



## 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

Youth eleven to fourteen years old are often intensely focused on their friends and figuring out how to deal with (or avoid) the evolution taking place in their bodies. The rise in self-dislike and anxiety about everything too often takes away from their innate spirit of playfulness and living joyfully. This group wants to live in the worlds of both child and adult, not always fitting well into either. The greatest gift we can extend to these youth is to give them space to leave their emotional crisis of the moment, to be childlike, and to find the God of joy even in their chaos of adolescence.

### About this Exploration

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

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

1 John 1:1-2:2  
Psalm 30

## Leader Preparation

As you prepare to work with your group of young people each week, think about your middle school years. What were the joyful experiences in your life during that time period? What were the horrendous experiences in your life during that period? The emotional roller-coaster of your experiences are likely similar to some of what the young people in your group are handling. Pray for each youth before the session. Keep a prayer journal each week in which you reflect about your group members and their lives. It will help you remember their humanity and that they are each a child of God, especially when behavior problems occur and upset session plans.

*Prayer: Creator and Great Teacher, let me learn each young person's name, gifts, stories, and ways he or she might know you better. Let me not make assumptions about their questions or answers. Let me see each young person in your reflection. Help me to remember to take time to breathe and enjoy our journey in practicing together our faith. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Take a Tour (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Make sure the spaces you plan to tour are available. If you have a large group, consider having an extra adult present for when you walk through the building to make sure you keep everyone together.

**Supplies:** None

Let the youth know that they will be going on a tour of the church today. Before starting out, encourage them to think about their tour through the eyes of being creative and/or playing. If possible while going from room to room, play games such as “follow the leader” or “hop-scotch.” Try to have fun on the walking parts of your tour. If rooms are occupied or in use, be sure to check with leaders of those activities to see if your group can come in without being disruptive.

Start the tour by going to the nursery. Have each youth take one minute to find some object in the nursery that reflects play or creativity. Have the group quickly share about why they chose their object. If you have a lot of youth, have them share in smaller groups. (The youth may want to stay in this room to play with all the great toys, but be strong and keep them moving!). Continue on your tour, repeating the activity of finding an object in each place; a children’s learning area, an adult learning area, music/choir room, a special sitting room at your church, and then end in the sanctuary.

Pose these or similar questions: In which space was it easiest to find things to play with? What space was most difficult? What might be the reasons for that? In what ways can you imagine including more play/creativity in the spaces that were difficult? Is there a magic age in your church when it seems like being playful or creative is no longer acceptable?

### 2 Playful Pets

**Leader preparation:** Either plan to visit the humane society with your youth or have a couple folks bring “playful pets” to your gathering. If going to the humane society or an animal shelter, call ahead to make sure you may visit to play and walk some of their animals. If having a few animals come to your group, make sure the animals are child-friendly and like to play with kids.

**Supplies:**

- playful pets or animals

Have your group spend time playing with the pets (either at the shelter or church)—perhaps fetch, chase, races or other fun games the youth come up with. After playing for some time with the animals, bring the youth together to reflect on the following questions.

If at the shelter: What part of the surroundings might not be very “joyful”? How much do you think the animals were thinking about their surroundings when you were playing/walking? In spite of any sadness of their not having homes, what allowed for you all to have fun? When times are rough in your own life, what are ways you still can find joy and a playful spirit?



### 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.

If at another location with pets: What was the most fun part of playing with the animals? In what ways might an animal’s life not be very fun? In spite of any of those negative aspects of being an animal, what allowed for you all to have fun together? In your own life when times might not be very fun, what are ways you can still find joy and a playful spirit?

### 3 A Baby’s Laughter

**Leader preparation:** On <http://www.tinyurl.com/246ezbn> you can find all kinds of baby laughter videos. Find some that you think are really fun, and prepare to have your group watch 4–5 minutes of “baby laughing” clips. They will likely want to watch more, so be prepared to have an extra encore clip.

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- data projector with sound

First, invite your youth to say what comes to their mind immediately when you say the word “baby.” Often negative images of crying, diapers, and food being thrown up come to mind. There might also be joyful images of babies mentioned. Let them know they are going to watch some baby image clips and at the end will discuss what they saw, heard, and felt. If possible, have one of the other leaders write down how folks are sitting, watching, and perhaps not looking very joyful, noting changes while the video takes place. Watch several short clips of babies laughing. After the clips ask the youth what they saw and heard. At this point invite the adult that wrote down about the youth before and then during the video clips to answer: What physical changes did they note? Did folks lean into the screen? Were there more smiles?

Then ask the youth how they felt at the end of the video clips. Did they feel happier and/or more joyful? What might have caused that? Did their life circumstances change, or did their attitude and what they were focusing on change? In life, how much of being joyful is based on the circumstances we are in or the attitude we have? Where does our faith connect with joy?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Joyful, Joyful (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Songs communicate a message to the recipient, and inviting your youth to think about messages of songs can make a profound impact. This simple activity invites the youth to think through the song lyrics to “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy). You can read the lyrics and hear the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>.

**Supplies:**

- hymnals or songbooks, or lyrics to “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee”  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>
- candy bars or other small items for prizes

Start with humming the tune “Ode to Joy” and ask if any of the youth can name that tune. Give the winner a candy bar/small prize. Ask if someone else can name the composer, Ludwig van Beethoven, and award another candy bar/small prize. In listening to the tune (even briefly), what emotional tone do they hear is being communicated? Hand out the songbooks or lyrics and invite the youth to take a

moment to read through the song silently. After a minute of quiet reading ask for volunteers to read each verse. Invite those not reading to close their eyes and simply listen to the lyrics. After the song is read by volunteers, ask: What phrases or ideas struck you as particularly joyful? What about those phrases was joyful? What images of a joyful life was this song embracing? Where in our world do you think we need for more joy to enter in?

Give everyone a candy bar or other silly prize for participating.

### 5 New Game Creations

**Leader preparation:** Much of the playful spirit of young people is hidden underneath the surface just waiting to come out. This activity lets that playful and creative spirit be expressed and thinks about the notion of creating something good from junk. Be prepared for some chaos and ideas that are out of the norm. That is perfectly okay! Search the supply closet (especially any old stuff you don't know what to do with anyway) for all kinds of funky "junk" including string, egg cartons, poster board, cardboard tubes, fabrics, glue sticks, markers. The more stuff available, the more inventive the youth can be!

#### **Supplies:**

- funky junk such as egg cartons, poster board, cardboard tubes, fabrics, glue sticks, and markers

Divide the group into teams of two to four and give them 10 minutes maximum to come up with a new game—never done before—for the rest of the group. Use the "junk" on the table or other things in the room, within reason. Explain that their game does not need to be perfect, but rather fun and creative. They will also need to be prepared to explain to the rest of the group at the end of the 10 minutes about their "New Game Creation." Make sure to give them a two-minute warning when coming near the end of the 10 minutes.

Invite groups to describe their games. If possible, allow time to try playing one or more of the games. Invite the youth to talk about this activity. What were the easiest parts of creating a new game? What were the most challenging? There are lots of "junk" experiences in different parts of our life that pile up: friendships that go bad, conflicts with parents, body changes that we don't like, and so forth. Amid all that junk, what are creative ways to still find joy and have some fun? How does God help us create joy?



### 6 A Joyful Dance

**Leader preparation:** Asking youth, especially at this age, to find ways to use their bodies to express joy can be dangerous, but also very rewarding for them. Find a room large enough where youth can move and use their bodies to express joy, and prepare yourself for smells, sounds, and sights that might be full of play.

#### **Supplies:**

- poster: "Joyful Dance" by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>
- CD or iPod with random six to eight clips (roughly 20–30 seconds each) of playful and eccentric-sounding music—perhaps mix in clips of holiday music, nature sounds, rap music, and symphonic sounds
- CD player or speakers for iPod

Find an open space and invite the youth to stretch their bodies some before beginning. Explain that you will be playing a lots of music clips. Their job is to act

out whatever dance and movement their bodies are telling them to do—including running, break-dancing, posing, or whatever else. If mobility is a concern for some of the participants, introduce the idea of “hand dancing.” In this activity one remains seated and simply moves one hand in various gestures in response to the music. If some are self-conscious about this activity, simply invite them to close their eyes. It can be quite powerful!

Let them know that they cannot touch other people in their movements. After the first couple music clips, bring the group together and ask whether it is awkward to allow themselves to move freely. In what places are they being told to not move freely in their lives? Show them the poster “Joyful Dance” and ask what are some of the images they see coming from this poster. How much freedom do these folks seem to have in their “Joyful Dance”?

Invite them to think about letting themselves relax into the next series of music clips and have some fun. Play the remainder of the music clips. Gather them back together and ask whether they were able to move a little more freely yet. Do they have space in their rooms or homes to allow them to move freely and dance joyfully? How might that feel? Encourage them to try dancing alone this week with their own music and version of a “Joyful Dance.”

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 A Reading of Psalm 30 (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Psalm 30 is a perfect passage for youth this age as it speaks to the emotional extremes of life from one line to the next. Inviting youth to hear this psalm and working through it can be very enriching.

#### Supplies:

- several different translations of Psalm 30
- short phrases from the different translations of the psalm written on note cards or strips of paper

Invite the youth to sit comfortably around the room and to simply listen to the words of Psalm 30. Read aloud the same translation twice. Ask: What messages do you hear in this passage? Invite them to listen to a different translation and let them know that you will be asking where they hear God is at in the passage.

After reading Psalm 30 and inviting their responses, let them know you will be reading the passage one more time and then asking where they hear themselves in the passage. After reading the passage and then giving space for their responses, invite the group to gather in a closing circle. Hand each person in the group, including adult leaders, a phrase from Psalm 30 and invite them to read their phrase in a new way of hearing and saying Psalm 30. There is no right pattern. Others may have the same phrase, and they are welcome to read their phrase more than once.

Close in prayer when you feel everyone has shared their phrase. Use this prayer or adapt it as needed: *God, there are moments in our lives where we feel like the world has crashed in on us and we are in the pits of despair. Thank you for still being there for us. Some moments we are in our height of feeling on top of the world and like nothing could get us down. Thank you for being there with us in those moments, too. Help us to remember to see you in both the despair and the joy this coming week. Amen.*



### 8 Life-size Joy

**Leader preparation:** This activity is geared to help youth think through what qualities make a person joyful. As youth consider body image, clothes, personal attributes, and all of the “stuff” that might be inclined to help one be joyful, watch for those places of cross-over that might not lead one to joy, but actually arouse more self-doubt and anxiety. Much of the world’s pressure to look and be a certain way actually takes us away from living in the present and joy-filled place that is where we are able to be with God.

**Supplies:**

- drawings of two or three life-sized bodies on poster board or butcher paper
- markers

Hang the two or three life-sized bodies on a wall (with paper behind it in case marker leaks through) with the words “Joyful,” “Lacking joy,” and “Creative” (optional) on the top of the sheets. Invite the youth to spend five to seven minutes writing words and drawing on the bodies—things that reflect these concepts. After the time is up, gather around the bodies and ask for a couple volunteers to read and say what is on the bodies. Reflect with your group on the following questions: What is least surprising about what you see? What is most surprising? If your friends were bodies on this wall, what words/images might be true for them? How might the people around us affect what words describe who we are and what people think about us? Is that fair?

### 9 The Phone Message

**Leader preparation:** Many of the youth likely have their own cell phones, which at times can create disruptions while in a group setting. This activity encourages the youth to think about what message is communicated when people call their phone—whether it’s a message of disappointment, no message, or one that has an uplifting thought.

**Supplies:**

- markers
- sheets of newsprint or paper
- phone with speaker

## Reflect

As you begin this journey of Faith Practice with youth, what assumptions might you have made about the faith experiences and perspective youth bring? Are there assumptions that the youth might have about how they practice their own faith? As the leader, are you making space for joy and play in your time together? Would the youth reflect that their time together is an experience of joy and play? If not, what might help create more of that atmosphere?

Ask the group what message cell phones in the room give when someone calls them and they do not answer. If possible call a few of the phones and have folks listen on a speaker to different messages. Ask what someone might feel if they called and went into this voice message. Then divide the group into two to three per team and have them come up with a 20-second “joyful” voice message that they will do live for the group. Give groups 5–7 minutes to create their message. After groups come back together, have them present their “joyful” voice message. What kind of message might be on God’s cell phone?

Conclude with a few of the following questions: What was easy about this activity? What was difficult about this activity? What are other ways we can send joyful messages to people besides on our phone?

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# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

Youth, ages eleven to fourteen, are starting to see scripture as more than literal and Bible stories as difficult to believe scientifically. This is a wonderful age to start exploring the truth revealed in scripture—separate from the facts that might not be as important. Encouraging your youth to see this dynamic approach to scripture will allow for more joy and greater openness to reading our sacred stories without needing to hold to literalism.

### 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:**

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

## Leader Preparation

What are your attitudes about scripture? Have you been a person who has seen scripture used as a tool of oppression? If so, how might these experiences affect how you communicate what joy and happiness we can find through the stories of the Bible? If not, might some of your youth see scripture through the lenses of the oppression of women, gay/lesbian people, or people of color? It will be important to name for yourself your own values around the Bible and how it might be a place of joy and comfort and at the same time the opposite. Your youth will appreciate your struggle as they are most likely trying to find the words to name their own journey in scripture.

*Prayer: God of truth and word, allow me to step back to listen to what is needed and still facilitate what is helpful. Help me to remember that the scriptures are still being heard in new ways and that I am practicing my faith with the young people as a sojourner, not an expert. Amen.*

## Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from nine activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from “Exploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Acting It Out (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Often the best way to hear a Bible story is to move physically through what is happening. Mark 9:30–37 is a great passage to have a few different narratives told through your youth “actors” that will tie in with one another.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles

Divide the group into three groups—the size of the groups will not matter because these skits can be done with many or few participants. Encourage each group to make the passage relevant to their current context. Have the first group prepare a skit from Mark 9:30–32, the second group from Mark 9:33–35, and the third group from Mark 9:36–37. Give groups 5–7 minutes to prepare their skits (skits don’t need to be much longer than 1–2 minutes). Have the groups do their skits in order of the passage. Follow up with these or similar questions: How might these different skits relate to one another? What messages were most important in these skits? What were the messages the disciples were most interested in thinking about? What might be important messages in life that we don’t hear because we are focused on other things? (Some possibilities could be: God loves us, and we are too centered on a new zit; our parents provide for all our needs, and we are focused only on their divorce, and so on.)

### 2 Take a Hike

**Leader preparation:** The amount of preparation needed for this activity depends on the place where your group meets and the amount of time you have. You can plan for a simple hike to spend a few minutes in nature around your building, or take an afternoon and climb a hill to a beautiful view.

**Supplies:** None

Take the group on a nature hike and ask them to think about what they see, smell, hear, and feel, and where they found God in their hike. In their being present to what is happening to them in nature, hopefully they will both find God as well as a greater sense of joy that can be found in the creation all around them.



### 3 Dancing ‘Til Dawn

**Leader preparation:** A drumming circle can be a fun and powerful way to let every member of the group participate and have a “voice.” Find someone in your congregation or community who might be willing to lead your group in a time of drumming. This activity also merges in the piece of art “Dancing ‘Til Dawn” that can provide another means of creative expression.

**Supplies:**

- drums
- poster: “Dancing ‘Til Dawn” by Marianne Millar  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>

Ask if anyone has stayed up all night—perhaps at a slumber party or a youth group overnight lock-in. What were some of their fondest memories from that

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event? Let them know that they are going to be looking at a piece of art and thinking about what might have been on the minds and hearts of the Native American individuals in the poster as they had perhaps been up all night. Let them know that while they are looking at the art, you will have some rhythmic drumming going on. Invite their participation. At this point go ahead and practice the drumming and make sure everyone understands how to follow a leader and go quieter and louder as a group. After they grasp the idea of drumming, continue the beat while you bring the poster around to each person to study for a moment—perhaps make a couple rounds with the poster. Follow up with some questions:

- What were some of the first words that came to mind when you looked at the poster?
- What might you imagine the dancers were thinking about?
- What were the places that you found creative energy in this activity?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### ④ Two Truths and Not Really

**Leader preparation:** This is a simple variation on “Two Truths and a Lie,” which many of your youth may have played before.

**Supplies:**

- index cards
- pencils or pens

Gather the group in a circle and explain that you are going to play a variation of “Two Truths and a Lie.” However, they are going to come up with a list of three things, two of which really help them to be happy and one that doesn’t (but likely would make someone else really happy), and then write the lists on their index card. Examples of what might help someone be happy, but could be the opposite for someone else, are: having dessert with your grandma, coffee hour after church, swimming at the lake, reading, or talking on the phone. After giving the group a few minutes to write their lists, have them pass their cards to the person next to them. That person will read the responses and have the group guess which answer really doesn’t help the first person feel happy. After going around the circle and giving everyone an opportunity to have a card read, ask several follow-up questions: Which answers surprised you? What were some of the similar things that made several of us happy? How can we help one another in the group stay positive and joyful?

### ⑤ Parking Lot Joy

**Leader preparation:** Car owners sometimes find menacing notes on their windshields advertising events or places that have no appeal and are completely irrelevant. This activity helps your group think through the folks in your congregation while spreading some joy to the car owners in your parking lot.

**Supplies:**

- paper
- markers
- Bibles



Invite the youth to make cards wishing people a “joy-filled day” or some other positive message that includes an uplifting Bible verse about joy and/or happiness. Once you have enough cards for the number of cars in the church parking lot, let your youth know you are sneaking around on a special mission to place notes under all the windshield wipers in the parking lot.

When you return from your mission, follow up with some questions: What might folks think about when they read their cards? When might they most need a random reminder to find joy in their circumstances?

### Pizza Creations

**Leader preparation:** Virtually all youth love pizza, so take time and make creative pizzas with your group.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- pizza dough (instant or already prepared, depending on time)
- lots of favorite pizza toppings
- lots of unusual toppings and/or sauces including barbecue sauce, pine nuts, chicken, spinach, different kinds of cheeses, and so on. (You might even consider having the youth bring their favorite or weirdest pizza topping and you provide the cheeses and crust.)
- oven mitts and a kitchen where making a mess won’t cause a job loss

Have a creative pizza making night or afternoon. Pair your youth in teams of two to four, depending on size of the pizzas, and have them make the most creative pizza ever. You might want to make some plain cheese pizzas for those less adventurous tasters. Plan some games to play while the pizzas are baking. After the pizzas are baked, slice them in small taste-size portions and then sample all the different creations with your group. After devouring the creations, follow up with questions: What pizza might have tasted the best? The ickiest? How might we best deal with circumstances when we try to be creative and our “masterpiece” doesn’t turn out exactly how we planned?

Read Philippians 2:1–13. When we have stuff in our lives that has turned out really well, how might we share that in good ways? When our masterpiece doesn’t turn out as we hoped, how might we still celebrate with the person who succeeded? Where in your life might you be able to celebrate in the bigger picture of accomplishments?

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 A Happy Top Ten

**Leader preparation:** In preparing for this activity, think about the “David Letterman Top Ten Lists.” However, this will be a fun list that your group comes up with of things that bring them the most happiness.

**Supplies:**

- markers
- newsprint or posters
- Bibles



Divide the group into small groups of two to four youth and give them 7–10 minutes to come up with a collective list of the top ten things that bring the most happiness to their lives. Encourage them to be creative and have fun with the activity, and let them know that they will be sharing their lists with the rest of the group—you might even have them start at item #10 and work up to the #1 item that they all agreed on that makes them happiest. Tape the posters to the walls (if possible) to remind the group when they meet about all those things in life that bring happiness.

Read Mark 9:30–37. Jesus was letting his people know that his death would be coming and, while this might be seen as a sad space in Jesus' life, he still welcomed the children and looked outside of his own circumstances. Have there been times in life where it would have helped to have had a larger picture? To remember that things are not as bad as we might imagine? How might we keep our attitudes centered on the joy we can find in life?

### 8 Children's Game Time

**Leader preparation:** Chat with a leader of an early elementary group in your church or organization about taking 10–15 minutes of their group time to have your youth visit their class and play some games.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

As a group come up with two to three children's games that take no more than 10–15 minutes total (such as duck-duck-goose, Simon says, elbow tag) and let them know you are going to be visiting the early elementary group for game time. Ask that everyone to participate and pay special attention to how the children respond to the youth playing games with them. After you are done with the special game time, return to your meeting area and follow up with some questions: What did you notice immediately with the children? What was the most fun part of your playing? What was the least fun? What might the children have to teach about being playful and/or joyful? Read Mark 9:30–37. How are games part of welcoming children?

### 9 "Say It! Sing It!" Circle Game

**Leader preparation:** Learn the words to "Say It! Sing It!" by JoEllen Miller. Plan to teach the song to the group, or make arrangements for someone else to do this if desired. This activity will help youth practice joy in the art of welcoming one another to the circle and sending one another out with a blessing. As Christians we invite people in, and when we go forth into our lives outside of church we bless one another till we meet again. Living and playing joyfully mean to be welcoming and to be blessing.

- Bible
- space for youth to move around and to make a circle
- musical instrument, unless planning to sing song a cappella
- song: "Say It! Sing It," Attachment: Activity 9

As Christians we are called to serve one another and share the love of God with one another. One way to do that is to cooperate with one another so that no one is left out. Tell the group they will be playing a circle singing game. Have youth stand in the middle of the circle. Have each one pretend to be lost and searching (they might make their hands into a telescope or bring one hand up over their

eyes as they look around; they may kneel down and search the ground and so on). As you sing the song, have them keep looking, and tell them you will be looking with them. When you call a name, that person is to come stand by you as you keep singing. Then that youth calls out the name of another person in the room. Eventually everyone is standing in a circle facing each other singing the song. Follow up with the questions:

- When have you felt alone and searching in life?
- What was it like when your name was called?
- Who in your life might be alone and needing a friend?

Send the group out by reading Philippians 2:1–4.

### Reflect


Celebrating our sacred stories and joy in scripture will be a wonderful gift for your youth. Remember, it is not necessary for anyone—youth or others—to accept the scriptures at face value. Even if this is desired, it can come over time.

Reflect on this prayer: *God, we are learners and sojourners in this Christian faith and see much love and joy in our sacred texts. We read passages that are hard to understand and might even find ourselves in disagreement about. Allow us the space to ask questions and the permission to not need all the answers. We are grateful for the current of joy and peace that runs through our stories, and may we find you there. Amen.*

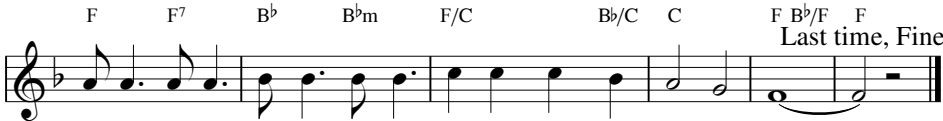
Attachment: Activity 9

## Say It! Sing It!


$\text{♩} = 132$



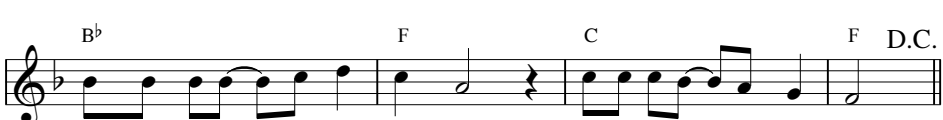
If you can say it! Sing it! Let peo-ple know how you feel. If you can



pray it, play it, know it, show it, let them know God's love is real! — Last time, Fine



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



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

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# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

Youth ages eleven to fourteen can be challenged to step up and take an active role in their own faith and path in discipleship. This developmental age is starting to ask questions about what they believe and whether the faith handed down by their parents will continue to make sense for them. It is especially crucial to help them see tangible measures through which faith can be relevant and helpful, which means they are finding ways to experience joy and happiness through their faith life.

### 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

Write down any words that come to mind regarding what it means to be a disciple in the twenty-first century. Of those words, are there any that would not apply to youth? Too often we ask too little rather than too much of our young people when it comes to being a Christian disciple. Challenge your own assumptions of how your youth can practice their faith more fully and live a life following Jesus.

*Prayer: God of young and old, help me to remember that we are all called to follow you regardless of age. Help me to put away any biases against youth and help them step into a fullness of walking with you. Amen.*

## Session Development

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

- 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 Change Yourself

**Leader preparation:** Being a disciple of Christ requires openness to changing oneself from the inside out. This activity helps lead a discussion on how we try to change ourselves outwardly; this is generally much easier than the hard internal work we are often challenged to do.

**Supplies:** None

Invite youth to get a partner and then to stand back to back. They will have exactly 15 seconds to change three things about themselves; then say “go.” After the 15 seconds have them turn around and give them about a minute to see if they can each tell what the other person changed. Have them turn back to back again and this time give them 25 seconds to change five things about themselves. After the 25 seconds, again give them about a minute to figure out what each other changed. This will be the last time, give them 40 seconds to change seven things about themselves. Again, after the 40 seconds are up give them about a minute to figure out all the things that their partner changed. Now gather them for some questions:

- What round was easiest for you/most difficult?
- What were some of the easiest/most difficult changes to make?
- What were some of the things you changed?
- What changes did you make that the other person didn’t figure out?
- Did anyone think about changing things that were not visible? What might some of those things have been?
- What takes longer for you, changing what is outside or inside?
- How might this apply to our being disciples or followers of Jesus?

### ② An iPod shuffle

**Leader preparation:** Before this session, invite the youth to bring their iPods or favorite CD. It can be a true privilege to visit the world of youth and at times it can also be shockingly sad to see the loneliness and struggles that can be present in drug addiction, eating disorders, abuse, and the growth pains of moving from child to adult. This exercise may illicit a whole host of emotions for you. It will be very important for you not to judge or give comment to the world you visit through their music. You should act as an honored guest during this time and allow for the youth to share part of who they are or, more likely, are trying to decide to become.

**Supplies:**

- computer
- speakers for an iPod
- CD player (optional)

Invite the youth to bring in their iPods or favorite CD and create a shuffle using eight to ten one-minute song clips from their music—but don’t identify whose clip goes with whom. Try to have a range of their music choices and, perhaps, if some songs are on every iPod, play a couple clips from the song. Invite the youth



to be somewhere comfortable and listen to the music and/or lyrics if possible. After listening to the song clips, invite responses: What were some of their favorite songs? What were some of their least favorite? What are some of the messages we hear in music? What role does music play in their life? What role does music play in their faith/spiritual life? How can music speak to us as disciples of Christ?

### 3 Collage of Happiness

**Leader preparation:** There are many things in life that we can be thankful for and happy to have. Often media points us to the stuff we don't possess yet, giving the impression that if only we had this thing or that experience we would be happier. This activity is designed to help create a conversation and awareness of how many people, things, and experiences in life we have already that we can find joy from.

**Supplies:**

- lots of magazines
- scissors
- glue sticks
- large sheet of paper or poster board for every person
- markers

Invite youth to spend about 10 minutes creating a personal collage of all the stuff in their life they already have and are thankful for or find happiness in. Encourage them to use magazines, draw, and make their poster personal. Let them know that they will have the opportunity to share (if they wish) their collage with the group and the things in their life that bring them happiness. When you are done, ask these or similar questions:

- What were the most common themes in all the collages?
- What were the surprises you had while creating your collage?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 A Cast of Two Characters (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Youth this age are often focused on their friends, but mentors also are an important part of these developmental years. Helping your youth think through what their mentors might be modeling in terms of creativity and joy may help them to identify characteristics they would hope to incorporate into their own lives.

**Supplies:**

- paper
- markers or crayons

Invite the youth to spend a couple moments in silence to think about two people. The first is the most creative person in their life and the second is the most joyful/happy person—but the people cannot be in the room. Often youth have mentors and role models that they do not know personally, but have a great affinity for; these are fine to have as their mentors. Once you give them a moment to think

about their two people, have them draw the two individuals on sheets of paper. They can use words, colors or other ways to express what it is about these two people that they find represents the creativity and joy that resonates from their lives. After allowing 7–10 minutes, bring the group together and invite them to share about one or both of the people they drew. After everyone who wishes has had a chance to share, ask these or similar questions: What was easy about this activity? What was difficult? Were you surprised with whom you chose or others might have chosen? What qualities of creativity do you think you might notice in yourself? What ways of expressing happiness might others notice in you? In what ways might a person’s faith be important in helping her or him be creative or joyful?

### 5 Extreme Makeover of the Custodian’s Closet

**Leader preparation:** A television show that some of your youth might have seen is “Extreme Makeover,” where someone transforms a space that was outdated or messy into a beautiful and fashionable new setting. One place that can be fun to overhaul is the custodian’s closet. Be careful not to upset the custodian or the church property board/committee in doing this! However, building a positive relationship of respect and appreciation for all the hard work the custodian does can be a great lesson for your youth. Many times the custodian is paid the least on staff (or is even a volunteer) and receives very little affirmation for that ministry. This can be your group’s opportunity to change that.

**Supplies:**

- paint
- cards
- cleaning supplies
- some new tools (optional)

Make sure you have permission before painting or doing too much to your custodian’s closet. He or she can be very protective of the space, and this could turn out to be a very bad experience for everyone if you don’t plan ahead. If you have permission and everyone is on board with the idea, spend time cleaning, painting (perhaps a nice mural or thank-you graffiti), and sprucing up the custodian’s closet. Invite the ideas of your youth about what they think this person might appreciate. If you know this is going to be a bad idea for your context, you can still have your group write posters of thanks and/or cards, posting them on the wall of the custodian’s closet or office. When you are done, talk about how we are called to love everyone and especially the “least.” Where do they see others in their lives who might be in need of some appreciation and love? How might they be creative and demonstrate that they are thankful for that person? How are they a disciple?



### 6 Saints Alive!

**Leader preparation:** All Saints’ Day, November 1, is that occasion each year when we think about people in our lives who are saints—the ones who have reached out and made a difference in our life’s journey. Yet it is an appropriate holiday at any time of year, and it can be tied into January resolutions, Valentine’s Day, Easter alleluias, Memorial Day memories, Pentecost good spirits, and so on. Some of these people have died, and we keep them in our hearts. Some of those people are alive, and this holiday reminds us it’s important to say “thank you” to people—to the grandmother or the doctor, to the friend, neighbor, school teacher, camp counselor, coach, or whatever person modeled for us the kind of behavior that lifts us beyond ourselves.

**Supplies:**

- poster: “Allerheiligen” (All Saints) by Wassily Kandinsky laid flat on a small table that is covered by a cloth, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- unscented votive candles (one for each person)
- lighter or matches

Ask if anyone can explain the holiday “All Saints’ Day.” If no one knows, offer a brief explanation. Then have them view the picture “Allerheiligen,” which means “All Saints” or “All the Holy Ones.” Ask what different ways saints are represented in the visual imagery.

Reflect on roles saints play in life—both saints who are alive and deceased. In what ways have they experienced a saint in life? Invite every youth to light a candle, lifting up a prayer of thanks for a saint in his or her life with a simple prayer: *God, for the saint in my life, [name, if desired], thank you.*

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Charades

**Leader preparation:** Charades may be a new and uncomfortable game for your youth—especially shy or awkward youth. In thinking through this activity with your group, you may want to have teams of youth present to the rest of their group.

**Supplies:**

- paper
- pen
- container such as a hat or bag
- score sheet

Divide your group into two teams to play charades with the theme of “being joyful.” Remind youth of the rules of no talking, and perhaps come up with hand gestures that can mean movie, TV show, book, actions, song. You may wish to choose some possible titles (see list below for suggestions). Write them on a piece of paper and place them in a hat or bag. Have youth draw one of the papers, and give them one minute to try and get their group to guess the listed item.

- actions: serving the homeless, visiting shut-ins, washing windows, making dinner, going to church
- movies: *Toy Story 3*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Happy Feet*
- songs: “Amazing Grace,” “Party in the USA,” “Lean on Me”
- TV shows: “Dancing with the Stars,” “The Biggest Loser,” “Extreme Makeover”
- books: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

### 8 Cards for Folks Who Are Homebound

**Leader preparation:** If possible at the next holiday, get a list of names of people from your church who are homebound, or names at a retirement home that you support. The group will make cards for these people. Plan to deliver the cards in person, if possible.

## Supplies:

- paper (both fancy and regular card stock)
- fancy scissors
- glue sticks
- stamps
- miscellaneous supplies from a scrapbooking store

Create and deliver holiday cards for shut-ins. Before leaving to deliver the cards, invite your youth to share what experiences they have had visiting the elderly and what they might encounter. Set up some ground rules about things they should not say while there (comments on the smell, the way people look, the medical situations people might be in, and so forth.) After returning from the visit, follow up with some questions.

- What were some of the things that you saw/smelled/heard?
- In what ways did you bring joy and happiness to their world?

## 9 School Locker

**Leader preparation:** Think back to being a youth at the age of your young people; a lot of that world is about friends and school. This is also the age that many have a locker for the first time and a space that is their own. This activity might help them remember that, when they are having a really bad day at school, they are still loved and valued.

## Supplies:

- paper
- blank magnet strips that can be cut and written on
- markers

Start by inviting youth who would be willing to share to tell about their worst-ever day at school. This might get really crazy, and they might try to one-up one another's worst experience—but that's okay. After those who would like to have shared, ask what they did to help them get through that day.

Let them know that they are going to be given time to come up with a phrase or sign that might help them remember that, even on their worst days, they can look in their locker and remember they are loved and valued. Give youth about 5 minutes to design their phrases or signs and invite them to share what they have designed. Some ideas could be: "You are loved," "You can do it," or "I love you—God." Then give them permission to adjust their phrase or sign and have them draw what they have created onto a magnet to take and hang in their locker at school.

## Reflect

Learning to live a life of joy and creativity with our faith can be the greatest gift you give your youth. As you end this session on discipleship, invite them to offer the prayers and ways they are seeing God active in their life. Perhaps give them some time to write their prayers or thoughts and then to offer them to the group, which is often a wonderful way to include the shy and introverted.

As you leave the meeting, invite each youth to share verbally or by showing her or his magnet one more time as the closing prayer.

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# Playing and Living Joyfully



<http://www.tinyurl.com/5p4tun>

## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Youth ages eleven to fourteen are becoming immersed in a world of pluralism. There are tons of choices for almost everything in their life, and whether they follow the Christian tradition is simply another one of those choices they face. This is not a bad thing, but a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the uniqueness as well as similarities found in the Christian tradition and other faiths. The word “creativity” would probably not make the list if you invited your youth to brainstorm ways to explain the Christian tradition—but why not help them to understand it?

### About this Exploration

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



**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

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

## Leader Preparation

What traditions are most important to you? What is it about those traditions that are so special? In the Christian tradition, what are the highlights for you? What might be some of the highlights for the youth you are working with? Perhaps they might not fully understand their own tradition in the context of joy and creativity—what a challenge ahead if that’s the case! Allow for the spirit to flow and space to be given to your youth, who may be trying to name their own important ways of finding the Christian tradition their settled home.

Prayer: *Creative and perplexing God, allow me to let go and give space for your spirit to move in ways of bringing joy and creativity rather than control and answers. 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 Bible Drill (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Joy is a common theme in the Bible. This activity gets the youth more familiar with the Bible and encourages them to read several joy passages.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- prizes such as bite-size candy bars, small toys (optional)

Don’t reveal the theme of the passages you will be looking up. Make sure every youth has a Bible (best if they are all the same translation, but not critical). Let them know you will be competing to see who can find the Bible passage first. Remind them that in the front of their Bible is a list of the books that might be helpful. After naming six to ten passages, ask if someone can identify the common idea running through the passages. Award small prizes to folks who find the passage first and to the person who identifies the theme. You might consider closing with a reflection on what messages they often think the Bible sends and whether being joyful was the one they would think of. If not, then why not? Offer prizes to the remaining players as a reward for participating. Some possible passages: Psalm 30:11; Isaiah 29:19; Philippians 4:4; 2 Chronicles 7:10; Galatians 5:22; Romans 14:17; 2 Corinthians 8:2; I Thessalonians 1:6; Luke 2:10; Nehemiah 8:10; Job 20:5; I Thessalonians 5:16; Joel 2:23.

### 2 Church Member Interviews

**Leader preparation:** One of the best resources to help think through how we share in the Christian message of hope and joy can be found in the members of your church. This activity pairs up youth and some adult members to talk about happiness and joy. You can ask for 15–20 minutes of an adult group, or ask volunteers to help your group for their interviews.

**Supplies:**

- paper
- pens
- list of questions

Identify one adult for every two to three youth and let them know they will be doing a short interview of this member. Before having them meet up, review some ground rules for what is and is not acceptable behavior. Come up with the list of questions either as a group or print them ahead on a sheet to save time. Let the youth know that their interview time will only be 15 minutes. Make sure the person being interviewed also knows the time limit. Some possible questions (after everyone shares their names):

- What brought you to this church?
- Where do you find the most joy at church?
- What is the most joyful part of being a Christian for you?
- What is your favorite Bible passage or song that helps you when times are hard?
- Describe a time when you needed to use that song or passage.
- What advice for finding joy in this world would you give youth today?

- 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.

After completing the interview, invite the youth to share about their experiences. What did they hear that was most surprising? What did they hear that they could most relate to? How might the advice they heard be helpful?

### ③ Christmas Joy

**Leader preparation:** One of the most festive and joyful times of year is Christmas with all the lights, music, and celebrations. Think of ways to bring the joyful feeling of Christmas to another part of the calendar year, perhaps just for your group or your whole congregation. This activity will work best if you are not already in the season of Advent, and even better in the summer!

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- Christmas lights
- Christmas decorations
- Christmas music
- any other Christmas items

Have a Christmas service out of season. Decorate the worship space you will be using in the theme of Christmas. During your service sing Christmas carols, read the birth story of Jesus (Luke 2:1–20), collect food for the hungry, and have the message reflect the theme of the joy of Christ's birth all year long.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Creed of Joy (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Some youth will be familiar with the Apostles' Creed, while others may have no idea. Introducing your youth to creeds can be tough, and this activity will hopefully make that easier while also engaging them in making their own creed.

#### Supplies:

- copies of the Apostles' Creed (found in most hymnals or worship books or on the Internet)
- paper
- pencils
- poster board
- markers

Invite several youth to read through the Apostles' Creed, and then have the whole group read it together. Ask if anyone knows what having a shared creed is all about. After spending a brief moment on the Apostles' Creed, let them know that they will be working in small groups of two to four to produce their own "Creed of Joy." The group will read all the creeds together as a way of thinking through how you will all have a shared understanding of living in joy. Encourage them to use paper and pencil while brainstorming their creed, which does not have to be long, and then have someone write it on the poster board to present to the whole group. Give the teams 10–15 minutes to write their creeds. Gather them back as a group to present each team's creed. If you have time, try to find common elements of all the creeds and come up with just one "Creed of Joy" for the group.

## 5 Superhero Fun

**Leader preparation:** Youth often are required to use their imagination less and less. This activity provides an opportunity to use imagination, play, and spark conversation about a Christian calling. Prepare bags (one for every three to five youth in the group) containing such items as suggested in the supplies list.

### Supplies:

- old costumes
- items that might be a little bizarre (toilet plunger, crazy purses, wild hats, paint roller, whisk)
- makeup
- digital camera

Invite the group to describe characteristics of superheroes. Divide into teams of three to five youth and invite them to create the perfect live Christian superhero using the characteristics they named. Choose one member of the small group to be “decorated” as the hero. Give the teams 12–15 minutes and then have them come back together to explain who and what their superhero does in the world. Make sure to take a picture of your superheroes together. After they have been presented to the group, follow up with some questions.

- What was easiest about this activity? Most difficult?
- Were there common themes among the superheroes? If so, what might they have been?
- What are some Christian acts we are called to do, even though we are not super-heroes?
- What would be one special “power” you would want to help make the world better?



## 6 Where Are You?

**Leader preparation:** This activity demands that you take time for some answers and allow the youth to put themselves in the space of others. This can be a great exercise to help youth think about how we, as Christians, are called to be in relationship with our neighbors, even the ones we do not know or see.

### Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard
- markers
- poster: “Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>

If possible invite the youth to sit in a circle and take a few deep breaths to center themselves. Let them know you will be showing them a poster and then asking what they see: Who are the people? What is going on? What are the things that are present? Ask them to look briefly at the poster in silence and then write their responses on newsprint or whiteboard. After writing their initial responses, let them see the poster again for a little longer and then ask if they might see anything new that they didn’t notice before. Write these responses on the newsprint or whiteboard.

Divide the groups into small teams of three to five and ask them to choose a person in the poster. Give them a sheet of newsprint and invite them to name their person and answer the following questions:

- What is your person doing in this picture?
- What might your person be adding to (or taking away from) the scene?

- What do you think this person is feeling, smelling, and seeing?
- In what way is this person either in need of love or giving love?
- In life, where do you see the kind of person that you chose?
- When are times you are the person you chose?

After about 6–8 minutes of the group working through the questions, bring them back and let each group share what they discussed. Some groups will have gotten farther in the questions, and some will have perhaps missed the point, but affirm all the groups for their work. End with the question: Where do you think God was in this picture?

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Family Portraits (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** The youth in your group might not be aware of many of the folks in their church family, but this activity gives them an opportunity to reflect on the people who are there for them, even though they might not know their names.

#### Supplies:

- paper
- markers

Invite your youth to draw a line down the middle of their paper. Give them 3 minutes to draw a family portrait on one side of their sheet. They will use the other side in a few minutes. After they have completed the first side, invite them to draw their “church family” portrait on the other half. Have them think about past leaders, ministers, choir folks, custodians, greeters, and anyone else they might think about being in their family. Remind them to include themselves in each family picture. After spending another 3–5 minutes on their church family, invite them to share briefly their two family pictures. Once everyone has shared, end with some questions.

- What did you notice immediately that was different in your two families?
- Which family is larger? What might that mean?
- In the church family, where did they put themselves? Is there a different role they would like to have in the church family at some point?

### 8 Talent Show

**Leader preparation:** In advance of this session invite the youth (a followup e-mail, call, or note during the week is very helpful) to think about a talent they might share with the group. A talent could be playing an instrument, singing, doing a magic trick, reading a poem, painting a picture, dancing or tumbling, playing a sport (bring sport equipment), gardening. There are often talented young people in our groups that we fail to challenge in using their talents and gifts for Christian service.

#### Supplies:

- a cheesy award for all who participate

Announce to your group the week before your talent show that you are wanting several people to share their talent or special skill, and that there will be awards given. They can work in small groups or individually. If possible, have a stage or

place that they can perform their talent. You might consider inviting some special judges that come up with awards for all who participate. This activity can be pretty short, or it can take a while—just make sure to set the time limit you desire for each act ahead of time. Also, make sure that if they are doing jokes, songs, or dance to keep them appropriate. After all the talent has been shown, award crazy prizes for everyone. It takes a lot for some youth to share at this age. Affirm everyone for sharing their gifts. Follow up with some questions:

- What were some of the talents or gifts that people shared in the show?
- What are some of the talents or gifts that you see people use around the church?
- What are ways to use our gifts and talents in Christian service—both inside and outside the church?

### Picture Scavenger Hunt

**Leader preparation:** Your church is full of Christian treasures and heritage that your youth and adult leaders have probably walked by dozens of times, paying little or no attention. Walk around your church creating a list of items they will need to take a picture of on their scavenger hunt. Depending on the size of the church and amount of time you have, this can be a quick list that is more about speed, or a list that benefits the person who knows what things mean and where they are.

#### **Supplies:**

- digital camera for each group of three to five youth (many phones have a camera so don't stress over this)
- scavenger hunt list

Create the scavenger hunt list and divide the group into teams of three to five youth. Some ideas for the scavenger hunt might include: picture of nonwhite Jesus, place where the communion is prepared and wine/juice poured out, choir robes with group all wearing one, church yearbook, picture of a church activity from at least 10 years ago, picture of first minister, communion set, griddle, welcome sign, a specific item with memorial name, everyone asleep in a pew. Each team will need a camera to take a picture of each item on the list. After your group has returned and you have viewed the items on the camera, discuss how each item relates to the Christian tradition.

## Reflect

As the youth decide what part of the Christian tradition the youth most appreciate and perhaps least appreciate, let this engage your own understanding of Christian tradition. What are parts we need, and what are parts that are outdated? Where do the youth find the most creative times in the Christian year (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints' Day)? How might their gifts be used more fully in those times?



# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

Youth ages eleven to fourteen can have a small world, but it is getting bigger every day. The idea of context and mission may be completely relevant to your youth and on-target, or it may be a concept still needing some maturity. Regardless, your youth will find that their world is in need of the message of love and joy of Christ; helping them to find ways to express that message can be a challenge.

### About this Exploration

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

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**John 12:20–36**

**Luke 1:39–56**

## Leader Preparation

What is the “mission field” facing your youth? How is the church preparing them not only to survive but to thrive in that context? Take a lunch break to visit the school of some of your youth and set up an appointment with one of the counselors or administrators to ask about the context that your youth are in. As you walk through the school, pray silently for the teachers, the administrators, the custodians, the students, and their parents and caregivers.

*Prayer: God of all places, help me to embrace a wide vision of what it is to be in Christian mission. Encourage me to understand—and to share—a sense that mission can be any and all kinds of outreach in Christ’s name. 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.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Playing the Role (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Create skit ideas for small groups that will invite them to think about how they can respond to life’s tough situations with both joy and creativity. Much of the life of a youth revolves around self-image and friends. The situations should not be minimized, as they can be very traumatic for the person at the time they are happening.

**Supplies:** None

Divide your youth into groups of two to five and give them a basic skit idea to perform for the rest of the group. They should try to find a creative and joyful way to respond to the situation. Give groups 3–5 minutes to prepare their skits. Some of the situations might be:

- Your best friend recently broke up with a boyfriend/girlfriend
- a massive zit appears on the end of a group member’s nose
- someone just got the worst haircut of his or her life
- a teacher gave a grade that did not seem fair and was too low
- a birthday gift was not at all what the birthday boy or girl had hoped or asked for

After the groups have performed their skits, follow up with some questions. How realistic are these situations? How realistic were the responses to the situation? What might be other ways to cope with the bad stuff that happens in life?

### 2 Life’s Desolation and Joy

**Leader preparation:** The context in which youth live is often between two worlds of different expectations—childhood and adulthood. Conflict surrounds their world and even happens in their bodies. This exercise invites the youth to name some of that context and to play, trying to figure out how best to navigate the two worlds, neither of which are really home.

**Supplies:**

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

Invite youth to form small groups of two to three and take a couple minutes to draw the conflict in the world. Have the youth quickly share their posters of that conflict with the rest of the group. Now invite them to go back and add a place of joy amidst their conflict poster. Have them share again, answering how easy/difficult that was, adding joy to the conflict. Look at “Children Playing in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan, November 26, 2001.” Kabul had already suffered a decade of war by the time this photograph was taken. Invite your youth to spend a moment in silence to think about what they see. Follow up with questions:

- Where do you see yourself in this poster?
- What experience do you think helped them to play in the midst of war?
- Where is God in this poster?

This is not a black and white photograph but is indeed in color; the color is simply muted by the surroundings. Does noticing this change how you respond to the poster?

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

### 3 Story Time

**Leader preparation:** Remember that your group of youth often find themselves in the world between childhood and adulthood. Allowing them to have space to remember fond parts of their childhood can also allow for new ways of looking at old stories and messages. One way children experience stories is by having them read to them in “story time.”

**Supplies:**

- several popular or well-known children’s books with positive messages, such as *Butterflies under Our Hats* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso and Joani Keller Rothenberg, <http://www.tinyurl.com/248grba>

If possible, go to one of the children’s rooms in your building or, if you have a tradition of children’s time during your worship service, bring your group into the sanctuary and sit where children’s time happens. Remind them that one thing that happens often in childhood is story time. Tell them you are going to read them a story. Invite them to gather around and pretend that this is a really fun activity for them. Read the story you have picked out (make sure it’s not too long) with lots of expression, and make sure to show them all the pictures as often happens when you read a child a story. After you are finished, invite them to share what message they heard. Then ask them to name some of the people who read to them in their childhood. Ask if they remember when stories stopped being read to them, and if they know what might have caused that. In their life now, who might be the people they would want to read them stories again? Who might they want to read stories to now that they are older? Finish by praying for those who have read to us in the past and those who to whom we will read in the future, as we share love and affection for those important people in our lives.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Life Focus (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Much in the world of a youth takes away from creativity and joy. There are all kinds of people, events, and life challenges that will bring someone down. There are also things in life that build up strength, creativity, and play. This activity invites youth to think about the parts of life to which they are giving the most attention.

**Supplies:**

- poster board
- markers

Make two posters to put on opposite sides of the room. Title one poster “Play/Creative” and the second “Drudgery/Life-draining.” Invite youth to write words or phrases that correspond to each poster. After a few moments, go over the lists starting with Play/Creative while inviting other suggestions. Ask: How much of your time is spent living in this world? How might you spend more time in this area? Then move to the other poster reading and inviting creative ways to find “play/creativity” in those places. How might they spend less time in these spaces?

### 5 The News

**Leader preparation:** Much of the media focus is on how lousy life is for someone. Pick up the newspaper and a couple of current celebrity magazines that may make this point to youth about the messages with which media bombards them.

**Supplies:**

- whiteboard or newsprint
- newspaper
- several current celebrity magazines
- paper
- pens

Ask about some of the news stories participants have heard about in the last few weeks; list them all on newsprint or a whiteboard without telling them what they represent. Ask whether the story is something joyful, depressing, or neither. Divide your group into small teams of two to four and invite them to go through the newspaper and magazines, tallying the stories that are joyful, the stories that are depressing, and the stories that are neither. After about 5–7 minutes, tally what numbers the teams came up with. Probably you will have more depressing stories, but even if it is close, ask what story is most likely to get their attention? What are ways to focus on more positive stories about people and events?

### 6 Cell Phone Ringtones

**Leader preparation:** If most of the youth have a cell phone, this can be a great activity for them. However, if many of your youth or families do not have cell phones, avoid this activity.

**Supplies:**

- cell phones
- computer with Internet access
- sheets of paper
- pencils/pens

Encourage youth to bring a cell phone to this session. As you gather as a group, collect all the cell phones and cell phone numbers, putting them in a basket. Make sure their ringtones are set on the loudest volume. Assure the youth that they will get their cell phones back after the activity. You are taking the phones just for this activity. Ask them to number down the sheet of paper the number of cell phones that you have collected. If you have a large group, simply have them number somewhere between 10 and 15. Next, let them know that you will be randomly calling cell phones and inviting them to listen to the ringtone. Invite them to write words that communicate what message might be indicated by the kind of music played. Brainstorm what messages of each ringtone could be: crazy, sad, happy, boring, hip, godly. Follow up with these or similar questions.

- What, if anything, does a ringtone say about the individual who owns the phone?
- How might a ringtone send a message of feeling?
- If God had a ringtone, what do you think it would sound like?
- If you thought God cared about what kind of ringtone you should have, what might God say it should be?

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 A Game of Sardines (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Sardines is a popular game for many youth groups. In this game, one person hides somewhere in the church or building. As the other youth seek and find that person, they join in hiding in that location—often being in very tight quarters like sardines. Eventually, the whole group is somewhere squished together trying to be quiet while the last few folks are still trying to find them. This can be a great game to lead into a discussion on finding a community where we belong and can be supported.

**Supplies:** None

Play only one round of sardines and make sure to let your youth know that you will be hanging out for a few moments once everyone finds the person who hid. Encourage the person hiding to make it somewhat simple for the group. Once everyone is together, ask: What are the parts of sardines that can be joyful? What is it like being all alone and searching for a place to belong? How might the church and your youth provide a more welcoming space for everyone to belong, especially those who are alone and searching?

### 8 Playing with the World

**Leader preparation:** This activity involves seated movement. Holding a beach ball in one's hands, touching the round beauty of the earth—even symbolically—opens up the heart. You can find the lyrics for “Over My Head” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>.

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

**Supplies:**

- words to song “Over My Head” (tune: African American traditional hymn)
- inflated globe (easily found in a toy store); an earth ball can be created by cutting out continent shapes from a map and gluing them on a beach ball of contrasting color
- adhesive bandages (such as Band-Aids)

Invite youth to play with the world by tossing it around. Each person who catches it names a place in the world that is a source of joy. The joy may have come from ethnic heritage, a vacation visit, enjoyment of traditional music or food from a particular place. Repetition is acceptable.

Distribute bandages and suggest that this time, as the participants catch the ball, they name a global concern. This may be a particular country, or it may be a more general concern, such as refugees, war, world hunger, global warming, the extinction of various species. Each one places a bandage on a representative place for this concern. Encourage anyone who wishes to remain silent to do so and simply position a bandage.

Close by singing “Over My Head” beginning with the verse “Over my head, I see trouble in the air,” followed by “. . . I see Jesus,” “I hear singing,” “I hear music,” and so on.



### 9 What are You Planting?

**Leader preparation:** A lot of crazy events in life happen that we believe will only cause despair. Youth are constantly going through that range of ups and downs. This activity invites them to think about how these experiences, while we try to bury them, might actually be helping us to grow and bring forth new places of life.

#### Supplies:

- soil
- seeds (but don't tell the group what they are)
- small planting pots for everyone
- water

Hand out pots to every person. Invite them each to get some soil, plant a seed in their pots, and water their seeds a little. Then have them guess what the seed is going to become. After you have taken several responses, let them think about what things in life people often bury. Take some responses—it might be parents divorcing, a loved one's death, or a friendship that ended. In spite of how bad some of these things are that people sometimes "bury," there can sometimes be something unexpected or even positive that grows out of such as experience. Ask if they can name any of those unexpected results. As they reflect on how the unexpected can happen, ask where God might be in that planting/burying. Pray with them over their pots/plants and encourage them to keep their pots (and to water them!) to remember that even in the midst of the really bad things of life, to watch for the things that grow out of those experiences unexpectedly.

### Reflect

Think through with your youth where the places are in their lives where they are being asked to be creative. Where are the places they are finding the most joy? As you think through their context and mission with them, how might they bring more creativity or joy into their worlds?

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

Youth ages eleven to fourteen are often absorbed in their world of school and friends, but are also increasingly feeling the stress of performing—to gain access to the right schools and eventually have the right career. This is a wonderful age to plant seeds about a Christian vocation of call and how the most joy and creativity in life they find might be through the gifts and talents they have been given.

### 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

What does a “Christian vocation” mean for you as a leader? Do you feel that you are working in your area of vocational call? If so, how might that affect your sense of joy and creativity? If not, how might that affect your sense of joy and creativity? How might your youth see calling extended beyond church workers to a nurse, a politician, a stay-at-home parent, a business owner, a farmer, or a teacher?

*Prayer: God of joy and play, allow the journey of life for both the youth and myself to be centered in call, rather than in expectation and drudgery. 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 Team Pictionary® (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Play a fun adapted version of Pictionary®. It can be a great way to engage your youth in talking about living out their lives with creativity and joy.

**Supplies:**

- whiteboard or sheets of newsprint
- marker

Come up with a list of phrases and words for use in the game. The youth will select a phrase from a basket or other container and then try to draw that word or phrase. There can be no talking or gesturing of the answer. Ask one team to draw at a time; the other team is able to steal the point if they can guess the correct answer if the other team fails to guess. Play until one team scores ten (or another determined number) correct answers. Some suggestions of phrases include:

- action**—dancing, hiking, meditating, fishing, drinking coffee, exercising, dreaming, drawing, going to church, fishing, baking
- person/place/thing**—forest, King David, book, friends, family, holiday, cabin, laptop, card, grandparent
- difficult**—psalms, birthday, retreat, choir, joy, celebrate, party, contest

### 2 Play-Doh Structure

**Leader preparation:** It is amazing what insights can be made through the use of creating an object with Play-Doh or modeling dough. This activity is very simple, yet it can allow for a jumping-off point of digging deeper into living a life of play and creativity. You might even consider letting the youth mix the colors of the Play-Doh, which was often a big no-no when they were children.

**Supplies:**

- a can of modeling dough for every team of two to three youth

Divide youth into teams of two to three (they can also do this activity by themselves) and ask them to create an object from the modeling that would remind them to live their life with great joy and playfulness. Give them about 4–5 minutes to complete the activity. After groups have finished, go on an art tour and ask each team to describe their object and what it is about it that will inspire life lived creatively and playfully.



### 3 “Say It! Sing It!”

**Leader preparation:** The song “Say It! Sing It!” by JoEllen Miller works well to accompany an activity on a “vision and future” understanding of playing and living joyfully.

**Supplies:**

- song: “Say It! Sing It!” Attachment: Activity 3
- musical accompaniment

Play the musical accompaniment to “Say It! Sing It!” and invite the group to listen to the music. Then invite your youth to read the words along with the music from

the handout, and eventually invite the group to sing along if they choose to do so. Next, divide your group into small teams and ask them to come up with a third verse for the song. Give them about five minutes to complete the task, and then have them come back together and share what they wrote.

Ask some followup questions:

- What was the easiest part of your task? Most difficult?
- What were the main ideas your team thought about including in the song?
- What message(s) do you hear in the whole of the song?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Church leader Panel Discussion (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Youth might not have a good understanding of who the leadership in the church includes or what those leaders do for the church. And the leaders might not know who the youth are and what they all are up to. This can be a great activity to bring those two groups together to get to know one another and share about their vision of the church.

**Supplies:**

- two or three leaders of the church (perhaps the senior minister, chair of council or board, choir director, elder)

Invite several of the church leaders into a discussion about where the church is heading and how the youth might participate in their vision. Have a couple questions for the folks ahead of time and let them know that your panel discussion will only be a total of 10–15 minutes, so they keep their answers brief. Some suggested questions for the leaders:

- What is your greatest joy about being a member of the church?
- In what ways would you like to see the youth reach out to the wider church more?
- In what ways do you see the church supporting youth?
- What is your vision for the church and the youth working to create a more creative and joyful community?

Thank your guests for being part of your panel, and then invite the youth to reflect on what things they heard. Were there points of agreement or disagreement? What might their vision be for the church being a more creative and joyful community?

### 5 You Win Life (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Check your supply closet and do an Internet search to gather several “how to win” instructions from various board games.

**Supplies:**

- instructions from various board games

Read aloud the instructions on how to win different games and see if the youth can guess the game from which these instructions came. Separate your group into pairs or trios and ask the groups to create a “how to win life” set of instructions. Gather together again and share these aloud, reflecting on similarities of instructions.

### 6 Facing a Future Vocation

**Leader preparation:** Discussing a vocational call with youth ages eleven to fourteen can be one of the best gifts you can give. There is tremendous pressure to compete and perform in the world. Knowing that our lives, and professions, are to be lived out of a calling is a huge asset. Consider how you think of vocation and call. Do you have a sense of call in your own life to speak from and, if so, how might you share that path? If not, how might you find the joy in your calling even now? Post this definition on newsprint or a whiteboard: Vocation is “an understanding of life as a gift from God, in which struggle and celebration hold hands, as each person discerns the purposes to which they are called” (*Lives to Offer*, Pilgrim Press, 2007, p. 4).

#### **Supplies:**

- poster: “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- definition of vocation
- newsprint
- markers

Ask the youth what they hear when you say the word “vocation.” Vocation may be a new word for most or all of your young people, so take time and discuss what vocation means.

The definition of “vocation,” from the book *Lives to Offer* (Pilgrim Press, 2007) is: “an understanding of life as a gift from God, in which struggle and celebration hold hands, as each person discerns the purposes to which they are called” (page 4). Read aloud this definition that you have displayed on newsprint or whiteboard. Read it several times. Ask the youth what they hear from this definition that is helpful in understanding vocation.

Invite them to look at the poster “Sisters in the Wind” and simply think about what might be happening. What might they imagine is happening in the lives of these sisters? What might they be looking at?

Invite them to imagine they are the siblings looking off the rock into the vocational future. What support or encouragement might they need along the way to live the life God is calling for them to have? Where might they already be called in their Christian vocation?

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Affirmation Circle (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Youth and adults need time where they are affirmed for their giftedness and joy that they bring to others. This activity provides a space for young people to celebrate one another and the many gifts of the group.

**Supplies:** None



Gather the group in a circle and let them know that they will be sharing with one another ways they appreciate the individuals and their gifts in the group. Set the ground rule that they are not to do any affirmations that are about outward appearance, but rather think through what inner beauty and creativity they appreciate. To help them get thinking in the right direction, ask for a few general affirmations and ideas. Let them know that each person will have a moment in the center. Depending on your group size, if you have more than eight to ten youth and leaders, give about a minute for every person to be bathed in the affirmation as people are invited to talk on top of one another.

Have one person sit or stand in the middle of the circle formed by all the members of the group. All the group members will say affirming statements about the person in the middle. It is not so much the details of what they hear, but rather being held in the positive energy that will boost the person in the middle.

### 8 **Finest Dining**

**Leader preparation:** This activity will take some work, but is an amazing way to end the session on playing and living creatively. Invite the youth to celebrate who they are, and model another way to enjoy and be creative in life. In preparation for this activity, encourage the youth to wear their best outfit.

**Supplies:**

- a cook or two
- lots of dishes
- table decorations
- food and drink

Recruit helpers to provide the finest dining experience possible for your youth. Have multiple courses of simple but great food that youth will eat, some sparkling juice for a toast, and special music that they will enjoy. Decorate in an over-the-top manner and make sure to encourage them ahead of time to wear their best outfit. Consider inviting someone who will help guide the group regarding etiquette for such a feast, but make sure they have fun with their part.

A sample menu:

- sparkling cider or juice
- appetizers when gathering
- salad course of Romaine lettuce, nuts, fruit, and dressing
- soup course of broccoli cheese soup
- fish course with shrimp cocktail
- entree with pasta, vegetable, garlic bread
- dessert of chocolate fondue with lots of fun dipping items

Alternatively, go for a meal at a local fast food restaurant. Ask everyone to wear fancy clothes (formal dresses, jackets and ties). Bring tablecloths and centerpieces. If you cannot do the whole meal, plan a fancy dessert.

### 9 A Joy Pole

**Leader preparation:** Many churches and organizations have a peace pole that has the word “peace” written multiple languages. As a way of continuing to remember we are called to live joyfully, consider creating a joy pole that will sit in your room or come out at special occasions in the life of your group. You might even create this pole and then present it as a gift to your worshiping community, encouraging them to find joy and creativity in the world. This can be a smaller pole or bigger project depending on how excited and handy you are with projects like this. Consider inviting one of the crafty folks in your congregation to help with this project if this does not seem like your talent area.

#### Supplies:

- 4" x 4" wooden fence post
- paint
- stencils
- wood glue

Divide your group into four teams and let them know that they will each be taking a side of your joy pole. Ask them to come up with a short phrase or few words to express how they would encourage others and remind themselves to live life with joy and creativity. Give groups 3–5 minutes to come up with their phrases and share them among the group to make sure you are not duplicating. Then assign each group one side of the joy pole to paint and decorate with their phrase. End your time gathering around the pole, offering prayers of phrases and ideas that the group contributed to their joy pole.

### Reflect

Challenge your youth to find places in their life where they can practice being creative. Where might some of those places be for them? What might be ways to incorporate more play into a busy life and not see it as simply another task to perform? Consider giving each of them an item to help them remember to be creative and live with joy—perhaps a can of modeling dough or jar of bubbles.


Attachment: Activity 3

## 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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