

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Imagine viewing the world as a place with endless possibilities. This is the natural tendency of many elementary-aged children. Most are confident that, with practice, they will learn to read well, develop athletic skills, and learn fractions. They assume that they have gifts waiting to be discovered. What a blessing to have this confidence—and a responsibility for adults as they care and support children. Some of the children may have been exposed to the word “gifted” in school, in which the gifted students are the strongest academically. It’s important to differentiate that in God’s realm every person has gifts. Those gifts will help God in your faith community and in the world.

About this Exploration

Throughout our whole lives we have the opportunity to discover our gifts of ministry. As we listen attentively to God’s call and affirmation, identify our own passions, gifts, and skills, and participate in community where gifts are celebrated and shared, our gifts shape the unique ministry we have as we serve God and God’s people. The process of discovery may involve prayer, community, scripture, nature, solitude, silence, and openness to the gentle nudging of the Spirit. We may be surprised by the Spirit, as well, and discover new and unexpected gifts along our journey.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Ezekiel 2:1-5
1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Leader Preparation

Read the Bible passages and review the activities. Spend time reflecting on your spiritual gifts and how those gifts have changed or developed as you matured. Enjoy this Exploration. Enjoy your faith journey.

Prayer: Creator who is still creating, thank you for my many blessings. Guide my words and actions so I model Christ's example with these young people. Thank you for allowing me to partner with you in ministry. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine 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 with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Attention (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Ezekiel 2:1–5 and be prepared to briefly explain what Ezekiel said and did. This activity involves a short role playing opportunity for each child. You may choose whether you prefer pantomime or the use of a few words. You may need to ask a clarifying question, but trust the children's acting to convey the message. Feel free to begin with an example. If you have a child who is hesitant with acting, pair him or her with a more extroverted child.

Supplies:

- Bible

Explain that Ezekiel was a prophet who prayed, read the Hebrew Scriptures, preached, and served people. Some people liked him, and some people didn't. Often in the Bible we learn about people who know a lot about God. Many times these people listen and pay attention to God. God spoke to Ezekiel and told him to stand up so God could speak to him. God was saying, "Hey, Ezekiel, get ready because I need you to help me." God spoke to Ezekiel. God speaks to each of us. It's our job to pay attention and to listen so we know how to help God.

We are surrounded by people who pay attention. Ask the children what the word "attention" means. Some possibilities may include "awake," "notice," "be alert," and "be on the lookout." Invite the children to do an activity in which they will have an opportunity to pretend they are a person paying attention. The remainder of the group will have a turn to demonstrate attention by listening and watching respectfully.

Before the children start acting, say: *I wonder how all these people will be alike.* Ask the children to choose a person, or you may assign it. They are to act like that person when that person is paying attention. Options include: a parent, sister or brother, teacher, coach, pastor, police officer, nurse, farmer, pilot, school crossing guard, pharmacist, repair person, lifeguard, babysitter, or friend. You or an older child may want to begin. Enjoy the children.

When finished, thank the group. Then ask: *How are all these people alike?* Answers may include: They are people. They can help us in different ways. They are awake. They act with care and caution. They try to do what is right. Many times they have special training. Sometimes they tell us when we are doing something wrong or when we need to try harder. Then ask: *Why would God want you, like Ezekiel, to pay attention?*

2 We Belong

Leader preparation: The song "All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir" is a fun way to introduce that all of creation has a part in God's glorious choir, whether small or large, reptile or fish or insect or mammal or bird, winged or webbed or hoofed. The video "All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir" will bring a smile, but it is optional. What's important is learning the song and exploring its message. Obtain a recording of the "All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir" by Bill Staines. Watch the video and determine whether you want to show it as part of the activity or send the link to parents as a follow-up suggestion.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- song: “All God’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir” by Bill Staines, video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcG1JNpazN4>; lyrics, <http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/lyrics/critters.htm>

Teach the song “All God’s Critters Got A Place in the Choir” and celebrate its message. Show the video “All God’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir,” if desired. Engage the children in conversation about the song using the following questions.

- Who is in God’s choir?
- Why the diversity?
- What animals would you add? Why?
- How can you help create a place where everyone belongs?



③ Flowers in the Garden

Leader preparation: Prepare a background for a group mural of a flower garden. Use green mural or craft paper, or tape together several sheets of green construction paper. Give a bit of dimension to the green paper by sponging or dabbing several shades of green paint all over the background paper, allowing it to dry prior to the group time.

Supplies:

- prepared green mural or craft paper, or several sheets of green construction paper taped together
- variety of colors of construction paper
- pencils
- scissors
- glue sticks
- embellishments, such as wallpaper scraps, foil, cupcake liners, glitter glue, ribbon, rick rack, and so forth
- artwork: “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” by Gustav Klimt, <http://www.art.com/products/p15177883-sa-i3715775/gustav-klimt-farm-garden-with-sunflowers-c1912.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55edd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=klimt+farm+garden+with+sunflowers>

Invite the children to close their eyes and imagine themselves as a flower or plant. Ask them to describe how they look, demonstrate how they move in the wind, and share what makes them special. Have the children open their eyes and gather at tables to create their flowers or plants. As they finish, have the children add their flowers to the prepared background. After a quick cleanup, invite the children to look at “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” (c.1912) by Gustav Klimt. Give the children at least two minutes to visually explore the image. Then place the artwork next to the group mural. Invite the children to consider the variety of colors, shapes, textures, different sizes, and beauty in both gardens. Tell the children that the background and the flowers—all parts—are needed to form a beautiful picture. They are like a flower or plant in God’s garden. They are important and they have a special gift. God’s garden needs each of them!

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Faith Word: Call (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Children will probably know the word “call” as used in “phone call” or being called when recess is over or mealtime begins. The concept of a biblical call may be new, so be prepared to answer questions. Think of how God has called you throughout your life. Be prepared to share one or two examples with the group. The activity focuses on 1 Corinthians 1:1–9, but you may also use Ezekiel 2:1–5. The Ezekiel passage is frequently subtitled the “call of Ezekiel.” When discussing the concept of call, many young disciples will ask, “How do you know when God is calling you?” In faith communities we identify that sense of call, often individually, and then we pray and dialogue with other Christians. We discern the wisdom of the group and seek their support as we say “yes” to God.

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Explain that people of faith often say they feel “called” to perform a certain task or to begin a ministry. The word “call” can be a noun or a verb. Many dictionaries have numerous definitions of the word. Invite the children to list all the meanings of “call” they can think of. Some possibilities may be a phone call, an umpire or referee’s call, calling a witness, bird calls, calling instructions in square dancing, and calling a name. Ask the children what they think it means to be called by God. Read 1 Corinthians 1:1–2 to the children, or ask someone to read it aloud. Point out that Paul is called, specifically, to be an apostle, but that the entire congregation is also called. Explain that “call” in a faith community means inspired or guided by God. When you are called by God, God asks you to do something that makes God’s community stronger, or uncovers an injustice, or helps someone, or protects nature. Every person is called in some way, often in different ways throughout life. God doesn’t forget anyone. Ask the group how they think God calls them. Give the children a couple minutes to think before sharing their answers.

5 Valuing Your Gifts

Leader preparation: The movie *The New Eeyore* is part of the Disney Winnie the Pooh series. In the movie, Eeyore tries to become popular by being like Tigger. This does not work, but the One Hundred Acre Woods characters help Eeyore value being Eeyore. Preview the video “The New Eeyore,” noting the various gifts used by each character. The movie is slightly longer than ten minutes.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: “The New Eeyore,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3k_cVLHEIDI

Explain to the children that God has gifted all of us. Sometimes, a group of people share a gift (like a choir or gardeners). Sometimes one person has a gift. Before showing the movie, tell the group that they are viewing a movie about Eeyore and that during the movie they may learn how each character is special and help-

ful. Show the video “The New Eeyore.” Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What did Eeyore learn?
- What did Tigger learn?
- What makes each character special?
- In our group, how is each person special? (Include the adults, too.)

Invite volunteers to take turns reading Mathew 6:24–34 aloud to the group. Afterward, ask them if there were parts of the picture that correspond to the words or images in scripture.



6 Strange Land

Leader preparation: If the group’s Bibles do not have an Old Testament map included, consider downloading the “Then & Now Bible Maps: Middle East,” available at no cost through Rose Publishing, www.rose-publishing.com. Think about times in your life when you have been in a strange land. Be prepared to share one example. You may want to check with the pastor or faith formation director so you are aware of any special concerns among the children.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- colored pencils
- “Ezekiel and God,” Attachment: Activity 6
- map of ancient world in Bibles, or copy of “Then & Now Bible Maps: Middle East,” www.rose-publishing.com for each child

Read “Ezekiel and God” to the children. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What is God asking Ezekiel to do?
- How might Ezekiel have felt after listening to God?
- If God said this to you, how would you feel?

Find a map of the ancient world in each Bible, or hand out copies of the ancient world. Have the children find the cities of Jerusalem and Babylon, drawing a circle around or putting a finger on each city. Using the mileage or kilometer key, have the children determine the approximate distance between the cities. Explain that Ezekiel was a Jewish priest and prophet who was part of the group exiled (forcibly removed) from Jerusalem when that city was conquered by the Babylonians. His ministry was not in his homeland. He worked and lived in Babylon, a strange land.

Using your own words, explain that sometimes in life we are in a strange land. That place may be a different physical location. Many of your group may have changed babysitters, moved from a preschool to an elementary school or moved from a different city or house. Ask them when they have been in a strange place. Tell the children that God is with us in all strange places, whether we are children or youth or adults. God asks us to help, using our special gifts, while we are in those situations, just like he asked Ezekiel.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Making a Difference (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Write the following quotation by Catherine of Siena on a sheet of paper or whiteboard:

If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world ablaze.

Think which gifts you use that help you set the world ablaze.

Supplies:

- paper
- markers, pencils, colored pencils
- prepared newsprint with Catherine of Siena quotation

Ask an older child to read the quotation from Catherine of Siena (1347–1380). Invite the children to express what they think the phrase means. Help children who are literal thinkers with the metaphor “world ablaze.” Ask the group to paraphrase the quotation in their own words. Example: If I become what God wants me to become, I will make a difference in the world.

Then, divide the group into pairs. Ask each person in the pair to share how that person thinks God has gifted him or her. Then ask the other person to share what he or she sees as the partner’s strengths. If you have a small group of children, you may do this as a circle activity. Finally, ask everyone to draw him- or herself acting in a way that uses his or her gifts to help the world. Write, or ask the children to write, the Catherine of Siena quotation on the paper. Have the children take home the drawing to share with their family and as a reminder to use their gifts throughout the week.

8 Thanks

Leader preparation: Purchase an inexpensive composition book or notebook for each child. In 1 Corinthians 1:4–5, Paul gives thanks to God for every member of the Corinthian congregation and their gifts. Read the activity and begin your own journal entry. Create a short note for parents informing them that their child has a “Thanks” journal and that you would appreciate their encouragement in helping their child identify how he or she is grateful. You may decide whether you want the children to bring the journals back or to keep them as a project at home.

Supplies:

- Bible
- composition book or small notebook for each child
- pencils

Invite a child to read 1 Corinthians 1:4–5. Ask the children why they think the apostle Paul is thanking God. Allow a brief discussion. Hand out the journals and pencils. Explain to the children that they are creating a “Thanks” journal and that they will create the first entry today. The children may take the journals home to create additional entries, one per day for the next week. During the group time, ask all to write or draw in their journals what they are thankful for that day. Ask them to pay particular attention to the skills they used that day to help others, to help themselves, or to help the earth. Give them time to ponder their blessings and to create the entry.

9 Circle Time: Gifts from God

Leader preparation: Think of people in your life who have been and are affirming. This activity may be a closing for any of the Explorations.

Supplies: None

Gather the children in a circle. You may choose whether to hold hands or link arms or sit in a circle. Explain that you are beginning the circle with words that will be repeated by each person. Begin the circle by saying to the child next to you: “[Name], you are a gift from God to the world.” That child then says the same sentence to the next person. This proceeds around the circle. Close with a prayer, such as: *God, you created us. You give us special ways to help the world. Help us learn how to use our skills in a way that pleases you. Amen.*

After the prayer, ask the children during the week to tell at least three people that each is a gift from God to the world.

Reflect

“All God’s critters got a place in the choir, some sing low, some sing higher . . .” goes the Staines children’s song mentioned in Activity 2. Where are you in the choir? Where are the children? Does everyone have a place where they are comfortable? Is everyone lovingly welcomed?

Ezekiel and God

Paraphrase based on Ezekiel 2:1-5

God: Ezekiel, Stand up! I want to talk to you.

(Ezekiel stood up and listened.)

God: The Israelites have forgotten my laws.

Ezekiel: I'm not in Israel now. I'm in Babylon. This is an awful place for Jews. All of us miss Jerusalem.

God: I know where you are, and I need you now. You are to remind the Israelites that they are my children and they should act like it! I'm seeing a lot of very bad choices.

Ezekiel: They will not listen to me.

God: Don't worry, Ezekiel. No matter what choices they make after hearing you, they will know that I have sent a prophet.

Ezekiel: I will remind them that you are our God wherever we live.

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Children love a good story. Thankfully, the Bible is filled with wonderful stories showing how God has helped the faithful discern their gifts throughout the ages. Solomon asking God for wisdom, and Jesus calling the disciples are stories children enjoy and remember. They are usually comfortable with God and Solomon having a dreamy conversation like best friends. God is a present reality for many children, a reality that may become more distant as they mature. Children understand feeling excited when a leader wants them to be part of a team. Of course, the fisherman would follow Jesus. Your challenge, as an adult guide, is to help them understand that as God called ancient peoples, God calls people today, children and adults.

About this Exploration

Scripture provides many examples of people discovering God-given talents that help them not only in their own lives, but also in ministering to or caring for others. As Solomon discovered, gifts such as knowledge and a discerning mind are to be valued more highly than riches, long life, or power. Scripture, along with the community, inspires and affirms people in recognizing the different gifts they possess. Gifts of ministry allow people to play important roles in this world, in faith-related settings as well as in homes, workplaces, schools, and places of recreation.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 Kings 3:3–15
Mark 1:14–20

Leader Preparation

The scripture passages tell about King Solomon asking God for wisdom and Jesus gathering the disciples. Both are wonderful examples of believers being in ministry with God in their specific time and place. As you read the 1 Kings passage, ponder which gift you would like from God. When reading the Mark account, ponder what contemporary situation has you saying “yes” to Jesus. As you review the nine activities, pray to choose the options that will best guide your group.

Prayer: Our God our help in ages past, you have called kings and queens, fishermen, tax collectors, and sellers of cloth. Help me, too, discern how to best serve you. I want to be in ministry with you, our hope for days to come. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine 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 with supplies normally found at the

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Name It (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read the activity and think about the children in your group. Anticipate some of their answers and your response. It’s important to honor their requests to God, while also highlighting that Solomon asked for wisdom, not riches. Try not to be judgmental with seemingly silly requests, because they may have a more serious desire. An older child may reply that Solomon was already wealthy, had power, and was an adult—all accurate observations. Focus on Solomon’s choice to be faithful, humble, and in relationship with God. Being in ministry is choosing to listen to and serve God.

Supplies:

- Bible
- index card for each person
- pencils or pens

Ask the children to write or draw what they would like God to give them. Don’t have them show the card to anyone. Tell them to turn it upside down. Ask a child to collect the cards. Either you or another child can shuffle them, dealing all cards face down on the table. Ask the children, one by one, to select a card and to read the request. As a group, try to match the request with the child who wrote or drew it. Give the child an opportunity to explain why that request was important to them, asking everyone to listen respectfully. Then read aloud 1 Kings 3:3–15. Ask the following questions.

- What did Solomon want from God?
- Why did he want wisdom, an understanding mind?
- What kind of childhood might Solomon have had that made him ask for wisdom? (He knew God’s laws, worshipped, prayed, was thankful, and so on.)

2 Fishers of All

Leader preparation: Evangelism is a gift of ministry. The foundation of evangelism is your relationships with other people, which takes time. As you learn about people, you tell them your faith story in a way that engages that person and invites him or her into the faith community. Read the Bible passage, and be prepared to discuss how you share your faith.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read Mark 1:14–20 to the group. Ask them what happened in this story and what they think Jesus is talking about when he says he’s “fishing for men.” After a brief discussion, ask a different person to read the passage aloud again. Ask the children how they tell people about Jesus or about their church. Listen for their answers. Celebrate the variety of answers. Some children will invite people to worship, or share a book, or bring someone to vacation bible school, and so on. Affirm that all of these are examples of being in ministry with Jesus, making fishers of all people. People in churches who have the gift for inviting people to know Jesus are called evangelists.

Have the children to divide into groups of two or three. Invite the each group to create a short skit about telling other people about their faith or about the congre-

church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

gation. Allow the children to decide the setting (home, school, sports team, and so on). Knowing different ways to tell people about Jesus is important. Remind them that there are many ways to serve God, and there are many ways to invite people to learn about God. Have another child read the Mark passage for the third time.



3 Snowboarding

Leader preparation: Review the activity and spend time looking at “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA.” This activity can be used with either 1 Kings 3:3–15 or Mark 1:14–20. Decide which passage you would like to use.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- artwork: “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA,” <http://www.art.com/products/p13950276-sa-i2807680/diamond-peak-nevada-usa.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=diamond+peak>

Ask the children the following questions, recording their answers on newsprint or a whiteboard.

- What is trust?
- How do you know when you trust someone?
- How do trusting relationships feel?

Show “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA” to the children. Give them a few minutes to look at it. Ask them to create the same stance as the snowboarder. Then ask them the following questions.

- What might the person be feeling?
- Did this person learn to snowboard with one attempt? If not, what was needed?
- What equipment is needed?
- What skills are needed?
- What was needed so the snowboarder trusted his skills?

Read 1 Kings 3:3–15 to the group, and ask them what examples of trust they hear in this story. If necessary, note that God trusts Solomon and Solomon trusts God. Read Mark 1:14–20 to the group and ask them what examples of trust they hear in this story. If necessary, note that God trusts Jesus, Jesus trusts the fishermen, and the fishermen trust Jesus. Ask the children why they think trust in God is important as they are trying to figure out their gifts of ministry.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 We Need One Another (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reflect on how being in a faith community helps you. What part of being in community brings you joy?

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read Mark 1:14–20 to the children. Ask the children what happened in this passage. Once they understand the passage, ask them to act it out. Let the children use their imagination and what is readily available for props. After they perform the skit, ask why they thought Jesus wanted to help. Tell them that we need one another because God never intended for us to do everything by ourselves. In churches we call this “living in community.” Communities help us on good and bad days, and they help us grow as Christians. Communities support us as we try new skills and gifts, like when they first sang in the children’s choir or helped usher or served at coffee time. Jesus needed disciples to help spread God’s word, to help manage the crowds, to take him to people’s homes, to prepare meals. Jesus needed a community to help him be the best possible partner with God. Explain that we need community, too. Ask the children to explain how the church community helps them. Then ask them how they provide community by helping others in the church.

5 Offering Bowl

Leader preparation: Review the activity, and consider how you express thanks to God for your ministry. As you guide the Bible discussion, help the children understand that the offerings included burnt offerings, offerings of well being (financial), and Solomon provided a feast for his servants (hospitality, caring). Honor that creating art is a ministry, as is offering gifts to God. Display the following prayer on newsprint or a whiteboard:

God, I made this bowl while thinking of you. Thanks for making me so creative. Help me be thankful. Help me use my other gifts, too. Amen.

Supplies:

- Bible
- self-drying clay
- clay tools (table knives, forks, toothpicks, spools, buttons, leaves)
- plastic for tables
- a drying spot (shelf, window ledge, table)
- index card for each child
- pencils and pens
- prepared newsprint with prayer

Read 1 Kings 3:3–5, 15 to the children. Ask the following questions.

- What is Solomon doing?
- Why did he give God offerings?
- Why do we give God offerings today?

Tell the children that when we know that God is the source of our gifts, Christians respond with thanksgiving. We pray, worship, use our talents or gifts of ministry to help the church, donate money, and help others. There are many different ways to offer gifts to God. Ask the children how they thank God.

Invite the children to make offering bowls. They can make a pinch pot (round ball of clay and thumb in middle, pressing outward) or a coil pot (long coils spiraling to make a shape) or a free form bowl. They may decorate with any of the tools provided. Since the bowl will not hold water or flames, they may make cut out shapes, as well. Enjoy making the bowls. Have them leave their bowls on a table or move them carefully to a safe place for drying. Draw the children’s attention to the prayer. While the bowls are drying, have the children copy the prayer on an index card. Have the children put their prayers in their bowls when they take them home.

6 What Is Belief?

Leader preparation: Think about what you believe. How do your beliefs influence your ministry? How have your beliefs changed as you matured? Our beliefs usually change or deepen as we mature. We need belief in God to be effective in ministry. Ministry and belief are a matched set.

Supplies:

- Bible
- newsprint and markers

In the movie *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, there is a conversation between the characters Lucy and Reepicheep in which Reepicheep says, “We have nothing if not belief.” Read 1 Kings 3:3–15 to the children and make sure the children understand the story. Ask them what they think Solomon believed and what God believed about Solomon. Mention that we need to believe in God if we want to be ministers or partners with God. God trusts us to be ministers and we trust God by our beliefs and our actions.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Reminder to Follow Jesus Every Day (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review the activity and ponder how you follow Jesus every day. If you have many younger children, you may prefer to make labels with the Bible verse, rather than having them write it. Write Mark 1:17 on newsprint or a whiteboard: “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”

Supplies:

- construction paper in a variety of colors
- scissors
- markers
- prepared newsprint or whiteboard with Mark 1:17

Display the Mark 1:17 verse. Help the children learn Mark 1:17, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” As a group, create motions for this verse. Invite the children to cut out a fish shape from construction paper, allowing older children to help the younger ones. On one side, have them write the Bible verse. On the other side, have them write the question “How did you follow Jesus today?” Invite them to answer the question. Listen carefully to their answers because they will guide you in how children are called to follow Jesus (taking care of pets, recycling, helping a grandparent, reading to a student who is blind). Affirm their answers and specifically say how they are in ministry with Jesus. Ask each to take home the fish and share it with their family, suggesting that answering the question could be a regular bedtime or mealtime activity.



8 Wisdom: Honi and the Carob Tree

Leader preparation: Read and learn the story “Honi and the Carob Tree,” a treasured Jewish tale about wisdom, environmental stewardship, and generational care. You may also share this story with older children and ask them to prepare it for the group.

Supplies:

- “Honi and the Carob Tree,” Attachment: Activity 8

Explain that wisdom tales are stories told by grandmas and grandpas, moms and dads, aunts and uncles to children so they learn what’s important in their family, their faith, and their culture. Introduce the story of “Honi and the Carob Tree” and tell or perform it. Ask the children the following questions.

- Who is the teacher in this story?
- What lessons did the old man learn from previous generations? What lessons did Honi learn?
- What have you learned from this story?

Take a walk around your church. Ask to children to notice anything that has been gifted to them from previous generations. It may be a tree, a piano, library books, windows, sheet music, vestments, and so on. Notice which gifts are handmade or planted and which gifts were purchased. Celebrate the sharing of artistic gifts, care for creation, and financial resources. Note that your gift of teaching is a generational gift. Churches need a wide variety of gifts from people of all ages.

9 I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

Leader preparation: Enjoy leading this song that has a nice beat and a great message. You can sway to it easily. Read the activity and prepare your own options.

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- song: “I’m Gonna Live so God Can Use Me,” African American spiritual (tune: I’m Gonna Live), http://www.hymnary.org/text/im_gonna_live_so_god_can_use_me?tab=about
- music player

Ask the group when they think God can use their gifts (anytime). Ask them to say a one syllable noun describing when they can serve God, such as play, jump, write, sleep, ride. Teach the children the African American spiritual “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me,” and add verses from the list they made.

Reflect

Hildegard of Bingen said that “every creature is a mirror of Divinity.” Where did you find God in each child? Were you able to help them discern their special gift? How are you a mirror of Divinity?

Honi and the Carob Tree

One day Honi was journeying on the road and he saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked him, "How long does it take to bear fruit?"

The man replied, "Seventy years."

Honi further asked him, "Are you certain that you will live another seventy years?"

The man replied, "I found this world provided with carob trees, and as my forebears planted these for me, so I too plant them for my children."

Honi then sat down to have a meal, and sleep overcame him. As he slept, a small cave formed around him, which hid him from sight, and he continued to sleep for seventy years. When he awoke, he saw a man gathering the fruit of the carob tree and Honi asked him, "Are you the man who planted this tree?"

The man replied, "I am his grandson."

SOURCE: BABYLONIAN TALMUD, TA'ANIT 23A

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Children are disciples and gifted in ministry. Children are the church's present and future. They are waiting for adults to encourage them to become disciples with the skills and enthusiasm they already possess. Children understand that when Jesus said, "Follow me," they were included. They understand that they want to serve in a safe, caring, and faithful environment. Children are frequently asked to help elderly neighbors and relatives, and older children often care for younger children after school. Many children prepare meals, take care of pets, have farming responsibilities, and perform household chores. It is our privilege to show them that they can be in partnership with Jesus as they learn and serve every day.

About this Exploration

Jesus extends the invitation to "come, follow me." We are asked to trust that our gifts, talents, and interests may be used by God for the ministry that is before us. We are not asked first to learn more or begin afresh in order to be noticed by Jesus, but rather to hear the Spirit's call and come just as we are. Through this invitation we are encouraged to place our confidence in God, who is able to work through our open hands and hearts that are offered to the church, community, and world. If we have doubts about our abilities or qualifications, we can be encouraged by the countless Biblical stories that remind us that God always chooses and uses the "least of these." Come, let's follow!

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Jeremiah 15:15–21
Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Reflect on why and how you choose to be a disciple. Read the Jeremiah and Matthew passages for this Exploration. When have you felt like Jeremiah? When have you been like Matthew, or like the Pharisees or the leader in the synagogue, or like the suffering woman? When have you experienced resurrection? Discipleship is seldom a predictable path. Be aware of the Spirit's presence in your life. Listen for God's voice.

Prayer: Holy One, thank you for being in relationship with me. Help me to model discipleship with joy and gratitude, so the children I serve witness discipleship as a privilege. Guide me as I encourage them to be your disciples. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine 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 with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.



1 Collage: We Belong! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Who can be a disciple? Anyone who follows Jesus. Write "We Belong!" at the top of a large sheet of craft paper or newsprint.

Supplies:

- prepared large piece of craft paper or newsprint
- old magazines
- glue sticks
- scissors

Invite the children to make a collage, a collection of pictures glued on to a large sheet of paper. Have the children cut out pictures of people who could be Christ's disciples. The older children can cut for the younger children, if needed. Have them glue their pictures to the large sheet of craft paper or newsprint. While the magazines are out, hold up the collage and comment on how many people could be Jesus' disciples. Ask the group if anyone is missing. Make a point if you are not seeing an image of a prisoner, or someone who is ill, or someone who isn't wealthy, or a representation from many age groups, or a person with a disability, or people of various ethnic origins. Note that they could also be Christ's disciples. Ask the children each to find images to make the collage more complete. Celebrate the marvelous diversity.

2 I Sing a Song

Leader preparation: Become familiar with the song "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God." If needed, ask an accompanist to help you. Verses 1 and 3 are used for this activity. You may include verse 2, if desired, noting that "some are killed by a fierce wild beast" may involve a short discussion on martyrdom. The created actions can be used during worship or for other explorations.

Supplies:

- hymn: "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God" by Lesbia Scott (tune: Grand Isle), <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh712.sht>

Teach the children the song "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God." Divide into two groups. Have one group create motions for verse 1 and the second group create motions for verse 3. Come together and allow the groups to teach each other the motions for the verses.



3 Being Called Can Be Challenging

Leader preparation: Read Jeremiah 15:15–21. It is important for children to know that God is with them in bad times, too. They can honestly express their emotions to God and God will continue to love them. When we discern a call to ministry, communicating honestly with God is vital. Many times what makes us upset can point us to a ministry. For example, a recycling program often emerges from frustration over too much trash, or sending a portion of an allowance is often a response to a natural disaster.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Vision After the Sermon” by Paul Gauguin, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- Bible

Ask the children if they ever have had a bad day and to describe how they felt. Ask them where God was on that bad day. Invite two volunteers to read Jeremiah 15:15–21 to the children. Have one child be Jeremiah and read verses 15–18. Ask the children what kind of day they think Jeremiah was having. Then have the other volunteer be God and read verses 19–21. Ask them how God responds. Invite the children to take a few minutes to look at “Vision After the Sermon” by Paul Gauguin. Ask them the following questions.

- Where is God in the picture?
- Where are you?

Affirm that God is with us when we are upset. Being honest with God is important as we minister with God. God is with us when we are challenged. God can handle our questions. Through it all, God loves us.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Follow Me (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review the activity and discern which areas in the church you want them to experience. Consider inside and outside options as well as places like the sanctuary, kitchen, front door, pastor’s office, custodial area, any outdoor signs, classrooms, and any special areas, like a library, columbarium, food pantry, or garden. Select a variety of locations so as many gifts as possible are highlighted. Make sure everyone is able to identify a number of gifts. Find one gift that each child already brings to the congregation and work that into your discussion. At the end of the tour the children might be amazed at how many gifts are being used in your faith community.

Supplies: None

Gather the children and tell them that you are leading them on a special tour of the church. They are to look around silently and think how disciples use that space. Once you are standing in one place, such as the kitchen, ask: *What special gifts do disciples need here?* (Cooking, cleaning, hospitality, caring, organizing) Ask the same or a similar question for each selected area. At the end, ask whether they know of any gifts that were missed. Ask them if they knew so many people were involved in helping Jesus right here—including all of them! Celebrate how Jesus has called so many people with applause or shouts of joy.

5 Be a Disciple

Leader preparation: This game is similar to “Follow the Leader.” Have plenty of ideas of motions for acts of discipleship so you can help younger children or children who may be new to faith communities.

Supplies: None

Stand in a circle or gather chairs in a circle. Ask one child to be the first person. Each person acts out what a disciple of Jesus does in a simple action. Everyone repeats the action. As quickly as possible go to the next person and that person needs a different action. No acts of discipleship should be repeated. Try to go around the circle at least twice. If you have mostly older children, you can adapt this game. With each added motion everyone also repeats the previous motions, so you have a series of movements about discipleship. This adaptation is probably too difficult for younger elementary children.

6 Be Well

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 9:18–26 and be familiar with the passage. You will not need costumes for this activity, but if they are easily available you may adapt this activity to include them.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- (optional) costumes

Ask someone to read Matthew 9:18–26 to the group. Ask a second person to read it again. Ask the following questions to make sure the children understand the miracles of healing.

- What did people ask Jesus to do?
- Why did the woman want to touch Jesus' cloak?
- What happened to the girl?

If you have older children, ask them to reenact the scenes from memory. If you have mostly younger children, ask them to reenact the scenes as you read it to them. If you have more than one person who really wants to be Jesus or the woman or another character, do the reenactment more than once.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Mercy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: For this activity you will need to identify a group who would like to receive greeting cards made by the children, such as shut-ins, nursing-home residents, college students, or patients at a children's hospital. You may select a group within your congregation, asking the church office for help with addresses. You may also create cards for people you don't know in your community. Read Matthew 9:9–13. Mercy is sometimes explained to children as forgiveness or kindness or giving to the poor. Mercy is the compassion and love we offer to others to model our understanding and appreciation of God's actions to us. People with the gift of mercy often serve in places like food banks, refugee centers, job training programs, and drug rehabilitation clinics. They organize clothing drives, the collection of school supplies or packages for people serving in the military. St. Augustine referred to mercy as "ever ancient, ever new." How are you merciful to others?

Supplies:

- Bible
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

- construction paper
- colored pencils, markers or crayons
- addresses
- envelopes and stamps if you are unable to hand deliver the cards

Ask someone to read Matthew 9:9–13 to the group. Ask the following questions.

- What happened?
- What might Jesus mean when he says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”?
- What is mercy?
- How do people act when they are merciful?

Brainstorm options, recording their responses on newsprint or a whiteboard. Invite the children to create greeting cards for the selected recipients. Tell them to make one card to give to the group you have selected and another card that they will take home and give to a person of their choosing. When the cards are finished, gather the cards and say a brief prayer: *Merciful God, thank you for loving us. May our cards bring a smile to the people receiving them. Amen.*

Collect the cards for the group project and tell the children that you will deliver or mail them. Ask the children to hand deliver or send their card and to pay attention to when and where they are merciful.

8 Healing

Leader preparation: Some people have the gift of healing. This is important during illness of any kind. Jeremiah was distressed with his call and needed God’s affirming words. Jesus healed regularly and, for this exploration, raised a girl from the dead.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- two small adhesive bandages for each child
- permanent markers
- construction paper

Read Matthew 9:18–26 to the children. Ask them how they think the girl and her father felt. Ask them where they go when they are not feeling well. Some children may go to the doctor, some to the school nurse, others use natural remedies, and others do not receive health care. Mention that some people are gifted in healing and that this is their special ministry. They may be doctors, nurses, emergency medical technicians, or people who know about natural medicine. Give everyone one adhesive bandage, and ask them to remove the packaging. Have each child use a permanent marker write the name of a healer on the top of the bandage. Have them remove the adhesive backing and place their bandages on the piece of construction paper, making a design or placing the bandages randomly. Repeat the process a second time with each child writing a way he or she has been a healer, such as washing a cut, saying soothing words, giving a hug, calming a person, and so forth. Celebrate the gift of healing. Invite the children to speak with other adults, asking them to share a healing experience. Ask the children to be attentive to how they are healers.



9 Pocket Prayers

Leader preparation: This activity may be used with either Bible Focus Passage. Sometimes life is overwhelming for children and for adults. The attachment includes prayers that can be copied and placed in a pocket, purse, backpack, or under a pillow. Two prayers are affirmative, one prayer asks for forgiveness, and one prayer asks for help. Praying is an act of discipleship that everyone can do. Some people have the special gift of praying regularly for others. The prayers go home with the children for their use.

Supplies:

- card stock
- markers or colored pencils
- scissors
- “Pocket Prayers,” Attachment: Activity 9 (two copies for each child)

Tell the children that prayer is something every disciple can do. We pray when we are children, when we are in high school, when we are adults, and when we are very old. Prayer is our way to talking to God. Sometimes we pray for ourselves and sometimes we pray for others. Some people have the special gift of praying. Give each child two sets of the “Pocket Prayers.” Ask them to cut along the lines and to fill in the first set, decorating them as desired. The second set can be completed and used at home anytime. After the decorating, ask the children to silently pray with one of the cards. Then, as a group, gather in a circle and respond aloud to the prayer of thanksgiving, with each person sharing one prayer.

Reflect

Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972) said, “Just to be is a blessing; just to live is holy.” That’s a person who understood walking every moment of every day with God. How are your young disciples? What did you discover about them? What did you discover about yourself? How do you plan to be a disciple?

Pocket Prayers

Thank you God for . . .	Thank you God for . . .
God, help me with . . .	God, help me with . . .
God, I'm sorry for . . .	God, I'm sorry for . . .
God, I'm happy because . . .	God, I'm happy because . . .

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Children thrive with predictable actions, such as schedules or family activities at home, an order of worship and particular prayers (the Lord's Prayer) every week at worship, or annual programs and displays at church. Christian traditions connect generations of believers from ancient to modern times. Children also know that traditions may be adapted. They will understand that a caring e-mail or Twitter may replace a greeting card or telephone call for many people. It is an adult privilege to help them understand Christian traditions and why they are important.

About this Exploration

Faithful Christian practices encourage a communal awareness that God calls, nurtures, and blesses the use of our gifts to strengthen God's work in the world. Our understanding of this partnership with God is always emerging. Traditional gifts, such as preaching, hospitality, music, and caring may be demonstrated in ways recognizable since ancient days. Christian tradition may also be informed and evolve to include modern forms of expression such as social media, video, legislative advocacy, and more. No matter the era or tradition, gifts of ministry are grounded in a desire to minister with and on behalf of Christ.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 49:1-7
Luke 10:38-42

Leader Preparation

When did you first know you were called by God? Where were you? What did you feel? Read the Isaiah and Luke passages for this Exploration, pondering carefully their message for you. Children can easily understand how the hospitality and tensions in the Mary and Martha story are relevant today. The rivalry between the sisters may be evident in many families. Children also may identify with Isaiah, who felt called by God from birth. Most children have something they have known since birth. Often what they “know” has been told to them by their parents, by sharing stories. Sharing stories is what worshipping communities do well. We tell the Bible stories over and over, generation upon generation. Each generation makes these stories part of their faith journey.

Prayer: Timeless and always present God, empower me to bring these stories to life for the children and for me. Make these ancient passages resound with relevancy. Affirm the children’s gifts of ministry and help all believers to welcome them with glad hearts. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Wonderfully Made (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: When you read Isaiah 49:1-4 you will notice that Isaiah describes himself. This activity allows the children to identify how they are wonderfully made. Steer the children to affirmative descriptions. Note how they describe themselves. In the description will probably be an attribute they consider a gift. Help them discern how that gift may be used in ministry. Write a poem for yourself.

Supplies:

- Bible
- lined paper
- pencils

Ask the children what are the many ways that God made them. You may need to start the conversation by giving a few examples of your own, such as “God made me with brown eyes,” or “God made me taller than my brothers,” or “God made me with an ability to sing.” Encourage all the children to participate in the conversation. As a group, learn how Isaiah described himself. Read or invite someone to read Isaiah 49:1-4 to the group. Remind the children how they thought God made them. Give them the lined paper and a pencil. Ask them to create a three or four line poem about themselves that expresses ways that God made them. Help younger children with the writing. Consider using a simile format by pairing an adjective with an animal. The poem does not need to rhyme. Example:

Fast as a tiger,
Brown as a bat,
Smart as a dolphin,
Happy as a cat.

Invite each person to share her or his poem with the group. As a group, affirm how each person is wonderfully made and how each person’s special traits can be used in ministry.

2 Hospitality

Leader preparation: Hospitality is the gift of welcoming others, including visitors or strangers. In the Luke passage, Martha is so busy being hospitable that she forgets to listen to Jesus. Jesus does not correct her gift of hospitality; he corrects her priorities at a specific moment. Faith communities often work diligently with hospitality. Our faith stories in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament are laden with meals and generosity.

This activity explores ways your faith community is hospitable. Review the activity and prepare the list of ways your congregation is hospitable. Some examples may include: signage; bathrooms for children or bathrooms with railings; large print bulletins and Bibles; handicapped accessibility; an elevator; accepting people regardless of race, sexual orientation, economic level or education; greeters with umbrellas on rainy days; a food bank; kitchen surfaces at various levels; a clean and inviting nursery. Include the sacraments of communion and baptism in this list.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine 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 with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- prepared list of congregational hospitality

Ask the children what they think it means to be hospitable. Record the children’s responses on newsprint. Explore the ways your church is hospitable. Using a charades-like format, tell the children you are going to whisper one option in a child’s ear and that child is to act it out without using words. The rest of the group may guess how the congregation is hospitable. Engage the children in conversation about hospitality using the following questions.

- Which examples of hospitality are important to you?
- Where do they participate?
- Who in your group and who in the congregation are gifted with hospitality?

③ Mutually Beneficial

Leader preparation: Symbiosis is the scientific term for two different organisms that are mutually beneficial to each other. When we work with God in ministry, everyone benefits. We serve a faith community enhancing the lives and faith of others. Our spiritual journey is deepened. God has a dynamic witness and a partner in ministry. Discovering gifts of ministry is a win for the individual, a win for the faith community, and a win for God. Read Isaiah 49:1–7, and preview the National Geographic video “Fish Symbiosis.” Ponder how your congregation’s ministries are symbiotic.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: National Geographic’s “Fish Symbiosis,” <http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/player/kids/animals-pets-kids/fish-kids/fish-symbiosis-kids.html>

Older children may have learned about symbiosis in school, but the concept may be new for younger children. Explain that in symbiosis all parties benefit. Ask the children about the relationships in their life, when they give and when they receive. Note that there are times when we give more than we receive and vice versa (caring for an elderly person or the child/parent relationship). Overall, healthy relationships have balance. Show the children the National Geographic video “Fish Symbiosis,” and learn about symbiosis in nature. Read Isaiah 49:1–7 to the group, and ask the children how they think Isaiah benefits from his relationship with God and how God benefit from the relationship with Isaiah. Note that when we use our gifts in ministry, everyone benefits—the giver, the receiver, the faith community, and God. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions.

- What are some examples in your congregation where the children’s ministry benefits the congregation? (Possible answers may include a Christmas play and the children’s choir.)
- What are some examples where the congregation supports the children? (Some possible answers may be paying for faith formation resources and the presentation of Bibles.)
- How does God benefit from all these gifts of ministry?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Mary, Martha, and Jesus (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The Luke passage is a beautiful story that children grasp quickly. They also understand the timeless rivalry between Mary and Martha. Know Luke 10:38–42 well enough that you don’t need to refer to the Bible as you help the various groups in the activity. It is helpful to have a larger space so the groups can be easily accessible for you, but the children are not distracted by the other groups.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Divide the children into groups of three, making sure younger children are with children who read well. Then read Luke 10:38–42 to the children using different tones of voice so they understand Martha and Jesus’ words, and they realize what Mary is doing. Do not discuss the passage with them. Make sure each child has a Bible. Ask them to act out the story in their small group. Let them divide the parts and determine how they want to act the story. The acting is not for presentation; it’s for learning. Wander among the groups helping as needed. If there is time, ask each group to rotate parts so they interpret the Luke passage three times, with each person playing Jesus, Martha, and Mary once. Bring everyone together and ask the following questions.

- Which gift did Jesus use in ministry with Mary and Martha?
- Which gift did Mary use?
- Which gift did Martha use?

5 Gifted

Leader preparation: Pentecost is celebrated during late spring by all Christian traditions—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. It is the holiday when we celebrate the Holy Spirit infusing believers and sending them to create faithful communities. Pentecost occurs fifty days after Easter. Review the activity. It would be helpful to have an extra adult or youth to print the photographs while you are with the children looking at the artwork.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel” (Anonymous), https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401
- digital camera
- computer with color printer or photo printer
- photo paper
- scissors
- glue sticks
- mural paper
- markers or colored pencils

Take a headshot photo of each child and print the photos while the children are looking at “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel.” Ask the group to gather around the picture, and give them a few minutes to study it. This Early Christian image may be unfamiliar. Ask the group to describe what they see. Some possible answers may be people in tunics, flames above heads, dove descending, blue arc

overhead (signifying heaven), and the plants in the corners (abundance in God's Realm). Explain that this picture was painted before most people could read, and churches used pictures to tell the Bible stories. Ask the group what story they think the picture tells.

Explain that Pentecost is the birthday of the church, a special time when the Holy Spirit came to believers and gave them the desire to create faithful, worshipping communities. The dove represents the Holy Spirit, and the flame represents the gift the Spirit gave to each person. Since the very early days of the church, Christians have believed that God has a special gift for them. Note that there is a flame above every person's head. Ask the children the following questions.

- What gifts did Christians have long ago that you may have today? (Some possible answers may be cooking, music, dance, hospitality, gardening, teaching, healing, preaching, and caring.)
- If the people in the painting sat next to you, which of your gifts may surprise them? (Some possible answers may be social networking, computers, graphic design, and recycling.)

Give each child a place on the mural paper. Ask each child to trim or shape his or her photo, if desired, and glue it to the paper. Older children can help the younger children with this task. Instruct them to draw in the body with favorite clothes on. Tell them to draw a flame over the head. At the bottom of the mural, have the children write their special gifts beneath the feet.

6 Being a Light

Leader preparation: The Wingclips video "Deepest Fear" (Lions Gate Films, 2006) is from the movie *Akeelah and the Bee*, about a girl challenged by the National Spelling Bee. Akeelah's teacher, Dr. Larabee, has the following quotation on his wall from Marianne Williamson's book *Return to Love*: "Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure." She asserts that by manifesting the glory of God within us we conquer that fear, allowing God's light to shine through us and on to others.

Supplies:

- Bible
- video: Wingclips video "Deepest Fear" (Lions Gate Films, 2006), <http://www.wingclips.com/movie-keelah-and-the-bee/deepest-fear>
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector

Ask one person to read Isaiah 49 6–7 to the group, where God is speaking to the prophet, Isaiah. Ask the following questions.

- What is God saying to Isaiah?
- What is Isaiah's "job"?
- Isaiah is not popular. How do we know that?
- How might Isaiah feel about being chosen by God?

Show the Wingclips video "Deepest Fear" from *Akeelah and the Bee*. Ask the following questions.

- What is Akeelah's challenge?
- What does she realize?

- How does her teacher, Dr. Larabee, help her?
- How might Akeelah's spelling be used as a ministry?
- How are Akeelah and Isaiah similar?
- How is Akeelah or Isaiah like you?.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Isaiah 49:6b (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity helps the children memorize a verse. Write Isaiah 49:6b on a whiteboard or sheet of newsprint.

I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6b)

Supplies:

- prepared verse (Isaiah 49:6b) on newsprint or a whiteboard
- eraser or index cards and tape

Read the verse as a group. Ask the children what they think God might have meant when he said this to the prophet Isaiah. Affirm that God calls each of us, just like Isaiah. Ask the children how they think they can act so that they are a light to the nations. Here is a simple explanation for salvation is: *Salvation means saved or protected from harm. We believe that Jesus died for our sins and we are saved because of this.*

Invite the children to read the verse aloud again. Starting with the youngest child, ask him or her to erase or cross out any one word in the verse. Place an underline mark where the word was so the children can keep track easily. If you wrote the verse on newsprint, cover the word with an index card. Each child will take a turn erasing or covering a word, and the group repeats the verse. By the last word, everyone might know the verse. Ask the children to share the verse with their family. At home, they can begin a discussion on how each family member can be light to one another, then to their neighbors, schoolmates, and to the faith community.

8 First Things First

Leader preparation: It is difficult to discover your ministry if you are distracted. This has been a challenge since ancient days, as evident in the story of Mary and Martha. Practice the activity. Reflect on what distracts you. Reflect on what helps you focus on Jesus.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- small jar with lid, such as a small plastic container, baby-food jar, or half-pint jelly jar
- sand or rice
- three rocks or marbles like those used in floral arrangements per child
- one small bowl per child

Give each child a small container with a lid. Ask each child to place three rocks or marbles in the container, fill the container with sand or rice, and then put on

the lid. Hurrah! Everything fits. Now, have each child empty everything in the container into the extra bowl. Then, have the children fill the container with everything from the bowl, but this time each child should put the sand or rice in first and then the three objects before putting on the lid. Surprise! The lid does not fit. Have children empty the objects and sand or rice into the empty bowl and start over, putting the three objects in first. The lid will fit on again.

Invite someone to read Luke 10:38–42 to the group. Explain that Martha was distracted by preparing the house and meal for Jesus. Ask the children how they might get distracted from listening to Jesus. Answers may include school, chores, video games, and television. Note that it's hard to discover our gifts of ministry if we're so busy that Jesus does not fit into our lives. Hold up the jar with the three objects. Tell the children that the sand or rice represents what distracts us. Explain that the three objects represent God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Ask the children to put Jesus first or "first things first" this week, like Mary did. Tell the children to take home the container, explain the activity to their family, and put it on the table where they usually eat. During meals, they can look at the container and discuss their day and explain how they intend to put Jesus first.



⑨ One Spirit of Love

Leader preparation: Write the first verse and refrain of "One Spirit of Love" on a sheet of newsprint, leaving room for illustrations.

Supplies:

- "One Spirit of Love," Attachment: Activity 9
- video: "One Spirit of Love" by Paul B. Svenson, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBg80JaNJ1M>
- prepared newsprint with first verse of "One Spirit of Love"
- crayons
- music player

Learn the first verse and refrain of "One Spirit of Love" by inviting the children to illustrate the phrases on the newsprint. Discuss the verse with the children.

- "Many are the wonders of God." Ask the children what they think are God's wonders. Answers may include anything in nature or the birth of a baby. Invite several children to illustrate "wonders."
- "Many doors open wide." For young children who are literal, you may want to discuss the greeters or the folks who hold umbrellas during rainstorms. Invite several children to illustrate "doors open wide."
- "Many roads that are still untraveled." Ask children about roads through the countryside or places to travel where there are no roads yet.
- "Many are the gifts that we share." Ask the children what gifts are shared. Answers may include food, money, and various talents, such as singing, construction work, or helping ministries. Invite several children to illustrate some different gifts we share.
- "Many burdens we bear." Ask the children how they think we bear one another's burdens. Answers may include donating clothing, giving hugs, sending cards, and buying extra school supplies. Invite several children to illustrate how we bear each other's burdens.
- "Many mysteries still unraveled." This is a harder phrase to understand and illustrate. Ask the children to suggest what pictures or symbols might illustrate a mystery. Invite several children to add those to the newsprint.

- Refrain: “Many gifts, one Spirit of love.” Affirm that all gifts of ministry are gifts of love.

“One Spirit of Love” by Paul B. Svenson. ©1987/2011 Dad’s Songbook Music LLC. All rights reserved. Used by permission, www.dadsongbook.com.

Listen to the music recording of “One Spirit of Love.” Play it again, and invite the children to join in singing the first verse and refrain. Ask the children to notice God’s wonders and the way they help others during the week. Have them remember to thank God for all they observe.

Reflect

What have you learned about Christian tradition? What did the children learn? Which traditions are vibrant in your life?

Attachment: Activity 9

One Spirit of Love

♩ = 89
Muted strum
Light Reggae Feel

Paul B. Svenson

G 4 G D Em

1. Ma - ny are the won - ders of God ma - ny
2. Some will be the tea - chers of life some the
3. Li - ving as the bo - dy of Christ and the

Em/D C D G

doors o - pen wide ma - ny roads that are still un -
prea - chers of love some the fa - thers and some the
heart of the earth and the hands that will break new

C D G D

tra - veled Ma - ny are the gifts that we share
mo - thers Some will be the ones who will care
gro - und Cel - e - brate the gifts from with - in

Em Em/D C

ma - ny bur - dens we bear ma - ny
some will li - sten and share serv - ing
now its time to be - gin God's -

D G C D

my - ster - ies still un - ra - veled
God as they serve each - o - ther
peo - ple can turn the world a - rou - nd now!

C D G G7 C D G

CHORUS Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love

C D G F C D G

Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love

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Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

It is hard to surpass the infectious smile and enthusiasm of a child who loves to serve. Some congregations ask children to be greeters simply because they have the gift of helping everyone else smile. Children understand that they need other people to help them. As a result, they are overjoyed when they can contribute. For children, sharing their skills is an exciting part of growing up. By including young people in ministry, we benefit from their gifts while helping them learn that those gifts can be a ministry. They also experience intergenerational relationships that set in motion a lifetime of Christian learning and service.

About this Exploration

All of us are like “letters from Christ,” as Paul says, sent to bring hope and healing wherever there is need. In all contexts, there are opportunities for us to share our gifts of ministry in a variety of ways, be it at home, at school, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, and at church. Over our lifetimes, the diversity of our gifts can emerge and grow, and may change, as we move into new places and spaces in our lives. Trusting that God can work through us right where we are is an exciting way to realize that the Holy Spirit is all around us.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Nehemiah 2:11–20
2 Corinthians 3:1–6

Leader Preparation

What has God put in your heart? How are you a letter of Christ? Read Nehemiah 2:11–20 and 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. Review the activities and determine which will be most effective for the children. Help your group discern the message from Nehemiah of listening to God’s call while celebrating the builders, architects, and administrators in your faith community. Paul highlights the need for each person to be a “letter of Christ,” an empowering and challenging metaphor. Note that both men give God credit for their accomplishments, and both men acknowledge that their work is inspired directly by God.

Prayer: Spirit of the living God, thank you for writing your love and grace on my heart. May my actions make me a dynamic letter for you. Help me to discern your call in my life. Help me identify your desire in the lives of these young people. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Servants with Heart (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Nehemiah 2:11–20. Reflect on what God has put in your heart over the years.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- markers or colored pencils

Tell the children that Nehemiah was a Hebrew prophet. There is a book named for him in the Old Testament (or the Hebrew Scriptures). Have the children find the scripture in their Bibles. Invite someone to read Nehemiah 2:11–12 to the group. Focus on the phrase “what my God put in my heart.” Nehemiah didn’t consult others or form a committee or didn’t “text message” his friends. God asked Nehemiah to rebuild the heavily damaged walls of Jerusalem, and Nehemiah got up at night, awoke some friends, and they went to inspect part of the wall. Note that Nehemiah knew it was God who spoke to him. Nehemiah didn’t receive a scroll with instructions. God put the request on Nehemiah’s heart.

Explain that the word “servant” is used in faith communities for people who help others using their talents and who know they are doing God’s work. Give everyone a piece of paper, and instruct the children to draw a large heart on their papers. Tell them to write what God has placed in their hearts on the inside of the hearts on their papers. Ask them to put their names on their papers and put the drawings up in the room. Celebrate all the ways God uses the children in ministry.

2 Photos and Maps: Jerusalem

Leader preparation: This activity is based on Nehemiah 2:11–20. Preview the websites “City Map in Nehemiah’s Time” and “Jerusalem, The Old City: Old City Walls & Gates.” You will be showing the children pictures of the walls that Nehemiah and the people built.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- website: “City Map in Nehemiah’s Time,” <http://www.bible-lands.net/cities/jerusalem/385-jerusalem-restored-city-map-in-nehemiahs-time>
- website: “Jerusalem, The Old City: Old City Walls & Gates,” <http://www.israelinphotos.com/jerusalem/JerWallGat.htm>

Ask the group to take turns reading Nehemiah 2:11–16 aloud to the group. Tell the children that Nehemiah was a real person and Jerusalem is an actual city. Show the children the website “City Map in Nehemiah’s Time,” and find the various places mentioned. The Gates may be identified, but the Dragon’s Fountain and King’s Pool are not on the map. Read Nehemiah 2:17–20 to the children. Ask the children what Nehemiah decides and how he is treated. Show the children the pictures from “Jerusalem, The Old City: Old City Walls & Gates.” The wall Nehemiah rebuilt was not made of Legos or toothpicks. It was massive and an

with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

enormous undertaking. Nehemiah was a gifted administrator who hired gifted builders and laborers.



3 Everyday Mission

Leader preparation: Everything we do—cooking, laundry, driving to work, contacting a friend—can be a way to serve God. Sometimes we think of mission as the big things, like mission trips or large projects. Mission is our also our everyday service. As Paul notes, how we treat others is the letter of Christ they read. Review the activity and reflect on 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. Be prepared to mention how you’ve noticed people being a letter of Christ during the week.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner, <http://www.art.com/products/p10286254-sa-i677605/henry-ossawa-tanner-the-banjo-lesson.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6ce32fa19f9d47aaa58758970c9f0162&searchstring=banjo+lesson>
- Bible

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1–3, or ask an experienced reader to read it. You may need to summarize the passage for younger children. Ask the children what they think it might mean to be a “letter of Christ.” If necessary, consider saying something like: *How we treat other people says a lot about how we think God wants us to treat others. What we say and do tells people whether we care about them. We’re a “letter” because they are reading our actions.* Affirm that our daily actions, like feeding the dog or riding the bus or clearing the table, can be a ministry. God uses and needs us wherever we are. Share how you have seen people being a letter. Ask the children what they have observed.

Display “Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Allow the children a few minutes to look at it. Engage the children in conversation about the picture using the following questions.

- What do you think is happening in this picture?
- What ministry might be illustrated?
- How do you think the older man may be a “letter of Christ”?
- How might the child be a “letter of Christ”?

If the children haven’t noticed the background, direct their attention to the pitcher and bread. The two generations are not only sharing music and time, they are prepared to share a meal in a home filled with sunlight and firelight. There are many sacred moments in everyday life.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Mission: From God for the Common Good (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Nehemiah 2:11–20 and 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. Know the passages well so you don’t need to look at the Bible as a reference. Even though the Nehemiah passage has unfamiliar physical locations, it is usually easier for older children to understand. You may need to assist the group working with Paul where the passage has a few metaphors.

Supplies:

- Bibles, a variety of translations

Divide the children into two groups, making sure there are good readers in each group. Have one group read Nehemiah 2:11–20 and the other group read 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. Give them time to read from more than one translation. Have each group report back with a summary of their passage. Ask the following questions.

- What happened?
- What gifts of ministry were used?
- Where is God in the passage?

Both passages seem different, but both reflect mission as being from God and for the common good. Nehemiah and Paul did not personally benefit from their ministries with riches and honors, but God’s realm did and continues to do so. Make sure the children understand that common good means that the ministry benefits a larger group, which may be another person or a family or a larger group or a congregation. Ask the children to share what they think they do for the common good. Some answers may be recycle, ride a bike instead of driving, volunteering, and welcome a new child at school.



5 Bird Feeders

Leader preparation: Sometimes we are called to serve people, and sometimes God calls us to serve animals or creation. This activity is appropriate for any season. The birdseed bagels can be frozen for later use. You may want to make extras for that purpose. Ponder who in your congregation has a gift of caring for creation and keeping people aware of environmental justice issues. This is a ministry where many people help, but it is a dominant gift for some. Care of creation is also a topic taught frequently in elementary schools. It is wise for churches to link the environment and ministry so children make the connection. Prepare the space for making the bird feeders.

1. Cover the table for easy cleanup.
2. Add birdseed to plates and place on the table.
3. Cut string to create a large loop for hanging the bagel on a tree branch. Set the string aside.
4. Set out a half bagel and one knife per child.
5. Place some of the suet on a plate for easy access.

Supplies:

- paper or a covering for the table
- ½ stale bagel per child
- unsalted suet or lard
- birdseed in a pie plate or paper plate
- table knives for spreading the suet
- string
- waxed paper or plastic bags for carrying home
- “Bagel Bird Feeders,” Attachment: Activity 5

Direct the children in making bird feeders using the instructions on the attachment. Then ask the children the following questions.

- How do you help animals or creation?
- Why are your actions important?

- Who do you know who has the gift of caring for creation?
- How is your care of creation a ministry?
- If more people viewed caring for creation as a ministry how might the Earth respond?

During the project state how the children are serving God and creation, especially birds and probably a few squirrels.

6 Serving at Church

Leader preparation: Read 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. This activity helps children be a “letter of Christ” for your congregation. The activity includes greeting and ushering for a worship service. You will need to check with the greeting and ushering teams to determine possible dates for the children to help them. You will need to communicate any service dates with parents or guardians, as well as expectations for behavior and attire. Invite an usher and greeter to the group to teach the children what they need to do.

Supplies:

- Bible
- invited guest usher and greeter

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1–6 to the children. Ask the children how they might serve the congregation, being like a “letter of Christ.” Celebrate their gifts. Tell them that they are going to help with greeting and ushering for a worship service. Introduce your guests and explain what they do. Engage the guests and the children in a discussion on the gifts of ministry needed for greeters and ushers using the following questions. The children may have some answers, and the usher and greeter may want to help the children understand these ministries.

- What does a greeter do?
- How can you tell a greeter from a normal worshipper?
- How is greeting a ministry?
- What special things does a greeter need to know prior to greeting?
- How is being a greeter like being a “letter of Christ?”
- What do the ushers do?
- Who prepares, prints, and folds the bulletins? Or, who prepares the worship computer presentations?
- What ministries do ushers have during the worship service?
- Who is responsible for any needed first aid during worship?
- How are parents contacted if the nursery staff needs them?
- How is the offering collected?
- Why is the offering dedicated?
- What gifts of ministry are needed to be an usher?
- How is being an usher like being a “letter of Christ?”

Celebrate the variety of gifts used in the two ministries. Thank your guests for being a blessing to the congregation and to your group.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Being Christ's Letters (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Ask the adults to be prepared with letters for themselves to help make words (vowels, frequently used consonants). Reflect on the ways your group is already a letter being read by the world, individually and as a larger group.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- (optional) dictionary

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1–3 as a group. Ask the children what they think it means to be a letter. Explain the metaphor—that our actions reflect what we believe about Christ. We can be a letter by ourselves, or a group can be like a letter. Ask the children how they are a letter of Christ. After a short discussion, ask the children to think of their favorite letter in the alphabet. On the newsprint ask each child to write an alphabet letter, one at a time. You or an older child may help younger ones.

As a group, create words of ministry with the letters the children provided. If there are not enough vowels, add a list of vowels to the letters. Ask nonreaders to suggest a word and determine whether the letters are available for that word. Ask someone to record the words. Tell the group that every letter is different, just like each person's gifts. But, in ministry, our gifts work together to create new ministries, like individual letters creating new words. We can be "letters of Christ" individually and as a group.

As the children leave, ask them throughout the week to notice how their gifts combine with those of other people (setting the table while an adult makes dinner or taking the dog for a walk while an adult purchases food). Ask them to be a "letter of Christ" at least once a day.

8 Humility: Giving God Credit

Leader preparation: In today's culture, parts of the two selected passages are challenging. Nehemiah states, "The God of heaven is the one who will give us success." Paul states that "our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant." Both are examples of humility, giving God credit for their actions and successes. Read Nehemiah 2:11–20 and 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. Preview the video of J. S. Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor" and reflect on when you give God credit for your actions. The piece is 8 minutes long and is a lovely example of God in every note, every breath. You may play the music and enjoy the visuals. If children want solely to listen, allow them to stretch out on the floor.

Supplies:

- Bible
- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: J. S. Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipzR9bhei_o

Ask the children the following questions.

- When you do something well, how do you feel?
- What do you say or think?
- Do you share a high five or special handshake?
- Who celebrates with you?

Ask one child to read Nehemiah 2:20 aloud. Ask another child to read 2 Corinthians 3:4–5 aloud. Ask the children who is responsible for success in both passages. Ask them why they think Nehemiah or Paul give God credit. Explain that realizing that our gifts come from God and remembering to thank God is an example of humility. “Humility” may be a new word for them. Make sure everyone understands it. Tell the children that you will play an organ piece for them that was written by Johann Sebastian Bach. Every piece of music Bach wrote was signed “SDG.” Explain that it stands for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God alone be glory.” Explain that Bach never sought fame or money, and he is one of the most famous organists and composers who has ever lived. He wanted to honor God with every note he wrote and every note he played. He was very humble about his music ministry.

Darken the room so the children watching the video can see easily or so the children preferring to listen can rest comfortably. Show the video of J. S. Bach’s “Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor.” Allow a period of silence after the piece. Ask the children to pay attention this week to who they credit for their accomplishments. Ask them to remember to thank God and to be humble.

9 Random Acts of Kindness

Leader preparation: Random acts of kindness are different from being a secret Santa. Random acts have no expectation of reward, including a thank you. Practice one random act every day as preparation for leading the activity. If you want more ideas on acts of kindness, view the website “The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation,” <http://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>, which has an abundance of ideas.

Supplies: None

Introduce the concept of random acts of kindness, if it is unknown. Engage the children by asking the following questions.

- What acts of kindness have you received recently?
- How does it feel to be treated kindly?
- Have you been kind to anyone?
- What is it like to be the giver?
- How is being kind a form of ministry?

Reflect

How can you encourage the adults and children who work with you in their Christian ministry? Do you need to refer children or adults to other ministry leaders so they are included in activities? Offer prayers for the various gifts you received today from your group and include a prayer of thanks for your gifts.

Help the children link their gifts of kindness with ministry (sharing music or cutting flowers they grew or smiling). Ask each participant to perform one random act of kindness each day.

Bagel Bird Feeders

Supplies:

- table covering
- ½ stale bagel per child
- suet or lard, preferably unsalted
- dinner knives
- birdseed
- pie plate or paper plate
- string
- waxed paper or plastic bags

Procedure:

1. Cover the table for easy clean up.
2. Add birdseed to plates and place on the table.
3. Cut string to create a large loop for hanging the bagel on a tree branch. Set the string aside.
4. Set out a ½ bagel and one knife per child.
5. Place some of the suet on a plate for easy access.
6. Ask each child to “frost” the bagel with suet. It is easier to frost only the cut side of the bagel, but the children may also frost both sides.
7. Dip the suet-covered bagel in the birdseed. Press gently so the seed is embedded.
8. Thread the string through the hole and create a double knot.
9. Put the bird’s treat in a plastic bag or wrap with waxed paper for easy transport.

Discovering Gifts of Ministry



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

The future is a grand adventure for children. They anticipate being taller, older, smarter, more coordinated, more helpful and so on. Children raised in a secure environment face a future with confidence and a sense of well being. Children from challenging environments have hopes for regular meals and healthcare, safe housing and schools. Both environments can create healthy or unhealthy families. Children raised with regular worship attendance and family devotions may not know that their ministry is important, now and in the future. They may not be aware that God will probably call them differently throughout their lives. Being in ministry with God is an adventure. What a gift for adults to share this exciting journey with children!

About this Exploration

We are not who we once were. We adapt and change along with the shifting circumstances we experience. Gifts of ministry develop throughout the duration of our lives. Our gifts are revealed, acquired, and developed as we encounter the present and are led toward expanding hope for the future. When we engage our gifts of ministry we join with God in making that hope reality, and we become the people God calls us to be.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
1 Samuel 3:1–20
Philippians 4:1–13

Leader Preparation

The two Exploration passages are understandable for children. In 1 Samuel 3:1–20 God calls Samuel as a child to serve and to be faithful. Philippians 4:1–13 is a wonderful text about the virtues and challenges of being a Christian community. Both texts are endorsements that believers and God will thrive in partnership. Review the activities, determining which work well for your group. Spend time with the Bible texts and include them in your prayers.

Prayer: *God of all ages, I learn about you in the Bible, know your involvement in my life today, and seek your guidance in the future. You are my joy and crown as I strive to stand firm in your ways. Guide and embolden me in my ministry. Amen.*

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from nine 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Church Community (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This fun game is an illustration of how individuals can work together. Individual gifts, ideas, and skills combine to function as a healthy whole unit, like a faith community. Review the activity and decide the location for the game. A indoor or outdoor space larger than a classroom, but wider than a hallway would work well. Consider how to adapt the game if you have children with mobility challenges, perhaps placing different people’s hands on wheelchair handles or guiding by a shoulder touch should they have crutches or leg braces.

Supplies: None

Enjoy this community building game.

- Find a place to stand where everyone can be seen, but they are spread apart from one another.
- The person who begins will choose another person and link arms with that person, forming a pair. The people standing and unlinked may not change locations.
- The newest person now directs where the pair will move and then links arms with another new person.
- The process of the new person leading and linking arms continues until everyone is part of the line.
- Try creating different shapes as part of a linked line. Try a circle, a square, a triangle, and a heart.

Debrief the game by asking the following questions.

- How did we get everyone in the same line?
- What did we need to do so everyone was included?
- What could we have done to include people who were outside our class and not in the room?
- Which gifts of ministry were needed in this game?

Explain that when individual members of a church link their skills, their love, and their gifts with other people at the church, we create a church community. Each person comes into the church as an individual gifted by God and stays as their own person. But the church community becomes stronger by working together. The community also becomes more flexible. It’s hard to make different shapes by yourself. With the help of others, we learn how to be more faithful to God individually and as a community. Gifts of ministry are often discovered and they are practiced in community.

2 Call of Samuel

Leader preparation: Read 1 Samuel 3:1–10, 19–20. Practice the reading.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Tell the children that Samuel is a child, and he is a student in the temple. This was a normal practice in ancient times when people in trades were apprenticed at an

with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose three activities, using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose four or five activities, using at least one activity from each category.

early age. Eli, the priest, taught and took care of Samuel. Ask the children to help you with the reading. Tell them to put their heads on the table while you read 1 Samuel 3:1–10, 19–20. When Samuel speaks ask them to lift their heads (“Samuel, Samuel”) and then to put down their heads when Samuel is finished. Help them embody Samuel resting and then awaking to speak so they understand the action. If needed, read the passage twice so they understand the story. Discuss the story with the following questions:

- Have you ever slept at the church? In Samuel’s time it was normal to learn and sleep in the same location.
- Why was the Lord seeking Samuel?
- What did God want Samuel to do?
- Why were Samuel and Eli confused?
- Who helps you listen for God?
- How do you recognize God?
- When you recognize God who helps you understand how God is calling you?

③ The Summons

Leader preparation: This is a simple tune that a child could play. Consider asking one of your young instrumentalists or singers to learn this prior to your gathering time. It will probably be too difficult for them to play while the group is singing, but everyone could learn the tune and sing a cappella, or without accompaniment. Writing the words on newsprint will make this activity easier. Write the first verse of “The Summons” lyrics on a sheet of newsprint. Obtain a music recording of “The Summons” (tune: Kelvingrove).

Supplies:

- song: “The Summons” by John Bell (tune: Kelvingrove); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0aAkOe87mo&feature=related>
- prepared newsprint with the first verse of “The Summons”
- music player

Play the music recording of “The Summons,” inviting the children to sway gently with the tune. Invite the group to sing the first verse of the song. Discuss the five questions from the first verse using the following questions.

- “Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?” What kind of relationship is needed for you to follow someone? The composer has Jesus speaking this verse. Pretend that Jesus is asking this question. How would you respond?
- “Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?” For children, everything is new. They lack the perspective which comes with experience. What new experiences have you had and what has that been like?
- “Will you let my love be shown?” How do you show Jesus’ love?
- “Will you let my name be known?” How do you share Jesus with others?
- “Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?” Honor that all of us, all ages, are on faith journeys. Honor that as we grow in Christ’s love, Christ grows in our love. The relationship works both directions. This may be a new concept for the children. How can you continue to grow in Christ’s love?

Invite the children to sing the first verse again.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Dance: Rejoice (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Create your own dance as a personal act of worship. The children may create a dance to the words in the Philippians 4:4–7 passage. They may also create a rhythm or tune that reflects the verse. Give them some creative space.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- (optional) ribbons, long strips of fabric, or rhythm instruments

Ask four children to read Philippians 4:4–7, one verse per child, pausing after each verse, as you invite the group to say the main thought or word in each verse. Have another four children read the verses again. Invite the children to create a dance for the verses. If you have a large group, divide the gathering into two groups. Enjoy the dance. Remind the children that Christians rejoice even when they are in a difficult place. Paul was in prison when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. Rejoicing is a way we honor God now and in the future, regardless of our age or our job or where we live.

5 You Are What You Think

Leader preparation: Humans have the ability to change the way their brain functions by controlling their thoughts. This is a twenty-first century scientific discovery that people of faith have observed since ancient days. This activity uses Philippians 4:8–9 where Paul asks the Philippians to think on things that are pure, just, pleasing, and worthy of praise. You may wish to listen to Sharon Begley when she was a guest on National Public Radio’s “Talk of the Nation” in 2007: “Can Thoughts and Actions Change Our Brains?” <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7131130>. This concept is also why affirmations work so well when changing behavior.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Engage the children in conversation using the following prompts.

- Describe a time when you have had an opinion and then changed it because of someone else’s opinion. (This behavior is prevalent by third grade.)
- Describe a time when you have been upset by someone else’s words.
- Describe a time when you have been influenced by others, positively or negatively.

Explain that you can change the way your brain functions by changing your thoughts. You can actually re-grow brain cells and change your emotions by your thoughts. It takes practice, but it is entirely possible. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he describes what is important to think about. Invite someone to read Philippians 4:8–9 to the group. Explain any words that the children may not understand. Ask the children what they think about Paul’s advice. Ask them what might be different in the way they behave if they could follow Paul’s words.



6 Art: Looking Ahead

Leader preparation: Read Philippians 4:4–7 and reflect how the words impact your vision of your ministry. Look at “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard and create a view of God’s world in the future.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard, https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401

Invite the children to look at the artwork “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard. Invite the children to get into pairs and imitate the posture of the two girls in the picture. Explore the picture with them using the following questions.

- What do you see?
- What do you feel?
- Why might the children have their hands to their face?
- What are you seeing or waiting to see?

Have them switch places, and ask the questions again.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Benediction (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: A benediction is words of blessing usually said by the pastor at the close of worship. In this activity the children write a benediction based on 1 Samuel 3:19–20.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper
- pencils

Read 1 Samuel 3:19–20 to the children. Notice the relationship between Samuel and God. Samuel grew in his faith and remained faithful. God made sure “none of his words fell to the ground” or fell on unreceptive hearts and ears. God assured the success of Samuel’s ministry. Samuel assured that God’s words would be heard. They were partners in ministry. Have the children get into pairs, pairing a younger child with an older child. Have the children write a benediction for their personal use. Use the following directions to guide the children in writing their benedictions.

- What would you like to remember about God? Begin the benediction with the word “may.” Example: May the God of love be with me.
- Think of a situation where you want God to be present. Example: May God be with me at school.
- Think of a gift of ministry you would like to use in this situation or place. Example: May I be kind and patient.
- Close with words of encouragement. Example: I will serve God, knowing that God and I are partners in ministry.

8 Exercise: Strength Training

Leader preparation: You will need a space with room for movement. Adapt the exercises so every child can participate.

Supplies:

- Bible

Ask the children how they get stronger. Tell them that they are going to do some exercises that will strengthen their bodies. Begin with simple stretching exercises. Add a couple more options like running in place or jumping jacks.

Invite the children to sit in a circle and read Philippians 4:13 to the group. Ask the following questions.

- What do you think this verse means?
- How do you think God strengthens us?
- What kind of faith muscles do we need for ministry? (Relationship with God, prayer, worship, service)
- How can you tell if a person is strengthened with the muscles of faith? (Confidence of God's love in crisis, regularly prays, gives God credit, reads the Bible, service to others)

Remind the children that whenever they exercise, even getting out of bed in the morning, that God strengthens them. Their job is grow their spiritual muscle a little bit every day. Everyone needs strong faith muscles to serve God in ministry.

9 Think on These Things Quilt

Leader preparation: Prepare nine four-inch by four-inch squares of construction paper for each child. Punch two holes on each side of each square, about a half inch from the side. Each child will make a paper quilt by tying the squares together with yarn. Make a quilt as a sample.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- prepared squares of construction paper, 9 squares for each child
- scissors
- yarn

Reflect

Thank you for shepherding your group. We hope you found joy with yourself, the children, and your faith journey. Spend a few moments pondering where God is calling you. Do you need to talk to someone? Would you like more information? Record your calling and put it on your mirror or on your screensaver. Let it be part of your prayers. Then decide how you want to take action. In all things, may the God of peace be with you.

Read Philippians 4:8–9 to the children. Ask the children what Paul asking the Philippians to do. Record on newsprint or a whiteboard the actions or attributes Paul mentions in this passage. Invite them to brainstorm additional items that could be added from the first part of verse 9: “Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen from me.” Examples may be worship, communion, baptism, prayer, service, music, and so on. Record their ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard as well.

Have the children take nine squares of construction paper in any colors desired. Tell them to write or draw one attribute or action that Paul mentioned or the children brainstormed on each square. Invite the children to create a paper quilt by tying together their squares with yarn into a larger square. Tell them that doing what the quilt suggests will not only bring them closer to God, but it will help them their entire life to discover their various gifts.

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