

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Intergenerational

### About this Setting

For all human beings, play time is learning time. Through play, children learn social, physical, and conceptual skills. Through play, we can simulate possibilities without having to risk the consequences of the real life situation. As adults, when we playfully engage in sports or watch movies or read novels, we can experience emotions, gain insights about ourselves or others, and even gain insights about the world. When people are learning a new skill (such as how to use a new computer program) we often use experimentation or trial-and-error learning. These, too, are dimensions of play.

Intergenerational gatherings offer rich opportunities for playful and joy-filled interaction. Older people and youth often find it much easier to be playful and spontaneous when there are children around. And children and youth delight in opportunities to interact playfully with people who are older. This kind of encounter stimulates and expands the range of experiences available to them and provides a quality of attention that they do not usually receive from adults (most adult attention is focused on discipline or teaching, not on play).

### About this Faith Practice

In today's world people of all ages need to give themselves permission to play. We believe God seeks to awaken a playful spirit among us. We invite God into this process as we seek recreation and re-creation. While it can lead us into other things, play is inherently its own reward; the experience of playing and living joyfully is—in its essence—pure hope,



delight, celebration, and song. Playing and living joyfully moves beyond prescribed forms and places. It includes ways of doing justice and moves us outside ourselves into sharing one with another. Joy is contagious; come and play!

### Intergenerational Options

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

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

For an event lasting one to two hours, choose three or four activities from the list of twelve. There are enough activities for three or four events! Or choose a single activity (15–20 minutes) to use as the activity at a community meal or other gathering. Wearing name tags is a good idea, as often older and younger members of a church do not know one another’s name.

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

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

### Exploring & Engaging Activities

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

### Discerning & Deciding Activities

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

### Sending & Serving Activities

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



## Intergenerational Leader Preparation

Philosopher Ellen Dissanayake suggests that playful, spiritual, and artistic behaviors have much in common; they are universal human activities that we seem to need as much as we need to eat, sleep, or drink. Through play and art and spiritual expression we expand the bounds of our vision. We begin to imagine life and the world (and ourselves) as they might be rather than being resigned to things as they are. Playfulness enlarges the spaces of possibility for God to act in our midst. Perhaps this is why Jesus pointed to children as signs of God’s realm in the here and now. Perhaps this is why he urged us to welcome the child as a way of welcoming God. Read Mark 9:30–37. Ponder what it means for you to “welcome the child” in this exploration. Pray for playfulness and openness to God-with-us as you prepare to meet with the intergenerational group that has gathered for this event.

Prayer:

*Creator God,*

*May your Spirit blow through us as it did at the birth of creation.*

*Keep us attuned to your presence and alert to your wisdom.*

*Help us to honor one another as bearers of your holy imprint;*

*Inspire us as we seek to share the gifts you have entrusted to our care. Amen.*



## Exploration: Discovery

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Mark: 9:30–37**



### 1 “Shoe” and Tell (Exploring and Engaging) (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Be aware that some people are very sensitive about their feet.

**Supplies:** None

Gather in a circle. Ask everyone in the group to take off one shoe and put it in a pile in the middle of the circle. Mix up the pile of shoes; ask everyone to select a shoe that is not his or her own. Give these instructions:

- find the person who is wearing the shoe you chose
- find out two things about this person that make him or her special (ask people to tell things that most people in the room don't know)
- someone will also find you and ask you to tell two things about you that most others in the room don't know
- gather back in the circle

One person starts, tells the two things about the person whose shoe she or he has, and then returns the shoe to its owner (it is fine for the owner of the shoe to prompt if the person introducing needs help remembering). That person tells two things about the person whose shoe he or she has, then returns the shoe, and so on until all the shoes are returned.

Ask: Do we have to be or do anything in order to be special or important to God, or is it okay just to be ourselves? Invite people to explain their responses. Encourage different opinions and ideas.



### 2 Share a Laugh (Exploring and Engaging)

**Leader preparation:** If you play “Chuckle Belly,” be sensitive to those who are wearing skirts or dresses. Provide towels or blankets to cover their legs and to protect their dignity and privacy.

**Supplies:**

- towels or blankets

Ask learners to pair up facing one another. Without touching, one person tries to make the other person smile or laugh while the other person keeps a straight face. See how long you can hold out.

Or play this version of the game. Two players face one another while the rest of the group watches. The first player says: “Honey, if you love me, won’t you please, please smile?” “To which the second player replies: “Honey, I love you, but I just can’t smile.” The first player is allowed to smile, but the second player must get through the line without smiling.

Play “Chuckle Belly”: The whole group lies down on their backs in close proximity. The first person places his or her head on the lower abdomen of the next person, who in turn places his or her head on the lower abdomen of the next person. This continues until everyone is linked up with two people and the whole group is in a chain. Ask the group to keep still and silent and to concentrate. Inevitably someone will begin to laugh and the chuckle will pass through the group in a domino effect, belly to belly (hence the name “chuckle belly”).

For conversation, use these or similar questions: Ever wonder about how contagious laughs and smiles are? Why is this? How does laughter help us feel better? Can laughter ever make someone feel badly? Does God value laughter? In what way is laughter important in your life?



## Exploration: Scripture

### 3 Tug of Peace: A Cooperative Game (Exploring and Engaging)

**Leader preparation:** Depending on the size of the group, you may want to divide into teams of no more than ten people each. Be sure there is an intergenerational mix on each team.

**Supplies:**

- a length of heavy rope or nylon strap, one for each team
- Bible

Play some games in which there are no winners or losers. In “Tug of Peace” everyone works together to achieve a goal. First, have the group sit in a circle with their legs pointing in toward the center. Pass the rope around the group so that it forms a circle, with everyone holding on with both hands. Work cooperatively to slowly tighten the rope until it pulls the whole group up into a standing position at the same time. It takes a bit of practice to get this right and everyone has to hold onto the rope and work together. See if they can slowly lower themselves back to seating position in the same way.



Then, try this: Everyone forms a line with one person directly behind the person in front, hands firmly on the shoulders of that person. Then form the line into a small circle so that the first person in the line now has his or her hands on the shoulders of the last person. Finally, see if the whole circle can sit down all at one time without breaking the hold on each other or the circle. When it works, everyone will sit on the lap of the person behind his or her.

Read aloud Mark 9:33–34 or tell the story to the group. Ask: What were the disciples arguing about? How did Jesus want them to behave? In our games, what might have happened if someone had tried to “win” or to be “the greatest”?

### ④ Images of Greatness: Body Sculpture (Discerning and Deciding)

**Leader preparation:** Be sensitive to those who need lots of personal space. They may not want to be sculpted. Perhaps they could be a photographer of the sculptures.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible

Ask learners to pair up. Invite one person to be the sculptor and the other person the “clay.” The sculptor shapes the clay by gently positioning the person into a shape or motioning for that person to move into a certain position. Make sure sculptors know to move gently and respectfully, taking someone's elbow and guiding an arm position, gently placing a hand on someone's head to tilt it forward. Have the sculptors shape their “clay” into a position of someone who is mourning or sad. Invite people to look around, taking turns, to see the other sculptures.

Then have the sculptors shape a person who is full of joy. Again, pause to look around at what others have made. Switch roles so that the person who was the sculptor becomes the clay, and the other the sculptor. Repeat the activity.

Read aloud Mark 9:33–34. Invite sculptors to create an image of “greatness” the way the disciples thought of it. Now create an image of greatness the way Jesus intended. Again, give the participants time to look at what others have created.

Questions for conversation: What did you notice in the sculptures that people made of greatness? Why do you think Jesus choose a little child as an example for the disciples?

Option: Have the whole group make a collective sculpture of “welcoming the child.” Ask: What do you like about this sculpture? What are some ways that we can welcome children?

### ⑤ Child of God (Sending and Serving)



## Exploration: Discipleship

**Leader preparation:** Bring a recording of joyful music.

**Supplies:**

- a recording of joyful music

Say aloud a paraphrase of Galatians 4:4, such as: “You are a child of God. God’s spirit is in your heart. You are not a servant or a nobody with God. You are a child, an important and special member of God’s own family.” Ask learners to mill about the room while the music is playing. When the music stops, they say to the person next to them, “*You are a child of God. God’s spirit is in your heart.*” Play the music again and have people move about. Repeat a few times. Then, have people say to one another. “*I am a child of God, God’s spirit is in my heart.*”

Talk about how it feels to hear and say these phrases. Ask questions such as the following to start a conversation: What is it like for you to think of having God’s spirit in your heart? How can we help others experience a feeling that they too are children of God?

### 6 Make a “Jump for Joy” Obstacle Course (Exploring and Engaging)

**Leader preparation:** Make accommodations for persons with mobility restrictions, such as people who use walkers or wheelchairs or who have leg braces. How will everyone be able to participate in this activity?

**Supplies:**

- masking tape
- paper
- markers
- crayons
- a rope or skipping rope, chairs, pillows, gym mats, or other items readily available in your learning space that may help create an obstacle course (obstacles)

Invite learners to pair up. Each pair must come up with an interesting way to jump: for example, making a hopscotch pattern with masking tape to jump through, jumping off a step, creating a pretend “river” to jump across, a way of skipping or jumping on the spot. When every pair has come with a jumping idea, create a kind of jumping obstacle course together—a sequence of jumps. Use chairs or whatever is available to mark off the course and tape up signs with numbers or instructions for each part of the course. For example, learners might have to jump like a kangaroo to get from point A to point B, then they may have to jump over a rope (or use a skipping rope), then jump backwards for another section or do five jumping jacks.

Have everyone go through the jump course. Then gather in a circle to talk about jumping for joy. Ask questions such as the following to guide the conversation: Have you ever felt like jumping for joy? What made you feel that way? What kinds of things make you especially joyful? What kinds of activities help you to express your joy or happiness? How can we share that joy with others?



## Exploration: Christian Tradition



### 7 Make Resurrection Rolls (Exploring and Engaging)

**Leader preparation:** Make copies of the recipe for resurrection rolls, Attachment: Activity 7. Gather supplies for making resurrection rolls; test the recipe first if you are not sure how to make the rolls.

#### Supplies:

- recipe: "Resurrection Rolls," Attachment: Activity 7
- flat cookie tray
- prepared dough for crescent rolls and other ingredients on the recipe
- lifter/spatula
- access to a stove or toaster oven
- Bibles

Make resurrection rolls according to the recipe. While the rolls are baking, talk about the resurrection story. Ask: What are some of the different resurrection stories you know from the Bible? Invite participants to share a story if they know one. Then read aloud Mark 16:1–8. Ask: Why do you think the story of the resurrection is so important in our Christian tradition? How does this story connect with your life today? Gather back to enjoy the rolls together. Ask the younger participants why they think the rolls might be called resurrection rolls? (*Note:* they may come up with a variety of interesting responses—prepare to be surprised!)



### 8 Travel through Time (Discerning and Deciding)

**Leader preparation:** Make an imaginary "time traveling" device such as a small self-standing tent draped with a Mylar emergency blanket (found in many first aid kits); a decorated appliance box; and a table draped with a large piece of black fabric. Be sure to provide a device in which people with limited mobility can enter.

#### Supplies:

- copies of the letters from "Time Travel Letters," Attachment: Activity 8

Explain that you are going to take an imaginary journey through time, visiting some people who have experienced trouble or persecution. At each stopping point, you will hear something that might give hope to the people who are facing that situation. Invite learners to enter the "time travel machine" and travel with you to the first stop. At each place you visit, read the first part of the letter that tells where you are. Invite learners to imagine the scene. Then read the second part of the letter. Gather back in your own time zone to talk about the places you visited. Ask learners to think about what gives hope or comfort to people in difficult situations in the past, or today.



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### ⑨ Build a Church that Welcomes the Child (and Youth) (Discerning and Deciding)

**Leader preparation:** To adapt this activity for people with arthritis or other joint and muscle limitations, use building blocks and create a large church. They may want to use chairs and tables as well as the building blocks.

**Supplies:**

- play dough or modeling clay
- wooden craft sticks
- toothpicks
- plastic to protect work surfaces (if needed)

Divide the participants into groups of three to five people. Give each group supplies. Ask groups to use the craft supplies to make a model of a church that truly welcomes children. When groups are ready, take a “gallery tour” of the creations. Ask those who are viewing to talk about what they see. Then ask the creators to talk about what they made and what it represents to them.

Consider together what it might mean for your faith community to be truly welcoming of the child—the child in each one of us, the children of the congregation, children and youth in our community.

Allow lots of time for the creative process, but encourage participants to work with the clay as they decide what to create rather than talking about their plan first. Encourage groups to play with the modeling clay and let the experience guide them into a vision of what such a church might be like. Don't sit and talk about it; do it!

### ⑩ Take a Community Tour (Discerning and Deciding)

**Leader preparation:** Designate areas of the Fellowship Hall as places in the community where people gather, such as a grocery store, a shopping mall, a movie theater, a school, a church, a park. Put up a sign to identify each area.

**Supplies:**

- signs for public places

Divide learners into teams of five to eight. Ask them to imagine they are an intergalactic delegation, visiting earth for the first time. They are here to prepare a scientific report on the human species—in particular, they are examining what makes humans happy and what problems or troubles humans face. Ask the space delegations to tour the area in which you have designated public places. In each place, the team is to make a list of what they might observe in that public place. Have the intergalactic teams report back and share their lists with the other groups. Ask the space visitors, still in role, what advice they would give humans about what they should do to increase happiness and well-being on earth.





## Exploration: Future and Mission

### ① Song Fest (Sending and Serving)

**Leader preparation:** Invite an accompanist to assist the group in singing the songs. You may want to prepare PowerPoint slides of the lyrics of the songs. Invite different age groups to lead each song.

**Supplies:**

- songs: “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy); “Over My Head” (African American traditional); “Say It! Sing It!” (Attachment 11); “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy”; “If You’re Happy and You Know it”
- a variety of rhythm instruments
- hymnbooks

Enjoy singing all the songs together. Make up simple actions to go with some of the songs. Use rhythm instruments to accompany the songs. Invite the participants to name other joyful songs to sing. Look through your congregation’s hymnal to find joyful songs.



### ② Make a Joyful Painting (Sending and Serving)

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the poster “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong. Set up different stations with room for six to eight painters at each station.

**Supplies:**

- poster: “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>
- art supplies: either acrylic paints, medium width brushes and prepared canvas boards or oil pastels (a type of crayon available in art supply and craft stores)
- heavyweight paper
- cups of water for wetting and washing brushes
- paint smocks
- access to a sink for clean up

Display the poster “Joyful Dance” and invite learners to look at the image. Pay attention to the way the artist has used the colors in short wide strokes, with the colors overlapping and blending in. Ask: How does this way of using the brush strokes help make the painting feel like a joyful dance? Invite learners to copy this technique in their art. Give lots of time for learners to experiment with color and form. Try to resist the urge to praise or compliment them on their art. Instead, acknowledge it by noticing what is there. For example, “I see how you have used red overlapping with yellow in this section.” Invite all the artists to talk about what they have created. Give lots of uninterrupted and unhurried time.

For those who don’t want to paint, set up a poetry station where they can create cinquain or free verse poetry.

A cinquain is a very short poem. In its simplest form, it has five lines:

*line 1:* one word

*line 2:* two words

*line 3:* three words



*line 4: two words*

*line 5: one word*

Example:

happiness  
is when  
just like Jesus  
we show  
love

Plan time for everyone to share their creations for the whole group. Perhaps the paintings could become cover art for future worship bulletins. Publish the poetry in the church newsletter. Celebrate all the gifts with applause that gives praise to God.

### Reflect

Recall some of the highlights of this intergenerational experience. What did you enjoy most? When did you notice participants feeling free to play and enjoy themselves? When did you feel that participants were most engaged with the activity or with one another? How was the session able to involve learners of all ages? When did you feel that some were left on the margins? What might you do differently another time? Take note of your own learning from this event. What did you discover about playing and living joyfully in your own life?

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Attachment: Activity 7

## Resurrection Rolls

These rolls are baked with a marshmallow inside. When they are baked, the marshmallow melts, leaving behind an empty space like the empty tomb.

### Ingredients (increase quantities for larger numbers of learners)

- 1 (10 ounce) can refrigerated crescent dinner rolls
- 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 8 large marshmallows
- ¼ cup melted butter
- Oil for greasing baking sheet

### Directions

- Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C).
- Grease a baking sheet with oil.
- Separate the crescent rolls into individual triangles.
- Put cinnamon and sugar in a small bowl. Stir with a small spoon.
- Dip a marshmallow into melted butter, then roll it in sugar mixture. Put the marshmallow in the center of the triangle of dough. Wrap the marshmallow in dough by folding up the edges of the triangle. Pinch the seams together tightly so the marshmallow is completely sealed in. Place each completed roll on a baking sheet.
- Bake in a preheated oven until rolls are light brown, about 15 minutes.



Attachment: Activity 8

## Time Travel Letters

### Letter 1: Judah (southern Palestine) 740 BCE

Greetings, time travelers.

You have traveled about 2,750 years back in time. You are in the kingdom of Judah, near the place where Jesus was born, but Jesus won't be born for another 740 years. This is a dry, deserted place. The sun is hot and the brown hills seem to shimmer in the heat. The people of this region are very worried. A brutal civil war has just ended in this tiny little kingdom and giant nations all around are gathering their armies and gaining strength. If you look into the distance you can see a cloud of dust. An army is on the move. (Pause to imagine the scene.)

Other nations want to claim Judah as their own. The little kingdom has no hope—it cannot possibly defend itself. War is inevitable. Or is it? The prophet Isaiah hasn't given up hope. You hear him cry out in his clear, deep voice:

Do not give up hope. Turn back to God. God promises that a good leader will come to power, someone who isn't corrupt like our kings, someone who really cares about the poor and the weak. He will make good decisions; he will lead with strength and wisdom. Soon, peace will come."

### Letter 2: Christian Catacombs near Rome, 205 CE

Time travelers, I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ. The year is 205. We are standing in a cool dark passageway, deep underground, just at the edge of the city of Rome. This is a catacomb; see those little alcoves dug into the walls—those are burial places for Christians. The only light comes from torches placed in the walls. In the dim light, you can see simple paintings and carved designs. Carved into some of the walls are shapes that look like fish. Here, Christians gather to celebrate their

funeral rites, and the anniversaries of the martyrs and of the dead. (*Pause to imagine the scene.*)

Look, a small group is gathering at the end of the passageway. They are here because another Christian has been tortured and killed by the Romans in the recent persecution of the Christians. If you draw closer, you will hear that they are singing a hymn. The words remind you of something you heard in the Bible.

A shoot will grow from the fallen tree  
A leaf of green for the world to see  
The Spirit of justice and wisdom and power  
The Spirit of Jesus is with us this hour.

### Letter 3: Charleston, South Carolina, 1769

Greetings, time travelers, you have arrived in Charleston, South Carolina. The year is 1769. You have arrived at a brutal time in the history of this little town. A slave auction has just taken place. Ninety-four slaves—39 men, 15 boys, 24 women, 16 girls—who were captured in Sierra Leone were sold at the dockside today. They have been harshly treated since their capture—beatings and torture have left many scars both inside and out. They have watched many family members and friends die in the long journey to America. And now they are being separated once again. (*Pause to imagine the scene.*)

As the slaves stand in chains in the blazing sun, they hear someone singing. Listen carefully, and you will notice that the singer is also an African slave. This is what you hear:

Over my head I hear music in the air  
Over my head I hear music in the air  
Over my head I hear music in the air  
There must be a God somewhere.



Attachment: Activity 11

### Say It! Sing It!

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If you can say it! Sing it! Let peo-ple know how you feel. If you can

pray it, play it, know it, show it, let them know God's love is real! \_\_\_\_\_

Last time, Fine

1. Ma - ny are search-ing for mean-ing, mak-ing their way all a - lone.  
 2. We are to help\_ one an - oth - er; help one an - oth - er be - long.

Hop - ing that some-one will guide them. In - to the path that leads home.  
 Wel-come the weak and the wear - y. Join in the fam - i - ly song.

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