

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Youth in this age group find themselves sorting out personal roles and self-image, relationships, talents and goals, life commitments, and their newly emerging attitudes and feelings about faith. They can be very group-focused, influenced by peers, while at the same time testing out and expressing an individuality that will carry them into adult years. This Exploration offers some new ways they can continue their lifelong journey of faith by connecting a number of faith practices to the experiences in their own lives in school, at home, or among friends. Through this process, they'll be given opportunities to hear and share stories that not only increase confidence in their own abilities to learn and make decisions, but that also help shape their future lives of faith.

About this Exploration

We are a people of story, built on the witness of our Bible and rooted in the testimony of our communities. Discovering the power of giving witness and testimony means recognizing that we each have a valid story, indeed, many stories, and that we can identify God's work within those stories. It takes courage to share one's own story; it takes openness to fully listen to the stories of others. Claiming this practice involves shaping a common language. Sharing our testimonies celebrates enriching traditions of communities and the particularity of personal experiences of grace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Genesis 24:34-67
Acts 16:16-34

Leader Preparation

When it comes to the older youth's relationship with a faith community, there is a wide spectrum of involvement. It can range from parent-influenced participation (with certain expectations and "shoulds") to a more independent, self-initiated approach. It could be one that inspires risk taking, trying out new things, getting involved in team or group programs, volunteering, or even finding one's voice (and "witnessing" to one's ideas or ambitions) through activities such as writing and texting, conversation, role-playing, music, art, and others. All of these can support older youths' growing need to communicate and express themselves. With this in mind, our focus will be on discerning their individual interests and needs and then employing the various "testimony" activities offered in this Exploration to help them embark on their own journeys of faith, sharing their discoveries with others through personal testimony and witness, thus adding their own valuable insights to the witness of others who have come before them.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the young people who are an important part of this amazing world you have created. Thank you for the privilege of working with and among them—guiding them, inspiring them, nurturing them, mentoring them, and learning from them. Give me wisdom to hear their stories, learn of their gifts and abilities, care for them as individuals, and

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Name It and Claim It (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: You will want to come equipped with a Bible that includes a concordance or index to look up names and meanings, a dictionary with a scriptural name section, and perhaps some current newspapers or magazines to help prompt recall of names in the news. Think of names of people you've known or admired whose stories you can share. Consider ways that these same people (or others like them) have used these stories to give witness or testimony that illustrates God's action in their lives and our own.

Supplies:

- Bible containing concordance or index, often available in church library or from pastor
- 8½" x 11" paper halved, quartered, and halved again into name tag-size rectangles of four ¼" x 2¾"
- pens or markers to write names on the tags

Ask the youth to open their Bibles to the table of contents and look over the different names of the books in the Old and New Testaments. Some feature familiar names still in use today, such as Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Samuel, Timothy, Ruth, Daniel, and Peter. Others are not so ordinary, like Ecclesiastes and Habakkuk. Have each youth choose a biblical name (which can be found either in that table of contents page or in various stories of the Old or New Testaments) and write the biblical name on one side of a name tag and his or her name on the other side.

Go around the group and have learners introduce themselves using either name on their name tags. Along with the name invite them to tell one thing about themselves, either from their own life (if they're using their given names), or something they might imagine or recall from Bible stories. It's not necessary to be absolutely factual for this activity or to have the name story connect to a particular Bible passage, since the purpose is simply to start a process of conversation to help them feel more comfortable in sharing their personal stories with their peers.

For example, "Hi, I'm Kaitlyn. I don't think my name is in the Bible anywhere. My mother says it's Irish, and it means either 'pure' or 'beautiful flower.' I can really relate to flowers. My aunt has a flower shop, and I love to visit there." Or: "My name is Peter. It's supposed to mean 'rock.' But I think I'm more like a snowball—cool, soft, shape-able, and if I roll around I kind of grow with the flow."

After introductions have been made, ask questions such as:

- If you had to choose another name for yourself, what would it be, and why?
- What are the names of some other people in the Bible that you can relate to or are inspired by? What stories can you recall about them?
- What are the names of some people in the world today that you really like? What do you think you could learn from them?
- How would you like to be more like (or different from) them?
- How do we honor or remember people like them?
- Are any of these people of faith? Why or why not?
- How do you think God may have been working in their lives?
- Who are some people of faith that you admire and why?

tailor my own witnessing to all the many different teaching moments that will present themselves in the days to come. 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.

Share with the group the idea that names can be a powerful tool for witness and testimony, since the meanings of the names as well as the associations they may have with people portrayed in the Bible can be a good door opener for further conversation about one’s faith, especially about how faith guides our lives today.

2 Rewriting for Today

Leader preparation: Stories from the Bible can seem like wonderful glimpses into the past, but the question that always comes up is, “What do they mean today?” The youth of today want to know the relevance to their own lives—which may seem like a far cry from stories about a miracle jailbreak or playing matchmaker for Isaac. This activity will ask them to do some creative rewriting of these same stories, transplanting the characters and scenarios into modern times, not only to discover possible similarities and links between past and present, but also to explore how the biblical passage might actually offer some insights and direction for their faith journeys in contemporary settings.

Supplies:

- Bibles (different versions, if available)
- paper and pen or pencils
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers (or a computer and digital projector)

Have the group read both Genesis 24:34–67 and Acts 16:16–34. Talk about what both stories seem to be saying; try to summarize the plot in a couple of sentences. That way all the participants will be on the same wavelength. Working in pairs, have the learners choose one passage and rework it so that the story takes place in a contemporary context. These or similar questions may encourage their progress:

- Why are the characters doing what they’re doing?
- What do you suppose their ultimate goal is?
- Why would they choose that direction instead of another?
- Who would be their helpers or supporters in today’s world?
- Who would be their challengers?
- What are other obstacles or setbacks that you might imagine? How would the characters overcome them?
- Is this story similar to some other one you may have seen on TV or in the movies or experienced in real life? How?
What was the ending in that case?
- How would you have done things differently?
- Whom would you cast in the leading roles?

Stories are a powerful form of testimony since they help us transform hard-to-define, hard-to-imagine concepts like hope, love, faith, and peace into everyday examples that bring our faith home to us in ways that make sense.

3 Naming God

Leader preparation: One of the first things we receive from parents at birth is the gift of a name. Names are very important especially when we enter into relationships. They help to reveal or describe who we are. It’s no different with relationships of faith. Moses, in his first conversation with God on the mountain, asked “What shall I tell the people your name is?” And God replied, “Tell them ‘I Am’ has sent me to you.” Throughout the Bible you can find a wide variety of different names for God—more than 900 of them by one count. God is so awesome and so far beyond imagination that it’s virtually impossible for one name to describe

God fully. As we read the many stories in the Bible, we begin to get a better idea of who God really is—even though that picture can never be 100 percent complete.

Supplies:

- Bibles (different versions and translations)
- computer with Internet access and video/sound playback (for viewing a YouTube video)
- paper and pens or pencils
- resources such as Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's children's books *What Is God's Name?* or *In God's Name*
- "900+ Names and Titles for God"
<http://tinyurl.com/3tzt2gt>
- YouTube video on the names of God
<http://tinyurl.com/3dtq4ju>

Have the group make a list of all the names they know for God. Ask them how many names they think there are and why there are so many. Mention that Jesus himself came up with a few names that broke new ground, such as "Abba," which translates as "Daddy," or told stories that pictured God as a "mother hen" (a feminine image, unheard of in Jesus' culture), as a "planter of seeds," or as a king who gives a wedding banquet for his son. Read one of Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's short children's books (if available) about the names for God. Show the YouTube video that offers another presentation of various names for God set to music. Look up the 900+ names for God on the Internet.

Invite the youth to come up with their own names for God. Encourage them to develop names that either mean something personally to them or names that might tie into Bible stories or other faith messages. Remind them that some of the names directly related to people's reality in biblical times so they can think of how that translates to their own context.

When the group has finished, ask them to read aloud the names and discuss which names they feel they can most relate to and why. *Which names do you feel least close to? Why? How do all these new names give you some new ideas about who or what God is? Is this a complete picture? Why or why not? How would other groups of people or different cultures imagine God in their particular settings?*

Talk about how just using the name of God can be an effective form of testimony. The mere mention of God witnesses to our belief in God, while the descriptive phrases can help others understand how our particular view of God shapes how we express our faith.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 What Do You Believe? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Witnessing doesn't mean just watching and observing; it can also inspire us to take what we've seen or experienced and decide what to do with it. What we believe determines how we live our lives and what decisions we make, particularly when it comes to practicing our faith. In this activity participants in the group will be asked to prepare brief individual "statements of belief" and then talk about the ways that they can take their beliefs and put them into actual practice. These statements will serve as a witness to our faith, and they

will also be an opportunity to lay the groundwork for future testimony through deeds and actions.

Supplies:

- samples of church creeds or statements of belief from a hymnal or book of worship (usually found in either church pews or a congregation library)
- paper and pens or pencils

Have the group look at some traditional statements of belief, such as the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, or your denomination's statement of faith. Portions may be read aloud or silently. Many of these historic statements came about in response to specific situations such as a need to define the church's official stand on core beliefs, such as the resurrection of Jesus, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins. Open up the conversation with questions such as:

- What parts of a statement like this do you think you most relate to?
- How might these help you in living your life? What other things you would focus on more?
- What are some examples of more relevant or helpful items you'd prefer to see?

Invite the youth to write the kinds of beliefs that they feel would be important to their personal faith journeys. Mention that they should not try to copy or imitate the "official" church statements they just read, but instead come up with a set of personal beliefs written in their own words that they feel they'd like to follow in their own lives.

These questions might help them think about and write their statements:

- What do you believe about God?
- How does God affect or influence your life today?
- What do you believe about Jesus?
- What are some of the most important things he taught us?
- What is the Holy Spirit?
- When and where do we see the Spirit acting in our lives or in the lives of others?
- What do Jesus' teachings tell us about how to relate to other people?
- What is the "kingdom" or realm of God?
- How do we "enter" the kingdom or be part of it?
- What is the church?
- How does the church help us as Christians?
- What does a community do for us?
- What can we do for the community?

To make the point that faith is firmly connected to testimony through both words and action, ask the group how they can translate their personal beliefs into actions they might take in response to specific circumstances in their lives or to help out in disasters and other situations around the world.



5 Reporting the News

Leader preparation: One way to discover how to share witness is through experiences involving the creation of “stories” and then telling those stories to others. In a nutshell, that’s how the news media works. News events are covered, notes taken, and reporters then write up the story either for newspaper articles or radio/TV newscasts.

Supplies:

- Bible
- notepads, paper, pens or pencils for writing stories and/or scripts
- (optional) computer with printer
- (optional) video camera along with a microphone, which can either be functional or simply used as a prop for on-camera reports
- recorder and microphone (digital or audiocassette), if radio news story is decided upon
- “Tips for Writing News Stories,” Attachment: Activity 5

Give the group a quick introduction to “News 101” using the tips from hand-out. Let them know that they will be functioning either as newspaper or radio/TV news reporters, taking the basic information from the Acts 16:16–34 passage and turning it into a media-style story. As part of the experience some members may serve as writers or reporters; others may wish to serve as producers or editors, supervising and “coaching” the process; and some may want to be on-camera personalities. If the story is done for print media, then the finished product will need to be a mockup of a newspaper page featuring the Paul and Silas story. If done for broadcast, the participants will create a radio or TV story using whatever technology they have available, whether an audio recorder, camera, and/or computer with simple video editing abilities.

Have members of the group read Acts 16:16–34 and decide what are the most important details, using the traditional news formula of “who, what, where, when, and why.” They’ll also need to determine what parts of the passage may have to be “edited” out because of limits on time or space. Instead of approaching this as a total group effort, some individuals may also decide to write their own stories, bringing their pieces back to the group for discussion. Once the stories or scripts are in hand and the group has agreed on a final presentation, produce a print mockup or broadcast story using the talents of as many of the group members as possible.

When the story is complete have the group consider some of these questions:

- Why do you think some parts of the story were left out or made less important?
- How do you think this activity was a good demonstration of “giving testimony and witness” for our faith?
- If you were the news director at your local newspaper or radio/TV station and dealing with a story like this, how would you do things differently and why?
- How can we share our messages in ways that reach more people with the “full” story?
- What other media might be a better choice for giving testimony and witness?



6 God's Online Dating Service (G.O.D.S.)

Leader preparation: The Bible is the ultimate “variety store” of literature. Its pages include history, poetry, humor, tragedy, politics, mystery . . . and, of course, romance. The Genesis 24:34–67 passage, which tells about finding a bride for Isaac, is a classic story of matchmaking and family relations in biblical times. These subjects are actually a vital part of our faith journey, too. By witnessing how God’s presence can be experienced through encounters with others, learners may get a glimpse into how even the smallest details of dating or relating are part of God’s plan for keeping us all connected.

Additional resource for further reading by leaders: *Wrestling with Angels*, by Naomi H. Rosenblatt, a helpful guide to the stories of Genesis from a relational and psychological point of view. See pages 213–27 for the story of Rebekah and Isaac.

Supplies:

- Bible
- video camera and tripod
- paper and pens or pencils
- “God’s Online Dating Service (G.O.D.S.,” Attachment: Activity 6
- video interview questions, Attachment: Activity 6

Have the group read Genesis 24:34–67 together. Talk a little about what it must have been like in biblical times for dating, going steady, or marriage. How did men and women get together back then? How does this compare to today? Some cultures still have a custom of arranged marriages today. What has been your experience with traditions like this?

Pose a “what if” question: What if they had dating services back in the days of Rebekah? Introduce the idea of “God’s Online Dating Service (G.O.D.S.)” as a way that Isaac and Rebekah could have been matched. Distribute copies of the Dating Questionnaire forms and have everyone fill one out—but not as themselves. They may choose to play the role of Isaac, Rebekah, or Abraham’s servant. They may find details about these people in the Genesis passage.

After the questionnaires have been filled out, have the participants compare answers so that the character descriptions can be fleshed out more completely. Ask for volunteers to play Isaac, Rebekah, and the servant on-camera. Tape them doing a typical “dating video” in which the off-camera interviewer asks questions to help prompt them through a short personal introduction. As with the written questionnaires, they’ll need to assume the character’s role and answer the way they think Rebekah, Isaac, or the servant might respond.

The group will view the completed videos and informally vote on the dating candidates for fun. *Who was the most convincing prospective date—Rebekah, Isaac, or the servant (who’s supposed to be making a case for Isaac)? Why? Would the things that attracted you today be traits that people of biblical times considered important? What do you think they were looking for in a companion? How did it differ for either men or women? How does that compare with today?*

What role did you discern God playing in this story? How do you think the people of that time viewed matchmaking and marriage in relation to their religious traditions? Why do you suppose this story of Rebekah and Isaac was included in the Bible? What can we see in their individual personalities that could be translated to the “big picture” of the people of Israel? Were the people of Israel known for certain traits such as risk taking or hospitality that helped them in the day-to-day practice of their faith?

Talk with the youth about how we all personally witness to our faith through experiences with friendship and dating. How might other people be able to observe their faith in action by the way they decided to engage in their relationships? What kind of testimony does that offer to others as a way of demonstrating what we stand for?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Spokespersons (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Moses had Aaron as his “spokesperson”; John the Baptist served as an advance man helping to pave the way for Jesus; Abraham’s servant went to Mesopotamia as Isaac’s advocate to help find him a wife (Genesis 24:34–67). Perhaps the best example of all when it comes to spokespersons is the group we know as Jesus’ disciples. They were hand-picked, trained, and sent out to take Jesus’ ministry to the four corners of the earth.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pen or pencil

Have all the members of the group pair up so everybody has a partner. Ask them to read Genesis 24:34–67 for background and to pay attention to the spokesperson or advocate role that Abraham’s servant plays in this story. Invite each pair to engage in conversations to help them prepare for their own roles as spokespersons.

The pair will need to decide which partner plays the spokesperson role first and who will be the person being represented. The spokesperson will then ask a number of questions of his or her partner in order to get a better understanding of the need for representation, as well as the talents, qualities, selling points, and so forth that they might be able to use. These questions might include:

- What do you most want in your life right now?
- Is there some goal or dream or desire you have that you could use some help attaining or accomplishing?
- If you had a spokesperson to represent you, like the servant of Abraham, what would you ask that person to do for you?
- How would you want your spokesperson to present your talents or good points to someone else?

Be honest about the things a spokesperson might be able to say about you in order to represent you. Help your spokesperson develop a list of selling points, features, advantages, and characteristics to use in his or her sales pitch.

Using the results of this dialogue, the spokesperson would take notes and deliver a presentation to his or her partner, demonstrating the kind of picture he or she would create to make the “sale.” Then have the two people reverse roles.

Have both partners think about how they went about this process of discovering each other’s gifts and advantages and translating them into a “presentation” or “spokesperson” pitch. Ask them to reflect in the same way about their faith. How would they talk up or witness to their faith with another person, essentially serving as a “spokesperson” for how they felt their faith has helped them? *How has your faith added to your life, given you hope or comfort, inspired you with new ideas?*

How comfortable would you feel sharing with another person as a personal testimony to the role faith plays in your life?



8 Seed Mart

Leader preparation: The Christian faith can be experienced in a wide spectrum of traditions and spiritual practices. Regardless of a particular faith community’s approach, there are certain things held in common with followers everywhere, such as Jesus’ direction to “go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Another thing we share is a huge treasure trove of Bible stories, especially the illustrations and parables that Jesus used. One of these is the parable of the farmer, Matthew 13:4–23, which has inspired countless spin-off stories as well as classic art like Van Gogh’s “The Sower.”

Many of these call us to take the “seeds” we have been given and go out to spread them. In this activity, Van Gogh’s painting will be a starting point to talk about sending and serving, coupled with the retelling of a Megan McKenna story about a seed store, where God gives us the resources to go out and put our faith to work.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork: “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh
<http://tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR2>
- “Seed Mart,” Attachment: Activity 8
- paper and pens or pencils
- seed packets—enough for all the participants in the group to take home and plant

Have the group view the Van Gogh poster “The Sower.” Talk about the artwork, the artist, the impressionistic painting style, the treatment of the subject, the colors used, and connections or parallels with other subjects, such as marketing, communications, modern culture, or the Christian faith. Read Matthew 13:4–23. Ask the youth how the artwork and the Matthew account complement each other. *In what ways does the painting help you imagine the “sower” parable more vividly? Of whom does the sower remind you? How would you describe the job of a farmer like the one in the picture? Is it hard work? Lonely? Rewarding? Powerful? Peaceful?*

Have them act out the story “Seed Mart” in Attachment: Activity 8. After they finish the sketch, encourage them to share their reflections. Use these or similar questions to prompt discussion:

- Does it seem that there are a lot of possibilities being presented in this store? Why or why not?
- Why would we want to shop at a store like this?
- If we put ourselves in the shoes of the shopper, what do you suppose we are being asked or called upon to do?
- How does God, Jesus, or our faith enter into this process?
- Would you feel encouraged or challenged by a situation like this?
- If you had a chance to select your own seed packets for the kinds of things sold at this store, what would they be and why?

Give each member of the group a single seed packet. Tell the group that their mission is to plant their seeds. Invite them to continue to talk to one another as the seedling sprouts and grows, sharing how their faith and witness is growing along with it. Suggest to the group that small, symbolic reminders such as a

seedling or more dramatic actions such as getting involved in causes like those mentioned in “Seed Mart” can all be a very engaging testimony to the power of our faith.

9 Listening for God

Leader preparation: Testimony is worthless if no one is listening to us. Sometimes in order to find our voice we have to spend time listening to the voices of others. In this activity the group is encouraged to make a plan that extends beyond the confines of the church or this time together to reach out to others who have a story to tell. These stories will hopefully find their way back to the group for an opportunity to reflect on how the testimony of others has influenced these learners.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- local phone book
- (optional) Internet access

Read Matthew 25:31–46 together. Talk about who are the “least of these” in your area and what services are offered to them. On newsprint or a whiteboard make a list of the social service agencies in your area, concentrating on those that have people meet for a meal. Make arrangements to visit one of these agencies and, instead of planning to serve the meal, go as participants sitting with the clients and listening to their stories. Be sure to sit at different tables so you each engage with another person without overwhelming anyone. Talk about what questions you might ask. *What do you want to know about the people? Can you ask them about their faith, and how it has helped through this time in their life?* Schedule a time to reconnect as a group and talk about your experience and how the witness of these people informs and enhances your witness.

Reflect

Grasping the idea of giving witness and testimony is something that we all wrestle with from youth to adulthood. Shyness, stage fright, comfort levels in speaking or conversing, and even concerns about one’s knowledge about a given subject all enter into the uneasiness we sometimes feel when engaging in activities like these. How have the participants or you grown in your ability to discover what faith is all about and then talk about it with others? Do members of the group feel more empowered, encouraged, or comfortable, compared to when you started? Is there a growing sense of community in which relationships and connections are beginning to be established? What were some of the memorable highlights of these activities for you and the group?

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Attachment: Activity 5

Tips for Writing News Stories

The Five “W”s and the “H”

This is the crux of all news—you need to know six things. Any good news story provides answers to each of these questions.

- What happened?
- Who was there?
- Why did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- How did it happen?

The Inverted Pyramid

This refers to the style of journalism that places the most important facts at the beginning and works “down” from there. The “lead” of a news story, typically the first paragraph, should provide a clear and concise overview of the main point(s) (who, what, when, where, why, and how), thereby conveying to the reader what he or she will be learning about in the piece. The rest of the article explains and expands on the beginning. Mention facts in order of descending importance.

A good approach is to assume that the story might be cut off at any point due to space limitations. Does the story work if the editor only decides to include the first two paragraphs? If not, rearrange it so that it does.

More Tips

- It’s About People—News stories are all about how people are affected. In your sports story, you might focus on one or more individuals, or on how the team morale is doing, or how the supporters are feeling.
- Have an Angle—Most stories can be presented using a particular angle or “slant.” This is a standard technique and isn’t necessarily bad—it can help make the purpose of the story clear and give it focus. Examples of angles you could use for a sports story: “Team Tackles National Competition”; “Big Ask for First-year Coach”; “Local Team in Need of Funds”
- Keep it Objective—You are completely impartial. If there is more than one side to the story, cover them all. Don’t use “I” and “me” unless you are quoting someone.
- Quote People—For example: “We’re really excited about this competition,” says coach Bob Dobalina, “It’s the highest target we’ve ever set ourselves.”
- Don’t Get Flowery—Keep your sentences and paragraphs short. Don’t use lots of heavily descriptive language. When you’ve finished, go through the entire story and try to remove any words that aren’t completely necessary.

Attachment: Activity 6

God's On-line Dating Service (G.O.D.S.) Questionnaire

Name _____

Age _____ Gender _____ Role: Dating candidate Friend or servant

Hometown or homeland _____

Brothers or sisters? _____ How many? _____ Names? _____

Personal health? Not so good Good Pretty Good Very Good Excellent

Willing to move to a new place? Yes Maybe No way

Favorite activities, hobbies, sports, things to do in spare time _____

Do you consider yourself attractive? Yes A little Not really

Would you say you're hard-working, and demonstrate average to superior physical strength?
 Of course! Sometimes Not me!

When somebody asks you to do something, do you just do what the person asks, or do you try to do more? Just the minimum Sometimes a little more I go way out of my way

How do you feel about taking care of animals? Do you feel nurturing or compassionate towards them? Definitely Maybe a little Can't get into it

When it comes to kindness and hospitality, how would you rate yourself?
 Outstanding! Okay Don't care Forget it

Do you consider yourself decisive—are you able to make quick decisions?
 Yes! Maybe Um, what was the question again? Can I have more time?

Do you like taking risks? Always! Sometimes Never

Describe the kind of person you would consider a good life companion.

God's On-line Dating Service (G.O.D.S.) (continued)

Video Interview for Dating Candidate

1. Introduce yourself. Tell us your name, nickname, age, where you're from.
2. What are some of your favorite things to do? What are some of your interests?
3. If you had to describe yourself to a total stranger, what would you say?
4. What do you think makes you a fun, interesting, engaging, likable, or appealing companion?
5. How would your friends describe you?
6. What are you looking for in a date or companion?
7. How would you know if you found your perfect match?

God's On-line Dating Service (G.O.D.S.) (continued)

Video Interview for Friend or Servant

1. Tell us about the person for whom you are speaking. What is his or her name, nickname, age, hometown, or homeland?
2. What are some of his or her favorite things to do? What are some of his or her interests?
3. If you had to describe him or her to a total stranger, what would you say?
4. What do you think makes him or her a fun, interesting, engaging, likable, or appealing companion?
5. How would friends describe him or her?
6. What do you think he or she would be looking for in a date or companion?
7. How would anybody know if he or she has found the perfect match?

Attachment: Activity 8

Seed Mart

*A creative retelling of an original Megan McKenna story,
inspired by the parable of the sower, Matthew 13:4–23*

There was a woman who desperately wished for peace in the world and peace for her soul, and all sorts of good things, but she was getting very discouraged. The world seemed to be falling apart. She'd see the news on TV and get very depressed. One day when she was out shopping, she went into a mall and picked a store at random. She walked in and was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was him, because he looked just like the pictures she saw in paintings and stained glass windows.

She looked at him again and again, and finally got up her nerve and asked, "Excuse me, are you Jesus?"

"I am"

"Do you work here?"

"No," said Jesus, "I own the place."

"So what do you sell in here?"

"Oh, just about anything!"

"Anything?"

"Yeah, anything you want. What are you looking for?"

She said, "I don't know."

So Jesus said, "Well, why don't you do this. Just walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is you want, and then come back and we'll see what's in stock."

So she did just that, walked up and down the aisles. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, an end to homelessness, peace in families, no more drugs; there was clean air, careful use of resources, no recession, no political mudslinging. She wrote and wrote and wrote dozens of things on her list. By the time she got back to the counter, she had an incredibly long list.

Jesus took the list, skimmed through it, looked up at her, and smiled. "No problem."

And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, stood up, and laid out some packets.

She asked, "What are these?"

Jesus replied, "Seed packets. This is a catalog store."

She said, "You mean, I don't get the finished product?"

"No, this is a place of dreams and visions. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them to grow, and someone else reaps the benefits."

"Oh," she said. And she left the store without buying anything.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

At this age youth no longer depend on parents for everything. So, adults' views about faith, the Bible, and spiritual practices are less and less accepted as "gospel truth." Instead, opinions of peers, teachers, and messages received from news media and entertainment channels begin to replace family-influenced interpretations of religion or church traditions, including the usefulness or credibility of the Bible. Unfortunately, in a time when Internet hoaxes and misleading or sensational news stories cast doubt on all institutions, youth may see scripture passages as yet another question mark, wondering what to make of them. As they start thinking abstractly and hypothetically, forming opinions of their own, trying out their new-found understandings of logic and cause-and-effect, and rejecting conventional ideas or long-held beliefs, the ancient biblical stories of commandments, miracles, and faith transformations may seem odd, outdated, or unbelievable. The challenge becomes one of relating centuries-old writings to the world of today, in a faithful, genuine, heartfelt, and honest examination of how God really does still act in our lives and how to share that discovery with others, through testimony and witness that uses today's words, images, and technology.

About this Exploration

Our lives are part of the tapestry of God’s larger story in the world. Scripture contains testimonies of people who aren’t perfect, which invites us to tell our stories in response. In John’s account of Jesus and the blind man, the man’s witness sparked a process that touched on people’s relationships, different understandings of God, the role of religious authority, and viewpoints within the community. The healed man’s testimony inspired dialogue and, ultimately, transformation. Similarly, our stories may shape other people’s response to scripture and draw out their testimonies. The experience of hearing scripture varies according to our experiences, situations, traditions, and settings.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

John 9:1–41

Psalm 116

Leader Preparation

Helping older youth feel empowered in their own opinions and learning processes takes a little creativity and finesse. One needs to understand that turning away from traditions and family views is not a rejection, but a sign of growing maturity. Also, youth should be encouraged to get involved in the planning, discussions, rule setting, problem solving and collaborative faith exploration at every level possible. You can do this by helping youth to engage in these activities guided by skillful supervision without undue or overly directive interference. Remember that everybody learns in different ways, so what works for one may not work for another. In a mutual exchange participants who present their ideas can learn from others in the group, while listeners also have an opportunity to share their thoughts, and thus offer additional discoveries to the presenters.

Prayer: Dear God, in our lives we’ve all heard many stories and read a great deal of words that sometimes leave us wondering. Help us to approach the message of our faith with an open mind and an open heart. Lead us to new meanings and new insights in passages that have already offered so

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 The Curious Pharisee (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Engaging and reading the Bible “between the lines” takes a bit of imagination. The midrash in the Jewish faith is a form of biblical interpretation that encourages being playful with scripture. With this approach you might take the original text and explore all kinds of other possibilities for the story. What if the main character were female instead of male? What if the setting were different? What if we delved more deeply into the character’s personality and found that beneath the surface there was a very sympathetic side to the person? For this activity the group will be asked to look at John 9:1–41 and create a modern-day “interview” of the blind man from the story.

The interviewer will be someone called “the Curious Pharisee”—a very different, nonstereotyped, open-minded Pharisee who just wants to know more about the whole situation with Jesus and the blind man and how it played out. Participants will develop interview questions and possible responses in order to imagine “a different side” to the text from John. As the youth become more comfortable with exploring their faith in this way, they will also feel better about sharing their discoveries with others—the essence of witnessing and giving testimony.

Supplies:

- Bibles (different versions, if available)
- paper and pen or pencils
- large poster board and markers

Read aloud John 9:1–41 and chat a little about what first impressions the group might have. *What were your feelings about the blind man? His parents? The Pharisees? Jesus? What do you think some of the different concerns might be from the Pharisees, the parents, or even Jesus’ disciples? Why would the parents be afraid of the Jews? What could be some parts of the story that we don’t know or aren’t told in this passage? How would that make a difference in your opinions toward the characters? Through the telling of this story, how are different views of faith being given voice to or communicated? Do you think this can be described as “giving testimony”? Why or why not?*

Describe the Jewish midrash custom of being more liberal and less literal about the words of scripture texts. Introduce the idea that it is okay to “read between the lines” and even come up with new spin-offs on the original story to help in understanding it better. For example, a Jewish scholar once suggested that the two stone tablets that Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai were actually blank—because there was no possible way to capture the entire essence of God’s agreement with the people of Israel in all its complexity on only two tablets.

The youth will work together to create an interview show called “The Curious Pharisee,” in which the blind person will be interviewed by the Pharisee—not just an ordinary Pharisee, but one who is somewhat more open, curious, sensi-

much inspiration and so many different perspectives to those who have come before us. Guide us in hearing these words in fresh ways and then using our own talents to take them, build on them, and transform them so that we can all go out and witness to their power to change this world. 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.

tive, and maybe even sympathetic. This Pharisee’s aim is to find out more about this whole episode from the blind person’s point of view. In the spirit of midrash, the blind person doesn’t have to be male.

Have the participants write interview questions as well and some possible answers for the blind person. Encourage them to collaborate on the thinking behind the dialogue, for example, why did the Pharisees seem to be so hard on the blind person? Why did they show such an attitude? How do you suppose the blind person felt? What might be going through the parents’ minds? How was Jesus using this situation to make a point? What was he trying to communicate or advocate? How would “the Curious Pharisee” try to approach things with more flexibility and openness? Select the players and actually conduct the interview, ad-libbing as needed. Afterward, talk with the group about how this process changed the story for them and their understanding of faith and testimony.



2 Discovering Prayer

Leader preparation: Connecting with God through prayer is one of the most common ways of engaging and growing in our faith. There are so many different ways of praying that even in Jesus’ time questions arose as to what the proper words should be, or the correct attitude, or the degree of real, authentic, personal commitment associated with prayer. Jesus took the opportunity to guide his followers in how they should approach prayer themselves, even giving them a model of words to use. His example, which we call the prayer of Jesus, is still in wide use today. It is considered by some to be the best known prayer in Christianity.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- sturdy poster board or cardboard to construct a folding “easel,” as in “Creating a simple easel stand . . . ,” Attachment: Activity 2
- paper and pens or pencils
- markers
- art supplies
- hole punch
- some means to attach (and flip) pages mounted on the easel—pegs, nails, staples, brass fasteners, loose leaf-type rings, thumbtacks, or pushpins
- background information on the subject of prayer and the Lord’s Prayer

Invite the youth into a discussion about prayer. *What does prayer mean to you? When have you seen others pray? How have others prayed? What are some different ways to pray? Which ways are most comfortable for you? Prayer can be a rather personal thing, but can you share with the group the ways you feel comfortable praying?*

Introduce the prayer that Jesus taught, also known as the Lord’s Prayer. *What do you know about the prayer that Jesus taught? How are you accustomed to seeing or hearing it? What are the different times, places, settings, or occasions where they’ve heard this prayer? Are there some situations in which the prayer has been said, where they’ve felt more closely connected than others?*

Read Matthew 6:5–15 together. What are the group’s initial impressions, hearing these passages? How does this connect with some of their own experiences with prayer in general or the Lord’s Prayer in particular?

Construct a simple easel, using whatever paper, cardboard, and art supplies are available. Invite suggestions of how it needs to be designed, knowing how it will be used as a “flip chart” tool. When the easel is completed, talk about the prayer that Jesus taught line by line. Write each line on a separate page of the easel. Ask

what each phrase and each line means to the youth—either personally, or as a group, or perhaps in the perspective of the larger world. With each line take a moment or two for quiet reflection while you guide them through a sharing of meanings, feelings, responses, questions. Also mention that prayer is another type of testimony, which puts into words the deep feelings, unspoken beliefs, hopes, and dreams we all have. By sharing these with others we initiate dialogue, encourage witnessing by others, and ultimately shape a collective, common transformative experience that helps us all grow in our faith.

Say the prayer that Jesus taught one last time using the “flip pages” with a very deliberate, slow, meditative pace, pausing between each line or phrase to allow time for reflection and thought. End with a very soft “Amen” and a few moments of silence.

3 Texting the Word

Leader preparation: In the early days of Christianity people met in secret places to avoid persecution. They developed their own type of code “language” to witness to their faith and to let other followers know of their gatherings. One of these was the “fish” symbol. Ichthus, the Greek word for fish, served as an acronym for the words “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior.” Often the fish sign would be found on the walls of catacombs, pointing the way to a secret meeting place. When you think about it, those early Christian acronyms weren’t that different from the “texting” language of today. “CUL8R” is actually a hybrid of acronym and code, meaning “See You Later.” Check these websites for help with texting word lists: <http://tinyurl.com/y5xggu>; <http://tinyurl.com/yd9cjhq>; <http://tinyurl.com/3fx5ead> (the 10 Commandments in Textspeak).

Supplies:

- Bibles (different translations such as the NRSV, The Message, NIV, Contemporary English Version)
- several cell phones (ask the participants ahead of time to bring theirs)
- notepads or scratchpads and pens or pencils, as an alternative to cell phones for texting
- a computer with Internet access
- texting word lists giving commonly used texting codes
- history of ichthus “fish” symbol, found online at <http://tinyurl.com/6agch6d>

Introduce the history of the Greek “ichthus” fish symbol and how it was a sort of secret “code” or language that helped early Christians communicate. Talk about how symbols like this were similar to texting language of today. Ask: *What if early Christians had cell phones and wanted to tell a fellow believer something, maybe share a passage from scripture? How would they “text” it?* Supply the group with sample texting phrases acquired from online sources. Also provide a couple of different Bible translations such as the NRSV, The Message, and the Contemporary English Version to help them see the different ways a particular thought could be rephrased.

If members of the group have free texting capability with their cell phones, have them text their faith messages back and forth, beginning with a portion or two of Psalm 116. Encourage the group to take turns suggesting texting abbreviations for the biblical phrases. If free texting is not possible, have them write their messages on notepads or scratchpads that can be passed back and forth.

Have a brief conversation about the language of testimony and witness. Ques-

tions to consider:

- How does “texting” make it easier—or harder—to share messages of faith?
- Do you think a new “texting” vocabulary is needed, specializing in words that relate to faith?
- What kind of texting phrases would you create for this?
- What kind of problems did early Christians have when they were trying to tell their story?
- What similar challenges do we have today, especially regarding language?
- What words or phrases do you find tough, or hard to understand, that make talking about faith difficult?
- Since we’re all called to witness to our faith with others, what can we do, in terms of language, to help make this easier? How can technologies like texting help?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Different Faith Views (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Faith can be a very difficult concept to understand. There are countless definitions and many different perspectives, but no single, all-purpose, foolproof way of describing it or practicing it. For that reason sharing witness and testimony can be equally challenging. What works to communicate the faith for one person may be totally wrong for another. To add to the complexity of this task, our faith is also constantly changing. What may be an acceptable approach today may be out of date or out of favor tomorrow.

Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils
- “The Elephant and the Blind Men,” Attachment: Activity 4
- (optional) computer with Internet access and audio playback capabilities (with speakers), or CD player, iPod, or MP3 player (with speakers)
- (optional) [song](http://tinyurl.com/3nm2tjq) “Five Blind Men” by David Roth, from the *Rising in Love* album (can be downloaded from the iTunes store <http://tinyurl.com/3nm2tjq>)

Ask the group whether there’s ever only one answer or one way of looking at things. *Have you ever heard of the often told situation of a crime scene detective questioning five different people who were eyewitnesses, only to get five different “eyewitness” accounts of the same event? Why do you suppose there can be so many different opinions, outlooks, beliefs, or vantage points? Ask for examples from their lives when they’ve had a difference of opinion with somebody. Ask: How did it feel? Were you ever able to see the other person’s side? Could that person see yours? Did you ever resolve your differences? How? What are some ways that different viewpoints can actually help, or better, a situation?*

Read the story “The Elephant and the Blind Men” from the handout, or play the David Roth song “Five Blind Men.” Ask whether they’ve ever heard this particular story before. Distribute paper and have everyone write one idea that stands out from the story or the song. Go around the group and see how many different ideas are shared. What connections can they draw between the blind men’s dif-

ferent deductions and the different ideas that the members of the group came up with? *Think about the parallel between the blind men and the ways that different views on faith can seem equally far apart. What other similarities can be seen? In what way is having differences of opinion like this a good thing? A bad thing? Reflect on how different people's ways of witnessing to their faith can contribute to a greater understanding on everyone's part. Think of specific ways that this can happen.*

5 Essential or Nonessential

Leader preparation: Over the centuries as the Christian faith spread around the world, many different cultures added their particular spin to the original message taught by Jesus. As the stories of the Bible began to be rendered in different languages, new shades of meaning came about simply because few words translate exactly from one language to another. Local customs also had an impact on worship. When people adapted earlier practices or added new traditions in order to explain or demonstrate Jesus' teachings in new settings, faith expressions took on different appearances or understandings. As a result churches in different lands experienced a sense of disconnectedness because certain traditions seemed "foreign" to their own. Consequently, when churches came together in cross-cultural, ecumenical gatherings, time needed to be spent ironing out differences.

Church leaders came up with the idea of distinguishing between "essentials" and "nonessentials" of the faith. A well-known motto attributed to St. Augustine and since used by a variety of Christian organizations captured the spirit of this new goal: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love." By agreeing on things that are critical to our faith, like the divinity of Jesus, or the promise of resurrection, we are then able to be more flexible on issues that aren't serious enough to divide us.

Supplies:

- paper and pens or pencils
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- drawing paper, colored pencils or markers, scissors, and any other available art supplies, to be used in the designing of a banner
- artwork: "Baptism" by Hullis Mavruk, <http://tinyurl.com/fp-aphm>

Talk about differences among human beings—hair color, eye color, height, weight, language, body parts. Ask for examples of differences the youth can see in their own group. Then talk about similarities. What do all people have in common? Is it the differences or the similarities that define us as human? Connect this discussion with the Christian faith by having the youth describe some differences they're aware of among denominations, cultures, or religious groups.

Display the painting "Baptism" by Mavruk. Baptism is one "essential" that all Christians agree on even though there are many different practices, such as sprinkling, immersion, infant baptism, believers baptism, and so forth. Invite the youth to describe their impressions of the Mavruk artwork. *How are the people in this painting witnessing to their faith?*

Read the statement by Augustine, "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, love." *What does this mean in relation to differences among Christians? How would you define "essentials" and "nonessentials"?* On newsprint or a whiteboard, list what the learners feel are essentials and nonessentials in their own faith. What are the issues they feel strongly enough about, that they would not be willing to budge on, in order to define themselves as "Christian"? About which

points do they feel they could be more understanding, flexible, charitable, or loving?

Work together to design a banner with graphics and words symbolizing the main points of their Christian faith that they feel they have in common. This banner will serve as another form of witness, a visual expression of our shared beliefs.

⑥ Reading for People Who Are Blind

Leader preparation: For years people have volunteered their time and voices for the purpose of turning printed books into audio recordings so that people who are blind would be able to “read” or hear books and publications of all kinds. It’s easy for many of us to take for granted the gift of sight particularly when it comes to reading and understanding the writings of our faith, like the Bible. In that light, the story of Jesus healing the blind man is more than just a discussion of how the religious community understands and interprets its traditions, or how it views Jesus and his miracles. It is also an opportunity to put our faith to work through new acts of our own, in service, witnessing, and care for others.

Be sensitive to the reading abilities in the group and to any visual impairments that the youth may have (or that their family members may have). Do not assume that everyone can read or see well.

Supplies:

- Bibles in different translations, such as the NRSV, the New King James, Good News, NIV, New Living Translation, The Message
- computer(s) and access to the Internet for online Bible search software such as <http://www.biblegateway.com/>
- blindfolds and/or a number of pairs of old glasses and sunglasses, enough to supply one set of glasses for each pair of participants (glasses to be smeared with Vaseline or some other material to make seeing difficult)
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Divide the group into pairs and have each pair take a blindfold or pair of glasses. Each pair should also have a Bible or an online version of John 9:1–41. Have each member of the pair take turns playing the role of a person who is blind and a reader. First, the person who is blind tries to read the text either blindfolded or wearing the hazy-filmed glasses. Then the other reads the text to the person who is blind. Have the youth switch roles and do the same again, experiencing the frustration or total impossibility of reading the Bible text when eyesight is limited or nonexistent. (For another variation, when roles switch, use Psalm 116.)

Invite the group back together. Use these or similar questions:

- How did it feel not being able to read?
- How did it feel being read to?
- How did it feel being the one in the role reading to the person who is blind? How does it feel being on the receiving end?
- How would it feel to not ever be able to read anything at all?
- When you switched roles and became a reader, did you notice any difference in how you understood the words? Were there things you hadn’t picked up on when you first heard it read to you?
- In the Bible passage, what were the different attitudes toward blind people, as told in the story? Is blindness only lack of sight, or might it

stand for something else? What other kinds of “blindness” are there? Who are some of the others who might be considered “blind,” besides the man whom Jesus healed? Why would you say they’re “blind”? What did Jesus mean by his statement “I am the light of the world”?

- Do you feel you “see” things differently at this age than you might have when you were younger? What are some specific ways you “see” differently? What about your view of faith and religion? How did you see it as a child compared to today?
- How do you think your views might change in five or ten years? How about your views of those with different abilities or physical limitations?
- Would you ever consider becoming a reader for the blind or volunteering in other ways to help people? How do you suppose doing things like this is a good way to “witness” to your faith?
- How does taking opportunities to strike up friendships and form relationships, while working or serving, also offer “testimony”? Do conversations that grow out of helping others provide a chance for you to talk about your own faith? How?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 It’s Christ’s Party (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Some very well-known passages in the Bible have compared heaven, or “the age to come,” to a grand banquet that will be the ultimate reward of God’s promises. Some of Jesus’ stories used the banquet image as a way of putting into everyday terms this idea of “celebration” and “grand finale” while giving us an idea of how generous, bountiful, and extravagantly welcoming and hospitable God’s table will be, especially to people who might otherwise have been left out of comparable affairs in this world because of their status as “outcasts” or “outsiders.”

You may find it helpful to research the Oremus Bible Browser, <http://bible.oremus.org/>, for looking up the references to “banquet” and “feast” in the New Testament. A regular concordance or index in the back of certain Bibles may work just as well.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper, pens, pencils, markers, art supplies
- (optional) party planner guides
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- (optional) large poster or picture of Jesus as a reminder of who the party is for

Explore some different mentions of “banquet” or “feast” in the New Testament using the Oremus Bible Browser or a Bible concordance in print form. *What stories are told about banquets? Are they happy occasions or events that come with certain warnings or precautions? What’s the role of God in these stories? How would you describe God as a party organizer?*

Invite the group to organize a party for Jesus. It is to be in his honor and the theme is “Witness to Jesus.” Everything in this party must be according to what

the group feels Jesus would have done. The guests are those Jesus would include; the meal and presentation would be Jesus' recommendations; the order in which people are served is by Jesus' direction; and even the activities scheduled for the evening would be ones that Jesus would either enjoy or desire for his guests.

Invite the group to plan the many different aspects of the party: creating invitations, writing an opening prayer of grace, seating plans, refreshments, entertainment, and a meaningful way to create the perfect "send-off" at the close of the celebration that would be in keeping with Jesus' own interests, mission, ministry, and vision for us all.

In what ways would this be different from the parties you've attended? What about entertainment? Would Jesus encourage his guests to have fun and enjoy the entertainment? What other activities do you think would be good to include? Music? Dancing? (Check the Old Testament for references to dancing, particularly the mention of David in 2 Samuel 6:14.)

Knowing a little about Jesus' ministry, what would be a perfect send-off for your guests that would witness to Jesus' example? Talk about how everything in our lives, from the ways we serve others, to the example we set in our social activities, is a testimony to what we believe our faith calls us to do. As the youth look over the party details, ask them what messages of faith they feel this particular event will witness to.



8 Welcoming Everyone

Leader preparation: Numerous passages in the Bible talk about God "making all things new" or "singing a new song." Newness, change, and ways that are "different" are things to be welcomed rather than feared or shunned. In Jesus' time, blindness (or any other "difference," whether physical, mental, gender, racial) was considered to be the result of the victim (or his or her parents) having committed a sin. Today we have a different understanding of visual limitations and other disabilities. But often, when it comes to including those who are differently abled in our faith communities or even in our Sunday morning services, we still forget that what we take for granted in terms of full participation may not be possible for those who do not have the same capabilities.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens or pencils
- a copy of a "handicapped accessible" logo or sign (can be downloaded from the Internet from a number of sources. (See <http://tinyurl.com/3jtcsfz>)
- artwork: "The Blind Pedlar" by Robert McGregor, <http://tinyurl.com/fp-aprm>

Read Revelation 21:1–5, ending with the line "See, I am making all things new." This text is usually interpreted as the voice of God describing the new world to which we can all look forward. Call the group's attention to the references to "wiping every tear" and "mourning and crying and pain will be no more." *What do you suppose this means? How do you think God intends to make things different? How does this vision compare to the way things are now? How are people who have limitations or differences treated by our society?*

Invite the youth to draw the handicapped accessibility logo. *Where is this displayed in your church? What does this logo usually communicate? Does "accessibility" always*

mean full, complete inclusiveness for all people? In what ways is your church accessible? How welcome would a person who was blind or had a visual impairment such as macular degeneration feel in your church?

Display the McGregor poster “The Blind Pedlar” as a visual reminder of blindness, and have the group think about how they would explain or describe their favorite worship experiences to a person who is blind. Remind the participants that a person blind from birth would have no frame of reference for visual objects. *To those who have never had sight, things such as red-colored banners or stained glass windows are nearly impossible to describe. What is red? What is stained glass? How else could you describe the church or meeting room?*

There are all types of conditions, disabilities, impairments, and different abilities that might offer similar challenges. For instance, gluten sensitivity becomes a factor in communion. *How many churches offer gluten-free or wheat-free bread? What are other examples? How can we be better prepared in our faith communities to include everyone? What can we put in place to help everyone feel more welcome? How did Jesus help outcasts or people who were different feel included in the family of God?*

Recipe for Life

Leader preparation: Stand around at any church gathering and eventually you will hear someone share a favorite recipe. Whenever we come upon a great recipe, book, restaurant, or movie, we can’t wait to share it with our friends. Spend time reading the psalms, and pick a few of your favorites ahead of time.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Reflect

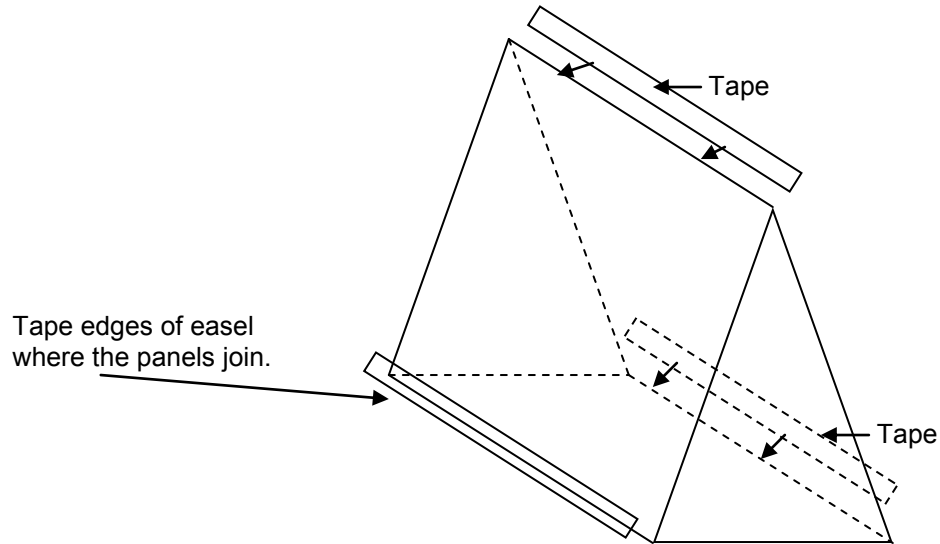
Scriptures have sometimes been thought of as formal, “carved in stone,” extremely challenging documents that are anything but “Good News.” And yet, the abundant messages of hope, forgiveness, love, justice, healing, salvation, and peace that can be found throughout the Bible are more than enough to make the case that they actually do have a much more positive and uplifting story to tell than some would admit. How have these different investigations of scripture helped participants to discover a different side to the Bible that they may not have known about previously? How can these experiences be used to encourage more “witnessing” about their faith to others? What were some of the noteworthy highlights of these activities for you and the group?

When asked about a favorite piece of scripture, many people name Psalm 23. Indeed this is beautiful, but there are 150 psalms in all. Invite participants to open their Bibles to the Book of Psalms. Invite them to share their favorite “recipe for life” with one another. Give them about 10 minutes to peruse the psalms and then ask them to name their favorite and why it is their favorite. Encourage them to do daily Bible reading of some sort and to get in the habit of sharing with a friend or member of this group those pieces of scripture that are especially meaningful.

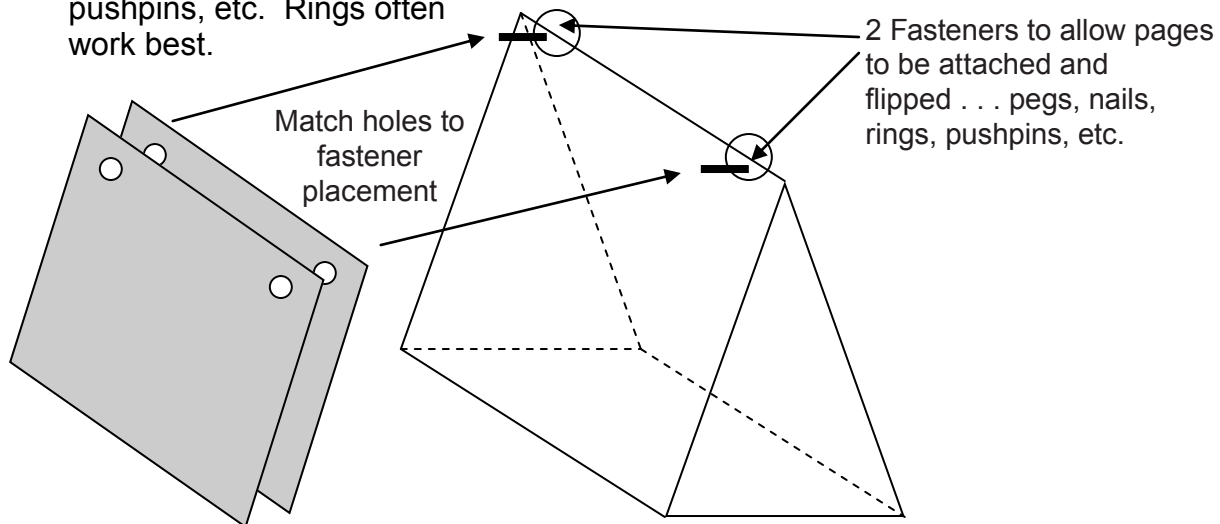
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Attachment: Activity 2

**Creating a simple easel stand
from heavy-duty cardboard or poster board**



1. Cut three equal-sized panels, and tape them together as shown, so the easel will stand upright on its base.
2. Add some type of fastener to the front (top) of the easel, to allow pages to be attached and turned, one by one, flip chart style. Use whatever is available—pegs, nails, screws, staples, brass fasteners, looseleaf-type rings, thumbtacks, pushpins, etc. Rings often work best.



3. Hole-punch pages corresponding to your fastener placement, and place them in a stack on the front of the easel, so that as a page is finished, it can be turned over, flipped, or otherwise removed to reveal the next page.

Attachment: Activity 4

The Elephant and The Blind Men

Once upon a time, there lived six blind men in a village. One day the villagers told them, "Hey, there is an elephant in the village today."

They had no idea what an elephant is. They decided, "Even though we would not be able to see it, let us go and feel it anyway." All of them went where the elephant was. Every one of them touched the elephant.

"Hey, the elephant is a pillar," said the first man, who touched his leg.

"Oh, no! It is like a rope," said the second man, who touched the tail.

"Oh, no! It is like a thick branch of a tree," said the third man, who touched the trunk of the elephant.

"It is like a big hand fan," said the fourth man, who touched the ear of the elephant.

"It is like a huge wall," said the fifth man, who touched the belly of the elephant.

"It is like a solid pipe," said the sixth man, who touched the tusk of the elephant.

They began to argue about the elephant, and every one of them insisted that he was right. It looked like they were getting agitated. A wise man was passing by and he saw this. He stopped and asked them, "What is the matter?" They said, "We cannot agree on what the elephant is like." Each one of them told what he thought the elephant was like. The wise man calmly explained to them, "All of you are right. The reason every one of you is telling it differently is because each one of you touched a different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all those features what you all said."

"Oh!" everyone said. There was no more fighting. They felt happy that they were all right.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

This age group has a passion and energy that can result in very committed disciples. At the same time, they have questions, concerns, and doubts that come from having observed the complexity of life. When tapped and guided by the wisdom of age, their passion and energy can become a powerful testimony to the transforming love of God. Once allowed to experience how their service in God's name helps people and even changes individual lives, they will be inspired throw themselves wholeheartedly into a discipleship based in today's world.

About this Exploration

When giving testimony and witness, a disciple becomes both learner and leader. In response to God's prompting, disciples serve the community through speaking and acting faithfully.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 8:27–38

Psalm 25:1–10

Leader Preparation

Disciples come in all shapes and sizes. Jesus’ original disciples were about as varied as any twelve average people one could pick off the street today. For that reason, discipling techniques aren’t a “one size fits all” approach. Some may respond better to straight-forward informational methods, while others are better reached by games, hands-on activities, and participatory or interactive techniques. Throughout these different activities, look for all sorts of opportunities to help the group members discover new things about themselves that may just serve as the “seeds” for their growth and development as the newest generation of disciples.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to love ourselves for who we are, whether we fit the traditional mold of “discipleship” or discover that our unique gifts may just be the new color that you are looking for to add another exciting dimension to the world we’re helping you build. Encourage us in our differences, celebrate with us in our similarities, and help us share our energy and knowledge with one another in ways that make your power more real every day. 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 “Ex-

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Guess Who? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: One of the fascinating puzzles of the Christian faith is the way that opposing or contradictory ideas are sometimes presented. For example, in Mark 8:27–38 Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is, but then directs them not to tell anyone. If we are supposed to go and spread the word, sharing testimony and gaining new disciples, how do we do so without revealing anything about our leader?

You can find background information on two common guessing games, Charades and Pictionary, available at these web links: <http://tinyurl.com/3ere7l6>, and <http://tinyurl.com/ycezh96>.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) paper and pens for drawing

Depending on your preference for acting or art, this activity can be done either as a game of Charades or Pictionary. Either will work well to convey the element of surprise and provide enough challenge and fun for the group while they try to guess the secret word or name.

Divide the group into two teams. Don’t divulge anything more than “We’re going to play a game of Charades [or Pictionary].” Let them know that each team will be given a secret word or name to communicate. The idea is not to make things too easy; they can act out or draw as few details as possible in order to start the other team guessing.

Give the first team a common, faith-related word such as “heaven,” “miracle,” “angel,” or “church,” or any other similar term that most people would know. Don’t make it too obscure or impossible, or the game won’t get off the ground. Once the group has a trial run guessing the first, more commonly known word, assign the second team “Jesus” as the secret name to communicate and guess.

Once “Jesus” is guessed, congratulate both teams and ask them how it felt to play a game in which they weren’t being given that much information and the secret words or names were a little more unusual or unexpected. *How easy was it to figure out what the other players were hinting at? What would have made it less challenging?*

Read together Mark 8:27–38 and talk about the initial questions to the disciples when they were asked to guess who Jesus was. *Why do you suppose Jesus didn’t want them to tell anyone that he was the Messiah? Why was this being kept a mystery? What problems do you suppose this might have created if other people knew? How do you go out and tell people about Jesus if you can’t say anything? How do you demonstrate what Jesus is all about? What are some nonverbal ways of communicating Jesus’ teachings or witnessing to the good news he was telling people to spread at other times? As one of Jesus’ disciples, how do you witness to your friends about your faith or about Jesus?*

ploring and Engaging,” at least one from “Discerning and Deciding,” and at least one from “Sending and Serving.” The first activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation with supplies normally found at the church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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

2 Psalm Show

Leader preparation: For some people, the Bible can be “word heavy” and thus discouraging, especially if one’s accustomed approach to learning about new things is more hands-on, visual, nonverbal, or participatory. Yet there is a wealth of material in the texts that can inspire and suggest other avenues of investigation and expression, whether musical, dramatic, or artistic.

Supplies:

- Bibles—different versions or translations such as The Message or the Contemporary English Version
- poster board, construction paper, markers, scissors, other art supplies
- costumes (if available)
- paper and pens or pencils

Read one or two different versions of Psalm 25:1–10 together. Ask the youth to take note of some of the emotions, word pictures, and images that the psalm conjures up for them. One or two of the group may offer to demonstrate a few relevant facial expressions, signing, or other means of nonverbal expression that tie into the text to demonstrate shame, love, exulting, or other words.

Invite the group to share the visual, pantomime, or dramatic ideas to help tell the story of the text. In some cases they may want to use the art supplies to create “subtitle” cards with words or other visuals that help illustrate the text if suitable nonverbal approaches can’t be found. Participants may also work with a partner to create a particular relational pantomime image that requires more than one person.

Once all the lines are accounted for, do the psalm from start to finish with everybody joining in. A narrator may be helpful to read the words of the psalm as the participants “deliver” their lines. The group may even want to take their “show” on the road, presenting it as part of a church worship service, doing it for a Christian Education group, offering it as a nursing home program, or performing it in some other setting.

3 What’s Your Cross?

Leader preparation: We’ve often heard the expressions “Taking up your cross” or “It’s my cross to carry” in connection with a burden or challenge in our life. In Mark 8:27–38 Jesus said that any who wanted to become his disciples needed to “take up their cross and follow me.” In that light, a “cross” could be anything from a personal trait or characteristic to a situation curtailing options such as employment, education, or relationships. On the other hand, advocates of positive thinking say there’s no such thing as “problems”; think of them as opportunities instead. So the “cross” we take up (or accept) as part of our faith journey could in fact be something we’ve recognized about ourselves, or our individual shortcomings, or our different gifts, that actually helps us to become a better follower with God’s help.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper, pens, pencils, markers, construction paper, thin sheets of balsa wood or cardboard, string or yarn, a variety of different art and craft supplies, a hole punch, and other materials for designing crosses
- computer with Internet access
- cartoon about “carrying our cross” available on an Internet blog: <http://tinyurl.com/42mktye>

Read Mark 8:27–38 emphasizing in particular the text that mentions “taking up their cross.” *What does this mean? What kind of cross could Jesus have been referring to? A literal “cross” or something symbolic? What are some possible examples of problems or obstacles that the group can think of? What are some ways to deal with them?*

Show the group the cartoon strip “Carrying Our Cross,” found on the Internet blog, “Stumbling toward God.” What are their impressions? In what ways can they relate this cartoon to any times in their own lives? Encourage them to share their experiences. *How did they get through them? What were the final outcomes? Did something good come out of it, or not? Could there be some discovery or learning in it yet to be seen?*

Bring out the art supplies and invite the youth to make designer crosses that express something specific to their lives. *What is your cross? How does your faith or your relationship with Jesus help you bear this cross? How can a cross actually be transformed into an asset or advantage for you? Is it something that can help us in some way? Will it provide a bridge to a relationship? Will we discover how to better deal with setbacks? How can we thank God for the presence of this cross? What do we feel we can tell others about our cross as a way of offering personal witness and testimony?*

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Stories to Make Sense of Today (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: We all love stories. This is something so basic to human nature it happens as naturally as breathing in and out. As we share the stories, there’s a power to them that we don’t often realize. While they do provide instant entertainment, they also have a longer-lasting effect that goes far beyond the first hearing. Many stories told by others help us to “discern” or understand our lives in a new way.

This “storytelling” activity will serve as a good foundation for investigating the Bible stories of the past in order to understand how they can help us decide who we are and how to practice our faith in today’s world. The old expression, “Those who ignore history will most likely find themselves repeating it,” may seem a negative way of viewing life’s never ending parade of stories. But the truth in this expression is that we can use these accounts from the past (both biblical stories and our own personal recollections) to help us change history for the better. Be prepared to tell a story from your life to begin this activity.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- comfortable chairs, pillows, rugs for casual seating
- paper and pens or pencils

Read aloud Mark 8:27–38 (or another passage of the group’s choosing) to give an example of a Bible story that reflects on the question “Who am I?” As a way of demonstrating the story/meaning approach, tell a brief story from your life, with a closing that explains how that incident affected your life today.

Invite the members of the group to tell a story from their past, keeping it short, in the interest of allowing enough time for all to participate. Include in each story a “learning” that came about from the experience. For example, “Because of my near brush with drowning, I decided to take swim lessons. I found that I enjoyed

it so much that I became a swim instructor.” Help the participants realize that by sharing these stories of their experiences, they’re offering living testimony of a faith that guides them in positive, life-changing new directions.

5 Know It All

Leader preparation: Older youth are at a cross point of trying to exercise their knowledge and independence and occasionally finding out they may not know it all and still have need for their elders. It can be a frustrating time for them, as they can be confused about when to ask for help and when to be more independent. Find a group of elders to join you so that the youth can pair up with the elders and talk about what it means to be a disciple and how they testify to it in their daily lives.

Supplies:

- invited guest elders
- questions and themes for discussion

Disciples have been around for a very long time. A disciple is anyone who is willing to learn from another, usually someone older with more experience. But sometimes we are surprised by the insights we learn from the young among us. Gather the group together and talk about how they could learn to grow in their discipleship from some of the elders of the church. Spend time coming up with a list of questions they would want to ask, and encourage the youth to think about how they might answer those questions. Make a separate list of things they might want to tell the elders about their faith experiences. Set up a time to meet with the elders, either during this session or at another time and share with one another the insights you have about these questions and other issues of faith and discipleship. Remind all involved that as we talk about our faith with one another, we participate in testimony and witness.



6 Wanted: Disciples

Leader preparation: In today’s world we know what a bank teller is, or what a police officer does, or a baseball player, a carpenter, a daycare provider. But what about a “disciple”? That’s one of those “church” words that isn’t so easy to define. Consequently, if we’re unsure of who a disciple is, or what he or she does, the potential to be a disciple gets a little cloudy and uncertain. We may decide to shy away from the idea out of our misunderstanding or lack of knowledge. Yet, with just a little bit of exploration, we may learn that it isn’t as challenging or overwhelming as it may seem.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Sample Job Descriptions for Teacher, Coach, Intern,” Attachment: Activity 6
- paper, pens and pencils
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- computer with Internet access, audio playback capabilities, and speakers
- song “Tú has venido a la orilla” (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain) <http://tinyurl.com/fp-orilla>

Ask the group to define “disciple.” *What qualifications are necessary? What does a disciple do? In what ways is the job hard or easy? Why? How would you compare it to other jobs you know?*

Distribute copies of the handout with the job descriptions for three traditional positions (teacher, coach, intern). Have the group look over the descriptions. Ask: *What do you think about these jobs? Are they hard or easy? Why? Do you think they're do-able? Would these be jobs you might consider applying for? Why or why not? What similarities or connections do you see between these jobs and the position of disciple? Explain.*

Read a few short passages from the Bible that talk about the job that Jesus gives to his disciples: Matthew 4:18–22, 9:35–10:13, 11:28–30, and 28:18–20. What do the youth think about them? How do they seem, compared to the business world job descriptions? What would they add, if anything, to these “descriptions” or change in any way? How?

Introduce the song “Lord, You Have Come to the Seashore” (“Tú has venido a la orilla”). Listen to the song and read along with the lyrics; then play it again and sing along. This song offers another helpful way of defining the word “disciple” and offers some expectations. *Having heard the song, do you think being a disciple is as challenging or hard as you might have thought? Why? What are your feelings about discipleship now?*

Invite the participants to create their job descriptions for the position of disciple. List their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. When they have a good working job description, read it aloud, and ask whether it's a position they would consider applying for. Finally, have the group sing “Lord, You Have Come to the Seashore.”

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Serving Up Faith (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Servants are mentioned throughout the Bible—from people who literally are servants (as a job description), to symbolic or poetic use describing someone as a “servant of God.” In today's world, actual servant jobs vary from traditional housekeepers and personal helpers to service industry positions such as wait staff, repair person, nurse's aide, administrative assistant. Defining “servanthood” or “discipleship” in the faith setting is more challenging compared to ages ago, especially in light of the infinite ways that faith can be expressed through different vocations, practices, ministries, organizations, and programs.

Supplies:

- Bible
- tables and chairs (small card tables would work well)
- several memo pads or other small wire-bound pads for taking orders, or plain paper folded in half
- pens or pencils
- copies of “Faith Café Menu,” Attachment: Activity 7

Ask the group whether any of them have served as wait staff. *What was it like? What did you like best or least about the experience? How would you suppose that compares to the “servant” roles often mentioned in the Bible?*

Read John 13:3–17, which describes Jesus in the role of servant washing the feet of his disciples. *What was Jesus trying to communicate by setting this example? How did he want his disciples to follow his lead? How do you suppose a servant's job in Bible times differs from service industry occupations today? Specifically, how do you think things such as loyalty, employee/employer relationships, workdays, attitude, dedication, attention to detail would be either more or less demanding?*

Divide the group into “tables” of three to five persons apiece. Each person will get a chance to wait on the others and then switch parts to become a “customer.” Distribute copies of the “menu of faith” from which to order. Explain that they’ll all be “hungry” for some kind of discipleship or “servanthood” entrees through which they can practice their faith. The wait staff are encouraged to make suggestions or recommendations, especially if they know of specific interests or talents of other group members.

After everyone has had a turn playing waiting on and being a customer, bring the group back together for conversation. Ask: *How did it feel to be the servant? How did it feel to be the customer? What did you discover about some of the many options available for “servanthood” in the modern world? How do you think some of these might tie in with your own special “tastes” for expressing your faith? What opportunities could you envision for yourself or others in the group? What are some new possibilities that weren’t listed on the menu or that may have occurred to you as you were talking with other members of your group? How would you go about pursuing them? What do you think it would be like to serve in a particular role? How do you feel taking on a responsibility like this would help you to grow in your faith?* Encourage the members of the group to think about how this discipleship exercise, by its very nature, is a perfect example of testimony because it demonstrates servanthood, one of the core practices of our faith.



8 Do It Yourself Disciples

Leader preparation: Jesus’ approach was rather simple—go out and hand-pick twelve people to be his first followers or “disciples.” Get to know them, go places with them, have meals with them, talk about stuff with them, and help them discover things about their faith that will equip them for the days ahead. When they’re ready, give them their mission, sending them out to the four corners of the earth to spread the word and recruit new followers.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper, pens, pencils
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- copy of “Travel Tips,” Attachment: Activity 8
- globe, world map, or road maps from local areas
- information resources on traveling, obtained from the Internet, such as <http://tinyurl.com/3smmttn>

Invite the group to describe their experiences of traveling. When all have had a chance to share, read Luke 10:1–11 and Mark 8:27–38. The first is Jesus’ instructions to disciples he sent on a mission; the second includes Jesus’ predictions of the hard times ahead, ending with the basic requirements to be a follower. Discuss how the one passage might connect with the other, and what Jesus’ relatively simple travel tips have to do with the very demanding directive to “deny yourself” or even “lose your life” in order to be part of Jesus’ team.

Talk about what it must have been like in those days for people to travel as these disciples were being asked to do. Invite the learners to be the organizers of a trip for disciples. How would they plan it? Have the group participate in a brainstorming session in which they share ideas and suggestions on how to do a “mission” trip in today’s world. These questions may help guide the discussion:

- How would you prepare the disciples?
- What are some critical things the disciples would need to know or learn?
- How should the disciples be equipped?
- What should they wear?
- What would they need to bring along?
- What kind of itinerary or travel schedule would you set up? Where would they be going?
- How would they get there?
- Where would they stay and with whom?
- How would they be guided by their faith to accomplish the job they were called to do?

They may use maps, travel tips, and whatever other resources they have available in order to put together this mission. But remind them that they’re more than just business-minded travel experts; they’re also people of faith who have a higher purpose guiding them.

After the youth have set up their travel plan, have them reflect on how it compares with Jesus’ advice. How would they be witnessing to their faith through the decisions they’ve made regarding travel arrangements? *What value is there in being a “model” or “example” to others by the way you choose to live your life, that is, how you travel on your own faith journey? How does this serve as a real life testimony to Jesus’ teachings?*



9 Family Tree

Leader preparation: Part of Jesus’ story, as told in Matthew 1:1–17, is a long list of his ancestors, dating back to David, Solomon, and even Abraham. Family trees look at the people, their plans, their passions, and their history so we can observe a process at work in which God’s Spirit is moving among them, creating something bigger than any one person can ever imagine. Out of that visions are born.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper, pens, pencils, markers
- a number of sheets of large poster board or oversized newsprint pads
- “A Family Tree of Faith,” Attachment: Activity 9

Ask the group to describe something about their family tree. What stories are they willing to tell about parents, grandparents, great-grandparents or other distant relatives? *Is there someone famous in your family tree? Does your family include a whole string of people in the same profession such as a multigeneration legacy of woodworkers, sales people, or teachers? If you don’t know of any patterns like that, what stories were passed down to you about your grandparents? Do you share any of their talents or interests? Are you “following in the footsteps” of a favorite aunt or uncle or other relative? Do any of you have nieces or nephews for whom you’d hope you could be a role model?*

Read Matthew 1:1–17, a record of Jesus’ genealogy. *How many names do you recognize? What does that tell you about Jesus? What do you think he may have inherited from some of these ancestors? How did his life serve as a witness to the lives of those who came before him?*

Using the poster board and writing supplies, have the participants brainstorm about how to create their “family tree of faith”—not a regular list of people’s names, but a picture of how faith has been guiding or working in their own family or a larger “family of faith” such as a church or other group. Use “A Family Tree of Faith” diagram as an example to follow. The questions provided can help guide the process. Encourage learners to take this home and continue the process with their family members.

Reflect

It takes a certain discipline to follow the example of someone you admire, or to find ways put into action ideas you’ve learned about your faith. What have you or the group members discovered about the requirements of discipleship? What about the rewards or advantages that come with it? In a world that often asks “What’s in it for me?” how have these activities helped to turn the concept around to an other-centered focus, inspired by Jesus’ own model that calls us instead to say “What can I do for you?” How did this experience help to clarify how “discipleship” is also a form of witness and testimony?

Attachment: Activity 6

Sample Job Descriptions for Teacher, Coach, Intern

Teacher

General Purpose: To plan, organize, and implement an instructional program in a learning environment that guides and encourages students to develop and fulfill their academic potential.

Main Job Tasks and Responsibilities

- plan, prepare, and deliver instructional activities that facilitate active learning experiences
- develop work and lesson plans
- establish and communicate clear objectives for all learning activities
- prepare classroom for class activities
- provide a variety of learning materials and resources for use in educational activities
- identify and select different instructional resources and methods to meet students' varying needs
- instruct and monitor students in the use of learning materials and equipment
- assign and grade class work, homework, tests, and assignments
- provide appropriate feedback on work, and encourage and monitor the progress of individual students
- maintain discipline in accordance with the rules and disciplinary systems of the school
- perform certain pastoral duties including but not limited to student support, counseling students with academic problems, and providing student encouragement

Education and Experience

- Bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited institution
- Meet professional teacher education requirements of school, district, state
- State certification
- Relevant teaching experience

Key Competencies

- self motivation
- high energy level
- verbal and written communication skills
- attention to detail
- high work standards
- problem solving
- decision making
- organizing and planning
- learning orientation
- critical thinking
- stress tolerance
- flexibility
- adaptability
- initiative

Attachment: Activity 6 (continued)

Sample Job Descriptions for Teacher, Coach, Intern

Athletic Coaches—Baseball

(From eHow: <http://tinyurl.com/3npwv9y>)

Coaching a sport like baseball has different requirements at every level of play. High school coaches are trying to teach fundamentals of the game and make sure that they are used. College coaches are demanding teachers and strategists who want their players to get better and also want to win. Pro coaches have to continue to develop talent but their jobs are dependent on their team winning.

High school coach: A high school coach must conduct tryouts for his or her team, organize a pitching staff, determine a starting lineup, and get involved in all the day-to-day particulars that impact the team. That includes putting together a schedule against other high school teams, arranging transportation for road games, hiring umpires for each home game, and establishing the rules of conduct for the players. The coach's bosses in the athletic department will help with the administrative tasks, but ultimately the coach must follow through to make sure those tasks are handled responsibly.

College Coach: A college coach has to recruit players who have enough ability to make the team and be successful. This means determining which high school players are good enough to make the team, going to their homes to talk to the players and their parents, and selling them on the school and getting them to commit to going to it and playing for the team. The coach needs to hire assistants to help run the team and coach the players. The coach needs to develop a game plan that includes the expectations from each player and the way a player must perform at practice.

Professional Coach: The coach at the professional level is not the boss on the field. That title goes to the manager. The coach will assist the manager at every level, and that includes working with individual players on their skills. This means having a fine eye that allows the coach to see the flaws in the players and a formula on how those players can correct those flaws. The coach must also stand in the coach's box outside of first and third base and give instructions to base runners. The coach will also have the responsibility of preparing scouting reports on upcoming opponents. The manager of the team will have a meeting before a new opponent comes to town, and a coach will give a report on the strengths and weaknesses of that opponent and how to handle them.

Types: At the professional level, there are hitting coaches, pitching coaches, bullpen coaches, bench coaches, and base running coaches. The hitting coach works with batters on their individual strengths and weaknesses. The pitching coach checks on the pitchers' health and what they can do to improve. The bullpen coaches work with relief pitchers and tries to make sure they are ready to pitch whenever they are called to come into the game. Bench coaches consult with the manager on in-game decisions. Base running coaches teach players how to get a lead, how to avoid a tag while sliding, and how to get up to top speed quickly.

Considerations: Most of the time, coaches are former players. Playing the game of baseball as a high school, college, or pro player gives an individual a perspective on the game that nonplayers won't have. Players may have more in common with coaches who have played the game. However, if a former player does not have the ability to communicate with and teach players, he or she will not be successful.

Attachment: Activity 6 (continued)

Sample Job Descriptions for Teacher, Coach, Intern (continued)

Intern

Mission Statement: To prepare students for entry into the world by providing a thorough understanding of the _____ functions of a _____ services organization to include theory and practical application of attained knowledge.

Program Objectives—Marketing/Sales

- Understand the needs of the small business and individual target markets.
- Learn how to apply marketing skills and tactics.
- Develop presentation skills.
- Learn marketing tracking techniques.
- Develop and coordinate firm-wide mailing campaigns.
- Understand and assist in the execution of event planning for clients and prospects.
- Understand the necessity of detailed market research.
- Report directly to the firm’s marketing director for additional marketing related duties.

Selection Criteria: Our goal for this intern training program is to establish a fundamental business foundation in these key areas:

- business management
- marketing and sales skill training
- product knowledge
- personal development
- team-based relationships, including mentorship

The marketing director will employ an assessment to help the student determine his/her level of competency in the marketing process and local campaign reviews on a regular basis.

Program Incentives

1. The primary incentive in this program is the opportunity to investigate a career opportunity in the _____ industry with hands-on experience prior to graduation. Once completed, the intern will have sufficient knowledge necessary to determine if a career in the _____

industry, or in a marketing role, is the right opportunity to pursue.

2. You will be participating in actual marketing campaigns, development, and rollout. Pre, present, and post activities of the campaign to include, but not be limited to, actual follow-up and tracking of the campaign results.
3. You will work closely with the marketing director to develop campaigns and effectively manage them within the firm.
4. You will develop skills vitally important in today’s business environment, including team-based interaction, the ability to manage outcome without having direct authority over others, and the capability to aid in the definition and the direction of local firms’ marketing initiatives.

Work Schedule

Your work schedule will include marketing sessions, training classes, and mentor sessions with your direct supervisor as well as other managers in the firm. You should expect to spend a minimum of 30 hours per week in the structured activities in our local office.

On-the-job training will occur daily at the direction of our local _____ department. The transition to the above model to provide practical application based on the attached marketing stage tool and the knowledge and skills learned beyond this point will be evaluated in conjunction with your onsite internship supervisor and school counselor.

Compensation

Although this internship is (paid or unpaid), we will work with the student and his/her school to assist the individual in receiving college credit. (Optional). A stipend, or reimbursement for expenses incurred on the student’s behalf may also be considered. (Company Name) offers many opportunities to increase your knowledge of business, personal development, and technology skills. This will benefit your growth at our firm, while giving you a good foundation for your entire career.

Attachment: Activity 7

Faith Café Menu

Menu of Servanthood and Discipleship Possibilities

Welcome to the Faith Café! In our desire to serve you, we've cooked up a delectable list of menu options that may help guide you in your selections. We hope you enjoy your dining and discipleship time with us, and we invite you to tell all your friends and neighbors about your experience.

Appetizers

Hospitality

- Preparing meals
- Cookies and baking
- Cleanup
- Table and chair setup
- Greeting and welcoming
- Special event coordination
- Programming
- Dinners for Eight
- Picnics

Creative Skills

- Calligraphy
- Arts and crafts
- Bulletin boards and displays
- Photography
- Sewing
- Quilting
- Dancing
- Aerobics

Entrees

Adult Discipleship

- Bible study
- Welcoming visitors and inquirers
- Small groups
- Lay ministry development
- Leadership training
- Men's ministries
- Mentoring new members
- Older adult fellowship
- Spreading the news
- Retreats
- Single adult ministry
- Stewardship
- Women's ministries

Adult Education

- Teacher, Sunday morning
- Teacher, weekday or evening

Mission and Outreach

- Community dinners
- Habitat for Humanity
- Twelve-step programs
- Food pantry
- Soup kitchen volunteer
- Family outreach
- Child care
- Emergency assistance
- Meals on Wheels
- Visiting newcomers
- Caring for outcasts
- Shelter/temporary housing
- Animal care/assist dogs

Justice and Peace

- Civic engagement
- Community development
- CROP walks
- Witness for Peace
- Overseas mission work
- Gender equality
- Workplace programs
- Immigration reform
- Peace Corps
- Media reform
- Volunteers in Service to America
- Inner city programs

Children and Youth

- Child care
- Sunday school teacher
- Vacation Bible School
- Recreation and outings
- Camping
- Plays and pageants
- Arts and crafts
- Confirmation classes
- Youth mentoring
- Middler events
- Senior high events
- Young adult (twenty-somethings)
- College program

Attachment: Activity 7 (continued)

Communications

- Publicity
- Website help
- Telephone chain
- Newsletter stories
- Photography
- Video or audiotaping
- PowerPoint presentations
- Social networking

Family Life

- Marriage enrichment
- Parenting support
- Young mothers group
- Adoption support
- Daycare or child care
- Family fun nights
- Discussion groups
- Parents' night out
- Household helper

Caregiving Ministries

- Grief and loss
- Flower delivery
- Visitor to homebound
- Hospital visitor
- Inactive member outreach
- Phone ministry
- Prayer chain
- Support groups
- Twelve-step programs
- Other

Sides

Building and Grounds Skills

- Carpentry
- Gardening/landscaping
- Painting
- General contracting
- Electrical
- Plumbing
- Heating
- Handicapped accessibility

Church Organization

- Committee member
- Recruiting and nominating
- Finance and bookkeeping

- Auditing
- Programming
- Stewardship Committee
- Trustees/Property Committee

Office Skills

- Answering phones
- Computer
- Mailings
- Publicity
- Filing
- Calendar/scheduling

Dessert

Music

- Senior Choir
- Children's Choir
- Play a musical instrument
(what type?) _____
- Talent show
- Liturgical dance
- Bell Choir
- Brass ensemble
- Guitar/drum/keyboard accompaniment

Sunday Worship

- Greeting and welcoming
- Announcements
- Bulletin preparation
- Audio/visual
- Communion preparation
- Flowers
- Friendship record collecting
- Scripture reading
- Storytelling
- Lay worship leadership
- Mission Moments
- Developing new worship services
- Creating name badges

Other Ministry Ideas (not listed above)

Attachment: Activity 8

Travel Tips for Domestic and Foreign Travel



* **Reserve early** With the large numbers of people traveling by air, particularly to resort and vacation areas, make your arrangements early. Flights and hotels are frequently booked up. So give your travel agent at least two or three months' time to arrange your trip.

* **Plan for rush hour** Peak travel times are usually from 10 am to 2 pm and 7 pm to 10 pm. Allow for delays during these times.

* **Save on air fares** You can save a considerable amount if you travel on off-days (usually Tuesday-Thursday) and at non-peak times (midnight through early morning). Check with your travel agent.

* **Passports** A valid, updated passport is required for most international travel. It's a good idea to apply for passports or renewals at least six weeks before departure. Some countries accept birth

certificates, voter's registration cards, or naturalization papers as proof of citizenship. For more information, contact diplomatic representatives of the particular country you plan to visit.

- * **Confirm your flight** Sometimes weather and the tremendous number of scheduled flights can cause delays. Call the airline for current information before leaving for the airport.
- * **Check in early** Try to arrive at the airport in more than sufficient time to make your flight. Sometimes airports or airlines can give you an estimate of how much time to allow, because of wait times for security checks. If you're unfamiliar with the airport, allow an extra half hour to deal with traffic, parking, check-in lines, etc. Airlines are not obligated to honor your confirmed reservation if you haven't boarded the plane 10 minutes prior to departure.
- * **Remember your luggage tags** All checked luggage should be identified with a luggage tag or other means. Include your name, address, and phone.
- * **Checked bags** Use sturdy, lockable suitcases. (Lock them before check-in). Unlock and inspect them for damage immediately on arrival at your destination.
- * **Keep these items with you** Car keys, medication, money, and important documents are a few things that should stay with you, rather than going into checked luggage (there's a chance they can get lost). Keep some small change, too, for phone calls, lockers, vending machines, and tips.
- * **Security checks** Go to the Transportation Security Administration website <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm> for tips on what items are prohibited as carry-ons, like sharp objects, sporting goods, guns and firearms, tools, martial arts and self defense items, explosive and flammable chemicals, other dangerous items, and toiletry or medicinal items that are liquids, gels, or aerosols. Worried about film? (Some film is more sensitive than others). Before entering a security checkpoint, transfer it from the camera bag to your pockets (it won't set off the alarm). Don't take gift-wrapped presents through security checks. Some machines may not reveal the exact contents, so you might have to unwrap the package.
- * **Carry-on items** Limit your carry-ons to what the airlines permit. Gate personnel may decide you have too much, causing you or your luggage to miss the flight. All carry-ons should be small enough to fit under the seat or in the overhead compartment.
- * **Travel items and cars** In some countries, items required for your personal or professional use can be brought in duty-free. The same applies to your private car (and any gas in the tank), providing you take it out with you when you leave.
- * **Travelers' checks** Rather than carrying cash, use traveler's checks. They're the best way to safeguard your money, since they're insured against theft. Keep a listing of check numbers in a separate wallet or pocket.
- * **Credit cards** Not all hotels, shops, or restaurants accept credit cards. Ask before making a purchase.
- * **Money exchanges** If you need to exchange foreign currency, you can usually find money exchanges at airports, border crossing points, major railroad stations, and large banks.
- * **Travel light** Pack just what you think you'll need. That way, you'll have room for bringing back things you purchase on your trip. Remember to put identification tags on all luggage, and include your home country in the address.
- * **Clothing tips** Care-free clothes are best . . . like synthetic knits, and quick-drying, wrinkle-free blends that you can rinse out quickly.

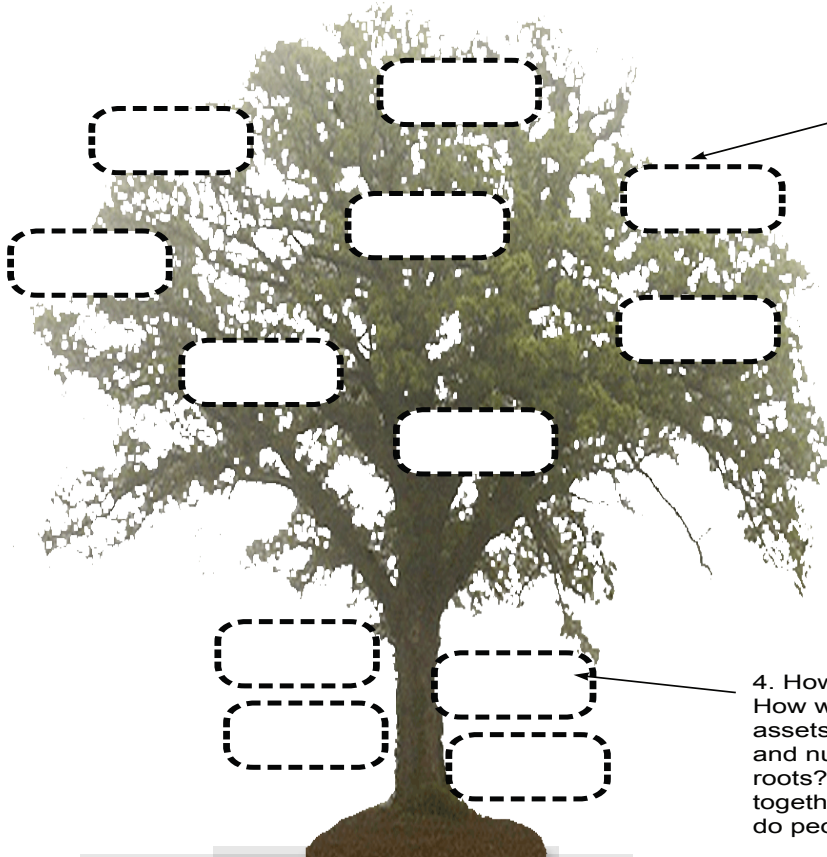


Attachment: Activity 9

A Family Tree of Faith



6. Who will be following in your footsteps? How will they carry on your vision? How do you communicate your hopes and dreams to them?

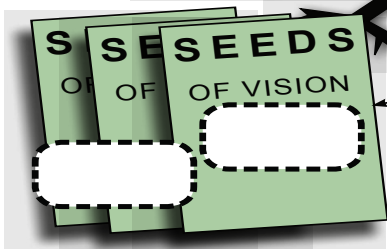


5. Branches, leaves and fruit: what are the ways the vision will become reality? What ministries, programs, activities, services, followers, etc., will be offshoots? What will you ultimately be harvesting?

4. How will the trunk function? How will it bring together the assets, common resources, and nutrition coming from the roots? What will draw people together? What kinds of things do people have in common?

3. What specific kinds of things will assure a good root system? People, funding, facilities, time—what else?

2. What talents, gifts, abilities, interests, characteristics, strengths, or group or community resources do you have to work with? What limitations or precautions are there?



1. **THE VISION:** What do you want to give birth to? What do you want to plant? What are your hopes and dreams?

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Since youth of this age are very concerned about how they appear to others, their own “identity” is a big focus—thinking about the roles they’ll play in the adult world, experimenting with different behaviors and activities, and trying to figure out where their lives are headed. Choosing personal beliefs can lead to conflict with adults over religious and political affiliations. Consequently, things like traditions are often called into question in big or small ways. What worked for their parents no longer works for them; expressions of faith are no exception. Some intentionally seek out new, unconventional, and even surprising or radical ways to talk about, practice, or illustrate their emerging beliefs.

About this Exploration

In addition to the witness of scripture, our faith story continues to be told through the holy and imperfect journey of the Christian church. From the day of Pentecost to the current day people have testified to God’s work in our lives and in the world. In this exploration, we will look at how the varied expressions of the Christian tradition over time and around the globe shape our testimony and witness today.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Isaiah 52:7-10
2 Peter 1:16-21

Leader Preparation

All of us have favorite songs, images, habits and routines. When working with youth, group leaders need to remember that having different tastes, even when they seem like polar opposites, is an opportunity for learning rather than a cause for conflict or misunderstanding. Helpful new ideas and concepts usually come about through a process of statement/counterstatement/synthesis—through the constructive interchange of opposing perspectives and their eventual “blending” together, much like a sweet-and-sour recipe. Agreement or conformity, on the other hand, typically leads to more of the same, which hinders growth and learning rather than encouraging it. In these activities try to remain open minded, knowing that through the expression of differences we create an opening for the Spirit to work with and among us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the rainbow of different people, ideas, and ways of expressing ourselves that have been an important part of your creation since the very beginning. Help us to see this diversity of gifts and viewpoints as a way to further showcase your greatness as we learn together how to appreciate the extremely wide variety of traditions people have used to express their faith. Guide us as we discover and explore new traditions that empower us to continue witnessing to your love for us shown to us through Jesus. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Prayer Books (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity the group will use some commonly available resources to compile a collection of prayers they can all use in their faith journeys. Whether the prayers share joys or pain, certainty or doubt, they are all a valid part of their experiences and have an important place in this prayer book. All the different ideas for prayers, both traditional and unconventional, will help in witnessing to an amazingly all-inclusive, loving God.

Check with your pastor or look in the church library for a book of prayers.

Supplies:

- Bibles—different versions, including some with contemporary language such as the Contemporary English Version (CEV), New Living Translation (NLT), or The Message
- a “Book of Prayer” or hymnal from your church or denomination that may offer examples of prayers and prayer language used in traditional worship services
- (optional) one or two contemporary-style prayers as an alternative to the traditional prayer language sometimes found in hymnals or books of worship
- paper, pens and pencils
- (optional) photocopier

Invite the group to read some passages from the psalms (Psalm 22, Psalm 51, Psalm 59, or others) as examples of prayers that the people of Israel offered. Talk about what the biblical writers asked for in their prayers and how they tried to communicate with God.

Look through the hymnal or other church resource that provides samples of prayers. If there are particular issues or subjects the youth would like to deal with, some of these materials may have ready-made written prayers for special concerns. Encourage them to rewrite, combine different prayers, or come up with their own variations, using language and phrases with which they are comfortable. Prayers don’t have to be formal, ponderous, or poetic; they can be as simple as an ordinary conversation with friends.

Invite them to read aloud their prayers. Collect the prayers, photocopy them (if possible), and talk about ways the youth could compile the prayers into a “published” form to share with one another or with others outside the group. They could even post their prayers in blogs, or share them via the Internet if they wish. By doing this, they will publicly witness to their belief in the power of prayer, as well as to the presence of a God who is such a vital and real part of their lives.

2 Imaging Our Faith Traditions

Leader preparation: If possible, dim the lights slightly and arrange votive lights around the room, especially near the Hopi Virgin artwork and the computer screen. Set up the poster in a central place so all can see. Put the computer (with speakers or audio playback) in a secondary place so the soundtrack of flute music can play softly in the background and the YouTube video can be visible, but not distracting.

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.

Supplies:

- small table, with a simple, decorative cloth covering (native American style, if available)
- votive candles, holders, and matches or lighter
- artwork: “Hopi Virgin and Child” by Fr. John Giuliani, <http://tinyurl.com-fo-uccr>
- computer(s) and access to Internet for YouTube video and music track, “The Hopi ‘LOST LANDS’ flute music by Michael Owens” <http://tinyurl.com/3j9jbdz>
- download or printout of Wikipedia and Wiktionary article on iconography <http://tinyurl.com/ql2oh>, and <http://tinyurl.com/3auomy2>
- definitions of “halo” and “holy” at <http://tinyurl.com/3gkf9vu>
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Offer a few brief words of introduction giving insights about images, icons, and church art as a form of tradition. Set the stage for what is to follow: an easygoing, casual, open-minded exchange of thoughts, feelings, ideas, and responses to the poster “Hopi Virgin and Child” in order to explore how nonverbal forms of communication (especially in the arts) may be a powerful tool for witness and testimony to our faith.

Invite the participants to get comfortable, seated on chairs, beanbags, or the floor. Prepare the group by inviting them to enter into a quiet meditation on the artwork for the period of time that the flute music plays, approximately 5½ minutes. This will be a more contemplative session, inviting the youth to share their thoughts and feelings, not only about the art and music, but also about faith traditions in general. The aim is to open discussion on how traditions such as art, music, prayer, and other forms of worship may be experienced in many different ways, in a variety of times and places, but that all of them are intended to help us express and witness to our faith to others.

Start the video and soundtrack, dim the lights, and invite everyone to focus first on the painting and its various colors, lines, shapes, symbols, and meanings, as well as the faces and expressions of the two subjects, the Virgin and Child. Guide the participants in considering the various aspects of the artwork, in a meditative or prayerful style. (For example: “Let your gaze meet the eyes of the Virgin, and connect with her thoughts, her concerns, her hopes and dreams ...”). Then encourage the participants to close their eyes and recall or imagine different parts of the picture, the impressions they had on viewing the icon, and the feelings that were inspired by the Native American subjects and the accompanying music. Ask them to think about how this icon looks somewhat different from other religious art with which they may be more familiar, especially icons that may be used in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Protestant churches.

After the video and flute music conclude, have the participants open their eyes and take a few moments to center themselves and become reaccustomed to their setting. Ask the participants what they think about the colors used or some other aspect of the painting. As the discussion continues, guide and encourage the group members in expressing their feelings and discoveries about the artwork.

What does having a Native American Virgin and Child say about the Christian faith? How does this help us to see ourselves in the “big picture” of the greater family of faith across the globe? How would an artistic approach like this one help us to understand one another better? How can art like this be an avenue for encouraging conversations with

people of other faith groups? What connections can you draw between this image and the stories in the Bible about new people and different nations being welcomed into the faith, as Christianity spread beyond its birthplace in Jesus' homeland?

Suggest to the group that traditions such as art can be a powerful form of non-verbal testimony to God's promises of radical inclusivity and love for all people.

③ Bring Many Songs

Leader preparation: Music has always been a key part of the Christian faith. Each generation finds inspiration in new words and melodies, new styles of musical expression. For each individual, different tastes are a big part of the picture as well. What may be very inspiring or meaningful for one person, in terms of faith message or musical approach, may totally miss the mark for another—but that doesn't make it any less important or necessary.

A week before this session, send a message to the participants inviting them to bring copies of their favorite "faith" songs. These could include hymns as well as songs that don't necessarily feature a literal or obvious reference to God or Jesus.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- hymnals of different churches (available from a church or pastor's library)
- CD player, MP3 and/or iPod player (including speakers and connecting cables)
- lyrics and/or sheet music of "Bring Many Names" by Brian Wren
- recording of "Bring Many Names" available at <http://tinyurl.com/3g35aym> and <http://tinyurl.com/beq43>
- (optional) keyboard, if a musician is available

Begin by singing "Bring Many Names" by Brian Wren. Have the participants talk about their impressions. What do they think of the song? How does the idea of a God with many different qualities, appearances, or names relate to them? What other images of God could they suggest? Why is it important to expand our ideas of faith, or our understanding of God, to include a wide variety of different ideas, concepts, and expressions—whether musically or verbally?

Invite the youth to share the songs they've brought. To allow enough time for all to participate, play only a portion of a song so there is time for conversation and feedback after each piece.

Additional questions to consider:

- What role does God play in the song?
- What faith messages are being communicated?
- Does the song serve to praise, comfort, provoke, encourage, inspire, explain, or motivate? How?
- What do you like most about this song? What do you like least?
- How effective do you think this song is in communicating the faith, or sharing witness and testimony with others?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 Lights, Candles, Action! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The symbol of light is a centuries-old tradition for the Christian church. The Gospel of John begins with an introduction of Jesus Christ that connects Christ's role with the power of light, saying his life was the "light" of all people and "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Supplies:

- Bible
- tea light candles
- matches or lighter
- fire extinguisher
- a heat resistant or fireproof surface (such as a large serving dish, hotplate, or potholder)
- information on the history, use, and symbolism of candles, obtained from the Internet: <http://tinyurl.com/39lll3> (see section on Candles and Religion) and <http://tinyurl.com/3o7pwv2>

Have the group enter a darkened room. Talk about how it feels to be in the dark. Ask them to share their thoughts, experiences, and memories regarding dark places—either literal dark places or "dark times" in their lives. *What would it have been like to have someone give you some needed hope, comfort, or reassuring words at those times? Could you compare it to "bringing some light into your life?" What kinds of "light" or help would you have appreciated receiving?*

Turn on the lights and continue the discussion by asking how it feels to be in the light. *What are things or experiences you might associate with light? When you watch movies or TV shows, how are light and dark used to express a viewpoint, create a mood, or depict a character? What kinds of scenes or activities are usually filmed in the shadows? Why is mystery associated with darkness, or light associated with power?*

Read aloud John 1:1–9, describing Jesus as the light of the world and 2 Peter 1:16–21, which mentions "a lamp shining in a dark place." Both scriptures witness to Christ's role in the world. What other passages can they recall where light is mentioned or is used as a very important part of the story?

Tell the group the history of the symbolism of light in the Christian faith. Include the use of candles, starting with their practical application in a time prior to electricity, and the symbolic use they were later associated with in certain faith traditions, especially their use at Christmas and Easter.

Dim the lights again. Distribute tea light candles to everyone, and introduce the closing devotion. They will each light a candle, and, as they do so, witness to God's presence by sharing a prayer with the group that ties into the idea of light as a symbol for something in their lives.

Before concluding the devotion, prayerfully offer a testimony to the collective faith of the group, asking God for inspiration on how to spread the word to others about the "light" that has come into everyone's life. In closing, mention that light serves as a symbol for the kind of witnessing we all do whenever we share the good news of Christ, bringing light to the dark places of this world. End the

prayer with a few moments of silence, an “Amen,” and then slowly get up and turn on the room lights.

5 The Tradition of Francis

Leader preparation: Throughout the centuries there have been countless individuals who have come to the forefront of the Christian faith, inspiring us and engaging us through their courageous example. One of these was a young man, the son of a rich cloth merchant in twelfth century Italy, who left his family and renounced his inheritance to set off on a very different journey of faith. He later became known as Francis of Assisi. Through his various experiences, such as nursing lepers, providing ministry to the poor, caring for animals, and starting a religious order that put his beliefs into practice, he challenged many of the faith traditions of his day in order to return to what he felt were the original teachings of Jesus. Many of these in his view had been forgotten, misunderstood, or undermined over the years, resulting in a church that had grown wealthy and powerful, but uncaring toward its followers.

Supplies:

- computer with Internet access and audio/video playback capabilities
- video projector (one larger computer monitor may be suitable for a small group)
- projection screen, large wall, or sheet that can be used as a projection surface
- room that can be darkened
- comfortable chairs
- background information on Francis of Assisi, <http://tinyurl.com/48kdws>
- 8-minute YouTube clip of “Brother Sun, Sister Moon,” showing Francis’ visit with the Pope, <http://tinyurl.com/42ujnfv>.

Share some background about Francis of Assisi from the resources. You might want to ask what details the youth know about Francis. Many churches, for example, hold an annual “Blessing of the Animals” tied into a celebration of St. Francis’ Day.

Talk about church traditions. *What are some traditions of which you’re aware? What are specific ceremonies, customs, songs, artwork, events, foods, often repeated words or expressions, or ways of praying, worshiping, or other actions and events connected with church? How important do you think they are to understanding Jesus’ teachings? If we didn’t have them, how much different, better, or worse, would the church be? How do they impact the day-to-day practice of our faith?*

Watch the YouTube clip from “Brother Sun, Sister Moon.” Have the youth pay particular attention to the grand, palatial setting; the garments of the members of the papal court; the various customs or traditions associated with the church of that era. *How do you suppose these traditions might have contradicted the ways of Jesus?*

What are your first impressions of this film clip? When Francis gives his speech about the larks needing only berries and water to be able to live and yet soar in the heavens, how would you compare that to the lives of human beings? How do you think that we can be “free” ourselves, like the birds, to enjoy God’s creation? When we think about traditions that make up our faith, do you think it’s possible to strip away a number of these to the bare necessities, the ones we really need? Would these help us to be “free”? What are some traditions that we could do without?

Have learners think about the stage of life that Francis was at in this movie. He was so young and innocent. The Pope noticed that and recalled that he, too, was once at that point—young, enthusiastic, full of energy and hope—until he took on bigger and bigger jobs in the church, which wore heavily on him. *Do you think that as you get older and have more responsibilities, you will also lose some of your joy of life? Can you envision being so worried about “doing it right” or handing on your faith so exactly, that you lose sight of what the faith is really all about? What is it about, in your opinion? What role do traditions play in the faith?*

At a couple of points near the end of the clip it seems as though Francis wanted to say one last thing to the Pope. *If you were writing the script, how do you think Francis might have wanted to finish his testimony? Was Francis’ very life a form of witness to all that God wants for each one of us? How can we incorporate that same kind of testimony into our lives?*



6 God for Everyone

Leader preparation: One key idea of our faith is that God sent Jesus Christ to live among us in order to show God’s love in a human or “incarnational” form. Some say that picturing Jesus, a Middle Eastern male of centuries ago, limits our understanding of God. Women, persons of other races and cultures, and even people of our modern times, may feel “left out” or unable to relate to a male God-figure who is so specifically and literally depicted through the art and writings of church traditions. By holding firm to a tradition that defines God in too narrow or particular a way, we could be unwittingly creating a major obstacle to learning about our faith.

Supplies:

- Bible
- computer with Internet access and sound playback capabilities
- CD, iPod, or MP3 player with speakers
- artwork: “The Adoration of the Kings” by Jan Brueghel, the Elder <http://tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR>
- lyrics (and music, if available) of the Joan Osborne song “One of Us” (you may purchase a copy of the song online from the iTunes store at <http://tinyurl.com/3srp99n>)
- access the music video from YouTube at <http://tinyurl.com/lstupt>
- prints of nontraditional images of Jesus, which can be found through a Google image search—try “female Jesus,” etc.; here are some examples: <http://tinyurl.com/3mmlynw>, <http://tinyurl.com/3wuskay>, <http://tinyurl.com/4xmda74>, <http://tinyurl.com/3hvs7br>, <http://tinyurl.com/4ylhost>
- cameras or cell phones that can be used to take pictures of group members, friends, or other people
- paper and drawing materials

Read aloud 2 Peter 1:16–21. Call attention to the last line that mentions “men and women,” whom the text seems to suggest are all equally moved by the Spirit of God. *What does this mean? Could you consider ours an “equal opportunity” faith? Do men and women get an equal chance to express their faith or become involved in church life? Why or why not? What examples can you offer of times when you felt there was (or wasn’t) equality? What about other races or cultures? Are they given “equal opportunity” in our faith? Why or why not?*

Turn your focus to “The Adoration of the Kings.” Have the youth look at the painting and offer initial impressions. Tell them the name of the painting and ask: *Who are the kings? Where are they pictured here? What ideas are suggested to you*

by the fact that this was supposed to be a depiction of Jesus' birth and the response to it by an entire village? Encourage them to look closely and pick out some of the details, the different people, their expressions, fashions, and so forth.

This painting appears to be reporting Jesus' birth as happening in the sixteenth century. *When did Jesus' birth occur, according to biblical accounts? Why do you think Brueghel chose a different time period? What message could he have been trying to communicate by this intentional demonstration of "artistic liberty"?*

Turn to Joan Osborne's song "One of Us." Ask the group: *What idea do you think was behind Joan Osborne's lyrics? How might you connect this with the traditional paintings or descriptions of God or Jesus? What do you think the word "incarnation" means? When we talk about "the Incarnation" or "an incarnational God," how would you define that? If we understand this as "something or someone that becomes flesh or assumes a physical body," how would you imagine God assuming human form? If we're all created in God's image, would God look like each of us? How would that change our opinion or expectations of God? How would that affect how we viewed one another, or how we treated one another? Would there be a big change? What kind? Why?*

Invite the group to let their imagination go wild and picture God in the flesh, in our midst. For those with cameras or cell phones, invite them to take pictures of themselves, their friends, or strangers on the street as a way of picturing how God could be here in any one of us and every one of us. Their pictures will be a very dramatic testimony to God's closeness and involvement in our human lives.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Good News Notes (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: From Old Testament times to the present, our faith has been more than just a word-heavy tradition that deals only in ideas and dreams. Our Jewish ancestors took their words and turned them into actual everyday practices like hospitality and charity, which helped them to be a blessing to other people. Christians followed in their footsteps and found new ways to turn their visions of faith into reality by feeding the hungry, healing the sick, housing the homeless, caring for the outcasts, offering hope to the hopeless and bringing peace to a troubled world. The power of the words that serve as a foundation of our faith lies in their infinite potential to stimulate action on so many different fronts.

Supplies:

- Bible
- copy of the Wikipedia article "Social Gospel," <http://tinyurl.com/3vxqkdv>
- plain paper, pens and pencils
- packs of blank stationery or note cards with envelopes
- samples of "Care Notes" from a church, hospital, social service agency, or other organization, or see a sample at <http://onecaringplace.com>
- a list of actual "care" providers in the nearby area, such as churches, nursing homes, hospitals, social service agencies, child-care providers

Read aloud Isaiah 52:7–10 in a dramatic or very enthusiastic style. Explore what the text says. Using the information from Wikipedia, talk briefly about the Christian movement called the "Social Gospel," which focuses on starting organizations that strive to deal with problems such as social injustice, inequality, poverty, and poor schools, to name a few.

Introduce the group to the idea of “Care Notes,” which started as a way to provide helpful words of comfort, advice, and encouragement on a personal level to people experiencing all sorts of challenges. Today, there are numerous different Care Notes available on practically every subject. While many of these are very professional in wording and appearance, the thoughts behind them can be quite simple. Another variation of this can be a short personal note or letter, which can either take the same approach, or a letter of praise or encouragement.

Have the participants brainstorm for a few moments about people, groups, organizations, or causes they think could use encouragement or “good news.” *What kind of good news should it be? What messages could you create specifically for them that would inspire, comfort, or help? What do you think the recipients of your message might like to hear?* After the group finishes drafting their messages, encourage them to put the messages into finished form so that they can actually serve as a faith witness to the outside community, letting others know of their interest and concern. Have them rewrite the messages on stationery or note paper, and then make arrangements to deliver or send them to the individuals or groups they’ve chosen to receive their “good news.”

8 Old Houses to New Spaces

Leader preparation: One way Christian tradition has been expressed is through buildings and architecture. Although the origins of the faith go back to times when Jesus literally didn’t have a roof over his head—or the early days of the church when small congregations met in “house churches”—the modern church has placed a great deal of focus on creating buildings that try to symbolize the nature of God or heaven. Church buildings have been intentionally designed to communicate who their congregations are and how they practice the faith. With styles that range from simple and humble to majestic and stately, houses of worship have both a practical function as a place for people to gather and a symbolic function as another type of tradition, which can have both pros and cons.

Supplies:

- Bible
- computer with Internet access
- paper, pens and pencils
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- resources on the history of houses of worship, <http://tinyurl.com/3qc3cco>, <http://tinyurl.com/3e32rhq>, <http://tinyurl.com/3o5ujzp>, <http://tinyurl.com/3cazjuw>, <http://tinyurl.com/3ojzx5n>, <http://tinyurl.com/yjhb2z>, <http://tinyurl.com/qhxnkw> (see section on “Mobile vanguard”), <http://tinyurl.com/2fvnju>, <http://tinyurl.com/gwcu2>
- resources on church floor plans, <http://tinyurl.com/4x4xj4t>, <http://tinyurl.com/3plt3gr>

Using the various Internet resources as background information, have the group briefly explore the early Israelites’ belief of God not having a “permanent” home except for a Tabernacle or Ark of the Covenant that was carried to different destinations. *Why do you suppose the Israelites didn’t choose to build permanent structures at this time? When was the Ark finally given a more permanent “home”? Who was the leader responsible? (Read 1 Kings 8:14–30 to see what the Bible says about this event in Israel’s history). Do you think Solomon believe that God could really be contained in a house built by human hands? Why or why not?*

Discuss the roles of the temple and synagogue. Note that having a permanent synagogue or a specific building as a “consecrated space” was still not the norm. Back then the only requirement for worship was to have ten Jewish faithful pres-

ent (see the Wikipedia article on Synagogue, especially the introduction and the section on Origins). *How does this compare with Christian understandings? Do we feel that worship needs to take place in a church building? What does this say about how we feel about God?*

Talk about church buildings. *What are some similarities and differences? With what different types of churches have you had experience? What did they look like, outside and inside? What did you either like about them or find challenging? In what ways do different aspects of a church's appearance or layout affect how people relate or worship together within that space? Give examples of a particular church building you know of, and how that congregation does certain things well because of how the building is designed. For help talking about church interiors, see the two website resources on church floor plans.*

Invite the group to brainstorm about how they would design a “church of the future.” Encourage them to write or draw their ideas and talk about them. *What would you include in the church? Where would you locate it? What do you consider to be most important, and how would you arrange the floor plan or layout to emphasize that? What might you add that we don't normally see in most traditional churches?*

How would you do church differently from what's been done up to now? What does that say about how you feel about your faith? Is a church building really “God's house”? Why or why not? If not, what would we need to do to change that? What kind of testimony does a church's appearance give to people who have no idea what goes on inside? What message do we want to share with the world about our purpose or mission through the architecture? How can we best use our church buildings to symbolically witness to the good news and love that awaits all who enter them?

Reflect

With as many different traditions as there are in the Christian faith, there are more than ample ways to express the diverse understandings of God to be found in the four corners of the earth (to which the early disciples were sent.) Today, as a result of this rich heritage, we recognize that no single group (and no one tradition) can possibly represent all there is to be known or experienced about our faith. Through these various activities, how have you or the group expanded your appreciation for the many-faceted approaches to witness and testimony that Christianity has developed over the centuries? What traditions were strange or surprising? Which ones were familiar and comfortable? What new messages did you take in? What were some of the memorable highlights of these activities? How have these helped you to be open to new ways of witnessing and testimony?

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Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

For this age group, faith needs to be relevant and interactive. Worship, mission, and other practices need to allow for genuine and free expression of faith. Helping this age group learn about their faith comes with the necessity of allowing freedom of expression, which means being open to a full range of questions even when they might challenge our beliefs. These young people are building a faith that is their own. Whatever mission they see as theirs will grow out of the context of this very genuine faith.

About this Exploration

We live in circles of context, one of the richest of which is the local church. This Exploration investigates webs of relationships that call us beyond family, workplace, congregation or community out to a mission of sharing and listening with all people. Testimony can be a tool for building justice when we engage in dialogue beyond our usual circles. The body of Christ is strengthened when our witnessing is intertwined with those whose situations are vastly different from our own.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Matthew 5:13–20

Romans 8:31–39

Leader Preparation

Illustrating the concept of context can be rather difficult initially. Yet, as one discovers approaches that actually connect with the world of today's young people, the task becomes increasingly easier. "Aha!" moments turn into realizations that propel them onward into the next phase, connecting their personal, inward faith with outward expressions that help other human beings. In a sense, everything is personal—the common denominator is the relationship we have with others, which drives how, when, where, and why we do mission. Identifying the local settings or "context" in which we find ourselves can be a big factor in determining the directions open to us; then the possibilities somehow multiply miraculously, surprising us with a variety of new ideas and different mission fields.

Prayer: Dear God, you've constantly amazed us with your creation. You've been there when we've expressed our concerns or worries; and you've even helped us when we hit a brick wall thinking that we have nowhere to go. When you reveal to us the ways that everything is interconnected and interrelated, we gain a new appreciation for your plan. Guide us as we discover new paths to help others in both familiar places and places we've never been before. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Sandwich Makings (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Everything that happens in the world has a context—a specific setting, the particular circumstances surrounding it, people who are the players, a history preceding the event, and the rippling effects that will be felt by others in the days and years ahead. The expression of faith is no different. A historic incident such as the Apostle Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus was a turning point for Christianity that still has an impact centuries later. But had it occurred in another time and place or involved a different person, would our faith be the same today? Likewise, our own faith journeys are also affected by a variety of factors that can lead in all sorts of alternative directions. Thankfully, we also know that whichever path we choose, God is working in the background finding ways to support or guide us even though we might not have selected the best or most direct route.

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Sandwich Diagram," Attachment: Activity 1

Invite the group to describe how to make a sandwich. Perhaps they've ordered a sandwich from Subway or Penn Station or a similar sandwich shop, or perhaps some of them even work at such a place. *What are some ingredients you've put on your sandwiches? Do you always use the same ones? What seasonings do you use? If you were making the sandwich for someone else, how would that person's tastes influence how the sandwich is made?*

Read Matthew 5:13–20. *What do you suppose Jesus means when he tells the disciples they are the "salt of the earth"? What could be meant by the statement about salt losing its taste? If he was comparing his disciples to "salt," what happens when one loses his or her "saltiness"? How does that affect our ability to work with or have an impact on others? When we talk about sandwiches, what does salt do? If you leave it out, how will the sandwich taste? Would you still want it? Explain that this is an example of context. Every single ingredient helps determine the appeal of a sandwich to a specific customer in a certain place . . . or the effectiveness of a message in reaching a particular audience.*

Show the group the sandwich layer diagram as a visual illustration of context. *What essential elements are present in every situation? What are the add-ons, the options, the dressings that customize it to a particular person or group? Compare that to other situations, such as mission opportunities. How would you customize your "sandwich" to the context of the specific mission and the people that the mission would serve? What would be the "meat" or "cheese"—and what would be the other ingredients? For example, if the mission is to provide aid kits for people in emergency shelters, what are basic needs for which certain items would be the "meat," like soap or shampoo? What are the extras? How might this change in different locales? Think about climate and how that changes the "ingredients."*

Using the same diagram, have learners think about the mission of "spreading the word." *For example, come up with a particular segment of the population that you'd like to reach with an antiviolence message. How would you do so? What context would you be working with? Where do the people live? Describe their lifestyles. What kinds of violence do they face in their daily lives? What's the best way to reach them—newspaper, radio, TV, music, posters? What's the message? What would the "meat" of it be, and what would be the "extras"? Who needs to deliver the message? Who would be appropriate for*

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.

that particular community or setting? What other “toppings” would be helpful, to do the job as well as possible?

Ask: Where is God in all of this? How do you feel the Spirit leading you in your consideration of different contexts, messages, missions, and resources? While engaging in mission is an excellent way of witnessing to our faith, it needs to go hand in hand with an understanding of what specific circumstances are part of the original problem. A true testimony to Jesus’ example of caring for others is not complete unless it includes both the core act of compassion as well as a genuine sensitivity to the situation surrounding or creating the need.

2 Paper Chain

Leader preparation: The Apostle Paul once compared the church to a human body (1 Corinthians 12:12–31), suggesting that there were many parts, all of them interconnected and interdependent. He was referring to the church as he knew it, in his time. However, the same can be said today, as we consider the many different places our faith can be observed in action, the diverse denominations and congregations, the thousands of ways the faith has been expressed through word, song, sacrament, social action, fellowship, and spiritual practices. When we talk about the context of our faith, we need to be aware of this incredibly vast “body” that is so large and so complex that one small group of individuals at first glance seems to play such a minor part. Yet, in the “big picture,” each of us actually plays a really important, indispensable role.

Supplies:

- Bible
- a ream of paper, with sheets cut into strips 2 1/8' x 11" to make individual links (cut up as many as you think you'll need for the time you have available)
- pens or markers
- staplers
- telephone directory (for finding lists of churches or other faith-related organizations)
- world atlas or globe (for finding names of countries where there are Christian churches)
- roadmaps of local or state areas (for finding names of communities where churches are located)
- computer with Internet access
- list of Christian denominations: <http://tinyurl.com/4yguzmy>
- lists of faith-related social service, social justice, or human services organizations: <http://tinyurl.com/3e498uo>, <http://tinyurl.com/3bgh5bt>

Have the group read from Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth the passage describing the body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. Chat briefly about their impressions: *What does this text mean? How would you interpret Paul’s words in the context of your life or today’s world? Paul mentions a few specific examples of parts of the “church body.” What are other examples?*

Read aloud Matthew 5:13–20 referring to Jesus’ followers. It calls them “the light of the world.” *What does this mean? What kind of light do they shed for the world? What do you suppose they are being asked to do? What specific roles or missions can you think of, in which they will let their “light shine before others”? How is this an example of offering personal testimony?*

Discuss how the worldwide church includes such an amazing variety of congregations, denominations, social service organizations, health-care institutions, ministries, schools, and colleges, and other “parts” of the body. *What are a few “parts” that you can identify for starters? What’s a good example of a “head” or “brain”? What are a few other “parts”? What about organizations that function like a “heart”? Or like the “voice”?*

Introduce the idea of the paper chain as a visual way of showing how all of these parts are interconnected. Bring out the supplies. Have the group write on each link the name of one “part” of the body. As they complete a link, staple it to the others.

When the chain is as finished as it can be at the end of the activity, add one last link: the names of your own group members written on one link. Note that there are obviously many more links that could be added, given more time. Conclude with a few moments of silence, then a prayer thanking God for the many different parts of the worldwide Christian body, asking that we take with us our knowledge of how big and interconnected this body is. Emphasize that no matter how large or widespread the church is, each of us as an individual is an important part of this body too, with special gifts and abilities that we offer as our own personal testimony to the continuing global mission of the Christian faith.

If the group desires, display the chain or share it with others in a church service or community gathering as part of a “mission moment” that asks for acknowledgment of and prayers for the worldwide body of Christ.

Salt Tune

Leader preparation: The words from Matthew 5:13–20, telling the disciples that they are like the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world,” are a poetic way of witnessing to the role of Christian followers in the world. This text becomes even more powerful when performed with music. Some describe singing hymns as “praying twice” because of this mysterious potential to amplify and enliven otherwise ordinary words on a page. Of course, when a group of people join together, blending their voices in harmony, the experience becomes that much more amazing—suggestive perhaps of Jesus’ promise “when two or three are gathered in my name, there am I.”

Supplies:

- Bible
- computer with Internet access, audio playback capabilities, and speakers
- song “You Are Salt for the Earth, O People” (tune: Bring Forth, irr. with refrain) <http://tinyurl.com/fp-salt>
- (optional) keyboard if a musician is available to play the accompaniment

Ask one person from the group to read aloud Matthew 5:13–20. Talk about what the text means and how it might have connections to their lives, to the church, or to the world in which they live. *How might it apply to your personal faith journey? What does the symbol of salt mean for you? In what ways might you be “salt” or “light” for the community in which you live? How can you envision yourselves not hiding your own light under a bushel, and instead witnessing to God’s amazing gifts of life, hope, and love?*

Have another individual read the lyrics for the first verse of the song, then have another take a turn with the lyrics for the second verse, and so on. After all verses have been read, have two people read the first verse in unison, then have the en-

the group read the same verse again.

Now introduce the music. Either play the accompaniment on a piano or keyboard, or use the downloaded “karaoke” music track so the group can sing along. Have them sing the entire song this way once; then have them do it again.

Invite them to reflect on how they experienced the Matthew passage differently as they went from original scripture reading to spoken lyrics and finally to everyone joining together in singing the hymn. *Did you feel a growing energy or power as more voices were added or as music was introduced? What was that like? In what other ways might this kind of “power” be harnessed to help tell the messages or stories of the Bible? How can music serve as a type of “mission” to others who may be outside your community of faith? What kind of testimony does it provide about God’s ability to use opportunities like this to reach out to people in an ever-growing movement to spread God’s good news?*

Conclude the activity with one final round of the group singing the entire song to the music accompaniment.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Walking and Talking (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The very surroundings in which we live, eat, sleep, play, and relate can be an important influence on how we actually witness to our faith. Jesus knew that; he used the rural settings around Galilee to share messages that connected with the people of that region. Stories about birds of the air, planting seeds, vineyards, sharing bread and fish, and similar subjects provided the perfect “ice breaker” for talking about God.

Supplies:

- notepads, pens and pencils
- (optional) cell phones with camera function

Prepare the group to take a walk together around the neighborhood as a way of discovering opportunities to engage in faith exploration, using the ordinary, commonplace objects, places, people, and creatures of their daily lives. Invite them to observe their surroundings, their local “context,” in order to spark ideas about how God plays a role in using that locale to help us practice our faith, spread the good news, and offer care to others all around us. Whether the setting is urban or suburban, rural or big city, there are countless ways to discern God’s promises and then witness to God’s hand in shaping our own “testimony” in order to fit our community. Mention that Jesus used stories that connected intimately with the people and places of his area, particularly his reliance on ordinary objects and situations that related to a rural lifestyle.

Depending on the size of the group, you may want to divide into subgroups of five or six, with someone in each tagged as a “conversation leader.” *The ground rules are simple: walk silently at first, looking all around you and taking notice of things both natural and manufactured. Take time to imagine how all these things came about, how they’re used (for both positive and negative purposes), and how it might be possible to find a connection to one’s faith in them.*

After a short while have the walkers talk about what they see. Encourage them to share spontaneous comments, memories, “what-if” hopes and dreams, potential stories that someone could tell about his or her surroundings to help others understand that world, and even questions or concerns about faith triggered by situations the group happens to witness on their “walkabout.” Some who have cell phones with cameras might even wish to snap pictures of things they witness on the walk.

These or similar questions might spark this activity:

- What do you see around you that reminds you of God’s promises?
- How do we know that these came about through God’s presence in the world?
- What do we see that might create doubts or concerns about God’s presence?

Gather together after your walk and discuss your observations.

5 Faith in the News

Leader preparation: Several people have written versions of “A Prayer on Watching the Evening News.” The stories in the news can sometimes be a very discouraging part of our day. We often wonder where God is in all of this. What can our faith tell us about the uncertain state of the world? How do we see God and our own role in the context of the events around us?

This activity may help participants explore those very questions. By intentionally collecting, selecting, and dissecting the news stories of the day and then looking for a faith connection to the stories, they’ll discover how to “discern” where God may be in the disasters, in the doom and gloom that seem to greet us everywhere we turn.

Supplies:

- Bible
- newspapers and magazines with a variety of recent news stories that can be clipped
- poster boards
- scissors
- tape, glue, paste, or other means of attaching the clippings to the poster board
- paper, pen, and pencils
- 8½” x 11” paper halved, quartered, and halved again into small rectangles of 4¼” x 2¾”, each containing a single Christian expression such as faith, hope, love, charity, peace, justice, forgiveness, healing, new life, rebirth, reconciliation, stewardship, mission, ministry, hospitality, praise; these slips are to be folded so the words are hidden and handed out at random to the participants in the group before they begin looking through the news stories.

Talk with the group about some recent news events. What stories caught their interest? What is it about a particular event that they want to know more about? Are these stories mostly good news or bad? If they were in charge of a TV newscast, webpage, or newspaper, what kind of stories would they like to see more of?

Read together Romans 8:31–39, in which Paul says, “If God is for us, who is against us?” Use this text to set the stage for an investigation of news stories

that illustrate some of the hardships, distress, and perils that confront us in this world. Point out that, as Paul witnesses, nothing in all of creation is so bad that it can take away God's love or God's working behind the scenes to reverse incidents of injustice or unfairness.

Give each person one slip of paper. These are some of God's promises for all of us in this world. The group's job is to go on a "scavenger hunt," searching for examples of what is listed on each one's piece of paper in recent news stories. Explain that this doesn't mean that they're only looking for a story in which love literally conquers all, or in which two feuding neighbors are finally reconciled after years of animosity. Rather, they need to look at all the stories with some degree of imagination. If there is no positive spin to the article, encourage them to think of what "new" ending they might want to write themselves, revealing how someone responded to the story with an offer of help or support. *In God's mysterious plan, how might there be a new development that brings triumph out of tragedy, or healing out of hurt?*

When reading the news items, search for:

- Does the story already contain some hint of God's good news?
- Is there some potential for an unreported, behind-the-scenes response to the story that might already be happening, such as a neighbor coming to the aid of a crime victim, or someone organizing to help out with some tragedy or disaster?
- Where and how is God at work in the story?

Can they witness to how God may be working through us or with us? As Paul writes, if we can uncover this, then we'll know that nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God.

Distribute the newspapers and magazines. Invite the group to clip out articles and paste them to the poster board. Encourage all the members of the group to contribute ideas on how they feel God might be working in a particular story. The group may wish to add notes or markings of their own in the margins of the stories, or on the poster boards, offering a short message on some good news "they would like to pray for in connection with a particular story.



6 Color My Faith

Leader preparation: When God created the world in all its amazing diversity, the infinite rainbow of colors was part of the divine design. As a vivid witness to our faith, this rainbow reminds us that there are many ways of understanding God, or worshiping, or even viewing the world. In the context of this multihued, multifaceted creation, we also realize that our different perspectives, which can be affected by color, are ever changing and fluid, and that this is a quite normal part of the daily process of life—or faith, for that matter.

Supplies:

- Bible
- copy of *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss (available from a local library as either a children's book or a video)
- (optional) video playback equipment if *My Many Colored Days* is shown on video
- white cardboard or lightweight poster board (should be thin enough to cut easily with scissors)
- scissors

- two different-sized circle “templates,” which could be 7” and 8½” diameter dinner plates, for tracing circles on the cardboard
- pens, pencils, a full set of color markers of different colors
- brass fasteners
- copies or printouts of resources from the Internet explaining color theory, color meanings, etc.: <http://tinyurl.com/34th8a>, <http://tinyurl.com/4yvf6x3>
- “Sample Color Wheel,” Attachment: Activity 6

Ask the group members to identify their favorite colors, and tell why they like them. Ask if they happen to know the two places in the Bible where a rainbow is mentioned. (The ending of the flood story, Genesis 9:12–17, and a vision described in Revelation 4:3). Read Revelation 4:3–8 to the group. Discuss what kind of a scene is being portrayed. Ask: *How would you describe the mood or the atmosphere? If you could associate specific colors with this scene, what would they be and why?*

Have the participants take turns reading one page each from the Dr. Seuss book *My Many Colored Days*. As an alternative, show the video. Discuss what this story tells the youth about how color is viewed or interpreted. *Do different colors determine how you're feeling or go along with what you're experiencing? How?* Ask how their moods change day by day, or hour by hour, along with their associations with “color.” Introduce some of the color meanings and associations described in the Internet materials.

Invite the group to create their individual “color wheels” according to their favorite color preferences and priorities. Have them pick seven colors for the pie slices, filling the inner circle. On the outer circle, write words such as hope, charity, peace, love, faith, justice, courage, joy, or other gifts of the Spirit that are meaningful to them. Fasten the two circles together with a brass fastener in the center.

The placement of the particular colors on the wheel is entirely up to them—as are the words. Encourage them to be creative—*Where do you think the colors should go? Where should the words be placed?* Point out that depending on how they’re feeling in a day, they’ll be able to rotate the wheel so a given color corresponds with one of the words. For example, if they’re in a blue mood they might want to move the blue to match up with hope, since they would like to ask God for the gift of hope at this time in their life. If the Spirit is moving in them (and the Spirit is often associated with red), they could move the red to match up with charity, since they are being inspired to do something for their world, perhaps some mission activity. In this way the color wheel can function as a sort of prayer aid or spiritual practice.

Some final questions for reflection:

- How does your appreciation of color serve as a personal testimony to our gifts of many moods, feelings, and interactions with God’s world?
- How can we apply these gifts to some type of mission that benefits the world?
- How does our faith guide us in the use of color that witnesses to the infinite diversity and tremendous possibilities in God’s amazing creation?

Sending & Serving Activities

 7 Mission Calendar (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The element of time is another context that plays a role in how (and when) mission is done. It's all too common to rush ahead and try to offer a ministry to someone before everything is ready or before obtaining a clear understanding of the person's needs and concerns. Mission experts often advise establishing relationships first, discovering more about a person's or group's situation, and then finding ways to provide help. Timing is critical in this regard. In addition, setting up plans and schedules (also related to time) can be helpful not only in terms of taking the first steps in making a particular faith commitment, but also staying on track in a very busy, hectic environment. While it's true that our faith doesn't follow the ways of this world, it needs to function alongside cultural considerations, limitations, and other examples of world-influenced context.

Supplies:

- Bible
- legal pads or another type of notepad
- pencils
- a calendar
- dictionary
- (optional) information on "mission," including general definitions:
<http://tinyurl.com/3l62b3e>, <http://tinyurl.com/3vgbv4s>, <http://tinyurl.com/3gdo3dk>

Invite the group to define the word "mission." After they've shared a few ideas, read the definitions obtained from your sources. One of the roots of the word "mission" means "to send." *How does this help explain what a mission is or describe the role of a missionary? We know of the account in the Bible where Jesus sent his disciples out. What did he want them to do?* Have the group read Matthew 9:35–10:1 and Matthew 25:35–40, which list some of the jobs Jesus gave them.

Give the group their own "mission" to create a 30-day mission calendar that lists a variety of different possibilities for local mission work that they can do either as individuals or as a group. By drafting a calendar, they'll be making an actual commitment to put their faith to work.

Begin by encouraging them to think about their neighborhoods and the local surrounding communities. *What are some of the problems, needs, concerns, or opportunities you're aware of in their area? What organizations need help or volunteers? What particular talents, gifts, or interests do you have that might tie in with some of the needs?* Some examples you might suggest are reading to the elderly, volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club, or working at an animal shelter.

Once they have a list, write the names and locations on a 30-day calendar and make copies for all the members of the group. The idea is that they can look at their calendar each day and make a conscious decision to go out and engage in some kind of mission work, either by themselves or with other members of their group. After the 30 days have passed, they can even create a whole new calendar to continue their missions beyond the original period. *How does doing mission work today make you feel like you're following in the footsteps of Jesus' disciples, who were sent out to do similar work centuries ago? How are you offering a personal testimony of your faith through their decision to do mission work?*



8 Labyrinth Making

Leader preparation: Labyrinths aren't exclusive to Christianity. They date back over 4,000 years to ancient Greece. In past centuries they provided Christians who were not able to travel to the Holy Lands a simpler, local substitute for a symbolic spiritual "pilgrimage" that illustrated the challenging, mysterious path toward enlightenment. Today, labyrinths are experiencing a revival as people find new use for them in faith practices for both groups and personal meditation. As a different form of "context" or "mission," a labyrinth offers a variety of symbolic possibilities that not only speak to the idea of moving beyond the conventional "circles" of our local community's very particular needs and concerns, but also the need to share our discoveries, our newly gained insights about finding our way "out" to new places for giving witness and testimony.

Supplies:

- computers with Internet access
- paper, pens, pencils, markers, art supplies
- large poster boards for drawing and designing
- resources for general background information on labyrinths and labyrinth building: <http://tinyurl.com/3atxbu>, <http://tinyurl.com/3ftyt3c>, <http://tinyurl.com/3gnka3h>
- "Sample Finger Labyrinths," Attachment: Activity 8

Share some of the background and uses of labyrinths from the information you found from the Internet links provided. Ask if any of the participants have walked a maze (maybe at Halloween), a labyrinth, or a "funhouse" attraction in an amusement park. *What was the experience like?* Explain that a labyrinth, unlike a maze, is meant to bring a person to understanding, not to confuse him or her.

Distribute copies of the sample finger labyrinths and invite the participants to use one of the designs in the group setting. It is recommended that they use their nondominant hand (the one they don't write with). Have them slowly trace the path to the center with a finger, rest in the center, then slowly trace the path back out.

Have the participants take time (about a quarter of the total session) to draw up some plans for their own personal labyrinths. Provide hard copies of some of the labyrinth plans available from the Internet as idea-starters. Encourage learners to take home their labyrinths to use as a meditative tool to help them understand their testimony and what it means for their community.

9 Tests of Faith

Leader preparation: Often our testimony is muted because we may feel uncomfortable talking about issues of faith in certain situations. If we understand that our testimony is more about witnessing to what we believe than trying to convince another to believe like we do, it helps free us from the fear that might hinder us. The topics listed below are difficult, so be prepared to provide a safe environment where participants can share their beliefs

Supplies:

- three pieces of paper, each containing one of these words: Yes, definitely; Absolutely NOT; Maybe/maybe not
- tape

Place the “Yes, definitely” and “Absolutely NOT” posters at opposite ends of the room and the “Maybe/maybe not” in the middle. Explain that the group is going to practice testimony. Remind the participants that this is not a time to try to convince others they are right, but rather it is a time for sharing their deep beliefs and listening to the beliefs of others. As you read each of the following statements, ask the participants to place themselves somewhere on the continuum. If they don’t feel strongly one way or the other, they would belong somewhere in between. After everyone has placed him- or herself on the continuum, invite each to tell why he or she chose that spot. Spend time at the end of the exercise talking about what it was like to share and listen to one another’s beliefs.

- The world was created in seven days exactly as it is stated in Genesis 1.
- The story of Noah and the ark didn’t actually happen.
- Jesus is the son of God.
- People who don’t believe in Jesus will go to hell.
- You can’t be a Christian and be pro-choice.
- People who murder should be put to death because the Bible says, “an eye for an eye.”
- The Ten Commandments should be posted in every public building.

Reflect

Like a painting in a beautiful frame, or a diamond in an exquisite setting, our faith can be a shining beacon of light when we find ways to connect both faces and places—actual people, needs, concerns, and the stuff of “relationship,” which exists side by side with the practical jobs, services, programs, and activities of “mission” in a very specific setting or “context.” How have these activities helped give a better picture of how context and mission need to be part and parcel of the same process? What new understandings of testimony came out of these experiences? What were some highlights of these activities for you and the group?

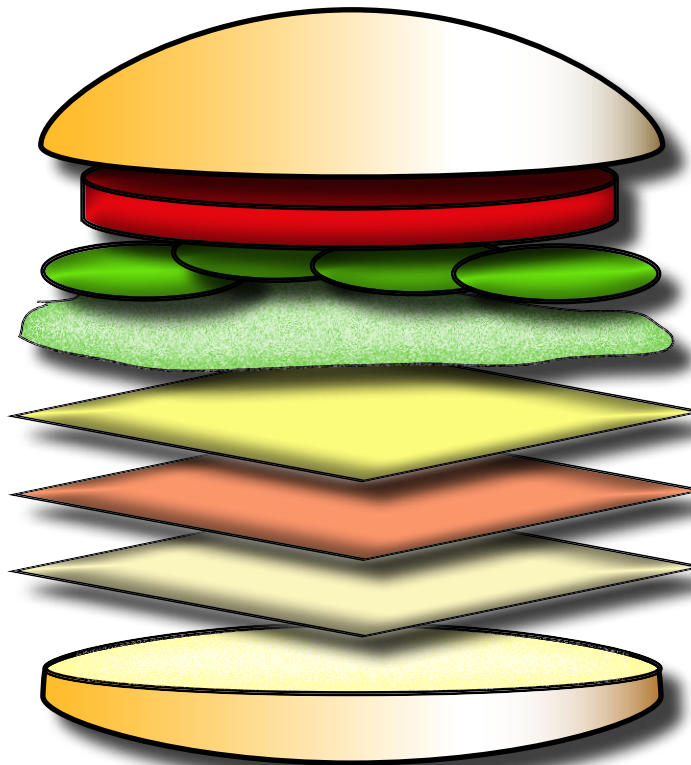
Sandwich Diagram

CONTEXT
(bun)

EXTRAS
(toppings,
dressings)

ESSENTIALS
OR BASICS
(meat/protein)

CONTEXT



CONTEXT
(population/
audience/setting)

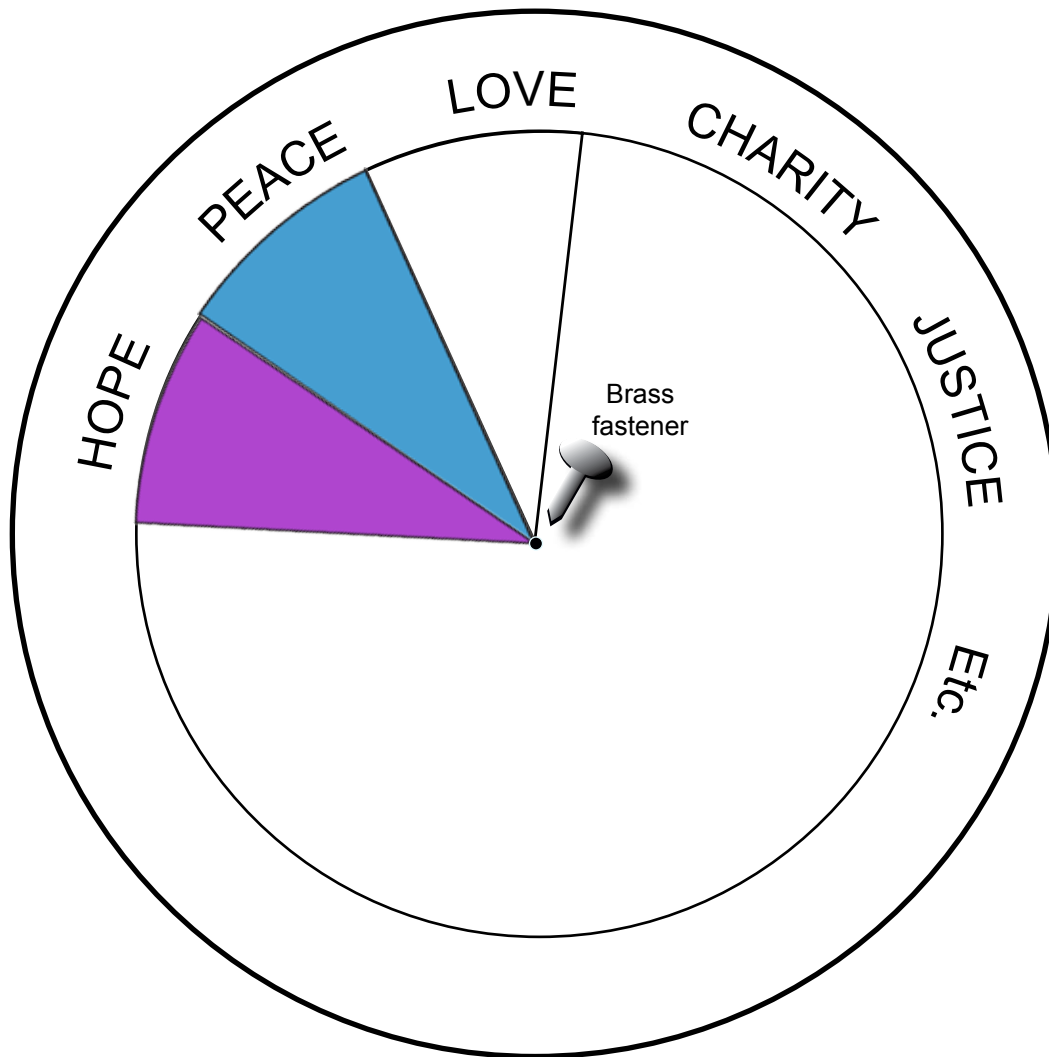
EXTRAS
(faith options,
choices,
practices)

ESSENTIALS
OR BASICS
(mission or
message)

CONTEXT

Attachment: Activity 6

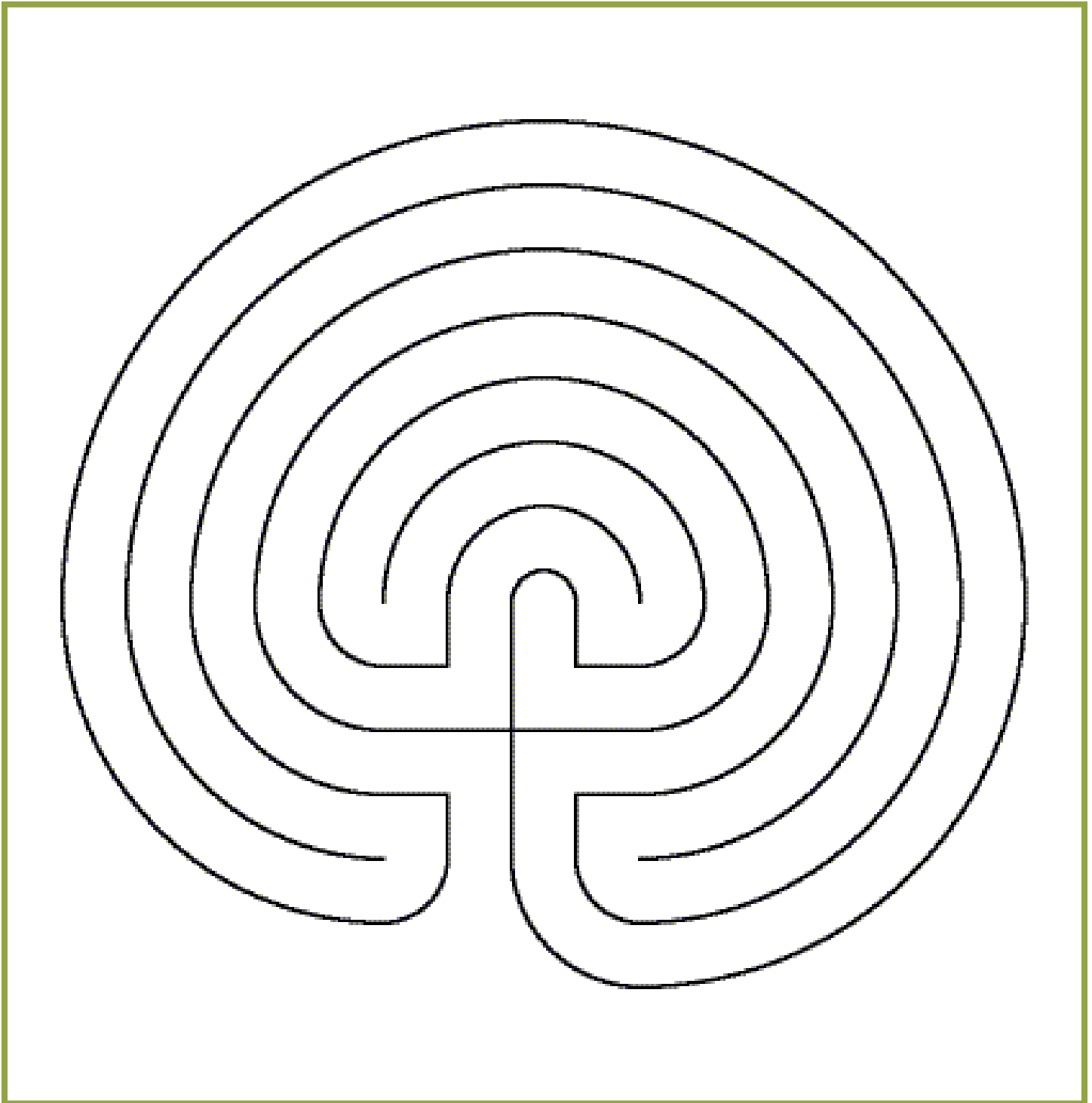
Sample Color Wheel



Attachment: Activity 8



Attachment: Activity 8 (continued)



Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group or Setting

While school is a primary focus right now for this group, the future looms on the horizon as a major influence on current activities, expectations, and concerns—not just friendships, after-school programs, and community involvement, but also the role of faith in their lives. Some trend-watchers say that worries over things such as employment or getting into college have a very pragmatic impact on things like volunteerism or social justice initiatives, because they're only seen as a means to an end—gaining “credentials” for college admission. Other factors include higher stress, greater uncertainty and risk, and looser connections among family, friends, and communities. As a result, young people are hungry for some reassurance about the future and are searching for it in many different places—including faith settings that help to lessen their anxiety, provide honest communication, and offer the benefit of new relationships.

About this Exploration

A glimpse of God's realm becomes possible every time we practice testimony and witness. In this Exploration we move daily to express the presence of God through language, symbols, and rituals, as we increase our hope and vision for ourselves and future generations. By sharing our experiences of God's love day to day, we pass on the all-encompassing grace that sets a foundation for the church of tomorrow. Acknowledging that the practice of testimony and witness is an ongoing process, we focus our attention upon God's continuing revelation, as we move toward the future “kin-dom” (the realm of God where all are kin).

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18
Philemon 1:1–25

Leader Preparation

Knowing that these can be stressful times, a helpful way to approach these activities is structuring them as a safe haven in an uncertain world. One can't take away all the qualms and worries, especially when "the future" is such a big unknown. But offering consistent, open-minded, and personally affirming activities as well as continuity through relationship might lessen the participants' apprehensions. Look for opportunities to lighten the mood, encourage positive interactions, be a source of comfort and security, provide useful methods for dealing with inevitable challenges, and see the future as a hopeful place instead of a fear-filled one.

Prayer: Dear God, so much is uncertain right now. When you ask us to think about the future, it's just one more thing to worry about. Help us to find the strength and the wisdom inside ourselves to get beyond our doubts and misgivings. Guide us through these activities in a way that gives us confidence and courage. Let your Spirit move among us, stirring us and awakening us while at the same time comforting us, so that we know you are looking out for us wherever we may go and whatever challenges we may face, as we create our own visions for the future. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 This Is Your Life (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: We witness to our faith in numerous ways—through writings that have been passed down from earlier generations (like the Bible), and through practices such as prayer and worship, caring for others, and a variety of different traditions. Another aspect of faith is our personal experience, the tales of our own lives. If we scan through the pages of the Bible, we see countless stories about the people of faith who came before us—reason enough to conclude that our story is important, too. The faith we've shown through our relationships, our accomplishments, the wisdom we've gained, the ways we've cared for others, the manner in which we've shared our talents and gifts . . . all these contribute to a valid and essential piece of the puzzle. Our individual role, as one part of the worldwide "body" of Christ, is just as vital as that of every other follower, whether past, present, or future.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper, pens, pencils
- (optional) background information on "prophecy": <http://tinyurl.com/y49j4v>, <http://tinyurl.com/3flt4wk>
- "Interview Questions," Attachment: Activity 1

There are multiple sources for learning about people's lives: books, the Internet, magazines, social networks, museums. Some of these provide current information, and some are historical chronicles. Ask the participants what their favorite source of information is. *What about stories that are written to outline and detail the life accomplishments of someone? What are your feelings about those? Did you ever feel inspired by their example? How?*

Read aloud 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18. *When Paul, the writer, mentions "finishing the race," what do you suppose he's referring to? Could he be describing the accomplishments of his life in a kind of proud look back at all he's done? If you were in Paul's position, what could you say about your own life?*

Talk about "prophecy." *What is prophecy? Is it something that only happens in the Bible in a big way? Or can it be something we do or experience in our own everyday lives? Is prophecy only about predicting disasters and awful things? Or can we also use prophecy to express hopes, dreams, and visions for the future?*

Divide the group into pairs. Ask them to interview each other as if they were news reporters, putting together a brief "life story" feature on their partners. Be sure to include details about their personal faith journeys (including predictions of their future lives). They'll need to word the stories in a way that blends present reality and future prophecy into one account, as if everything had already happened. They may use the interview questions on the handout. Remind them that these life stories are also a way of witnessing to their faith, since they'll be creating a personal vision for themselves, especially the dreams they have for making a difference in the world by putting their faith to work.

Session Development

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

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

② Marching toward a Goal

Leader preparation: Being on a journey usually involves a destination. A faith journey is no exception. But it’s not as easy as simply taking out a map, picking a distant city, and having Google or a GPS automatically decide the shortest, quickest, or most scenic route possible. With faith journeys we’re not always sure where and how we’ll be going. Nor do we know whether we’ll travel in a straight line. Some have even compared faith journeys to climbing a mountain, in which we may sometimes double back or go in a very roundabout fashion because of the challenges of the terrain

Supplies:

- Bible
- computer with Internet access, speakers and audio playback capabilities, or a CD, mp3, or iPod player with speakers
- song “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos” (tune: Siyahambra, irr. South African song) <http://tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb>
- Wikipedia article on Siyahamba <http://tinyurl.com/4y5729x>
- YouTube videos of Siyahamba performed by different choirs: <http://tinyurl.com/3auzpcq>, <http://tinyurl.com/4y3v44d>

Listen to (or watch) one of the performances of “Siyahamba.” It might be interesting to play only the South African lyrics without the translation. Using the words downloaded from the Internet, invite the group to join in the performance, singing along as the piece is replayed.

Present the information from Wikipedia about “Siyahamba” as a brief background before starting a conversation about the group’s impressions of the music. *What do you like about the piece? How does it compare with other songs you’ve heard? Does anything in particular about the song stand out for you? What action or activity does the music suggest? If somebody is “marching,” where is the person marching? Does one usually have a goal or destination in mind? What kind of goal do you think you can imagine for this song? Would it only be a single goal or perhaps more than one? Are these goals that can be accomplished by everyone? Would different people have different goals?*

Suggest that a song like this can be compared to a faith journey. *If there’s a lot of repetition in the song, what does that say about our faith journeys? Do we sometimes need to practice something over and over again, to learn how to do it better? How can we find inspiration or motivation in this process? If there’s a spirit of joy to the music, what does that suggest about the faith journey? Is there an element of mystery or discovery? What are some goals for members of this group? What are you “marching” toward? How far along do they think they are? What challenges lie ahead? What skills or knowledge are you still fine-tuning? When we talk about the possibilities for the future, or try to envision where our faith is taking us, what style are we more comfortable with—spelling out the exact destination and route, or being open to the “surprises” of the Spirit and the unexpected sightseeing along the way? How can we use either one of these styles to offer personal testimony to the faith goals we have in mind?*

Sing the song again with the group joining in and perhaps even marching to the music.

③ Daily Review

Leader preparation: In this activity the group will be introduced to a simple “daily review” routine based on the book *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*, which functions like a status monitor for our faith. Similar to a NASA command center flight check, this helps us decide if all systems are go. Are we on track? How can things be fine-tuned and adjusted to make tomorrow even better? Do we have enough fuel for our trip? Learning how to answer just two basic questions (based on a spiritual practice originally created by St. Ignatius) may help the participants put today’s events in perspective, grounding them in the realities of what they actually experienced while laying a foundation for what they can expect for the next day and beyond.

Supplies:

- Bible
- candle and matches
- paper, pens, and pencils
- (optional) *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, published by Paulist Press, available for purchase online at <http://tinyurl.com/3fzrkzn> or <http://tinyurl.com/3jqp298>

Ask the participants if they’ve ever filled out a questionnaire or survey. *Who was conducting the survey? What types of questions were asked? What topics were covered? When you finished answering the survey, what was the next step? Were you given a reward or coupon for your participation?*

Have them read Matthew 25:1–13. Jesus tells the story of the foolish bridesmaids who run out of lamp oil. Consequently, they aren’t prepared for the bridegroom’s arrival, so they miss out on the banquet. *How do you suppose they could have done things differently? How important is being alert or prepared?*

Introduce the idea of a “daily review” in which they ask themselves two questions that help monitor the continuing progress of their faith journey toward the future. Explain that this is a practice based on a book titled *Sleeping with Bread* inspired by “The Spiritual Exercises” of St. Ignatius, used for guiding people on retreats. When done consistently, this routine can reveal a direction for our lives by providing “spiritual” food for our faith journeys. The practice is usually done at the end of the day as a checkup or review.

Light the candle, symbolizing the light of God’s revelation in our everyday experience. Take about five minutes of quiet time to become aware of God’s loving presence. Ask: *For what moment today am I most grateful? For what moment today am I least grateful?* (The paper and pens can be used to write answers).

Conclude the exercise by having the youth give thanks for whatever they have experienced, good or bad, and thinking about what they’d like to do differently tomorrow. If possible, they can share with a friend as much as they wish about these answers. And, if they’re concerned about the future, they can also ask: *What gives (or, in the future, could give) me life as I face a particular situation? If we know our needs and the resources available to us, the future loses its power to terrify. When we’re better equipped or better informed, we won’t be in the same situation as the foolish bridesmaids, missing out on an opportunity awaiting us in the future. Through our own example of being better prepared, we’ll be living examples of, or witnesses to, a faith that comforts us and encourages us at every step of our journey.*

Discerning & Deciding Activities

 4 **Back to the Future IV (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: The Christian faith is forward-looking, rooted in the history of Israel but focused on a future filled with God's promises. Biblical writings such as the Book of Revelation predicting "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1), or Jesus' teachings that hint at the nature of heaven, have long been a source of hope, encouragement, inspiration, and vision for generations of followers. At the same time, the mysterious way in which many of these prophecies have been worded has led many people to come up with their own interpretations in a well-meaning attempt to discern what heaven is really like, or how and when the "age to come" will arrive.

Supplies:

- Bible
- a tall stool, or a large, overstuffed chair, or some other special place to serve as the "time machine," where the individual participants will sit when they describe their trip to the future

Invite the group to imagine traveling into the future. Ask: *How would you describe it? What would you like to be different about the future? What would you like to remain the same? What kind of a future has been portrayed in movies?*

Read aloud Revelation 21:1–5, 10–27, which details a vision of the future. Invite quick impressions and then present this scenario: *You have been given a time machine that will allow you to travel into the future. Each of you will take a turn in this time machine, and while in the future, you will describe what you see to the rest of the group.* Encourage them to be as creative and imaginative as possible, coming up with predictions, hopes, or dreams that they could hope to see either in their own lifetimes or in the far distant future.

As the participant "comes back from the future," he or she will tell the group what changes or new things he or she would like to introduce or invent here, in this time, if given the chance.

After all have participated, take a few moments for reflection. What did you discover? What are some ideas you can take away from your trips to the future? What would you tell others about the experience? How does it change the way you might witness to or share their faith with others?

  5 **ABCs and 123s of Vision**

Leader preparation: There are a number of Bible passages that describe the accomplishments of pairs or teams of people: Paul and Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquila, Moses and Aaron, Jesus and the disciples. The reality is that it often takes at least two people with different, complementary skills to achieve certain major goals. One person by himself or herself may not be able to pull it off. Helping a vision become reality is one of those tasks. There are the dreamers, the futurists, the visionaries, who are the ones offering the ideas and inspirations—and then there are their counterparts, the people of action, the technicians, the practical-minded ones who know how to take the right steps in the right order to be able to get things done. Both types are needed in the world of faith. Both are equal partners called to work together, so that hopes for the future can be transformed into accomplishments in the present, serving as testimony to what our faith can and will achieve.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper, pens, pencils
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- artwork: “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong, <http://tinyurl.com/fp-apdo>
- “ABCs and 123s of Vision,” Attachment: Activity 5

Invite the group to name some famous teams, duos, or partners either from history or current events. These could be athletic teams, music personalities, couples, or politicians. Talk about how people’s different talents, skills, and abilities can complement one another’s. *What would happen if you had a great idea for a product, but no way to fund it or to get it on the market? What about finding a partner who’ll work with you on the project?*

Show the painting “Blind Feeling” and talk about the faces pictured. Note that they merge together in a symbolic joining of people’s differences and characteristics. *How does this suggest complementary gifts or assisting one another through teamwork? How can one person’s vision (or lack of) be a helpful counterpart to another’s abilities? In what ways do these faces suggest different ways of witnessing, at different times and places?*

Read aloud Philemon 1:1–25 where Paul appeals to his “partner” Philemon on behalf of a former slave, Onesimus, whom he is sending back to Philemon with a new purpose and a new status. *What do you think Paul means when he talks about Onesimus’ usefulness? Of what new abilities or possibilities might he be speaking? How can he be helpful in promoting the faith? What does it mean to “welcome him as you would welcome me”?*

Divide the group into two teams, the ABCs and the 123s. The ABCs are the idea or inspiration people, the “imagineers,” whose mission is to come up with a vision. The 123s are the “action” team, whose job is to help put practical plans together to help the vision become a reality. The two teams will need to collaborate on a way to further the faith through a specific initiative they all develop, given the particular interests, talents, hopes, dreams, knowledge, and abilities of both ABCs and 123s.

Pose this scenario. The learners are a group of young people looking at the current situation of the world. What do they see? What urgent problem or concern do they think needs to be addressed? What does their faith tell them about how they can make a difference? What would they like to share with the world as their part of a solution? What’s the vision going to be for their group?

To help guide their thinking, give them the list of questions on the handout “ABCs and 123s of Vision.” The questions are divided into three sections. For each section, the respective ABC or 123 team will collaborate on the questions assigned to them and then report back to the entire group as a whole, so that their counterparts on the other team can respond with their own report, complementing the results of the first. Then, move to the next section and do the same.

Ask: How does it feel “being” the change you want to see in the world? In what ways is it helpful to have others working with you on the project? How is this a testimony to our faith?

⑥ Designing God's City

Leader preparation: When the people of Israel set out for their “promised land,” they had no idea where they were going or what they would find. The only thing they knew for sure was that God promised them they would finally be free! It was a remarkable exercise in faith for them to travel onward with no actual blue-print or roadmap and no plan for life in their new destination. In today's world, we still have hopes and dreams based on God's promises, but we tend to rely much more on specifics. Many of us would want every detail and every aspect of our new home spelled out and organized before we even consider the possibility of signing on the line and moving there.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper, pens, pencils, markers, drawing tools, grid paper, rulers, poster board or large newsprint pads, and a variety of other art supplies to help the group put plans together for a new city
- background information from the Internet on “SimCity”
<http://tinyurl.com/346bcv>

Find out from the group how many of them have lived in the area for much of their lives. How many have moved from somewhere else? How many are familiar with other areas or towns or countries besides their own? What do they like about those other places? Or dislike? If you could build your own city, what would it look like? What would it include?

Read aloud Leviticus 25:1–28. Focus on it being God's plan for the promised land, discussing use of land, relationships with fellow residents, Sabbaths, and jubilee year guidelines. Mention that there are also many more “specifics” including laws, codes, and commandments that were designed to help the people of Israel live together peacefully and faithfully in their new homeland. Read aloud Revelation 21:15–26, which shares a vision of the new city of Jerusalem in the age to come.

Invite the group to plan and design their own “promised land” or “city of God.” Encourage them to prepare street plans, sketch buildings, talk about accessibility, consider “green” building materials, and plan for open spaces, learning centers, family resources, interdependence, cooperative living, and so forth.

These or similar questions may guide them:

- Where would it be located? Would it be urban, suburban, rural, or a mix of all three?
- What would it look like?
- Where would people live?
- How do they travel about?
- What community resources will they have?
- How about health care, food, recreation?
- What opportunities will they have to practice their faith—and where will that take place?
- What requirements or rules will there be? Will there be rules? If not, how will everyone get along? What kinds of relationships will people have? What about their relationship with God?
- How will God's presence be a key part of all this?

Ask: *How do you think your concept for this city will be pleasing to God? How do-able or possible do you think your plans are? Would you like to see even a small part of this vision become reality in your lifetime? What parts? How do you think you can help make that happen? What can you do personally to partner with others in the building of such a place? What does your faith tell you about a future like this? How could you see yourself working toward a dream of this sort? What would you feel comfortable telling others about a plan like this? How can this serve as a practical example of “sharing witness and testimony?”*

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Thank You Notes (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: We’ve all heard of people who unexpectedly see their “life flash before their eyes” as they suddenly realize that they might be at a crossroads between life and death. We’ve also known of people who have an opportunity to look back at the years they’ve lived and reflect on both the accomplishments and the regrets they’ve had. Paul’s letter in 2 Timothy 4:6–8 is a good example; he spoke of fighting the good fight, finishing the race, and keeping the faith. Yet, he dealt with challenges, like having his supporters desert him. For many Christians, our lives are similarly mixed with both joys and sorrows.

Supplies:

- Bible
- 8½" x 11" paper for writing status reports
- 8½" x 11" paper halved and cut into 5" x 8½" pieces for thank-you notes
- pens or pencils

Talk with the group about awards shows on TV, such as the Grammys, the Emmys, the MTV Music Video Awards, or the Country Music Awards. *What do they recall about most of the award winners’ speeches? How do the speeches usually end? Who do the winners mention and why? How important is it to show appreciation like this or to give credit where credit is due?*

Read aloud 2 Timothy 4:6–8 and 16–18, and talk about how Paul sums up his life. Ask: *In what does he take satisfaction? What regrets does he have? What’s his opinion of the supporters who left him? What’s his prayer for them? What do you suppose his greatest accomplishment was and why?*

Distribute paper and pens or pencils, and ask the participants to make a “status report” of their faith journeys to date. Have them make three columns on the page. In the first column, they list life accomplishments or events they feel are important to share. In the second column, they list names of people who may have worked with them in these achievements. In the third column, they write a brief note about what was learned from these experiences or from the people helping them.

Finally, instruct the group to use the smaller pieces of paper for writing thank-you notes to the people who helped them behind the scenes in this faith journey. Or, instead of thank-you notes, they can create “awards” for those people like the achievement awards given out on TV. Remind the group that witnessing to others’ faith contributions in this way is a very powerful form of testimony, since it acknowledges present actions and encourages similar ones in the future.



8 You Send Me (or Not)

Leader preparation: The need to show proof or to confirm what we've been told is true, or to test out a gut instinct, is a common part of human nature. We see examples of this throughout the Bible, from Moses' interactions with the Egyptian pharaoh (who needed a few plagues to realize the invincible power of God) to the disciple Thomas's request to witness Jesus' wounds for himself in order to believe in the resurrection. However, there are also passages that tell us to "have faith" without benefit of proof—all in the same Bible. When we go off on our personal journeys of faith, how do we know that we're really being sent on a faith-driven mission? How do we know if we're staying on course? What checkpoints, compass, or Global Positioning System (GPS) do we have to guide us or correct us? If we think we have a God-given gift, or a path laid out by the Holy Spirit, how do we know for sure it's right?

Supplies:

- Bible
- "Spirit Discernment Guide" and "Gifts of the Spirit Quiz," Attachment: Activity 8

Invite the group to talk about their experiences traveling. Have they ever been lost or made a wrong turn? What tools do they use? Do they sometimes rely on gut instinct or intuition, or a kind of "internal compass"?

Read the story of the prophet Elijah saving the life of a widow's son (1 Kings 17:17–24), in which the woman realizes that Elijah is indeed a man of God and what he says is the truth. *What are your impressions of the story? Has anyone ever seen similar dramatic proofs of God's presence in their lives? What kind of demonstration or proof could we expect? Does it always have to be grand and miraculous, or can it be simpler and down-to-earth?*

There have been many different ways people have tried to figure out whether what they're experiencing is God-sent or ordinary. Some, like the Apostle Paul, came up with the idea of looking for "fruits of the Spirit," which are characteristics of a God-inspired behavior. There are other examples in the Bible of similar "tests" that followers have used through the ages. *What are some ways you think you'd be able to use to tell whether God is really guiding you?*

Hand out the "Spirit Discernment Guide," which explains some of the different methods used to discern God's presence. What are the group's feelings about some of these approaches? Introduce the idea of the "Gifts of the Spirit Quiz." Tell them this is a list of the most common gifts of the Holy Spirit that people have traditionally viewed as coming from God. Have the group pair off so each person has a partner. Give them copies of the quiz and ask them to check off which gifts they think they might have. One partner will first play the role of test taker and the other will be the facilitator or "Spirit counselor" (switching roles after the first partner takes his or her turn). The Spirit counselor will go over the answers with his or her partner, asking additional questions (supplied) that may be helpful in determining which directions or paths the partner could follow in the future. As with any role-playing activity, encourage participants to ad-lib and come up with their own questions and responses as well.

Bring the group back together and ask them if they feel they now have some additional tools to help them discern God's direction for them. *Will these be helpful in figuring out their future? How? If you find yourself wrestling with the question of whether or not God is "sending" you (and where), will these provide some additional ways of checking in or "testing" to see if you're really on track? Does having other people involved in the process make for an even stronger testimony that you're right on course?*

9 Play Time Capsules

Leader preparation: Paul's picture of "fighting the good fight" and "finishing the race" have been an inspiration to generations of Christian followers who have risen to similar challenges in their own lifetimes and demonstrated equal perseverance. For some people, finishing a small project start to finish can be a source of pride. For others, taking on something that is much bigger than themselves, like joining a program to help the homeless, is what they'll list on their summary of accomplishments.

Supplies:

- Bible
- 9" x 12" manila envelopes
- cardboard box, to contain the Time Capsule contributions
- card stock, construction paper, markers, pens and pencils, other art supplies
- pictures, photos, video, or other media (if available) that can be included as evidence of accomplishments
- group roster

Read aloud 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18. As a way of starting the discussion ask the youth how they would describe the achievements and progress in their lives up to this point. What have they discovered about themselves or their faith as a result? How can these accomplishments be translated into future directions?

Based on this conversation, have the group construct a "Time Capsule" that brings together objects, notes, and other materials to provide a brief snapshot of their experiences. The time capsule contents can include journal or diary entries, materials created for previous projects in *Faith Practices* or other activities, drawings, photographs or digital media, recordings, references to online blogs or Internet links, comments or stories by or about individual participants, and so on.

Once the contents are decided upon and readied for packaging, have the group think about their vision for the future. Participants may either contribute individual notes, messages, hopes, and predictions or write a "group" vision that lays out a roadmap for the days or years ahead.

Seal the "Time Capsule," put a date and label on it that gives instructions like "Do not open until January 1, 2015," and make arrangements for delivering it to a person or place where it can be kept safe and accessible (preferably not buried away where it will be forgotten). Talk about how a time capsule can be a personal testimony about the connection between our lives and our faith that helps inspire new generations through our histories, accomplishments, and hopes for the future.

Reflect

What does the future really hold? God, of course, knows the answer to that. We are all doing the best we possibly can to live our lives faithfully and with purpose, trusting that God will be along for the ride, helping us to learn and grow and discover what we need to in order to go courageously into the future. Can we envision new depths or new directions as a result? What are a few of the experiences you'll find yourself fondly recalling long after these conversations are over?

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Attachment: Activity 1

Interview Questions

- Looking back, how would you describe yourself?
- What did you have a passion for? What excited or inspired you?
- Where did you travel?
- What causes did you work for?
- Whom did you help?
- How did you contribute to a better world?
- Through your example, how did you express your personal sense of faith?
- What setbacks or obstacles did you have to overcome?
- How did you overcome them? What happened as a result?
- Who were your friends, associates, coworkers, fellow companions in faith?
How would you describe your relationship with them?
- What did you do together? What activities or programs did you start?
- What were some of your accomplishments? Who benefited from them?
- Wrapping up the story, how would you sum up your entire life journey of faith?

Attachment: Activity 5

ABCs and 123s of Vision

Questions for the ABC team	Questions for the 123 team
Section 1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What’s important about our faith that we want to witness to and share with others? • What have we learned about our faith that helps us to live our lives? (Do we have a God of justice and peace? A God of relationships and connections? Is our faith more of a personal nature, or do we express it through caring for and helping others?) • Given this picture of our faith, what change do we want to see happen in the world that we think we might have a role in shaping? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we celebrate the gifts of all the people here? • What are the particular talents, gifts, abilities, interests, and specialties each person has to offer? How can these specific resources be used to help change the world and serve as a testimony to the power of our faith?
Section 2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some ideas for specific projects or ventures that would go along with our overall vision? • Peace: Do we form or join a nonviolence group? Take part in a rally against the war? Create Internet blogs that keep the messages going to further peacemaking negotiations? • Assuring clean water for the Third World, where there is a scarcity of resources: Do we partner with Heifer Project or other organization to raise money for wells or irrigation projects? • Provide affordable housing: Do we get involved with Habitat for Humanity? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What action steps are needed to make this happen? • List the actual steps, requirements, intermediate goals, resources needed, people skills, funding, timeline, or schedule.
Section 3	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other ideas support this vision? When you hear the 123s outline the practical steps, what additional inspirational or creative thoughts can you offer to keep the process going or to help witness to the overall vision? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we sustain this movement of ours? • What resources do we need to take care of ourselves and our project, to make sure we have what we need to accomplish our goals and at the same time assure there’s enough funding to keep it going well into the future? • How are we going to hold ourselves accountable? (Ideas are good, but if you can’t put “feet” to them, and pair the spiritual or visionary thinking with practical measures, the idea will most likely die.) • What realistic things do we have to do to keep this one alive as a testimony to our faith?

Attachment: Activity 8

Spirit Discernment Guide

Here are some ways people have tried to decide whether they're really being guided by God, sent on a God-given mission, or being given some special gifts or talents.

1. Read the Bible. What passages can you find that might offer guidance, or illustrate similar situations? There are prayers (as in the Psalms) that could be used as a way of connecting with God.
2. Pray. Find a quiet place, and pray the way you feel most comfortable. It doesn't have to be formal or traditional. Think of it as a conversation with a "silent partner." Open yourself to any feelings that may be signaling where God wants you to go.
3. Talk to other people, especially people from your congregation or faith group or a trusted teacher, mentor, or minister. Sometimes just talking something through can be a big help.
4. What do you feel inside? What is your conscience telling you? How is your heart guiding you? What do you suppose God is trying to communicate? Where is God sending you? How do you feel that your actions or the path you've chosen are being affirmed by God?
5. Have you had any dreams that seem to point you in a certain direction? What do you recall about them? Who was in them? (Often, it's said, the "other people" in your dreams are actually you.) How did they end?
6. What insights can you discover from things like faith traditions? Does your particular culture or tradition offer any ways of seeking guidance? (For example, the Quakers have a custom of coming together to help one of their members in a kind of reflective brainstorming or discernment practice.)
7. Try these additional questions:
 - Look at what you are doing or what another person does. What does your conduct or action communicate? If there's a big disconnect between what's said and what is being done, it may not be a God-given direction.
 - What about the credibility of the person? What do you know about his or her reliability, or faith journey?
 - View what's happening through the lens of Jesus' greatest commandment: Is it being said or done in love?
8. Is the direction, behavior, gift, or message in question a good example of one or more of these "gifts of the Spirit" mentioned by the Apostle Paul: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

Attachment: Activity 8 (continued)

Gifts of the Spirit Quiz

These are some of the most common gifts, talents, and abilities that people usually mention as coming from God. How have you experienced these in your life? Are there any in particular you that feel you've demonstrated more than once, on different occasions? Be as honest and candid as possible in answering. Please place a check mark next to the specific gifts you feel you offer. If there are any especially important ones that you feel very strongly about, put a star (*) next to those.

Practical, Personal, Hands-on, Behind-the-Scenes Gifts

- Assisting**—assisting one or more individuals who are leaders, organizers, teachers, etc.
- Crafting**—using skills such as gardening, property maintenance, professional, technical, or trade.
- Creativity**—all forms of artistic creativity and expression.
- Mercy**—personally helping those in need.
- Service**—helping groups or projects around the church or in connection with your faith group.

Nurturing, Caring, People Oriented Gifts

- Encouragement**—short-term, as needed, moral encouragement of others.
- Faith**—having personal trust in God, which may or may not lead to helping and supporting others in direct ways.
- Hospitality**—being comfortable meeting new people and providing a warm welcome and inviting space.
- Mentoring**—longer-term support for faith development.
- Multiculturalism**—being comfortable in a difficult or different culture.

Leadership Gifts

- Knowledge**—the ability to gather and organize information and ideas. This may be done for others to use.
- Leadership**—the quality of communications and relationships so that groups work for a common purpose.
- Organization**—the ability to coordinate all the details for a program or project to be successfully accomplished.
- Teaching**—the ability to help others learn and understand.
- Vision**—clarifying the goals, outcomes or purposes for a group, program, or project.
- Wisdom**—the ability to provide insightful yet practical solutions to complex, conflicted, or puzzling situations.

Personal Faith Gifts

- Discernment**—an above-average ability to sense personal motives and hidden agendas.
- Evangelism**—being comfortable talking with others about one's faith.
- Faith**—having an above-average trust in God in all circumstances.
- Giving**—an above-average generosity with one's money.
- Healing**—improving or restoring health. It may or may not involve prayer, but is focused exclusively on healing.
- Justice**—an above-average ability to see underlying causes and connections for social, economic, political, and environmental relationships.
- Prayer**—an above-average time spent in prayer. It may include prayers for healing, but will not be focused exclusively on healing.

Attachment: Activity 8 (continued)

Additional questions for the facilitator or Spirit counselor to ask:

1. **Age and stage of life.** What age and stage of life are you at? Do you think you ought to seek an opportunity to learn, deepen, and grow? Are you ready to be given major responsibility without close supervision? Could you offer wisdom and nurture to others? What are your personal needs?
2. **What are your family responsibilities?** How much time and energy do you have available?
3. **Past experience.** As you reflect on your past experience, what has worked; what has given you energy and excitement; what feels unfinished?
4. **Personality.** Are you outgoing? Do you prefer to work with one or two others? Are you comfortable with strangers or prefer people you know? With what age groups do you connect? Are you comfortable with people from different backgrounds than your own? What level of stress, noise, and energy can you cope with? Can you keep commitments without supervision?
5. **Personal maturity.** What level of self-awareness do you have about your emotions and needs? How do you handle your own, and other people's, anxiety? Can you stay connected and continue to problem solve in the midst of heated conflict?
6. **Faith maturity.** What is the level of your personal relationship with God, and of your daily discipleship?
7. **Cooperation and evaluation.** Can you accept evaluation of your gifts and how you are using them? Can you work constructively with others? Can you admit your limitations? Can you work for goals that others may have set?

Thanks to the Rev. David Ewart, www.davidewart.ca, and Anna S. Christie, author of *Evoking Change*, www.evokingchange.ca, for the general ideas in this quiz. A more extensive, interactive questionnaire is available online at the Spirit Given Gifts website, <http://tinyurl.com/3mk7xcs>.

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