



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

Christian hospitality includes everyone, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, economic status, age, ability, education level, health, or the number of friends on a social networking site. The United Church of Christ declares: "No matter where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here." Many older youth are employed in the hospitality industry that offers a different viewpoint. Your pilgrims may wait tables, cook, scoop ice cream, make beds, clear dishes, lifeguard, baby-sit, caddy, mow lawns, etc. During job training they are instructed to "be hospitable" to keep clients happy, which may lead to increased tips, but also confusion regarding appropriate boundaries. Money, personal recommendations, and corporate status drive hospitality. Christians offer hospitality, individually and as a community, because we are called to model the extravagant welcome modeled by Jesus.

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 welcome people outside of current experience. Receiving hospitality can be more challenging than offering it. Hospitality must be experienced, modeled and practiced as a continuing expression of faith.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Luke 19:1-10
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Leader Preparation

This week we encounter the practice of hospitality and what that discipline means to Christians, personally and as a community. Naming hospitable actions is important to raise consciousness now and in the future. There are a variety of activities to help with that process. Review the United Church of Christ's "Statement on Christian Hospitality," which is applicable for most denominations, at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/27tts8f>.

It is also helpful if you spend two hours to review the scriptures and the 54 activities suggested for this component of this faith practice. Think of your sojourners and create opportunities for them to assume leadership, offering hospitality for snacks, greeting, reminder calls, prayer, leading activities, etc. Equip your saints to experience the discipline of giving and receiving hospitality.

Prayer: Holy One, grant me the awareness to welcome others as you have welcomed me and the commitment to follow Your path. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Come All Ye People (Uyai Mose)

Leader preparation: Learn song before the group meets. "Uyai Mose" is a song from Zimbabwe in the Shona language that can be sung with motions to indicate welcoming. The Shona words are: Uyai mose, tinamage mwari, uyai mose zvino. If you have hand-held instruments and/or ribbons for dancing, gather them.

Supplies:

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

Use this Zimbabwe song to introduce the spiritual discipline of hospitality. Sing it more than once. Once everyone learns it, create hand motions to accompany the singing. Feel free to have the group create a dance. If your group enjoys this song, please use it for any or all sessions. It is a wonderful opening song that quickly sets the tone for hospitality.



2 Prayer

Leader preparation: Review the prayer.

Supplies:

- print or electronic copy of the prayer, Attachment: Activity 2

The prayer is based on the song, "Come, All You People":

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>.

Consider having everyone read the portion in capital letters and different groups read the remaining text. This prayer could also be a closing activity. It can be reused for any of the sessions, if you would like a consistent element for each session.

3 Ice-Breaker

Leader Preparation: Keep groups to 8 or fewer people. Otherwise, this activity takes a longer time.

Supplies:

- 1 roll of toilet paper

Sit in a circle. Each person tears off sheets of toilet paper. They can select the number of sheets, but having at least three per person is advised. After everyone has a pile of toilet paper sheets in front of them, use a process of mutual invitation to have them say something about themselves per sheet. One person takes a turn, and then invites by name someone else in the group to take a turn. That person may speak or may pass. In either case, that person invites the next person. Continue until everyone has been invited and everyone has used all the sheets in front of them. Their name counts as one sheet, if you have someone shy. Ask them to have one sheet reserved for an item that people in the group may not know about them, but that they would feel comfortable sharing.

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.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Word Association (Easy Preparation)

Leader Preparation: Create a list of suggested words for this activity, such as hospitality, angels, entertain, strangers, crowd, guest, and/or visitor. Choose words that usually have a positive association and also words that usually have a negative association (like strangers). Some words can be positive or negative. List these words on newsprint or a marker board.

Supplies:

- a sheet of paper per person
- pencils or markers

Invite the participants to choose a word from the list, write it vertically on their paper, and then think of a descriptive word beginning with each letter of that word. Don't spend a lot of time thinking. First thoughts are fine. Example: Hospitality—Helpful, Outgoing, Supportive, Personable, etc. Please do not judge or comment on the word choices, unless they are completely inappropriate. First thoughts sometimes illuminate biases and help us identify areas where we need to grow. Display them, so your sojourners know their baseline for future sessions.

5 Zacchaeus

Leader preparation: Read the Zacchaeus story in Luke 19:1–10.

Supplies:

- a variety of table settings: china, plastic, everyday dishes, paper plates, cups, utensils, etc.
- Bibles

Read Luke 19:1–10 as a group. Zacchaeus starts as a spectator, urgently seeking to see and hear Jesus. That role quickly changed, and he became a host. Put yourself in Zacchaeus' shoes. You are hosting Jesus. Would you take Jesus to your home or to a restaurant? What meal would be served? Why did you need to urgently see Jesus? What would be the discussion topics? Invite each person to create a place setting for Jesus and then to describe his or her choice for the group.

6 Hebrews Reading

Leader preparation: Gather several different Bible translations and paraphrases, such as the New Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, The Message, etc.

Supplies:

- Bibles in a variety of translations and paraphrases
- Newsprint and markers or marker board

Invite the participants to read Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16 in several different versions. What difference do they notice? What do we learn about hospitality? What acts of hospitality are described? If you used God-glasses during the week, how might you view the people around you differently? Have them write a contemporary paraphrase of these verses. What words or images would they use to communi-

cate the message of this passage? List those on the newsprint or marker board. What would they say about hospitality?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Witnessing Hospitality Survey (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Spiritual disciplines need self-awareness and self-evaluation. A first step is to become aware of the culture in which we are living. The project is not difficult, but the information will increase awareness and help the youth discover hospitable and inhospitable acts encircling their lives. It is helpful for youth to work individually before joining the larger group. As preparation, do this survey over a few days. An option: Post the surveys (physically or electronically) and update them as you explore this faith practice. Or, print the survey responses on large sheets of paper and add to it as a gathering activity.

Supplies:

- survey spreadsheet, Attachment: Activity 7
- pencils/pens
- computer with Internet access

How do you experience hospitality (giving and receiving)? After the discussion, view the two video clips at <http://www.wingclips.com>. Type “elderly” in the search area, select “Up — My Name is Russell.” The short clip highlights when Russell knocks on Mr. Fredricksen’s door, offering to help by reading from a manual. Fredricksen wants silence, but softens. This is a humorous reminder that hospitality needs practice. And, even though awkward, Russell’s introduction leads to a wonderful relationship. The second clip, same site, relates to the Hebrews passage. Type “wisdom” in the search area, then select “Bella — A Beautiful Day.” This is a touching reminder that hospitality, giving and receiving, surrounds us.

Work on the survey, individually and then together. What do the combined observations tell you about the culture in which you are living? Where would the spiritual gift of hospitality be beneficial? How does the lack of hospitality affect people?

8 Judgments

Leader preparation: View the YouTube video about Susan Boyle at <http://www.tinyurl.com/c49rg1>. Ms. Boyle, who is 48 years old, sings “I Dream A Dream,” from the musical “Les Miserables.” Prior to starting the performance the crowd and the judges were dismissive of her. Her singing transforms everyone.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access

Our own judgments may block our ability to see people as God sees them. This video is Susan Boyle’s “Britain’s Got Talent” performance on April 11, 2009. In only 3 days, the video had over 50 million hits from viewers around the world. Why did this video strike a nerve? What judgments were evident prior to the performance? What spiritual and emotional resources did Ms. Boyle need to sustain her dream? How would your group of friends, your family, your colleagues, your

worshipping community interact if you actually knew them well enough to know their dreams? For this week, make a commitment to spend time with one person you know (but don't know really well) and listen carefully to that person. Simply enjoy that person's company. Ask the group to hold one another accountable.

9 Embrace of Peace

Leader preparation: Spend at least three minutes viewing the poster. Note your thoughts. Learn about the artist and the painting in the attached file. Please do not share information about the artist and painting until after the discussion.

Supplies:

- poster: "Embrace of Peace," <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, by George Tooker
- camera

Spend at least three minutes silently viewing the poster. Then ask these or similar questions and listen carefully to the responses: What is happening? Do these people know each other? What event caused this reaction? Was the event joyful or sorrowful?

After the discussion, stage the poster. Try to copy the poses. Ask someone to take photographs of your 3-D "painting" from a variety of angles. Consider displaying the photos and/or giving them as a gift during another session.

Tell the participants the following information about the artist George Tooker:

"George Tooker was raised in New York City, attended Philips Academy in Massachusetts, and earned an English literature degree from Harvard University. After Harvard he attended art school and pursued his career as an artist. In 2007 he received the National Medal of Arts, the highest honor awarded in the United States.

"Throughout his life and through his painting, Tooker explored themes of social isolation and social injustice. He asserted that isolation can be remedied through communities choosing caring human interactions that transcend perceived differences. George Tooker and his partner were active in the 1960's Civil Rights Movement in Selma, Alabama, advocated acceptance of interracial marriage, and participated in gay rights campaigns.

"In 1976 Tooker joined the Roman Catholic Church and began painting religious subjects. 'Embrace of Peace' is his illustration of the communal greeting which is offered prior to Mass. During the embrace, participants greet each other, ask for forgiveness for wrongs committed, and then join together for Communion or the Eucharist. Tooker found the Church to be a community where perceived differences could be transcended. He found a community that could share each other's joys and sorrows, creating a glimpse of heaven through a paradise on earth." (Robert Cozzolino, Marshall Price, and M. Melissa Wolfe. *George Tooker*. New York: Merrell, 2008.)

Does this information change your perspective? During the week try to view at least one situation each day from a variety of perspectives.

Reflect

An unattributed benediction reads, "May you love God so much that you love nothing else too much; May you fear God enough that you need fear nothing else at all." Those two sentences are packed with challenges regarding personal choices. Where are you in this hospitality exploration, on a personal level and also as a guide? Where are the youth you serve after the first exploration of hospitality? Is there a group baseline or are there multiple baselines? What learnings of this session need to be reiterated in the next session as a refresher and also to bring new pilgrims on board?

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Attachment: Activity 2

COME ALL YE PEOPLE
Hispanic, Native American,
Asian, Indian,
Arabic, African, Aborigine,
Caucasian

COME AND PRAISE
YOUR MAKER
Yahweh, Creator, Jehovah,
Shepherd,
El Shaddai, Abba, God

COME ALL YE PEOPLE
Healed, needing healing;
Forgiven, needing forgiveness;
Whole, needing wholeness.

COME NOW AND
WORSHIP
THE LORD
Thankfully, honestly, joyfully.

Attachment: Activity 7

HOSPITALITY SURVEY: EVERYDAY ACTIONS

DAY	ACTION	GIVER	RECEIVER	RESPONSE

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Many high schools include a unit on biblical references as part of the English curriculum because students do not know Bible stories. Without that knowledge youth do not understand biblical references in newspapers, in literature, and they are unable to use those stories in their own writing. Schools have learned that students need a biblical background to be competitive on tests and for competency in various professions. As Christians we want to know how the scripture applied to the original characters and how scripture applies to us today. Every *Faith Practice* older youth Exploration includes activities that delve into the Bible passages, to help pilgrims learn the story. Hospitality and all faith practices are grounded in biblical stories and biblical traditions. Here we encounter Abraham and Sarah, which is the compass story for the faith practice of hospitality. Enjoy meeting them again or meeting them for the first time!

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

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

Leader Preparation

In his book *I and Thou*, the Jewish theologian Martin Buber (1878-1965) wrote that “all real living is meeting.” Buber asserted that when we meet a person authentically, not only does that person become less of a stranger, but we may glimpse God. When we meet people authentically our guard is down, our judgments are shelved, and our awareness of God’s presence is stronger. Authentic meeting is authentic hospitality.

Prayer: Gracious God, guide us toward the recognition of Your presence in all of creation. Give us the wisdom to receive You with arms wide open, so we may embrace and serve You authentically. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Breath Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Youth like breath prayers because they can be done in silence and they are easy to do while standing in a cafeteria line, when stressed during exams, or when in an awkward situation. We can mentally say the inhale and exhale in silence. The concept can be adapted to any situation. Try one of the examples. Have everyone sit straight; learn the prayer’s words; close eyes; take a few deep breaths (slowly inhale and slowly exhale); and then say aloud the chosen prayer.

Supplies: None

This verbal prayer has two phrases: one phrase is stated and the words are inhaled, like catching the words with your breath, and one repeated on the exhale (you can speak and exhale). The inhale invites the Spirit in and the exhale is a request. Example: (inhale) Gracious God, (exhale) Open my heart. Repeat 3 or 4 times. Then repeat 2 times in silence. Amen. Other examples: (a) (inhale) Holy Spirit, (exhale) Guide Me; (b) (inhale) Jesus, (exhale) Welcome me.

2 Quartz

Leader preparation: Determine your “quartz” of hospitality. Try to locate a picture of quartz either in a rock and mineral book or on the Internet.

Supplies:

- picture of quartz (optional)

Quartz is the most common mineral on earth. It is found in igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary rock. It is found on every continent. The mineral comes in a variety of colors. Its crystals are used in glass, radios and watches. Quartz is composed of two elements, silicon and oxygen: SiO₂ — one atom of silicon, Si + two atoms of oxygen, O = one molecule of quartz.

Hospitable actions are as common as quartz. They happen in every situation, at any time of the day, and in every setting. We choose which actions we share with another person. What is your quartz, the three most common actions that define your hospitality? A smile + a wave + a greeting? A handshake + eye contact + “hi”? Eye contact + a bow + eye contact?

3 Scavenger Hunt

Leader preparation: Walk through the building your congregation uses for worship. Review the scavenger hunt. Please add questions to make the hunt specific to your location.

Supplies:

- pencils
- scavenger hunt, Attachment: Activity 3

Divide the group into teams and locate signs or symbols of hospitality in the building.

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

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Abraham and Sarah, “Entertaining Strangers” (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Please select this activity! It is the foundational hospitality story. (If you do not like the suggested skit, then please read the story directly from the Bible with your spiritual explorers.) Please read the skit. Many Bibles have maps, should you want to locate the skit’s setting. The first act revolves around Abraham, Sarah, and the three strangers. Ancient hospitality required graciousness as a way to serve others and as a way to learn whether a stranger meant harm. It was a dance between giving and receiving, openness and caution. The second act notes that contemporary conflicts have ancient roots, since the Muslims descended from Ishmael and the Jews descended from Isaac, both sons of Abraham.

Supplies:

- copies of the skit, Attachment: Activity 4

The skit is inspired by the compass story from Genesis. The story is the foundation for the spiritual discipline of hospitality and the story has references in future sessions—entertaining strangers, foot washing, welcome, feasts, graciousness. Please debrief the skit upon completion. Is this story new to you? Did we learn anything? What did you like? What disturbed you? Is entertaining strangers an option in our culture? Why or why not? Have you ever met a person and observed the Divine?

5 Everyday Hospitality

Leader preparation: Jacob Lawrence (American, 1917–2000) was an artist with the WPA, Works Progress Administration. He was influenced not only by the colors and shapes of Harlem, his home, but also from his service with the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Navy in Italy, India, and Egypt. His work is called dynamic cubism. Decide which everyday scene you would like to create.

Supplies:

- poster: “Barber Shop” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1> by Jacob Lawrence
- construction paper in a variety of colors
- scissors
- glue or glue sticks
- white or manila paper for background

Using geometric shapes, create an everyday scene where hospitality is given and received. Lawrence used the barber shop for inspiration, but you may draw from any aspect of your life — school, work, sports, the arts, media, friends, family, community. Once you have a scene in mind, recreate it using geometric shapes. Glue the shapes to another sheet of paper. Share the end result with others, explaining what is hospitable about that setting. In your chosen setting, is it possible for you to experience God and to see God in others?

6 Authenticity and Hospitality

Leader preparation: The Christian rock group Casting Crowns was created by Mark Hall, a youth pastor and the lead singer. The song “Stained Glass Masquerade” was included in the group’s 2005 “Lifesong” album. “Masquerade” remains popular on Christian radio stations.

The link <http://www.tinyurl.com/ck6qdo> has a slide show over Casting Crown’s vocals. Review the video. The song is a lament sung by a person who wants to be authentically present in the worshipping community.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access and a projector

Watch the video. If someone owns the recording, work from that resource. How do we make our community inhospitable? How are we inhospitable to ourselves, our family, our friends? How are we inhospitable to visitors? Stained glass windows are usually created using more than one color. Frequently, our acts of inhospitality come through a variety of actions, perhaps more than the colors in a window. This exercise is not a blame game! Its goal is awareness-building to help us learn where we need to try harder, individually and as a group. When we speak about our rough edges, we need to remain hospitable with one another.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Refuge (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read through the handout and consider your answers to each question. Be prepared to share with the group examples from your life.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- copies of the handout, Attachment: Activity 7

Invite the youth to read the passage from Isaiah. Distribute copies of the handout along with pens or pencils. Briefly review the contents of the sheet and share your examples. Invite the youth to find a comfortable space where they can work individually without being interrupted by others. Tell them that they will not be required to share information from the sheet, but they will have an opportunity to do so if they choose. Allow ten minutes for them to think and complete their papers. Invite those who wish to do so to share their answers. After completing the discussion, invite the youth to take their papers home and look at them during the next week as they think of God as a refuge.

Pray this or another prayer with the group: God, you have been our refuge in all generations. Be a safe place for our lives as well. We ask for your shelter and your protection. In Christ we pray, Amen.

8 Las Posadas

Leader preparation: This is a Mexican Christmas tradition. Please read the following description of Las Posadas. This activity could be reenacted, if desired. If you have members of your community who participate in a Posados, invite them to share their experience and to learn more about their tradition.

Las Posadas is celebrated in Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries from December 16–24, nine days before Christmas. The Posadas is an enactment of Mary and Joseph’s struggle to find lodging. Children, youth and adults gather at dusk, holding candles. Nine families agree to be innkeepers. Either sculptures of Joseph and Mary riding a donkey are carried in a procession or live characters perform those roles. The travelers follow. For eight evenings, the procession and travelers knock at an innkeeper’s door and each night they are not allowed entrance. Everyone returns home disappointed.

On the ninth evening, the innkeeper welcomes Mary, Joseph, the donkey, and the travelers. There is a celebration. Prayers are recited around the inn’s nativity scene, carols are sung, a feast is enjoyed, and there are piñatas (papier-mâché hangings filled with candy and small toys) for the children. The evening ends with a candle-lit procession to the church for the Christmas Eve service.

Supplies:

- costumes or pieces from a nativity set
- a piñata (optional)

The Posadas is an enactment of Mary and Joseph’s struggle to find lodging. The community gathers for nine nights searching for a hospitable innkeeper. The ninth night, Christmas Eve, they meet with success and a celebration follows. During the week reflect on times when you have not recognized the Holy in your presence. Be alert for signs of the Holy this week in your interactions. How do you recognize the Holy One in your midst?

9 Three Cups of Tea

Leader preparation: Greg Mortenson was a mountain climber. During a trip to Pakistan to climb K2 in the Himalayas he met climbing failure. He also experienced the hospitality of the Balti people and that gift transformed Mortenson’s life. He made a personal commitment to help fund and build schools in Pakistan, especially schools that trained girls. Now he builds schools in Afghanistan, too. For further information go to <http://www.ikat.org>, the website for the Central Asia Institute. This site also shares Mortenson’s speaking schedule. You may have an opportunity to hear him. His book is on reading lists for upper high school and entry-level college courses.

When the porcelain bowls of scalding butter tea steamed in their hands, Haji Ali spoke. “If you want to thrive in Balistan, you must respect our ways,” Haji Ali said, blowing on his bowl. “The first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family, and for our family, we are prepared to do anything, even die.” He said, laying his hand warmly on Mortenson’s own, “Doctor Greg, you must make time to share three cups of tea. We may be uneducated. But we are not stupid. We have lived and survived here for a long time.” (Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin. *Three Cups of Tea: One Man’s Mission to Promote Peace One School at a Time*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006. p. 150.)

Supplies:

- a cup of tea for each participant

Read the quotation from Greg Mortenson's book. Serve tea to the group. Invite them to talk about rituals of welcome in their home, in their school, in groups to which they belong. Encourage them to talk about rituals of welcome in your church. If they do not name any, mention baptism. How does your church welcome people who transfer their membership from another congregation?

Reflect

Every major world religion has as a mandate hospitality to strangers—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism. What prevents us from being hospitable, from recognizing the Divine in each person? By the end of this second session you are probably learning about challenges that your pilgrims confront. How can you help shepherd them? Do you need more adult mentors? Please be hospitable to yourself as you work with your pilgrims, so you may also recognize the Divine in your interactions.

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Attachment: Activity 3

Scavenger Hunt

How are guests welcomed to your community?

How are new people welcomed to your youth fellowship?

How would someone who is blind navigate your building? Someone with mobility challenges (crutches, wheelchair, walker, stroller)?

What do you think visitors notice first? If you have visitor in your group, ask them!

What do you notice first? If you have been a part of this community for more than one year, have your observations changed?

Go to the sanctuary or the place where services of worship are held. What parts of that area would be unfamiliar to a guest? How are these parts explained to guests?

In what languages are your signs written?

Do all the signs have words or are there pictures, too? What and where are the pictures or images?

How would a newcomer know how to navigate your building?

Would a stranger know the location of water fountains, bathrooms, the kitchen, offices, sanctuary, emergency aid supplies, main hall, etc.?

What are the special features of your community? A columbarium? A chapel? A meditation garden? Nursery? A library? A food bank? How are these areas identified?

Where do visitors get information about your community?

Who is responsible for contacting visitors? What information is given? Is there a different approach for different ages?

How do visitors learn about ways to get involved in the congregation?

How long do visitors need to attend before they can participate as a volunteer? Where can they be involved immediately? (Most congregations have a child protection policy for education programs.)

Does your community follow up with existing members who have been absent?
How long is someone absent from worship before contact is initiated?

What do you think are your community's best practices regarding hospitality?

Attachment: Activity 4, p.1

ENTERTAINING STRANGERS

Based on Genesis 18: 1-15 and Genesis 21: 1-17

ACT ONE

Setting: In Mamre, just north of Hebron and west of the Dead Sea, in the hill country of Judah

Seven Characters: Abraham, Sarah, 3 strangers, Hagar, and God

Narrator: Abraham is resting at the entrance to his tent during the heat of the day, when he notices three people approaching. He runs to greet them and bows in front of them.

Abraham: Blessed ones, welcome! Please allow me to serve you according to our custom. May I bring you some bread and some water to rinse your feet? You are strangers, but you are now part of my family. Please rest under this tree and relax. The next part of your journey will surely be long.

Stranger #1: Thank you. We have been praying to find a kind soul. We are, indeed, tired. *(Abraham helps them settle comfortably by the tree and then runs to Sarah.)*

Abraham: Sarah, we have three guests. What a wonderful surprise! They are resting under the tree. They are tired and need food. Please use our best ingredients to make cakes. I'll slaughter a calf, get some milk and gather the curds. Am I forgetting anything?

Sarah *(teasing Abraham):* You seem to have forgotten to help me clean the tent this morning. This place is a mess and now we have company. Other than that, I think we're set. You are a most gracious host, my dear. I milked the cow this morning, but the goat will be ready. While the cakes are cooking, I'll gather some fruit to round out the meal. I may even have time to fold some blankets and sweep. Do you know anything about these strangers?

Abraham: No, but they seem pleasant enough. We'll let them rest. We will certainly learn about them during the meal. In fact, let me take three of those blankets and they can fold them for pillows. *(teasing Sarah)* See, I knew they didn't need to be folded this morning. Holler if you need anything. You're the best!

Sarah *(talking to herself):* A little excitement, break in the routine—yeah, it's good. After all these years I should be used to Abe's graciousness—and his inability to fold a blanket. What would he do without me? What would I do without him?

Narrator: Abraham gives the blankets to the strangers and makes sure they are comfortable. Abraham and Sarah work separately on the same meal, doing their own part the best they can. The three strangers nap, feeling welcomed. Their basic needs of water, shelter and safety have been met by Abraham and Sarah.

The calf is slaughtered and the best cuts are prepared for dinner. Sarah's cakes are lovely. She prepares a fruit plate with cheese, as well as a dish featuring various grains and herbs. Rugs are spread outdoors and pillows are placed around the edges. Wine and water are poured into containers and dishes are placed on the rug. Abraham and Sarah work together on the final details before Abraham returns to the guests.

Abraham to strangers: A meal has been prepared in your honor. With every preparation we prayed for you and for your journey -- your travels yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Please grant us the privilege of your company as we dine together.

Stranger #2: Your hospitality is a gift from Yahweh, who is certainly pleased with you and your wife.

Stranger #3: Between dozing and sleeping, I saw the activity and was just too tired to help. Thank you for noticing that we needed to rest. Your thoughtfulness and hospitality are a blessing.

Narrator: The meal is a celebration. Food is enjoyed. Stories are shared. Hearts are opened as they learn they have more in common than they have differences. Sarah rises, removes dishes, and goes back into the tent.

Stranger #3: Where is Sarah?

(Sarah leans toward the tent door when she hears her name.)

Attachment: Activity 4, p. 2

(ENTERTAINING STRANGERS continued)

Abraham: She's in the tent. It's getting dark and she's probably getting some candles. I also saw some yummy desserts that haven't been served yet.

Stranger #2: Your wife is as gracious as you, Abraham. She has grieved the loss of her youth and has remained faithful to God, even when disappointed and questioning. She didn't lose sight of the big picture. For that, you are a most blessed man. We will leave soon, but we will return in many months. When we return we will see you and Sarah enjoying a healthy newborn son, from her womb.

Sarah (*laughs and speaks quietly to herself*): I am older than the tree that shaded them this afternoon. Abraham is older than me. Crazy men! (*She composes herself and brings out dessert and candles.*)

Stranger #1: Who do you think you are entertaining? I am the Lord. As Creator of the Universe, I've had lots of practice with miracles. I can bless couples, older than the tree that shaded me, with the gift of a son. Sarah, why did you laugh? You certainly know my résumé.

Sarah: I didn't laugh.

Stranger #1: Yes, you did. I heard your heart. The blessing remains even though you lied to me. Sarah, I don't expect perfection, but please choose honesty.

Sarah: Your forgiveness is undeserved. The gift is completely unexpected. Thank you.

Abraham: When we welcomed you, we didn't expect anything in return. You honored us with your presence and now you fulfill a desire, long ago mourned and released. Please rest for the evening and we will prepare a morning meal before you start the next part of your journey. Our home is your home.

ACT TWO

Narrator: Sarah bore a son, as the strangers said. He was healthy. Abraham and Sarah named him Isaac, which means "laughter." The child grew, developed normally, and was eventually weaned. To celebrate Isaac and to honor God, Abraham organized a special feast. The joyous occasion, scheduled for tomorrow, is tainted by today's challenges.

Sarah: Who do you think you are, Hagar? You are nothing but a slave from Egypt. Keep your son away from Isaac.

Hagar: Ishmael, my son, is also Abraham's son. He is as much a gift from God as your son. They are boys. Of course, they can play together. You're being petty and jealous for no reason.

Sarah: Petty and jealous. I'm married to him. You're not. What's that make you?

Hagar: That's not very becoming for an elderly woman who gave birth recently. You of all people should be gracious to everyone. How many more miracles do you need? Abraham remained married to you even when you couldn't produce an heir. Obviously, he loves you.

Narrator: Sarah and Hagar separate, but the boys continue playing. Chores still need to be completed, but Sarah is still simmering when she approaches Abraham later in the day.

Sarah: Abraham, I want Hagar out of here. I simply will not tolerate her son inheriting anything upon your death. You know how old both of us are and we need to plan for Isaac's future.

Abraham: Sarah, this request is unreasonable. I love both boys. Where will Hagar and Ishmael go if I send them away? What happens if you die? Then, who will help me raise Isaac? We aren't exactly in a big city here. What if Isaac dies? With Ishmael gone, I won't have anyone to inherit anything. Did it occur to you that God may have wanted me to have two sons by two women for a reason? Just because I don't understand it doesn't mean it's not part of God's plan. If I can be faithful to God and not know all the details, why can't you?

(*Abraham exits to walk outside and pray.*)

Attachment: Activity 4, p. 3

(ENTERTAINING STRANGERS *continued*)

Abraham: God, what am I supposed to do? Sarah's unreasonable, but I love her. She's protecting Isaac. Hagar has been with our family for years and Ishmael is my son. I love them, too. The boys will grow up together and there is plenty of work around here for both of them. Both will receive a fine inheritance upon my death. I certainly can't send one son away. That's like cutting off a limb. Tomorrow is Isaac's festival and I want it to be a happy day. Sarah and Hagar are wonderful women and fine mothers. Isaac and Ishmael are my sons, both joys. Why can't we live together without so much tension?

God: Abraham, I, too, have plenty of work for both of your sons. I, too, can provide a fine inheritance. Both of your sons will lead nations. Do as Sarah requests, trusting that I will take care of Hagar and Ishmael, just as I am taking care of you, Sarah, and Isaac. I will hear Hagar and Ishmael in the desert of Beer-sheba and they will follow me. Don't judge Sarah harshly. She is part of my plan, as are Hagar and Ishmael and Isaac.

Abraham: How will this end? When will my family be together again?

God: Abraham, when I was a stranger you welcomed me and bowed before me. You fed me and you washed my feet. You granted me rest and you listened. When your descendants choose to be as hospitable as you, when they can see me in strangers and in each other, then they will start being your family together. Abraham, I promised you descendants more numerous than the stars in the heavens. Some of those stars will burn out before your family is united. Trust me. All the acts of hospitality, graciousness, compassion, and love bestowed in my name will prevail.

—Written by Karen E. Wagner, 2009 for *Faith Practices*

Attachment: Activity 7

REFUGE—WEBSTER’S DICTIONARY

- 1. Shelter or protection from danger or distress**
- 2. A place that provides shelter or protection**
- 3. A means of resort for help in difficulty**

Isaiah, in 25:4, refers to God as a refuge—a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. In our time we have places of refuge for animals so they can migrate safely or live in a protected environment. We have refugees, usually people fleeing persecution due to political turmoil or warfare. A synonym for “refuge” is “sanctuary.” That word is also used in reference to wildlife. Many worshipping communities have a sanctuary, where worship services are held. In what other ways are the words refuge and sanctuary used? What do you think Isaiah means? Do you have any experiences where God has been a refuge or a sanctuary?

By verses 6–9, God is an amazing host, entertaining with delicious meals, swallowing up death, wiping away tears, and removing the heavy baggage of our past. God is the God of salvation. This party beats the after-prom, let alone the actual prom. This party is better than a World Series ticket. What would you be willing to do to be invited to this party? Were you aware that you have already been invited? Were you aware that God has already set the table and is waiting for you? God is waiting to offer you God’s gracious hospitality so you may be fed, nourished, sustained, and prepared to be in service to others.

How do you see God as a shelter or protection from danger or distress?

How do you see God as a place that provides shelter or protection?

How do you see God as a means of resort for help in difficulty?

When was a time when you experienced God as a refuge?

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group or Setting

In this session we expand our discipline of hospitality. The activities include graciousness to people we have not met, to creation, and to familiar people who may place us in a difficult situation. This session may be a stretch for some of your pilgrims and it may be a stretch for you. There are no easy answers, but Jesus provides our model. A faith practice is just that—practice of our faith. We ground ourselves in the scriptures, listen carefully to how we believe God is calling us, seek the counsel of wise and trusted people, act to our best abilities, and seek forgiveness and assurance when we disappoint ourselves, others, and God. We practice and practice to serve as Christ's hands and feet on earth.

About this Exploration

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

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

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
John 13:1-7, 31b-35
Acts 2:42-47

Leader Preparation

The Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia*. *Philo* translates as “love of.” Depending on the context, *xenos* is either guest or stranger or host. All three roles have the same root word. *Philoxenia* is a compound word meaning the love of the guest or stranger or host—hospitality. The concept sounds simple, but hospitality is a life-long commitment and a faith practice that needs honest, unencumbered encounters with every person and with all of creation. Thankfully, as Christians, the star we follow is Jesus Christ.

Prayer: As Jesus cleansed the disciples’ feet, guide my actions to be as gracious, inclusive, and nonjudgmental as the Servant of all. Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Octopus (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This game helps develop the concept that when we are united we make it difficult for folks to escape our tentacles, which are hopefully loving and Christ-like. The rotating leadership, in which each person has a small but important role, is also instructive.

Supplies: None

This can be an indoor or an outdoor game. Create boundaries so everyone is in the same space, preferably a large room or courtyard that is contained, but has no obstacles. One person is “it.” That person tags or bumps into another person. They hold hands and then either person can tag or bump into another person. The people they tag join at the ends, and soon you have a long flowing line that becomes harder for “outsiders” to escape. The longer the line, the more communication is needed because the line needs to move in the same direction. Otherwise, it breaks in the middle. This is also a game where the people on the ends become the leaders, so leadership is constantly changing. Except for the last person tagged, everyone has a leadership role. Play until everyone is part of the line.

2 Boy at the Fountain

Leader preparation: Observe how, when, and why we use water. Notice any media coverage related to water or water usage (crops, river levels, drought, swimming pools). Think of water uses in your worshipping community (baptism, healing, cleansing, food preparation). Water is both life-sustaining and life-threatening (drowning, flooding).

Supplies:

- poster: “The Public Fountain,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, by Manuel Alvarez Bravo
- writing surface (paper, whiteboard, etc.)
- writing tools

Sit silently and study the poster for a few minutes. What do you notice? Could this photo be taken in your neighborhood? Why or why not? List the ways you regularly use water. Where are your area’s public water sources located? Are those sources created by God or humans? Is water available to everyone in your geographic area? How many water sources are there in your church building (faucets, fountains, toilets)? As Christians, does water have additional uses or meanings? If so, what are they and what do they mean in your community?

3 World Water Development Report

Leader preparation: If your group is blessed with social justice or public policy enthusiasts, refer them to <http://www.unesco.org>, which has the United Nation’s March 16, 2009 “World Water Development Report.” The report is updated every three years. Ask if they would report back to the group. Or, you may be interested in this topic or have a member of your community who could assist. The well-organized report is sobering. It highlights the need for a global response to a current problem and a pending international crisis.

* 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:

- UNESCO report and willing presenter(s)

As part of the developed world, most people using this source curriculum probably do not think of life-threatening water shortages on a daily basis. We may conserve water to save money rather than thinking about the environment or the global impact of our usage. This report puts water usage in a global context with causes, as well as possible solutions. How can Christians use the spiritual gift of hospitality to address a global issue? Could our daily actions be a gift to people we may not know? Why or why not? Do our hospitable actions need to be acknowledged by a recipient?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Cartoons (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the Acts passage. This activity does not require advanced drawing skills. Stick figures work well. When grouping the youth, consider mixing extroverts and introverts. Sometimes hospitality and listening within a group is difficult due to different ways of processing the same information. This is a fun activity that can help bridge that gap, allowing differences to serve a larger cause.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper and pencils

Read Acts 2: 42–47 in a small group. Create a strip cartoon inspired by the actions of the early Christians, usually with three to five boxes. Or, create an editorial cartoon. Listen to feedback from everyone in the group as you create the cartoon. Share and display the end result!

5 Wade in the Water

Leader preparation:

The Web site <http://www.tinyurl.com/admtwq> uses Eva Cassidy's jazz arrangement of the spiritual "Wade in the Water." The spiritual became popular by participants in the Underground Railroad. The hounds, pursuing the escaped slaves, would lose the slaves' scent when they walked in the water. A more traditional arrangement of "Wade in the Water" is by Moses Hogan. It is a standard high school choral competition selection. You may have members who have or will be singing it. A local choral group may already have a YouTube video. Ask. You may have additional resources readily available.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access

Together watch and discuss the video. It consists of slides from Antarctica with text describing ice formations. This link expands our visual repertoire of water images and also highlights God's awe-inspiring hospitality in the creation of our world. Use this video to prompt discussion on creation as God's hospitable gift to us. How are we doing as recipients of this gift?

6 Foot Washing

Leader preparation: Read the John passage and view this movie clip:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2b2hhro>.

The clip is from “Entertaining Angels,” a movie about Dorothy Day (1887–1980), a social justice advocate, who founded the “Catholic Worker” newspaper. Your denomination’s Book of Worship may include resources on foot washing. Spend time thinking about how you would have treated Judas if you knew he would betray you, or Peter if you knew he would disappoint you. How do we extend hospitality when it is not easy?

Supplies:

- Bibles
- towels
- water in bowls or pails
- disposable hand washing wipes

As a group read John 13:1–7, 1b–35 silently, then aloud, then silently again. What happened? Please make sure the group understands the narrative. Does anything jump out as different or unsettling? How does Jesus treat Judas? Peter? What does Jesus say is most important? How does Jesus model that choice? How do we usually treat people who have disappointed us? How would we treat them if we knew about their betrayal ahead of time? How would following Christ’s example affect your decisions?

After the discussion, view the movie clip. Facilitate feedback. To close the activity, create pairs and wash each other’s hands or feet, rinsing and drying them. As an alternative to the use of water, hand washing wipes can be used. Be aware that the evaporating alcohol from these makes them feel quite cold. Having participants bring their own towels provides a way of warming hands and feet after washing, regardless of the method used to wash.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Prayer of Confession

Leader preparation: This prayer and assurance could stand alone as you close the gathering time. Or, you may ask the sojourners to write their own confession and/or assurance, either in a small group or individually.

Supplies:

- copies of the confession, Attachment: Activity 7
- paper and pens

Confession is hard because it is not a simple “I’m sorry,” as when we accidentally bump into someone. Confession is an acknowledgment that we screwed up, and we don’t want to make that mistake again. We are coming before God with our tail between our legs, like a dog that knows it’s in trouble. And, we are greeted by a God who receives our confession, and then offers forgiveness and wholeness. The cycle of self-awareness, confession and forgiveness is essential to deepening any spiritual discipline. Invite the young people to read the confession together.

An assurance of forgiveness or pardon follows confession. Use this or similar words:

Through Christ, healing waters flow from the crown of your head to the tips of your toenails. Nothing internal or external is untouched. Forgiveness is granted. Forgiveness is yours to embrace. Love prevails — always!



8 Periodic Table of Hospitality

Leader preparation: Many of the youth in your group will be familiar with the periodic table of elements. It is a commonly accepted way of arranging the elements of the earth. It provides a framework to clarify, systematize, and compare the different forms of chemical behavior. A brief Internet search will provide you more detailed information along with different colored versions of the table. In this activity, the youth will not be achieving such a precise list of the elements of hospitality, but using a familiar structure might get them to thinking about hospitality in different ways. If you have a youth who is particularly interested in science, consider inviting that youth to give a brief explanation of the periodic table of elements.

Supplies:

- copies of the blank periodic table, Attachment: Activity 8
- pens and pencils

Describe the purpose of the periodic table of elements. Invite the youth to brainstorm about different ways in which hospitality is expressed. Ideas may include handshakes, hugs, smiles, kind words, gestures and more. Show the youth the chart and ask them to work as a team to fill out the chart with many different elements of hospitality behavior. Some elements will appear in several places on the chart. Some elements are frequently used. Others might be only used periodically. The extra spaces at the bottom of the chart can be used for random acts of hospitality or acts that do not fit into the categories that are listed at the top of the chart.

When your group has completed the chart, display it where everyone can see it. Ask the youth to give examples of hospitality that they have seen and to identify those acts on the chart. Invite youth to think of new acts of hospitality that they might display in the week to come. You may want to return to the chart in a future meeting to receive reports on the experiences of the youth.

9 Baptism

Leader preparation: One denomination's Book of Worship states: "A person is incorporated into the universal church, the body of Christ, through the sacrament of baptism." Simply, "a person." That person could be of any age, race, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, education background, marital status, disability, or health condition. Also note that the "body of Christ" is flanked by commas and is a description of the universal church. What does that mean to you? Think about your views of baptism. What are the practices in your faith community?

Supplies:

- none, although you may want to refer to the baptism service in your denomination's Book of Worship

Baptism and communion are two sacraments held sacred by all Christian churches—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. Think about your faith community's baptism service. Is it conducted during a regular service of worship? Is there a congregational response? Who is responsible for helping the newly baptized person grow in the Christian faith? Who is accepted for baptism? What is the criteria for baptism? Read aloud, or write on newsprint or marker board, the opening sentence about baptism, noted above. What does that sentence say about baptism and hospitality? What does it say about the universal church as the body of Christ?

In some churches' service of baptism, the congregation is asked to make a commitment such as, "We promise our love, support, and care." During the week think and act in ways that are loving, supportive, and caring. How are these actions part of Christian discipleship? Part of hospitality?

Reflect

Alice Walker, the contemporary African-American writer, reflected: "It's so clear that you have to cherish everyone. I think that's what I get from these older black women, that every soul is to be cherished, that every flower is to bloom." How are you blooming? How are the flowers in your garden, the pilgrims on this adventure, growing? What weeds are sprouting? What plants need more tending? Which flowers bring you joy?

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Attachment: Activity 7

Prayer of Confession

(based on John 13:1–7, 31b–35)

Jesus, Fount of our many blessings:

We begin life with egg awaiting and sperm swimming upstream. We grow surrounded by amniotic fluid, cushioned, and connected. A tear and then a rupture develop as we emerge from a dark canal into awaiting hands. We welcome the outside world with cries and with hunger.

We mature, master skills, and become unique personalities, but the cushioning and rupturing cycle continues through stages of development and transition. Some ruptures are as natural and as predictable as moving from a crib to a bed, or losing the freedom of summers to summer jobs. Some ruptures occur through our own willfulness or thoughtlessness or neglect. When those times occur, Jesus, please keep us close, as you did Peter and Judas. Don't disown us! Wash us, cleanse us, grant us the grace to recognize Your presence around us. Use our lapses in judgment and compassion to challenge us to become like Peter, stronger for the errors and more committed to serving You. Help us realize that Your cleansing leads to complete healing so we do not make choices like Judas, choices of self-destruction and pain.

Jesus, your water, your cleansing, does more than remove the dust from our feet or the dust from our lives. It removes the stench of poor choices, repairs the rupture, and cushions us again. We humbly ask for forgiveness. Guide us as we try again to be worthy of Your gracious hospitality. Amen.

—Written by Karen E. Wagner, 2009

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Christian traditions bridge time periods, geographical barriers, and our local expressions of faith with the church universal. Some of those traditions include worship, the sacraments, creeds, music, art, prayer, fasting, tithing, and mission. Many local congregations have their own traditions, like a Palm Sunday Pancake Breakfast or a Christmas Pageant or Youth Sunday. The United Methodist Church incorporates the Wesleyan Quadrilateral into spiritual decisions. The quadrilateral, composed of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, is applicable for any faith practice. Traditions are developed from interpretations of scripture. Those interpretations are influenced by reason and experience, the lens of a time period. Traditions, though sometimes predictable, are never static. They give us the foundation from which we may launch new experiences, guided by the Spirit.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 14:22–25

1 Peter 4:1–11

Leader Preparation

This Exploration can be organized differently, if desired. The activities in Exploring and Engaging and Discerning and Deciding would work well as stations, around a room or a series of rooms. Please bring everyone together for your choice of Sending and Serving activities. Determine how much time you have and allow 10–12 minutes per activity (plus travel time). The pilgrims could move, individually, from station to station. They could start and end at any of the stations, but logistics are easier if people move in the same direction. The activities in this Exploration allow the youth time to practice aspects of a spiritual discipline with short guided activities. The three Sending and Serving activities can be combined as part of a Communion service.

Traditional prayer of preparation: Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Sovereign. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

 **1 Little Pencil Love Letters (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Hospitality to oneself is frequently difficult. Recognizing our own role in God’s plan and honoring that role is a learned skill. Older youth are accustomed to academic achievement judged by others as well as auditioning or trying out for ensembles or teams. Write the Mother Theresa quote on newsprint or a marker board.

Supplies:

- note cards or paper and envelopes
- colored pencils, pens

Mother Theresa (1910–1997) said, “I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God sending a love letter to the world.” Ask each person to write a love letter from God describing how she or he is being a “little pencil.” How is this person a love letter to the world? When the note is finished please ask the youth to write his or her name on the envelope, slip the note in the envelope, and place it in the offering plate. The letters can be added to any Sending and Serving activity as an offering. Later, please mail or hand-deliver the letters to each person.

2 Gifts Received and Given

Leader preparation: Reflect on the hospitable gifts that you have received and given over the past week. Gather numerous objects per person. Start the bowl or vase with your contributions.

Supplies:

- clear vase or large clear bowl
- pebbles, marbles, pieces of ribbon, buttons, shells or any combination of small objects

For a few minutes reflect on the past week. Select an object for every hospitable gift you have received and remembered. Quietly name the gift as you gently place the object in the bowl. Repeat this as many times as needed. Then, remember your own hospitable actions this past week. For every one of your actions, select an object and gently place it in the bowl. Each person adds a contribution, creating a group affirmation. The bowl can be added to any Sending and Serving activity as an offering. You may want to keep the bowl intact for the following weeks as a reminder.

3 Woven Hearts

Leader preparation: Weaving is an art form and tradition in every recorded culture, ancient to modern. This activity creates a woven heart-shaped paper basket that could be filled with a short note, Bible verse, candy, or gift card. Practice making a heart. Your pilgrims may want to make two hearts, one for themselves and one to give to a friend, a family member, a member of the congregation, perhaps someone who is homebound. This heart is flat until filled and could be easily mailed to the community’s college students. If a heart is given, you will need addresses from the pastoral or administrative staff.

Directions for making the woven hearts can be found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2j3yq9>.

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:

- two colors of construction paper (red, white, pink, lavender) or origami paper
- scissors
- glue stick

Have each person in the group make at least one woven heart basket. As they work, talk with them about members of the congregation to whom they might give such a gift. What would be a good Bible verse to put in the basket?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4. Pep Talk (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In a previous session you may have read about Jesus washing Peter's feet, and we know of Peter's betrayal. In the text for this session Peter is a leader in the early Church. God does not need perfect people. God needs people who stay in the game and who keep trying.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- large sheets of paper or board
- markers

Read 1 Peter 4:1–11. Peter, who betrayed Jesus shortly after the Last Supper, became a leader in the early Church. Peter wrote this letter to Christians who were being persecuted in northern Asia Minor, around 64 AD.

Part One: Imagine this congregation as a basketball team. They are down 30 points at halftime. As a coach, what kind of pep talk would you give these early Christians so they keep the faith and stay in the game?

Part Two: Continue imaging a basketball team. In the Christian life, sins are fouls. If you are the referee, when would you blow the whistle? What violations qualify as a one shot free throw, traveling, unsportsmanlike conduct, a technical foul, etc.? Are there fouls where you can be removed from the game? Where is hospitality in this discussion? Record the responses on newsprint or marker board.

5. Peaceable Kingdom

Leader preparation: View the video and the poster. Where are you in creating a peaceable kingdom? How far are you in the process?

Supplies:

- poster: “The Peaceable Kingdom” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> by John August Swanson
- “The Making of a Serigraph Print” by Lynn Feldman at <http://www.tinyurl.com/25byh6q>

View the poster and the video. This serigraph, “The Peaceable Kingdom,” is based on Isaiah 11:6–9. A serigraph is created by a printing process in which a single color is applied and then dried. Every color is applied individually, layer by layer. A Swanson serigraph may have over 60 colors. Not only is this a beautiful image, but the process, itself, relates so well to hospitality. Seldom do we truly know

someone from one encounter, one color. Usually, we learn about others and they learn about us from repeated encounters, through layer upon layer of sharing, forgiveness, laughter, and tears. Over time, those layers of hospitality could yield a colorful and peaceable kingdom. Reflect on your relationships with family and with friends. How are you creating a peaceable kingdom in each relationship? In viewing the poster, which color or image is most like you?

6 Last Supper

Leader preparation: Read the Mark passage and do the activity.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read Mark 14:22–25. The disciples prepared the Passover meal, a meal that has been part of Jewish tradition since Moses led the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt. Jewish history is retold during the meal, and God is praised. Jesus knew the significance of the Passover meal. He added new meaning to the meal when he blessed the bread and the wine. Put yourself in the place of the original disciples. What would you be thinking? Do you think the disciples understood the significance? What questions would you have? Why is this passage included in a session about hospitality? The meal became known as “The Last Supper” following Jesus’ death and resurrection. Today, that meal is called communion or the Eucharist. When we break bread and drink the wine or grape juice our Jewish history, our Christian history, and God’s promises of eternal life intersect, as they did for past generations and as they will for future generations.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Contemporary Creed (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This creed was written in 1980 by the United Church of Canada. “Creed” comes from the Latin word “credo,” meaning “I believe.” While creeds are not sacred text, they do give us a glimpse into the way scripture was interpreted during a specific timeframe. Writing a personal creed is frequently an activity for confirmation or church membership class participants. Look in your hymnal to find other creeds.

Supplies:

- copies of the creed, Attachment: Activity 7
- paper
- pencils/pens

Read the creed aloud. As a group determine what you believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and your call related to welcoming and serving others in your time frame and location. The discussion may remain verbal, or you may record the group's beliefs.

8 Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?

Leader preparation: Learn the hymn “Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?” (tune: SERVANT SONG) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>. This is a lovely hymn with a flowing melody.

Supplies:

- musicians and musical instruments
- hymnals

Learn the hymn and sing it together. You may also use the verses as a prayer. What does this hymn have to say about hospitality? This is a relatively new hymn. Search through your hymnal to find other hymns on the theme of servanthood.

9 Communion or Eucharist Service

Leader preparation: Find out about your congregation's requirements for officiating at a communion service. Invite an authorized person to serve communion with your group.

Supplies:

- communion elements used in your congregation

Engage youth in preparing for and serving communion. In what ways is a service of communion inclusive? Is there anyone who is excluded in your congregation's celebration of communion? At the close of the session, partake in the gifts of God for the people of God.

Reflect

The second verse of the hymn “Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?” is: “We are pilgrims on a journey, we are travelers on the road; we are here to help each other go the mile and bear the load.” When we practice our faith, we strive to have our body and soul, our head and heart, congruent. As noted in the verses from 1 Peter, serving one another authentically, lovingly, and joyfully is what God most desires.

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NEW CREED

United Church of Canada, 1980

Leader: We are not alone, we live in God's world

People: We believe in God;
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:

to celebrate God's presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus,
crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Many high schools require a specified number of service hours for graduation. At minimum, service hours are strongly encouraged. College admission counselors review service hours and community involvement, as well as grades and test scores. The military, as well as employers, also want to see community service on the resumes of older youth. They seek young people with a well-rounded education.

In worshipping communities mission to others is modeled by Jesus, by the Old Testament figures, and by leaders of the early Christian church. We serve because serving is a blessing for the giver and the receiver. We serve because we have experienced our faith's abundant, transforming love and we are called to share that love by serving others. We serve because God calls us to use our commitment, our energy, and our talents to serve those in need.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Romans 12: 9-18
John 6:1-12

Leader Preparation

Youth presume diversity, expect intergenerational relationships, and understand that economic and social disparities exist. Mission is a strong component in most youth programs. Youth thoroughly enjoy serving others, whether raking leaves, helping a community following a disaster, serving meals at a homeless shelter, watching the World Series with residents at a nursing home, or creating a newsletter. Many youth are involved with their denomination at the regional and national levels. They are also willing to experience situations where new skills are needed. Our challenges as guides include discerning their motivation for service, keeping youth surrounded with caring adults, listening to them as their interests develop, and matching longer-term and emerging interests with opportunities for Christian service. Service to others keeps our circle wide. It keeps the circle growing as more people and more experiences expand our worldview.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for the miraculous feeding of 5,000 people, pushing the perceived limits of hospitality through faith with grace. Reinforce me and all pilgrims with the same determination when we meet seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Grant us the conviction to act out of abundance, out of love. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Draw the Circle Wide (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Learn the tune for the praise song “Draw the Circle Wide,” or choose another hymn such as “Help Us Accept Each Other” or “Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether.” If these are not familiar hymns, look through your hymnal to find a song that talks about including everyone in the community of faith. If you are not comfortable leading the singing, invite another person to lead singing.

Supplies:

- copies of the hymn you chose

With the group, read the words of the hymn. Choose a song with a simple melody and beautiful words. What does this hymn say about hospitality? As disciples of Jesus, what is our mission in terms of hospitality? Use the verses as a prayer.

2 11' x 10'

Leader preparation: When is a cramped space an example of hospitality? This activity reminds us that sometimes the same situation saves lives. Remind yourself of the spaces used with the Underground Railroad or to hide Jewish people during World War II. Think of spaces used today by immigrants who often house multiple generations in a small apartment or by women and children who relocate to a domestic violence shelter or by people in drug or alcohol rehabilitation programs or families in disaster relief trailers. What are some examples from your local community where living in close quarters is important economically or for safety?

Supplies:

- masking tape

Use masking tape to mark the corners for an 11' x 10' room, or use a room of similar size. Ask the group to name small spaces that are used for hospitality. Think of housing options, as well as short-term options (music practice rooms, car, restaurant booth). As each person suggests an option ask that person to become a new resident in the marked space. What strategies must people use to live in any of the short-term options? Debrief the activity with ideas from the leader preparation. How could your group or your worshipping community be hospitable to local people in cramped spaces?

3 One Great Hour of Sharing

Leader preparation: One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS) is an ecumenical offering collected by numerous communions, with denominational support materials. When you present this information, tailor your presentation to your denomination. You may find specific information on your denomination’s Web site.

One Great Hour of Sharing

Many congregations have a One Great Hour of sharing (OGHS) offering during the Lenten season. This offering is called by different names in different denominations. This offering is dedicated to serving people in need locally, nationally, and internationally. How does your community use its OGHS funds? Is the offering collected during Lent or at another time? If you do not have OGHS, what of-

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.

fering is used for mission? How is the OGHS offering an example of hospitality? One Great Hour of Sharing started in 1946, during World War II. Episcopal Bishop Henry Knox Sherrill challenged his members, in a nationwide radio address, to raise one million dollars in one hour for relief work in war damaged Europe. In three years, Episcopalians raised over \$3.8 million dollars.

In 1949, church leaders from many communions decided that their individual relief efforts would have greater effect if the offering was coordinated and combined. The effort called, “One Great Hour,” premiered on Saturday, March 26, at 10:00 pm. President Harry Truman issued the greeting and major actors, like Gregory Peck, promoted the offering. The initial statement read:

“This nationwide united effort by American Christians has an importance far beyond the practical goal of fund raising. For this great joint program will not only strengthen the vitally important relief and rehabilitation work of the churches overseas, but will also prove to all the world how great is the power generated when Christians unite in a common cause.”

At the end of the program, viewers were asked to attend worship in less than 12 hours and to contribute sacrificially to a united Christian relief offering. In the first year, over 75,000 congregations participated. Some years the offering was coordinated with the Jewish Passover Appeal as well as the Roman Catholic Bishops’ Fund. Was your congregation an early participant in this offering? Do you participate now?

What can you do to support OGHS, regardless of the time of year? How do you keep the needs of people in the global community in your consciousness? How can you, in your current location, be hospitable to refugees, those in need of disaster assistance, those experiencing political turmoil?

The Rivera poster is included in the discussion. Sometimes our symbols of hospitality may also raise justice issues.

Supplies:

- poster: “Vendedora De Pinas,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters3>, by Diego Rivera
- OGHS information available from <http://www.ucc.org/oghs> and <http://www.oikoumeme.org>
- pineapple, if available

Pineapples are symbols of hospitality and welcome. At Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Illinois, there is a concrete pineapple on the graduation stage, reminding seniors that alumni are always welcome; graduation is not the end of the relationship. Pineapples are also grown in countries that are often recipients of the OGHS offering. The people who grow our food are being gracious to us in the collection of the food, and they are usually responsible stewards of the earth. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Web site, <http://www.usda.gov>, includes a spreadsheet of top pineapple producers, top exporters, and top earners of export dollars. In 2005, Mexico is listed as the tenth highest volume exporter, preceded by Brazil, Thailand, Philippines, Costa Rica, China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Kenya. Mexico is not on the list of top exporters or top earners. Nine of the ten top earners are not countries that produce pineapples. What does this indicate about the global food economy? Is it possible to create solutions that do not harm the original producers and collectors of our food? How can we be hospitable in the global economy? What is and could be a role for ecumenical efforts? How is OGHS helping people in the pineapple-producing countries?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Interview (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 6:1–21 and determine which interview format you prefer. The disciples notice that there is not enough food to feed 5000 people. Jesus, looking at the same facts, sees abundance. When have you acted out of scarcity? When have you acted out of abundance? This passage also tells of Jesus going up the mountain after the feeding of the 5000. He needed to rest, to recuperate. Please remember that all of us need time alone with God to replenish ourselves. Maybe the Energizer bunny can keep going and going, but humans need quality God-time.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers

As a group read John 6:1–21. You may invite a volunteer reader or readers, or you may decide to read the passage yourself. Have the group members identify the flow of events in the story. You could list these on newsprint or a chalkboard. There are two miracles plus alone time with God in this text. Have the group create an interview to tell the story to a larger audience. Some options include: a real-time interview, broadcasting live on-the-spot talking with people who are on the scene; an investigative reporter who pieced together the story from memory card data and recollections after the fact; a before-the-miracle interview with a disciple or a person waiting to hear Jesus; or, arrive early evening and report the feeding of the 5000 miracle from gathered data, while the reporters wait for Jesus to come down from the mountain and then report the second miracle live. Encourage your disciples to experience the story!

5 Marketing our Identity

Leader preparation: Paul's letter to the Romans includes a list of over 20 Christian directives. We could type the text with bulleted points as a "to do" list. Decide on two or three reasons to describe why you are a Christian.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Romans 12:9–18. Read silently first. Then, have different people enthusiastically exclaim the various directives from Paul. Why would Christians choose this lifestyle? Can we do this alone? If not, what resources are needed? As a large group, create a marketing campaign to convince other people that Paul's words are a great choice. What would you say? Would you have a slogan and/or a logo? Who would be the spokesperson — someone from your group or a celebrity? Who would be the target audience? How would you deliver your message: in person, via social networking site, computer advertisements, printed media? How will you determine the success of your marketing campaign?

6 Fish Soup

Leader preparation: Make copies of the handout. If you use the ice cream example, plan to include an ice cream snack. If not ice cream, select another food item for the graphing. For further information on the Hmong culture, go to <http://www.laofamily.org> from the Lao Family Community of Minnesota, Inc.

Supplies:

- copies of the handout, Attachment: Activity 6
- ice cream or other food item

Interconnectedness is the acknowledgment that all parts of our life are valuable and related. The concept is prevalent in several cultures, particularly Asian, Native American, and African cultures. The handout includes a graphing exercise, similar to diagramming a sentence or drawing a football strategy. After graphing ice cream, ask these or similar questions: How would your worldview be different if you valued each person's hospitality to you? If you valued creation's hospitality? If everyone valued your hospitality to them?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Epiphany (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make copies of the handout.

Supplies:

- pencils or pens
- copies of the handout, Attachment: Activity 7

The handout includes epiphanies, moments of awareness or enlightenment, from Thomas Merton and Black Elk. In both instances the men realized the interconnectedness or lack of separateness between themselves and others. Strangers became family. Name examples in your life or the media or your community where barriers have been removed between people. Between now and the next time the group gathers, collect other observations to share with the group.

8 Skittles Prayer

Leader preparation: Buy enough bags of Skittles candy to have flavors for each participant. If available, study a world map and locate the various regions where fruits are grown.

Supplies:

- a bag of Skittles candy, at least one of each color per person
- world map

The Skittles' flavors are lime, lemon, orange, strawberry, and grape. These fruits grow in the northern hemisphere and many areas around the world. The citrus fruit grows in southern states, as well as Hawaii, throughout Central and South America, and parts of Asia and Australia. Strawberries and grapes grow along both coasts, the Midwest, Northeast, Plains, Western states, Canada, southern and central Europe. If available, locate these areas on a world map. As you eat each color, say a prayer for people in a different region. During the week, notice how your life is impacted by people outside your local community.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality 



9 Serving in Turkey

Leader preparation: Make copies of the handout. Read the report of an Easter celebration for refugees in Turkey from <http://www.tinyurl.com/26nwssd>. The refugee population in Turkey is assisted by the Turkish government as well as interfaith ministries.

Supplies:

- copies of handout, Attachment: Activity 9

Hospitality to migrants and refugees in Turkey is an interfaith ministry that is also supported by the Turkish government. What issues in your community already have interfaith cooperation? What issues still need hospitality? Look at your community with fresh eyes this week.

Reflect

Understanding mission and our interconnectedness with all elements of creation is a difficult concept to “teach.” It is a concept easier to grasp through experience and observation when our eyes have been opened to a different perspective. How did the Spirit mingle with the group participants during these activities? Where do you feel yourself being led? What group insights need to be included as you plan the next session?

Attachment: Activity 6

INTERCONNECTEDNESS

In the Hmong culture, originally from Laos and southern China, interconnectedness is a normal way of life. Harmony is expected among people, the environment, and their emotional, mental, and spiritual life. Their cultural norm has conflicted with Western cultural norms as they have settled in the United States.

In her book *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, author Anne Fadiman relates a story about a young Hmong student in a French class at Merced College in California. The class was given an assignment to make a five-minute presentation. The student said he was going to teach the class how to make fish soup. However, in Hmong culture one does not talk about something without acknowledging every other detail. Before you can make fish soup, you need a fish. To catch a fish, you need a pole. The pole and lures depend on the size of fish you want to catch and the time of day. They also depend on whether you are fishing in saltwater or freshwater. Once the fish is caught, there are multiple ways to clean it. The student continued for forty-five minutes graphing on the chalkboard the fish soup for the fish, the broth, and the other ingredients. In Hmong culture, he could not list the ingredients and be finished. That would be disrespectful to everyone and everything involved in the creation of the soup, which he was preparing to feed himself and his family. Every part of the soup's graph sustained his family, and he acknowledged gratitude for each part.

Try to graph an item you normally eat, such as a bowl of cereal, a scoop of ice cream, or a slice of pizza. Let's try the ice cream.

- Is it dairy or non-dairy?
- What flavor?
- What are the ingredients?
- Where does each ingredient originate?
- How many different people are involved in the creation, marketing, packaging and distribution of each ingredient?
- What natural resources are needed: sunshine, grass, soil, heat, water, etc.?
- Did you buy the ice cream from a store?
- Who sold it to you?
- How did you get to the store?
- Is the ice cream served in a cone or a bowl? Follow the thread of either the bowl or the cone using the same questions as for the ice cream.
- Did you use a napkin or a towel? That's another list.

How many people do you think have been hospitable to you for your scoop of ice cream? Now think about that for all the food you normally eat in one day. Now, think about everything you normally use in one day such as clothing, toiletries, paper, shoes, etc.

Are you beginning to feel the magnitude of the number of people who are hospitable to you? How many of the people listed do you know personally? In Hmong culture, no one is taken for granted because everyone's contribution is important.

Attachment: Activity 7

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness.

—Thomas Merton (1915–1968), a Trappist monk who lived part of his life near Louisville, Kentucky

Merton, Thomas. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. New York: Image Books, 1989, p. 156. First published 1966.

And while I stood there, I saw more than I can tell, and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being.

—Black Elk (1863-1950), a leader of the Oglala Sioux

Neihardt, John G. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*.

New York: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

What was happening politically, socially, and culturally during the lifetimes of Thomas Merton and Black Elk?

Both men thought deeply about community and acted in ways that emphasized their interconnectedness. What do we learn from them? How do you think they reached this point in their life?

Do you seek to have the same understanding as Merton and Black Elk? If so, what would need to happen so you had a similar awareness? If not, why not?

Attachment: Activity 9

Written by Ken & Betty Frank
April 25, 2008

As I looked around the meeting table, I saw that we were an unusual group.
In terms of religious background we were:

- Roman Catholic
- Protestant
- Greek Orthodox
- Syrian Orthodox
- Armenian Orthodox
- Muslim

In terms of nationalities we were:

- American
- Turkish
- German
- Austrian
- New Zealander
- Australian

We were all gathered for one purpose: to serve the needs of the poorest and most marginalized people stranded in Istanbul, people striving to get to somewhere where their lives could be better. We coordinate various programs of assistance to refugees and migrants, people in Turkey without documents and living on the edge. We represent the various parishes and groups of Istanbul who unite in this critical service to those in need of food, clothing, and hope.

There may be one hundred thousand such persons in Turkey. Most of them are called transient migrants and refugees -- people looking to move on to find work in the wealthy countries of Europe. In Turkey they can't work, use the medical services, or send their children to school, because they are undocumented. They are simply part of millions of people on the move around the globe, knowledgeable in this information age about where wealth is concentrated, and spurred on by the yawning global chasm between rich and poor, between safety and menace. We receive many clients from countries suffering from war and anarchy, such as the Sudan, Somalia, and Sri Lanka.

The churches of Istanbul can help but a few in these rivers of humanity. We focus on women with children, who are among the most vulnerable. We see that they get some food, clothing, medical advice and assistance, and help with their search for documents and recognition and hope for improvement.

Our program participated this Spring in organizing and sponsoring a party at Easter time for the children of refugees and migrants, and for Armenian students without parents. It was a grand event with 300 children, clowns, balloons, Easter eggs, games, singing, and dancing. Our photo is from that colorful event.

The Turkish government in recent years has taken action to assist these many migrants and refugees within its borders. To its credit, the Turkish government does not throw them out, turn them away, or simply let them beg on the streets but wants them to register and be cared for in various cities around the country. This system is new and falls short of what is required as much as it helps. We counsel the undocumented persons as they seek to be recognized as refugees by the United Nations, a procedure that takes at least two years.

Our interparish program is amazing for its unity of purpose in this area. That we of such different backgrounds can unify in this service to others witnesses to what God asks of us.

Peace,
Ken & Betty Frank



*Ken & Betty Frank serve with the American Board in Istanbul, Turkey.
They share the job of General Secretary of the American Board.
They also serve on the board of the Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program (IIMP).*

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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group or Setting

"Never place a period where God has placed a comma!" One of the gifts we give older youth is the knowledge that their faith can be their foundation even though their understanding of it may change. Faith practices help us evolve in our relationship with Christ. We evolve throughout our lives. This session's activities are not the end of discovering hospitality, just like high school graduation is not the end of learning. It is a milestone, but it is also a launching pad.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Luke 14:15–24
Mark 10:13–16

Leader Preparation

In this session we look at the story of the Great Banquet, as well as Jesus welcoming the children. A meal is an activity. Please allow another group to host the dinner, so you may receive hospitality. The older youth disciples are already looking toward the future. They've been studying and preparing for the future since elementary school. Many will leave the community for work or education. Some will stay or return. During all these transitions, how do we help them take faith practices with them? How do we help them understand that Christian hospitality always includes each of them?

Prayer: Gracious One, grant us the awareness to recognize your hospitality in each morsel of food and every sip of beverage. Allow Your sustenance to feed our bodies, our souls, our thoughts, and our actions. With that awareness, how can we be anything other than inclusive, hospitable, and loving? Amen.

Session Development

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Create Your Own Verse (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the Mark passage. This activity is based on the tune to "Jesus Loves Me," <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSongJLM>. If this is new for you, please learn the song. Prior to guiding the activity, create your own verse, discerning what you have explored during this spiritual adventure. Please remember that some older youth who are new to the Christian community may be unfamiliar with this tune.

Supplies:

- paper and pencils

Sing the first verse together, so everyone is familiar with the tune. Write a new verse based on hospitality. You may do this activity in small groups or individually. Then, share the verses.

An option: Use the new verses as a Sending and Serving activity. For example:

In Christ's name I welcome you
reaching out to know you
I'll help you. Will you help me?
Working in community.

Chorus:
We are a blessing!
We are a joy!
We're children of God!
The Bible tells us so.

2 Meal

Leader preparation: In scripture we frequently encounter a meal as a form of hospitality. In this faith practice, we met Zacchaeus, Abraham and Sarah, we experienced the Last Supper and the feeding of the 5000, and we learned about hospitality with the early Christians. Today we reenact the Great Banquet. Many of your pilgrims may have little experience with family meals. Plan a sit-down meal for your group. Frequently, youth are the "worker bees" in congregations. Please ask another group to host the youth. This meal does not need to be complicated. Spaghetti or enchiladas work well. What is important is that your sojourners experience a community meal.

Supplies:

- determined by the meal's menu

Provide a sit-down family meal for the youth, served either buffet or family style. This is an opportunity to eat, converse, and experience hospitality.

3 Primary Colors

Leader preparation: This activity explores the primary colors in light using colored cellophane and flashlights. The primary colors in light are red, blue, and green. The intersection of all three colors produces white. Youth usually work with colors in pigment, through artwork or dyeing fabrics or coloring frosting. In

plies 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.

pigment, the primary colors are red, blue, and yellow. When the three primary pigments are combined the result is black. Please practice this exercise. If you have a visually impaired disciple, please ask someone to be that person's eyes and explain the activity.

Supplies:

- 3 flashlights
- 3 sturdy rubber bands
- white wall, screen, or fairly tight sheet
- cellophane squares in red, blue, and green large enough to cover the lighted end of the flashlight

The primary colors in pigment are red, yellow, and blue.

Red + Yellow = Orange

Red + Blue = Violet

Yellow + Blue = Green

Red + Yellow + Blue = Black

We mix pigments for paint, for coloring Easter eggs, for frosting, etc. There are other primary colors, though. This experiment deals with the primary colors in light.

1. Using the rubber band, secure one cellophane sheet per flashlight over the light. You do not want wrinkles or loose cellophane.
2. Turn the flashlight on to check the color.
3. Shine the red and blue lights on the white screen so they intersect. What color is produced? (*Magenta*)
4. Shine the red and green lights on the white screen so they intersect. What color is produced? (*Yellow*)
5. Shine the blue and green lights on the white screen so they intersect. What color is produced? (*Cyan or blue*)
6. Shine all three colors so they intersect. If the cellophane sheets had pure color, then you will have white. If the colors are not completely pure, then you will see off-white.

Why is this experiment included as an activity to help us learn more about the spiritual gift of hospitality?

- a) It's always intriguing when there is more than one set of answers. What are the primary colors?
- b) If there is more than one answer to a basic question, then there are probably other questions that seem simple, but have complicated responses.
- c) How am I hospitable to myself? How am I hospitable to others? How am I hospitable to people I know? How am I hospitable to people I do not know? How am I hospitable to creation?
- d) How do I combine the colors or skills in my life to welcome others?
- e) How can using the colors in my life make another person's life brighter?
- f) What do I need to do so that my actions never negatively color another's life?
- g) How do I notice other people's colors and invite them into my own world?
- h) When do the colors in my life shine alone and when do they combine with others? Is the mixed color the same or different?

Primary colors are different in light than in pigment. This activity demonstrates

how light combines differently from pigment. The "facts" in one arena are sometimes not the "facts" in a different arena. Faith practices help us to see the world in a different light. Faith practices also help us keep our mind and our heart open to other perspectives.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Great Banquet (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The attachment could be a dramatic reading or a skit. The skit includes references to ancient customs to help place the passage in an historical context.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- supplies, as desired, for a skit
- skit "The Great Banquet," Attachment: Activity 4

Read the Luke passage from the Bible. Then invite the young people to read or act out "The Great Banquet."



5 Choosing Community

Leader preparation: Become comfortable with the poster, allowing your eyes to enjoy each morsel: the dog, the people, the hats, etc. The subjects are not on vacation or modeling the latest Parisian fashions or enjoying a family reunion. This painting is a beautiful example of individuals choosing community when life is not pleasant. Renoir completed the painting in 1880–1881 after France was defeated in the Franco-Prussian War and during the social upheavals that paralleled the Industrial Revolution. This group includes businessmen, a journalist, artists, working class people, and a high society woman. Prior to the Industrial Revolution people would have relaxed and enjoyed a meal based on their economic class. When do you need to be with other people?

Supplies:

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

View the painting silently for a few minutes. What do you notice? Which person would you like to meet? What do you think they are discussing? Describe for the group the setting of the painting (see Leader preparation). When do we intentionally seek community to help us? Often the occasions are sad times, like death, job loss, health problems, broken relationships, disappointments, moving and relocating. When do we seek community for happy times? (birth, wedding, graduation) What does community offer that a person cannot do alone?

6 "I Believe"

Leader preparation: Watch the video
<http://www.tinyurl.com/ydb8eel>

This video features the lyrics for the Brooks and Dunn song "I Believe." The first act of hospitality in the song is when the mother sends her son to see Mr. Wrigley. That simple act of hospitality invites a long-term change in both of their relation-

ships — and possibly the mother’s relationships. During the song we see snippets of their friendship. At the end, we can glimpse the impact of Wrigley’s death. We are left wondering how the relationship impacts the life-choices made by the young man. If you are new to your faith community, please speak with an older member or staff person. You may want to know whether any of the pilgrims have experienced a recent loss or if there has been a suicide at school. Being informed could make you more hospitable and caring. Note: some youth will not know that the “words written in red” are the words of Jesus. Many congregations do not use red-lettered Bibles.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access

Listen carefully to the song, noting the many layers of hospitality. What does this song suggest about the power of relationships, of those hospitable moments? When does the giving and receiving end? If it does not end, how does it continue? Remember kindnesses from a deceased person. How do those kindnesses impact your life now?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Yarn Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Pray for each person in your group

Supplies:

- one ball or skein of yarn for every small group, maximum of 8 people

Ask the group to sit in a circle and to be in a prayerful attitude. Toss the yarn from one person to another, with the single strand remaining in the tosser’s hand. The person receiving the toss states a prayer request, then tosses the yarn to the next person. Hold the yarn to create a web, tossing and praying across the circle. Make sure each person has two turns to state a prayer request. Then pause. Remind the group that prayer creates a community with God, with one another, and with people around the world, whether we are physically together or apart. The person holding the ball then tosses it back to the sender along the strand. That person rewinds the yarn and the tosser offers a blessing or encouraging words to the person holding the ball of yarn. This process continues until everyone has been blessed at least twice. Close the prayer with encouragement to keep the web connected through prayer.



8 Social Isolation

Leader preparation: The handout contains information about the increasing rate of social isolation and the results of that trend. The book referenced is packed with scientific studies and information, and its conclusions are challenging for faith communities. The faith practice of hospitality is essential and needed.

Supplies:

- copies of the handout, Attachment: Activity 8

Read and discuss the handout. Where in your community do you observe social isolation? How can Christian hospitality transform this issue? What can you do individually and as a group to remove barriers? Looking ahead, how are you continuing this faith practice? Create short-term, mid-range, and long-term options.

Benediction

Leader preparation: Write your own benediction based on hospitality.

Supplies:

- paper
- pencils, pens

A benediction or charge is a public statement declaring what we want to do and what we want to be. At the end of a service of worship, the benediction is usually given by the pastor to the congregation, like a parting gift. As a group create your benediction for hospitality. It could be inspired by music, art, scripture, or learnings during this faith practice. Example: Remembering that there is always room at Christ's table, keep your heart open to receive everyone as Christ has received you. Feel the Spirit's guidance, acknowledging that the Divine in you is also in others. Express extravagant hospitality to yourself, to others, and to all of creation. Amen.

Reflect

While this reflection closes the hospitality faith practice, the spiritual work and the service inspired by our Creator continue. Thank you for sharing your faith, time, energy, and commitment. Trust that your hospitality is significant and that it brings glimpses of God's realm on earth. In closing, hear these words from the hymn "Away in a Manger": Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in your tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with you there. Amen.

Attachment: Activity 4

THE GREAT BANQUET

Based on Luke 14:15–24

Narrator: Jesus is a guest at a Sabbath dinner hosted by a leader of the Pharisees. He encouraged the guests to extend hospitality to those not invited, especially those who could not return the favor. The hosts and hostesses would be blessed abundantly now and in the future.

Ashley (a dinner guest) speaking to Jesus: Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God! Jesus responded with a parable about a marvelous banquet.

Narrator: Manuel, the host, planned a great dinner party and invited many people. The “to do” list was completed.

- ✓ Invitations sent
- ✓ Menu determined
- ✓ Musicians hired
- ✓ Floors swept
- ✓ Cushions fluffed
- ✓ Room decorated
- ✓ Candles made
- ✓ Reservations returned
- ✓ Beverages prepared
- ✓ Food cooked
- ✓ Desserts baked

Satisfied, he sent his servant, Jacob, to receive his guests.

Manuel: Jacob, tell everyone the banquet is ready!

Narrator: The servant timidly returned:

Jacob: I’m sorry to report that everyone is busy. Three people did send regrets, though.

Narrator: Manuel was confused. No one rejected a banquet. Food spoiled quickly, and everything had been prepared based on the reservations. He asked Jacob about the reasons given. Perhaps the invited guests needed him to deliver a meal to them. Perhaps they needed help.

Manuel: Jacob, what were the reasons for not attending at the last minute?

Jacob (swallowing hard): The first man said that he bought a piece of land and needed to go out and see it.

Manuel: Excuse me?

Jacob: The first man said he bought a piece...

Manuel (angrily): What idiot buys a piece of land without seeing it first? This is 30 AD, not the 21st century! No one does that!

Jacob: Sir, I’m simply reporting what I was told.

Manuel: What about the second one?

Attachment: Activity 4

(THE GREAT BANQUET *continued*)

Jacob: Variations on a theme, sir. He bought five yoke of oxen and was going to try them out.

Manuel: Try them out? As in, checking to see if they are healthy, the right age, and can pull weight steadily?

Jacob: Yes, sir.

Manuel: After he bought them? I not only invited idiots, I invited flagrant liars. Do they think I'm stupid?

Jacob (*nervously*): Would you like the last response?

Manuel (*angrily*): Response? I think they are excuses. I'm sorry, Jacob. Please go ahead.

Jacob: He reported he had just been married and could not come.

Manuel: Married? No one has been married recently. The community would have been invited and we would have celebrated together. I would have sent musicians and many containers of wine as a gift. He could have used my cooks to prepare the meal.

Jacob: With all due respect, these aren't white lies. These are in-your-face lies.

Manuel: Jacob, are you sure there are only three excuses? Didn't anyone else respond?

Jacob: No sir. Just three lies. I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news.

Manuel (*furious*): Jacob, go out and quickly find guests. Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Jacob, bring the elderly, the widows and the children. Bring those not previously invited.

Narrator: Jacob busily offers invitations to anyone he finds along the streets and alleys. Manuel calms down and waits for his guests.

Jacob: I have done as you requested. They are, indeed, most grateful. Sir, there's still room!

Manuel (*much happier*): There always will be. Go out again and invite anyone you see. All are welcome! Absolutely everyone is welcome at my table!

Jacob: Sir, if I see any of those you invited first, what would you like me to do?

Manuel: They have lost their seat tonight, Jacob. Perhaps, after they have spoken with me and me with them, I will extend another invitation. Tonight is not an option.

Jacob: Yes, sir.

Manuel: Jacob, when you return, join us at the table.

Attachment: Activity 8

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Olds and Schwartz are clinical psychologists who teach at Harvard University and practice in the Boston, Massachusetts, area. They noted that in a 2004 General Social Survey one out of four Americans had spoken to no one about something important to them in the previous six months. In North American and European urban settings the number of single person households is frequently above 40%. In previous generations folks thought of widows as single. Today, singles come from many age groups and economic levels. The increase in one-person households corresponds with the increase in depression and other mental health issues, as well as the increased use of resources needed to create and furnish housing, furniture, appliances, etc.

Social connections have been documented to benefit humans in many ways, such as better health, wiser decision making, fewer mental health issues, less substance abuse, and more satisfying interpersonal relationships. Internet social networking sites expand contact lists, but those relationships are frequently numerous and often shallow. Humans need eye to eye contact, listening, sharing, giving, and receiving to thrive.

Olds and Schwartz also wrote about the role of faith communities. They note that congregations do help people reduce isolation. However, with the loss of social status, congregations tend to focus more inwardly, creating homogeneous gatherings, while reducing engagement with local communities. On page 187 they say the following about religion:

“It is the most powerful uniting force in human history, knitting together individuals and groups into large, interconnected communities. It is also the most powerful divisive force in human history, shattering communities with unrivaled violence. Religion will clearly continue to be a source of rich social networks within religious groups. What role it will play in relationships among groups, whether it will enhance connection or cause separation, is at this moment very uncertain.”

The faith practice of hospitality is desperately needed—welcoming the stranger, seeing the Divine in each individual, being a servant to all, listening and learning from various perspectives, and being extravagantly inclusive. Let’s pray that faith communities embrace hospitality, so faithful relationships within and among groups thrive.

Olds, Jacqueline, M.D. and Richard S. Schwartz, M.D. *The Lonely American: Drifting Apart in the Twenty-first Century*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2009.