crippled, blind, and lame" are people that God invites into our faith community. Ask if any of the group has experience with people who are differently abled. Many children may have family members who require extra attention and focus. Be sensitive to the personal stories and to the role of care giver. Read a selected book from the library about a disability. Explain about "Hope Network," a Christian organization that serves people with disabilities. Brainstorm ways the group can lead the congregation in participating in a "Walk for Hope" or in earning money to sponsor another walker. Think about ways the group can offer hospitality to others who are differently abled. Agree to take action and follow up on one individual and one group idea.

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TRINITY JUMP ROPE RHYMES

GOD

Heavenly Presence
Holy One
Turn, turn, turn, us around.
Help us touch on Holy Ground.
Raise our hands into the air.
Send us out
to show your care.
Heavenly Presence
Holy One
Step right out and tell everyone!

JESUS

Teacher Redeemer
God's true son
Peace maker
Prophet, make us one.
Jesus, the shepherd, counts
one, two, three.
Hold your hands up
then touch your knees.
Teacher, Redeemer
God's true son
Step right out
and tell everyone!

HOLY SPIRIT

Holy Spirit, come
like a rushing wind
over God's nation.
Fire us up
to jump so high.
Now turn us around
as we reach for the sky.
Holy Spirit, come
as we step right out
to tell everyone!



Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Intergenerational

Intergenerational Options

These activities may be used to build an intergenerational event for the commencement or conclusion of your series on Hospitality (up to three hours). Or, the activities may be used independently (15–20 minutes each), interwoven with age-specific activities throughout the series. An intergenerational event might be used during a time of year that is already set aside as special, such as Advent, Kwanzaa, Lent, Vacation Bible School, or forty days of prayer for children.

Familiarize yourself with all twelve activities, four from each of the categories of “Exploring and Engaging,” “Discerning and Deciding,” and “Sending and Serving.” Consider the age of participants and the time available for this event, and choose a group of activities that will meet your needs.

For an event lasting one to two hours, choose three or four activities from the list of twelve. There are enough activities for three or four events! Or, choose a single activity (15–30 minutes) to use as the activity at a community meal or other gathering. Wearing name tags is a good idea, as often older and younger members of a church do not know one another’s names.

Each activity ends with a prayer appropriate for the end of the session.

Gather as a church family to grow together and have fun!

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Whether we are new to a particular faith practice or an old hand with much experience, all of us benefit from new opportunities to explore the shape of the faith practice and to engage the issues of faith that the practice offers. Sometimes this is a matter of learning new ideas about the practice. Sometimes this is more about reflecting on what we have done in our practice. The activities in Exploring and Engaging help us figure out how a faith practice intersects with our life and the life of the community of faith.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

Practicing our faith always involves discernment: naming the realities of our community and world and seeking the will of God for our lives and for the world. We then decide how we will act, what we will do, what values move us forward, what faith has called us to do. The activities in this category give us opportunity to practice by discerning and deciding.

Sending & Serving Activities

Practicing our faith involves serving others and being sent out as empowered disciples of Jesus Christ. We need time in our exploration to plan how we will serve. We need moments that send us forth blessed by the community from which we venture out. The activities in this category offer opportunities to practice our faith through sending and serving

Intergenerational Leader Preparation

Abraham's gracious welcome of strangers provides insight into how our communities of faith can cooperate together as intergenerational groups to create hospitality. Community-based events require planning in advance. It helps to form a group of three or more people (including various age groups) to assist with the planning. The event planning is an important part of intergenerational work. Adults require patience, since listening to younger people takes more time than just doing the job themselves. Younger people are required to follow through with their commitments, something they may not have experienced before outside of a family or school situation. Your prayer might include: Imagine a family where everyone works together, helping each other, listening to each other, celebrating each one's gifts. Imagine you are sitting around a table together. Picture the face of each person at this meeting. Breathe into this image. Exhale a sense of peace and energy. Repeat this intake and out take of breath three times. End the visualization with these words, "Unto God we give our energy, so that all may benefit from this event." Amen.



Exploration: Discovery

1 Soldier's Angels (Sending and Serving)

Leader preparation: Inquire of your congregation if any family members are serving in the military and stationed in a war zone. If no one is, call a local congregation or contact a military facilities chaplain who can recommend units and names. Research <http://www.soldiersangels.org> online. This organization helps connect civilian volunteers with individual soldiers. You can select from any number of activities sponsored by this nonprofit organization, including adopting a military person or sending care packages to Iraq or Afghanistan. Important note: not all military people are soldiers. Some are sailors or marines.

Supplies:

- care package items listed on “Soldier’s Angels” Web site
<http://www.soldiersangels.org>

Advertise to the entire congregation by announcements and printed material. Set a date to make a collection. Include the collection in a worship setting where the items collected can be brought forward and blessed by the worship leader and congregation. Organize a group to gather and pack the materials. The US Post Office will provide free packaging and package mailers. Young children can make cards and draw pictures for the recipients. Older children can collect the items for shipping. Older youth can lift and pack the items. Adults can arrange for shipping. An e-mail address can be exchanged if military people wish to contact the congregation when the package(s) arrive.

2 Filling the Ark (Sending and Serving)

Leader preparation: Research <http://www.heiferinternational.org>. Provide information for the congregation, making connections with all age groups. “Filling the Ark” is a program designed specifically for intergenerational involvement.

Supplies:

- materials from “Heifer International” including a Leader’s Guide to “Filling the Ark”: <http://www.heiferinternational.org>

Each family can take home a Heifer International bank along with a calendar. Adults can gather the information and speak to the various groups of learners during the education hour. Don’t forget to include adults! Announcements can be made during worship. Form a committee to designate a special donation to purchase animals selected by the children, youth, and adults. Organize specific money-making projects to gather funds for “Filling the Ark.”



Exploration: Scripture

3 Worship Alive! (Exploring and Engaging)

Leader preparation: Organize your group to dramatize the story of Abraham, Sarah, and the three Strangers (Genesis 18:1–15). Gather props and simple costumes. Involve parents and families, including congregational participants who do not have children in the education program. Approach an adult Bible study group to help with advertising. Arrange transportation if you visit a local retirement community.

Supplies:

- simple headdresses for costumes
- props: a small loaf of bread, water in a pitcher, items for table setting, a stuffed animal for the calf, a tent for Sarah

Rehearse the play with or without a narrator. Simple lines can be given to individual actors. Ask other congregational groups if you could come to their place and show them the story of Sarah and Abraham and the three strangers. Ask your worship leader if you could present the drama during a service of worship. Call a local retirement community and ask if the congregation could come and present their drama.

④ Sing-Along (Exploring and Engaging)

Leader preparation: Gather a hymnal for each person in your group. Ask someone who plays piano or guitar or any other instrument to accompany. Ahead of time make a list of all of the hymn favorites. Include favorites for every age level. When the Sing-Along lags, have this list ready.

Supplies:

- hymnals and accompanists

Meet fifteen minutes before the service of worship for a “Hymn Sing-Along.” Choose an older youth to stand in front and ask for suggestions. Invite those who know the hymn (not necessarily choir people or the usual worship leaders) to stand and lead the selected hymn. Emphasize the theme of each hymn. Encourage everyone to sing, even those who are not in tune. With enough participants, everyone sounds great. This is a model for the work of hospitality for the congregation. With enough participants, the job gets done. Keep a list of the hymn favorites that can be used once each month or when time permits. Encourage your group to sing these songs before or after they get together. Remember, even if some members of your congregation do not read, holding the hymnal makes young ones feel a part of the group—even if the hymnal is upside down!



Exploration: Discipleship



⑤ Praying with Art (Deciding and Discerning)

Leader preparation: Obtain a copy of the poster “The Public Fountain” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Take time to study the print before introducing to your group.

Supplies:

- poster: <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> by Manuel Alvarez Bravo
- paper and pencil

1. Display “The Public Fountain” by Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Treat the print as a work of art and as sacred opportunity by first asking everyone to take a moment of silence to center themselves.
2. Hand each person a piece of paper and a pencil. Ask the participants to write down what they observe, including everything they initially notice about the work. Size, color, or lack of it, texture, subject, etc are all opportunities for noticing.
3. Pair young children with adults or youth so that the older person can write what the child dictates.
4. After you have given time for writing, ask for people to share their response. Allow each person to speak without being interrupted. Ask the participants to save their responses to one another until after everyone has had an opportunity to share.
5. Ask the learners to notice (in silence) what most attracts or repels them in this print. They can jot down their responses on the paper, or they can just mentally note them.

6. Now ask the piece of work to speak to you, as if it had a voice. Some imaginations may give voice to inanimate objects or to the flow of the water, for example. Encourage each participant to listen carefully and join in a dialogue with the print (silently) if it seems right. Afterward, encourage people to share their experience.
7. Gently place aside the poster. Remember this piece of art is God's gift through the artist and deserves careful treatment.
8. Now pray with the group. Your prayer may sound like: Thank you creating God for bringing this piece of art to our focus. May our understanding of your work in the world and our understanding of ourselves be increased, by encountering art in a prayer-filled way.

6 "Water for the World" (Deciding and Discerning)

Leader preparation: Gather with a group of interested lay people to plan an intergenerational worship event. Invite clergy to participate. This may center on the worldwide "Water Day Celebration" that happens in March. For more information search <http://www.water.org>. The UCC documentary, *Troubled Waters*, <http://www.ucc.org/troubled-waters>, also gives a good overview of the issues.

Supplies:

- a list of the parts of worship used by your faith community, such as call to worship, musical responses, prayers, prayer responses, litany, message, music, affirmations, benediction or sending forth

Plan an intergenerational lay-led community worship with "water" as your theme. Include recent facts about water pollution and shortage from the Web site www.water.org. Emphasize how disciples of Jesus work for all the world and can practice loving the world by supporting good stewardship with regard to the world's use of water. Organize a concert for the day, where proceeds can be sent to water-conscious nonprofit organizations.

Divide the group into small groups and be certain that each small group includes people of various ages. Assign one part of the worship event (from your list) to each group. That group can write, draw, or choose music.



Exploration: Christian Tradition

7 Walking the Labyrinth (Exploring and Engaging)

Leader preparation: Research locations of labyrinths near your worship community. Sometimes community hospitals have a labyrinth or a carpet that can be transported. Some labyrinths have been made of stones and/or canned goods that are later donated to a local food pantry. Two excellent Web sites for ideas and related information are: www.veriditas.org and www.labyrinthproject.com.

Supplies:

- labyrinth
- CD of contemplative music
- CD player
- light refreshments (optional)

Many people benefit from walking the labyrinth. People with disabilities can negotiate most labyrinth paths, or you could provide a finger labyrinth. All ages appreciate participating in the ancient ritual of spiritual walking. This event can be advertised as an outreach to your community, since it is nondenominational and ecumenical in nature. Set the space in a convenient location. Provide quiet music in the background, along with a description of the practice. Offer light refreshments after the walk. Recruit volunteers to help with the space, answer questions, and to keep the walkers spaced apart to avoid confusion. Invite spiritual directors to talk with participants after their walk.

8 Blessing of the Animals (Sending and Serving)

Leader preparation: Review liturgy and animal concerns on <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ez7cup>.

Set a date and time for the blessing, and advertise the animal blessing in your community. Talk with various small groups and studies in your community about their animals. Invite a clergyperson to do the blessing (not necessary but nice!). Select music from the hymnal about animals in God's creation, such as "All Things Bright and Beautiful," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cdamxh>, and "All Creatures of Our God and King," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2bkxkbc>.

Supplies:

- a tent for outdoor blessing (if needed)
- a banner advertising the event
- bowls with water and feathers for sprinkling
- baked dog biscuits (see recipe)
- human cookies — animal crackers are good!
- scarves for pets
- a clipboard to list animal's names
- chairs (if people are to be seated)
- song sheets or hymnals

Recipe for dog biscuits:

Mix together:

3½ cups unbleached flour

2 cups whole wheat flour

1 cup cornmeal

½ cup skim milk powder

1 tablespoon (or 1 package) dry yeast

3½ cups lukewarm chicken or meat broth

Dissolve the yeast in the lukewarm chicken or meat broth. The richer this broth is, the better your dog will like the biscuits. Let yeast broth mixture set 10 min. Then stir in flour mixture. Roll out resulting dough ¼" thick. Cut dog biscuit shapes from dough. Brush biscuits with egg wash. Bake on greased cookie sheets at 300° for 45 min. Turn off oven and leave biscuits overnight to finish hardening. Makes 60 medium-sized biscuits.

Invite people of your faith community and the rest of the community to bring their pets for a blessing in the tradition of St. Francis. Plan a short service. List the names of the pets and say them aloud. Pray for our creation including all living things. If some children or families do not have an animal, encourage bringing stuffed animals. A special blessing can be made for the stuffed animals that remind us of God's love and protection.



Exploration: Context and Mission

9 The Transformational Movie Festival: Not Your Average Drive-in Experience (Deciding and Discerning)

Leader preparation: Check out this Web site for tips about planning a movie event: <http://www.tinyurl.com/26zdybp>. Organize a film night (depending upon choice of film, invite appropriate age groups, providing child care for younger family members). Provide snacks. Gather background information about the film and write discussion questions. Invite volunteers from various age groups to be small group discussion leaders. Advertise the event as community outreach.

Remember that it is illegal to rent a movie and show it without permission. Churches can purchase a license from the Motion Picture Licensing Corporation in order to be able to show these copyrighted movies for either entertainment or education. This license needs to be updated annually and is offered for a reasonable fee at the following address:

Motion Picture Licensing Corporation
5455 S. Centinela Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90066-6970
www.mplc.com

Supplies:

- space where a film can be projected or shown on TV with a DVD
- tables for serving snacks
- napkins and plates or bowls or paper sacks for popcorn
- comfortable seating or floor space for families to bring blankets and pillows
- art experience table with paper and various art supplies including markers, crayons, water colors, pens, pencils

Select a movie that is appropriate for all ages. Advertise a movie night, encouraging people to bring blankets and pillows to lounge on the floor. Young children can make posters of the movie for advertisement. Provide comfortable seating for those who do not lounge!

Briefly introduce the movie. Afterward, divide into small groups for discussion. Provide questions for each group leader. Set up an art experience table for those who prefer to respond by drawing and/or painting.

10 Safe Harbor (Sending and Serving)

Leader preparation: This after school program can become an ongoing event. The first event could be scheduled for a weekend or even one evening per week for a month. If it is successful, it can be scheduled more frequently. That's how events become new faith practices!

Make certain that all adult volunteers have background checks to encourage support of safe sanctuary church policies. To insure the background checks are viable, begin planning six to eight weeks before the actual event. Advertise in the community by Internet, bulletin board, or local school newsletter. Contact local schools in person or by phone.

Supplies:

- volunteers
- pencils, paper
- newsprint or white board and markers
- space for short spans of physical activity
- tables, chairs

Invite youth, young adult, and adult volunteers to provide an after-school program for youngsters. Some volunteers can be tutors. Some can supervise games or art activities. Some can be available for conversation. Provide healthy snacks and short activities between study sessions. Youth may be able to earn community service points by participating.

Advertise the event in your community as “Safe Harbor.”



Exploration: Future and Mission

⑩ The Story Tellers (Exploring and Engaging)

Leader preparation: Research Reverend Bill at www.revilly.com. Engaging the community with impromptu theater (it looks impromptu but actually requires planning and rehearsing) is distinctly part of the emerging Christian church and appeals to youth.

Supplies:

- small groups of interested people, all ages
- paper and pen
- contact information of group members

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

Plan to tell the scripture stories used in the six Explorations of “Forming Community: Giving and Receiving Hospitality.” You can tell the story in a biblical setting or in a contemporary setting. Organize a small group for each story. Meet once per week for rehearsals. If needed, include rehearsal time during your congregation’s education time. Have each actor provide his or her own costume for the event. Include props and scenery that can be quickly changed and transported. Arrange a time and location for “Story Tellers” appearance. This could be an impromptu event during fellowship hour, during small group studies during the week, a planned but exciting interruption during worship, in the parking lot as people come in to worship, in the narthex before worship, or as a part of a larger community-wide event.

⑪ Practicing Discernment (Deciding and Discerning)

Leader Preparation: Discernment is often seen as an individual practice. Learning discernment as a group process requires practice. Read through the activity so that you are comfortable leading. If you have a large group, recruit additional

leaders as necessary to form groups of about 10 or 12 participants. Gather supplies and prepare the space.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or a white board and markers
- a comfortable room with chairs for all participants
- a table where participants can work on art projects
- a low table in the center of a circle allows for some participants to sit back while others work at the table
- simple art supplies: colored pencils, crayons, modeling clay and/or water-color paints and paper.
- snacks (optional)

Welcome the participants as they arrive. Invite them to find a comfortable place to sit. Show them the art supplies and invite those who wish to do so to play with the supplies provided. Tell them that they do not have to produce finished artwork, but can just play with the supplies while the group discusses. Invite the adults to assist children and to play with the media themselves.

When all are comfortable, tell them that your group has the task of thinking of a way for your church to demonstrate hospitality. Remind them that the church has long used prayer as a way of discerning what God is calling it to do. Have them find 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, and invite someone to read the verses. Invite the group to think of the gifts that others have brought to the group. Go around the group naming each individual and inviting the group to name the gifts that person brings. You may need to give simple examples: “Kyra has a cheerful smile.” “Jason is good at solving problems.” List these different gifts on newsprint or a white board. When each person has been recognized and gifts have been identified, remind the group of all of the gifts your group has. Ask them to think how these gifts might be used to help your church extend hospitality to others. Tell participants they might have ideas they want to share in words, or they might want to draw or sculpt their ideas. Allow a few minutes of quiet for thinking.

Invite the participants to share their ideas. Record the ideas so that they can be reviewed later.

Reflect

Intergenerational events, when planned well, bring together a community of faith. We learn the language of our faith community by participating in group events of hospitality. Since the first century, people have recognized faith communities by how they treated one another, in ways not seen in secular settings. The giving and receiving that is so necessary to make an event possible embody what Jesus shows and tells us in the Gospels. As we invite the stranger, serve the least among us, work together in spiritual formation, we become “The Church.”

As a group decide on one or more ideas that can be accomplished by your group. Identify the steps it will take to implement the idea. What resources are needed? What timeline will you establish? How will you recruit volunteers? How can you involve more people in implementing this idea? Discuss how your group will follow up on their ideas.

Invite those who wish to do so to display any art they have created. Close with a brief prayer and snacks, if desired.