



Giving and Receiving Hospitality

About this Faith Practice

Hospitality begins when we perceive ourselves and others as strangers in a community of welcome. Seeing Christ's presence in the other enables us to welcome Christ into the midst of the community, with all of the costs and joys of discipleship. Gentle, attentive, patient, and consistent care is required to create a community where members are intentional about seeking and welcoming all, especially those whose abilities, experiences, and cultural traditions are different from the mainstream of the current community. A community of hospitality is aware, sensitive, and open to divergent cultural practices. It reaches far beyond the limits of the familiar in a highly mobile world, transforming both the newcomer and the established community.

Let's Begin...

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

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



Discovery



Scripture



Discipleship



Christian Tradition



Context and Mission



Future and Vision

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

2 Locate the Exploration you've chosen

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

- If you're planning a 30–45 minute session, choose 3 activities.
- It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring and Engaging, at least one from Discerning and Deciding, and at least one from Sending and Serving.
- For 45 minutes to 1 hour, choose 4 or 5 activities.
- For a 1½ to 2-hour session, you can use all 9 activities.

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

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

Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

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

Ordering Posters

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

Art

Six posters are used with the faith practice Giving and Receiving Hospitality and may be ordered by clicking on the links provided.

From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:

"The Peaceable Kingdom" by John August Swanson (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"The Public Fountain" by Manuel Alvarez Bravo (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

"Embrace of Peace" by George Tooker (<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>)

From AllPosters.com:

"Barber Shop" by Jacob Lawrence (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1>)

"The Luncheon of the Boating Party" by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters2>)

"Vendedora De Pinas" by Diego Rivera (<http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters3>)

Music

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

Come All You People, Tune: Uyai Mose (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>)

Wade in the Water, Tune: African-American Traditional (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong2>)

Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant, Tune: Servant Song (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>)

Scripture

Twelve Bible passages are used with Giving and Receiving Hospitality, two with each Exploration.

Discovery	Luke 19: 1–10	Hebrews 13: 1–8, 15–16
Scripture	Genesis 18: 1–15 (21:1–17)	Isaiah 25: 1–9
Discipleship	John 13: 1-17, 31b–35	Acts 2:42–47
Christian Tradition	Mark 14: 22–25	1 Peter 4:1–11
Context and Mission	Romans 12: 9–18	John 6: 1–21
Future and Vision	Luke 14: 15–24	Mark 10: 13–16

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Adults
Seekers and New Church Participants
Young Adults
Older Youth
Youth
Older Children
Young Children
Multiage and Intergenerational
Living Practices in Daily Life
Workshop Rotation
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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Older children know what it is like to give and receive hospitality. They enjoy going to a friend's house to play. When family and friends come to visit they like to help entertain. Children in this age group will connect with the story of Jesus giving and receiving hospitality from Zacchaeus, one who has been marginalized by society. Children ages 7 to 11 years old are aware of groups, who is in and who is out. This story and the Hebrews text challenge children to extend hospitality to all people, not just those in their family or circle of friends. In so doing, they may entertain angels. God is pleased when we share and do good to others.

About this Exploration

Hospitality is the intentional and respectful care of both the potential and the gathered community with its diverse and ever-changing hopes, dreams, fears and needs. Extending God's extravagant welcome requires expansion and adjustment of the physical space and the interior space of individuals. To be truly hospitable, individuals must be personally centered in God's grace for themselves and others. While respecting boundaries, hospitality requires suspending territories, prejudices and judgment to establish welcome space for all. Hospitality is a radical broadening of individual worldview to welcome people outside of current experience. Receiving hospitality can be more challenging than offering it. Hospitality must be experienced, modeled and practiced as a continuing expression of faith.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Luke 19:1-10
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Leader Preparation

Giving and receiving hospitality is a characteristic of God's children. Hospitality means sharing God's warmth and kindness in a nonjudgmental way. Hospitality is rooted in God's love and grace. We are hospitable because God is hospitable to us. Jesus is our example and shows us how to give and receive from others. Hospitality often pushes us beyond our comfort zones.

As you prepare to lead this session, think about what makes children feel welcome. Make your gathering space warm and inviting. Decorate with balloons, artwork displayed at children's eye level, plants or items from nature, soft cushions, cozy blankets, warm colors, and so on. Set up a book nook with children's books about hospitality. Prepare a worship table with a colorful cloth, open Bible, candle, and symbol of hospitality. Play world music such as a "Putumayo Kids" CD. Post a sign on the door that says "Everyone Is Welcome Here." Most of all be hospitable in the way you interact with the children. Receive the gifts the children offer you. Carefully listen to each child. Ask the kind of questions that provide more opportunity for attentive listening. Be gentle and patient. Affirm their gifts and honor the Christ in each child. "Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting" (Mother Teresa).

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Jesus Comes to Visit (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Prayerfully read and reflect upon Luke 19:1-10. Prepare to retell it to the children. Props and simple costumes would make the story interesting, but they are not essential.

Supplies:

- Bible or children's Bible story book such as *The Pilgrim Book of Bible Stories* (Pilgrim Press, 2003) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPBookTPP1> or *The Family Story Bible* by Ralph Milton (Northstone, 1996)
- props and costumes: coins in a bag, chair, robes or fabric, blanket, plates, food (optional)

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Imagine what it would be like if someone very important came to their home for dinner unannounced. Invite the children to dramatize the story as you tell it from the Bible or a Bible story book. Recruit these volunteers: Zacchaeus, Jesus, and people (any number). If available, provide props and costumes. Tell the story slowly. If time permits, switch parts and allow the children to narrate the story. After the story, use these questions or your own: I wonder why Jesus decided to go to Zacchaeus' house for a visit. I wonder how Zacchaeus felt when Jesus announced he was coming over. How did Jesus show Zacchaeus hospitality? How did Zacchaeus show Jesus hospitality? I wonder how Zacchaeus' life was different after he entertained Jesus. I wonder how Jesus shows us hospitality. How do we welcome Jesus? I wonder what questions you have about the story.

2 "Hospitality" Means ...

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Find a place and get permission to display your mural or banner in the church.

Supplies:

- dictionary
- banner paper, plain bed sheet or tablecloth, or poster board
- art supplies such as glitter, glue, markers, paints, brushes, pastels, charcoal, construction paper, chenille wires, tape, yarn, magazines, pencils, erasers, scissors
- self-adhesive note paper

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Ask the children what "hospitality" means. Use their words and images to create a banner or mural. Invite them to work together using a variety of art supplies. After the mural or banner is completed, display it in your church for others to enjoy. Provide self-adhesive notes for people in the congregation to add their comments to the poster.

Prayer: Generous God, thank you for loving, accepting, and welcoming me. What a privilege to share your generous hospitality with children. Help me receive the gifts and lessons they offer. May your hospitality and kindness be in my face, eyes, smile and words. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities, using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5, using at least one activity from each category.

3 “Everyone is Included” Tag

Leader preparation: Gather supplies and snack. Familiarize yourself with the rules of this game. It is played like “Octopus tag” and best played in a large open space. Mark off a playing area. At both ends of the playing area, mark off an area large enough to hold the players. If there is a child with a disability in your group, revise the rules so that that child is included.

Supplies:

- rope or masking tape
- a healthy snack such as water and fruit

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Recall how living God’s way of hospitality means we show kindness to all people, not just those in our family or circle of friends. God is pleased when we find ways to include everyone. Invite the children to play “Everyone is included” tag. Point out the boundary lines. Choose one child to be “it.” This child stands in the middle of the playing area. The other children gather at one end of the playing area. When the child in the middle yells “Hospitality!” everyone runs as fast as they can to the other end of the field. “It” attempts to touch them. If they are tagged, they link arms with “it.” They then act as additional “arms” and assist “it” in tagging others. Continue playing until everyone is included. The last person to be tagged may begin a new game. Serve a snack and talk about ways to include everyone at school and play.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Show Hospitality (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies.

Supplies:

- index cards (one per child)
- markers
- simple costumes (hats work well) or props (optional)
- popcorn (optional)

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Brainstorm with the children all the people they are likely to meet and places they go in a typical week. These may be people they know as well as strangers. As they suggest ideas, print each idea on a separate index card. Place the cards face down in two piles: “person” and “place.” Invite the children to work in pairs or small groups. Give each pair or group a card from each pile. Ask them to create a skit to show hospitality using their “person” and “place” ideas. Allow time to prepare the skit. Then present the skits to the rest of the group. Serve popcorn if you wish.

5 Who is Coming for Dinner?

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Make arrangements for another group (such as seniors) to join you for a snack, but don’t tell the children. Find out if there are any food or latex allergies.

Supplies:

- balloons
- streamers

- tablecloth
- fresh flowers
- napkins
- cups
- snack: food items that are individually wrapped or sealed
- beverages

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Ponder what it would be like if Jesus came for dinner. In Luke 19, Jesus surprised Zacchaeus and came to his house for dinner. Being hospitable means we welcome both unexpected guests and those we invite. In Hebrews 13:2, we are reminded when we entertain strangers we may entertain angels. Strangers in biblical times included the poor, the needy, and the vulnerable. Ask the children to plan a party for surprise guests. Some children may decorate the room and set the table. Others may assemble food. Talk about how they will show hospitality to the guests. Welcome the guests when they arrive, and enjoy a snack together. Be sure that introductions are part of the plan with the guests.

6 Art Engagement

Leader preparation: Study the poster “Embrace of Peace”:

<http://www.tinyurl.comUCCResources>

and reflect upon what practicing hospitality requires of you. Make “speech balloons” out of paper.

Supplies:

- poster: “Embrace of Peace” <http://www.tinyurl.comUCCResources> by George Tooker
- paper “speech balloons” (two per child)
- tape
- pens, pencils, erasers

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. When we practice hospitality, we are faced with choices and decisions. How will we act? What will we do? What does faith require of us? Invite the children to study the poster “Embrace of Peace.” Encourage them to quietly reflect upon the artwork. Do not rush this time. Then offer these questions and your own: What do you notice about the people in this artwork? Who is giving hospitality? Who is receiving hospitality? What does their body language tell you about how they are feeling? What might the people be thinking? Where might you be in this poster? What questions do you have about the artwork? Using speech balloons, ask the children to write what the people might be thinking or saying to each other. Be alert to any child who has difficulty writing. Assist with spelling or offer to write words dictated by the child. Post their speech balloons around the poster.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Litany of Blessing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Make arrangements for children to share their litany of blessing with the congregation.

Supplies:

- chart paper
- markers
- samples of litanies used by your congregation

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Jesus both gave and received hospitality from Zacchaeus. Invite the children to write a litany of blessing to share with one another and then later with the congregation. When we bless one another, we send each other into the world to serve God. Write a group litany. Look at and talk about litanies used in your congregation. You may wish to use the format of Leader/All respond. After the litany is crafted, invite the children to face each other and send each other with the blessing. Let the children know when they will be sharing their litany with the congregation.

8 Welcome “Care Package”

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Identify a new family in the congregation to receive a welcome “care package.”

Supplies:

- Bible
- items for a welcome “care package”: granola bars, water bottle, tissues, toy or book for children, journal, pen, pencil crayons, church directory, information pieces about the church
- box, wrapping paper, tape
- card-making supplies: various kinds of paper, markers, pencil crayons, pens, stickers, ribbons, embellishments, scissors, glue
- paper, markers, pens, pencil crayons, pencils, eraser

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Read Hebrews 13:1, which challenges children to offer hospitality to those they don’t know. Invite them to serve others by preparing a welcome “care package.” This could be given to someone in their congregation or community. Talk about ways to help people feel welcome in the church. Some children may decorate a box with wrapping paper. Others may write about or draw a picture of “What I like about our church” or “What church means to me.” Some may assemble the care package. Others may create a card for everyone to sign.

9 Loved by God

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Learn the words in other languages to the verses of “Jesus Loves Me” <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSongJLM2>. Make a sample of a “ribbon streamer.”

Supplies:

- song “Jesus Loves Me” <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSONGJLM2>
- world map or globe
- for each ribbon streamer: 4 lengths (30–40” lengths) of colored fabric ribbon (approximately 1–1½” wide), large sturdy safety pins, eye hooks, ½” diameter doweling (cut into 9” lengths)
- marker

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Hospitality is rooted in God’s love and grace. When we feel welcomed by God, we extend God’s love and kindness to others. We are hospitable because God is hospitable to us. Zacchaeus turned from his wrong ways and received God’s love and forgiveness. Then he shared God’s love with others. We are invited to do the same. Invite each child to make a “ribbon streamer.” Then learn “Jesus Loves Me” in other languages. Use a world map to identify the countries of each language. Create a movement with the ribbon streamer to go each phrase of the song. Celebrate God’s hospitality around the world.

Reflect

Take some time to thoughtfully reflect back over your time with the children. What were the gifts and lessons you received? What new discoveries did the children make about this faith practice? How did the activities engage them? Where did they experience God’s loving and hospitable welcome? How did they show hospitality to each other? Take a moment to pray for each child by name. Imagine them being held in God’s loving embrace.

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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Most children ages seven to 11 like surprises. Sometimes they are surprised with a visit from grandparents. Sometimes guests whom they don't know drop in. In the story of Genesis 18:1-15, Sarah and Abraham are surprised by strangers bringing wonderful news. Abraham and Sarah show gracious hospitality by preparing a feast. In Old Testament times, strangers were to be treated as highly honored guests, and a person's reputation was determined by how well he or she treated strangers. Today children are taught to be cautious of strangers. They may have differing experiences with strangers, some positive, some negative. Our reading and understanding of scripture is impacted by many factors such as cultural and life experiences. Hospitality requires that we respect one another's viewpoints. Isaiah 25:1-9 echoes the theme of feasting in Genesis. God invites all people to an abundant feast of finest foods and wines. God is constantly up to something wonderfully surprising!

About this Exploration

As hospitality and scripture intersect, we acknowledge the many ways people enter and encounter sacred story. Multiple intelligences, cultural experiences, social locations, and life experiences impact the reading and interpretation of scripture. This invites dialogue, mutual learning, and broadened understanding. Hospitality requires a commitment to multiple expressions of the story. We honor one another and one another's viewpoints. We are called to embody scripture in the context of a diverse world with many sacred texts. At the intersection of hospitality and scripture, the sacred story challenges and changes all.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Genesis 18:1–15
(21:1–17)
Isaiah 25:1–9

Leader Preparation

Scripture is like a compass giving us direction for hospitable living. As we study scripture in community, we learn from one another regardless of age. As you prepare to lead this session, think about the way you enter and encounter sacred story. How does your preferred way of learning, cultural experience, social location, and life experience impact your reading and interpretation of scripture? Read and prayerfully reflect upon Genesis 18:1–15 (21:1–17) and Isaiah 25:1–9. Use all your senses as you enter these biblical texts. What do you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch? What speaks to you in these passages? How are you being challenged? During the coming days, be aware of strangers along your journey. Put yourself among people you do not know. What does hospitality feel like among strangers? God is a God of wonderful hospitality and surprises.

Prepare your gathering space. See the “Discovery” Exploration Leader Preparation for ideas. Add a compass, flashlight, or other symbol to represent the way scripture guides us into hospitable living to your worship table.

Prayer: God of holy surprise, your surprises come to me through unlikely people. Sometimes you surprise me through the words and actions of strangers. Thank you for opportunities to feast with others. Bless our time together as we encounter you in sacred story. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Lectio Divina: Feasting on Scripture (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Genesis 18:1–15. Learn about *lectio divina*, a traditional Christian practice of reading scripture:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina.

Find a hospitable space for your group to gather that lends itself to quiet reflection.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- handout, Attachment: Activity 1
- pens, pencils, pencil crayons, erasers, paper
- CD player, CD of reflective or nature music (optional)
- candle, matches
- cushions or pillows

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. There are many ways to explore scripture. *Lectio Divina* is a traditional Christian practice with four parts: we take a bite (*Lectio*), then chew on it (*Meditatio*), then savor the essence of it (*Oratio*), and finally, we digest the Word and make it part of our body (*Contemplatio*). Explain this spiritual exercise to the children. Ask them to find a quiet place where they can be alone with their thoughts and God. Light a candle to welcome God’s presence. Then lead the children through these steps. First, quietly read the story from Genesis 18:1–15 slowly and attentively. Repeat the reading two or three times. Then write down words or phrases that catch your attention. Finally, write a prayer to God, draw a picture, or simply rest in God’s loving presence. Dim the lights and play reflective music during this exercise.



2 In Havruta

Leader preparation: Make photocopies of the questions (see supplies list). Gather supplies. Read Genesis 18:1–15 and Isaiah 25:1–9. Be prepared to pair “beginning readers” with “experienced readers.” Think about how you can provide a hospitable environment that encourages children to question scripture.

Supplies:

- copies of questions, Attachment: Activity 2
- Bibles
- pens or pencils and erasers
- apple slices and honey

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. *Havruta* comes from the word *Haver*, which in Hebrew means “friend.” A famous rabbinic text states: “Hence, say the sages, a person should acquire a *Haver* for everything: for reading Scripture, studying Mishnah, eating, drinking, and sharing all secrets” (Sifre Deuteronomy #305). In Christian tradition, we study the scriptures to learn how to live God’s way. As we share our discoveries, we do so in a spirit of hospitality. Older children are beginning to question scripture. Their study skills are developing and they enjoy digging into a text. Invite the children

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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to work in pairs to excavate Genesis 18:1–15 and Isaiah 25:1–9. They will read the passage together and answer the questions. Then ask the pairs to share their findings. How is studying the scripture in “Havruta” different from studying alone? Serve a snack of honey and apples, a typical treat for Jewish children after study.



3 Surprised by Strangers

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Genesis 18:1–15. If possible, lead this session outside. Set up a small camping tent, or make a tent using a blanket or tarp spread over chairs and secured with tape or clothespins. Make photocopies of the script “Surprised by Strangers.” Think about the reading level of your group. Plan to pair beginning readers with experienced readers.

Supplies:

- photocopies of the script, Attachment: Activity 3
- Bible
- small camping tent or large blanket/tarp, chairs, clothespins or duct tape
- props: water and basin (for washing feet), towel, bread, picture of meat
- costumes: first-century clothing (robes, lengths of fabric, blankets)
- highlighter markers

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. There are different paths to enter scripture. As we imagine ourselves into the story, we discover how the biblical story is our story. We find our voices in the voices of the biblical characters. Invite the children to present the story “Surprised by Strangers.” Read Genesis 18:1–15. Distribute the script “Surprised by Strangers.” Ask for these volunteers: Narrator (any number of children), Strangers (three), God, Abraham, Sarah. Provide costumes and props. Give the readers time to read their script and highlight their parts. Present the drama. Then reflect using these questions or your own: What did you discover about yourself through this story? What did you discover about God? What feelings did you experience? Which character are you most like? What questions did they have? Present the drama several times so everyone has a chance to participate.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 What Would You Do? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Genesis 18:1–15. Familiarize yourself with the story “Waiting to Be Welcomed” so you can share it with the children.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- story “Waiting to Be Welcomed,” Attachment: Activity 4
- song “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” (tune: CHEREPONI)
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>
- Web site about safe practices with strangers:
<http://www.safechild.org/strangers.htm>

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another.

Invite the children to read the story from Genesis 18:1–15. Imagine you are Abraham or Sarah. What would you do if strangers came to your tent? Then read the story “Waiting to Be Welcomed.” Imagine you are the person who met the old man in shabby clothes. What would you do? Would you offer hospitality? Do we miss out on God’s surprises when we ignore strangers? Should we avoid strangers? Should we invite them into our homes? How do we discern what God wants us to do? Talk about safe practices with strangers when you are not with an adult who is taking care of you. How do we make safe choices? What tools help us make wise decisions?

Sing “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love.”

5 Feasts and Food

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Genesis 18:1–15. Recall stories in scripture about food and feasts. Learn about how children feast around the world. Print a Middle Eastern blessing on chart paper.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Middle Eastern snack foods: grapes, hummus, pita bread, melons, pomegranates, cheese, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, mint tea
- small paper plates or napkins, cups
- chart paper, marker
- book *Children Just Like Me* by Anabel Kindersley and Barnabas Kindersley (DK Children, 1995)

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Read Genesis 18:1–15. Sarah and Abraham decide how they will respond to strangers at their tent. They welcome the stranger with a fine feast of food. We, too, decide how we will welcome strangers. These may be people new to our neighborhood, school, or church. Eating together is still one of the best ways to build relationships and welcome strangers. Enjoy a snack of Middle Eastern food. As you are eating, brainstorm other feasting or food stories in the Bible. Look at the book *Children Just Like Me* to discover how people around the world feast. Then bless each other with an Iraqi blessing: *Asalamu Aleykum!* (A-SA-lam-u A-LAY-kum) or a Hebrew blessing *Shalom* (Sha-LOAM) meaning “peace be with you.”

6 Hospitality Hunt

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Genesis 18:1–15 and Isaiah 25:1–9. Ponder the places where hospitality is at its best in your congregation.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- clipboard
- pens, pencils, erasers
- paper

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. As children of God, we discern how we will embody scripture in our church, community, and world. Read one of the Bible focus passages: Genesis 18:1–15 or Isaiah 25:1–9. Then invite the children to go on a “hospitality hunt” to discern where hospitality happens in your congregation. Check for signs or symbols of welcome. Is there an entrance where more welcome signs could be useful? Could the children make some? How about some pink triangles to welcome the gay, lesbian and transgender community to your church? Tour the church building, inside and outside. At each place, talk about how hospitality happens, who gives and who receives. Include these places: worship space, fellowship space, kitchen, foyer, nursery, classrooms, library, parking lot, sidewalks, property, and so on. Invite the children to be “reporters” and record their findings. Then look at the list and see what is missing. Decide on one way to make the church more hospitable.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 How Will We Serve? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Genesis 18:1–15.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- a few props and costumes (optional)

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Read Genesis 18:1–15. Reflect upon how Sarah and Abraham served three strangers by offering generous hospitality. We, too, have opportunities to share hospitality by serving others, including strangers. These may be people we don’t know or people we don’t normally spend time with. For older children, peers are very important. Sometimes it is hard to move outside their peer group. Invite them to create and present short skits about serving others by offering hospitality. How will we serve a child who is new to the group, visitors at church, refugees, an elderly neighbor, people who are homeless, people who have disabilities, and so on?

Send the children with these words of blessing, “child’s name, go and share God’s hospitality!”

 **8 Enough for All**

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Isaiah 25:1–9. Display the poster “The Luncheon of the Boating Party.” Cover up the title. Make arrangements to deliver sandwiches to a homeless shelter. Be sensitive to children in your group who do not have their basic needs met.

Supplies:

- poster: “The Luncheon of the Boating Party” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters2> by Pierre-Auguste Renoir
- Bibles
- sandwich ingredients

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Invite the children to study the poster “The Luncheon of the Boating Party.” Reflect using these questions or your own: What do you notice about this artwork? What title would you give this poster? (Then uncover the title.) Who is invited to this party? Who is not here? Fairness is very important to older children. Read Isaiah 25:1–9. Who is included in this feast? Invite the children to imagine a world where everyone had enough. What can we do? What experience have you had with people who are homeless? Do we see them as strangers or angels with messages from God? Prepare sandwiches for a homeless shelter. Pray for the “angels” who will be receiving the food.

9 Hospitality Relay

Gather supplies. Find a space, preferably outside, to play this game. Mark off a distance for each relay team to run. Set up relay. Be aware of food allergies.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- for each relay team: bathrobe, package of baby wipes, snack such as rice cakes
- markers such as a pylon, masking tape, or rope
- song “Guide My Feet” (tune: GUIDE MY FEET) <http://www.tinyhurl.com/FPSong14>

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. In Old Testament times, strangers were to be treated as highly honored guests. Sarah and Abraham entertained angels without knowing (Genesis 18:1–2). Other people mentioned did the same (Judges 6:11, Genesis 19:1–2). These people showed with their words and actions their love for the stranger. Recall with the children how Sarah and Abraham showed hospitality: greeted the strangers, bowed to show respect, washed their feet, and served a fine feast. Invite the children to play a relay game to serve each other. Divide the children into relay teams. Have each team line up at the end of the playing area. Point out the marker at the other end of the playing area. Explain these steps. Each person will run to marker and do these steps: put on robe to “greet” the next person in line, “bow” to the next person, wash their feet, and serve them a snack. When the relay is complete, sing “Guide My Feet.”

Reflect

How did scripture “compass” you as you explored hospitality? Reflect upon your time together. What questions did the children have about scripture? What Bible skills are they developing? How might you continue to encourage them to be people of the sacred story? How are they growing in their faith journey? Take a moment to pray for each child by name. Pray that God’s story might become their story.

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Attachment: Activity 1

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a way of reading the Bible that is very old. It dates back to the 12th century ... that's 900 years ago. All kinds of people—grownups and kids, people who have been studying the Bible for years and years, and those who are reading it for the very first time—do *Lectio Divina*. You are never too old or too young to start.

Here's how to do it:

First, find a quiet spot where you can be alone with your thoughts and God. Light a candle to welcome God's presence. Play quiet music if you wish. Then go through these four steps:

1. We take a bite (*Lectio*).
2. We chew on it (*Meditatio*).
3. We savor the essence of it (*Oratio*).
4. We think about God's love for us and our love for God (*Contemplatio*).

Are you ready to begin?

Read the following scripture passage slowly and carefully. Underline the words or phrases that catch your attention.

The LORD Promises Abraham a Son *Genesis 18:1-15 (CEV)*

¹One hot summer afternoon Abraham was sitting by the entrance to his tent near the sacred trees of Mamre, when the LORD appeared to him. ²Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. He quickly ran to meet them, bowed with his face to the ground, ³and said, "Please come to my home where I can serve you. ⁴I'll have some water brought, so you can wash your feet, then you can rest under the tree. ⁵Let me get you some food to give you strength before you leave. I would be honored to serve you."

"Thank you very much," they answered. "We accept your offer."

⁶Abraham quickly went to his tent and said to Sarah, "Hurry! Get a large sack of flour and make some bread."

⁷After saying this, he rushed off to his herd of cattle and picked out one of the best calves, which his servant quickly prepared. ⁸He then served his guests some yogurt and milk together with the meat.

While they were eating, he stood near them under the trees, ⁹and they asked, "Where is your wife Sarah?"

"She is right there in the tent," Abraham answered.

¹⁰One of the guests was the LORD, and he said, "I'll come back about this time next year, and when I do, Sarah will already have a son."

Sarah was behind Abraham, listening at the entrance to the tent. ¹¹Abraham and Sarah were very old, and Sarah was well past the age for having children. ¹²So she laughed and said to herself, "Now that I am worn out and my husband is old, will I really know such happiness?" (a) ¹³The LORD asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Does she doubt that she can have a child in her old age? ¹⁴I am the LORD! There is nothing too difficult for me. I'll come back next year at the time I promised, and Sarah will already have a son."

¹⁵Sarah was so frightened that she lied and said, "I didn't laugh."

"Yes, you did!" he answered.

Now think about the passage. Can you summarize it in two sentences? Why is it important? What might it teach us about God? Write your thoughts here.

Talk quietly with God about the passage. Don't forget to listen to what God might have to say! Write down any thoughts that suddenly pop into your mind.

Finally, think about God's love for you. On the back of this sheet, write a prayer to God, draw a picture, or, if you prefer, simply rest in God's loving presence.

Attachment: Activity 3

Surprised by Strangers

A Readers' Theater based on Genesis 18:1-5

Voices: Narrator, God, Strangers (3), Abraham, Sarah

Narrator: It was the hottest part of the day. Abraham sat at the entrance of the tent. He raised his head and saw three men coming toward him. He hurried out of his tent to greet them. He bowed before them.

Abraham: Gentlemen, I am here to serve you. I am honored that you came here. Please, stop for a while and rest. Let me get some water to wash your hot, dry feet. There is shade for you to rest under this tree. I will get some food to refresh you and give you strength for your journey.

Strangers: Certainly. Go ahead.

Narrator: Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah, his wife.

Abraham: Sarah, we have guests to care for.

Sarah: What shall I do to serve them?

Abraham: Get three cups of our best flour. Knead it and make bread. I will go get one of our fattest calves to prepare so we can offer these strangers the finest feast.

Narrator: Abraham ran to the cattle pen and picked out a nice plump calf. He gave it to the servant who lost no time getting it ready. Then he got curds and milk. He brought those and the calf that had been roasted to the guests. Abraham set the meal before the men and stood there under the tree while they ate.

Strangers: Where is Sarah, your wife?

Narrator: Sarah is in the tent.

Stranger 1: I am coming back here about this time next year. When I arrive, your wife Sarah will have a son.

Narrator: Sarah was listening at the tent opening, just behind the stranger.

Abraham and Sarah were old by this time, very old. Sarah was far past the age for having babies. Sarah laughed.

Sarah: An old woman like me? Get pregnant? With this old man of a husband?"

Narrator: Then God said to Abraham,

God: Why did Sarah laugh at the words of the stranger? Is anything too hard for God? About this time next year you will have a baby.

Narrator: Sarah was afraid. She said that she didn't laugh. She didn't believe what the strangers said would ever happen!

Waiting to be welcomed (*a true story*)

A shabbily dressed old man visited a foreign country. He went to the embassy to ask for assistance. Since he was poorly dressed, no one took the time to help him. He waited and waited for his turn. He waited the whole day. It was closing time. He was told to leave and come back the next day.

Meanwhile, a woman came by the embassy at closing time to meet up with a friend at the embassy. On their way out, they noticed the poorly dressed old man. He was carrying a suitcase. The woman stopped him and asked if he was a tourist. He explained he had just arrived in the country and was going to find a place to stay for the night. The woman visited with him for a few moments and discovered he had come to learn acupuncture.

She gave her husband a phone call. After consulting with him, she invited the stranger to their home. Perhaps they would be able to help him since the embassy ignored him. That night the stranger was entertained by the couple. They gave him dinner and then took him to see some beautiful sights in the city. As they got to know one another better, the couple learned that this man was a millionaire in his country!

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Some older children may be familiar with the term “discipleship.” Their understanding of Jesus and his teachings is growing. They will connect with the passage from John 13:1–17, 31b–35 where Jesus shows us what it means to love and serve others. Children in this age group are becoming less egocentric and understand the sacred system of interrelationships. Since they are in the stage of forming habits, they can be encouraged to cultivate habits of attentiveness and see the face of God in others. Some children may be uncomfortable receiving hospitality when it is outside of their own culture and experiences. However, they can be challenged to receive God’s many gifts of hospitality to our world.

About this Exploration

Hospitable disciples see God in each encounter with the people in our daily lives and those who lie beyond our usual circles of experience. The distinctions between other and self decrease when other living creatures and the earth are encountered as a sacred system of interrelationships.

We practice hospitality in cultures with habits of expected interaction. However, Jesus calls us to habits of attentiveness which go beyond our own cultures, needs and experiences. As disciples, all can be encouraged to see the face of Jesus in every experience of hospitality.

Hospitality encompasses giving and receiving. Receiving the gift of hospitality from another, even when uncomfortable, embodies receiving God’s many gifts to our world.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
John 13:1–17, 31b–35
Acts 2:42–47

Leader Preparation

Prayerfully read and reflect upon John 13:1–17, 31b–35 and Acts 2:42–47. In the play *Les Miserables* Jean Valjean says, “To love another person is to see the face of God.” As you prepare to lead this session, think about who has been the face of God to you. How do you cultivate an attitude of attentiveness to see God in others and in the world around you? As you go about your daily activities, look for God’s face. Ponder how you can love others unconditionally, graciously, and generously. What does discipleship ask of you? Jesus shows us a way of love and service.

Prepare your gathering space. See the Exploration “Discovery” Leader Preparation for ideas. Add water or another symbol of discipleship to your worship table.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for people who are the face of God to me. As I prepare to lead this session, may I be attentive to each child. Help me receive your many gifts of hospitality. Thank you that your immense love encompasses all people. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 activities that help learners engage the practice of faith. It is best to select at least one activity from Exploring

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 “Follow the Leader” Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Find an area, preferably outside, that is large enough to play “Follow the Leader.”

Supplies:

- Bibles

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Ask the children what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The word “disciple” appears 232 times in the four gospels and the Book of Acts. Invite them to read John 13:1–17, 31b–35. We are Jesus’ disciples when we learn from and follow the teachings of Jesus. John 13:35 tells us that others will know we are Jesus’ disciples when we love one another. Play the game “Follow the Leader” to reflect upon the meaning of discipleship. Invite the children to take turns being the leader. Be sensitive to children with disabilities as you chose actions for the group to follow.



2 Serving and Loving

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read John 13:1–17 and 31b–35. Make three copies of the script “Washing his Disciples’ Feet.”

Supplies:

- Bibles
- simple props and costumes: robes and/or pieces of fabric, apron, water, basin, towel
- script “Washing his Disciples Feet,” Attachment: Activity 2
- highlighter markers
- song “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?” (tune: SERVANT SONG)

<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Invite the children to read John 13:1–17, 31b–35. Jesus shows us how to love and serve. Ask for three volunteers to read these parts: Narrator, Jesus, Peter. Distribute the scripts, props, and costumes. The children may wish to highlight their part on the script. Other children may be the disciples. Invite the readers to act out their parts as they read. Do the story several times giving all children who wish to participate the opportunity. Then talk about the passage. What are some ways our church practices foot washing today? How do we love and serve others? Sing “Won’t You Let Me Be Your Servant?”



3 Sacred Relationships

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Spend time with the poster “The Peaceable Kingdom.” Learn about the meaning and symbolism of the peacock. Print an image of a peacock from a Web site.

Supplies:

- poster: “The Peaceable Kingdom”
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> by John August Swanson
- paper, pens, pencil crayons

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 using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

- Web site about peacocks such as: <http://www.tinyurl.com/6gj7jw> and <http://www.tinyurl.com/dhlxb9>

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Talk about how hospitable disciples see the sacred relationship between themselves and other people, living creatures, and the earth. Invite the children to explore this sacred relationship. Ask them to quietly study the poster “The Peaceable Kingdom.” What do you notice? What might the peacock symbolize? How are the people and animals connected to each other? How do we honor the sacred relationship between ourselves, others and all living creatures? The children may wish to journal or sketch their responses to this art engagement.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 The Early Church (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Acts 2:42–47.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper, tape, markers or pencil crayons

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Invite the children to read Acts 2:42–47. Talk about what how the early Christians followed the teachings of Jesus. What did they do? How did they live? Give each child two pieces of paper. Invite them to fold each paper into quarters. Using Acts 2:42–47, ask them to draw one picture in each quadrant to show a characteristic of the early church such as: learning, fellowship, communion, prayer, sharing, worship, eating, and praising God. Reflect upon how your congregation is similar to the early church.



5 Being Attentive to God’s Ways

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Choose from among the quiet places and set up prayer centers (see Quiet Place Direction Cards). Pair an older child with a younger child.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- supplies for the prayer centers you decide to set up (see supply list on Quiet Place Direction Cards), Attachment, Activity 5
- small bell or wind chime

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Prayer is one habit of a disciple of Jesus. When we spend time talking to God, we learn to know God better. Prayer helps us become attentive to God’s ways in our life, in others, and in the world around us. Prayer was important to the early church (Acts 2:42–47). Invite the children to experience different kinds of prayer. Briefly explain each prayer center and the direction they will move. Allow children to spend 3–4 minutes in each center. Sound a small bell or wind chime when it is time to move to a new prayer center.

6 Living as Jesus' Disciples

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Prayerfully read and reflect upon "Living as Jesus' disciples." You may wish to lead this activity outside. With a rope make a circle large enough for the children to stand inside. Place the rock in the center.

Living as Jesus' Disciples

Directions: Use a rope to create a large circle. Make sure the circle is big enough for all the children to stand inside. Place a rock in the middle to represent God. As you read a statement, invite the children to step toward the rock if the statement helps them live as Jesus' disciples or step away from the rock if the statement does not help them live as Jesus' disciples. Begin with all the children in the circle.

Use statements such as:

Share my favorite toy with my younger brother or sister
Watch a TV show my parents wouldn't approve of
Pray for places in the world where there is war
Leave someone out of a game
Invite someone for dinner
Worship with others at church
Pollute the environment
Share some of my allowance with someone else
Love others
Spread a mean rumor
Lie to my parents
Hurt someone's feelings
Ignore someone who is sad and lonely
Listen carefully to a friend who wants to talk
Receive a gift from someone who wants to give
Be a peacemaker
Get angry at my brother and call him names
Sing songs about God
Help a person who is old
Read the Bible

Supplies:

- long rope
- rock

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. In our focus passages for today, we learn what it means to live as disciples of Jesus. Invite the children to stand inside the circle. Point out that the rock in the middle represents God. As you read a statement, ask the children to step toward the rock if the statement helps them live as Jesus' disciples and brings them closer to God. If the statement does not help them live as Jesus' disciples they will take a step away from the rock. Invite the children to add their own statements to the game.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 “Be Church” Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Acts 2:42–47. Find an appropriate large playing area.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Invite the children to read Acts 2:42–47. Talk about the ways the early Christians were church. How are these practices part of our church today? How do these practices show hospitality? Then invite the children to create simple actions for these ways we are church: learn, fellowship, break bread, pray, share, worship, eat, and praise God. For example, they could clap their hands for “praise God.” Then play “Be Church.” The leader begins by saying “Be church,” and the children run around the playing area. When the leader calls out an action such as “two friends praise God” the children must get with a partner and do the action. The game continues with the leader calling out another grouping and action such as “four friends pray.”

8 The Most Important Thing

Leader preparation: Read John 13:31b–35. Find the book *The Three Questions* — <http://www.tinyurl.com/2armwym> — and practice reading it.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- *The Three Questions*, written and illustrated by Jon J. Muth (Scholastic Press, 2002) <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ck83of>

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Invite the children to read John 13:31b–35. What is the most important thing to do as Jesus’ disciples? Invite the children to listen to the story *The Three Questions*. What is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do? As hospitable disciples of Jesus, we can see the face of God in each encounter we have with others and with the world around us. As you send out the children, use these words of blessing: “Child’s name, I see the face of God in you.”

9 Caring Blanket

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Acts 2:42–47. Find someone in your congregation or community to receive your blanket. This activity works best if done on a clean floor or on a table that is large enough to accommodate the entire piece of fabric. Familiarize yourself with these instructions: <http://www.tinyurl.com/6ow3xs>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- heavy (polar) fleece fabric in coordinating or contrasting colors
- sharp scissors
- ruler or tape measure

- instructions: <http://www.tinyurl.com/6ow3xs>

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Invite the children to read Acts 2:4–47. The early Christian church loved and served others. One way we serve others is by sharing and caring. Invite the children to recall a time when they received an act of kindness from someone. Make a “caring blanket” to give to someone in your congregation or community. Follow the instructions on the website. When the blanket is completed, say a prayer of blessing for the person who received it.

Reflect

As you reflect upon this session, think about the discoveries you made about discipleship and hospitality. How is God’s Spirit forming your group into Christian community? How are you honoring the different ways children learn in your group? How are you receiving and affirming their gifts of hospitality? Thank God for the faith journey of each child. Take time to visualize each child and see the face of God in them. Pray for them by name thanking God for the gifts you are receiving from them.

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Attachment: Activity 2

Washing the Disciples' Feet

Narrator: It was just before the Passover Feast, the festival when the Jewish people remember how God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Jesus: The time has come for me to leave this world to go to God.

Narrator: Jesus ate a special meal with the disciples. Then he got up from the table, took off his robe, and put on an apron. Pouring water into a basin, Jesus began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with an apron. Peter was shocked to see Jesus behaving like a servant.

Peter: Master, you will never wash my feet!

Jesus: If I don't wash you, Peter, then you don't really belong to me.

Peter: Then not only my feet, Master. Wash my hands! Wash my head! Wash my whole body!

Jesus: If you've had a bath in the morning, you only need your feet washed now and you're clean from head to toe.

Narrator: After Jesus finished washing their feet, he put a robe on and sat down at the table with the disciples.

Jesus: Do you understand what I have done? You call me "Teacher" and "Master." I have shown you how to be humble and kind. Now you must learn to serve one another the same way. Just as I have loved you, love one another. Everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Attachment: Activity 5

Quiet Place Direction Cards

Instructions:

- Read through the cards and decide how many and which quiet places to prepare.
- Plan the layout of the places and gather materials
- Copy and cut apart the direction cards.
- Display a direction card in each quiet space along with the supplies for that space.

Supplies Needed for Quiet Places:

1. Desert: tray of sand
2. Sea: large bowl of water, towel, small pitcher or measuring cup
3. Mountain: small, smooth stones (about 12)
4. Forest: Pine branches and cones, weathered wood, leaves, seeds
5. Music: CD player with headphones, nature or instrumental music
6. Plants: Plants, magnifying glass
7. Wonder: Bubble solution, wands
8. Beauty: blue, green, purple watercolors, brushes, 2 bowls of water, paper

Quiet Places

Desert: Take a deep breath. Breathe in and then breathe out. Do it again very slowly. Concentrate on your breath. Then trace a pattern in the sand with your finger. Continue breathing deeply as you move your fingers slowly through the sand. Think about your life—how is God walking with you? How is God with you each step of the way? If a word comes to your mind, you can spell it in the sand.

Sea: Look at the quiet water and let yourself become quiet. Scoop up a little water with the pitcher and pour it back slowly. Slide your hands into the water—your fingertips, your fingers, and then your hands. Spread your fingers in the water and then bring them back together. Feel the coolness. Think of God’s peace pouring over you. Imagine God’s peace covering the whole world.

Mountain: Pick up a stone and examine the color and shape. What do you notice? Feel the cool smoothness of the stone. Then feel the weight of the stone in your hand. The weight can remind us of things we are worried about or wrongs we have done. Let them go and give your thoughts to God. Feel God’s peace and kindness. Then close your hand around the stone. Imagine being held in the hand of God. You are in God’s love and care.

Forest: Smell the freshness of the pine. Look at the items from the forest and examine them closely. What

do you see? Look for patterns and shapes. Close your eyes and feel the items. Think about how they feel. Now imagine you are in a huge forest. Picture how big it is. Imagine how big God is and how God cares for the tiniest seed.

Music: Listen to soft music with the headphones. Listen to what God is saying to you.

Plants: Use the magnifying glass to look closely at the plants. What amazes you? What do you notice? Now look at a part of your body. What amazing things do you see? Be thankful for the mystery and wonders of creation.

Wonder: Dip the wand into the bubble solution. Gently blow some bubbles. Watch them float. Notice the colors. Let your thoughts wonder about God and the amazing world God has created. Think about how much God loves you. Let the peace of the bubbles fill your thoughts.

Beauty: Dip your brush in the clean water and brush the water gently over the paper. Then dip your brush in one of the colors. Drip spots of color onto the paper and watch the colors spread. Don’t try to paint a picture; just enjoy watching the beauty of the color spread. Think about the beautiful colors in our world. Think about God’s beauty in your life. Think about how you can share that beauty with others.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Practices of faith have been shaped by those who have preceded us in the history of the Christian church. This rich history of the Christian tradition guides us as we give and receive hospitality today. Older children understand special meals and rituals. They like to participate in these times. Some will be familiar with Mark 14:22–25 and make the connection of the Last Supper with communion. Children in this age group enjoy learning about rituals, Christian symbols, the heritage of their church, and the church around the world.

About this Exploration

God continually invites us to extravagantly welcome others into abundant life. We are not the first to experience questions, failures, accomplishments, joys and sorrows. Our Christian tradition gives us ancestors in faith whose stories and life experiences inform our own. Every drop of water reminds us of Christ's baptism. Shared meals recall Jesus' breaking bread and sharing the cup. Grounded in Hebrew tradition, Jesus displayed radical commitment to the poor. Love for the poor continues to characterize Christian community. God invites us to welcome those whom we encounter in daily life, and those we might not otherwise encounter, to see them as God's beloved people, and treasure the diversity of humanity. We are called by God to create a safe, welcoming environment for all. We join the family of all time.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 14:22–25
1 Peter 4:1–11

Leader Preparation

Prayerfully read and reflect upon Mark 14:22–25 and 1 Peter 4:1–11. As you prepare to lead this session, think about how Christian tradition has informed your understanding of hospitality. Which “ancestors in faith” have shaped your faith journey? Ponder how God has graciously gifted you to serve these children.

Prepare your gathering space. See the Exploration Discovery Leader Preparation for ideas. Reflect upon the practice of baptism and communion in your church.

Prayer: Creator of all people, you have been with us in the past, are with us in the present, and will be with us into the future. Thank you for men and women whose faith stories have shaped me. May your extravagant welcome be evident in the way I treasure each child. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Come, Everyone! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Make plans to sing “Come All You People,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>, for the congregation during worship.

Supplies:

- song “Come All You People” (tune: Uyai Mose, Iona Community) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong1>
- world map or globe

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. As God’s beloved people, we treasure the diversity of humanity. Invite the children to learn the song “Come All You People” from Zimbabwe, South Africa. Locate Zimbabwe on the world map or globe. The words are in the Shona language. Our hands welcome others. Divide the children into two groups facing each other. All children do a “beckoning” motion on the beat with fingers, palms upright, arms in front, as each group invites the others to “come in.” The song is in 4/4 time, so shift weight from one foot to the other, and let the hands go to the same side on each 4 beat measure. Present the song to the congregation during worship.

2 Our Church, a Welcoming Place

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Invite a guest from the congregation who can share some interesting history about the church in “child-friendly” ways. Encourage him or her to bring photos or other artifacts about the church’s history. Ask the guest to think about ways the church has become more welcoming.

Supplies:

- welcoming “project” supplies
- thank-you note, pens

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Recall that we are called by God to make our churches places that are safe and welcoming for everyone. Listen to a guest talk about the history of the church and how it has become a more welcoming place for others over the years. Then invite the children to do a “welcoming project” to make the church more inviting: plant flowers, make a “welcome banner,” pick up trash on the property, wash windows, wash toys in the nursery, bake muffins, tie balloons with a message “God loves everyone!” on car doors, or whatever activity you choose! Ask a child to write a thank-you note to the guest and have everyone sign it.

3 Learning About Baptism and Communion

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Learn about the meaning of baptism and communion in your congregation. You may find this on your denomination’s Web site.

Supplies:

- pitcher of water
- bowl
- plate and cup
- grape juice and small loaf of bread
- fabric for communion table runner
- permanent markers

activity in each category is designed for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Recall that a sacrament is a gift from God for the people of God. Our church practices two sacraments: baptism and communion. Show the children the sacrament items and ask them which sacrament the items belongs to. What do these sacraments mean to us? How are they practiced? Then invite the children to make a communion table runner. They may use markers to draw symbols of the sacraments. Invite them to sign their names on the runner when they are done.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Stories of Hospitality (Easy Preparation)

Leader Preparation: Gather supplies. Read 1 Peter 4:8–11. Arrange to have a guest, preferably an older woman, share with the children about how she has used her gifts of hospitality to serve God. If you serve a snack, be aware of food allergies.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- notepaper, pencils, erasers, pens, pencil crayons, fine-tipped markers
- snack (optional)
- song *Tú has venido a la orilla* (You Have Come down to the Lakeshore) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong15a> (tune: *Pescador de Hombres*)

Welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Recall how our Christian tradition gives us ancestors in faith whose stories and life experiences inform our own. We join the family of all time. Invite the children to read 1 Peter 4:8–11. We are called to serve one another with the gifts God has given us.

Listen to a guest share how he or she has used gifts to share God’s hospitality with others. Enjoy a simple snack with the guest.

Sing *Tú has venido a la orilla* <http://tinyurl.com/2bgafff>. Then have the children make a thank-you card to send to the guest.

An alternative idea is to have the children learn about a woman such as Mother Teresa; see <http://www.tinyurl.com/7lwsy7>.

5 The Gift of Water

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Research world water facts. The UCC documentary, *Troubled Waters*, <http://www.ucc.org/troubled-waters>, gives a good overview of the issues. Be aware of the gift of water in your life. Research the background of the song “Wade in the Water,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong2>, on the Internet.

Supplies:

- poster: “The Public Fountain” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> by Manuel Alvarez Bravo
- chart paper, marker
- Web sites about water: <http://www.ucc.org/troubled-waters> or <http://www.water.org/>

- world map or globe
- song “Wade in the Water” <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong2>

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Every drop of water reminds us of Christ’s baptism. Invite the children to quietly study the poster “The Public Fountain” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> What do you notice? Where is this water fountain? Why is the boy drinking here? Is it a clean source? What does water mean to this boy and his family? What is the expression on his face? Many children in the world do not have an adequate source of water. How can we help those who do not have enough water? Make a list of ideas. Pray for children in the world who do not have enough water. Sing “Wade in the Water.” Talk about the origin of this song.

6 Tour the Place Where Communion Supplies are Stored

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Mark 14:22–25. Arrange ahead of time for a tour of the place where communion supplies are stored. Print the title “Communion is ...” on mural paper. Learn about your congregation’s policies related to children and communion.

Supplies:

- mural paper, markers
- Bibles
- communion ware and communion supplies
- bibliography of resources on children and communion in your church (check your denomination’s Web site)

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Invite the children to add their ideas to the mural “Communion is ...” Talk about special meals they share with their families. Communion is a special meal we share as God’s people. Read Mark 14:22–25. Then go to the place in your church where communion supplies are stored. Look at the communion ware and learn how the communion elements are prepared. Talk about how communion is served in your church. Sometimes people stay in the pews and the communion is passed along the row. Sometimes people come forward to receive the elements. On special occasions, a congregation may vary how communion is served. If there is different communion ware for these styles, explain them. If there are stories about your communion set, share these stories.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 “God’s Gifts” Game (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read 1 Peter 4:8–11. Place chairs in a circle, one less chair than children.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- chairs (one less than the number of children)

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Invite the children to read 1 Peter 4:8–11. We are called to serve one another with whatever gift God gives us. Brainstorm with the children the ways God gifts them and how they can serve others. Then play a game together to celebrate

God's gifts. This game is played like "Fruit Basket Upset." Choose four gifts such as: music, art, drama, sports. Assign each child one of the four gifts. The children sit on chairs with a "caller" in the middle of the circle. The caller says a gift such as "sports." Those children must stand up and exchange places. The person left without a chair becomes the next caller. If the caller says, "All God's gifts," then everyone stands up and finds a new seat.

8 The Last Supper

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Mark 14:22–25. Cut out "question mark" shapes from paper. Be prepared to help younger children with writing their questions or have them dictate to an older child.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- small loaf of bread, cup, grape juice
- Bible story books depicting the Last Supper
- paper "question marks," pencils, erasers
- bread or crackers, grapes or juice, napkins

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Invite the children to read Mark 14:22–25. As you read, dramatize the story by holding up bread and a cup of grape juice. After the story invite the children's reflections. Show them various art images of the Last Supper. Imagine how the disciples might have felt as they shared this meal with Jesus. What might they have been feeling, thinking, wondering? We are not the first to experience questions, joys and sorrows. Give the children "question marks" and invite them to write their questions to God. Then serve the children bread and grapes or juice. Remind them that the Lord's Supper is a special meal for all God's children. It strengthens us, as God's people, to love and serve others.

9 Caring for People Who are Poor

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Choose a project such as "love kits for kids," "love kits for health," or "love kits for school and home."

See <http://www.tinyurl.com/22qehrs>.

Supplies:

- supplies for the project you choose

Reflect

This session invites the children to explore the rich history of the Christian tradition as it guides us in the faith practice of hospitality today. What activities connected with the children? What feelings and thoughts were evoked? How did the children interact with one another? Thank God for the gift of tradition as it informs our faith today. Take quiet time to pray for each child. Hold each one before our Maker in grateful thanks.

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Jesus always cared for people who were poor, and he taught his followers to do the same. Throughout history, love for people who are poor has characterized the Christian community. Invite the children to recall stories of Jesus' care for people who were poor and church mothers and fathers who have cared for people who are poor. Talk about how your church cares for people who are poor in your community and around the world. How can we care? Invite the children to make a "love kit" for children in parts of the world where there is poverty because of war or natural disasters.

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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Older children are action oriented. They like to engage in concrete activities such as service projects. Their primary context of relationships is family and friends. However, their world is expanding and they are becoming more aware of local and global communities. They are sensitive to the needs of others. Romans 12:9–18 shows them how to be a welcoming community. Many will be familiar with John 6:1–21 where Jesus uses the gift of a child to meet the needs of a crowd. Children in this age group are becoming aware of their unique gifts. What a wonderful opportunity to affirm their giftedness as they reach out to others.

About this Exploration

Hospitality marks the identity and inspires the action of a welcoming community. Discerning needs of the local community and expressing compassion for the global community call individuals and congregations to respond to the real need. Each individual brings unique gifts to the community and extends opportunities to share. Mission partnerships are never one-way streets. Risking outreach to others creates opportunities to receive. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and those in prison are ways of welcoming Christ into the community. Those sent forth in mission are uniquely able to return with lessons of hospitality offered by those who have been served. Looking to God for guidance, the open hearts and serving hands that reach out to the world are the same hearts and hands that welcome.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Romans 12:9–18
John 6:1–21

Leader Preparation

Prayerfully reflect upon Romans 12:9–18 and John 6:1–21. Learn about the ways the United Church of Christ is extending hospitality to those in need through mission and service:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2autp6e>.

Find out what your congregation is doing in mission and service both locally and globally. Ponder how you are God's hands to others.

"God has no hands but our hands to do God's work today;
 God has no feet but our feet to lead others in God's way;
 God has no voice but our voice to tell others how Christ died;
 God has no help but our help to lead them to God's side."
 (adapted from Mother Teresa)

Prepare your gathering space. See "Introduction to the Practice" (Discovering the World) Leader Preparation for ideas.

Prayer: Gracious God, you gift us and invite us to carry out your work in the world. Guide me as I lead this session. I offer you my "loaves and fishes." Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Welcoming Others (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Romans 12:9–18. Make copies of the readers' theater "Welcoming Others." Think about pairing strong readers with beginning readers.

Supplies:

- copies of "Welcoming Others," Attachment: Activity 1
- paper, markers, pencil, crayons
- envelopes, stamps

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Hospitality marks the identity and inspires the action of a welcoming community. Invite the children to present the readers' theater "Welcoming Others" based on Romans 12:9–18. Non-readers may create actions. Then invite the children to choose one idea from the readers' theater that they will work on in the coming week. Print that idea in the middle of a piece of paper. Create a border on the paper with markers or colored pencils. Place the paper in envelopes, seal, and write their mailing address on the front. Mail these ideas or give the children their sealed envelopes to be opened midweek at home.

2 A Child's Gift

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read John 6:1–21. Make two fish out of paper.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- simple props and costumes: robes or fabric, five small dinner rolls, two paper fish

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Invite the children to dramatize the story from John 6:1–21. You may wish to tell it several times. After the story, invite the children into a time of wondering. Use these questions or your own: What were the needs of the crowd? How did Jesus show compassion? What gift did the young child bring? What gift did the crowd receive? What gift did the child receive? What gifts of hospitality do we give and receive?

3 Stories of Mission

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Invite a mission worker to talk about an experience of giving and receiving hospitality in the global community. If you cannot find a guest, locate a story of mission on the internet:

<http://www.globalministries.org/lac/missionaries> or on your denomination's Web site.

Supplies:

- world map or globe
- snack from the global community

for “easy preparation” (able to be done with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

- guest or story from <http://globalministries.org/lac/missionaries>
- note paper, pens

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Mission partnerships are never one-way streets. Listen to a guest talk about an experience of giving and receiving hospitality in the global community. What lessons were learned about hospitality from that experience? What risks were involved? What did they give? What did they receive? Locate where they served on a world map. Eat a snack that is typical from that geographic area. Write a thank-you note to the guest.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Looking to God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read “Guided Prayer.” Find a quiet place to lead this activity.

Guided Prayer

Find a place where you are not distracted by others. Sit in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. Take a deep breath in. Slowly let it out. Take another breath in and let it out.

Imagine yourself in your favorite peaceful place. Maybe you are outside or maybe in your bedroom. Think about how your body feels when you are peaceful.

Now imagine yourself in the arms of God. You feel surrounded by God’s loving care. Now think about the people God has placed in your life, people who love and care for you, people who make good food for you, who wash your clothes, who look after you when you are sick. Feel God’s love through others. Think about the way you show love and care, by sharing your toys with your brother or sister, by playing with your dog, by hugging your mom or dad, by being a good friend. God’s love is in you and all around you.

Now think about your hands. Feel your hands. Rub them together. Think of all the things you do with your hands. You do homework, you draw pictures, and maybe you play a musical instrument or sport with your hands. Your hands serve others and make others feel happy. They clap and cheer, they wash dishes, they welcome people. Your hands also receive kindnesses from others. They open your favorite snack food, they open birthday gifts, and they open doors to visitors. God’s kindness is in your hands.

Think of your feet. Imagine all the places your feet go. They go to school, to parks, to church, to visit grandparents, to shopping malls, to play with friends. They take you to people you know and people you don’t know. They help you feel connected to the earth around you and all of God’s creation. They skip when you are happy and walk slowly when you are sad. God’s goodness is in your feet.

God’s love is in you and all around you. God’s kindness is in your hands. God’s goodness is in your feet. Thank God for God’s love, kindness, and goodness. Sit

quietly for a few moments and when you are ready, you may open your eyes.

Supplies:

- paper, crayons, markers, pencils, erasers, pens

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. As we discern how we might best serve God in our community and world, we look to God for guidance. We are grounded in prayer. We offer God our hearts, hands and feet as we reach out to the needs around us. We also receive from others who show us the love, kindness, and goodness of God. Invite the children to find a place where they are not distracted by others. Slowly and thoughtfully read the “Guided Prayer.” When you are done, children may draw a picture or write poetry in response to the prayer.

5 Chopsticks Game

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Learn how to play the game “Chopsticks.” Choose a mission story to share with the children:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2autp6e>

or on your denomination’s Web site. Invite a guest who is not Asian to teach the children how to use chopsticks.

Chopsticks Game

Can you use chopsticks? Children in China (and Japan and Korea and many other places) use them all the time. Here’s a chopstick game from Global Ministries missionaries, the Searles, who live in China. This very exciting game will teach you to use those chopsticks fast!

Set-up

1. Form two teams. (Don’t make the teams too big, 4–5 people is best. If you have extra people, have a cheering section!)
2. Line up each team on one side of a table, team members standing or sitting next to one another.
3. Give each player a bowl and a set of chopsticks.
4. Put a bowl full of raisins or small marshmallows to the left of the first player on each team.

Play

When the referee says “Go!” the player at the start (left) of the line begins taking raisins from the bowl to her/his left and putting them in the bowl in front of her/him. The next player will take raisins from the bowl on her/his left and put them into his/her own bowl, and so on until the bowl in front of the last person is full of raisins

Supplies:

- chopsticks
- bowls
- raisins or small marshmallows
- mission story
- song “I Am the Church” (Avery and Marsh, 1972)

<http://www.tinyurl.com/2fp9bpt>

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers.

Sometimes God calls us into mission experiences that are unfamiliar to us. Invite the children to play a game with chopsticks. Using chopsticks may be new to some children. Children in China, Japan, Korea, and many other places use chopsticks all the time. Invite a guest to teach the children how to use chopsticks. Ask the guest why he or she chose to learn this art. Invite the children to take the chopsticks home and use them with their families. Tell a mission story with the children. Sing “I Am the Church” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2fp9bpt>.

6 “What Is Your Gift?” Game

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Prepare a “gift box” — place a group treat inside a small box and then wrap the box in as many layers of gift paper as you have children.

Supplies:

- wrapping paper
- small box (like shoe box)
- treat for group
- CD player, CD

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. God has given each of us special gifts to use to serve others. Invite the children to think about their gifts or the things they enjoy doing and do well. These can be things such as “I like to play the piano” or “I am a good listener.” Give them a few moments to think. Then play a game. Pass the “gift box” while music is playing. When the music stops, the child who is holding the box unwraps one layer of paper and identifies a gift God has given him or her. Encourage the children to pass the gift to someone else if they have already had a turn. Invite the last child to open the gift box and share the treat with the rest of the group.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Singing (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Learn the song “Jesu, Jesu” (tune: CHEREPONI) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- song “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love”
<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong4>
- world map or globe

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Invite the children to learn “Jesu, Jesu,” a Ghana folk melody. Ask the children to create actions for the verses and chorus of the song. On a map, locate Ghana in Africa. Brainstorm with the children the many gifts, like music and food, we receive from our global community.

8 Offering Hospitality

Leader preparation: Check with a local homeless shelter and inquire about appropriate gifts for children. If the shelter does not want “candy kabobs,” explore

the possibility of other gifts such as personal care items, books, school supplies or other items. Gather supplies. If making “candy kabobs” learn how to make them at <http://www.tinyurl.com/26ampvk>.

Supplies:

- materials for making candy kabobs: cellophane, ribbon, skewers, a variety of wrapped candy, or
- alternative non-food activity: toothbrushes, travel size tubes of toothpaste, ribbon, books

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Jesus invites us to show love and compassion to those in need. Sometimes those in need live around the world, and sometimes those in need live in our communities. Jesus said, “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40b). Invite the children to make “candy kabobs” to give to children at a homeless shelter in your community. An alternative non-food activity is to put together a child’s care package with the following: a toothbrush, travel size tube of toothpaste, and book. Tie the items together with a ribbon.

9 Hospitality Cafe

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read John 6:1–21. Set up a “hospitality cafe” using tables, chairs, and colored table cloths. Post a sign “Welcome to the Hospitality Cafe.” Be aware of food allergies. Choose breads from around the world and cut into bite-sized pieces. Place a toothpick in each piece of bread for easy serving. Prepare dips using your favorite recipes.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- tables, chairs, tablecloths, welcome sign
- breads from around the world such as: whole wheat (North America), Pita (Middle East), Chapati (India), Tortilla (Central America), Croissant (France), Bagel (Austria), Rye bread (Europe), Naan (Asia), Injera (Ethiopia), English muffins (Britain)
- dips: guacamole (Mexico), curry (Asia), tango salsa (Mexico), or your own choice
- world map or globe
- CD player, music CD from the global community
- small dishes, napkins, toothpicks

Reflect

Take time to think back over the session. What were the highlights? What new understandings and experiences of mission did the children have today? How has your understanding of mission and hospitality grown as a result of their comments and insights? Thank God for the gift of children in our world. Take a moment to name each child in prayer. Imagine them using their gifts in mission.

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. The Bible has many stories about hospitality. Read John 6:1–21. Reflect upon how the child shared his lunch and Jesus fed a crowd of people. In Bible times, bread was the most important food for many people. To “eat bread” meant to have a meal together. Today, food brings people together. When we eat together, we get to know one another in different and new ways. Invite the children to practice their hospitality skills at the Hospitality Cafe. Share bread and dips from around the world. Listen to music from the global community.

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Attachment: Activity 1

Readers' Theater "Welcoming Others"

Based on Romans 12:9-18

Reader 1: Be good friends who love deeply. Love from the center of who you are. Be real in your love for others.

Reader 2: Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Let go of everything that is wrong, and hold tight to everything that is good.

Reader 3: Be kind and loyal to one another. Outdo one another in showing honor. Outshine one another by showing respect. Love one another as brothers and sisters.

Reader 4: Don't give up. Eagerly follow God's Spirit and serve God. Keep your spiritual energy, serving the Lord. Don't burn out. Keep yourselves fueled and aflame, serving God.

Reader 5: Be joyful in hope, patient in trouble, faithful in prayer. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Let your hope make you glad. Be patient in times of suffering and never stop praying.

Reader 6: Practice hospitality. Share with God's people who are in need. Be hospitable to strangers.

Reader 7: Ask God to bless everyone who mistreats you. Bless your enemies and do not curse them under your breath. Don't mistreat someone who has mistreated you. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Reader 8: Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy, and share tears when they're down.

Reader 9: Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. Be friendly with everyone. Don't be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Make friends with ordinary people.

Reader 10: Repay no one evil for evil, but think about what is good for everyone. Get along with one another. Don't be stuck up. Make friends with "nobodies." Don't try to be the great "somebody." Do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

All: If possible, as far as it depends upon you, live at peace with everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it." Discover God's beauty in everyone.

(adapted from: Priests for Equality, New Revised Standard Version, The Message, Contemporary English Version)

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Belonging to a group is very important to older children. They are aware of “who is in” and “who is out.” Sometimes they experience exclusion. Perhaps they are not invited to a party. Sometimes the church is not “child friendly.” Or they may be the ones who exclude others based upon appearances, abilities, talents, or preferences. At the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15–24, those who are usually left out are extended an extravagant welcome. Children in this age group will connect to Mark 10:13–16 where Jesus blesses and welcomes children. What a wonderful affirmation of children’s place in God’s kingdom. They can be empowered to share God’s vision of a future filled with welcome for all.

About this Exploration

Pursuing hospitality invites self-examination and even criticism. Where are we as individuals and where is the community in the complexity of protecting, tending and making space for self, God, others and all creation? Where are the points of giving and receiving hospitality? How do we discover the courage to reach beyond the familiar? What growth is required as individuals and as a community? What practices, events and experiences are worthy of celebration? What sustains a continuing journey? Living into God’s future calls forth a dance of individual and communal points of view, commitments, passions and understandings. God welcomes all into this future.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Luke 14:15–24

Mark 10:13–16

Leader Preparation

Spend time reading and reflecting upon the Bible focus passages. What practices, events, and experiences in your life are worthy of celebration? Then study the poster “The Peaceable Kingdom”:

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

What vision of God’s future does this give you? How are you living into God’s future? How do you show welcome to persons who are different from you? How can you recognize God in others and let go of your fears in order to change?

Prepare your gathering space. See the Exploration “Discovery” Leader Preparation for ideas.

Prayer: Welcoming God, you invite me to pursue a life of hospitality. Thank you for partnering with me as I learn this dance. Fill me with your holy vision of a future filled with your gracious welcome for all. Help me lay aside my fears and differences in order to change. Amen.

Session Development

For each session leaders may choose from 9 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

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Embrace of Peace (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation Gather supplies. Obtain a copy of the poster “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker. Print each of these words on a piece of paper: age, appearance, ability, talent, color of skin

Supplies:

- poster: “Embrace of Peace” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> by George Tooker

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Show them the poster “Embrace of Peace.” Invite them to quietly study the art for a few moments. Who are the people in this art? Why are they hugging one another? What brings them together? Then invite the children to work in small groups to create a skit showing how they can show God’s hospitality to people who are different from them. Give each group a piece of paper with a word on it. Have them decide how they would use that characteristic in their skit. Invite the children to present their skits.

2 Come to the Party

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Luke 14:15–24. Arrange to present the skit to another group.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- simple costumes and props: robes, fabric, party decorations, table cloth, dishes
- party snack food such as goldfish crackers

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Read Luke 14:15–24 and invite the children to act out the story. Reflect together using these questions or your own: Who was invited to the great banquet? Why didn’t they come? Who ended up coming? Then invite the children to create a modern day paraphrase of this Bible passage. Who might not be included on the first guest list? Give them time to create the skit. Then present it to another group. Serve party snack food.

3 Great in God’s Kingdom

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Mark 10:13–16. Learn how to make a “God’s eye” craft, and learn the origin of this craft to share with the group. Get plenty of experienced helpers for the craft. Instructions can be found at:

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

Supplies:

- Bibles
- twigs or sticks
- variegated yarn

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Read Mark 10:13–16 and invite the children to act out the story. Wonder together with the children. How did Jesus bless the children? Why did Jesus use children

with minimal preparation using supplies normally found at the church). Using all 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

* To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.

* To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 using at least one activity from each category.

to talk about greatness in God’s kingdom? What characteristics of children make them special to God? Invite the children to make a “God’s eye” craft to remind them how special they are in the sight of God. “God’s eye” or “The *Ojo de Dios*” originates with the Huichol Indians of Jalisco, Mexico.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Discovering Courage (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Plan games that build trust such as an obstacle course and trust fall. See <http://www.tinyurl.com/22vtocg>.

Supplies:

- supplies for the games you choose

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. When we give and receive God’s hospitality, sometimes it involves risk and change. How do we discover the courage to reach beyond what is familiar to us? Invite the children to participate in games that build trust. After the games, encourage the children to talk about their experience. How do these games help us discover the courage we need to live into God’s dreams of hospitality? What courage do we need to share God’s welcome with all? Where do we find the courage we need? Pray together.

5 Let’s Party

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Luke 14:15–24 and Mark 10:13–16. Make arrangements for a group of younger children to come to your party. Choose party games for young children at <http://www.gameskidsplay.net/>.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- a variety of seats: some comfortable, medium, and sit-upons
- party decorations: balloons, streamers, party hats
- snack: cupcakes, icing, plastic knives or popsicle sticks, decorations in shaker containers
- supplies for games you choose

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Luke 14:15–24 reminds us of God’s idea of a good party. Those who are usually excluded are given the seat of honor. Talk about offering the best seat to others and choosing something other than the best seat for oneself. In Mark 10:13–16 we discover that children are great in God’s kingdom. Invite the children to host a party for younger children. Decorate the room. After washing hands, invite each child to prepare a cupcake. Play favorite children’s party games such as “Duck, Duck Goose,” “Red Light, Green Light,” “I Spy,” “Mother May I?” “Musical Chairs” and so on. Show the guests God’s extravagant welcome.

6 Seeds of Growth

Leader preparation

Gather supplies. Read Luke 14:15–24.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- soil, seeds or flower, water
- flower pots, paints, brushes
- embellishments: glitter, glass gems, glue, foam shapes, etc.

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. At the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15–24, those who are the least in society are given an extravagant welcome. Invite the children to think about those who are often excluded. Perhaps they are people who are different because of their appearance, abilities, talents, or preferences. Hospitality involves protecting, tending and making space for self, God, others and all creation. Invite the children to plant a flower or seed to remind them of the nurture and care required to grow. Like the plant, we grow in learning to welcome everyone into God’s kingdom. They can decorate their flower pots with paints or other embellishments.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Songs of Hospitality (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Bring hymnals. Locate songs from the global community.

Supplies:

- hymnals

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Invite the children to look through the hymnals for songs about hospitality, welcome, and blessing. Sing together some of the hymns the children identify. Look for songs from the global community such as the South African hymn “Siyahamb’ ekukhanyen’ kwenkhos’ (We Are Marching in the Light of God)”:

<http://www.ingeb.org/spiritua/siyahamb.html>.

8 Blessed by God

Leader preparation: Search among your church’s teaching posters for “Christ Among the Children” by Emil Nolde, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>, or other posters of Christ among the children. Read Mark 10:13–16. Invite your minister to come and offer a blessing to each child.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- poster: “Christ Among the Children”
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> by Emil Nolde or another teaching picture that you have selected

Warmly welcome the children. Make introductions if there are newcomers. Welcome your minister to the group. Invite the children to study the poster or teaching picture as you read Mark 10:13–16. Read the passage several times inviting

the children to use all their senses. Then invite their reflections. What do they hear in the passage? What do they notice in the artwork? Recall with the children that they are welcome in God's kingdom and God's realm belongs to them. Invite your minister to offer each child a special blessing.

9 Imagining the Future

Leader preparation: Gather supplies. Read Luke 14:15–24. Find a place in your church to display the mural.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- paper, markers, crayons or paints

Welcome the children and make introductions if they do not know one another. Invite the children to read Luke 14:15–24. Reflect upon the story. Who was at the great banquet? Imagine what the table looked like. Then ask: What is God's dream of hospitality for us in our homes, church, community and world? Invite the children to "imagine the future." They will draw a picture and then create a mural with all of their artwork. Give the mural a title such as "God's Hospitality." Find a place in your church to display the mural.

Reflect

Take quiet time to reflect upon your group experience. What vision of God's future emerged? What discoveries did the children make about showing welcome to all persons especially those who are different from them? Where did you see God's hospitality in your interaction? Where is the courage to change? Thank God for holy moments shared. Pray God's blessing upon each child as he or she might embrace greatness in God's kingdom.

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