



## 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 Setting

Individuals discover the United Church of Christ (UCC) in many ways. Some have been born into the denomination and have grown up within it. Among these, some even remember when the denomination was formed in 1957, including what it was like in the predecessor bodies before the merger. These individuals have firsthand experience of what was gained and what was lost in giving birth to a new denomination. Some, however, have only recently discovered the UCC either as individuals or as members of affiliating congregations. Such folks may have come to the UCC from other traditions and backgrounds, bringing their particular gifts with them to enrich the whole church. They are now helping to shape what it means to be the UCC. All have stories to tell and “hidden histories” to discover and explore. This Discovery Exploration will help long-timers and newcomers alike to encounter the joy of who we are as a church that is united and uniting, multicultural and multiracial, open and affirming, accessible to all, just peace and whole earth oriented.

### 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**

**Exploring & Engaging Activities**

**Leader Preparation**

Spend time with the Bible focus passages listed above. Read them in a variety of translations. Consider how they relate to your life. Think of times in your life when you have found joy being a part of the United Church of Christ, in worship, fellowship, mission, or service. Be prepared to tell your own stories. Ask yourself each day, “What joy do I bring to others as a follower of Jesus?”

Note: The following activities are for a variety of age groups. Feel free to adapt them to your own settings of ministry.

Prayer: *Holy One, fill me with your light and life. Increase my understanding of your Word. Empower me by your spirit that, in communion with you and your child Jesus, I may be a voice for hope, justice, and joy. Amen.*

**Session Development**

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

**1 The Word of Life Brings Joy (Easy Preparation)**

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 John 1:1–2:2 several times using different translations.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles in a variety of translations

Gather in a circle or around a table. Invite two different participants to read aloud 1 John 1:1–2:2, using two different translations. After each reading, ask the participants to note the words or phrases that catch their attention. Ask them also to notice the differences between the translations. Invite the participants to connect to the reading by imagining themselves as either the writer of the letter or a member of the community receiving the letter. Who is the “we” the writer refers to? How might the writer be feeling? What might be the writer’s motivation for writing? How might the recipients feel? How might the recipients be changed by the words of this letter?

Discuss the following questions, either in small groups of two or three or in the large group, depending on its size: What does the phrase “Word of life” mean to you? How does sharing the Word of life bring you joy? How might you share the Word of life with others this week?

End with this or a prayer in your own words: *Holy One, you are the light of the world. You give us your word and offer us joy. Help us to share what we have seen and heard of the Word made flesh in our lives, so that we, too, may be a source of joy for the world. We pray in the name of your child, Jesus, and in the power of the playful Spirit. Amen.*

**2 More Truth and Light**

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adult, Adult

**Leader preparation:** Read the chapter on the Reformation in England found in the short history of the United Church of Christ, <http://www.tinyurl.com/39huk99>.

Prepare a brief summary of the setting in which John Robinson spoke the words “the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his Holy Word.” Create a simple altar in the midst of your setting. You may want to use a colorful cloth or scarf, rocks, and other natural items. Place enough candles on the altar for the number in your group, with a large candle in the center. Have a light and taper on hand. Secure a copy of the song “More Light, More Truth” (text and tune by Christopher Grundy, available at <http://www.christophergrundy.com>). Arrange for a way to play the song. If you wish, you may choose instead to sing a song about light, such as “This Little Light of Mine,”

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2cwbzzt>,

or another found in your congregation’s hymnal.

**Supplies:**

- a variety of candles in different sizes, at least one per participant, including one large candle
- a lighter and a taper
- items such as colorful cloth and rocks, to create a simple altar
- Bible



- 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.

- copy of the song “More Light, More Truth,” or a similar song about light
- the means to play the music or, if needed, hymnals or copies of the song

Gather in a circle or around a table, with the altar arranged in the center. Light the tallest candle in the center of your altar. Invite the participants to focus on the flame, breathe slowly and deeply, and become aware of God’s presence. After a period of silence, ask one participant to read 1 John 1:1–5.

Invite the participants to reflect on the words “word” and “light.” How do they experience “word” and “light” in their lives? Briefly tell the story of John Robinson and his admonition that God “has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his Holy Word.” Invite the participants to share how they have experienced more truth and light in and through the United Church of Christ. After a brief discussion, ask the participants to consider those areas of their lives, their community, or the world where more truth and life is needed. Invite each participant to light one candle and name a place, circumstance, or situation that needs more truth and light.

Offer the following or a similar prayer: *God of Light, illumine the dark places in our lives and in the circumstances we have named. Help us to listen for the truth you are still revealing and to speak it in love, so that the dark places in our world may be brought into the radiance of your all-encompassing love. Amen.*

End by playing or singing the song you have chosen.

### 3 Many Words, One Church

**Age Levels:** Older Children, Youth

**Leader preparation:** Write out the name of your congregation on a whiteboard or newsprint where all the participants can see it.

**Supplies:**

- piece of paper and writing instrument (pen, pencil, colored pencil, or marker) for each participant
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Ask the participants to read the words you posted (the name of your congregation). Ask the participants what those words mean to them. Distribute the paper and writing instruments. Tell the participants they have five minutes to find as many different words as possible that can be made from the letters of the name of your congregation. For example, from “Pilgrim United Church of Christ,” one might write pig, grim, grime, tied, untied, shirt, glue, pinch, and so forth. They may work in teams for this.

At the end of five minutes, have the participants read the words they found. List the words on the whiteboard or newsprint as they are called out. Ask if anyone sees any other words. End by noting that just as the name of the church is made of different letters that can be arranged in many words, so is the church made of different people and groups who are all united in Christ.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Called and Gifted (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults



**Leader preparation:** Read Ephesians 4:12–16 in a variety of translations. Reflect on Article VI, line 20 of the UCC Constitution, <http://www.tinyurl.com/3xmuh8h>. Consider the following question: What is your understanding of ministry?

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Invite the participants to sit in a circle or around a table. Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 4:12–16. Invite the participants to discuss the following question, either in groups of three or four or in the large group, depending on its size: How do you experience ministry in your life?

Read Line 20 of Article VI of the UCC Constitution: “The United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls the whole Church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ by witnessing to the Gospel in church and society. The United Church of Christ seeks to undergird the ministry of its members by nurturing faith, calling forth gifts, and equipping members for Christian service.”

Ask the participants to spend a few moments in silence pondering how they participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ in church and society. How is their engagement a source of joy, either for them as ministers or for the world?

After a brief period of silence, invite the participants to share their answers in small groups or in the large group. In the large group, ask each participant to name one gift he or she has been given to be used for the building up of the body of Christ. If participants have difficulty naming their gifts, invite others to name the gifts they see in them. Rejoice in the gifts that are present by clapping in praise to God or showing some other sign of enthusiastic gratitude.

End with this or a similar prayer in your own words: *Gracious God, thank you for the gifts represented in this circle and in the circles of saints that surround us. Nurture our faith and equip us by the power of your Spirit that we may be of joyful service in our church and in the world. We ask these things in the name of Jesus the Christ, in whom we are built up in love. Amen.*

### 5 Gifts Bring Joy

**Age Levels:** Young Children, Older Children, Multiage, or Intergenerational

**Leader preparation:** Read Ephesians 4:11–12 in a variety of translations. Before this session obtain a photograph of each participant. Gather enough small boxes, one for each participant. Tape or glue each photo inside a box. Wrap each box in festive paper and bows. Put the participants’ names on the boxes corresponding to their photos. Alternatively, you could wrap a small mirror in each box, instead of individual photographs.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- Photographs of participants, or a small mirror for each participant
- wrapped boxes as noted above

Gather in a circle or around a table. Invite the participants to tell a story of a time when they received a gift. What were the circumstances? Who was there? How did they feel? How did they use the gift? Discuss special times when people often give or receive gifts, such as birthdays, baptisms, Christmas, or confirmations.

Read Ephesians 4:11–12 in a translation suitable for your age group. Ask the partici-



pants what they think the passage means. Discuss the passage with them, explaining and giving examples for unfamiliar words. Then ask for a story of a time that they gave someone a gift. How did they feel? Discuss how gift-giving brings joy to both the giver and the receiver. Invite the participants to name the gifts that God has given to each of them. Distribute the packages you made, telling them they are not to open them until you instruct them to do so. Ask the participants to guess what is in them. Explain that what they have been given are gifts for the church.

Invite the participants to unwrap their gifts and to tell you what they see. Explain to the participants that each of them is a gift from God that brings joy to the church. Being a part of a church means sharing our gifts with others. Ask them to name the gifts that they give to the church. Prompt them, if necessary. (Suggestions: singing, praying, behaving well in church, helping a younger child or an older adult, greeting parishioners, letting someone else go first to the goodies during fellowship hour, helping on church clean-up day, donating toys to the refugee family.) Invite them to name one specific way they will share the gift of themselves this week.

End by singing “Thank you, God, for all our gifts” (repeat four times) to the tune of “Happy Birthday.”



### 6 Joy Comes with the Morning

**Age Levels:** Younger Children, Older Children

**Leader preparation:** Print the handout Attachment: Activity 6 front and back, and make copies for each child. Secure a copy of the poster “Dancing ‘Til Dawn” by Marianne Millar, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>.

Optional: Read about the UCC Council for American Indian Ministries and the hidden history of the American Indians in the United Church of Christ: <http://caimucc.org> and <http://www.tinyurl.com/35vthmb>.

#### **Supplies:**

- poster: “Dancing ‘Til Dawn” by Marianne Millar, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>
- one handout per participant, printed front and back, “Psalm 30:1–6,” Attachment: Activity 6
- brightly colored crayons, colored pencils, or markers

Ask the participants to sit in a circle on the floor. Show the poster “Dancing ‘Til Dawn.” Ask the participants to tell you what they think is happening in the picture. Read the adaptation of Psalm 30:1–6 from the handout.

Ask the participants if the psalm makes them see the picture in a new way. Invite the participants to draw pictures of themselves when they are sad and happy in the spaces indicated on the handout. As your closing prayer, have the participants read the psalm with you, if they are readers, or to repeat each line after you. End by encouraging the children to share the psalm with a special adult in their lives.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Mourning into Dancing (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Psalm 30 in several translations. Reflect on and prepare a brief testimony about a time when you experienced joy following repen-





tance. Arrange enough chairs in a circle for the number of participants. Place a candle on a small table or stand in the center of the circle.

### Supplies:

- candle and lighter/matches
- Bible
- paper and pen/pencil for each participant
- meditative music CD and player (optional)

Invite the participants to sit in a circle. Begin by welcoming everyone. Invite participants to introduce themselves if there is anyone in the group unknown to anyone else. Ask the participants what the word “repentance” means to them. Invite one participant to read Psalm 30. Refer to verse 11 and tell your story of experiencing joy after repentance.

Invite the participants to remember a similar time in their lives. Offer five minutes of silence (with music in the background) to reflect on their experiences by writing a poem, drawing a picture, writing a narrative, or simply making notes. At the end of five minutes, light the candle in the middle of the circle and invite the participants to share their stories. (This could be done in the large group, or in smaller groups of two or three.) At the end of the sharing, ask the participants to answer the following question with one word: What will it take to turn our mourning to dancing?

End with this or a similar prayer: *Merciful God, thank you for the gift of forgiveness, both offered and received. When we are in the depths of sin and anguish, forgive us and heal us. Turn our mourning into dancing, so that we might praise you and give you thanks, all the days of our lives. Amen.*



### 8 Joyfully, We Adore You!

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Make copies of the hymn “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You” (tune: Ode to Joy), Attachment: Activity 8. Gather supplies.

### Supplies:

- hymn: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You” (tune: Hymn to Joy), Attachment: Activity 8
- variety of colored pencils
- drawing paper
- markers, crayons, and paints
- old magazines
- glue
- scissors

Invite the participants to answer the following questions: How does being a part of the United Church of Christ bring you joy? How do you bring joy to others as part of the United Church of Christ? Explain that for Christians, joy often leads to praise of God, individually and in the midst of community. Distribute copies of the hymn “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You,” along with a variety of colored pencils. Invite the participants to underline or circle the words that stand out for them in each verse, using different colors in response to different feelings or memories. Encourage them to make notes or drawings in the margins that remind them of their feelings and memories.

After a few minutes, invite the participants to create a collage, painting, drawing,



or mural that reflects their engagement with this hymn. Encourage them to have fun with this exercise. When the artwork is complete, invite each participant who wishes to share their art piece with the group and to say a few words about it to do so. Remind everyone that this exercise is not about being a good artist, but about expressing one's joy with regard to God and one another. Encourage the group to ask questions or offer positive comments about each work of art.

End by gathering in a circle and singing the hymn together joyfully.

### 9 No Matter Who You Are ...

**Age Levels:** Older Children, Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Review the Free Hugs Campaign on YouTube at <http://www.tinyurl.com/pman7>.

Write out the UCC slogan (or display a poster or sign if you have one): "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access

### Reflect

Be sure to enjoy yourself as the leader! You are a role model for playing and living joyfully in the United Church of Christ.

Ask the participants how they have experienced the joy of being welcomed in the UCC. Invite the participants to share how they welcome others into the UCC. Into what and whom are they welcoming them? How do they demonstrate their welcome? Show the YouTube video clip "Free Hugs Campaign." Ask the participants how their homes, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and church might be different if everyone offered free hugs. Draw the connection between free hugs, extravagant welcome, and God's grace.

End with a group hug and a commitment on the part of each to offer extravagant welcome this week in unexpected places.



Attachment: Activity 6

## Psalm 30:1-6

I give you praise!  
You raised me up, God.  
I prayed to you;  
    you heard my prayers.  
You lifted my spirits  
    when I was hurt and feeling bad.  
Clap your hands, everyone!  
*(clap, clap, clap)*  
Praise God with your hands!  
*(clap, clap, clap)*  
I went to bed crying tears.  
When I woke, my tears were dry.  
I was happy!  
Even after a sad day,  
    joy comes with the morning.

Draw a picture of yourself when you are sad:

Draw a picture of yourself when you are happy:



Attachment: Activity 8

## Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You

*(words by Henry Van Dyke; tune Hymn to Joy)*

Joyful, joyful, we adore you, God of glory, God of love;  
Hearts unfold like flowers before you, opening to the sun above.  
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away;  
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!

All your works with joy surround you, earth and heaven reflect your rays,  
Stars and angels sing around you, center of unbroken praise.  
Field and forest, vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea,  
Chanting bird and flowing fountain teach us what our praise should be.

You are giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blessed,  
Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!  
Loving Spirit, Father, Mother, all who love belong to you;  
Teach us how to love each other, by that love our joy renew.

Mortals, join the happy chorus, which the morning stars began;  
Boundless love is reigning o'er us, reconciling race and clan.  
Ever singing, move we forward, faithful in the midst of strife,  
Joyful music leads us onward in the triumph song of life.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Setting

Within the United Church of Christ, it has been said that we take the scriptures too seriously to take them literally. "Seriously," however, does not necessarily mean "solemnly." The Word of God, written in our holy texts and made flesh in Christ Jesus, is proclaimed wherever the good news is needed. And good news not only makes our joy complete, but also brings good pleasure to our God.

### About this Exploration

The history of our faith, recorded in scripture, 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**

Read the scriptures listed above in a variety of translations. Reflect on the ways in which the story of our salvation intersects with your story. How does God’s good news bring you joy? Reflect on the role that Scripture plays in your faith community. How might you and your community practice being of the “same mind, having the same love, being in full accord” so that joy may be complete?

*Prayer: Gracious, God, you have revealed yourself in the sacred writings we call the Scriptures so that all may come to full knowledge of you. Unite my mind with that of Christ so that I may be a vessel of true joy for the world. In the name of the Word made flesh, 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.

**Exploring & Engaging Activities**

**1 Good News—Pass It On! (Easy Preparation)**

**Age Levels:** Older Children, Youth, Older Youth, Young Adult, Adult, Multiage, or Intergenerational

**Leader preparation:** Think about the good news in the life of your congregation, how you have received it, and how you pass it on. Reflect on the relationship between the good news in your congregation and God’s good news of the gospel.

**Supplies:**

- paper or index cards
- pen or pencil for each participant

Welcome the participants and ask them to sit in a circle or around a table. Invite the participants to think about the good news in their congregation and to write one piece of good news on an index card or piece of paper, without saying it out loud or showing their good news to others. Play the “telephone” game: one person whispers his or her good news in the ear of the person next to him or her, who whispers it in the ear of the next person, and so forth until it comes all the way around the room. Have the last person say the good news out loud. Repeat until all have shared their good news around the room. Compare each message in its original and final forms. (This should be fun!) End by noting that another word for the term “good news” is “gospel” and that as members of the United Church of Christ, we are to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. Ask the participants to commit to sharing the good news about their congregation with at least one other person this week.

**2 Sources of Joy**

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Psalm 1 in several translations. Reflect on the question, “What brings true joy?” Arrange the room so that the participants can sit in a circle and have access to a table for writing and other creative work.

**Supplies:**

- several translations of the Bible
- pens or pencils
- paper
- colored pencils, markers, crayons
- magazines
- scissors
- glue

The book of Psalms is the hymn book of the ancient church, and we have inherited it as our prayer book. Invite a volunteer to read Psalm 1. Encourage the participants to share what they hear in the scripture. Invite another participant to read Psalm 1 from a different translation. Ask the participants if they heard anything different. Invite the participants to name what they believe makes for a truly happy or joyful person. Invite the participants to write their own psalm, beginning with the words “Happy is the one who . . .” Encourage them to illustrate it if they wish. When the participants are finished, invite them to share their psalms with the group if they want to.

End with a discussion of the role of scripture in our lives as a source of joy. *Note:*



- 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.

Some people may have had scripture used against them in harmful ways, depending on their previous experiences. Be prepared to acknowledge this hurt, perhaps by noting that there are far more psalms of lament in the book of Psalms than there are psalms of thanksgiving and praise. Encourage the focus to be on joy, even if it also needs to be on healing.

### ③ The Bible and the United Church of Christ

**Age Levels:** Adults

**Leader preparation:** Download or order copies of the booklet *The Bible and the UCC* available at <http://www.tinyurl.com/32rga34>. Read the booklet. Consider your understanding of the role of the scriptures in your life and the life of the church.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles in different translations displayed artfully
- copies of the booklet *The Bible and the UCC*

Invite the participants to discuss how they have related to the Bible throughout their lives. How has their understanding of scripture and its authority in the church and in their lives changed since they first were introduced to the Bible? Hand out the booklet *The Bible and the UCC*. Invite participants to read the brief article entitled “Do We Believe in the Bible?” by Lillian Daniel. If the group is large, divide into smaller groups of three or four people each, and invite the participants to discuss the article in their small groups. End by asking the participants to discuss how the Bible is related to the faith practice of playing and living joyfully.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ The Bible Tells Me So (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Adults

**Leader preparation:** Gather a variety of translations of the Bible, enough for at least one per participant. Download and copy the article “Fifteen Passages to Know by Heart” by Quinn G. Caldwell, found in the booklet *The Bible and the UCC*, available at <http://www.tinyurl.com/32rga34>.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- copies of the article “Fifteen Passages to Know by Heart”

Begin by telling the participants that you are going to take a walk down Bible memory lane. Invite participants to sing “Jesus Loves Me” together; teach the hymn as needed. Ask the participants if they can remember the first Bible verses they were taught. Invite the participants to recite those verses out loud. What other verses bring them joy, comfort, inspiration, or admonition? Recite those verses. Distribute copies of “Fifteen Passages to Know by Heart” and compare the list of the groups’ favorites with those on the list. Encourage the participants to learn at least one new Bible verse and to pray it throughout the coming week. Stand in a circle, as participants are able, and sing “Jesus Loves Me” one more time.

### ⑤ Back to the Future of the Church

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults



**Leader preparation:** Visit the following link on the UCC website:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/349lf85>.

Download and make copies of this document, one for each participant. On index cards, write the following four headings: A Church Attentive to the Word, A Church Inclusive of All People, A Church Responsive to God’s Call, and A Church Supportive of One Another.

**Supplies:**

- copies of *Toward the 21st Century: A Statement of Commitment*
- index cards as noted above

Ask the participants who saw the film *Back to the Future* to recall it briefly and re-tell its story. Invite the participants to join in an exercise called Back to the Future of the Church. Divide the group into four smaller groups. Give each small group one index card with the headings noted above. Give 5 minutes for the groups to brainstorm what the heading they have been given means to them. Name biblical precedents for each heading. Invite each small group to share their heading and a summary of its meaning with the larger group.

Distribute copies of the document. The four headings on the index cards are the four commitments of the UCC, adopted by the General Synod in 1993, as it looked to the future of the church. Have the participants return to their small groups to name ways in which their congregation is living into each commitment. Invite the participants into prayer and discernment about the ways their congregation can strengthen these commitments in the future.

End with this or a similar prayer: *God of all time and beyond all time, empower us by your Spirit, that we may be a church attentive to your word, inclusive of all people, responsive to your call, and supportive of one another, as we seek to live into the future you have dreamed for us. We pray in the name of the one who has redeemed all time, Jesus the Christ. Amen.*



## 6 Put on the Mind of Christ

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 2:1–13 in several translations. Reflect on what it means to “put on the mind of Christ.” Secure supplies. Set up the room with table or counter space for creative play.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- plain brown paper grocery-size bags
- plain paper plates
- scraps of fabric
- ribbon, crayons, markers, old magazines, scissors, and glue
- “glue-able” craft items, such as yarn, feathers, buttons, old keys, and the like
- song: “Say It! Sing It!” by JoEllen Miller (*Sing! Prayer and Praise* #188), Attachment: Activity 6

Invite a volunteer to read Philippians 2:1–13. Discuss with the group what it means to “put on the mind of Christ.” Invite the participants into a spirit of play. Instruct them to use the items to create a visual representation of “putting on the mind of Christ.” Ask each participant to demonstrate their creation. Remind the participants that as the UCC, we proclaim by our very name that our unity is in Christ.



Close by singing "Say It! Sing It!"

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 A Pilgrim People (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Adults

**Leader preparation:** Arrange the room so that participants can see one another and are seated comfortably, such as in a circle or around a table. Reflect upon your spiritual pilgrimage, particularly as it relates to the United Church of Christ.

**Supplies:** None

Begin by asking the participants to introduce themselves to one another by telling the most exciting place they have ever been and the most exotic place they would like to go. Note that many of the gospel stories about Jesus occur while he and his followers are "on the way," that is, journeying from one place to another. Ask participants to name some of these passages. For example, the call of the first disciples occurred as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:18 ff); Jesus encounters the woman at the well on his way through Samaria from Judea to Galilee (John 4:1 ff); and the disciples encounter the risen Jesus without recognizing him as they traveled from Jerusalem to Emmaus (Luke 24:13 ff). Reflect on the fact that the UCC was formed in 1957 by the merger of four predecessor bodies: Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed, and that the UCC is still being formed by individuals and congregations who are joining us on our journey. Some of our forebears were even called pilgrims. With this in mind, invite the participants to tell the stories of their spiritual pilgrimages. Remind the participants that the first followers of Jesus were considered "people of the Way." Invite the participants to imagine where the United Church of Christ is being called in its journey into God's future and the Way in which we will get there.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Holy One, we are a people of the Way, on a journey toward you and the fullness of your reign. Thank you for making us traveling companions. Be with us as we venture faithfully into your future as your servants and servants to one another, we pray. Amen.*

### 8 Stand by Me

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 2:1–13 in several translations. Secure a means to show the YouTube clip "Stand by Me, Playing for Change" at <http://www.tinyurl.com/5m7cvu>.

Read the article "Coachella 95 Remembered: UCC Celebrates Farm worker Movement" at <http://www.tinyurl.com/3aef6po>.

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 2:1–13. Ask the participants to note the word or phrase that captures their attention. Discuss how unity and joy are related. Show the video clip "Stand by Me, Playing for Change." Invite the participants to reflect on what they saw and experienced. Tell the story of the "Coachella 95" and the action of the General Synod 9 to stand with the farm workers to prevent violence. Discuss the UCC's commitment to social justice and solidarity with those who seek justice. Ask for other examples of the UCC's commitment to



stand by those in need. Invite the participants to reflect on and discuss the ways in which a commitment to social justice and solidarity with “the least among us” is connected to the gospel of Jesus Christ (not something extra that we do, but part and parcel of who God calls us to be).

Invite the group to stand while you play the YouTube clip one more time. Dance your prayer of unity and solidarity.



### 9 Welcome the Little Children

**Age Levels:** Older Children, Youth, Older Youth, Young Adult, Adult

**Leader preparation:** Read Mark 9:30–37 in several translations. Secure a copy of the poster “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan,”

<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- poster: “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan,”  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>
- ball that can be thrown and caught easily

Invite participants to reflect on and discuss what it means to play and live joyfully. Elicit concrete examples from their own experiences. Show the poster “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan.” Explain that the group is going to create a story about the picture. Begin by saying, “Once upon a time...” Then you will toss the ball to someone in the group. That person will continue the story (for example, “...there were two boys whose names were...”). Then that person will toss the ball to someone else, who will continue the story. Explain that individuals may “pass” if they wish by tossing the ball to someone else. Toss the ball around the room until the story is complete.

*Note:* Be prepared to prompt the participants with questions if they get stuck, such as: Where are they? What are they doing? Where are their families? What were they doing before? What will they do after? Also, ask that the ball be thrown to you if you notice that some participants are being left out so that all who wish have a chance to participate. Ask the participants to make connections between their own experiences and the story they made up.

## Reflect

The scripture passages associated with this faith practice resource invite us to be childlike, welcoming, and of one mind, finding joy in our unity in Christ. Taking scripture seriously does not mean that we must always be solemn. As Paul reminds the believers in Philippi, our will and our work is for “God’s good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13b, NRSV). Have fun with these activities. Find your own pleasure in God’s word and freely share your joy.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Mark 9:30–37. Pose this question: How does our reading of this scripture inform how we might interact with the children in the poster? Begin tossing the ball again, so that each “catcher” must answer with a one or two word response.

End by asking the participants to consider how they as a group, or their congregation, might be more welcoming to the children of the world.





Attachment: Activity 6

### 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: Discipleship

### About this Setting

As members of a church family that is united in Christ, discipleship is a way of life. We are reminded in the UCC Statement of Faith that God calls us to accept not only the costs of discipleship, but also its joys. Too often, we think that discipleship is only solemn, serious work. Yet it can also be jovial and joyful play. In this Exploration, we are invited to “lighten up” and discover that God’s ultimate desire for us is to be God’s gathered children, free from all pain, sorrow, and tears.

### 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

Spend time reading and praying with the Bible focus passages. How do these words speak to you? What does it mean to you to be a child of God and also an heir? How have you experienced the joys of discipleship in the United Church of Christ?

Prayer *Holy One, you have made us your own through your child Jesus Christ. Help me to live as your child with joy and thanksgiving. Blessings and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and power and might be to you, O God, forever and ever! Amen.*

### Session Development

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

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

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Growing in Christ (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Galatians 4:4–7 in several translations. Consider how you understood God when you were a child and how that understanding may have changed as you have matured. Consider your understanding of the church in the same way. Arrange the room with tables in a large square, U-shape, or rectangle so that participants can see one another, easily enter into discussion, and also have a place for drawing and writing.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- drawing paper, at least two sheets per participant
- newsprint, enough sheets for every three or four participants in your group to have one
- crayons, colored pencils, and/or markers

Welcome the participants and invite them to introduce themselves if they do not know one another. Begin by asking for a volunteer to read Galatians 4:4–7. Briefly discuss what it means to be a child of God. Invite the participants into a childlike spirit. Distribute paper and writing implements and ask them to draw a picture of God as they understood God when they were young children. Allow about five minutes for this activity. Invite the participants to take turns sharing their pictures and describing them. Ask them if their understanding of God has changed as they have matured, and if so, how? Discuss.

Invite them to draw a picture of church as they understood the church as a child. Allow three to five minutes. Invite the participants to take turns sharing their pictures and describing them. Ask them if their understanding of church has changed as they have matured, and if so, how? Discuss.

As a final task, divide the group into groups of three or four to create a collective picture of what it means to be the United Church of Christ. Ask the groups to share their pictures and to describe them.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Jesus, you prayed that they all may be one even as you and your Abba are one. Unite us in this faith community so that we might be true followers of your way. Amen.*

### 2 Child of God

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Galatians 4:4–7 in several translations. Consider what it means to you to be a child of God. Invite participants to bring with them a photograph of themselves as a baby or young child. Secure masking tape or another means for displaying the photographs. (Be careful not to damage the photos with your adhesive.) Set chairs in a circle. *Note:* Be attentive to the needs of those with disabilities in your group and accommodate accordingly. Optional: Secure a copy of the song “I Am a Child of God” by Jill Hendrix and Maureen Jenci Shelton, found in *Sing! Prayer and Praise*, #171.

**Supplies:**

- Bible



- baby photo of each participant
- masking tape or other adhesive
- small bulletin board and pushpins or other means of making a display (optional)
- cut-out numbers or numbered sticky-notes to affix next to each photograph
- paper and pencils or pens for each participant
- copies of song or hymn (optional)

Ask the participants to give you a photograph of themselves as a baby or small child, without sharing the photograph with the others. Have them introduce themselves by telling their name and the story of their birth or adoption. Where were they born and in what circumstances? Who raised them? Who else was a part of their family at the time? Are there any family stories about their birth or adoption that they would like to share?

Make a display of the photos, with a number corresponding to each photograph. If possible, display them around the room for ease of movement later. (*Note:* Alternatively, if anyone in your group has mobility needs, make a display on a small bulletin board that can be passed around the group.) After the introductions, give each participant a blank piece of paper. Have them make a list of numbers as long as the number of participants/photographs. Look at the photographs and guess whose photograph is whose by writing the name associated with each number on their papers. Check the answers by noting the guesses for each number, having the actual person announce herself or himself at the end of the guessing. When all photographs have been identified, ask one participant to read Galatians 4:4–7. Invite the participants to discuss what it means to them to be children and heirs of God.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Abba God, you are Mother and Father to us all. You sent your own child to be born in this world so that we might receive adoption as your daughters and sons. Help us to live a life worthy of being your heirs. In the name of our brother Jesus, we pray. Amen.*

Optional: Sing “I Am a Child of God” by Jill Hendrix and Maureen Jenci Shelton, found in *Sing! Prayer and Praise*, #171.

### ③ Discipleship: Say What?

**Age Levels:** Older Youth

**Leader preparation:** Consider your understanding of the word “discipleship.” Look up and record a number of different definitions, using a regular dictionary, biblical or theological dictionary, and/or on-line resources, such as <http://www.ucc.org>. Look up the words “disciple” and “discipleship” in a concordance.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- several pieces of portable recording equipment, such as tape recorders, digital cameras, video cameras, iPhones
- whiteboard or newsprint and markers

Write the word “discipleship” in large letters at the top of a whiteboard or newsprint. Invite the participants to offer their own definitions of the word. If they need help, prompt them by looking at the root of the word and its suffix. See how many different definitions you can discern. There are many different understandings of the word “discipleship,” even though it is something that we as



Christians are fundamentally called to do and to be. Reference Bible passages on discipleship, such as Matthew 28:19.

Invite the participants to interview members of their congregation, asking them to define the word “discipleship.” If members are gathered elsewhere at the same time as this meeting, send your participants out in teams to record as many people as they can. If they are not gathered elsewhere at the same time, arrange for a time when the interviews can occur. When the interview teams return, ask them to share what they learned.

*Note:* Edit these interviews into a brief audio or video clip to be shared in worship along with a sermon on discipleship or at another faith practices gathering.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 **There’s No Ship Like Discipleship (Easy Preparation)**

**Age Levels:** Young Children, Older Children

**Leader preparation:** Consider your understanding of the word “discipleship.” Cut out a simple boat shape from brown paper, big enough to hold a small picture from each the member of your group, approximately 24–36 inches long. Decorate the boat (for example, with portholes, sail, or oars) and write the words “HMS Disciple Ship” on it. Cut out rectangles from drawing paper, approximately 3” x 4” or proportionate to your boat, one per participant. Gather supplies.

Optional: Learn the refrain to the hymn “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love.” You can find the lyrics and tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2acocog>.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper cut-out of a boat
- masking tape or other adhesive
- small rectangles of drawing paper
- crayons
- song: “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” (optional)

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

Before your participants arrive, tape your boat in a prominent place in the room. Explain to your participants that today you are going to talk about discipleship. Ask if any of the participants know the meaning of the word. Ask them if they can think of other words that end in the suffix “ship” such as friendship or fellowship. Read Matthew 28:19 in a translation appropriate to the children’s ages.

Explain that a disciple is a follower. A Christian disciple is a follower of Jesus. Ask for examples of how they are followers of Jesus. Invite the participants to draw a picture of themselves engaging in an act of kindness or doing something that Jesus would do. When they are finished with their pictures, tape them so that they are “in” the boat. They are now passengers on the “Disciple Ship.”

End by singing “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love.”





## 5 Words That Include

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Revelation 7:9–17 in several different translations. Consider who the “great multitude” is. What do they look like? Who is included? Who is excluded? Read “Inclusive and Expansive Language in the United Church of Christ” and “Language About People” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ucubcx>. Download and make copies of “Inclusive Language with Reference to the People of God” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/3xtv27p>. Gather supplies.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- paper for drawing
- crayons, colored pencils, and/or markers in a variety of colors
- copies “Inclusive Language with Reference to the People of God”
- instrumental music and player (optional)

Welcome the participants. Explain that today you are going to explore words that include and words that exclude. Invite a volunteer to read Revelation 7:9–17. Read verse 9 again.

Ask the participants to close their eyes and imagine what the “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (NRSV) looks like. Distribute the drawing paper and crayons, colored pencils and markers. Invite the participants to draw the image in their minds. (Optional: Play instrumental music while they do this.) Invite the participants to share their drawings. Discuss similarities and differences. Ask the participants to imagine if anyone has been left out of their collective drawings.

Speak briefly about the power of language to include and exclude and how we are shaped and formed by the language(s) we speak and hear. Ask if any in the group have ever felt excluded because of language. How did they feel? Discuss the UCC’s commitment to inclusive language. Distribute and review the article. Invite participants to be aware of the language they use and hear when referring to people in worship, work, home, and community.

End with this or a similar prayer: *God of many names and beyond all names, thank you for the gift of language. Enlighten and inspire us that, by the words we use, we may be bearers of your good news to all people in ever widening circles of inclusion, until that day when we stand together as a multitude before your holy throne. In the name of your Incarnate Word, we pray. Amen.*

## 6 Who Do You Say That I Am?

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Galatians 4:4–7 in several different translations. Consider the image of God as parent. What other images of God speak to you? Read “Inclusive and Expansive Language in the United Church of Christ” and “Expansive Language with Reference to God” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ucubcx>. On individual index or note cards, write one image of God along with the scripture reference for that image, one image per card (see <http://www.tinyurl.com/33b9kul>). Fold the cards in half so that the words cannot be seen and place them in a basket or other container.

Optional: Download and make copies of the resources listed above as handouts for the participants. Secure copies of the hymn “Bring Many Names” by Brian Wren, #11 in *The New Century Hymnal*.



### Supplies:

- Bible
- index or note cards as described above
- basket or container for cards
- copies of handouts (optional)
- hymn: “Bring Many Names” by Brian Wren (optional)

Welcome the participants. Explain that today you are going to explore expansive language for God. Ask a participant to read Galatians 4:4–7. Invite discussion about the image of God as parent. Note that while the image of God as parent, particularly that of “father,” is familiar to most of us, the Bible is filled with other images that expand our notion of who God is. Explain that the group is going to explore images for God through charades.

Tell the participants that you will hand each of them a card. They are to read it without letting anyone else see it. They are to act out that image without using words while the others guess what the image is. Hand out the cards and have fun playing “Image-of-God Charades.”

End with a discussion of the UCC’s commitment to inclusive and expansive language for God, humanity, and creation.

Option: Close by singing together the hymn “Bring Many Names” by Brian Wren.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Baptized into Discipleship (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Adults

**Leader preparation:** Arrange the room with comfortable seats in a circle. Place a small table in the middle of the circle. Cover it with a colorful cloth and place on it a bowl, pitcher of water, candle, and a small towel or individual napkins.

### Supplies:

- small table and table cloth
- bowl and pitcher filled with water
- candle and lighter
- small towel or napkins

Invite the participants to tell the story of their baptisms. Explain that, among other meanings, the act of baptism marks the beginning of a new life of discipleship with Christ. Invite the participants to discuss what discipleship with Christ means to them. Ask for examples from the life of your congregation that illustrate living discipleship.

Option: Distribute the handouts and discuss the meaning of baptism in the United Church of Christ.

At the end of the sharing, light the candle and pour the water from the pitcher into the bowl. Invite the participants to renew their commitment to discipleship through some ritual act using the water. For example, they may dip their fingers and make the sign of the cross, splash water on their faces or other parts of their body, wash their hands, or something else. Adapt accordingly for participants with special needs.



End with this or a similar prayer: *Joyful Spirit, through the symbols of this water and light, renew in us a spirit of discipleship that we may be one with Christ and one another, we pray. Amen.*

### 8 Making Discipleship Fun

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:**

Visit <http://www.tinyurl.com/yeyjrxz>. Secure a way to show the YouTube clip to your group. Arrange the room with comfortable seating in a circle or another arrangement to facilitate discussion among the participants.

**Supplies:**

- YouTube clip listed above and a means to show it
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Invite the participants to tell a story of a fun time they had living the life of a disciple of Christ. This question will likely lead to a discussion of just what discipleship is. Discuss for approximately five minutes. Ask: Would more people would engage in discipleship activities if they imagined them to be fun?

Show the clip from YouTube. Ask the group to brainstorm ways that discipleship can be made fun. Record these ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Ask the participants to commit to living consciously, intentionally, and delightfully as disciples this week. Suggest that they pick one idea from their list and put it into practice. Ask each participant to name the specific way she or he will make discipleship fun this week.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Holy One, you delight in us! May we delight in you and in one another as we go forth in joy as your disciples, even as fools for Christ. Amen.*

### 9 The Costs and Joys of Discipleship

**Age Levels:** Young Adult, Adult

**Leader preparation:** Secure copies of the “UCC Statement of Faith in the Form of a Doxology” for Each Participant, #885 in *The New Century Hymnal* (<http://www.tinyurl.com/363yv2kdr>).

Research the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (cf. <http://www.tinyurl.com/36frm5j>) and prepare a brief presentation on the notion of “cheap grace” versus “costly grace.”

**Supplies:**

- copies of the “UCC Statement of Faith in the Form of a Doxology”

Distribute the UCC Statement of Faith. Ask for volunteers to read it, one stanza at a time. At the end of the reading, ask participants to reflect on the idea of “the costs and joys of discipleship.” Invite the participants to tell a story of the costs and joys of discipleship in their personal and congregational lives. Ask one participant to record the key words of each person’s story.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Faithful God, you call us into your church as followers of your child Jesus and as members of this congregation [name of the congregation]. We come before you recognizing that your grace, while free, is not cheap. We know first-*



*hand some of the costs and joys of discipleship: [read the key words from the stories that have been shared]. Empower us, O God, that by your Spirit we may be willing to bear the costs and rejoice in the delight of true discipleship. Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you. Amen.*

### Reflect

“Life is not meant to be endured; it is meant to be enjoyed” (anonymous). The same can be said for a life of Christian discipleship. Encourage your participants to find the joy and to be willing to play. For God delights in us and desires for us complete joy (John 15:11)!

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Setting

The United Church of Christ is a united and uniting, reformed and reforming church. We honor the traditions of our forebears in faith even as those traditions are being made new, and new traditions are being formed, in every generation. Ours is a church with both roots and wings. We rejoice in a God who continues to make all things new.

### 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

Spend time with the Bible focus scriptures above, reading and praying with them. They are familiar passages to many. Even if they are familiar to you, read them again and yet again, perhaps from different translations, as if for the first time. How do these words speak to you of the traditions of the United Church of Christ? How do the traditions within our faith, both those of the past and those that are being formed for the future, bring you joy?

Prayer: *God of all things ancient and emerging, thank you for our forebears in faith upon whose shoulders we stand. Teach us to honor those traditions that have formed us even as you make all things new. 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.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### ① Testaments, Not Tests (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Gather a copy of the *New Century Hymnal* for each of your participants. Alternatively, you may download and print a variety of traditional and contemporary creeds and the UCC Statement of Faith in the form of a doxology from <http://www.ucc.org>. Have paper and pens or pencils on hand.

**Supplies:**

- copies of a variety of traditional and contemporary creeds and the “UCC Statement of Faith in the form of a Doxology” (several creeds, including this one, are in the *New Century Hymnal*)
- paper
- pens or pencils

Ask the participants to recall any creeds they learned as children and to recite any they know by heart. Hand out copies of several traditional and contemporary creeds and the “UCC Statement of Faith in the form of a Doxology.” Invite the participants to compare several creeds and the Statement of Faith. What stands out for them? What is similar? What is different? What is most essential in their judgment? Remind the participants that in the United Church of Christ we honor the ancient creeds and see them as testaments of faith, not tests.

Distribute the paper and pencils and invite the participants to write their own statement of belief. Allow five to ten minutes for this.

When they are finished, invite the participants to share what they have written. End with this or another prayer in your own words: *O God, we believe! Help our unbelief. Amen.*

### ② Spiritual Traditions: Holy Reading

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Isaiah 11:1–10 and Song of Solomon 2:8–13 in a variety of translations. Choose one passage in one translation for use in prayer. Familiarize yourself with the tradition of *lectio divina* (cf. <http://www.tinyurl.com/27wy354>). Set up your space with comfortable chairs. Place an altar with items such as a candle, icon, cross, or Bible in a central place in the room. Prepare a brief explanation of *lectio divina* from the resource above.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- altar and items such as a candle, icon, cross, or Bible

Welcome your participants and invite them to make themselves comfortable in the room. Invite the participants to share how they pray. Ask if any have experienced the ancient spiritual practice known as *lectio divina*. Offer a brief explanation of the practice if needed. Invite the participants into an experience of *lectio divina* using the focus scripture you have chosen.

Before reading the selected Bible passage, allow a minute or so of silence and remind people to listen for the word or phrase that catches their attention.



- 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.
1. A person reads the Bible passage slowly. People are given several minutes to recall in silence the word or phrase that caught their attention. Each person shares the word or phrase with others in the group, each taking a turn in order.
  2. Another person reads the same Bible passage. People reflect quietly on the question, “How does this scripture touch my life?” for several minutes. Each person shares aloud with the group how the scripture touched his or her life, saying, “I see, I hear, or I sense...” whatever God gave them.
  3. Another person reads the same scripture passage aloud. Participants reflect on this question in silence for a few minutes: “From what I have heard and shared, what does God want me to do?” or “How does God invite me to change?” Each person shares aloud with other group members in turn what the thing is.
  4. As a closing, each person prays out loud for the person on their left, naming what was shared in Step 3.

End with a prayer. Pause in silence.

When the time of prayer is complete, invite the participants to share what the experience was like for them. Encourage them to adapt this practice to their own needs and temperament.

### 3 Who Do We Say We Are?

**Age Levels:** Older youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** View the video clip on YouTube entitled “Celebration—Part One: Who Do We Say We Are?” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2w8uubg>. Consider your answer to that question. Arrange comfortable seats in a U-formation so that participants can view the video and easily engage in conversation.

**Supplies:**

- video clip: “Celebration—Part One: Who Do We Say We Are?” and the means to show it, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2w8uubg>

Invite the participants to discuss what it means to them that the United Church of Christ is a multiracial and multicultural, open and affirming, accessible to all, and just peace church. Show the video clip. Ask the participants to craft an answer in their own words to the question, “Who do we say we are?” Invite them to share their answer with one other person this week.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Promise and Fulfillment (Easy Preparation)

**Age level:** Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Isaiah 11:1–10 in a variety of translations. Consider the Christian tradition of God’s promise of a peaceable reign and our hope for its fulfillment. Arrange comfortable seating in a circle or other arrangement conducive to conversation.



### Supplies:

- Bible

Invite the participants to answer the question, “What do you hope for?” Ask for a volunteer to read Isaiah 11:1–10. Ask the participants how the passage makes them feel. Invite them to share how they would live if the peaceable reign had already come into its fullness.

End by praying together the Prayer of our Savior.

## 5 Emerging Traditions

**Age Level:** Young Adults, Adults, Multiage

**Leader preparation:** Find the video clip of Rev. Otis Moss III speaking at the Church House on how to talk about Jesus to a new generation available at <http://www.tinyurl.com/37xas4d>. Secure the means to show the video.

### Supplies:

- video clip of Rev. Moss and the means to play it

Invite your participants to consider how the gospel speaks to new generations in the United Church of Christ. Show the video clip of Rev. Moss. Discuss the ways your church reaches out to a new generation and the ways in which you could do that more effectively.

End by inviting the participants to make a commitment to talk with someone of a generation other than their own about the meaning of tradition in the United Church of Christ.

## 6 Love Letter from God

**Age level:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Song of Solomon 2:8–13 in a variety of translations. Consider how the poem celebrates the joy of romantic love. Ponder God’s yearning and love for you. Arrange comfortable seats in a circle. Gather the supplies.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- pens or pencils
- envelopes
- romantic music and a means to play it (optional)

Welcome the participants and invite them to sit comfortably. Ask the participants if they have ever written or received a love letter. Invite them to share how they experience God’s love for them. The Bible contains a book of explicit poetry celebrating romantic love, known as the Song of Solomon. One interpretation of this book is that it is an analogy of the way that God loves us. While that can be difficult for some, because of the raw and sexual nature of the book, it can be powerful for others, even for the same reason.

Ask a volunteer to read Song of Solomon 2:8–13. Invite the participants to share what they heard in the poem. Distribute the paper and pens or pencils. Imagine seeing yourself through the eyes of God. Write a love letter to yourself in God’s voice; that is, as if it were from God to you. Have the participants find a comfortable spot in the room to write the letter and ask them to engage in this exercise quietly. You may softly play music while they write. Allow ten minutes to com-



plete the letter. When the letters have been written, distribute the envelopes. Ask the participants to write their names on the envelopes and seal them. Make plans to mail the letters later in the week. Every time they need to be reminded that God loves them, they can reread their letters.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### **7 United Church of Christ Firsts (Easy Preparation)**

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Visit the United Church of Christ website and read the list of UCC firsts at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2e7wdeq>. Download the list and make copies. Become familiar with the UCC ministries of social justice by reviewing the UCC website at <http://www.ucc.org/change-the-world>, including how to join the UCC Justice and Peace Action Network at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2wvjckd>.

**Supplies:**

- copies of the list of UCC firsts

Briefly discuss the tradition of a strong commitment to social justice that is part of the DNA of the United Church of Christ. Distribute the list of UCC firsts and invite the participants to read through it. Ask the participants which of the “firsts” affect them and their congregation most directly. Invite them to tell the stories of that impact. Invite the participants to imagine the UCC ten years from now. What new “firsts” will be added to the list?

End by encouraging the participants to join the Justice and Peace Action Network, if they have not already done so.

### **8 The Tradition of Caring for the Earth**

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read the Song of Solomon 2:8-13. Consider the rich imagery of nature in the text. Visit the United Church of Christ website on climate change at <http://www.tinyurl.com/3a6pddr>. Set up the room so that the participants can sit comfortably and engage in conversation.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- the video clip “Earth Care Day Ecology Conservation Earth Space Photos Videos” found at <http://www.tinyurl.com/35kmjhb> and the means to share it

Encourage the participants to sit comfortably, relax, close their eyes, and breathe deeply and slowly. Invite them to keep their eyes closed and to use their imaginations by picturing the passage of scripture as it is read to them. Slowly read Song of Solomon 2:8-13 Pause after the reading. Invite the participants to open their eyes and describe what they saw with their mind’s eye.

Briefly discuss the UCC’s traditional commitment to the care of the earth, beginning with a resolution at General Synod 2 in 1959 that included “a call for conservation and development of the Earth’s resources for the benefit of all people now and in the future.” Show the video clip. Discuss ways that they as individuals and as members of a faith community care for the earth. Brainstorm ways they



could do more. Remind the participants that “no one can do everything but everyone can do something.”

Invite the participants to delight in God’s creation and to commit to one new thing they can do to care for the earth and its inhabitants.

### 9 Break(dancing) with Tradition

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Watch the YouTube video clip “Jill and Kevin’s Big Day” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/mxhtlw>. Download the video clip and secure a means to show it. Read Song of Solomon 2:8-13. Consider the traditions in your church and family around major life events. Set up the room so that participants can sit comfortably, watch a video, and engage in conversation.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- video clip: “Jill and Kevin’s Big Day” and the means to show it

Invite the participants to tell the story of a tradition associated in a major life event in their family or church, such as weddings, funerals, birthdays, graduations, Christmas pageants, and so forth. Ask: What happens when we break with traditions? How do traditions evolve? Play the video clip without any further explanation. Discuss with the participants what they saw in the video that relates to tradition. Discuss again the two questions listed above.

### Reflect

In the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* Tevye and others sing a memorable song about tradition. The song appears at a time in the plot when the traditions of his family, community, and culture are being questioned and new traditions are breaking long held patterns of stability. Consider the role that tradition plays in your life and the life of the church. Then consider how God makes all things new, even our most deeply held traditions. What is most essential? What can and must change for the sake of the gospel?

Invite the participants to be aware of traditions in their lives and in the life of the church that are evolving into something new.



# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Setting

A baseball game is a baseball game, whether it happens in a sandlot or on Wrigley Field. Yet the context matters to the experience. The same can be said of church. Church happens in specific times and places; the context of ministry matters. While we are united in Christ throughout the United Church of Christ and in our ecumenical partnerships, the rich diversity of the settings and cultures that make up our denomination bring unique gifts that are to be lifted up and celebrated. Let the celebration begin!

### 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

Spend time with the focus scriptures listed above. Pray with them and play with them. How would these scriptures sound to someone from a culture, ethnic or racial group, part of the world, or socioeconomic background that is different from yours? Name your own context for mission so that you may become more self-aware and sensitive to the experiences of others who are different from you. Celebrate the unique gifts that you bring to the United Church of Christ, as well as the unique gifts of others.

*Prayer: God beyond all time and space, you sent your Child to be born of a particular woman at a particular time and in a particular place so that we, your creatures, might be redeemed for all eternity. Help me to appreciate the particularities of our faith so that I might celebrate the unique gifts of others even as I am aware of and celebrate my own. In the name of the One who shattered the barriers between heaven and earth so that all creation might be united in you, 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

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 We Wish to See Jesus (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read John 12:20–36 in several translations. Consider the following questions: Who were the Greeks who desired to see Jesus? Why did Jesus answer the way he did? The scriptures do not tell us if they got to see him. What do you think? Why do you think they wanted to see him? Arrange the room with comfortable seats in a manner conducive to conversation.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Begin by welcoming the participants and inviting them to introduce themselves if they do not know one another. Invite a volunteer to read John 12:20–36. Ask the participants what stands out for them in this reading. Steer the conversation toward the Greeks who asked to see Jesus, with questions such as those in the leader preparation section for this activity. Then ask: If you were granted a one-hour, face-to-face interview with Jesus, what would you tell him or ask him?

At the end of the discussion, encourage the participants to look for Jesus in unexpected people and places this week.

### 2 Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** From the United Church of Christ website download and print the document of UCC firsts (available at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2e7wdeq>). Choose several of the individuals whose stories are briefly told and cut them out. Fold a large index card in half and glue the individual stories to the inside of each card. In your room, set a table with a table cloth, décor, and place settings, as if for dinner. You may wish to provide some light snacks for the “dinner” such as cheese, crackers, fruit, and juice. Place one card at each seat. If you wish, you may also provide “dinner music.” You may also make up place-cards of UCC folks from contemporary times, such as members of the Collegium, conference staff, or your pastor. Use your imagination!

**Supplies:**

- place-cards as noted above
- tablecloth
- décor
- place settings
- light snacks and beverages

Welcome the participants and invite them to find a place at the table, letting them know that here, everyone is welcome. Inform them that they are going to play a game called “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner.” Tell the participants that they have each been given a brief description of an individual important to the UCC. Instruct the participants to read about their “character,” but not to tell anyone else who that character is. Inform the participants that they are to engage in dinner conversation as if they are that character, giving hints without giving names. At the end of the “dinner,” the group will guess who each character is. As the host for the dinner, be prepared with questions to prompt the conversation, such as: How was your journey from \_\_\_\_? Did you have any trouble finding us? Have you any good news to share? How is your family? Encourage the participants to



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.

stay in character throughout the dinner and to engage one another in conversation.

After the guessing has taken place, ask each participant to read the card so that everyone can learn about one another’s characters.

### 3 Over My Head

**Age Levels:** Adults

**Leader preparation:** Find the words and music to “Over My Head,” available in several hymnals, including the *New Century Hymnal*, #514. You can also find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>.

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

Visit the UCC website and learn about the American Missionary Association’s work to establish schools for the children of newly emancipated slaves following the Civil War at <http://www.tinyurl.com/3yffgfox>. *On the Heels of Freedom: The American Missionary Association’s Bold Campaign to Educate Minds, Open Hearts, and Heal the Soul of a Divided Nation*, by Joyce Hollyday (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005) is another excellent resource.

Prepare a brief summary of the work of the American Missionary Association and the churches and schools that resulted from that work. Download from YouTube the brief film clip about Fisk University’s Jubilee Singers at <http://www.tinyurl.com/35h19es>.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- copies of the hymn “Over My Head”
- video clip and the means to show it

Introduce the work of the American Missionary Association. Show the clip of the Jubilee Singers, who were formed to help provide financial support, through their performances, for Fisk University, a school that was begun by the American Missionary Society and remains a UCC-related institution of higher learning. Invite the participants to discuss the role of education and the power of music to liberate.

End by singing “Over My Head.”

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 My Soul Magnifies My God! (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 1:39–56 in several translations. Arrange your room so that participants can sit comfortably and have a place to write.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper
- pens or pencils
- soft music and the means to play it



Ask the participants if they are familiar with the scripture passage in Luke’s gospel known as the Magnificat and, if so, what they remember about it. Invite one of the participants to read the passage. Ask: What stands out for you in the passage? Invite another participant to read the passage, and encourage the participants to place themselves in the reading by imagining themselves in the room with Mary and Elizabeth. What does the setting look like? What is the temperature, the time of day, the emotional feeling in the room? Are they visible to Mary and Elizabeth? Ask the participants to recall a time when they were so filled with joy that they felt like bursting out in a hymn of praise. If they cannot think of a time, ask them to imagine one.

Distribute the paper and pens or pencils and invite the participants to write their own Magnificat. Play the soft music while they write. Invite those who are willing to share what they have written.



### 5 Shotgun, Third Ward

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 1:46–55. Have Bibles in the same translation on hand, or make copies of the Magnificat. Secure a copy of the poster “Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>. Arrange comfortable seating in a manner conducive to conversation. Display the poster prominently in the room.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles or copies of the Magnificat
- poster: “Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Call attention to the poster. Ask the participants what they see. Divide the large group into smaller groups of three or four. Invite each small group to create a story based on what they see in the poster. Invite the participants to tell their stories to the larger group. Discuss contemporary situations evoked by the poster.

Tell the group that the title of the picture is “Shotgun, Third Ward #1.” Explain that “Third Ward” is the name of a part of the city of Houston, Texas, where the artist, John Biggers, lived. Most of the residents of that part of the city were African American people. “Shotgun” is the name of the kind of houses in the picture. They are very simple houses with two or three rooms. If you open the front door and the back door, and the doors of the rooms in between, a nice breeze can blow right through the house. Some people say they are called shotgun houses because you could shoot a shotgun right through from one end to the other, but that doesn’t completely make sense since shotgun pellets scatter and go everywhere, not in a straight line like a bullet. Other people say that “shotgun” comes from a word from West Africa *shogun*, which means “house of God.” Which explanation seems likely to you? Why? What “houses of God” do you see in this picture?

End by reciting the Magnificat together.



### 6 Sisters in the Wind

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Visit the Global Ministries website and download the letter from missionary Lydia Johnson entitled “Surprised by Hope,” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/37p5dcw>. Secure a copy of the poster “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard, available in the *Imaging the Word* poster sets, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>.





Set comfortable chairs in a circle. Display the poster in a prominent place in the room.

### **Supplies:**

- poster: “Sisters in the Wind,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- copy of the letter from missionary Lydia Johnson entitled “Surprised by Hope,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/37p5dcw>

Call attention to the poster and ask the participants to imagine what is going on inside and outside the frame. Engage the participants in a discussion of the difference context makes when engaging in ministry, theology, or the practice of one’s faith. Invite participants to take turns reading the letter from missionary Lydia Johnson regarding the efforts of women theologians in the Pacific islands to establish the Center for Oceanian Women’s Theology. Discuss the role of women in the church in your own setting.

End with this or a similar prayer: *God of all possibilities, surprise us with the hope of resurrection and the fulfillment of your promises of a peaceable reign. Empower us to stand in solidarity with our sisters in the winds of change. We place hope in and pray for the day when all people, women and men of all races, cultures, and times, may freely exercise the fullness of voice you have given them. Amen.*

## Sending & Serving Activities



### **7 Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is? (Easy Preparation)**

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read John 12:20–36, focusing on verse 23. Set comfortable chairs in a circle.

### **Supplies:**

- Bible

Invite the participants individually to describe their relationship with the United Church of Christ. Ask a volunteer to read John 12:20–36. Ask: What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “The hour has come..”? Check your watch or cell phone and tell each other what time it is. (Chances are, there will be a variety of answers, even if different by only a minute or two.) Ask the participants if any of them remember the 1960s Chicago hit, “Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?” If someone is willing to sing it, all the better!

Ask: What time is it in the United Church of Christ? What have we come to in this hour? What are we being called to next?

End with this or a similar prayer: *Holy One, teach us to walk in the light no matter the time or the place. Enlighten our minds and enliven our hearts, so that we are ready to respond whenever you call us. Amen.*

### **8 Cranes for Peace**

**Age Levels:** Older Children, Youth, Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults, Multiage and Intergenerational

**Leader preparation:** Visit the “Fold Cranes” for Peace page on the UCC website,





at <http://www.tinyurl.com/285kslu>. Download the instructions for folding a paper crane and make copies. Secure origami paper or cut out six-inch squares from foldable paper. Practice making paper cranes.

### **Supplies:**

- copies of instructions for folding paper cranes
- origami paper

Tell the story of “The Thousand Cranes,” including why Sadako began folding paper cranes, how her friends continued in her honor, and of the Children’s Peace Memorial. Pass out the origami paper and the paper crane instructions. Have fun learning to fold paper cranes. Talk about the Cranes for Peace project and suggest that the participants either as individuals or a group may wish to undertake the making of garlands for the Children’s Peace Memorial in Hiroshima.

End with this or a similar prayer (found on the Global Ministries “Fold Cranes for Peace” page):

*We are here by grace;  
We are meant to love;  
We will walk with hope;  
We will live for peace. Amen.*



### **9 Title: Dance as If No One Is Watching**

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Secure a copy of the poster “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>. Download the YouTube video clip “Where the Hell Is Matt (2008)” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/64skpp>. Secure a means to show the video clip. Consider the power of playful dance to unite people across the globe. Arrange comfortable seats in a large circle, with enough space in the middle for participants to dance. Display the poster in a prominent place. *Note:* Be sensitive to participants with disabilities and adapt this activity as needed.

### **Supplies:**

- poster: “Joyful Dance,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>
- video clip and the means to play it, <http://www.tinyurl.com/64skpp>

Call attention to the poster. Invite the participants to share their reactions to the poster. Ask the participants if they have ever danced as if no one was watching. Remind them that David danced before the Ark of the Covenant, and Miriam led the women in dancing upon entering the promised land.

Show the video clip of Matt dancing around the world. Invite the participants to discuss the power of playful dance to unite people and promote peace. (It’s hard to stay mad when you are dancing!) Invite the participants to enter into the circle, standing, in wheelchairs, or sitting on a chair in the middle of the room, if needed. An option for everyone is to hand dance, which involves remaining seated and letting one hand, and then both hands, move in response to music or to feelings. Those who may feel inhibited can begin with their eyes closed; some may choose to keep their eyes closed throughout.

Play the video clip again and invite the participants to dance as if no one is watching!



End with this adaptation of the proverb from Zimbabwe: “If you can talk, you can sing. If you can walk, you can dance. Even if you can’t talk, you can make a joyful noise. And even if you can’t walk, you can make a joyful movement!”

Encourage the participants to make joyful movements regularly and in public.

### Reflect

No matter the context, no matter the mission, dare to live creatively and joyfully, and to play!

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Setting

The United Church of Christ turned fifty years young in 2007. Ours is still an evolving church as we seek ways together to live out our vision as a multiracial, multicultural, open and affirming, accessible to all, just peace church. Our future lies ahead of us, beckoning us to come and play in the fields of our God.

### 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**

Spend time reading the focus scriptures above in a number of different translations. How does the resurrection inform your life and faith? How do you live as a righteous follower of God? How will you help to envision and shape the future of the United Church of Christ as one who strives to live in the joy of the resurrection and the delight of a righteous life?

*Prayer: God of wonder and delight, you have brought us safe thus far, and we trust that you will be with us as we journey into your future. Enlighten our minds, enliven our hearts, and empower our wills that we might choose to follow you in joy and justice. In the name of the risen Christ, we 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.

**Exploring & Engaging Activities**

**1 The ABCs of Faith (Easy Preparation)**

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Psalm 112 in several translations. Try writing your own acrostic poem about practicing your faith. An acrostic is a piece of text where each line, verse, or stanza begins with a different letter of the alphabet, in order. Some acrostics might follow a different pattern of letters, such as the letters in a person’s name.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper
- pens or pencils

Welcome the participants and have them introduce themselves if they do not know one another. Ask for a volunteer to read Psalm 112. Invite the participants to reflect on what they heard. Explain that Psalm 112 is an acrostic, a poem in which each successive line begins with consecutive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. (Note that some translations, including the Jerusalem Bible and the New Jerusalem Bible, preserve the acrostic nature in the English.)

Ask for another volunteer to read Psalm 112 again, inviting the participants to listen for what the psalm says about faith practices. Hand out paper and pens or pencils and invite the participants to write their own acrostic poem about faith practices. Alternatively, instead of using the letters of the alphabet to begin each line, use the letters of the name of your church or the letters of your name to begin each line.

End by having the participants read their poems.

**2 Joy!**

**Age Levels:** Adults

**Leader preparation:** Visit the United Church of Christ website at <http://www.tinyurl.com/33kk6lo>. Click on the YouTube video entitled “Joy!” Download the video clip and arrange a means to show it. Read Mark 16:1–8 in several translations. Consider what the joy of Easter, in the midst of terror and amazement, means to you. Arrange comfortable chairs in a U-shape so that participants can both see the video clip and engage easily in conversation.

Optional: Make copies of the “Order for the Great Vigil of Easter” found in the *UCC Book of Worship* for each participant.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- video clip “Joy!” and the means to show it, <http://www.tinyurl.com/33kk6lo>

Ask the participants how they usually celebrate Easter. Invite them to tell stories of memorable Easter worship services they have attended. Ask for a volunteer to read Mark 16:1–8. Discuss how the women and the rest of the disciples must have felt on that first Easter. Show the video clip “Joy!” explaining that it is a glimpse at the way in which one UCC congregation celebrates the Great Vigil of Easter. Invite the participants to imagine ways they might express their joy if they were to truly take the resurrection seriously.



- 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.

If there is time (or in a subsequent activity) distribute the handout from the *UCC Book of Worship* and study and discuss it together. Invite the participants to engage their imaginations and artistic/liturgical talents to plan a service of worship for the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

### ③ Help Wanted

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Psalm 112 in several translations. Cut out the “Help Wanted” sections of several newspapers or print ads from the Internet and post them in your room. Arrange your room with tables in a square or rectangle so that participants can both write and see each for ease of conversation. Place paper and pencils on the table.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- help wanted ads
- paper
- pens or pencils

Ask the participants if they have ever written or read a Help Wanted ad in the newspaper or on the Internet. Ask: What makes for a good want ad? Read a few of the more interesting want ads from the newspaper clippings or the Internet. Psalm 112 is a wisdom psalm that extols the virtues, qualities, or characteristics of a faithful person or community.

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 112. Invite the participants to listen for the virtues, qualities, and characteristics of a righteous person as described in the psalm. Hand out paper and pens and pencils. Invite the participants to write a “Help Wanted” advertisement for a faithful person or for new members of their church. When they are finished, invite the participants to share what they have written.

Invite the participants to consider this week whether they would get the “job” they described and/or how they might use these ads to invite people to join their community.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Terror and Amazement (Easy Preparation)

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Mark 16:1–8 in several translations. Think of a time in your life when you felt terror and amazement at the same time (for example, on a roller coaster ride, skiing down a mountain for the first time, giving birth or witnessing a birth). Set comfortable chairs in a circle.

#### Supplies:

- Bible

Invite the participants to describe a time in their lives when they felt terror and amazement at the same time. Prompt them with examples if needed. Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Mark 16:1–8. Invite the participants to place themselves in the scene and imagine themselves as one of the characters in the story. Ask:





What do you see? How do you feel? End with a discussion of the ways in which joy can come in unexpected ways.

### 5 Removing Roadblocks to Faith

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Mark 16:1–8 in several translations. Gather or purchase rocks (one to two inches in diameter) that can be easily written on. (Note: Bags of rocks are available in most craft stores.) Arrange comfortable chairs in a circle. Create a small altar in the middle of the circle with a cloth, a bowl of rocks, and a candle. Choose meditative music and have the means to play it.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- rocks
- permanent markers
- altar with colorful cloth
- bowl of rocks
- candle
- lighter

Ask the participants if they have ever come across a road block while traveling (such as fallen rocks, fallen trees, or an accident) that they could not move out of their way. How did they feel? Invite the participants to close their eyes, relax, and listen while you read aloud Mark 16:1–8. Use your imagination to put yourself inside the scene of the reading. After the reading, invite the participants to share what they experienced in the reading.

Invite the participants into a guided meditation. Begin playing the music, and say to participants: Imagine the stone over the tomb as a roadblock on your way to Jesus. (*pause*) What roadblocks in your life keep you from Jesus? (*pause*) Choose a rock. Write one word on the rock that represents the roadblock. (*pause*) What do you need in order to remove or go around that roadblock? (*pause*) Turn over the rock. Write one word on that side of the rock that represents the removal of or a way around that roadblock.

Invite those who are willing to share what they have written. Have everyone place their rocks on the altar.

End with this or a similar prayer: *Jesus, we delight in your resurrection, but sometimes we fail to live into the fullness of the hope and new life that it brings. Help us to remove the roadblocks that keep us from living fully the life you would have us live as your followers. When the stones in our way are too big to move on our own, send us companions to help make the way. May these rocks turn from obstacles into a pathway to you, we pray. Amen.*

As the participants leave, invite them to take their rocks with them as a reminder of the way to Jesus.

### 6 An Alternative Ending?



**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Mark 16:1–20 in a study Bible. Note the two endings that are given to the gospel of Mark. Many scholars believe that the original version of the gospel ended with verse 8 and that the two alternative endings were added much later in the development of the manuscript. Consider the differences these ending may have made to the life of the church as it evolved over time. Set comfortable chairs in a circle. Secure a copy of “Allerheiligen” (“All



Saints”) by Wassily Kandinsky (available from the *Imagining the Word* poster set), <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, and display it prominently in the room. Option: Visit <http://www.tinyurl.com/32rga34> and download copies of the booklet “The Bible and the UCC” for your participants.

### **Supplies:**

- study Bibles
- paper
- pens or pencils
- copy of the poster

Ask the participants if they have ever attended a play in which the audience got to choose the ending, or if they have ever watched a movie or TV show or read a book that ended abruptly and they were forced as the viewer or reader to imagine how the plot may have been resolved.

Ask for a volunteer to read Mark 16:1–8 aloud and a different volunteer to read verses 9–20. Invite the participants to notice the differences in the endings. Mark’s was the earliest gospel written. Many scholars believe the original version ended with verse 8 and the clause that says “and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid...” Later writers called “redactors” added the alternative endings to the text. Discuss what difference it makes if you stop reading the gospel at verse 8.

Distribute the paper and pens and pencils. Ask for another volunteer to read aloud Mark 16:1–8a. Ask: Assuming you had never heard this story before, imagine what happens next. Write your own alternative ending to this story. Use your imagination. Invite those who are willing to read their alternative endings.

Call the participants’ attention to the Kandinsky poster, and invite them to imagine how it may depict an eschatological theme, that is, the final “ending” that the resurrection anticipates, when God’s reign has come into its fullness.

Option: Distribute copies of “The Bible and the UCC” for the participants to take with them. Encourage them to read it.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### **7 Readers’ Theater (Easy Preparation)**

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Psalm 112 in several translations. Choose the translation that you think lends itself best to a reader’s theater experience. Make enough copies for each participant. Set comfortable chairs in a large U-shape, leaving room for rehearsal and performance space.

### **Supplies:**

- copies of Psalm 112
- pens or pencils

Explain that together you will be reading the psalms in a new way. The psalms were first composed and used in corporate worship. Many scholars believe they were actually hymns. When they were gathered together, they comprised the hymnbook of the ancient Hebrew people.



Invite the participants to take turns reading aloud with expression the stanzas of Psalm 112. Readers' theater is a dramatic presentation of a written work in a script form. No memorization is necessary. The reading parts are divided among the readers and are sometimes read by individuals, sometimes read by some of the readers in unison (such as all the men or all the women), and are sometimes read in unison by the whole group. The focus is on reading the text with expressive voices and gestures in order to communicate its meaning dramatically.

If your group is small, work together on creating the readers' theater script of Psalm 112. Decide how it will be performed, that is, what words will be emphasized, what gestures you want to use in what places, and who will read which parts. If your group is large, break it up into readers' theater troupes and invite each troupe to do the same thing. Ask each group to choose a director. Practice reading the scripts.

End with a performance or performances.

### 8 Go and Tell

**Age Levels:** Older Youth, Young Adults, Adults

**Leader preparation:** Read Mark 16:1–8 in several translations. Focus on verse 8 and imagine yourself as the one who is to “go and tell.” Cut out a large silhouette of a megaphone (the kind cheerleaders use) from poster or bulletin board paper. Post it in the room in a prominent place. Arrange comfortable chairs in a circle.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- cut-out of a megaphone
- markers

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Mark 16:1–8. Draw attention to verse 8. Imagine that Peter and his disciples represent what becomes the established church, that is, the roots of the UCC and all other Christian denominations. Now imagine themselves as the ones who are being directed to “go and tell.” Divide your group into smaller groups of three or four and invite them to discuss the following: What would you like to tell the United Church of Christ? What do you have to tell the church? Give them five to seven minutes for discussion. Have them write their announcement on the megaphone.

Bring the small groups back together to report what they have to go and tell. End by encouraging the participants to exercise their voices, for they are the ones shaping the future of the church.

### 9 Light from the Past, Hope for the Future

**Age Levels:** Young Adults, Adults, Multiage

**Leader preparation:** Secure a copy of the YouTube clip “UCC@50: Yesterday's Visionaries, Today's Voices” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/33kk6lo> and the means to show it. Consider the ways your congregation reaches out to people under age thirty. Consider the ways your congregation nurtures the call to ministry among youth and young adults. Set comfortable chairs in a U-shape so that everyone can see the video and engage in conversation with each other easily. Consider inviting young adults and the adult leaders of your congregation into dialogue in this activity.



### Supplies:

- video clip or copy of the video “Yesterday’s Visionaries, Today’s Voices” and a means to show it, <http://www.tinyurl.com/33kk6lo>

Ask: What is one thing you value most about the United Church of Christ? What one hope do you have for the UCC? Show the film clip or video. Invite the participants to tell stories of their own experiences of change in the church. Together identify how your congregation can more actively engage young people in the life and leadership of the church.

### Reflect

It has been said that imagination is salvation. Use your imagination to listen and respond to the “Still Speaking God” who is guiding us into ever more faithful ways of being church, God’s instrument of hope for a united, peaceful, and just world.

End with this or another prayer: *Gracious God, you have entrusted into our care the family we call the United Church of Christ. Thank you for the visionaries of our past and the voices of hope for our future. Give us the grace to change with the times so that your timeless gospel may be proclaimed in every generation. We pray in the name of the transforming Christ. Amen.*