



Playing & Living Joyfully

About this Faith Practice

In today's world people of all ages need to give themselves permission to play. We believe God seeks to awaken a playful spirit among us. We invite God into this process as we seek recreation and re-creation. While it can lead us into other things, play is inherently its own reward; the experience of playing and living joyfully is – in its essence – pure hope, delight, celebration and song. Playing and living joyfully moves beyond prescribed forms and places. It includes ways of doing justice and moves us outside ourselves into sharing one with another. Joy is contagious; come and play!

Let's Begin...

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

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



Discovery



Scripture



Discipleship



Christian Tradition



Context and Mission



Future and Vision

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

2 Locate the Exploration you've chosen



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

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

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

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

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

Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

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

Ordering Posters

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

Art

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

From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

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

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

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

From AllPosters.com:

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

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

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

Music

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

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

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

Over My Head, Tune: African-American traditional

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

Scripture

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

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

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Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Much of the lives of young children seems centered in play. Even in times when “play” has been set aside for other activities, children tend to express themselves with a bounce and a giggle. However, for children from infant and toddler age into the early elementary years, the ability to imagine and live from a natural sense of play lessens, and that center of joy that once seemed so recognizable becomes less apparent. The practice of living and playing joyfully, while seemingly natural in children, needs to be intentionally nurtured and acknowledged so that the child’s wondrous and wonder-filled way of being in the world does not diminish with age.

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

Fun fact: Six-year-olds laugh an average of three hundred times a day. Adults only laugh fifteen to one hundred times a day. As you prepare for your time with the children, remember that they may know more than you in terms of living playfully. Be open to the way the children’s joy may change you. As you lead and mentor the children, let them be mentors to you.

Prayer: *Holy One, may the power of your wisdom, the gentleness of your mercy, and the laughter of your joy guide me as I gather with your children. Soften my heart that I may hear your word in the voice of a child. May it be so, 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.



1 Why Play? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Children will wonder together why people play and why playing is one way we connect with one another and with God.

Supplies:

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

Conversation starters:

- Why do people play?
- What are some of your favorite games?
- What is your favorite thing to do at a playground?
- Do you ever see adults playing?
- What are some the ways adults play?
- Who plays more, adults or children? Why is that?

Invite the children to describe how they feel when they are playing. One word for that good feeling we get when we are playing is joy. Joy is a gift from God. When we are filled with joy we are also filled with love and kindness.

Option: Show the children the poster “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan.” What do the children see in this picture?

2 Wink, Wink

Leader preparation: Take a deck of playing cards (including the joker) and plan to use as many cards as there are players; one card must be the joker.

Supplies:

- playing cards with joker

Everyone sits in a circle. Go around the circle with the cards facing down and have each child draw a card and keep it hidden. Whoever draws the joker becomes the winker. The object is for the winker to catch someone’s eye and wink at them. When someone is winked at, they must say aloud “I’m filled with joy” and sit quietly until the game is over. The object is for someone to be able to identify the winker before being winked at. Anyone in the group who thinks he or she can identify the winker must say so aloud to the group, and tell who he or she thinks the winker is. If the winker is correctly identified, the game is ended. If not, then the person who guessed must say, “I may be wrong, but I’m still joyful!” and sit quietly until the game is over. Play the game several times, allowing all the children to have a turn as the winker.

3 Musical Hoops

Leader preparation: This activity needs a fairly large space, especially with more than six children. Prepare the room ahead of time with the hoops. Find music that expresses a wide range of rhythm and emotion.

Supplies:

- hula hoops or rope tied into loops 2–3 ft in diameter, one hoop/loop for each child
- CD or cassette player
- various types of music
- variety of rhythm instruments, one for each child
- Bible

Scatter hoops or jump ropes on the floor, one for each child. Place a different instrument (maracas, drums, bells, rhythm sticks, shakers, xylophones) in each hoop. Have each child stand in a hoop, and when the music begins have them play the instrument. Encourage the children to feel the music and respond not just with the musical instrument but with body movements. Stop the music. Have the children put down their instrument and move to another hoop. Start the music again and have the children play their new instruments. Have several different kinds of music so the children can feel the music in different ways. Do this until everyone has had a chance to play each instrument.

Gather the children and reflect on the experience. What instruments did they enjoy the most? Were some songs happier than others? Why do some songs make us happy? Why do some make us sad?

Read Psalm 30:11–12. God will turn even our greatest sadness into dancing and clothe us with joy!

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Laughter Yoga (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies:

- Bible

Gather the children in a circle. Ask the children to stand up straight and tall, reaching their arms high over head. Next, ask the children to bend all the way down until their fingertips touch the floor (or come close). As they bend ask them to pretend to cry loudly. Once all the children are bent over with sadness, ask them to slowly come back up. Do they feel the giggles coming on as they rise? The combination of pretending to cry while bending and then slowly rising often triggers laughter. Try this several times until all the children are comfortable expressing their “pretend” emotions. Read Psalm 30:5. Talk with the children about the differences between night and day, especially about the different ways they may feel at night and during the day. Repeat the yoga exercise asking the children to think of their bending as the setting of the sun and nighttime and their rising as the rising of the sun and daybreak.

5 Marching in the Light of God

Leader preparation: Be familiar with the song “We Are Marching in the Light of God.” You can find the lyrics and hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/yzdaqy6>.

Supplies:

- words and music for “We Are Marching in the Light of God.” or “Siyahambha,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/yzdaqy6>
- Bible

The children will learn a South African hymn, “We Are Marching in the Light of God” (also known as “Siyahambha”). Before learning the song, read 1 John 1:5–7. God is light. What does it mean to walk in the light, to walk with God? When we let God’s light shine before us, we can see the path God wants us to take.

Lead the children in singing “We Are Marching in the Light of God.”

Invite the children to create additional verses that reflect the joy of living in God’s light.

Suggestions:

- We are playing in the light of God . . .
- We are singing in the light of God . . .
- We are laughing in the light of God . . .
- We are dancing in the light of God . . .

6 Reflecting the Light



Leader preparation: Place a copy of the painting “With Hoot and Squawk and Squeal and Bark . . .” by Reid where everyone can examine it closely.

Supplies:

- poster: “With Hoot and Squawk and Squeal and Bark . . .” by Reid, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- flashlight
- mirror
- Bible

Have you ever tried to bend light or make a beam of light go where you wanted it to go? Hold up a mirror. Give one child a flashlight and ask him or her to shine the light toward the mirror. The mirror will reflect the light back in the direction of the child. Let the children take turns reflecting the light, but first talk about what is needed for the reflection to occur. The mirror must be facing toward the light. If the mirror is turned away from the light then the light will not be reflected. Nothing can come between the light source and the mirror. The light cannot be reflected if anything comes between the light and the mirror. Give each child a chance to reflect the light.

The Bible frequently uses the image of light, especially as a symbol for God. Read 1 John 1:5, “God is light; in God there is no darkness.” These words were written by someone named John who lived his life helping people understand the joy and love that comes from the light of God. When we act in ways that honor God, we are reflecting the light of God into the world. When we turn toward God’s light, we become like the mirror and reflect the light. Invite the children to name different actions that honor God, that help us reflect God’s light to others.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Doubling Our Joy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Become familiar with the song “If You’re Joyful and You Know It.” You can find the lyrics and the tune at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/33ymgp8>.

Supplies:

- construction paper
- scissors

The Bible is filled with stories written by people who wanted to share the good news that God loves the whole world. One of those people was named John. John was especially happy because he knew how much God loved and cared for him. John wanted others to know God’s love and to feel the same joy he felt.

Questions for children: Have you ever told someone that you love them? How do you think that made them feel? Who has told you that they love you? How did you feel?

Say: Just like us, John knew what it felt like to be loved, but John realized that he felt twice as good when he shared God’s love with other people. John wrote that whoever shares the joy of God’s love with others will have their own joy doubled! That’s like giving something away and then getting back even more.

Questions for children: What have you shared with someone? How did that make you feel?

Say: John said that sharing God’s love with others doubled his joy and happiness. (Hold up the sheet of construction paper.) Let’s pretend that this piece of paper is God’s love and the four corners (point and count the corners) are the happiness I feel because I know God loves me. I’m pretty happy, aren’t I? I have four corners of happiness! But what if I share God’s love with someone and give one of these corners away? (Cut off a corner and hand it to a child.) Let’s count the corners now. We have more corners than before.

Now let’s share God’s love with someone else. (Cut off another corner and hand it to a child.) How many corners do we have now? (Point and count with the children.) Continue cutting corners until all children have a piece of the paper. Note that each child has at least three corners. If they give away one of their corners, they will end up with more corners.

When we share the joy of God’s love with others our own joy increases. Sing “If You’re Joyful and You Know It” to the tune of “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” doing actions as appropriate.

If you’re joyful and you know it, clap your hands.
If you’re joyful and you know it, clap your hands.
If you’re joyful and you know it, then your love will surely show it.
If you’re joyful and you know it, clap your hands.

If you’re joyful and you know it, stomp your feet.
If you’re joyful and you know it, stomp your feet.

If you're joyful and you know it, then your love will surely show it.
If you're joyful and you know it, stomp your feet.

Invite the children to suggest more movements/verses.

8 Sharing the Light

Leader Preparation: Place a light source or a picture of a light source in each box. Make sure there are enough so each child has a box to open. Prepare to lead the song "This Little Light of Mine." You can find the lyrics and tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2cwbzzt>.

Supplies:

- small and medium sized boxes with lids, enough so each child will have one to open
- a source of light in each box, such as flashlight, stars, lighter (childproof), light bulb, candle, picture of the sun, light stick, picture of lightning, picture of firefly, picture of lantern

Ask children to sit on the floor in a circle. Hand each child a "mystery box" and ask them not to open their boxes yet. Go around the circle and let each child open his or her box, show what is inside and tell what it is and where it is found or what it is used for. The child then places the object in the center of the circle. After all the children have opened their boxes, ask: What do all these items have in common? Talk with the children about the difference between light and dark, day and night. Sometimes children are afraid of the dark. How does darkness make them feel? What do we get from the sun? Jesus said that God is light and that we live in God's light when we love God and one another. How can we share God's light with others?

Sing together:

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Share the light with others, I'm gonna let it shine.
Share the light with others, I'm gonna let it shine.
Share the light with others, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Add or make up other verses as you wish.

9 Smile! It's Contagious!

Leader preparation: Mirrors purchased at a craft store may have sharp edges. Use masking tape to cover the rims.

Supplies:

- small mirrors, one for each child
- masking tape
- stickers
- children's book *Underwear* by Mary Elise Monsell (optional)

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

One of the simplest ways to express joy is to smile. Smiling brings oxygen to the brain, makes the person smiling feel better, and sends the face of joy out to others. When someone looks at you and you are smiling, you brighten their day; when they smile back, they brighten yours. Smiling is contagious.

Give each child a mirror and ask them to look at themselves.

Make a sad face . . . how do you feel?

Make an angry face . . . how do you feel?

Make a worried face . . . how do you feel?

Now smile . . . how do you feel?

Ask the children to put their mirrors down and smile at one another. Talk about the smiles in the room and how they make the children feel. Smiles usually come from our mouths, but we can also smile with our eyes. Ask the children to practice smiling only with their eyes.

Give each child a sticker to place on their mirrors. Let the children take home their mirrors as a reminder to smile!

Option: Read the children's book *Underwear*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/ycpvr1w>, as an example of contagious laughter. It's delightful!

Reflect

During the week, reflect on all you have shared with the children. Let their response to joy be a reminder that the heart of a child overflows with the wisdom of God. Open yourself to all the silly, spectacular, miraculous ways God's laughter and smile breaks through the universe and rings like bells on Christmas morning. Remember your childhood joys and find time to laugh until your sides ache.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Young children learn through their senses and movement as well as their minds.

Children are best able to form images of scripture stories and remember the lessons when they are presented in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic ways. Whenever possible, tell the stories rather than read them, using simple language, pausing often, and allowing plenty of opportunity for questions. The focus scripture for “Playing and Living Joyfully” is Jesus’ welcoming the children and turning the world upside down with his commandment to love “the least” (Mark 9:30–37). This story pulls children out of the margins and places them at the center of a powerful lesson.

About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 9:30–37
Philippians 2:1–13

Leader Preparation

Pray for the children who will be in your care, remembering them by name. Encourage the children’s laughter and even silliness, but watch for those children who seem to withdraw. Some may have difficulty with overstimulation, so it is important that within each activity, regardless of the energy level, there be a time for quiet reflection and focused attention. Prepare your own heart for this time of playfulness by remembering the words found in the focus scripture: Jesus took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking the child in his arms, Jesus said to them, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:36–37).

Prayer: God, fill me with your holy presence and clear my eyes that I may see your joy in the faces of those in my care today. Guide me that I may be patient, hold me that I may be tender, tickle me that I may be light-hearted. Help me find peace in the sacred understanding that your love asks nothing more than the simple trusting heart of a child. May it be so, Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

 **1 Clap Your Hands! (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Be prepared to lead “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” particularly the verse about clapping your hands. You can find the lyrics and the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/33ymgp8>.

Supplies:

- Bible
- Copies of “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/33ymgp8>

Why do people clap their hands (applauding, keeping beat, getting attention)? Usually when people clap, something is making them happy or music has touched them in a way that makes them want to join in the song. We clap when we want to express excitement and enthusiasm. In church, clapping is a way to praise God. Sometimes clapping is a way to welcome people. How would you feel if people clapped when you entered a room? Jesus spoke a lot about welcoming people. He once took a child in his arms and told his disciples that when they welcome a little child, they welcome him, and when they welcome him, they welcome God. Share the story from Mark 9:30–37 with the children.

Invite the children to start clapping, as fast and as loud as they want. Are they smiling as they clap? Ask them to share the feelings they get when clapping. Let each child take a turn creating a rhythm with clapping and have the other children echo back the clapping.

Lead the children in singing “If You’re Happy and You Know It.”

 **2 The Rainbow Fish**

Leader preparation: Locate a copy of the book *The Rainbow Fish*, <http://www.tinyurl.com/374ohh6>.

Supplies:

- *The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister (North-South Books, 1992) <http://www.tinyurl.com/374ohh6>
- Bible

Read *The Rainbow Fish* to the children, <http://www.tinyurl.com/374ohh6>. Follow this by sharing Mark 9:30–37 (either in your own words, from a children’s story Bible, or from an appropriate child-friendly Bible version such as the *Good News Bible* or *Today’s New International Version*.) Focus on the similarities between the stories. Allow time for the children to think about the meaning of each story.

Possible questions to use after reading *The Rainbow Fish*:

- Why was the rainbow fish so special?
- The rainbow fish was the most beautiful fish, but was he the nicest?
- What did the rainbow fish do when the other fish asked him to play?
- Why do you think he acted this way?
- Did the other fish like him? Why not?

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.

Possible questions to use after Mark 9:30–37:

- What were the disciples arguing about?
- What did Jesus say when he found out why the disciples were arguing?
- What did Jesus say the disciples must do if they want to be great?

Compare the lesson the rainbow fish learned about getting along with others to the lesson Jesus taught the disciples. Relate the lessons to the children’s own experiences.

3 Joy in the Center

Leader preparation: Balancing requires finding your center. When dancers need to stand on one foot, they are told to focus their eyes on a spot and their focus helps them keep their balance. Try balancing. Focus your eyes on a spot on a wall. Lift one foot and see if you can balance. Close your eyes and try to balance. Living joyously comes when we focus on the gifts and blessings God has given to all creation. When we are feeling joyful we are not angry or upset; we are filled with good feelings and we share those good feelings with those around us.

Supplies:

- beanbags, one for each child
- Bible

Hand out the beanbags and explain to the children that the beanbags represent joy in their lives. Can they keep the joy by finding their center? Invite them at first to balance the beanbag on a fairly simple body part, like the palm or back of the hand, and to focus on something that brings them joy and happiness. Ask the children to walk around, keeping their beanbag balanced. Make this even more challenging by asking the children to balance the beanbag on the top of the head, a shoulder, or an elbow.

Read Philippians 2:1–4. This scripture tells us to live in harmony and balance by showing love for one another and considering others more important than ourselves. Think of the balancing beanbags. Would it be easier to balance the beanbags when we are calm or angry? Joy comes when we let go of worries and anger and see life as God’s great gift to all creation.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Joy Poem (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Arrange to teach/sing “I’ve Got Peace Like a River” (traditional African American), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ego6jy>.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard
- markers

Children will create a poem together, describing joy through the five senses. By naming and describing joy in the many ways they experience life, the children will begin to recognize, honor, and share how joy breaks into even the smallest moments of their lives.

Gather the children, seated in a circle. Ask them if they can name the five senses we use to experience the world around us. Invite the children to think about how they experience joy and happiness through their senses. Explain that together they will create a joy poem using their five senses. Record their ideas on newsprint or whiteboard. Use the following as a template for the poem:

Joy sounds like . . .
Joy smells like . . .
Joy feels like . . .
Joy tastes like . . .
Joy looks like . . .

Give the children some examples to get them started:

Joy sounds like birds singing, rain falling, babies laughing . . .
Joy smells like cookies baking, popcorn popping . . .
Joy feels like my mother's hugs . . .
Joy tastes like my grandmother's biscuits, caramel apples,
peppermint ice cream . . .
Joy looks like my dog chasing a ball, a rainbow . . .

Option: Sing the hymn "I've Got Peace Like a River" with the children. You can find the lyrics and tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ego6jy>. How is peace like a river? How is joy like a fountain? How is love like an ocean and faith like an anchor?

5 Hoop in a Loop

Leader preparation: Try playing with a hula hoop!

Supplies:

- hula hoop
- Bible

How much fun can the children have trying to do something that seems near impossible? Invite the children to stand in a circle and join hands, with one pair joining hands through a hula hoop. The children are to move the hula hoop around the circle without anybody letting go of the others' hands. When they have finished, reflect on the difficulty of the task and how they were able to work together to move the hoop. In Philippians 2:1–13, Paul writes of the joy found in following the way of Christ and reminds the reader to think about what others may need and respond with tenderness and compassion. The only way the hoop could move around the circle was through cooperation and assistance. This activity works best on uncarpeted floors, so you may need to relocate your group if your learning space is carpeted.



6 Dominoes Effect

Leader preparation: Fill a large bowl with water.

Supplies:

- large bowl
- pebble or small rock
- dominoes, several sets if possible
- poster: "Shotgun, Third Ward #1" by John Biggers
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Gather the children around a bowl of water. Ask the children to watch the water carefully as a small rock or pebble is dropped into the center of the water. Small

ripples move out in circles from the center. The pebble was dropped in the middle, but the effects from that rock could be felt out to the edge of the bowl. Sometimes we think that what we do doesn't matter much in the world. But each day is filled with opportunities to touch the lives of others in ways you never imagined. Just as that small pebble created circles of movement, something as simple as a smile can change another's life.

Divide the children into groups of three or four. Give each group a set of dominoes and explain that they will create a domino effect by standing the dominoes on end in a line and then tapping the first domino. Encourage the children's imagination and creativity. After all dominoes have been assembled into a pattern, let the groups take turns triggering the domino effect. We are similar to the first domino—what we do matters.

Show the poster "Shotgun, Third Ward #1," <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>. What do they see in the picture? A church or school is on fire, adults have gathered, and children seem to be playing. Most likely the adults are worried, sad, and perhaps scared. The children, however, seem happy. Could the joy that the children seem to be experiencing change the way the adults feel?

Encourage the children to find times during the week to speak to someone who seems lonely, to play with someone who seems left out, to change the world with a smile.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Pass Along the Joy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Print the poem on index cards. Alternatively, use a computer and print the poem in four equal portions of a sheet of cardstock so that when the piece is cut into even fourths the poem appears in each part.

In Philippians 2:1–13, we are reminded that our joy and happiness grow when we want what is best for others. In Mark 9:30–37 Jesus holds a child as he teaches the disciples about God's inclusive and abundant love. Small acts by even the youngest children can have a great impact on the lives of others.

Supplies:

- 3" x 5" cards or other cardstock printed with poem (four cards per child)
- stickers
- crayons and/or markers

Create a pass-it-on card. What are some small acts of kindness you can do that might change a person's day? Invite the children to create a tiny gift that they can pass on to someone, who can pass it on to someone else, who can pass it on, who can pass it on, and on and on and on and on. Maybe you can change the day for a hundred people!

Give each child four 3" x 5" cards. Read aloud the poem written on the card.

I made this little card for you
to brighten up your day.
Please pass this card to someone else
and spread joy along the way!

Think about images and words that make you happy, and then decorate your cards with appropriate stickers, pictures, and words. Over the next week give your cards to four different people. When you give the card to someone, tell them it's a pass-it-on card and they cannot keep the card for themselves, but must pass it on to someone else, telling that person to also pass it on. When we give to others, the gift of joy and happiness just keeps moving on, over and over.

8 Big Rock

Leader Preparation: None.

Supplies:

- queen size flat sheet, parachute, or similar material large enough to cover three to four children
- Bible

Have several children get on their hands and knees in a group. Cover the children with the large sheet or parachute. They are now the Big Rock. Working together as a team, the children will follow verbal instructions, such as move to the left, back up, move forward, and move the Big Rock. Let all children take a turn being the moving rock.

The only way this activity will work is if the children see one another as equally important and move together. If one child takes over and moves without the others, the rock will crumble. Read Philippians 2:1–13.

9 Growing Happiness

Leader preparation: You may wish to make up one of the craft items in advance. In Philippians 2:1–13, we are reminded that our joy, our happiness, grows when we want what is best for others.

Supplies:

- clear plastic cups, one for each child
- paper towels, one for each child
- soil
- lima or pinto beans, four for each child
- permanent marker

Explain to the children that they are going to plant some “happiness beans” and then care for the beans and watch them grow. Have each child wrap the inside of a cup with a paper towel. Carefully put soil inside the cup, taking care to keep the paper towel lining the cup. Fill the cup about 3/4 full. Place the four beans between the cup and the paper towel, making sure there is plenty of space between the beans. By using a clear cup and placing the beans against the towel instead of in the soil, the children will be able to see their beans sprout roots and stem. The soil will help hold moisture in the towel and keep the beans positioned against the cup. Have the children carefully pour water into their cups, soaking the soil and the paper towel thoroughly without disturbing the position of the beans.

Ask the children to share what makes them happy, such as playing with a pet, being with friends, sharing, reading, hiking, being with family, opening a present, and so forth. Let each child choose four happiness names, and write them with the permanent marker on the cup.

These beans are seeds. If they are cared for and given what they need, they will grow into bean plants. What do the bean seeds need to grow into bean plants?

How can you help the happiness bean seeds grow? Help the children water their happiness beans.

Say: We have something like happiness beans growing inside of us, but these seeds don't grow into plants. Our seeds are the seeds of smiling, caring, loving, laughing, playing, and sharing. Our seeds are given to us by God and when we take care of them then we are really taking care of the world. What do our "seeds" need to grow?

- We care for the seed of smiling by smiling a lot.
- We care for the seed of loving by telling others that we love them.
- We care for the seed of thankfulness by saying thank you.

Let the children take home their happiness bean cups and care for them. Encourage the children to find ways to care for the happiness seeds growing inside of them by caring for others.

Reflect

As you remember the children, let the words of Kahlil Gibran from the poem "On Children" (*The Prophet*, [New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1964]) guide you:

They come through you,
but not from you,

And though they are with you,
yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love,
but not your thoughts

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies,
but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house
of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit,

not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them,
but seek not to make them
like you.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Community for young children begins primarily in the family, regardless of the health and stability of the home. From there children learn how to be in relationship with one another and with the world. Their relationship with God may be understood simply through the words to the song "Jesus Loves Me" or through the idea that God cares and is watching over them. The welcome children receive at church may have a greater impact than the lessons they hear during these early years, and time spent building the community of Christ through joyful and caring relationships is invaluable.

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 bench warmers. 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

Pray for the children who will be in your care, remembering them by name. Welcome the children into the group as you would welcome someone into your own home. Use a breath prayer to release the worries of your life so that you may be fully present with the children. Breathe easily and evenly, in and out. As you breathe, silently recite a scripture or a short phrase that grounds you in peace. Continue breathing and reflect on your day, remembering the ways you experienced and expressed joy.

Prayer: (breathe in) *The peace of God is with me,* (breathe out) *and with all in my care.* Or (breathe in) *My heart is a fountain.* (breathe out) *God's love flows through me.*

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 Twisted Up in Joy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Become familiar with the song "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy" and the tongue twisting words, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2unvsbh>.

Supplies:

- Bible

Get silly with the children and the song "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy." The verses to the classic children's song become increasingly difficult to say as the verses become longer and filled with alliterations. Before singing, read Galatians 4:4–7. Because we are children of God, God has sent the Spirit of Christ into our hearts. With Christ in our hearts, we can't help but be joyful!

Ask if the children are familiar with the song. Those who are can lead the group in singing. Once the children are comfortable with the words to the song, ask them to create some hand or body movements to go with their singing.

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy
Down in my heart. (*Where?*)
Down in my heart. (*Where?*)
Down in my heart.
I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy
Down in my heart. (*Where?*)
Down in my heart to stay.

(*Chorus*)
And I'm so happy,
So very happy:
I've got the love of Jesus in my heart.
And I'm so happy,
So very happy:
I've got the love of Jesus in my heart.

I've got the peace that passes understanding down in my heart . . .
(*Chorus*)
And there is therefore now no condemnation down in my heart . . .
(*Chorus*)
I've got the wonderful love of my blessed redeemer way down
in the depths of my heart . . .
(*Chorus*)

2 Web of Joy

Leader preparation: None.

Supplies:

- large ball of yarn or heavy string
- Bible

Gather children, seated in a circle. Give one child the ball of yarn, ask him or her to name something that brings the greatest joy. Then have that child toss the ball

- 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.

to someone seated across the circle. Make sure each child holds on to part of the yarn so it creates a giant web as it moves back and forth. After all children have shared their thoughts, reflect on the web they have created. Each child's own joy has joined with another to connect them all in a circle of sharing and caring.

Read Galatians 4:4–7. We are all God's children, connected one to another through the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

③ Breath Paintings

Leader preparation: Use straws and paint to show the importance of breath. Use bubbles to illustrate how we cannot see air; we only see how air affects our environment. Similarly, we can't see God's Spirit; we only see the way the Spirit affects us and the world around us.

Supplies:

- white paper
- drinking straws (cut a small notch near the bottom to guard against children sucking up the paint)
- paint (watered down so it can move more easily in response to breath blown through a straw)
- bowls
- spoons or eye droppers
- bubbles (optional)

Have you ever tried to fly a kite or sail a sailboat? There are lots of things you can do to make the kite fly and the boat sail, but unless there is wind, nothing is moving. The Hebrew word for breath is the same as the word for spirit. Drop small drops of paint on paper and then move the paint around the paper using breath. As children paint with their breath, invite them to think about God's Spirit blowing life into us and shaping us into a work of art. You will probably find that you have very little control about where and how the paint goes, but the unexpected shapes can be beautiful.

After the paintings have dried, children can add black marker lines to the images and transform them again. They can use the markers to create either additional abstract designs or to fill in details and make the art more specific.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Hokey-Pokey Joy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Use an alternate version of a classic childhood dance, the "Hokey Pokey" to express joy through movement. You can see the lyrics and hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2vvhdffy>.

Supplies: None

Ask the children to describe what it feels like to be really happy. What are some ways you might move your body if you are filled with joy and happiness? Is dancing a joyful activity? What part of our bodies do we use when we dance? When we follow Jesus, when we move with Jesus, we use our whole bodies—our hands, our feet, our legs, our hearts. Let's celebrate the joy Jesus brings to life through dance!

Gather the children into a circle for the Hokey-Pokey. Invite them to do the actions while singing. Repeat as desired, substituting “left hand,” “right foot,” “left foot,” and “whole self.”

You put your right hand in,
 You take your right out,
 You put your right hand in, and you shake it all about.
 Your joy is overflowing and you have to dance around
(turn around with hands waving in the air).
 That’s what it’s all about!



5 Different Drummers

Leader preparation: Sometimes it is difficult to see and hear the needs of others when we are too focused on our own needs. Jesus’ life and teachings show us how to honor the life given to us while we honor the lives of others. In Galatians 4:6 we are named as children of God: brothers and sisters, family. As we experience joy, we want the same for others. In this activity, children will maintain their own rhythm while listening to the rhythm of others.

Supplies:

- rhythm sticks or similar rhythm instruments
- percussion instruments (bells, tambourine, triangle, clapper)
- words to “Say It! Sing It!” by JoEllen Miller, Attachment: Activity 5
- poster: “Dancing ‘Til Dawn” by Marianne Millar

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

Begin an exploration of rhythm by asking the children all to clap together. Once they are in unison, change the tempo of the beat and ask the children to follow the new rhythm. After the children have practiced listening for rhythm with clapping, give each child a rhythm stick (or similar rhythm instrument). Divide the children into two groups. Show one group how to keep a slow, steady beat using quarter notes. The other group will listen to the tempo of the quarter notes and then add eighth notes, which are twice as fast. For the rhythms to work together both groups will have to listen to the beat of the other group while maintaining their own rhythm. Let the children suggest different rhythms to play. Provide additional percussion instruments and invite the children to create sounds that express joy.

Lead the children in the song “Say It! Sing It!” and invite them to use their instruments to accompany the singing.

Show the poster “Dancing ‘Til Dawn.” Note that the women pictured are gathered at sunrise. Engage the children in questions such as these:

- What might the women be saying to one another?
- Are they praying?
- Are they singing?
- What sounds do they hear early in the morning?



6 Dot painting

Leader preparation: Cut sheets of letter-size finger paint paper in half (ultimately, you need sheets about 5” x 8”). Fold paper in half, and create a distinct crease. Distribute paint into bowls. Children will be dropping small dots of paint on paper, which is easily done with eyedroppers or by putting paint into squeeze bottles.

Supplies:

- washable tempura paint, at least five colors
- finger paint paper, cut into 5" x 8" rectangles, at least three for each child
- eyedroppers
- paper towels
- bowls
- poster: "Joyful Dance" by Diana Org, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>

Children will drop small (pea-sized) dots of paint on the right side of the crease only. Encourage them to use all the colors and to place some dots close to the crease. When they have finished, help them fold the left side down over the right. Press gently and then open the paper to see a new creation. What images do they see in their paintings? Do the images seem joyful? What does joy look like? Are any of the paintings the same? Just as each painting is different, so is the way we each experience God's gift of joy.

Look at the poster "Joyful Dance." Ask the children if they see the dots in this painting. Why do they think the people are dancing?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Honey, I Love You! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Review the rules for the game "Honey, I Love You." This is a well-known circle game, which may be familiar to some of the children.

Supplies: None

Have the children sit in a circle with one child in the middle. The child in the middle goes to anyone in the circle and says, "Honey, I love you, won't you give me a smile?" The child who is asked the question answers, without smiling, "Honey, I love you, but I just can't smile." The one asking the question can do anything to make the other smile except touch that child. If he or she can't get the other to smile, then he or she moves on to another person in the circle. If the child does smile, then she or he becomes "it." There are no winners or losers, and the game continues until all have had a chance to be "it."

God calls us to care for one another and all creation. One way we care for one another is by playfully inviting others to join in the experience of joy.

8 Mehndi (pronounced MEN-dee)

Leader preparation: Find examples of *mehndi* designs at the following Web site: <http://www.tinyurl.com/35p9fnu>. A *mehndi* is a temporary form of skin decoration.

Supplies:

- manila construction paper, one sheet per child
- black pencils
- colored pencils
- scissors

In India, people paint their feet and hands with fancy designs when they are celebrating special occasions. These paintings are called *mehndi*. These joyous celebrations are filled with song, dance, food, and storytelling. The children will

create their own *mehndi* as a reminder to use their hands to bring joy into their lives and the lives of others. In Galatians we hear that God has sent the Spirit of Jesus into our hearts.

How does the Spirit of Jesus work through our hands? What are some ways we use our hands to share God's love with others?

Give each child a piece of construction paper. Trace the outline of each child's hand on the paper and invite the children to use colored pencils to fill their paper hand with swirly designs. Ask them to think about how joy feels, or what joy might look like, as they create their designs. Invite them to be playful and silly as they create. Cut out the finished hands.

9 Happy Face

Leader preparation: Cut out 3" circles from yellow construction paper. Find a happy face or smiley face symbol to share with the children.

Supplies:

- Bible
- yellow construction paper circles, 3" diameter
- crayons, markers
- happy or smiley face clip art

Throughout the world the smile is seen as a happy, welcoming expression, and the happy face or smiley face is a universal symbol for joy. Sometimes the greatest gift we can give someone is a smile and kind words; even the youngest children can give the gift of a smile to someone. Through this activity the children will be given a chance to brighten the day for three different people.

Read Revelation 7:17, paying special attention to the words "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." What can the children do during the week to bring out the "smile" in others?

Give each child three yellow circles about 3" in diameter. Ask them to draw a happy face in each circle. When they are finished, explain that they are to give a happy face to someone who needs some extra cheer. Also, when they give someone a happy face, they might say something kind to them. Tell the children that they will have to really look and listen to find people who need an extra smile.

Reflect

Create Sabbath time each day through breath prayers. Find a short phrase or words from scripture or song that speak to you. Use these words as you breathe, repeating half as you slowly breathe in and half as you breathe out. Feel the breath fill you with life and send that energy back out into the world in gratitude.

"Joy is prayer—joy is strength—joy is love—joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls." —Mother Teresa

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Attachment: Activity 5

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: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Young children are naturally inquisitive and open to discovering a world larger than their own. By exploring the richness of other Christian cultures and remembering the faith of their ancestors, children can develop an appreciation for the many lives and voices that have shaped the Christian church.

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

Pray for the children in your care, remembering them by name. Before the children arrive, reflect on times when you were lost in play, remembering what it felt like to throw wide your arms and lift your face to the sun. Play time is Sabbath time, a gift from God for the people of God. Enjoy your time!

Prayer: God of all creation, help me pay attention to the small wonders of your world and rejoice in wisdom that spun the majesty of stars into the twinkle in a child's eye. May it be so. 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 Leaping, Singing, Cooing, Blossoming (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Song of Solomon 2:8–13 shows a playful and joyful response to love. When sharing this scripture with young children, find a translation that will be easy to understand and visualize. *The Message* or *The Contemporary English Version* are good translations for children.

Supplies:

- Bible

The Song of Solomon is filled with playful actions and beautiful descriptions. Read the scripture to the children, slowly, and ask them to picture what the writer is describing. Talk with the children about the images they see in their minds. Read the scripture again, but this time let the children take turns acting out the images—“leaping over mountains and hills,” “cooing of doves,” “flowers covering the earth,” and so forth.

2 Tin Can Painting

Leader preparation: Create decorated paper by placing the paper strips and circles into the cans and then putting marbles in paint and dropping the marbles into the cans. Secure the lids tightly on the cans. The children will roll the cans back and forth to one another and experience the surprise and joy of discovering what they have created together. Allow each group of three to create at least three paintings.

Supplies:

- coffee cans with lids, one for every three children
- white paper cut into circles the size of the bottom of the can
- white paper cut into rectangles the size of the inside of the coffee cans (so each rectangles just lines the inside of a can; the rectangle's width will be the can's height)
- marbles
- bowls of paint
- large pan or bowl of water
- spoons
- paper towels

Place children in groups of three. Each group will choose a can and then place a paper circle into the bottom of the can and a paper rectangle along the inside of the can. Place one marble in each paint bowl, and then use a spoon to transfer the marbles to the coffee can. Place the lid securely on the can. Invite the children to sit on the floor and roll the can back and forth for as long as they wish. When they are done, open the lid, put the marbles into a pan of water for washing, and then carefully pull out the painting they created together

As the children marvel at their creations, ask them what they see. Is one color more visible than another? Are any two pictures exactly alike? How would their pictures look if only one color had been used? Ask the children if they see a web

in their pictures. A web is created when lines are crossed over each other, back and forth. The church is similar to a web, where many people work together in different ways for the same reason—to love and serve God and to love and serve others.

③ Water Music

Leader preparation: Practice making music with a glass of water. You might want to place a mark on the glass for the amount of water to use for different notes.

Supplies:

- eight to ten 8 oz. glasses
- pitcher of water

Ask the children to think about the ways music is created in nature. What are some sounds that make them happy? Tell the children that they are going to create a musical instrument out of glasses filled with varying amounts of water. Ask the children to think of a simple song, such as “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” or “Jesus Loves Me.” Line up the glasses on a table. Pour water into one glass. Tap the side of the glass with a spoon. Is that the first note of the song? Does the note need to be higher or lower? The more water in the glass, the lower the note is. Sound out the second note and then fill that glass. Let the children adjust the water levels until the notes used in the song match the sound of the glasses. Think of new songs to play on the water glasses.

Ask: How would a song sound that contained just one note? Two notes? How many different notes did we need to create our water glass song?

In some ways the church is like a song. Many different people with many different voices have come together throughout history to build the church. As we listen to all the beautiful sounds God has placed in creation, let’s remember that church is a place where different voices should come together in harmony.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Animal Calls (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make a list of animals and practice the sound each animal makes. You will need half as many animals as you have children in the group.

Supplies:

- Bible

Whisper to each child the name of an animal (such as a donkey, chicken, horse, elephant, cat, dog). Make sure that each animal is used twice so that each child shares an animal with someone else. If the group is large, more than two can be given the same animal. Tell them they are not to tell anyone what animal they are and that there are two of each animal in the group. Their task is to find their match by making the sound their animal would make and then listening for that sound from another child. They may not talk. Make sure that all the children know what sound their animal would make. Give them a while, and when it seems like they’ve all found their match, let them stop and share the experience.

Play again, but this time ask them to find animals that would not live well together. Let the children use their imaginations. Once everyone has found their “enemy” have them stop and share why their animals might not get along. What are some reasons people might not get along?

Read Isaiah 11:6–10. Ask the children to listen for the names of animals and how they are paired. What kind of a world is the prophet Isaiah describing? Does this world seem happy and playful? Is this God’s hope and dream for all creation?

5 Are You Listening?

Leader preparation: Song of Solomon 2:8–13 shows a playful and joyful response to love. The opening words in the focus scripture from Song of Solomon concern listening. The activities presented focus on listening, especially listening for and responding to God’s presence. When sharing this scripture with young children, find a translation that will be easy to understand and visualize. *The Message* or *The Contemporary English Version* are good translations for children.

Supplies:

- two large paper cups
- sewing needle
- 25 ft. piece of string

The stories we read in the Bible weren’t written yesterday or last year or even a thousand years ago. Much of the Bible that is read today is thousands of years old. Some of the stories are even older than the written word, and they are with us today only because they were told over and over by parents and grandparents to their children, who then passed the stories on to their children. As children of God, we owe a lot to the faithful people who remembered God’s great story and kept God’s word moving through history. Just as important as the one who tells the story are those who listen. To tell God’s story we need to know how to listen for God’s story. What is necessary to be a good listener? Do we listen for God’s story only with our ears? How do we use our eyes? Hands? Voice?

Ask the children to close their eyes and sit quietly and listen for just a few moments. What are some sounds they hear? Keep listening. Ask them to name the “tiniest” sound they can hear.

Take two large paper cups and punch a tiny hole in the center of the bottom of each using a sewing needle. Thread the string through the holes on each cup and either knot or tape the string so it cannot go back through the hole when the string is stretched. Have two children each take one of the cups and walk apart until the string is tight. Ask one of the children to talk into the cup while the other listens. The second child should be able to hear what the first is saying.

The cup vibrates back and forth with the sound waves created by the person talking. These vibrations move through the string and the bottom of the second cup begins to vibrate just like the bottom of the first cup, producing sound waves. The person listening hears the sound waves from the person who is talking. This is also how a telephone works.

6 Get Creative!

Leader preparation: Be prepared to stand back from the children in this activity and let them lead with their imaginations. If the children need to be divided into two or more groups because of numbers, make sure there are enough objects for each circle.

Supplies:

- various objects that could be used to create a new game: balls, bean bags, dice, scarves, ribbon, hoops, plastic animals, tin cans—get creative!

Gather children and sit in a circle. Tell the children some of the games you played as a child. Invite the children to think about their favorite games. Ask them what makes a game fun, and what is needed to play a game. Who creates games? Games have been played for thousands of years. The games played two thousand years ago may be different from the games we play today, but one thing is the same—games are meant to be fun! The church has changed over the past two thousand years. The church isn't one person listening to God and telling others what God wants. The church is many faithful people who have heard God's call to bring hope and joy and love to the world. In church people work together in many different ways to love God and to love one another.

Place all the game objects in the middle of the circle. Invite the children to work together to create a game that people of all ages can play to experience joy. They are to use only the items in the center of the circle. Make sure that all the children have a voice in this activity; some children may want to take charge.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Playing Church (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: None.

Supplies: None

Gather the children, sit in a circle, and invite them to think about ways we express joy in church. Think of all the different parts of church—education, worship, fellowship, mission. Can we play in church? Can adults play? What could we do to make the church more playful? Encourage the children to use their imaginations: fill the sanctuary with balloons, blow bubbles during worship, decorate the fellowship hall with Christmas light in July? Are there ways any of their ideas can be incorporated into your church life? Adults often need children to guide them in the rediscovery of play. Ask the children to find a way during the week to invite an adult into playtime.



8 Joyful Dancing

Leader preparation: You can find the lyrics and tune for “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>.

Supplies:

- colorful, sheer fabric or nylon scarves
- CD player
- music recordings of various tempos
- song: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy)
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>
- poster: “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>

One way we can experience joyful living is through music and movement. Listen to excerpts from a variety of music and think of words to describe the feelings the music produces, such as happy, sad, silly, excited, and so on. Invite the children to use the scarves and move with the music, expressing through dance the rhythm and emotion of the songs.

Display the poster “Joyful Dance,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>, and invite the children to use their imaginations to wonder why the dancers are joyful.

9 Up, Up and Away

Leader preparation: Blow up plenty of balloons, and write the children’s names on the inflated balloons. Provide extra balloons for guests and to allow for balloons that pop during the activities.

Supplies:

- inflated balloons, one for each child, with extras in case of popping
- marker
- CD player
- music CD
- Bible

Give all the children balloons with their names printed on them.

Round one: Once they are given the signal, all the children toss their balloons in the air and then try to keep their balloon from touching the ground. Play continues until only one balloon is still airborne.

Round two: Start playing music. Children will keep their balloons in the air until the music stops, and then they have to catch someone else’s balloon.

Round three: With partners, children will toss their balloons back and forth (each pair is tossing two balloons). Continue until only two balloons are still in the air.

Gather the children and reflect on the experience. Some activities seems to bring on smiles—blowing bubbles, skipping, playing with balloons. Were the children laughing as they kept their balloons in the air? Even when they were “out” were they still having fun?

Name some joyful activities.

Read Isaiah 11:6–9. This is God’s promise—that all creation will live in peace and fellowship and all God’s creatures will live and play in joy.

Reflect

Both focus passages are wonderfully poetic. Read the passages aloud and feel the words as they form in the mouth. The words sing with imagination and limitless possibilities. Through God all things are possible. May this promise embolden you to expect miracles and anticipate days filled with joy.

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Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

For young children, their “place” in the world may not extend much beyond their neighborhood. While children are increasingly exposed to the larger world through technology, especially television, they may have difficulty understanding how their lives and the lives of people half a world away are connected. By emphasizing that we are all God’s children, God’s family, and by discovering the similarities of people through the imagery of family, children may develop a sense of kinship with all creation.

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Be patient. Attentions may wander and bodies will squirm. Remember the image of Elizabeth greeting Mary and the deep joy each felt for the other. Greet the children with that same enthusiasm, and open your heart to the unexpected questions, bounding silliness, and pure wonder that comes when you share space with children.

Prayer: God of the widow and orphan, help us all to see the needs around us and to find ways to use our meager gifts to help alleviate those needs. 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.

 **1 Hello! (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Practice the multicultural greetings. If there is someone in your congregation from a country other than your country, invite that person to join your group and demonstrate a greeting from his or her native country.

Supplies:

- Bible

Read Luke 1:39–45 from a Bible that is age appropriate (such as *The Message* or *The Contemporary English Version*). This passage is filled with expressions and actions of joy. Ask the children to listen for words that describe how Elizabeth and Mary felt about seeing each other. Ask the children about times when they have been excited about visiting someone or having someone visit them. How do you know when someone is excited about seeing you? Have you ever been so excited and happy to see someone that you felt “butterflies” in your tummy? How can you let someone know without using words that you are happy to see that person? How do you greet someone you are really happy to see?

Around the world people have different ways of greeting one another. Invite the children to use each of the following greetings; do some greetings feel better than others?

Multicultural Greetings:

- China: a nod or bow
- Singapore: place hand over heart
- India: place palms together as though praying and bend or bow slightly, saying “namaste” (na-mas-TAY; it means “I recognize the spirit in you”)
- Japan: bow from the waist, palms on thighs, heels together
- Korea: a slight bow and handshake (take right hand in one or both hands)
- Malaysia: both hands touch other person’s hands and then are brought back to the chest
- Philippines: a handshake and welcoming smile
- Sri Lanka: place palms together under chin and bow slightly
- Thailand: bend the head a little and raise the hands, palms together, until the forefingers touch the tip of the nose. This greeting is called *wai*.

2 Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy

Leader preparation: Try out this activity with someone at home so that you will know how to approach it with your group of children.

Supplies:

- plastic cups, 4–5 inches tall—one for each child

Gather children and sit in a circle. Give each child a cup, which they are to place upside down in front of them. Make sure that all children know their right hand from their left. Explain that they are going to play a rhythm game and that they will be moving their cups around the circle in unison. This may be difficult for the youngest children, although they should be able to do it if you move slowly, at least at first. Practice a few times before the game begins. Use the following

sequence of hand and cup movements for the first few rounds and then invite the children to suggest other movement combinations.

Grab cup with right hand.
Tap cup twice on the floor.
Move cup to the person sitting to the right.
Repeat.

Start slowly and then increase speed as children feel the rhythm of the game. Once the children are comfortable, add words to their movements. Tell the children that the cups represent the God's gift of joy in their lives and they need to pass that joy on to others. This time when they tap the cup twice in front of themselves, they will say "happy, happy." They will then they move the cup to the right and tap it twice in front of their neighbor, saying "joy, joy." Repeat.

③ Cornstarch Goo

Leader preparation: This is a messy activity, but worth the cleanup. Cover the working area with newspapers or a plastic tablecloth.

Supplies:

- newspaper or plastic tablecloth
- corn starch, at least 16 oz.
- water
- bowls
- spoons
- paper towels for cleanup
- zipper-lock bag

Divide the group into pairs or triads. Give each small group a large bowl. Fill each bowl with ½ cup corn starch, and mix with a little water. Keep adding water until the mixture is soupy. If the mixture sits even for a second it will start to harden, but as soon as it gets gently moved with hands or a spoon it liquefies again. Invite the children to hold the goo and squeeze it. The cornstarch and water mixture will harden when it is squeezed, but will melt when the hand opens. When you are angry or mean-spirited, your heart hardens like the goo. But when you open yourself to joy, your anger melts away.

Special note: Do not pour this mixture down the drain; it will clog the pipes and stop up the drain. Pour the mixture into a zip-lock bag and dispose of it in the garbage.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Happy Feet (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Check out the supply closet to see if there are recordings of lively music, or check with the music director for an appropriate recording.

Supplies:

- lively music (optional)
- Bible

Read Luke 1:39–45. Elizabeth was so happy to see Mary that her whole body was filled with joy. Even the baby growing inside her jumped for joy when he heard Mary’s voice. Invite the children to feel how joy can be felt throughout the body, in hands and feet, arms, shoulders, and legs. If possible, play lively music to accompany this activity.

Gather the children in a circle and ask them to tap their toes. Now change that toe tapping into happy tapping. How would feet show happiness? Move to the hands. Ask the children to stretch out their arms in front and open and close their hands. Now make those hands dance with joy. Invite the children to suggest how other body parts express joy.



5 Can You See What I See?

Leader preparation: None.

Supplies:

- potatoes, one for each child
- basket
- poster: “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard,
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Gather the children in a circle. Ask them to close their eyes and keep them closed tight until they are asked to open them. Pass around the circle a basket of potatoes and ask each child to take one. After everyone has a potato, ask them to get to know their potato using only their hands—they should not open their eyes yet. Can they feel the eyes of the potato, are there bumps, is the skin smooth or rough, how big is their potato? After a few minutes, go around the circle and collect all the potatoes. Tell the children they may open their eyes. How well did they get to know their potato? What did their hands tell them?

Put all the potatoes in the center of the circle and ask the children how easy it would be to find the potato they were holding. After the children have a chance to find their own potatoes, put all of the potatoes back in the basket. Pass the basket around the circle again and ask each child to take one potato, this time with their eyes open. (They do not need to find the one they held before.) Now ask the children to get to know their potato: what color is it, does it have bumps, how many eyes does it have, what is its shape. After a few minutes, go around the circle and ask the children to describe their potato using one or two words. Collect all the potatoes. Place the potatoes back in the center of the circle. Can the children find their potato now? Talk to the children about the difference between simply touching the potato with eyes closed and seeing and touching it.

Show the poster “Sisters in the Wind,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>. What are the children in the picture looking at? Do they seem excited, happy, scared, worried? Why are they standing on a rock? The sisters can see much farther standing high on a rock than they can standing on the ground. To see what is in front of us we have to keep our head up and eyes open.

In John 12:35–36, Jesus speaks to the disciples about walking in darkness and walking in the light. A person walking in the darkness does not know where

he is going. Jesus is often called “the Light.” When we walk in darkness we may stumble and fall, we may be frightened and worried, but when we walk with the light of Jesus in our hearts, we can rejoice in the beauty of creation and clearly see our blessings and happily share those blessings with others.

6 Treasure Map

Leader preparation: Draw a diagonal line across the paper that the children will use to create their treasure maps.

Supplies:

- Bible
- white paper, 8½ x 11
- colored pencils or crayons (not markers)
- several wet tea bags
- paper towels for cleanup

Read Matthew 6:19–21 and John 12:26. Jesus speaks often about loving things more than we love God and one another. Invite the children to create a treasure map showing what keeps them on the path toward God and what pulls them away.

On the prepared paper, have the children draw a picture of themselves in one of the corners from which the line extends and then a heart in the diagonal corner, where the line ends. On one side of the line/path they are to write words or draw images of material things that they love (TV, games, money). On the other side of the line/path they are to write words or draw images or symbols of what brings them closer to God and to other people (flowers, rainbow, family, church). On which side of the road do the children walk the most?

When the children have finished, wipe each side of their maps with a wet tea bag. The paper should turn a light brown and be soaked through. To further create the look of a treasure map, the children may gently crumple the paper into a ball and then let it dry overnight. The next morning they can flatten their map, which should now appear ancient. Encourage the children to look at the map during the week and treasure what brings them closer to God.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Ha, Ha, Ha! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make sure the floor is clean enough for the children to lie on. If the girls are wearing dresses, be careful to protect their dignity and privacy. You might want to bring blankets or towels to cover their legs.

Supplies:

- towels or blankets (optional)

Have one child lie down on his or her back. The next player lies down with his or her head resting on the first child’s tummy, and the next player lies down with his or her head on the second player’s tummy. Arrange all the children until everyone is zigzagged around the floor, each with his or her head on someone else’s tummy (if possible, make the line into a loop so that the last child can put their head on the first child’s belly).

Once all the children are in position, explain that the first child is to shout in a loud, clear voice, “Ha!” The second child, whose head rests on the tummy of the first, then responds with a vigorous, “Ha, ha!” The third child then responds, “Ha, ha, ha!” Continue until all players have shouted out their “Ha,” increasing “Ha!” by one with each child. More than likely the “Ha” will not make it through the chain before the children are rolling with laughter.

8 Bag of Laughs

Leader preparation: None.

Supplies:

- medium-sized paper bag or drawstring bag
- small paper bags, one for each child
- markers, crayons, stickers

Gather children in a circle. Tell the children that you are going to pass around a bag of laughs. As the bag is passed, each child will open the bag, inhale the laughter, and then refill it with laughter before it is passed to the next child. After children have finished with their spontaneous laughter invite them to decorate their own “Bag of Laughs” to remind them of the gift of laughter and that laughter is a blessing best shared with others.



9 All Saints

Leader preparation: This activity is messy, but few things are more joyful than finger painting. Cover surfaces with newspaper or plastic tablecloth; have plenty of paint smocks for the children and plenty of paper towels for cleanup. Most importantly—have fun!

Supplies:

- finger paints
- finger paint paper
- bowls for paint
- paint smocks, one for each child
- paper towels
- poster: “Allerheiligen” (All Saints) by Wassily Kandinsky, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

Reflect

Taken together the two focus passages mark the beginning and the end of Jesus’ life on earth. We know how to live joyfully in times of happiness, but how do we continue to live joyfully when we are overwhelmed by sadness. Living joyfully doesn’t mean we are always smiling or that sorrow will never sink our spirits. Joyful living is living in the understanding that whatever we experience as humans, we experience within the ever-present love and compassion of God. Pay attention this week to the ways you experience joy and offer prayers of thanksgiving for this gift.

Invite the children to look closely at the Kandinsky poster. What do they see? What colors are used? What emotions do they see in the faces? Explain that the painting is called “All Saints,” and the line of people represents all those who have followed God’s path.

Using finger paints, invite the children to create their own vision of swirling joy and God’s invitation to all people to walk in God’s light. Encourage the children to let their imaginations guide them in their creation.

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Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Mark 16:1–8 is rich in description and emotion and should be shared with the children in vivid detail. Let the children’s imaginations place them inside the scripture and share the anticipation felt by the women. What will happen next?

Young children often have questions that are difficult to answer. Be honest with them, saying, “I don’t know the answer. Maybe we can find out together.” God’s vision for humanity and all creation is too big for our minds to understand fully, but there is a place for us all in God’s glorious realm!

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

Pray for the children in your care, remembering each by name. Read Mark 16:1–8. Let the image of the women finding the stone miraculously moved from the tomb’s entrance serve as a visual meditation to ground you in sacred purpose. Do not worry about the time ahead, but center yourself in the joyful expectation that all will be well. Welcome the children as Jesus would, with gentle voice, open ears, and softened heart. May God work through your ministry as you guide the children in their joy-filled discovery of God’s word.

Prayer: Loving God, through our time together, bless the children with whom I am working. Fill [name the children] each with a spirit of hope and joy and resurrection. In Christ’s name 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 Mission: Playground (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: None.

Supplies:

- pencil and paper
- posters: “Shotgun, Third Ward #1 by John Biggers, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> and “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>

Gather the children and sit in a circle. Tell them that they have an important mission to accomplish. As children of God, we use our imaginations to help us see a world where everyone is welcomed and loved. If we can imagine such a place, then we can also help create it. Ask the children to close their eyes. Guide them in a moment of deep breathing, silently counting to three as they breathe in and counting to three as they breathe out. Once the children are relatively quiet and focused, ask them to imagine for a moment all the things they love to do. Swimming? Running? Fishing? Climbing? Singing? Dancing? Ask them think about the great feelings they get deep inside when they are doing what they love the most. Tell them to open their eyes. With those images still fresh, invite them to design together the perfect playground. What would the perfect playground for children and adults look like? This has to be a place where all people of all ages and abilities could find joy and happiness. As the children share their visions, write down all their ideas and read them aloud at the end of this activity.

Show the posters “Children Play in the Town of Kabul, Afghanistan” and “Shotgun, Third Ward #1.” What kind of playgrounds do these children have? In both posters, the children seem to be in places of danger, but they seem happy. Why do they think that is?

2 Let’s Get Excited!

Leader preparation: Break one seltzer tablet in half

Supplies:

- Bible
- seltzer tablet
- two film canisters
- water
- paper towels for cleanup

Mark 16:1–8 takes place on a Sunday morning. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Salome are taking spices to the tomb where Jesus has been laid so they can anoint his body. They are worried that they will not be able to roll away the stone from the entrance to the tomb. Read Mark 16:1–8. What did the woman see when they arrived at the tomb? Was Jesus in the tomb? Who was standing in the tomb? What did the man tell the women? Why are the women afraid? As Christians, we know the rest of this story. Jesus had indeed risen! The message of love that Jesus brought to us lives on in Jesus’ spirit and this is the good news that fills us with joy.

Do an experiment to show what happens when we live the good news and spread

- 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.

God's love with others. Take the tops off two film canisters and drop half of a seltzer tablet in each. The canisters stand for two people and the tablet stands for the scripture we heard. Both of these people heard the same words. But let's see if both people let these words fill them with joy. Put the top back on one of the canisters and see what happens. Nothing happens. The tablet just sits at the bottom of the canister. What happens to the second person if we add a little water to the canister? Add water and put the lid back on. In a few seconds, the canister will "explode." As Christians, we are filled with an explosive excitement because we know the rest of the story, we know that the Spirit of Christ lives in us and we share that good news in the way we love God and love each other. We can't help but live in joy knowing how much we are loved.

③ Make a Joyful Noise

Leader preparation: Cut white contact paper and cover containers.

Supplies:

- margarine or yogurt container or similar plastic container, one for each child
- dried beans or pebbles
- white contact paper
- stickers
- markers
- glue
- music
- Bible

Invite the children to make shakers to use as percussion instruments. Give each child a prepared container. Invite the children to decorate the outside of the container with images of joy and happiness, using stickers and markers. Fill the containers about $\frac{1}{4}$ full of dried beans or pebbles, and then put a small amount of glue around the edge of the lid and put it on tightly.

Read Mark 16:1–8. The women at the tomb were frightened because they didn't know what had happened to Jesus. We do know. Jesus wasn't in the tomb because Jesus had risen! This is good news! This is news that should make us want to sing. Invite the children to use their shakers as they sing a song that is familiar, such as "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy," <http://www.tinyurl.com/2unvsbh>.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Simon Says "Be a Rainbow"

Leader preparation: None

Supplies:

- Bible
- poster: "Dancing 'Til Dawn" by Marianne Millar
<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>

Invite the children to use their imaginations to express through pantomime images of joy. Gather the children in an area with plenty of space for movement. Explain that they will play "Simon Says," but instead of following simple commands they will become the joyful images Simon tells them to become.

Examples: Simon says . . .

- be a butterfly finding a flower
- be a balloon at a birthday party
- be a leaf floating down a river
- be a child being tickled
- be raindrops falling on a pond

Get creative. Stretch your imagination and encourage the children to be Simon and offer their suggestions of joyful imagery.

Read Mark 16:1–8 to the children. The women walking to the tomb expected to find the body of Jesus. They did not expect to find the tomb empty and a young man dressed in white telling them that Jesus had risen and gone ahead of them to Galilee. So much of Jesus' life and Jesus' teachings was not expected. We need to keep our imaginations open so that we can see what is not expected and experience each day all the wonderful surprises God has placed in creation.

Show the poster "Dancing 'Til Dawn," <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>, and ask: What are the women looking at? How are these women like the women at the tomb? How are they different? The poster is titled "Dancing 'Til Dawn." Can you tell the women are dancing?



5 Do You Believe? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: None.

Supplies:

- feathers, one for each child
- bubbles, one bottle for each child

Gather children and sit in a circle. Ask them if they believe the sun will come up in the morning. Why do they believe the sun will rise? Ask them if they think turtles can fly. Why do they believe turtles can't fly? Do we only believe what we can see?

Blow a bubble. How did the bubbles form and why are they floating in the air? Did we see the air? Then how do we know it was there? Give each child a feather. Ask them to move the feather, either on the floor or in the air, without using their hands. How did the feather move? Did we see what moved the feather?

In the Bible we read that Jesus was resurrected after death. Even the disciples had trouble believing that this could have happened until they saw Jesus again. Having faith is believing without seeing. We were not there when Jesus died. We did not go to the tomb and find it empty, but we believe that Jesus lives on in the Holy Spirit, gently moving us, as the air moved the bubbles and the feathers, to live as loving children of God.

Give each child a bottle of bubbles and a feather to take home as reminders of the way the Holy Spirit moves in their lives.

6 Dancing Raisins

Leader preparation: Young children are very literal thinkers. Some may not understand the connection between the raisins and the psalm.

Supplies:

- carbonated water
- raisins on a plate
- glass
- Bible

Show the raisins on the plate. The raisins are lifeless, just lying on the plate. Let's see if we can bring new life into them. Pour a half a glass of carbonated water and add a few raisins (no more than five) to the glass. The raisins may float at first, but then will sink. In about a minute the raisins will appear to have new life. They will bounce up and then sink again. They will "dance" like this for a while. The bubbles in the water are like little parachutes, lifting the raisins and then letting them drop back down, over and over.

Read Psalm 112 (in an appropriate translation). Psalms were often written by people who wanted to show their thanks to God for all their blessings and joys. Think about all the blessings in life. Thankful people are like the raisins, filled with bouncing joy. Are there ways to share your blessings with others so they too will be bubbling with happiness?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Pass that Smile (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: None.

Supplies: None

Gather the children and sit in a circle. One child begins the activity by smiling a wide, silly smile at everyone in the circle, trying to make someone else giggle or laugh. The smiling child gets a point for everyone who can't keep a totally straight face. After a while, she or he uses one hand to literally "wipe" the smile off her or his face, "hands" it to the person next in the circle, and on it goes.

8 Over My Head

Leader preparation: Become familiar with the hymn "Over My Head" (traditional African American). You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>. Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song.

Supplies:

- colorful scarves or nylon

Teach the children the hymn "Over My Head." After they are familiar with the melody, invite them to write new verses such as, "Over my head I hear laughing in the air . . ." or "Over my head I see rainbows in the air . . ." Once the children are comfortable with the song, give them colorful scarves or large pieces of material to wave overhead as they sing.

"Over My Head" is a traditional hymn and a song that was often sung during the

civil rights movement. It speaks of God's presence in music, singing, in Jesus, and even in trouble. It is a song of deep hope. As Christians we walk into the future anticipating God's goodness with every step. Invite the children to spend time during the week imagining days filled with joy and goodness. Before they get out of bed in the morning, they can imagine a wonderful day ahead and what they hope will happen in their lives. At bedtime, they can imagine children around the world and pray that their lives will be peaceful and filled with goodness.

9 Worms to Wings

Leader preparation: Cut tissue paper into rectangles.

Supplies:

- Bible
- assorted colors of tissue paper
- pipe cleaners
- string or thread

A butterfly's life begins as a caterpillar. Caterpillars make houses or cocoons for themselves. The caterpillar needs the cocoon to grow through the next stage of its life. If the cocoon is not built well, then the caterpillar will shrivel up and die. If the cocoon is built well, the caterpillar will disappear into the cocoon and then reappear as a butterfly, more beautiful and powerful than before.

Read Mark 16:1–8. The women left the empty tomb confused and trembling. They weren't sure what had happened to Jesus. But we know what happened and we are not confused and trembling. We are happy and filled with joy.

Collect an assortment of tissue paper. Cut the paper into various sized rectangles—the larger the rectangle, the larger the butterfly. Invite the children to pick two colors for each butterfly. Pinch the tissue together in the middle and wrap a pipe cleaner around the middle once or twice. The remaining length of pipe cleaner can be left straight or twisted with a finger for the antennae. String or thread can be attached to the butterfly so that it can hang from the ceiling or a wall.

Reflect

"Summer, grass, run, jump, youth!
Wake up! Wake up, oh this is your last
chance. I can't play Kick the Can alone .
. . . maybe the secret to the magic is Kick
the Can!"

—*Twilight Zone: Kick the Can*,
episode 21, 1962

Go and play!