



## Playing & Living Joyfully

### 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!

### Let's Begin...

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

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



**Discovery**



**Scripture**



**Discipleship**



**Christian Tradition**



**Context and Mission**



**Future and Vision**

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

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



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

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

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- For a 1½ to 2-hour session, you can use all 9 activities.

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

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

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

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

#### Ordering Posters

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

#### Art

Six posters are used with the faith practice Playing and Living Joyfully and may be ordered by clicking on the links provided.

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

“Allerheiligen” (All Saints) by Wassily Kandinsky (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

“Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

“Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources1>)

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

“Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>)

“Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>)

“Dancing ‘Til Dawn” by Marianne Millar (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>)

#### Music

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

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You, Tune: Hymn to Joy (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>)

Say it Sing it, (Sing! Prayer and Praise! #188) (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong11>)

Over My Head, Tune: African-American traditional

(Lyrics: <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12> YouTube: <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a>)

### **Scripture**

Twelve Bible passages are used with Playing and Living Joyfully, two with each Exploration.

Discovery	1 John 1:1 – 2:2	Psalm 30
Scripture	Mark: 9:30-37	Philippians 2:1-13
Discipleship	Galatians 4:4-7	Revelation 7:9-17
Christian Tradition	Isaiah 11:1-10	Song of Solomon 2:8-13
Context and Mission	John 12:20-36	Luke 1:39-56
Future and Vision	Mark 16:1-8	Psalm 112

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# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages seven to eleven) have a strong sense of fairness and engage in concrete thinking. In this Exploration as we invite them to discover playing and living joyfully, take time to ensure everyone has a chance to play or participate in activities. Children at this age may have already experienced loss or sorrow. Make time to hear their concerns and to validate feelings in addition to joy. Assure them that God is with them always. Choosing joy can give them strength in other times. Depending on the group's context, participants may be somewhere on the spectrum from oversaturated with electronic toys played alone to not having many toys or safe places to play. Their school setting may or may not encourage play depending on the availability of funding for physical education, arts, music and other programs. Some of the children may or may not have had the opportunity to play spontaneously or noncompetitively. They may need guidance to play together cooperatively and permission to use their imaginations. Games in which success depends on the whole group reinforce Christian life as communal and cooperative.

### About this Exploration

Playing and living joyfully is a legitimate expression of our connection with the divine. Living in joy does not require a particular time or place; it requires a willingness to divest ourselves of the expectations society has imposed upon us. To uncover holy joy in our lives, we must find a place of centering and spontaneity. We allow ourselves to return to what has been present in us since birth: the innate wonder, abandon, and delight of life in relationship with God.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**1 John 1:1–2:2**  
**Psalm 30**

**Leader Preparation**

First find a quiet time or place to read the scriptures that guide this Exploration, 1 John 1:1–2:2 and Psalm 30. Consider the excitement and joy of the author of 1 John to share the news that God is light and that Jesus offers us salvation. Consider, too, the great comfort offered in Psalm 30 of knowing God to be with us in times of trial and that with God our times of mourning can turn to dancing, that tears in the evening can transform into joy by morning. Living and playing joyfully as a practice recognizes that our circumstances may not always be cause for joy. Yet we are ever guided and buoyed up by the joy of knowing God in Christ. Release your present concerns or sorrows to God by naming them as you blow the fuzz off a dandelion. Next, compose a gratitude list to God for the people, places and events in which God has shown you joy. Perhaps you can write it in crayon or colored markers or pencils. Read the list out loud or silently. After each entry say, “Thank you, God of joy and wonder.” Now re-read the scripture passages, keeping your learners in mind. What might they be mourning? Celebrating? How might they dance their joy? How can you help them to experience the light and joy of a life in Christ?

Welcome the children to each session. You may want to establish an opening ritual of about five minutes that you will use in each session to create familiarity and comfort before leading the

**Exploring & Engaging Activities**

 **1 Sing-a-long with Joy (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Familiarize yourself with the lyrics and tune to “I’ve got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy.” (<http://www.tinyurl.com/2cmsxsxz>) Be prepared to sing with enthusiasm and joy regardless of your actual singing ability. Singing is an important component of Christian faith and an important part of living and playing joyfully with faith. Children who see adults being uninhibited will be encouraged to participate. As children learn both the fun songs and traditional hymns of the faith, they will be able to draw on these songs to fuel their life journey both inside and outside of church. This activity is designed with the idea of pure enjoyment and fellowship that comes from playing, or in this case, singing together.

**Supplies:**

- lyrics to the song “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy”
- lyrics printed on newsprint or whiteboard (optional)

**Lyrics**

I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy,  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart,  
I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy,  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart to stay.

*Refrain:*

And I’m so happy, so very happy  
I’ve got the love of Jesus in my heart.  
(Down in my heart.)  
And I’m so happy, so very happy  
I’ve got the love of Jesus in my heart.

I’ve got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus,  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart,  
I’ve got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus,  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart to stay.

*Refrain*

I’ve got the wonderful love of my precious redeemer,  
way down in the depths of my heart, (where?)  
way down in the depths of my heart, (where?)  
way down in the depths of my heart,  
I’ve got the wonderful love of my precious redeemer,  
Way down in the depths of my heart, (where?)  
Way down in the depths of my heart to stay.

*Refrain*

This simple sing-a-long requires only the words to “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy.” Check with participants to see how many know the song already; then teach the



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children in new activities. An opening ritual may involve allowing one child to turn on an electric candle or to light a real one. It may also involve opening the Bible to the suggested passage(s) for this practice and having a child read the passage or a key verse. Check in with the children for joys and concerns and offer a prayer to God about their intercessions. Conclude the opening moments by teaching the children to sing the chorus of “Say It! Sing It!” by JoEllen Miller. As they become familiar with the chorus, add the verses. Similarly, you may wish to have a closing ritual in which the children name where they felt joy or saw God during the session. Thank them for their participation, and then again sing at least the chorus of “Say It! Sing It!” to close the time together.

*Prayer: God, I give thanks for your healing and leading in my life. Help me to guide my learners from a place of joy. I know you are with me and with them wherever we are and however we are feeling in this moment. Give me the strength to try new activities. Keep me open to the Spirit’s leading in the happy accidents, momentary wonders, and spontaneous joy that comes from playing for you and with you. 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.

song. When everyone is comfortable, lead the children in singing at a normal pace, then faster and faster. Other variations are limitless. Sing slower, quieter, louder, with your eyes closed, lying down, while dancing and so forth. Once the song is learned, you may add verses, or have the children create new ones. This activity is bound to get children laughing as they have both success singing the words slowly and then experience the tongue twisting nature of the song as the pace is increased.



### 2 Dancing with Joy

**Leader preparation:** In this activity, learners will respond to a painting of dance and create their own dance of joy. Familiarize yourself with the painting “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong. Work your way through the activity instructions so you may be prepared to start or restart conversation with the children. Gather some recordings of dance music in a variety of styles from hip hop to waltz. You may find your public library to be a good source of recorded music in different styles.

#### Supplies:

- poster: “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>
- CD player or mp3 player
- recordings of dance music and a recording of hymns or other Christian songs of joy and praise
- space for children to dance and move around

Show the learners the picture “Joyful Dance” and invite their response. At first, do not reveal the title of the picture. Let them look at it and respond. You may ask them what they think is happening in the picture, what feeling they think is expressed, what elements in the picture create that feeling. Allow for a variety of responses. What would they name this picture? Next, tell them the name of the picture. Allow them to make additional comments about the picture.

Invite them to stand up and free dance to a lively song or to show off their favorite dance moves. If some in the group have mobility issues, invite them (and the whole group) to hand dance—this involves using simply the hands to dance. Using one or both arms, wave and move the hands in a variety of ways in keeping with the tempo of the music. For those who may be self-conscious, invite everyone to sit and use their hands to dance with their eyes closed. You may adapt this activity to fit any mobility or sight issues. Be creative, and invite the whole group to try the experience.

Invite them to name their favorite songs and groups. Make notes of whom they mention as you may then invite the children to bring recordings to future sessions, or you may find CDs in the library. Engage their music and at the same time help them learn the traditional and contemporary songs of the Christian faith. Play three or four different kinds of dance music and again ask the children to make up a dance to each.

Tell them that the scriptures, the story of our life with God, record many times in which people danced to show joy or thanksgiving to God (Exodus 15:1–21, Psalm 30, Psalm 150, 2 Samuel 6:12–15), and that one way to practice playing joyfully at church is through a special kind of dancing called liturgical dance. In this dancing one uses dance as a way to worship God, usually by enacting the words of a prayer or hymn or by showing a story from scripture. Invite the children to dance again to a hymn or to show how they would dance to praise God. Conclude with a circle dance like the one pictured in the poster.

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- 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.

### 3 Picturing Joy

**Leader preparation:** This activity invites you and your learners to explore and engage the idea of joy. Children will use their whole brain in naming and describing joy and in creating pictures of joy. You will need to set up the room so that each learner has space to create. You can hear the tune and read the lyrics of the hymn at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>.

**Supplies:**

- whiteboard or newsprint and markers
- blank paper and markers and crayons
- tables or floor space or other flat surfaces for making art
- CD player or other device and a recording of “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy)

Engage the children in a brainstorm about joy. What is joy? What does joy look like? Sound like? Feel like? Taste like? Smell like? Ask them to name people and places or activities that bring them joy. Children may be tempted to respond with the names of material goods like a doll or favorite toy. Acknowledge their contribution and yet see if you can get them to name the person who gave the item or the event for which they received the item. The intent here is to begin to recognize that joy is not contained in things, but is of God. Record their answers on newsprint or whiteboard that all can see. Be sure to chime in with your own responses after the children are finished.

Distribute blank paper, markers, crayons or other art supplies. Invite the children to create a picture of joy. While they are working, play a recording of “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” or other hymns or children’s songs relating to joy.

When everyone has finished, stop the music, and let each learner share his or her creation. Ask them to describe their artwork. Place the artwork on the walls of your setting to decorate your room or area throughout the sessions related to living and playing joyfully, or until the next meeting of the group. Perhaps you can use some of the art as a bulletin cover in church or display it in a well-traveled part of your setting or sanctuary. Whenever you return the art to the children, thank them for their contribution. Invite them to tell their guardians about their creation and to have a discussion about joy.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 “Who Is Welcome?” Drama (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Mark 9:33–37 and remember that this passage is about more than Jesus literally affirming children. In this passage Jesus affirms whomever is the least in society. Children in Jesus’ day did not have any power whatsoever, nor did they have a voice in making decisions in their communities. Jesus calls us to serve one another and to welcome whomever into a life of faith. Learners will read the scripture, take turns acting it out, and then discuss whom Jesus includes in God’s welcome and how that guides the way we are to behave as Christians today.

#### Rest and Work Scramble

This game is a version of the old favorite Fruit Basket Upset. Invite children to name some regular activities they do each week. Use their suggestions to make a list for the game. Set the chairs in a circle so that you have one less chair than children. Choose one child to be “It,” and have the rest of the children sit in the

chairs. “It” stands in the middle of the circle and calls out “Everyone who ... [naming an activity from the list].” Everyone who participated in that activity during the past week must leave their chair and find an empty one in the circle. At the same time “It” attempts to sit in one of the empty chairs. The child who is left without a chair becomes the next “It.” Repeat until you have gone through the list, or the children lose interest. If “It” wants everyone in the circle to move, he or she should call out, “Who will rest next week?” Everyone must get up and find a new chair.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles or printouts of Mark 9:33–37 (preferably in a child-friendly translation, such as *Today’s New International Version*, the *Good News Bible*, or the *Common English Bible*)
- space for children to move
- handout with text prepared as a simple drama in which the text is marked with lines for the disciples and lines for Jesus to speak (optional)

Ask the children to talk about going to a party or parties they may have at school. How does it feel to be invited? How does it feel to be left out? Explain that in Jesus’ day many different kinds of people were not included in community or group activities. Children in particular were not given much consideration. Only a very few would have any toys, the opportunity to go to school, or time to play. They had to work. Jesus teaches us that God is available to anyone, including children, with no one left out. In the Bible, we hear a story about how Jesus tells his friends to include people.

Read aloud the scripture. Ask learners what they heard Jesus calling his friends to do. Invite the learners to read the scripture to themselves, then invite a learner or learners to read the passage aloud. Divide the group into roles, having some play the disciples, someone to play Jesus, and someone to play the child. Ask the children to act out the passage and then switch a few times so that any child who wants may have a turn to speak Jesus’ words or to be the welcomed one or the disciples. Conclude the drama time and ask the children to name who is left out in their lives or in the world as they see it. Ask them to name ways they are called to be welcoming to those who are left out.

**5 Dancing the Psalm**

**Leader preparation:** Familiarize yourself with Psalm 30, including the major actions described in each verse. Imagine how you might act these out so you are prepared in case the children get stuck and cannot come up with a motion to use. A list of the actions by verse include: extolling God, crying for help, being healed, being lifted up from illness, singing praises to God for God’s help, sadness turning to joy, standing firm, calling out to God for help, mourning turning into dancing, being clothed in joy, thanking God forever. The beauty of liturgical dance is that it does not require a specific body type or physical skill. Even learners with limited mobility may participate from a seated or other position. There is no requirement that dancing happen only with the feet. Encourage children to use their arms and hands, facial expressions, and other movements to convey the meaning of the psalm. If access to music is difficult, create a liturgical pantomime instead.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles or enough copies of Psalm 30 for each child (preferably in a child-friendly translation, such as *Today’s New International Version*, the *Good News Bible*, or the *Common English Bible*)



- CD or other music playing device and a recording of instrumental music with no vocals, the mood or tempo of the music should begin slow and somber, and then move to a more joyful sound consider jazz, classical, or even electronic music
- scarves, bandanas, ribbons, or pieces of material in various bright and somber colors for the children to use in their dance (optional)

Read Psalm 30. Invite the learners to take turns with each child who is willing to read a verse aloud. Ask the group to name the actions in each verse. You may need to help them with some of the less common words like extolling. Make a simple list of the actions. Ask them if they have had an experience in which they were sad or having trouble and needed help. Who helped them, and how did it turn out? Remind them they may always talk to caring adults and also as Christians they may turn to God in prayer both to ask for help and to give thanks.

Invite them to create movement that will illustrate each verse of Psalm 30; then practice the movements. Play some instrumental music, and encourage them to dance the psalm. Dance along with them. This activity could be used in worship with additional practice times during a liturgical season such as Easter or perhaps your group can use it as a mission activity to share joy with residents at a nursing home or preschool or even the younger children in your setting. If you have scarves or other colorful pieces of material encourage the children to use them as part of their dance.

### 6 Sharing the Light of God Tag

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 John 1:1–2:2 to yourself. Next read it aloud enough times so that you are familiar with the text. Practice reading it with the joy and enthusiasm that its author shows in the choice of words. Keep the light next to you and have tape and strips of paper and a marker nearby. You may want to play a short version of the tag game first using just a few children so that all will understand how it works before engaging everyone in the game.

#### **Supplies:**

- strong flashlight or battery-operated camping lantern
- tape
- blank paper cut into strips
- marker
- a copy of 1 John 1:1–2:2 from *The Message* (optional)

Talk to the children about walking in the light of God. Following God requires that we be honest about how we live and that we share the good news of Jesus. In Jesus' day many people were having a difficult time getting along with one another. Ask the children if they can name some situations where people are not getting along today. Share with the children that God brought Jesus into the world to teach everyone another better way to be a community. Jesus devoted his life to showing the world that God loves the world and asks people in the entire world to love God and their neighbors. Jesus shows us how important it is to live a joyful faithful life. Sometimes people forget this and do things to hurt themselves or one another. When they hurt themselves or one another they also hurt God. This is a way to think about sin. Jesus asks us to confess or tell the truth if we do sin and to stop doing the hurtful action. Jesus promises God will forgive us. Ask the children to name some behaviors that might be hurtful to others and to God (examples: cheating, stealing, fighting, calling names, not sharing, telling lies, excluding someone). Write the hurtful actions on strips of paper. Next, ask the children what it feels like when somebody is kind or they are doing a good deed. Ask them to name some helping actions that show God's love. Write these things on strips of paper and tape them lightly to the flashlight or lantern.

Tell the children that when we or others do hurtful things, it is like there is no sunshine, only dark clouds in the sky. It can be like being in a room with no light or having a heart like the Grinch whose heart was three sizes too small when he stole Christmas from the people of Whoville. If we cannot see clearly, or we are acting in a way that hurts ourselves or others, we can miss goodness all around us. When we walk with God and share Jesus' teaching we walk in the light.

Invite them to play a game that will help them practice walking in the light of God. Give a strip of paper with one of the sins or hurtful behaviors on it to each learner. Have them stand up and begin milling around with the lights dimmed in the room. Pick one child to carry the flashlight with the helpful behaviors on it. On your signal the children run as in the game of tag. When the person with God's light catches or tags one of the players, they take away the hurtful behavior paper strip and tape on a helping behavior. Then both children run to the next and so on until everyone is transformed by God's light and is wearing a helping behavior. Have everyone sit in a circle, and read aloud John 1:1-2:2 to the children. Invite their response. (Note: reading from *The Message* can help bring the scripture passage to life.)

### Sending & Serving Activities



#### 7 Say It! Sing It! Circle Game (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Learn the words to "Say It! Sing It!" by JoEllen Miller. Be prepared to sing a cappella if other options are not available. This activity will help learners practice joy in the art of welcoming one another to the circle and sending one another out with a blessing. You may wish to share with your learners that as Christians we invite people in, and when we go forth into our lives outside of church we bless one another till we meet again. Living and playing joyfully means to be welcoming and to be blessing.

Supplies:

- space for the children to move around and to make a circle
- CD player or other way to play the music to "Say It! Sing It!" by JoEllen Miller, or a musician who can lead the song, <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong11>
- Attachment: Activity 7

Tell the group that we are called as Christians to serve one another and to share the love of God with one another. One way to do that is to cooperate with one another so that no one is left out. Tell them they will be playing a circle singing game. Have everyone stand in the middle. Invite each one to pretend to be lost and searching (they might make their hands into a telescope or bring one hand up over their eyes as they look around; they may kneel down and search the ground). As you sing the song, have them keep looking. Tell them you will be looking with them. When you call a name, that person is to come stand by you as you keep singing. Then that child calls out the name of another person in the room. Eventually everyone is standing in a circle facing each other singing the song. Close the game with everyone turning to their neighbor and saying, "The joy of Jesus be with you always!" The other person answers, "And also with you!" Switch positions and say it to your opposite neighbor. The leader then moves into the circle and tells the group, "The joy of Jesus be with you always!" To which they answer, "And also with you!" Everyone says, "Amen" together.

### 8 Serve One Another

**Leader preparation:** Chill the juice, or purchase it cold just before the session starts. Wash and prepare the fruit. Place the cookies or crackers in a bowl or on a tray. Give the snack a more festive and fun feeling than normal snack time. This is a special meal because all who are involved are going to be servants to the others.

Supplies:

- cold fruit juice
- plate of easy-to-eat fruit such as grapes, bananas cut in half, strawberries, apples or pears cut in slices
- toothpicks for picking up the fruit
- goldfish crackers or cookies on a plate with a spoon or tongs to serve
- party napkins
- party plates
- cups
- disposable kitchen gloves in place of the tongs for the servers to wear (optional)
- CD player or other music device and a recording of joyful music

In Mark 9:30–39, Jesus says that being a servant to all is one mark of being a disciple. It is a joy to be a servant of God, to follow Jesus in loving one another. A way to show that love is to serve one another rather than to demand special treatment or first dibs or to hoard good things. In another story Jesus showed he was a servant by washing his friends' feet before they ate together. Tell the children they are going to have a party if they are each willing to help serve. Appoint one child each to pass out napkins, cups, and plates. Appoint another child to carry the tray of fruit to each person; if a friend wants some, the server will serve it using the toothpicks. Appoint another child to hand out cookies or crackers in the same manner, and either yourself or an older child to pour the juice. When all are served, invite a child to give thanks to God for the feast and then everyone may eat. Play upbeat Christian music while the children eat. If someone asks for seconds, have the server bring it to them. As the leader you first bring a garbage can around to let the children throw away their napkins. Then have each turn to a neighbor and collect that person's plate and cup and put it in recycling or garbage bin. Ask the children how it felt to serve and be served. Close the activity by everyone saying, "Thank you, God!" and "Thank you, everyone!" or a similar expression of gratitude.

### 9 Pass It On

**Leader preparation:** This activity will give the children and opportunity to share their joy with one another as a blessing for going forth into their week. You may want to encourage them also to choose one person in their family or a friend with whom they can share God's love in the week to come.

Supplies:

- blank sheets of 8½" x 11" paper
- colored markers, pens, or pencils

Gather the children together at tables or in a circle on the floor. Tell them that a key joy in following Christ and being a child of God is to share that love with others; in other words, to pass it on. Telling the good news is not just something that happened to people in the Bible, nor something just for the pastor to do. They can share good news and today's closing activity will be a game called "Pass It On." If they are on the floor, they will need a flat surface to write on. Invite the children

to write “I see God’s love in/when . . .” on the top of their paper. Then give the children two or three minutes to finish the sentence. Offer the children the option to write their answers in words or to create pictures depending on their ages and comfort with writing.

### Reflect

Living and playing joyfully can be countercultural when all the evidence around us suggests that worry and doubt and fear or hoarding resources would be the wisest course of action. An instance of this happened to the preacher and theologian John Wesley, whose followers became Methodists. Wesley was on a sea voyage from England when a violent storm rocked the seas on which his ship was sailing. He feared for his life. Then he noticed a group of Moravian Christians who, despite the very rough and dangerous seas, had gathered together singing hymns and dancing. Wesley was profoundly affected by their faith in God. He chose a different way of relating to God after this experience. Think about the difference choosing to live and play joyfully can make in your life if this is not already your habit. Who do you know in your faith community who lives joyfully? Ask if you can talk to them about their practice. You might also watch the film version of *Amazing Grace* that shows how William Wilberforce and a dedicated team of activists helped end the slave trade in England. Note how, though he was often sick and faced a seemingly endless battle, Wilberforce lived a joyful life of discipleship. Living and playing joyfully is both an inward and external practice. What anonymous external random acts of joy or kindness can you practice at work, at home, and at church? Practice some of these acts. Inwardly practice joy by naming each evening before sleep where you saw or felt joy in your day and by giving thanks to God for those moments.

At the end of the time period, regroup the children. Share what you have drawn or written and then pass your work to a child in the circle. That child briefly restates where or when you see’s God’s love and then shares his or her own work, then gives his or her own picture to someone else, who recounts the previous child’s experience and shares her or his own—and so on around the group. When everyone has shared, place all the papers in the center of the circle and invite the children to put their hands and arms into the circle over their work. Ask God to bless their creativity, and thank God for all the ways we can see and hear and feel God’s love. Ask that the children be encouraged to continue to pass along God’s love at home and in their communities. After the prayer, invite the children to take their writings or drawings and give them to someone they know during the week.


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Attachment: Activity 7

### Say It! Sing It!

$\text{♩} = 132$



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!\_\_\_\_\_

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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# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages seven to eleven) have a strong sense of fairness and engage in concrete thinking. Most will take scripture literally and will need guidance to understand poetry and metaphors as imaginative descriptions rather than literal fact. Encourage children to read scripture themselves and to the group. Activities in this Exploration will assist children to become familiar with the Bible and to enjoy its contents. Children will be invited to explore ways scripture can help them live and play joyfully.

### About this Exploration

The history of our faith, recorded in the scriptures, is a tale of human beings who, like us, wrestled with doubt, oppression, and sorrow. Yet this story is rooted in a creation that God proclaimed good, and undergirded with the joy that comes from the assurance of God's faithfulness, forgiveness, and healing. This story, which is our story of salvation, invites us to creative imagination and to finding our own part in the "play."

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Mark 9:30–37**  
**Philippians 2:1–13**

## Leader Preparation

Everyone has a unique understanding of the relationship of the Bible or the scriptures to Christian discipleship. Perhaps you have a regular faith practice of scripture reading, or you may mainly hear scripture read aloud in Sunday worship. In either case, take time before leading sessions on scripture to sit down with a Bible (particularly a child-friendly translation such as *Today's New International Version*, the *Good News Bible*, or the *Common English Bible*.) You may prefer the *New Revised Standard Version* for your own use, but it is not very accessible to children. Hopefully, you will have time to examine a copy of the same Bible translation that your learners will be using.

Imagine you are encountering the Bible for the first time, as some of your learners may be. Note the arrangement of the books and the many different genres (history, poems, songs, letters, stories, sermons, proverbs) included. Locate the Bible focus passages for this Exploration: Mark 9:30–37 and Philippians 2:1–13. Both texts are in the New Testament. The first is in the book of Mark, one of the four gospels that report on the life of Jesus, his ministry, death, and resurrection. The second is in a letter understood to have been written by Paul to the church in Philippi. The portion for this Exploration includes a hymn in 2:5–11. If you have access to a church library or public library with The New Interpreter's

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Scripture Scramble (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 2:1–13. In this letter Paul encourages the readers to work together with humility, and to consider the needs of others above their own. In this activity the learners will work cooperatively to discover these key points in the passage. Write out the scripture verses on the construction paper ahead of time as directed below and have them all scrambled before the learners arrive.

**Supplies:**

- Bible, preferably in a child-friendly translation
- large pieces of construction paper or card stock 11" x 14"
- colored markers
- masking tape or blue painter's tape

On large pieces of construction paper or card stock write the following scripture verses, putting a few words on each sheet:

- *Verse 2:2* Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.
- *Verse 2:4* Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.
- *Verse 2:5* Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.
- *Verse 2:13a* For it is God who is at work in you.

Scramble up each verse, and put the pile of words in different locations around the room. Break the group up into teams. Tell them you will read the scripture passage through one time and that key parts of the scripture are written on the cards before them. After you read the scripture, they are to unscramble the passage and tape it up on the wall or lay it out on the floor. Read the passage and give them the signal to begin to unscramble the words. When they have finished have each group read their verse. Then invite conversation about what the verse means to them today.



### 2 Bible Scavenger Hunt

**Leader preparation:** Work through the scavenger hunt with a Bible that the children will be using in order to be sure each item can be found. The hunt is based on the *New Revised Standard Version* translation of the Bible. If you are working with another translation, some of the answers may use different words than those on the answer sheet. Note any variations to the answers. This should be a fun time for the children to work together with scripture. The hunt will introduce the learners to some basic information about the Bible. Share with them that knowing how to find things in the Bible is one step in a life long journey of scripture exploration.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles—preferably in a child-friendly translation, such as *Today's New International Version*, the *Good News Bible*, or the *Common English Bible*
- "Bible Scavenger Hunt," Attachment: Activity 2

Bible (check for latest edition), you may wish to read the notes made by biblical scholars about this passage with the understanding that even these scholars are presenting one of a variety of ways to interpret scripture.

If you have any questions about a passage, make notes and speak with your minister or other religious educator. Remember, your learners will have many questions, too. Encourage questions. Remember that doubt (or questioning) is not the opposite of faith. If the children ask questions for which you do not have a ready answer, note the question, find someone or a trusted reference book to answer the question, and follow up with the child.

To center yourself as a leader for this Exploration, find a quiet time to sit down with the Bible. Make a note of your favorite passages and consider why they are your favorites. Is there a particular scripture that fills you with joy or to which you turn in times of thanksgiving or praise to God? Again make a note of this scripture so that you may share where you find joy in the Bible with your learners. Next read Mark 9:30–37 and Philippians 2:1–13. Where do you hear joy in these passages?

Welcome the children to each session. You may want to establish an opening ritual of about five minutes that you will use in each session with this age group to create familiarity and comfort before leading the children in new activities. An opening ritual may involve allowing one child to turn on an electric candle or to light a real one, it may involve opening the Bible to the suggested passage(s) for this exploration and having a child read the passage or a key verse. You may wish to keep the Bible on the table with the candle for

Divide the group into pairs, ideally pairing older or more experienced readers with younger or beginning readers. Distribute the handout and explain that they will work with a partner to find the answers to the questions on the scavenger hunt sheet. Give them 10 minutes to work on this activity. After time is called, go around the room and have each team share answers to some of the questions with the group. If the group finishes more quickly, take time to show them some of your favorite passages that bring you joy or help you praise and give thanksgiving to God. Ask them if they have favorite passages or stories in the Bible. Practice finding them by book, chapter, and verse.



### 3 Scripture Collage

**Leader preparation:** The Bible is full of many stories, prayers, poems, songs, and proverbs that tell about the human experience of living with God and one another. Sometimes these writings contain stories of joy and hope, and sometimes the stories can be sad or scary. Sometimes the stories are a mix of all of the above, just like life. Scripture was written in particular times and places for particular audiences. For instance, the books of the Bible that Christians call the Old Testament are actually Jewish Scriptures known as the Torah, prophets, and writings. The New Testament, which contains the Gospels or stories of Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles, and letters, were written to help people who lived after Jesus understand who he was and what he asked his followers to do. Sometimes when scripture was written the writer, or the audience, was experiencing times of happiness and at other times they were experiencing fear or worry. Read Mark 9:30–37 and Philippians 2:1–13. Note the images of joy and sorrow or places where one might feel sad or afraid and the words that act as a comfort for those feelings. In this activity, learners will study a picture that is a collage of many stories and feelings. They will then make their own collages based on images in the scriptures.

#### **Supplies:**

- poster: Allerheiligen (“All Saints”) by Wassily Kandinsky, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- blank poster board, newsprint, or butcher paper
- copies of Mark 9:30–37 and Philippians 2:1–13 or Bibles with the passages marked, preferably in a child-friendly translation
- colored markers

Explain that the group will look at a picture and then have a chance to make their own art. Show the group Kandinsky’s Allerheiligen. Ask them what they see in the picture. What feelings do they think the people and creatures are feeling? Do they see joy? What is happening in the picture? Does the picture contain just one story or several stories? What do they like best in the picture? Least? Be sure to note that everyone has a different idea about what the picture shows.

(Note: You may wish to shorten this conversation if you are pressed for time.) Talk with your learners about how this wonderful and complex picture is a lot like the Bible with its many books and different kinds of writings. Everyone who reads the Bible is a unique person, and so everybody reads the Bible and understands it in her or his own way. Ask the children if they can name some books of the Bible and if they know what kinds of writings those books contain. Be prepared to show them where to find the names of the books and to tell them there are many different kinds of writings in the Bible, including stories, poems, prayers, letters, proverbs, and songs. The stories and poems and prayers sometimes tell about wonderful, joyful events such as Noah, who listens to God and saves the animals from the flood, or the birth of Jesus. Sometimes they tell about difficult or sad events, such as when Cain kills his brother, Able, or when Jesus



each session in this Exploration. You can also vary the Bible that is displayed to include perhaps your personal Bible, a pew Bible, or a children's Bible so that children will have a chance to touch and see a variety of Bibles. Check in with the children for joys and concerns and offer a prayer to God about their intercessions. Conclude the opening moments by teaching the children to sing the chorus of "Say It! Sing It!" by JoEllen Miller. As they become familiar with the chorus, add the verses. Similarly, you may wish to have a closing ritual in which the children name where they felt joy or saw God during the session. Thank them for their participation and then again sing at least the chorus of "Say It! Sing It!" to close the time together.

*Prayer: God of wonder and creative imagination, I give thanks for the words and stories of faith and praise and for the words of lament and questioning in our scriptures. Help me to share joyfully the assurance of your faithfulness, forgiveness, and healing with my learners. Open my ears and heart to receive their questions. Open my eyes to see the Bible in a fresh way. In all things encourage all of us to grow in faith. 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

and his friends are sad. It takes all kinds of stories and feelings to show us that God knows how we feel and that God loves us and is with us no matter what. The joyful stories remind us of God's love. The other stories show us that we are not alone, that other people have encountered difficulties, and yet with faith in God they are able to overcome those problems.

Divide the children into two groups. Invite one group to work with the Philipians passage and the other with Mark. Suggest they read the passage. Check for understanding of the words. Invite the children to draw a collage picture based on the images they hear in the scripture. Invite each group share their picture.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Who Is the Greatest? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Mark 9:30–37 first silently, then aloud, until you can read it smoothly. Know the short nonsense circular rhyme "Peat and Repeat were sitting on a fence. Peat fell off. Who was left? Repeat." On a whiteboard or newsprint, write the rhyme or draw two stick people on a fence, and then draw a picture of one falling off to illustrate the rhyme (optional).

#### Supplies:

- Bible or copy of the scripture passage Mark 9:30–37 in a child-friendly translation

Invite a volunteer to read the passage, and then ask the group what they think of it. Allow time for conversation. Then ask volunteers each to take a line in the passage and read it aloud. Talk to them about the argument. Tell them they will play a game to show how silly this argument is. Teach them the "Peat and Repeat" rhyme. Then ask two people to pretend to be Peat and Repeat. The whole group can say the rhyme, with one of the actors pretending to fall off the fence. Repeat over and over. Change up the actors. Draw to a close after several minutes. Ask the children whether the rhyme or the argument could ever be resolved. (The only way to stop is to not start it).

Read the scripture one more time and ask the children to describe what Jesus asks people to do instead of arguing or worrying about comparing themselves to see who is the greatest. What are ways to be servants? What connections can the learners make between peer pressure or concerns about fitting in and the disciples' need to be great? Help them draw connections about how this scripture might remind them or help them reduce peer pressure to focus on serving as a joyful way to be "great."



### 5 Reader's Theater

**Leader preparation:** Reader's theater is a form of acting in which children work together with a script to present a dramatic reading. In this activity learners will first have a conversation about Philipians 2:1–13. Then they will work together to read it aloud.

#### Supplies:

- Bible in a child-friendly translation
- "Philipians 2:1–13 Reader's Theater Script," Attachment: Activity 5

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.

- whiteboard or newsprint
- colored markers

(Note: Shorten or adapt this conversation as desired.) Read Philippians 2:1–13 with the children. This letter includes many details about how Christians are to work together and live a Christ-like life in order to show and share God’s love with the world. Ask them to brainstorm about what the following words mean to them: encouragement, joy, cooperation, humility, and caring for others. What might these actions and feelings look like, or how might they demonstrate these things? For example, when they brainstorm “cooperation,” ask them what cooperation means or words that describe cooperation (sharing, talking, helping). Then ask them to name a concrete example of a time when they have cooperated. List the answers on the whiteboard or newsprint. These are the traits and actions Paul asks the people to embody in verses 1–4. Then Paul talks about how Jesus is the ultimate example of these things and so he is willing to do anything to help people, including give up his life. Ask the children to think about Jesus. How did he show caring for others or being a servant or a slave for God? Jesus’ whole life and death are described in just a few short sentences in verses 5–8. Paul then tells about how Jesus overcame death because God saw his obedience and raised him up from death and how we are to show our love and thanksgiving for Jesus by obedient faith and praise. Finally, Paul reminds Christians that God is at work in them and says all we do we should do to please God. Ask the children to name ways they can work to please God.

Distribute scripts to the children who will be reading. The script is developed for six voices, but adapt it to fit the number of children with whom you are working. Have the children practice saying their lines, and offer assistance as needed. After they have practiced, form the children in a line in front of the group. They may have their scripts in hand—reader’s theater is not about memorizing, but rather about reading aloud well. Encourage the children to read their lines with the joy and excitement that Paul shows in his words. Depending on the size of the group, some may take turns being the audience while one team reads, and then they may switch with one another so that the actors become the audience.

### 6 Lectio Divina

**Leader preparation:** *Lectio divina* is an ancient Christian spiritual practice used all over the world that continues to be popular to this day. It is a way of holy reading or engaging scripture at a devotional level. Anyone can do this practice as a way to explore scripture. This method encourages participants to listen closely to God as God speaks to us through the Bible. It is important to remember that in *lectio divina* there are no right or wrong answers or judgments about anyone’s comments or answers. Leaders and learners are equals, and each person is to be given a chance to respond. Read the passage several times yourself so that you are comfortable reading it to the learners and can read it clearly. Pace yourself as you read the passage so that children have time to absorb what they are hearing.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- whiteboard or newsprint
- colored markers

Seat the children in a circle. Explain that today they will get to practice a special way to listen and explore the Bible. The Bible contains scripture that is one way we can hear God speak to us. People of faith wrote the words inspired by their understanding of God. We can listen and see what God might be saying to us today. Identify the three steps.



1. You will read the scripture once, and they are just to listen. There will be a silent time afterward. Read the scripture; pause for 30 seconds.
2. Read the passage again, and have the children listen for a word, or group of words (phrase), or some description that stands out for them. Pause for 30 seconds. Then invite the learners to share their word, phrase, or description. Write these on the whiteboard or newsprint.
3. Read the passage a third time. This time they are to listen for what God is saying to them in the passage. Pause for 30 seconds. Invite those who are willing to share their thoughts. List these responses on the whiteboard or newsprint.

Thank the learners for listening and sharing. Ask how might they respond to this passage in their own lives. What might they do differently or the same? Whom might they serve? How might they serve? Who are children who do not get welcomed in their community or who might need help to feel welcome? Or ask other questions based on the learners' responses to the scripture passages that were read.

Invite a volunteer to read the passage again. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for what has been discovered and for the gift of scripture.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Scripture Walk (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** In this activity you will lead the children around the church building and into the sanctuary to help them discover how scripture is present both in the Bible in words and also in art and other symbols, furnishings, and decorations in the church. Take time to walk around your church setting and notice banners, windows, altar or table decorations, the cross or other central objects in the sanctuary, and art in the narthex and hallways. This exercise can be performed simply by walking and talking with the children. Alternatively, make a check list of different rooms or objects for them to find. As they tour, have them note if they can find people, objects, and events mentioned in the scripture texts in their church building. Use this activity to encourage the children to watch for scripture images in their everyday lives. Afterward, show the children the worship bulletins and newsletters and have them look for how scripture is included in these items.

**Supplies:**

- copies of your worship bulletins or the church or community newsletter

Scripture is not just found in the Bible; it also helps guide our lives. It inspires people to write hymns, paint pictures or make art such as stained glass windows or banners. It helps teach us prayers we use in worship and teaches us how to have communion. One great practice of Christian life is to observe the world. As Christians we watch for the people and places in our lives who need care, healing, or loving kindness. As we practice looking for scripture outside the Bible, we practice our skills at noticing what is happening around us. When we read scripture we can make connections about how we should live today to please God.

Take the children on a tour of the church to find things from these passages in our building. Use the check list, or just talk with one another. Show children the

bulletin for your worship service and help them identify where scripture is used in the service or how it informs the hymns. Conclude the activity with a prayer thanking God for the gift of Jesus and for scripture that tells us the story of our faith. Ask for God's blessing that all may have open minds to see and hear God all around them. Encourage the children to continue to explore at home, out in the world, and at school for places they see elements from scripture.



### 8 An Encouraging Word

**Leader preparation:** Paul wrote many letters to the early churches encouraging Christians to have faith and to share the good news. In this activity learners will practice serving others by writing an encouraging letter of faith to someone in your community. Gather names of homebound members or others who are in care. Alternatively, the children might write to other children in the church, to the pastor, or to their parents. Prepare a name and address card for each person who will receive a letter from the children. The children may work alone or in pairs, depending on their age and ability to write. You may have to help younger children by transcribing what they say onto the paper.

#### Supplies:

- Bible in a child-friendly translation
- copies of "Model of a New Testament Letter (Epistle)," Attachment: Activity 8
- lined stationary or notebook paper
- pens or pencils
- envelopes
- stamps
- addresses
- colored markers or crayons

Writing letters is a very ancient way Christians used to encourage one another to be faithful. The Bible contains many letters. Some were written by Paul, who was a person of great faith. Paul wrote letters to encourage other people to live in faith. We can write letters to encourage one another and our friends and family to live a Christ-like life and to know Jesus. Many of Paul's letters have similar parts. Hand out the template and describe the parts of the letter as follows:

1. the opening, which includes the name of the writer and the recipient and a wish of goodwill
2. the thanksgiving for the recipient's health and for the good relationship between writer and recipient and something about the writer
3. the body of the letter, in which the writer says something about Christian life
4. the closing, in which the writer says good-bye and offers more good wishes for health and faith for the recipient.

After describing the parts of a Pauline letter, invite the children to write a letter. They may work alone or with a partner.

Distribute the index cards or papers with the names and addresses. Tell the children who will be receiving their letters. Invite the children to write a letter following the template. Provide crayons or markers so that the children can decorate the letter or draw a picture to include with the letter. Have them address and stamp the envelopes. Mail the letters after this session.



### 9 Open Invitation

**Leader preparation:** This sending activity invites and encourages learners to continue reading scripture with open eyes, minds, and hearts. Anything that hurts other people or ourselves is not part of Jesus' teachings.

#### Supplies:

- lyrics to "More Light, More Truth" music and lyrics by Rev. Dr. Christopher Grundy, Attachment: Activity 9 (also see <http://www.christophergrundy.com>)
- bottles of bubbles with wands or a shallow pan with bubble soap and many different types of bubble wands
- Bible in a child-friendly translation

This is a good outdoor activity, but will also work inside. Hold up the bottle of bubbles with the lid tightly sealed. Ask the children whether it is more fun to blow bubbles if you open the bottle or if you leave the cap on. Can they enjoy the bubbles if the bottle remains shut? Invite the children to blow bubbles. If possible, have a variety of wands, straws, or other implements available to make bubbles of different sizes and shapes. Let the group have some free play with the bubbles. Talk to the learners and notice out loud the different sizes and shapes they are making. While they are still blowing bubbles, ask the learners to name other things or places that are more fun or interesting when they are open rather than closed.

Have the children clean up the bubbles and gather in a circle. Hold up a Bible and let the children know that the Bible is also more fun and interesting when it is open and being used and read. At first, it may be a challenge to understand the stories and thoughts in the Bible, but as they grow and read they will understand more and more.

### Reflect

Scripture is an amazing gift. As we grow and mature and live our lives, our understanding of scripture grows, matures, and changes. Favorite passages from childhood may easily come to mind when we need comforting. We may see how once difficult texts make more sense as we have more life experience. At any rate, we should encourage our learners and ourselves to be lifelong scripture readers and explorers. In serving and welcoming all with humility we open ourselves to a life of playing and living joyfully. What happens when we leave off worries about our image and concentrate on God's image? Who do we notice? Who are our neighbors when we live for God and not ourselves alone? How can we describe or tell God how happy and joyful we are to know Jesus? How can we thank God for the gift of Christ in our lives?

Teach the song "More Light, More Truth." When the pilgrims left England for America one of their leaders who was staying in England blessed them and told them that more light and more truth was yet to be found in scripture. He meant that they should make the journey knowing that they would learn new things about God and God's world and that scripture (the Bible) would always show them new ideas if they remembered to study and read and think about it. This song reminds us to be brave and explore scripture like those early pilgrims.

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**Attachment: Activity 2**

**Bible Scavenger Hunt**

1. How many books are in the Old Testament?
2. How many books are in the New Testament?
3. The first four books of the New Testament tell the stories of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. What are the names of these four books, in order?
4. To help you find your way around the Bible, each book is divided into chapters marked with big bold numbers. Within each chapter are sentences called verses. Each verse is numbered with small numbers. To tell other people where you are reading—you say the name of the book, the chapter number, and then the numbers for the verses. So, if you wanted to tell someone to read about how Jesus stops a storm from sinking a boat, you would say, "Find Mark, chapter 4, verses 35 to 41." In worship when scripture is read, you will hear the reader say something like, "Our reading this morning is from the book of Mark, chapter four, verses 35 to 41." You write it this way: Mark 4:35-41.
5. Practice saying "Mark, chapter 4, verses 35 to 41" aloud twice.
6. What is the name of the first book of the Bible in the Old Testament?
7. What are the first seven words of Genesis 1:3?
8. A special book in the Old Testament is called the Psalms. This book includes songs of praise and songs of sorrow or lament. A well known psalm is Psalm 23. Find Psalm 23:3. On what kind of path does God lead the psalmist?
9. Two books in the Old Testament are named for the women who are the heroines of the books. What are the names of these books and heroines?
10. Find Matthew 10:1-4. Read this scripture. Write down the name of the twelve disciples from this passage.
11. Find Mark 9:35. How can you be first, according to Jesus?
12. In Luke 1:46-55, Mary, the mother of Jesus, sings a special song called the "Magnificat" to praise God. List three names she uses for God in her song.
13. In John 12:36, Jesus speaks of himself as the light and how those who follow him may become children of the light. Write down verse 36.
14. What is the name of the last book of the Bible and also the last book of the New Testament?
15. Write down the last words of the Bible found in Revelation 22:21.

Attachment: Activity 5

**Philippians 2:1–13 Reader’s Theater Script**

**One:** If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ,

**Two:** if his love has made any difference in your life,

**Three:** if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you,

**Four:** if you have a heart, if you (ital)care(ital)—

**All:** then do me a favor: Agree with each other.

**Five:** Love each other,

**Six:** be deep-spirited friends.

**One:** Don’t push your way to the front;

**Two:** don’t sweet-talk your want to the top.

**Three:** Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead.

**Four:** Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage.

**Five:** Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

**Six:** Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself.

**All:** He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all.

**One:** When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!*

**Two:** Having become human, he stayed human.

**All:** It was an incredibly humbling process.

**Three:** He didn’t claim special privileges.

**Four:** Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

**Five:** Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything ever,

**All:** So that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all to the glorious honor of God.

**Six:** What I’m getting at, friends, is that you should simply keep on doing what you’ve done from the beginning.

**One:** When I was living among you, you lived in responsive obedience.

**Two:** Now that I’m separated from you, keep it up.

**Three:** Better yet, redouble your efforts.

**Four:** Be energetic in your life of salvation, reverent and sensitive before God,

**All:** God willing and working at what will give God the most pleasure.

—Adapted from *The Message*



**Model of a New Testament Letter (Epistle)**

*(Opening)*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_, *(name of recipient)*

It is your friend, \_\_\_\_\_ *(name of writer)*.

I hope this finds you well. I am writing . . . *(to tell you I am thinking of you or to wish you a Merry Christmas, Happy Easter, etc.)*

*(Thanksgiving)*

I give thanks to God for your health.

I am thankful that we are part of the same Christian family.

I am . . . *(write something about the writer, such as what grade he or she is in school or about his or her family or some activity the writer takes part in)*

*(Body of the letter)*

What I enjoy most about learning about Jesus is . . . *(or other statement of faith—the children may also wish to ask a question of the recipient, such as what the person remembers or enjoyed from a youth group experience, or a question about Christian life)*

*(Closing)*

I hope this letter finds you in good health and spirits. I am praying for you as I write this letter. I hope you will pray for me, too.

May the peace of Christ be with you,

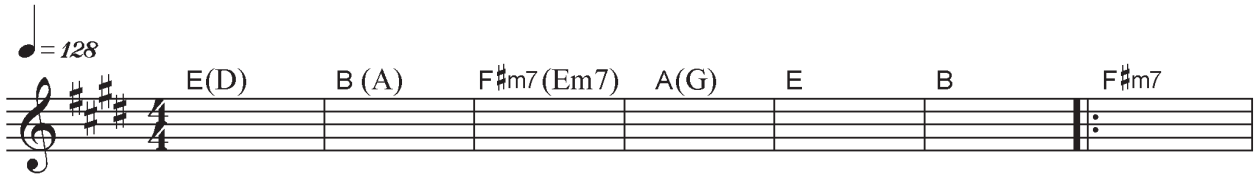
*(Signature of the writer or printed name goes here)*

Christopher Grundy  
 119 N. Bompert Ave  
 St. Louis, MO 63119  
 talk2us@christophergrundy.com  
 (314) 918-2743

# More Light

strum pattern: / / / /  
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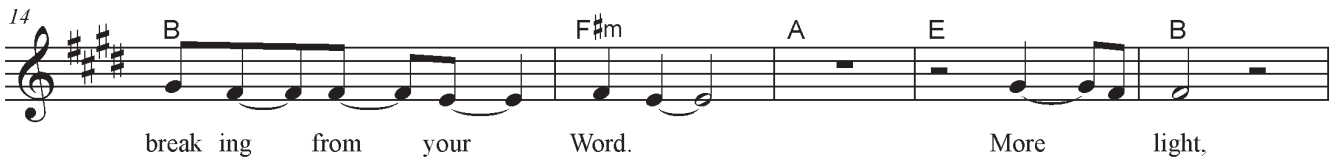


8



More light, more truth is

14



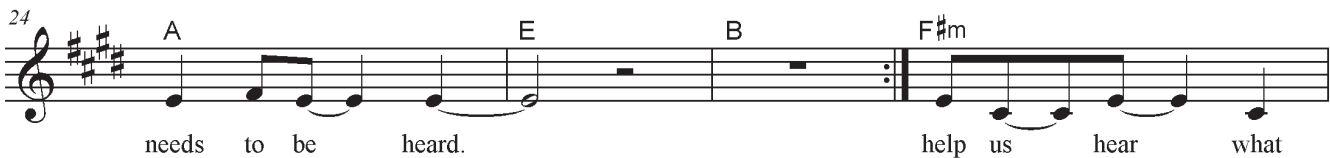
break ing from your Word. More light,

19



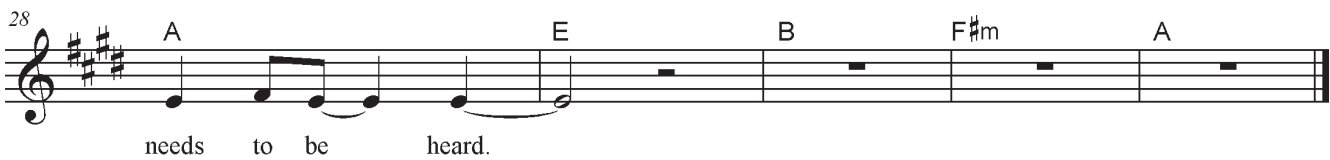
more truth, Ho ly Spir it, help us hear what

24



needs to be heard. help us hear what

28



needs to be heard.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages seven to eleven) want to be full participants in the life of their faith community. They think concretely about the here and now. This Exploration invites them to participate in the activities and sacraments that are hallmarks of discipleship. These activities also invite them to think about how they will live a joyful life in Christ. The “About This Exploration” statement places emphasis on each person taking turns and actively participating in his or her faith. Be aware of ways children are currently able to participate in the worship and mission of your church. Are they benchwarmers most of the time? Consider how to advocate for older children to have the opportunity to read scripture, help gather the offering, serve communion, work on mission projects, participate in choir, or perform other activities of your community.

### About this Exploration

In the Exploration of discipleship we focus on play as an experience of taking turns, learning every position on the field—from goalie to coach, from forward to cheering fan. In discipleship there are no benchwarmers. In Christian community all experience the amazing joy of Special Olympics, as each participant is embraced at the finish line by Jesus Christ.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

***Galatians 4:4–7***  
***Revelation 7:9–17***

## Leader Preparation

Imagine the best party you have ever been to or wish you could attend. Who is the host? Who is invited? If you are invited, can you bring your family and friends? What do you eat and drink? What do you do at the party? What gifts are given to you, and what gifts do you give to others? Where is the party held? Imagine the great party that is discipleship. Christ is our host, absolutely everyone is invited, especially children, and anyone who is willing is welcome to come along. The bread of life and cup of blessing are available as all-you-can-eat. We serve one another the bread and fruit of the vine, pray for one another, read scripture, and sing together. Each of us shares our talents and treasure to connect with those in need. The party is held in weekly worship. Yet it is a movable feast, for wherever two or three are gathered, Christ Jesus is there. Consider how you will open the door to discipleship for children this week. At the same time, open your heart to the joy and exuberance children can bring to worship and the sacraments.

Read Galatians 4:4–7. Jesus and some of the people he encountered were people of the Torah or law. Some of the members of his community got hung up on the letter of the law and thereby missed the spirit. Christianity as well as other Jewish movements arose in part to return the spirit to our relationship with God and one another. The culmination of this great invitation in the Christian

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### ① I Spy a Disciple (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Copy the listed questions onto cards or slips of paper. Decide in advance how many you wish to use—one per child, or perhaps two, but probably no more. Find the passages in the Bible that answer the questions ahead of time if possible. Unless you have a group that really likes this type of activity (and some kids do!), place the cards or papers inside the Bibles as bookmarks for the passages in question.

**Supplies:**

- pencils
- paper
- Bibles in a child-friendly translation

Make sure everyone has a Bible. Explain that you're going to go on a "treasure" hunt—you're going to go searching through the Bible to find information about disciples. Use the following questions, and assign one to each child. When each person has found a verse, invite him or her to read it aloud.

1. Find Matthew 4:18–22. Write the name of the two disciples and what job they did before they became disciples.
2. Find Matthew 9:9. Where is the disciple Matthew sitting when Jesus sees him?
3. Find Mark 3:13–19. Write down the names of the twelve disciples listed in this scripture.
4. Find Luke 6:12–16. Make a list of the names of the disciples listed in this scripture.
5. In Luke 8:2–3, we learn the names of women disciples. Make a list of their names.
6. What does Jesus say the disciples should take with them as they share his teachings in Mark 6:7–8?
7. What do the disciples do when they go out to share Jesus teachings in Mark 6:12–13?
8. What does Jesus ask the disciples to proclaim in Luke 9:2?
9. Where are the disciples to live while they do the work Jesus gives them to do? See Luke 10: 5–7.
10. What are they to have to eat and drink while they work? See Luke 10: 8.
11. How many people do the disciples help Jesus feed in Luke 9:10?
12. In Luke 10: 38–42, we learn of two sisters who were also friends and disciples of Jesus. What are their names?

### ② Hide and Seek—Invitation to Discipleship

**Leader preparation:** Arrange to meet in a room or outside area big enough to hide in, but not so big that learners cannot be found. Discipleship is not always easy or fun. Being a disciple may mean you refrain from activities your friends enjoy. You are called to befriend outcasts and speak up about injustice. Being a disciple is not about being perfect; disciples make mistakes.

**Supplies:** None

faith is a jubilant festival in which all creatures on heaven and earth praise God and in which all pain and suffering is washed away by the water of life. Read Revelation 7:9–17. Then, in the spirit of living and playing joyfully, take time to laugh at the quirks and foibles that exist in your community and in you. Conclude your reflection with this memorable baptism moment: <http://www.tinyurl.com/25gusp4>. Praise God for this child’s enthusiasm about baptism and the decision to follow Christ with his whole self.

Welcome the children to each session. You may want to establish an opening ritual of about five minutes that you will use in each session with this age group to create familiarity and comfort before leading the children in new activities. An opening ritual may involve allowing one child to turn on an electric candle or to light a real one. For this Exploration consider decorating the altar or table where you keep the candle with party hats and noise makers. Let the children know that everyone is invited to be a disciple of Christ. Discipleship is not without challenges, yet every day that we are with Christ is reason to celebrate and be joyful. Check in with the children for joys and concerns and offer a prayer to God about their intercessions. Conclude the opening moments by teaching the children to sing “Over My Head,” an African American hymn. Similarly, you may wish to have a closing ritual in which the children name where they felt joy or saw God during the session. Thank them for their participation and then again sing “Over My Head” as a way to close the session.

*Prayer: Jesus, light of the world and bread of life, I give you thanks and praise for becoming one of us and reminding us that we are all God’s children. I give thanks for the practices you taught directly or by example:*

Jesus called many people to become disciples. Some came right away, and some declined the invitation. In this activity the children will play hide and seek. One person will take the role of Jesus and the rest will be disciples. “Jesus” will count to 12 slowly with her or his eyes closed. After the count he or she will issue the challenge, “Ready or not, come and follow me!” Then Jesus will search for the hidden friends. As each person is found, he or she joins Jesus in finding the others, proclaiming together, “Ready or not, come and follow me.” Play several rounds, allowing as many learners as possible to play “Jesus.” After all have been found, sit down with the learners and ask them about the experience. Have a conversation about what questions they have about discipleship. Affirm for them that there is no one perfect way to be a disciple and that it is all right with God if we make mistakes, ask questions, and explore our faith.



### 3 Splish! Splash! I Was Taking A Bath—Baptism

**Leader preparation:** Baptism into Christian life is a gift of the Holy Spirit. We symbolize it in different ways, from full immersion in a pool or river to symbolic immersion or sprinkling of water. Either way, the meaning is the same: perhaps a reminder of the baptism of Jesus, a symbolic dying to the old life and rising from the water born into a new life with Christ, or simply celebrating being washed and made new. Find out your congregation’s understanding of baptism, who is baptized, and how it happens. Invite your pastor to be a special guest in this session and to give a tour of the baptismal font or pool and to walk the learners through the process of baptism.

#### Supplies:

- baptismal gown, if appropriate in your tradition
- water sprinkler if it is warm weather, or basin of water for indoor use if it is cool
- access to the baptismal font or pool
- poster: “Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- a picture depicting Jesus’ baptism
- Bible

If possible, meet in the sanctuary for this session. Invite the pastor to give a tour of the baptismal font or pool and to walk the learners through the process of baptism. Encourage the learners to ask questions. Afterward, invite someone to read Mark 1:9–11. Show the children the picture featuring the baptism of Christ. Invite them to note elements from the scripture that appear in the picture. What else do they see? Next show them the poster. Ask them what is happening. Where is the water? Who is in the water? Why are they there? What is stopping those who are not in water? Can they see elements of baptism in this picture? Be aware of your own context and check with the children, as some may have an experience that relates to this picture. After this activity, if the weather is warm invite the children to play in a water sprinkler. Alternatively, ask them to dip their fingers in a basin of water and to enjoy the feel of the water.



baptism, communion, prayer, and praise. Aid me now as I prepare to pass along these practices to the children in my care. Help us to hear you inviting us by name, to follow you, to love God, and to feel the leading of the Holy Spirit in all we say and do. 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.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Wild Geese Follow the Leader (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** In this activity invite the children to think about leadership. In this game learners will lead like Jesus. One way for learners to relate to servant leadership is to think about how wild geese fly. As they migrate one goose flies at the point of the “V.” As the lead goose gets tired, he or she drops back and lets another goose take the lead position. Each goose knows how to lead, and they share their work in order for the whole community to arrive safely at their destination. The flight pattern sometimes looks very organized and like a V, and at other times it is sort of a jumbled pattern, much like the community Jesus imagined in which none would be able to tell who was rich or who was poor or who was weak or who was strong because everyone would be working together.

#### **Supplies:**

- inside or outside space with room to move and run freely
- a picture of wild geese flying in “V” formation (one can be found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2amyxoj>; you might also like to watch this clip from YouTube: <http://www.tinyurl.com/25jl7j5>)
- Bible in a child-friendly translation

This is essentially a game of Follow the Leader. Ask the children to describe or name what a servant is or does. Then ask them to describe what a queen or king does. Talk to them about how Jesus acted as a different kind of leader. As a servant leader Jesus did not make people obey by force or fear or work without pay. Jesus taught that real leaders think of people first and share the work at hand. Another way to think about Jesus being a leader is to think of how wild geese fly. Describe this and show the picture or YouTube video. Invite a learner to read Mark 9:35. Ask another to read Mark 9:36–37. Invite the children to play a special kind of follow the leader. Everyone will get a turn to be the leader. Let the youngest person in the room start the game. When you call “switch,” the person leading will go to the back of the line and the next person will be the leader, and so on, until the first person is back at the head of a line. The youngest person should begin the game by honking like a goose and flapping her or his arms like a goose, and then choosing any motions he or she wishes. As each learner takes a turn, their first move is to be a goose.

### 5 Symbols of Faith Memory Game

**Leader preparation:** This is a simple activity but requires you to gather items beforehand. Learners will be challenged in this activity to notice as many objects as possible that are common in worship and life as a disciple.

#### **Supplies:**

- large cookie sheet or serving tray
- kitchen towel or cloth big enough to cover the tray
- blank 8½” x 11” paper
- pencils
- objects of different sizes that are symbols of Christian life, such as crosses of various sizes, rock, picture of Jesus, picture of or toy sheep, candle, Bible, hymnal, pieces of a nativity scene, butterfly pin or plastic butterfly, grapes, communion wafer, fish, rainbow, dove, worship bulletin, Prayer of Our Savior (Lord’s Prayer) on a bookmark or wallet card, and so on

- objects that are funny, such as a clown nose or baseball cards or a bottle of bubbles
- individually wrapped candy

Arrange learners in pairs or trios around a big table with tray covered by a cloth in the center. Distribute paper and pencils to each team. Tell them they will be playing a memory game to see how many objects related to Christian life they can identify and remember. You will take the cloth off the tray and give them thirty seconds to look at it. You will then remove the tray and give them one or two minutes to write down everything they remember on the tray. When time is up, return the tray to the center and tell them this time they will have one minute to study the tray. Remove it again and give them two minutes to add any new objects they remember to the list. Repeat a third time. Each member of the team takes a turn during one of the three rounds of being the scribe, the memory, and the encourager. In the case of pairs, one will be the scribe/encourager and the other will be the memory. Only the person playing the role of the memory may tell the scribe what to write. The encourager is like a cheerleader and must cheer both scribe and memory with encouraging words. After the third round, return the tray to the center uncovered and call out the objects. See which team has the most. Share the candies with the children and let them ask questions or handle the objects on the tray. Ask what else might go on the tray.

## 6 Carrying the Light of Christ

**Leader preparation:** Older children are very interested in being an active part of their faith community. They are capable and willing to participate fully in the work of worship such as preparing and serving communion, gathering the offering, reading scripture, and participating in other that can typically be seen as roles filled by adults. Children may have an opportunity to serve the church by being acolytes either on a regular schedule or at special times of the year. This activity allows the learners to learn about being an acolyte and to practice these responsibilities as one part of the outward work of discipleship. Even if your setting does not make use of acolytes, children may be interested to learn about the tradition and to know that many Christian youth and adults around the world participate in worship this way. You will need to be familiar with your particular denomination and congregational understanding of the work of acolytes and how one becomes one. You will also need access to the sanctuary if possible.

### Supplies:

- candles
- tapers or other lighters
- one votive for each child
- lyrics to “This Little Light of Mine” (traditional African American hymn), <http://www.tinyurl.com/39ahx4> or “Lord, Prepare Me to be a Sanctuary” by John W. Thompson and Randy Scruggs (lyrics can be found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/32m49x6>)
- stoles or robes worn by acolytes (optional)

Explain that as disciples or followers of Christ, we meet often to worship together. In Protestant denominations, an acolyte or helper may have a variety of duties. One of the most important is to carry the light into the sanctuary on the taper and to use that light to ignite the Christ candle. This represents or reminds people that Christ is present with them in worship. At the end of worship the acolyte relights her or his taper before extinguishing the Christ candle. The acolyte then walks ahead of the minister, carrying the light out of the sanctuary. This action symbolizes for the people that they are to follow Christ out into the world and to

live and work in a Christ-like way outside the church walls. Invite the children to practice carrying the light of Christ in to the table or altar and lighting the Christ candle and then practice relighting the taper, extinguishing the Christ candle and carrying the light out into the world. After everyone has had a chance to practice, relight the Christ candle and invite the children to come up one by one to light a votive that represents themselves by lighting the taper from the Christ candle and then lighting their votive. Sing “This Little Light of Mine” or “Lord, Prepare Me to be a Sanctuary.”

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Praise Party (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Disciples praise God and celebrate with joy as they seek to follow Jesus. Read Revelation 7:9–17 for a picture of the ultimate celebration when all praise God. You can find the lyrics for “Over My Head” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>. Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- lyrics for “Siyahamb”/“We Are Walking” (traditional South African hymn, see the lyrics and hear the tune at <http://www.ingeb.org/spiritua/siyahamb.html>)
- lyrics for “Over My Head” (traditional African American) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>
- musical instruments or noise makers
- party hats
- poster: Allerheiligen (“All Saints”) by Wassily Kandinsky <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Invite the learners to party and celebrate by singing their praise to God. Teach or rehearse the songs “Over My Head” and “Siyahamb.” If possible play the songs on the piano or another instrument, or on a CD player. Invite the children to sing and dance, play noise makers or other instruments. March around the learning space while singing “Siyahamb.” You and the children might write a couple of new verses for each song. For instance in “Over My Head,” the children may have something they hear or see that could be sung in place of the written lyrics. In “Siyahamb,” you can change the action word such as walking or marching to singing or laughing or any other active verb.

After singing, circle up, and read Revelation 7:9–17 aloud and invite the learners to imagine the celestial praise party depicted in the text. Show the poster, and invite them to respond to its images of celebrating and sorrow along with the text. Conclude with a rousing chorus of “Siyahamb” or “Over My Head.”

### 8 Loaves and Fishes—Communion

**Leader preparation:** Jesus ate with the disciples and all who would come to him. He left us with a special meal called communion. Some churches serve communion weekly, others monthly, some quarterly, and some only once per year. Be familiar with your denominational and congregational practices. Some church-

es allow anyone of any age to receive communion. Others require that children reach a certain age or participate in a class before they may share in communion. After the resurrection in some of the Gospels, Jesus appears to his friends and eats bread with them. Invite your pastor to prepare and serve communion to the learners, or share a “love feast.” This is an old Methodist tradition that is similar to communion, but uses water rather than wine or grape juice, and can be served by anyone. A key difference is that the bread and water are not “consecrated” or blessed.

**Supplies:**

- bread or crackers and grape juice or water
- chalice and paten used for communion (or other elements that are used in your congregation)
- Bible in a child-friendly translation

If possible begin this activity in the place where communion is prepared. Talk with the children about this special meal in which we remember Jesus and are reminded to be faithful and to love one another. Show them how your community prepares the meal. Then go to the sanctuary to show them how the meal is set on the altar or table. The pastor or an elder might talk to the children about the parts of communion such as the prayers and words of institution. Make time for questions and allow the learners as much hands-on participation as your tradition allows. If possible, serve communion or share in a love feast.

**9 God Squad—Mission**

**Leader preparation:** Prior to the session contact children to remind them to wear clothes that they can get dirty. Children will work communally in this activity to “get dirty for Jesus” or, in other words, to help clean up and add beauty to the setting where their community gathers to worship. This activity can happen in a variety of ways and either indoors or outdoors depending on the weather. It can be done with as few supplies as disposable gloves and trash bags. You may need to use brooms, mops, vacuum cleaners, dusters, and soap and water, or it may involve gardening tools, potting soil, and plants. Make the appropriate arrangements for the area of the church the children will clean or where they might plant flowers. Arrange for followup care in the case of outdoor or indoor plantings. Create an atmosphere of fun and teamwork. Begin with prayer. Arrange for the group to sing together as they work. Take pictures of the group at work to share in the church newsletter or in worship. If possible, give a copy of a group photo to each learner to remind them all of this “mission” activity in which they were encouraged to get dirty!

**Supplies:**

- cleaning or planting supplies

Talk about how loving one another includes helping one another by sharing work. Working together is one of the things Jesus wants for those who follow him. When we take care of our environment, we are working in a way that is pleasing to God. Work together to clean up/add beauty to the worship space. Have the group come together for a team prayer in which everyone puts a hand

in to the circle. Ask God's blessing on the work. Proceed with the project. Make sure learners work in teams. Take photos of the work in progress and share these in the church bulletin, on the website, in the newsletter, and in your learning space. Have everyone wash up after working. Conclude with a prayer in which everyone says a word of thanksgiving.

## Reflect

In what ways did the children practice their faith by playing and living joyfully as they learned about and experienced discipleship? What did you learn about each child in this session? What did you learn about yourself as a disciple who lives and plays joyfully?



# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages 7–11) will encounter people and places from around the globe and from the past and present. Visual aids such as a globe and maps are encouraged to help the children understand both where they are located and where others live and play. Learners may need guidance to imagine people and places outside their daily lives. They will be invited to practice joyful living and playing through hands-on activities created by Christians in other times and places.

### About this Exploration

Christian tradition comes from many places and cultures throughout the world. We learn to play and live joyfully from the traditions of communities who have lived through persecution: Christians in the catacombs, the early reformers, Africans who were enslaved, people in same gender loving relationships, immigrant-based faith groups, and others. We learn in new ways—to party, to dance, to eat, to sing, to talk, and to celebrate with our whole being.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Isaiah 11:1–10**  
**Song of Solomon 2:8–13**

## Leader Preparation

What a blessing it is to be a Christian in the twenty-first century. We have access like never before to the rich history and traditions of our faith. We are no longer limited to knowing only about the traditions of our own community or denomination; we are not limited to traditions and practices that developed in Western Europe. It is important to stretch our understanding of our world. Christians can be found in various settings around the world; families are diverse and can be configured in many ways.

It is important for you to help your learners respect and honor the cultures and people from which the practice or tradition arises. Remind them that both people from long ago and those living today take part in these practices. These traditions are rooted in their context. These activities will be made richer if you are able to contact a person who was born in or has lived in the context being explored and who is willing to share his or her experience with your learners. When we explore and participate in activities that are not part of our own tradition, ask yourself how another's practice enriches our understanding of our own faith practices. For instance, do you celebrate All Saints' Day? All Souls' Day? Totenfest? The Day of the Dead? How does your commemoration celebrate or mourn death in your community?

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Let's Build a Cathedral

**Leader preparation:** Read the following basic notes to share with your learners. This activity can be a portion of a session, a whole session on its own, or it could span several sessions. Gather supplies ahead of time and arrange your space so that there are several individual tables where small groups can work together. Base the amount and variety of building materials on the size of the group. If you wish to have multiple building sites, you may wish to use a variety of building materials. For instance, you might have separate sites with plastic bricks, miniature wooden logs, wooden blocks, or recycled boxes of various sizes. Or make a main building materials station and let the learners pick and choose from all the materials.

The word "cathedral" derives from the Latin *cathedra* and means bishop's throne. These buildings are the home churches of bishops and are usually bigger than a regular church. There are cathedrals on every continent except Antarctica. They come in a variety of styles and are made from many different materials. Cathedrals were built to give glory to God and thus include the workmanship of fine craftsmen. In premodern times it took several generations of workers from the same families to complete the building. Many cathedrals share some common design elements:

- The floor plan is cross-shaped with a nave crossed by a transept.
- The main or front doors are on the west side so that people enter facing east, which is the direction of Christ's coming and the star over Bethlehem.
- Even if they are not large buildings, cathedrals are often very tall and topped by a dome or other prominent tower or features. The understanding of the day was that heaven and God were located in the up direction. The cathedral was the tallest building in a community, indicating the importance of worship and the human longing to connect with God.
- Inside the cathedral there would be aisles, pews, a baptismal font, a large cross called a "rood," a lectern, and a pulpit.
- Often cathedrals would feature stained glass windows depicting the life of Christ or other important stories or themes in the Bible. In ancient times most people could not read. They learned the story of the faith by looking at the pictures in the windows. A special window in the western end of many cathedrals is called the rose window. It is a large circular window that may contain themes from scripture. Additional information can be found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/bpqx7d>.

St. John the Divine Episcopal Cathedral in New York City was begun in 1892 and is referred to as a "House of Prayer for All People." Construction continues, although the major work on the building was complete as of 2008. It is different from other modern cathedrals because authentic building methods were used and at one time the cathedral had its own stone mason school so that new generations of artists could be trained to carve and build with stone. The new artists were underemployed people from the neighborhood in which the cathedral sits. The cathedral operates many missions for the neighborhood, including a K-8th grade school for children of all faiths. Additional information can be found at <http://www.stjohndivine.org>.

To center yourself for this Exploration consider trying something different. Visit a church whose members are of a different demographic or denomination from your own. What do you notice about their worship, church architecture, and fellowship time that are similar or different from your own? Research and try out a faith practice such as contemplative prayer, walking a labyrinth, *lectio divina*, or some other discipline. Drive down one of the longest streets in the town or city where you live and note how the neighborhoods change as you move from the suburb to the inner city. What do you know about the lives of the people who live along the street? Say a prayer for each neighborhood you pass through. Try some old or familiar task in a new way and note what happens. What did you see, taste, touch, smell, and hear that was different from your usual method?

Center with the scriptures that support this Exploration. Both texts are from the Hebrew or Jewish portions of the Bible. The prophet Isaiah's scripture was written centuries before Jesus arrived on the scene and described both the ideal ruler and a peaceable kingdom that would result from such leadership. In uncertain times we may reflect on the kind of leadership we wish to provide for our learners. The second text, from the Song of Solomon, is part of one of the greatest poems celebrating human intimacy and love. It is largely lost in our Protestant traditions and social fears about our bodies and sexuality that have been a part of the Christian tradition for centuries. In the Jewish tradition, these texts are celebrated as wonderful witness to and affirmation by God of our bodies and the goodness of love. As you read this

### Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- building blocks (plastic bricks, miniature wooden logs, wooden blocks, recycled shoe boxes, recycled paper towel rolls)
- stained glass window pattern template for the children to color; use a glass or a jar and trace a circle on card stock; let the children decorate it with a pattern in many colors or with a hand drawn illustration from scripture
- pictures of cathedrals and churches from around the world, available on the Internet or at your public library (optional)
- colored pencils, markers, and/or crayons
- construction check list (see below)

Invite the learners to describe what they know about cathedrals. Most may think of cathedrals as old and European in nature. Show pictures of cathedrals from around the world. See the leader preparation notes for important cathedral details to share. Tell them that one of the very special American cathedrals is called St. John the Divine in New York. When the learners have all the details about the basic elements of cathedrals, invite them to work in groups at various stations with the building materials to make their own cathedrals. Print the following checklist on newsprint or a whiteboard.

### **Cathedral Construction Checklist**

The building can be any shape outside; it should include the following elements:

- a cross shaped floor plan inside
- a tall element such as a steeple or dome
- a rose window
- a baptismal font
- a pulpit
- a rood or cross

If you have a small group, simply have one station and encourage everyone work together on one building.

## **2 Illuminated Manuscripts**

**Leader preparation:** Illuminated manuscripts began in the medieval period of western European Christian tradition. In this activity children will make an illuminated scripture page. Consider using Isaiah 11:6–9 for this exercise. For time constraints you may want to assign only a few key verses. Alternatively, have a couple of scripture choices prepared ahead of time and allow the children to choose. Younger learners may find actually copying the text a challenge. Prepare the card stock or drawing paper ahead of time with the scripture printed on it minus the first letter of the first word of the passage. This letter is typically made bigger than the rest of the text and is decorated with illustrations or written in a color other than black. The children will draw in a decorative pattern for this letter. Older learners may also appreciate having blank paper to use in case they want to do their own fancy writing of the text in calligraphy or any font of their choosing.

An illuminated manuscript is a text supplemented by elaborate decorations of the first initial of the first word on the page, pictures and other illustrations. Originally only texts with illustrations in gold or silver leaf were considered illuminated. Usually only the wealthy could afford this art form. The text was written first in the center of the page followed by the illustrations that went in the margins. At first they were printed on vellum, a kind of parchment, made from calf or goat



wonderful text, consider that sometimes traditions need to change in order for us to become both more fully human and to move closer to God.

Welcome the children to each session. You may want to establish an opening ritual of about five minutes that you will use in each session with this age group to create familiarity and comfort before leading the children in new activities. An opening ritual may involve allowing one child to turn on an electric candle or to light a real one. For this Exploration consider placing a globe near the candle and or having a world map mounted on the wall. Open each session with lighting a candle. Remind children that children all over the world are also growing up Christian. Use the globe and map to help children locate the country or place where each activity in this exploration originated. In addition you may wish to search the internet for photos of contemporary children in the countries represented below. Post these each session so that your learners will have ways to relate to real children in these different contexts. Check in with the children for joys and concerns and especially offer prayers for other children in their neighborhood, community, or the world. Conclude the opening moments by teaching the children to sing "Over My Head." Similarly, you may wish to have a closing ritual in which the children name where they felt joy or saw God during the session. Thank them for their participation, and then again sing "Over My Head" as a way to close the session.

*Prayer: Creator God, you spoke and the world began. You brought forth a glorious diversity of creatures and land and made us in your image. Help me to celebrate your artistry and to learn from my brothers and sisters past and present and from followers*

skins. Books including illuminated manuscripts were made in monasteries. The earliest surviving manuscripts come from Ireland, Italy, and Turkey.

### Supplies:

- copies of Isaiah 11:6–9 (preferably in a child-friendly translation, such as *Today's New International Version*, the *Good News Bible*, *Common English Bible* or *The Message*)
- globe or world map
- colored markers or crayons
- blank 8½" x 11" paper
- examples of illuminated texts from library books, or search the Internet using the key words "illuminated manuscripts"
- card stock in beige or cream color to simulate old paper, metallic markers, stencils for making large fancy alphabet letters to begin each illumination, paints and fine tip brushes, or markers with fine tips (optional)

Explain the tradition of illuminated manuscripts. Show the children the location of the earliest known manuscripts that were made in Ireland, Italy, and Turkey. Show examples of illuminated manuscript pages. Distribute copies of the scripture they will illuminate. Some may wish to choose another passage; any scripture text that tells a story or contains images will work. Arrange the learners at tables and let them work on their projects. When time is up, invite each learner to hold up his or her work to show the rest of the group.



### 3 Celebrating the Birth of Christ in India

**Leader preparation:** This activity could take up an entire session. To condense the activity you may wish to make the star ornament, share the Christmas greeting, and read the scripture text. If you include food in the session, be sensitive to allergies. Prepare the food ahead of time. If you are unable to make the Indian foods listed below, provide cookies and fruit and a punch or cider. Many of the foods we eat at Christmas are also enjoyed in India. For the star craft, prepare the star shapes with the hot glue gun ahead of time, and then let the children decorate them in the session. Depending on the amount of time you have allotted for this activity, you may decorate your learning space with lights and candles as simply or elaborately as you wish. Enjoy the food after the reading of the nativity scripture to simulate the feasts held after midnight mass in India. It will be helpful to note with learners that India is a vast country and so there are many different traditions depending on the state or geographic region. Although this activity is focused on Christmas, it can be enjoyed year round.

There have been Christians in India since the first century of the common era. Some believe that the disciple Thomas traveled to India after the crucifixion of Jesus and arrived in Malabar in 52 CE. Today there are an estimated 24 million Christians in India, making it the third largest religion in the country. This long history yields rich traditions and theology only recently appreciated in the West. Many Indians, Christian or not, celebrate Christmas. People walk in family groups to their churches on December 24. The churches are decorated with poinsettias and candles. After, there are feasts of curries and other dishes. Christian homes display nativity scenes in their front windows and there are sometimes competitions for the best scene. In place of evergreen trees or wreaths, many people will decorate with mango leaves. People string up giant paper lanterns shaped like stars between houses to commemorate the star that heralded Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. In Southern India, little clay lamps are placed outside to show that Jesus is the light of world. On Christmas day, school children perform nativity plays followed by the singing of carols and eating sweets. Then Father Christmas comes with presents. He is called "Christmas *Baba*" in the Hindi language and

*of Christ and those who reach you following other stars. Open me and my learners to the wonder of Christian tradition that we might bring your peaceable kingdom into being. In the name of Christ Jesus, I pray. 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.

“Christmas *Thaathaa*” in Tamil. Christmas caroling parties go on the whole week before and after Christmas as people sing the story of the faith in their neighborhoods. Christmas day is called “*Bada Din*” in Hindi, which means Big Day. It is a national holiday in India.

#### Supplies:

- map of India
- nativity scene
- Bible in a child-friendly translation, with Luke 2:1–20 bookmarked
- Christmas lights
- votive candles
- recordings of Christmas carols and a music player
- star ornament; directions on Attachment: Activity 3
- traditional Indian food; recipes on “Christmas in India,” Attachment: Activity 3
- fruit punch or other juice
- Indian Christmas song: <http://www.tinyurl.com/3a5s813> (optional)
- Hindi Christmas song in Hindi with English subtitles: <http://www.tinyurl.com/36e9k6k>
- walking to midnight mass on star lantern lined streets: <http://www.tinyurl.com/3aoabos> or <http://www.tinyurl.com/34tv97r>

Welcome the children to the festival. Have music playing and the room partially decorated for Christmas. Share with the children the basic notes in the leader preparation section. Show them where India is located on the map or globe. Invite them to make a star ornament. As they finish making their decorations, hang the decorations around the learning space to dry. Work together to set up the nativity scene. Gather around the scene and read the account of Christ’s birth in Luke 2:1–20. You may wish to pass the Bible around so each child can read a part of the story in scripture. Teach the children the typical Indian greeting for Merry Christmas in English. Divide the group into two sides. Have one side stand up and turn to the others shout in happy voices “Merry, Merry Christmas.” Then have the other side also standing turn to the first side and say “Happy, Happy, Christmas.” Repeat it several times and encourage the children to be loud. This greeting is given with great joy in India. Enjoy sweets and sing carols. Conclude the session with another round of the Merry Christmas greeting.

### Discerning & Deciding Activities



#### 4 Spirituals (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity could be used as a complete session. Alternatively, talk about the origins of spirituals and sing “Over My Head” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” To lengthen the session, your learners might search the Internet to find out about the lives of slaves and the history of African American Christian worship and spirituality. You can sing even more songs or listen to additional recordings. If this tradition is outside your experience, arrange a visit for you and your learners to an African American or interracial congregation that has a gospel or spiritual choir or includes this music in worship.

African American spirituals are an important and rich part of our Christian musical heritage. The song “Over My Head” is one of hundreds of songs enslaved peoples sang to voice their devotion to God, to tell and teach about Jesus, and to indicate their need to escape slavery and find freedom. The African slaves



were not allowed to attend church or to officially hold their own church services. They developed songs that had coded meanings in order to worship and at the same time to encourage one another without being caught by the white people who owned them and controlled their lives. For instance, the word “home” in a spiritual could refer to heaven, but also to any safe free country or state where the Africans could be free of slavery. The way to get home was often a “train” or “chariot,” which was a coded reference to the underground railroad. “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “The Gospel Train” are both about Christian life and being carried to freedom on the underground railroad. The earliest spirituals grew out of African music remembered by the slaves. One style is the “ring shout” in which singers stand in a ring and begin to sing a spiritual. Eventually the singers all sing the same phrase or musical sound over and over again. This could go on for hours and produce an ecstatic state. Eventually people could even faint while participating in the shout. Another form is call and response, described below. Spirituals are some of the most powerful songs in the Christian tradition. When we sing them today, we can do so to honor the memory of the slaves and to give voice to the freedom and joy that comes from knowing Christ in the midst of great trouble and sorrow.

For more information on African American culture visit the New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, <http://www.tinyurl.com/yv9bkwh>, and for information on spirituals visit <http://www.negrospirituals.com>. You will also need to use your community’s hymnal and locate the spirituals it contains in order to show your learners where and how to find these songs in the hymnal. The *African American Heritage Hymnal* contains 575 hymns, spirituals, and gospel songs plus prayers and other worship materials.

You can find the lyrics for “Over My Head” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>. Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song.

**Supplies:**

- recordings of spirituals
- hymnal for your community
- lyrics for “Over My Head” <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12> and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” <http://www.tinyurl.com/35taxkb>
- copies of the doxology prayer (see below)
- a map of the underground railroad routes to freedom, recordings of spirituals, pictures of noted spiritual singers such as Paul Robeson <http://www.tinyurl.com/cvyxkp>, Mahalia Jackson, <http://www.tinyurl.com/6evgtd> Marian Anderson, <http://www.tinyurl.com/6739lp> and the Fisk Jubilee Singers, with biographical notes (optional, but strongly recommended), <http://www.fiskjubileesingers.org>

Invite the learners to name some of their favorite Christian hymns or songs. Tell them there are some very special songs created by Africans who were forced to come to America as slaves and by their descendants—both slave and free African Americans. Use the call and response form to sing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” in which the leader or preacher sings one line and the congregation repeats the same line. Next have the learners form a ring (they will not be singing for hours, but it will give them an idea of the form). Sing “Over My Head” and, as the learners sing, invite them to clap along or move their hands over their heads. You may sing additional spirituals as time allows. Conclude the activity with the following doxology prayer:

### Doxology (1890)

Great God, accept our gratitude,  
 For the great gifts on us bestowed—  
 For raiment, shelter, and for food.  
 Great God, our gratitude we bring,  
 Accept our humble offering,  
 For all the gifts on us bestowed,  
 Thy name be evermore adored.

by Josephine Delphine Henderson Heard, a daughter of slaves born in North Carolina, a teacher and a poet

Source: *Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans*, James Melvin Washington, Ph.D. (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 59.

### 5 Las Posadas—Room at the Inn

**Leader preparation:** In Hispanic communities the nine days leading up to Christmas form the season of Las Posadas. In this activity, learners will experience Las Posadas and make discoveries about hospitality and welcoming the strangers in our midst. You will need to prepare stations in your learning space or around your sanctuary for this activity. Mark out the stopping points with a cross on a piece of paper. The number of stations depends on the size of your space and the number of children participating. Try to have at least three or four places. Alternatively, provide two simple costumes for Mary and Joseph and similar simple stoles for the innkeepers. In a separate location and possibly outside, arrange a station for the ninth night and the piñata party.

The festive process of Las Posadas moves from inside the church out into the street and around neighborhoods. Children and adults take turns each night some playing Joseph and Mary and some playing the innkeepers with no room for the tired couple. At each stop or station on the walk, those playing the role of Joseph stop and knock. At the first stop Joseph says in a loud voice, “In the name of heaven, good innkeeper, do you have shelter for us tonight?” The innkeeper says: “This is not an inn; move on. I cannot open lest you be a scoundrel.” At each stop the innkeeper becomes angry at the knock on the door and rude in their refusal of Joseph’s request. Finally, at the last stop, Joseph tells the innkeepers that he needs *posada* or shelter even for just one night for his wife who is the Queen of Heaven. No one will let them in until the ninth night, which is Christmas Eve. Then Joseph’s request is met with love by an innkeeper who gives the young couple permission to stay in his stable. All the participants celebrate the generosity of the innkeeper and the shelter given to Mary and Joseph. The celebration includes dancing, music, food, and drinks. For the children there is a piñata with candy and other treats. The festival reminds everyone to be ready for the stranger who comes to the door and who just might be God or Jesus in disguise.

#### Supplies:

- simple costumes for Mary and Joseph
- simple earth colored fabric remnants that could be worn as a stole by those playing innkeepers, enough stoles so that an innkeeper at each stop can wear one
- a piñata in the shape of star or other Christmas symbol
- candy, pennies, or small trinkets to fill the piñata
- a stick and blindfold for breaking the piñata
- small bags for the children to collect their trinkets and treats
- Latin American or Hispanic Christmas music and music player

Explain to the learners that they will experience an Advent festival conducted in Latin American communities in the United States and Mexico. Show them where Mexico is on your globe or wall map. Remember to ask and see if any of your learners participate or have experience of Las Posadas and invite them to share their experience. Otherwise, share the basic notes listed in the leader preparation section above. Divide the group into Marys, Josephs, and innkeepers. Choose at least one person in each group to wear the simple costume. Ask all who are playing the innkeeper to move to the various spots except the station with the piñata. Move the Mary and Joseph group to the beginning of the route. Let the procession begin. At each station Joseph knocks and asks for shelter for himself and for Mary. Each time the innkeepers tell them they have no room and to move on. Have the whole group move through the three or four stations simulating the parade of the first eight nights of the festival.

Reassemble all the learners and send some to the piñata station to be innkeepers. Mix up your Marys and Josephs so other learners have a chance to participate. There is no rule that only girls can be Mary and boys can Joseph, so mix it up. Then set off in a weary slow walk. When the children reach the station where you have located the piñata, Joseph knocks and asks his line very wearily. The innkeepers throw open the door and greet the couple with joy. Turn on some music to create a fiesta-like atmosphere and let the children take turns with the piñata. After it breaks and everything is collected, invite the learners to relax and have a conversation about what it felt like to be Mary and Joseph and to be refused shelter and what it was like to gain it in the end. Ask them if they know or can name people without shelter in their community. In Mark 9:33–37 we are reminded that whoever welcomes the least also welcomes Jesus. Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving for shelter and a prayer for care for those in the community in need of housing and hope.



### 6 Playing Where You Are

**Leader preparation:** Christians have a rich tradition of joyful living even in very difficult circumstances. From Jesus and the little boy who feed thousands on the lakeshore with only a few fish and loaves of bread (John 6:1–15), to the apostle Paul singing while he was in jail (Acts 16:16–40), to Moravian Christians who danced and sang on a ship tossed by storms bound for America, to Latin American peasants who form base communities to celebrate their faith, to communities of Middle Eastern Christians living in and around the sadly very violent Holy Lands of Israel, Egypt, and Iraq, we can see Christians making a way out of seemingly impossible conditions. In this activity the learners will hear some scripture about Jesus and Paul and learn about Middle Eastern Christians. They will consider what it is like to play even when you are in difficult times and when you may not have fancy toys or actual sporting goods, but rather make do with handmade substitutes.

For more information about Christians in the Middle East see the National Geographic June 2009 story called the “Forgotten Faithful.” The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has a website with basic facts about Middle Eastern Christians at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2oou49>.

#### **Supplies:**

- poster: “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>
- rags or scrap material
- string or duct tape
- pictures of contemporary Middle Eastern Christians
- room to play soccer inside or outside

This activity can happen outside. Ask the learners about the kind of ball games they like to play. Show the poster “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>. Ask them what they see. What do they think has happened to the buildings? How is the “playing field” similar or different from where they play sports? How do playing sports just with friends or on a team help a person? Do any of the learners come from countries in which they have seen war? Are any of the learners the sons and daughters of soldiers? If so, they should have the option of sharing their experience.

Soccer is a game played by children all over the world. However, some children, like the ones in the picture who live in places like Kabul, Afghanistan, are living in war zones. They may not have any way to go to a sporting goods store or even a place like a mall to buy an actual ball or uniforms. They make do with whatever they can find. Give the learners a bunch of rags and some string or duct tape and ask them to make a soccer ball. When they are finished have the group divide in two and choose a goalie for each side. Have the children try to kick their ball and play soccer. Afterward, come back to the circle. Ask them how it was to play with the homemade ball. Explain that many times Christians find themselves in dangerous places or in places where food or shelter is scarce. Yet because we know our God is always with us, we are still able to “play” and “live” joyfully. Be sure to let them know that this does not mean that Christians never feel sad or scared. Relate the story of Paul singing in prison and how that was an audacious thing to do. Tell the story of Jesus and the little boy who fed thousands; having a feast when there was not enough food is another way of playing. Share information about Middle Eastern Christians with the children. Conclude with prayers for peace in war zones and for the health and safety of all people in the Middle East, including our Christian brothers and sisters.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Playing Church (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** None needed.

**Supplies:** None

Gather the group in a circle and invite them to think about ways we express joy in church. Think of all the different parts of church—education, worship, fellowship, mission. How might joy be a part of that area of activity. Can we play in church? Can adults play? What could we do to make the church more playful? Encourage the children to use their imaginations: fill the sanctuary with balloons, blow bubbles during worship, decorate the fellowship hall with Christmas light in July. Explore with the children ways you might do one or more of these activities, and make plans to do them!



### 8 Joyful Dancing

**Leader preparation:** One way we can experience joyful living is through music and movement. Dancing together can be a wonderful way to have fun. Remind the children before you begin that there are absolutely no “wrong” ways to dance—the idea is simply to enjoy yourselves. You can find the lyrics and tune for “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>.

### Supplies:

- colorful, sheer fabric or nylon scarves
- CD player
- music recordings of various tempos
- song “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy)
- poster: “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>

Listen to excerpts from a variety of music and think of words to describe the feelings the music produces—such as happy, sad, silly, excited, and so on. Invite the children to use the scarves and move with the music, expressing through dance the rhythm and emotion of the songs.

If using the artwork “Joyful Dance,” invite the children to use their imaginations to wonder why the dancers are joyful. Invite them, if they wish, to try to dance like the figures in the painting.

### 9 Make Flowers Bloom from a Bare Branch

**Leader preparation:** Make a paper flower following the instructions below. Sharing a simple flower with someone else can make his or her day.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- tissue paper in a variety of colors
- bare twigs
- thin (florist’s) wire
- transparent sticky tape or florist tape
- scissors
- pipe cleaners instead of wire and tape (option)

## Reflect

How good it is, the psalmist sings, when kindred live in harmony. Read and rejoice in Psalm 133 as you consider the rich heritage we have as a global church. Perhaps you will post Psalm 133 in your learning space and teach it to the children. How can we be peacemakers and thus God’s children in the world today? What would a peaceable kingdom look like in these days? What are the peaceful places or play places where the children feel safe and secure? What makes them laugh? What makes you laugh? Some smile facts: it takes more muscles to frown than it does to smile; smiling can use from five to fifty-three muscles in the face; smiling releases endorphins that improve one’s mood; we are born with the ability to smile; the smile is recognized in all cultures as a sign of happiness. How often have we taken time just to laugh out loud? When we choose joy, work becomes play.

Cut five circles of different sizes from different colors of tissue paper. Arrange the circles in a pile from smallest to largest with the largest circle on the bottom. Fold the pile of circles in half and then into quarters so that the smallest circle is inside and the largest circle is outside. You now have a pie-shaped bundle of tissue paper. Fold the pie in half again (to form a pie-shaped piece narrower than the previous one). Pinch the pointed end of the “pie” and twist it so that it forms a thin stem about an inch or two long. Wrap the stem tightly with florist tape, thin wire, or transparent sticky tape (children will need assistance with this step). Wrap tape around the stem and around the twig so that the flower stem is securely attached to the end of the twig. Gently unfold the tissue paper at the wide end of the flower, pulling the layers apart and spreading them wide, so that the flower is opened up.

Read aloud Isaiah 11:1–2. Consider all the ways flowers bring joy or comfort to people. Encourage learners to give their flowers to someone.

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Attachment: Activity 3

### Christmas in India

#### Make a Five-pointed Star

**Supplies:**

- craft sticks (either plain or colored see instructions below for options)
- craft jewels, stones, buttons, or beads
- glitter glue
- hot glue and hot glue gun
- ribbon
- scissors
- paint brush and paints (optional)

**Instructions:**

Make five-pointed stars by hot gluing together the craft sticks. Paint the star in the desired color and let it dry completely. You may use colored craft sticks or plain ones and leave them in the natural wood color to save time. Make a loop of a ribbon and glue it at the back of the star, so that you can hang the star ornament. Glue on beads, buttons, jewels, or other assorted decorative items to decorate the star. Add glitter glue to make some of the sparkling stars.

### Indian Food Recipes

#### Saffron/cardamom Buns

**Ingredients:**

2½ cups milk	⅔ cup sugar
½ cup butter	½ tsp salt
2½ tsp compressed fresh yeast	7½ cups all-purpose flour
1½ cup sour cream	1 beaten egg
¼ tsp of powdered saffron or ½ tsp powdered cardamom	1 cup raisins (optional)

**Directions:**

Heat milk and butter in a small saucepan until the butter melts and the temperature reaches 100 degrees F (38 degrees C). Crumble the yeast into a bowl, and then pour in warm milk. Stir well until the yeast dissolves. Prepare dough by mixing cream, powdered saffron or powdered cardamom, sugar, salt, and 7 cups of flour all together in a bowl. Cover and keep it aside for 40 minutes. Prepare two or three baking sheets by covering each with a sheet of parchment paper. Now divide the dough into 35 pieces and roll each piece into a 6 inches long rope. With the rope lying flat on the work surface, roll each end towards the center, in opposite directions, creating a curled S-shape.

Place the buns on the prepared baking sheets, and garnish with raisins if desired. Cover with a towel, let rise, and bake in a preheated oven at 425 degrees F (220 degrees C).

#### Turkish Delight

**Ingredients:**

2 cups granulated sugar
1¼ cups water
1 lemon, the peel cut into strips, the juice squeezed
1 orange, the peel cut into strips, the juice squeezed
4 tablespoons unflavored powdered gelatin
2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch

**Directions:**

Dissolve the granulated sugar in half of the water over medium heat. Add the strips of lemon and orange peel and the juices. Bring the mixture to a boil and simmer for 15 minutes.

Soften the gelatin by soaking it for 5 to 10 minutes in the rest of the water. Add the gelatin to the sugar syrup stirring well, and boil for 10 minutes, until the syrup reaches the thread stage. Strain the mixture into shallow dampened pan or onto platters, and let it set for 24 hours.

Cut the candy into 1-inch squares. Sift the confectioners' sugar and cornstarch together into a shallow dish. Roll the pieces of candy in the mixture. Store the squares in boxes with more confectioners' sugar and cornstarch between each layer.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages seven to eleven) want to participate in the life of their faith community. Two age-old questions are “Who are we?” and “What are we to do?” This Context and Mission Exploration seeks to assist children to think about these questions as they apply to Christian discipleship. While other Explorations focus on playing joyfully, this Exploration looks at ways even children can live and work for mission joyfully. When they remember who they are as children of God and that as Christians they are called to help Jesus’ mission in the world, they will be empowered to make a difference where they live. While mission has many elements, children in this age group will be most interested in hands-on activities. In this Exploration children will be invited to participate in mission at church, at home, and in their communities in ways that encourage play and joyful sharing with others.

### About this Exploration

Whoever we are and wherever we are, God invites us to play and live joyfully. God calls us to trust self-learning and self-discovery, even though the experience may at times feel awkward. As we become more aware of truth, joy, and tears, and let go of that which is hurting and binding us, we gain a willingness to take discerning risks and find different ways of enjoying God’s creation and life’s daily journey. We release ourselves to the rhythm of the Spirit. In partnership with God and others, we open ourselves to new ways to practice faith in our community and world.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**John 12:20–36**

**Luke 1:39–56**

## Leader Preparation

To center for this Exploration, work with a child in your family to make cookies or do yard work as a surprise for a neighbor. Notice how it feels to work together for someone else. In the first scripture for this Exploration we hear poignantly from Jesus as he asks his friends to carry on being the light in the world after his time on earth has come to an end. How are you carrying the light? How are you passing it along to others? In the second scripture, Mary, mother of Jesus, sings her praise and thanksgiving to God. Consider centering by answering the questions you will put to the learners in the first activity. Contemplate your answers.

Welcome the children to each session. You may want to establish an opening ritual of about five minutes that you will use in each session with this age group to create familiarity and comfort before leading the children in new activities. An opening ritual may involve allowing one child to turn on an electric candle or to light a real one. For this exploration consider placing a globe near the candle and have both a world map and a map of your city or nearby area on the wall. Open each session with lighting a candle. Remind children that there are children all over the world who are also growing up Christian. Use the globe and maps to help children locate their own communities as well as communities around the world. Check in with the children for joys and concerns, especially for

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Focused on God, What Do I See? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** This activity is designed to open learners to imagine God, to name what makes them happy, and to give thanks for blessings in their lives. When we center on God, feel joy, and can give thanks, we are better able to be a partner in mission. If you do not have access to the listed supplies, you may conduct this activity as a conversation with the children. Listen for their answers and be sure to let everyone have a chance to speak. It may be helpful in the case of very active learners to use an object such as a small globe as a talking piece. Each child has a chance to hold the stick and give a response. Only the person with the stick can speak. This lets everyone be heard.

#### Supplies:

- Bible or copy of Luke 1:39–56 (preferably in a child-friendly translation, such as *Today's New International Version*, the *Good News Bible*, the *Common English Bible*, or *The Message*)
- lined notebook paper
- blank paper
- colored pencils or crayons or markers
- pens or pencils
- watercolors, brushes, and cups of water and paper towel for cleaning and drying the brushes (optional)

This is an expressive writing exercise. Offer the children different ways to participate. They can either use pens or pencils and lined paper to write out their responses to three writing cues, or they are welcome to draw, color, or paint their responses. Let the children know they will have one minute to create the first response. Tell them you will say a sentence and they have one minute to finish the sentence anyway they choose in writing or by making a picture. Cue: I give praise to God when I . . .

Keep time, and at one minute ask everyone to finish what they were working on. Then invite anyone who wishes to share what they wrote or created.

For the second cue, allow three minutes. Cue: My spirit rejoices when . . . or I feel happiest when . . .

At three minutes again remind them to finish up. Invite those who are willing to share their work.

For the final cue allow two minutes. Cue: I am thankful for . . .

At the end of the time, again bring the children to a finishing point and have one last round of sharing.

Tell them that these cues came from scripture particularly from Luke 1:39–56 where Mary, Jesus' mother, sings a song in which she praises God, her savior. She names how she is blessed or for what she is most thankful. Read the scripture to the children and see what questions or comments bubble up.

other children in their neighborhood, community, or the world. Conclude the opening moments by teaching the children to sing “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy). Similarly, you may wish to have a closing ritual in which the children name where they felt joy or saw God during the session. Thank them for their participation and then again sing “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” as a way to close the session.

*Prayer: Magnificent Creator God, Light-bearing Jesus, Path-guiding Spirit: I rejoice in being your child. My heart sings in praise of your glorious work. Guide me and the children to use our hands and our hearts in your service and to your glory. 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.

### 2 Hammer for the Homeless

**Leader preparation:** Today many missionaries from one location go and learn from the people in another. They ask the local people what they need rather than imposing their own ideas about what is needed. Both groups work together until the local group is able to take over and manage the project on their own and to continue to tailor it or abandon it as their needs change. An example of this kind of mission is Habitat for Humanity. The recipients of a Habitat home work alongside volunteers from near and far to build their own house. They pay “sweat equity” by helping with the construction, and then the house becomes theirs and they are responsible for maintaining it. Perhaps adults in your community or even you have helped build a Habitat House or raised money to assist a build. Children seven to eleven years old love to help and enjoy projects with tools. This activity introduces them to the Habitat mission and gives them a way to help out. Coordinate this activity with others in your congregation, as needed.

Arrange for members of the congregation and parents to sponsor each child in your group. Sponsorships can be as little as a penny per nail on up to as much as a person cares to give, or they can set a flat amount. Distribute sponsor sheets and allow kids to gather sponsors. If possible, see if a local Habitat coordinator can attend the event to inspire the children and receive their offering. Information about Habitat for Humanity can be found at <https://www.habitat.org>. If your denomination or congregation does its own building projects or works with a similar organization, please feel free to substitute that group for this project. The idea is to give children direct experience in the project or mission of providing shelter for people.

#### Supplies:

- a person in the congregation or yourself who is handy with tools
- at least one sponsor per child who will also supervise children’s use of tools
- safety goggles
- gloves
- hammers
- 2” x 4” plywood, one piece per child
- 1½” nails with good flat heads
- permanent markers

Briefly describe what Habitat is and what Habitat volunteers do (both those who give gifts and those who help build). Remind the learners that though they are a few years away from helping on a build, they can still make a difference. Today they will learn hammer skills to use when they are older and to raise money now to help a family build their home.

Join hands in a circle and lead the learners and the sponsoring adults in a brief prayer of gratitude to Jesus for providing shelter for those gathered and for those in need. Thank Jesus for showing us that we are to be shelters for one another. Invite the children and their sponsor to move to a station that has safety goggles, gloves, a hammer, and nails. Ask a member of the congregation who is good with tools to demonstrate good hammer techniques and safety tips. Invite the children to practice with one or two nails. Next, have everyone set down their hammers. Tell the children to wait for you to give the signal of “Ready, set, nail!” They will have 10 minutes to affix as many nails as they can to their board. Emphasis is on safety and good clean hits. The children will then tally their nails and write their name and the number including the practice ones on their board. The board is their trophy. They then collect the amount of money based on the number of nails they were able to affix to the board or flat fee from their sponsor or sponsors. Total the amount and announce what the money can do. For instance \$10 = a box of nails, \$35 = roof shingles, \$100 = a kitchen sink.





### 3 Where Do You Play?

**Leader preparation:** This activity will give learners a chance to concretely identify their social and geographic location and to see how their location is alike and different from those of their fellow learners in the session, in their neighborhoods, and around the world. You will guide them through a series of questions that locate them on the map and help them do an inventory of where they play.

#### Supplies:

- street map of your city, town, or rural area
- map pins (or use markers)
- map of the country in which you are living
- map of the world
- yarn or thread in any bright color
- tape
- newsprint and markers
- posters: “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>, and “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Greet the learners and ask them about geography and maps. Have they traveled outside their neighborhood or city? If so, where did they go? Show them Israel on the world map. Move from Israel to the country you find yourself in while doing this activity. From the world map move to a country map and ask a learner to circle the region or state where you are, and then in a smaller circle mark the town or county. Finally move from the country map to the street map. On the street map invite a learner to circle the location of your church or learning space.

Ask the children where they live. Invite them to circle their street. Use ribbon, yarn, or thread tied or taped to the street map and run it back out to the state map and affix it to the map with a map pin. Continue from that pin and with more ribbon to make a connection from the state map to the world map. As you go invite the learners to understand that they are located in a specific place just as Jesus was located in his place.

Next move to the newsprint and ask each child to name their favorite place to play outside of their rooms. Is it a park, a backyard, a school yard? What is each space like? Is it clean? Do the slides and swings or other equipment work or are they broken? Do the basketball or tennis or volleyball courts have nets? Are there lights so games can be played at night? Can they walk to this place or do they have to go in a car? Is there shelter from the rain? Do they play there alone? With brothers and sisters?

Once all the children have answered and shared, show them the two posters and ask them what they notice about the children and where they are playing in each picture. Which environment seems more inviting? The outdoors or the urban street? What is missing from the pictures that they mentioned in the descriptions of the places they play? Hopefully they will notice the lack of formal play equipment in each poster. Ask them what they think about the lack. Do they think the children in the posters know that they are missing something or not?

Conclude the activity by asking them if they were offered a chance to travel on a great adventure would they be willing to go even if it meant they had to leave all their stuff behind? Relate that Jesus calls us all to go on a great adventure. We are to take our faith and go out and meet people and ask to join in their games and to hear their good news and invite them to hear ours.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Everyone Can Play (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Choose a game that the group can play together.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

If you have access to a large play area, play tag or dodge ball. If you have only a small learning area, play Human Tangle. (Join hands in a circle; one person is “it.” “It” hides his or her eyes while the others tangle themselves up—keeping hands linked they step over or under one another’s arms to make the circle into a knot. “It” then gently untangles the circle without breaking the hand holds.)

Gather back to talk about games. Ask questions such as: What made this game fun (or not)? How could we change it to make it more fun? What are fun games you play with your friends? What makes a game fun or enjoyable? What kinds of things make playing a game not so fun? Talk about ways to play that are fun and inclusive for everyone.

Tell the group the story of John 12:20–21. Ask: Why do you think the Greeks wanted to see Jesus? Do you think the disciples let them do so? How might Jesus have responded? Explain the rest of the story, in words such as the following:

The Greeks were excited to see Jesus. Jesus said to them, “I am going to be lifted up in glory.” The Greeks thought Jesus was going to become a mighty king. “No,” said Jesus, “It won’t be like that at all.” When he said he would be glorified, Jesus was talking about his death. “Whoever follows me will have to follow where I am going and that won’t be a fun and easy path.”

Say: I wonder what the Greeks thought about that? Do you think they still wanted to be with Jesus, even though it wasn’t going to be so fun?

### 5 Clean Up!

**Leader preparation:** A critical part of mission is caring for God’s creation. Children can help in this effort through park and playground cleanup. When they help clean up a space, they also make it more hospitable to others who may use the facility. This activity will happen outdoors. It may involve cleaning up a playground or park space on your church grounds or one nearby. Parents should be notified ahead of time to have the children wear old clothes. Make the time fun by singing songs as the children work together. Take some photographs before and after so the children can see and remember their work.

You can find the lyrics to the song “Over My Head” at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>.

Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song.

**Supplies:**

- garbage bags for trash and recycling
- gloves
- camera
- access to a sink and soap or antibacterial wipes for cleaning hands
- lyrics to “Over My Head” (African American hymn)

Gather the children outdoors. Talk about caring for the natural world by using trash cans, and by reducing, reusing, and recycling. Part of our Christian mission is to help keep earth well and another part is providing hospitality. Talk with the children about the location of the park and who uses it. They will help today both clean up the outdoors and provide hospitality for the people who use the park.

Divide the group into teams and begin to work. Sing songs such as “Over My Head” while working. At the end have everybody wash their hands and get together for one last song and a prayer for those who use the park or playground. Remember to take pictures of the location before and after and of the children working together. As well as posting these in your meeting space, try posting some elsewhere in the church where the congregation can see them, and/or put them in the church newsletter.

## 6 Bears to Share

**Leader preparation:** In this activity children will make stuffed bears to give to a local fire station, police station, or hospital emergency rooms. The bears are distributed by fire and police officers or nurses to children who have suffered loss or trauma. Call your local departments to see if they conduct such a program. You may also try a women’s shelter or children’s group home or other places where children may need some comfort. Depending on the age of your learners, you may want to precut the pattern and sew up three sides prior to the activity. Then younger children need only finish the bear by drawing the face and adding stuffing. Otherwise, set up stations with the bear template, fabric, and black sharpie markers for drawing the face. Set up a separate station with a sewing machine and a separate station for stuffing the bears before they return to the sewing machine for the last stitches.

You can download a teddy bear pattern from <http://www.bevscountrycottage.com>.

### Supplies:

- teddy bear template
- ½ yard of soft-yet-sturdy cotton or cotton blend per bear (choose both solids and prints)
- scissors
- black permanent markers
- stuffing such as fiberfill
- a sewing machine
- thread
- needles
- fabric that already has outlines of teddy bears or other stuffed animals on it (optional)

Gather the children together and ask them if they have or had a favorite stuffed toy, or if they remember their first stuffed animal. What was it? Did it have a name? What did they like about it? Explain that sometimes children are in accidents or in a situation where they have no special stuffed animal to play with or to hold. Check to see if any of your learners have direct experience or can relate to this.

Explain that part of Christian mission is to give freely and to help heal those who are hurt. While they may not be doctors yet, the children can help by freely sharing their artistic abilities and provide comfort to children. Let them know they have an opportunity to directly help children their own age and younger by making teddy bears for fire, police, doctors, and other emergency personnel to give to kids in need.

*Instructions for bear:* Trace the pattern on to the fabric. Cut out two bear shapes. Draw a simple face with permanent marker onto one bear shape. Stitch on the stitching line, leaving an opening on one side for the stuffing. Stuff the bear and then finish the opening by hand or with your machine. Do not use buttons for eyes as these can be easily swallowed by small children.

Group the children into pairs or have some work at tracing templates, others at tracing faces, cutting the templates, working with the adult on the sewing machine, and doing the stuffing. See how many bears you can complete. End the activity with thanks to the children and give a blessing on the bears and for the children who will receive them.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Sharing the Good News (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** In this activity, children will pair up and share the good news in scripture with each other or with younger children. An important part of Christian discipleship and mission is sharing good news. Children can begin to see scripture as something to read for enjoyment and to share with others. Depending on your preparation time, you may arrange for children to read Bible stories to younger children or to the toddlers in the nursery. If you do not have preparation time, plan to divide the group into reading pairs. If you have a church or public library, provide picture books with Bible stories for the children to read. If the children are to read directly from the Bible, list some key stories for them to find and share. Consider: Genesis 6:13–22; Psalm 23; Matthew 2:1–12; Matthew 28:1–20; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 2:1–7; John 6:5–15; John 6:16–21; Galatians 5:22–26; Revelation 7:9–17.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles in a child-friendly translation; bring enough for each child to have one
- story Bible or picture books based on Bible stories, such as *The Family Story Bible* by Ralph Milton (Westminster John Knox Press) or *The Pilgrim Book of Bible Stories* (Pilgrim Press, 2003)

Divide the group into pairs. Be creative in this. You might divide the children up by birthday months and then have them pair with someone born in a different month or older children with younger children, or children who prefer dogs with those who like cats or any other method you can devise. Mention that Jesus called people to be disciples from all sorts of different walks of life. He wanted people to work with one another no matter how different they were from one another. A strand of mission is sharing the good news or the story of Jesus with other disciples and those who have not yet heard his story. Distribute Bibles or Bible-based picture books and have the children take turns reading scripture to one another.

### 8 Gift of the Ark

**Leader preparation:** Children will have a chance to consider how God cares for all people and creatures through the story of Noah's ark. They will make and populate an ark and learn about Heifer International. If your youth group collects an offering, consider saving it up for several months and then sending it to Heifer. Or, invite the parents of the children to bring an offering for this activity. The amount collected will determine which kind of animals the children may select. You may wish to read up on Heifer Project and check for additional resources at <http://www.heifer.org>.

### Supplies:

- felt squares
- card stock templates of animals and the ark
- scissors
- flannel board to hold the felt figures, or poster board and hot glue gun to affix them
- Bible in a child-friendly translation
- Heifer International Information
- animal crackers and juice (optional)

Ask the children to tell you what they know about Noah's ark. Some of them may know the major story points. Acknowledge their offerings. Read the story in Genesis 6:13–22 and 8:1–12, or use a picture book that tells the story such as *Noah's Ark* by Jerry Pinkney (Chronicle Books, 2002). Distribute felt, templates, and scissors, and invite the children to make the ark and animals. When they have finished, place them on the flannel board.

Tell them about the mission of Heifer International and how children and adults help with everything from a few chicks to a whole ark full of animals. If you have prepared in advance, collect or total the offering for Heifer and have the children decide which kind of animal they wish to purchase for a Heifer recipient. If time permits, enjoy a snack of animal crackers and juice or play animal charades. Conclude the activity with a prayer celebrating the children's offering and for the family who will receive the animal or animals.

## 9 The Gift of Play

**Leader preparation:** In this activity children will help gather games and sporting equipment for children in need. You will need to make contact with a local agency or group who works with children and that needs games and sports equipment. Places to contact include Boys and Girls Clubs, state departments of children and family services, foster parent associations, children's homes or settlement houses, or refugee services agencies. Once you have identified whom your group will help, contact parents and the congregation to encourage their donation of gently used or new sports equipment or games. Gather these items in one place. In the activity, the children will help repair games as needed and make sure all the pieces are intact. They will also talk about the context of the children whom they will be helping. If you are interested in sharing sports equipment here or abroad you may want to contact <http://www.sportsgift.org> for more information.

You can find the lyrics and hear the tune for "Guide My Feet" at <http://www.tinyurl.com/25hfttj>.

### Supplies:

- soap and water or a nontoxic cleaning spray of vinegar and water
- soft towels or paper towels
- masking tape
- information about the group or children to be helped
- crayons and markers
- large piece of card stock or poster board
- Bible
- lyrics for "Guide My Feet" (African American hymn)

Throughout this Exploration the children have had a chance to think about God and mission. They have had a chance to work joyfully so that others might play. Gather the children together and share with them Jesus' welcome of children as central to his teaching about how we are to live. Read Mark 9:30–37. Talk to the group about how some children are not always able to play joyfully or feel Jesus' welcome. They are going to help give some care to children. Work as a group to clean and make repairs to gently used games and sports equipment. Make sure all the pieces are included in any open boxes. Work together on a greeting card in which the children send good wishes to the children who will play with these games. Take a group photo to add to the card. While you are working encourage the children to share with one another about their favorite sports and games. You might ask how it feels to win or lose, what they might do as a Christian to see that everyone is included in group games or to encourage others to do their best, or other questions. Conclude the activity by joining in a circle to sing "Guide My Feet."

### Reflect

Do you remember what it was like to be a child of eight or nine and to be strong and capable and yet not allowed to help out? Just as in Jesus' day, our children are often the least visible and are the least able to be heard. How can children get their voices heard by adults who have the power to make changes? How are children received in your community? What level of participation in the work of the congregation are they allowed to have? Outside your congregation, who speaks for children? Who is concerned with caring for them? How many other ways might children be able to serve in your community if given a chance?



# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages seven to eleven) have a clear sense of fairness, of right and wrong, and a developing sense of the world around them. In this Exploration, children will be invited to imagine living in the realm of God. They will explore how they can enjoy God's creation, of which they are a part, and live peaceably with their neighbors in the here and now. They will experience how to work and play for justice for all people and the environment now and into the future.

### About this Exploration

We understand from Jesus that the heart of a child invites us into the realm of God. Living and playing joyfully propels Christian congregations, families, and individuals to respond to this invitation with imagination, creativity, spontaneity, wonder, delight, and hope. Thus equipped we enjoy God's creation—of which we are a part—and confront adversity, scarcity, and fear. Our joyful living leads us to acts of compassion and social justice; our joyful playing makes space for peace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Mark 16:1-8**

**Psalms 112**

## Leader Preparation

Now more than ever we and our children live in uncertain and changing times. Now more than ever we need to tell one another about Christ, who shows us how to live, a God who is constant in love and mercy, and the Holy Spirit that helps us to reach out to others with compassion and hope. Read Mark 16:1-8. Note how the women feel in this passage. Though they are sad and afraid and speechless, note how God has gone before them. Someone has rolled away the stone. Jesus has been raised and will be waiting for them in Galilee. Jesus' story does not end on the cross, and ours does not end at the tomb. We have a choice about the life we lead after we know about Jesus. Read Psalm 112. Here even in the centuries before Jesus, Jewish writers gave voice to qualities of a righteous person. Such people take joy in following God and revere God with all their heart, mind, and might. Such people are gracious, merciful, and just. They give freely and help the poor. They are steady and true to God. They provide light in dark times. Think of persons young and old in your community who exemplify these qualities and be sure to include yourself in the list.

We need to remind ourselves that we are always works in progress, for we are also human and prone to imperfection. God forgives us, and in return we continue to strive to live a life that pleases God, as did Christ. Take time to imagine each child you will lead in

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Rolling Stone Relay (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** One of the great joys of Christian life is the knowledge that Christ has gone before us to prepare a way. In Mark 16:1-8 we read how Jesus' friends went to his tomb after he was crucified. They went to pay their respects and prepare him for burial. To see him they would have to roll away a large heavy stone. What a worry at a sad time. Yet when they arrived, the stone had been moved and an angel let them know where to find Jesus. In this boisterous physical activity, learners will embody God and Jesus going before us to prepare the way.

**Supplies:**

- Bible in a child-friendly translation
- space for running, ideally outdoors or in a large open hall
- a bucket or bowl of small rocks or stones or other objects
- water to drink after this activity

Explain to your learners that part of the good news of Jesus is that he has gone ahead of us through life, death, and resurrection so that we need not have fear about our future. We can see how God and Jesus go ahead of us in scripture. Have a learner read Mark 16:1-8. Talk with the children about the wonder of the tombstone being rolled away and the angel telling the women not to be afraid. Discuss the alternate endings to the text, or ask the children what they think happened next. Even though we cannot see God or Christ in person, we know God and Jesus are helping lead us into the future.

Divide the group into at least two teams, with a runner for each team at a starting line and then other team members staggered around the race course. On the signal from the starter, each runner at the starting line grabs a rock and dashes to a teammate. As they pass off the rock, have them paraphrase the angel's words in the text saying, "Do not fear. Jesus lives. He is in Galilee. Pass it on." The rock or stone is then passed to the next runner and both runners continue on to the next and so on around the course. The first team to complete the relay leaves one person behind and they run to another part of the room labeled Galilee where they wait for everyone to gather. The person left on the course points the way to Galilee for the other runners. You can repeat this game a couple of times and can have faster runners help encourage slower runners. The game is not over until everyone arrives safe in Galilee. When all have arrived, have everyone circle up and place their hands in the center of the circle one on top of the other and give a team cheer: "Wherever two or three are gathered Jesus is here. Hurray!" You may wish to provide water to drink after this activity.



### 2 Peace Blessings and Prayers

**Leader preparation:** The ancient people and early Christians of Ireland lived a life connected to the land and to the Spirit. Revering the earth and knowing one's place as a creature among God's creatures were among the elements of their spirituality. Similarly, many native or indigenous people also combined an understanding of the earth and natural environment with an understanding of a creative force at the heart of the universe. Indigenous people both in Ireland and the Americas did not make a separation between life and spirituality or spirit. While some converted by force or by choice to Christianity, their earlier understanding of the connectedness of all things and creatures continued to inform their spirituality.

this Exploration. Imagine all the children and yourself as children of God. Think of admirable qualities in each child that you will share in the following activities. How can you encourage them? If they have a hobby or sport or artistic skill, how can you help them see this as a gift from God? How might their efforts be strengthened if they think about playing or practicing or performing as their gift back to God?

You may want to establish an opening ritual of about five minutes that you will use in each session with this age group to create familiarity and comfort before leading the children in new activities. An opening ritual may involve allowing one child to turn on an electric candle or to light a real one. For this Exploration consider placing symbols of peace and pictures of peacemakers around the area with the candle. You may also wish to use the poster [Dancing 'Til Dawn](#) by Marianne Millar as a symbol of living into the future with joy. The figures in the picture have danced through the night and are welcoming the dawn. Share with the learners that as Christians we also persevere with joy. Open each session with lighting a candle. Remind children that as friends of Jesus they can help bring the realm of God and peace of Christ into this world. Check in with the children about their hopes and concerns for their future. Conclude the opening moments by teaching the children to sing "Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee" (tune: Ode to Joy). You may sing the whole song or just verses 1 and 4 as time permits. Teach the children to sing with joy and gusto. You will want to have the children read the song out loud before you begin teaching it to check for their understanding of the words. Similarly, you may wish to have a closing ritual in which the children name where they felt joy or saw God

Today people, other creatures, and the land or environment all need stewardship and care. We can learn much from the wisdom and work of indigenous persons. We take care in using prayers and blessings of other people to honor their memory and acknowledge their living descendants. The needs of the world are so great and our learners so small that it might seem overwhelming to them. This activity helps them begin to work for God's realm by learning to find and center in a peaceful place within themselves and to bless others with peace. Encourage them that all journeys start with the first step and that they have the capacity to accomplish good in the world. Print the prayer for the bookmark on card stock and punch a hole in the top. Write out the Gaelic blessing in the center of big piece of butcher paper or newsprint and put it on table.

### **Supplies:**

- card stock
- crayons or colored markers
- watercolor paints
- thin ribbons in various earth tones from greens to browns
- pinking shears or other decorative scrapbook scissors
- poster: "Dancing 'Til Dawn" by Marianne Millar,

<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>

Gaelic blessing text for the mural:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.  
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
Deep peace of the infinite peace to you  
*(adapted from ancient Gaelic runes)*

Source: <http://www.faithandworship.com>

Blessing text for the bookmarks:

I arise today  
Through a mighty strength:  
God's power to guide me,  
God's might to uphold me,  
God's eyes to watch over me;  
God's ear to hear me,  
God's word to give me speech,  
God's hand to guard me,  
God's way to lie before me,  
God's shield to shelter me,  
God's host to secure me.  
*(Bridgid of Gael)*

Source: <http://www.tinyurl.com/4pdtac>

Talk about peace. Ask the children what it feels like or looks like. Talk to them about the early people both before and after in Ireland and other places such as the native peoples of the Americas, Australia, and elsewhere who understood that there was a connection between the land and God. They understood that people were a part of creation and how they behaved had an effect on the land, other creatures, and the creator. Today we are relearning this ancient wisdom. As Christians we are connected to God by Jesus. We are also called to care for one another. A part of caring is to be peaceful. We can be peaceful and set aside fear because our God is faithful and present with us.

Ask the children how one might act peacefully. They may think of being still or calm. Wonder with them whether being peaceful can also be active. Might dancing



during the session. Thank them for their participation and then again sing “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” as a way to close the session.

*Prayer: Holy God, creator of heaven and earth, I thank you for the amazing never-ending gift of love and grace you bestow upon us. Your light shines before us so that we may follow without fear. The light is constant even in hard times. Help your light to shine through me and through [name your learners aloud] as we continue to bring your realm near with acts of love, justice, peace, and compassion towards ourselves, our neighbors, and your earth. 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.

or praying or marching or singing be peaceful or promoting peace? Show the poster. What do the children imagine is happening? Do they see peace in this picture? We do not know why the figures are dancing until dawn. They may be celebrating or mourning. These Native American people are using dance to express themselves.

Invite the children to make art to promote peace in themselves and the world. They will work together to make a peace mural illustrating the ancient Gaelic blessing of peace on the butcher paper or newsprint. The Gaelic people were the ancient people of Ireland. Invite them to draw pictures to illustrate the words on the paper. While some are working on drawing or painting the mural, others can work on decorating bookmarks on card stock. Each learner can make one bookmark to give to another learner in the group. Hang the mural up to decorate your learning space throughout this Exploration. Conclude the activity by reading the mural and bookmark prayers together out loud.

### ③ “God Made Something” Story Time

**Leader preparation:** We are all part of God’s creation. Unfortunately, for a large part of Christian history Christians understood that God’s gift of giving people dominion over the natural world in Genesis meant that we could do as we liked with the natural world. Hopefully today we are less arrogant and realize that all creation (including ourselves) belongs to God. We are called not to be dominating overlords, but stewards and caretakers of this earth as we await the coming of God’s realm. The creation story is one of the most familiar to most people. We speak of God as the Creator and tend to forget that part of the gift of being made in God’s image is that we are all called by the Creator to be creative. In this activity the learners will hear both scripture and a humorous retelling of the creation story that encourages them to fight boredom and to be joyful, creative, and imaginative along with God. Read Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the book *God Made Something Out of Nothing to Do and So Can You* ahead of time so that you can read the scripture with a sense of wonder and the story with a sense of fun. Be ready to pause as the group members ask questions or react to the text.

#### Supplies:

- book *God Made Something Out of Nothing To Do and So Can You* by Timothy LaBell (Paulist Press, 2001), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2bmx4ep>
- Bible in a child-friendly translation
- 8½” x 11” blank paper
- crayons or colored markers

Invite the children to sit comfortably in a semicircle around you. Let them know they will be hearing scripture about the creation of the world and also a funny story. Show them the book of Genesis in the Bible and read to them Genesis 1:1–2:3. Next read the storybook *God Made Something Out of Nothing To Do and So Can You*. Have a conversation about what they noticed as similar and different between the stories and what they liked in each reading. Pass out paper and art supplies and have the children draw a picture of something they can do when it seems like there is nothing to do. Alternatively have the children draw or paint a mural illustrating God’s creative work in making the world. You can draw an earth shape on the paper ahead of time and then let them fill it in with aspects from the scripture. Use their drawings or the mural to decorate the learning space for this exploration. Conclude the activity by discussing ways to work through boredom that encourage or promote discipleship qualities such as stewardship, care, healing, sharing, and loving—such as helping out at home or at school, making something to share with a friend or a new person at school, visiting people who are sick, taking care of the family pets, picking up trash to help the planet, and collecting recycled goods.

## Discerning &amp; Deciding Activities

 4 Joyful, Joyful Sing Along (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Singing is one way Christians pass along the story of our faith and express our joy and praise to God. A traditional hymn from Western Europe that expresses human joy in living with God is “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy). There are many different versions of the hymn, and it is sung in many styles and in many settings around the world. We learn the hymns and tunes of our faith and they can bring us joy in our daily living and sustain us in uncertain or changing times. In this activity, learners are invited to sing a traditional hymn of joy or to make art in response to hearing the hymn. You can see the lyrics and hear the tune at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12> and <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a>.

**Supplies:**

- Bible or text of Revelation 7:9–17, in a child-friendly translation
- lyrics to “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy)  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>
- access to YouTube to watch clip from *Sister Act 2*,  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/ddmcdt>, and a children’s choir,  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/29gw6cy>

Listen to and or watch various versions of the hymn “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee.” Invite the learners to sing along and dance with the music. Alternatively, share the lyrics with your learners. Let them listen to the song and then name how it makes them feel. Talk about how images in the hymn express joy. Invite them to listen to the music and draw or paint a picture or joy while they listen. When they are finished invite them to share their pictures with the group. Ask them to name ways they can share their joy, show joy to the world, and be joyful. Have the group read Revelation 7:9–17 and invite them to wonder about how this hymn is also a picture of all of creation praising God.

## 5 God’s Dream

**Leader preparation:** Most children are surrounded by more white (background) noise than ever before. Radios and iPods play in the background, television sets and video games blare and blast, cars and trucks and all kinds of mechanized objects like microwaves and cell phones beep and squeal. It can be hard in all that noise to make a quiet place to hear God speak. In this activity children will be invited to relax and still themselves. As they relax they will be asked to imagine the story they will hear. Read the book you choose for this activity several times to be familiar with it. Be comfortable with silence and if some learners fall asleep, let them do so. You may want to arrange with the children’s parents for them to bring a blanket and pillow to this session. Otherwise, provide beach towels or blankets for them to lie down on.

**Supplies:**

- beach towels or blankets and pillows
- a room in which the lights can be dimmed or that has enough natural light to allow the overhead lights to be turned off without making it pitch dark
- small bell, rain stick, or small drum



- a good story about God and God’s work in creation or of a vision of God’s peaceable realm; recommended: *God’s Dream* by Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2e7e21z>; *Does God Have a Big Toe?* by Rabbi Marc Gellman (see the Prologue: Partners, pp. 1–4), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2g9jhlq>; *Does God Ever Sleep?* by Joan Sauro, <http://www.tinyurl.com/28vlln4>; *In God’s Name* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, <http://www.tinyurl.com/24gjvdp>; or *God Created* by Mark Francisco Bozzuti-Jones, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2afzd7d>
- popsicles (optional)

At the beginning of this activity, invite the children to find a place to put their blanket so that they have space between them. Invite them to get comfortable by taking off their shoes. While they are getting comfortable and sitting on their blankets, talk to the learners about noise. Ask them to be quiet for a full minute and listen for sounds. What do they hear (note things such as the hum of machinery, traffic, breath, and so on). When have they had an experience of quiet? Explain that sometimes we can be busy and surrounded by noise. Sometimes it is good to take a break and remember God. Tell them that they are going to hear a story about God. They will be lying down so they can listen. They may even close their eyes if they like. Tell them that when the story is done, there will be a short time with no speaking and that when they hear you play a drum or a rain stick or ring a bell, they may open their eyes and speak. Play the instrument once so the children will know what the signal sounds like and so they will not be startled. Invite them to take three deep breathes. Demonstrate this yourself taking a long breath in, holding it, and then slowly exhaling. After they have done that invite them to lie down. Dim the lights. Read the story you have selected slowly and clearly so that the children have time to absorb the words. At the end of the story take one minute of silence and then play whichever instrument you have at hand. Invite the children to sit up and get reoriented. Distribute popsicles and ask them about what they heard or felt or imagined during the meditation.

## 6 Hungry Lions

**Leader preparation:** Children face a complex world with many temptations and pressures. Practicing faith and trusting God can help children make good decisions in tough situations. Children also have the capacity to play and be joyful in situations that may seem hopeless to adults. Children can be helped to grow strong in faith while nurturing their joyful souls. Read both stories ahead of the session. You may also wish to read about Ruby Bridge’s life in her own words at her website, <http://www.tinyurl.com/29pnprv>. Note comparisons between the two stories. Notice how both young people are faithful, confront hungry lions or racist people, and overcome adversity with faith. This is also similar to the life of the righteous person described in Psalm 112. The learners will hear both stories and converse about their similarities and will also look at the poster “Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers for signs of faith and hope. If you are unable to access a copy of either book, you may read or retell Daniel’s story from scripture and tell Ruby’s story from her website.

You can find the lyrics to “Over My Head” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>. Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song.

### **Supplies:**

- *Daniel and the Lion* by Sekiya Miyoshi (Pilgrim Press, 2001) <http://www.tinyurl.com/2az5zoy>
- *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, (Scholastic Press, 1995) <http://www.tinyurl.com/2a32cqt>

- poster: “Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- lyrics to “Over My Head”

Gather the learners in a semicircle to listen to stories. Let them know that God is with them always. Lead them in singing “Over My Head.” Share with them that there have always been children and teenagers who practiced their faith and found courage in trusting God. Outline the biblical story of Daniel, explaining that he was a faithful Israelite young man in the Bible. He was captured and forced to live in another country with people who did not have the same faith. He stayed faithful and survived being put into a lion’s den. Read *Daniel and the Lion*. After the story ask the children what Daniel did to survive. Next tell them you are going to share the story of American girl who was a faithful Christian and who was the first African American student to integrate an all white elementary school. Read her story. Again ask the children to notice Ruby’s actions. Finally show the poster and invite the children to draw parallels to the stories they have heard. Where is God in the picture? Who or what is or are the “lions” or danger in the picture? How are people responding? Ask the learners to talk about a time when they have they faced a difficult situation and how they have handled it. Conclude the session by praying Psalm 112 or Psalm 23 together.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Encouraging Words (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** In his teaching, healing, and other acts of compassion Jesus provided encouragement for the least and the last in his society. He also encouraged his followers, for he never sent them out alone, but always in pairs or groups. This activity will help reinforce Christian friendship and show the learners a simple way to encourage one another.

#### **Supplies:**

- index cards
- fine-tipped markers or pens
- lyrics to “Say It! Sing It!” by JoEllen Miller, Attachment: Activity 7

Gather the learners together. Lead a short ice breaker in which each child says his or her name and favorite game or sport and something that makes him or her smile. Then rehearse the lyrics to “Say It! Sing It!” Talk about encouragement. As Christians we are called to encourage one another and to speak truthfully. We are each children of God and therefore we have value as members of the human family. It is important to share encouraging words to build one another up in faithful living and bless one another. Distribute cards and pens or markers to each learner. Ask each to write his or her name on a card, and then to distribute these around. Ask each learner to write one thing he or she likes or admires about each of the other learners on the cards. As the leader you will write something about each learner also. When everyone is finished distribute the notes and give everyone a chance to read the encouraging words they have received.

### 8 Hope Flies

**Leader preparation:** The butterfly serves as a symbol of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The caterpillar spins a cocoon around itself and appears to have died only to emerge as a beautiful butterfly. Jesus lived a life on earth, was cruci-

fied and placed in a tomb and believed to be dead, and on the third day he was raised by God to new and magnificent life. This is the core of our hope for the future. A butterfly can remind learners of this hope and offer encouragement to them. In this activity the learners will think about this symbol of hope and make their own. You will want to practice folding several butterflies ahead of time in order to help the learners. Read the scripture passages as well so that you are familiar with the texts.

### Supplies:

- Bible in a child-friendly translation
- origami paper printed with patterns and solid colors
- either a book about origami with a butterfly pattern available in the library or at a craft store, or the ability to watch <http://www.tinyurl.com/c4geru>

*Option 1:* Provide enough origami paper for the learners to make five butterflies of various sizes and the following materials to make a butterfly mobile:

- thin wooden dowels bound together with tape or glue in the form of an X
- thin wire
- scissors

Join the sticks in an X and tie a thin wire to each end and in the center. Allow enough wire to fall at different lengths and attach an origami butterfly to the bottom of each wire. Use a sixth smaller piece of wire to create a loop on top of the X so the children will have a way to hang up their mobiles at home or in your setting.

*Option 2:* Use really large paper such as old newspapers to make the origami butterflies. Then attach wooden dowels to the underside of the butterflies to make a kite, and provide kite string and a winder for each learner. Take the butterflies outside and fly them. Supplies for this option:

- large card stock or sheets of old newspapers
- wooden dowels
- kite string
- masking tape or staples to attach dowels to paper
- small magnets to attach to the back of the butterfly, glue

Gather the learners around in a semicircle. Ask them what they know about the life cycle of the butterfly. Talk to them using the notes in the leader preparation section about how the butterfly is a symbol of Christ's resurrection. Ask someone to read the story from Mark 16:1–8.

Instruct them that they will make their own butterfly to symbolize Christ's resurrection and the new life in Christ, using the Japanese art form origami. Take the learners to a table with sheets of origami paper for each learner. Either watch the video on YouTube or guide the learners step by step in making their butterflies. They can then take their butterfly home as a reminder of the hope we have in Christ.

See above for the two main options for this activity. Another option is to make as many butterflies as you have people in the congregation and invite the children to keep one and pass the others out to people in the congregation at Easter, Pentecost, Bring a Friend Sunday, or even just to brighten an ordinary Sunday worship time.

You could use one or more butterfly kites, go outdoors, and let the children fly them. Be sure to be in an area away from power lines and trees.

## 9 Lemon Aid

**Leader preparation:** This activity will take some coordination with others in your faith community. The children will prepare lemonade and take donations for it before or after worship. You will need to announce the lemonade sale in worship, the bulletin, and church newsletter as a project of the children. You may also wish to invite donations of new or gently used sporting goods or games to the project. The money they raise may then be used toward purchasing games or sports equipment to be given to a family in need, a women's shelter, a group home, a school, a youth recreation center, or other place where children may be in need of a chance to play but lack equipment to do so. You will need to identify the family or other organization that you will help. You will need to coordinate when the children will have their "Lemon Aid" stand and perhaps they can prepare some simple easy-to-bake cookies to sell as well. You will want to have all ingredients assembled and ready to make before the learners arrive. This activity can be spread over several sessions or may be a whole session in itself. This is a simple mission project that allows the children to directly confront a scarcity in their community and to reach out and share with children their own age. In this way they can practice the righteous life described in Psalm 112.

Be sure to follow up on this activity with a report in worship or the newsletter or on website thanking participants and describing the project.

It will help to have a few adult or teen helpers for this activity.

### Supplies:

- Bible in a child-friendly translation; bring enough for each child to have one
- lemons
- water
- sugar
- mixing spoons
- knife
- cutting boards
- juice squeezer
- ice cubes
- cups
- access to a refrigerator (and a stove if you will also make a baked good)
- table for the stand
- garbage can and bags for cleanup
- donation jar or basket
- poster board and colored markers
- prepared cookie dough that can be baked while the rest of the activity is completed, or bring ingredients for something that is easy to prepare, such as no bake cookies or rice crispy treats (optional)

Children can begin right away to make a difference in their community. In this activity the learners will work together to prepare lemonade and possibly some baked goods for your community. They may charge a set price or simply ask for donations for their project. Work with the children to help them understand that whether we have many toys or sporting goods or just a few, there are children who are completely without playthings. The children as part of their own playing and living joyfully can share and help others to play, too. Read Psalm 112 with them.

In this activity the learners will turn sour lemons into a sweet drink and the sweet drink into games or recreational equipment to help other children play. Host this session in a kitchen and be sure to help the learners make the connection that their faith is not restricted to the sanctuary or regular learning space but goes with them in whatever they do. If you are preparing cookies or another treat, match older children with younger ones and an adult supervisor to prepare the treats. Form a second team with an adult to prepare the lemonade. All the cooks can then wash hands and set up the area where they will sell their drink and baked goods. They may make a sign advertising “Lemon Aid” and decorate their donation jar. Children may also want to write a short note of encouragement and friendship to the children who will receive their gift.

### Reflect

What keeps us going when we are sad, troubled, or discouraged? What does hope look like? How can we share hope that we have from Jesus with one another to help each other grow in faith? How can we share this hope outside our faith community? Jesus gives us eternal hope and a future with God. This is a joyful thing. How shall we live and share that joy? What difference can a child or group of children make in promoting the peace of Christ in their homes, communities, and the world?



Attachment: Activity 7

Say It! Sing It!

$\text{♩} = 132$

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!\_\_\_\_\_

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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