



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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Worship, Music, Arts, and Story
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

For youth (11–15 years), identity and acceptance are key issues. The primary question is “Do I truly belong? And if so, how and why?” The challenge of hospitality for this particular age group is twofold. First, youth need to be encouraged to explore their own need for hospitality. How have they been welcomed or excluded? What has created within them the sense that they have belonged? The second challenge for this particular age group is, then, to encourage them to risk the vulnerability it takes to know and be known by “the other.”

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

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is frequently mocked because of his association with “tax collectors and sinners.” The work of biblical tax collectors is vaguely equivalent to the unethical practices of debt collectors in the current day. They collected taxes, but the amounts collected often included excessive interest and fees. Zacchaeus had become wealthy from this endeavor. However, in an effort to overcome his limitations and see Jesus more clearly, Zacchaeus willingly gives up any dignity he might have. His efforts are rewarded by an opportunity to extend hospitality to Jesus. Ironically, the opportunity is also a moment of hospitality for Zacchaeus himself—a moment of public acceptance and grace that inspires him to “make right” the wrongs he has done in the past. With this, Zacchaeus’ status as a “Child of Abraham” is restored.

The Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 passage begins with a reminder that love within the covenant community is a “given,” but that love is also to be extended to “strangers,” likely those who rely upon the hospitality of the Christian community. Although the Christian community (then as well as now) may have some very plausible reasons for being suspicious of strangers, the call of Christ is to hospitality regardless of the vulnerability of our sacrifice.

Prayer: God of Ultimate Hospitality, help us not only to accept others, but to accept ourselves, as you have accepted all of us in your grace. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 How Do You Say Hello?

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the ways people greet one another in your neighborhood or community (i.e., handshakes, hugs, nod, playful punches). You might also include the greetings from your congregation, too. Using the Internet and other resources, research some greetings from other cultures. These could include but are not limited to the Namaste yoga position, the Islamic greeting of kissing the back of the hand and guiding it to the heart, Franciscan liturgical movement (palms coming from their chest and extended toward you while saying “And also with you”) or the Armenian tradition of serving water in a glass on a plate (not to waste any).

Supplies: None

Use these questions to begin a discussion: How do you greet one another at school? How do you greet your family members? How do you greet your friends when you see them on the street or at the ballfield or at the mall? How do you greet strangers (if you greet them)? How do you notice that older people greet others? Depending on how you greet your friends, your grandmother might think the greeting you use with your friends is inappropriate for greeting her! What happens when you don't do those gestures? What do people think when you don't use them? Why would you not use them?

Each culture has some particular common way of greeting one another. Describe for the group those practices that you discovered in your research. Practice greeting one another in these ways. Take care to do them as carefully and sincerely as you can in order to not disrespect other traditions. These greetings are just as important to the cultures they represent as your greetings are to you and your friends or family.

Would these greetings work in your life? Where would you use them and why? How can you introduce your friends to these greetings?

2 Spreading an Anti-Rumor

Leader preparation: Read the story “The Rabbi's Gift” from *Stories for the Journey: A Sourcebook for Christian Storytellers* by William R. White:

<http://www.stmarks-ral.org/sermons/sr030504.htm>.

(This activity may be done individually or in pairs working together, perhaps representing cliques.)

Supplies:

- slips of paper with the group members’ names written on them (name slips)
- paper
- pens/pencils

Read “The Rabbi's Gift” and invite the group’s reflection: What happened to the monks in the monastery when they thought that Christ was one of them? How do you think they felt as each was being treated differently?

Distribute name slips, making sure that no one received his or her own name. Invite the youth to consider the person on the slip. You may or may not know

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.

them very well. On a separate piece of paper, write a word or two describing a positive attribute about that person. You may use information that you have heard or even information that you assume. However, the information *has* to be positive! Do not put the person’s name on your paper. Once everyone is done, scramble the papers and then read them aloud. Can you guess who this person is? Could it be you?

3 Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner!

Leader preparation: As the purpose of this activity is to explore our personal hospitality, consider the discussion questions below for yourself and be prepared to share your input.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Have the group find Luke 19:1–10 in their Bibles, and ask for a volunteer to read aloud.

Discussion: Imagine that each of the following people is coming to your home for dinner tonight. How would you react? What would you need to do before they arrived, and why? What areas of the house would you allow them to see, and what areas would you keep private? Would you do something you don’t normally do, or not do something you would normally do? Who else would you invite? What would you serve?

1. Your school principal
2. Your favorite music or sports star
3. The President of the United States
4. Jesus Christ

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Put Yourself in the Picture

Leader preparation: Acquire the posters and display them in the room. Consider your own responses to the discussion questions below. Be prepared to challenge the participants about differences in socio-economic (class), race/culture, gender, values, etc.

Supplies:

- posters: “The Luncheon of the Boating Party” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters2> by Pierre-Auguste Renoir
“Barber Shop” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters1> by Jacob Lawrence

Invite the participants to study the posters. Use these questions for reflection for each poster:

- a. Would you “fit” in this scene? Why? Why not?
- b. If you entered this space, what would happen? Would you quietly sit alone, or join in the conversation? Do you think the people in the scene would include you in their conversation, or would they be suspicious of you?
- c. What would have to happen for you to feel comfortable or included in this scene? What would you have to do? What would others have to do?



5 As God Sees You

Leader preparation: Acquire a recording of Bryan Sirchio's song "As God Sees You" from his *Come As U R!* album <http://www.tinyurl.com/2785uck>. Showing hospitality to others who are different from yourself begins with accepting how you are different from others ... and the world can give you *PLENTY* of reasons you shouldn't be different! This is an ongoing struggle for many youth who are under a great deal of pressure to be "acceptable." This activity is especially recommended for groups with large numbers of girls.

Supplies:

- recording of the song "As God Sees You" and a way to play it
- a handout of the song's lyrics, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2785uck>
- newsprint or white board and markers
- magazines (especially youth/teen fashion or tabloid)

Invite the participants to look through the magazines and cut out pictures, advertisements, or article headlines that put pressure on you to look or feel a certain way in order to be "acceptable." Post these on newsprint to create a collage. Discuss other pressures the youth experience to be "acceptable." What do you do when you experience those pressures?

Listen to the song "As God Sees You." Pose these questions: What do you believe God sees when God looks at you? What do you believe God thinks about you? Is it hard or easy to believe that God loves you for who you are? Why?

6 Don't Drop Me

Leader preparation: Rejection is painful and is therefore difficult to talk about, especially for youth. This activity is designed specifically to "get at" that issue in a fun way and is also great for groups that require more physical activity. Make sure that you do this activity with a floor that is easily cleaned (preferably outside), or substitute hard-boiled eggs for the raw eggs. To make an additional point about multicultural situations, either intentionally select varieties of eggs or color the hard-boiled eggs before the activity. Before the activity, draw simple smiley faces on the eggs.

Supplies:

- raw eggs
- tablespoons

Arrange the group in a circle and give a tablespoon to each participant. Choose a starting person in the circle. Place an egg on his or her spoon. Pass the egg to one another in the circle, using only the spoon. No hands allowed! Be careful not to drop the egg!

Once the egg passes once around the circle, start another egg across the circle. Pass the eggs to one another in the circle, using only the spoon. You may keep adding more eggs depending upon time and interest. Pose these questions: What did you notice about this game? What was most difficult? What was easy? What did you have to do in order to prevent the eggs from dropping? What happened when someone did drop an egg? What happened when more eggs were added to the circle? How did you handle getting more than one egg at a time?

You may have noticed that the eggs had faces on them. For today, the eggs are a symbol of people who are new to a situation. They look "solid" but are very vulnerable — they can crack or break easily. When have you been in a situation or experience that was new to you (new school, new group, new team, etc.)? What

questions or concerns did you have? What did you need others already in the group to do for you? How did you feel when they didn't? What can you do for others who are new to help them feel welcome?

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Forgive us our sins ... as we forgive those who sin against us

Leader preparation: This activity is best done with a fresh newspaper — that is, one even you have not seen! Be prepared to give your input, but allow the participants to make their own decisions, and be sure to support them in the challenge!

Supplies:

- a weekend or Sunday newspaper

Find a narrative section of the newspaper — that is, one that isn't an ad or the comics! — and scan it for “sinners.” You may divide the group into teams, or give each person a section of the newspaper. Allow time to look, and then invite them to share what “sin” was committed by acting out the part for the rest of the group. This can be done like charades with only actions, or in first person with words.

Pose these questions: Can this person be forgiven? If so, how? What has to happen in order for them to be forgiven? Could they be trusted ever again? Under what circumstances? What would they have to do in order to regain trust?

Pause for a moment of silence. Think about something you might have done recently for which you would like to be forgiven. Think about what you might have to do in order for others to trust you again. Pray the Prayer of Our Savior together. You might want to have this written out for those youth who may be unfamiliar with the prayer.

Challenge: During the next week, ask for forgiveness from someone who you have wronged and forgive someone who has wronged you. Start the process of regaining trust.

8 Table of Friendship and Love

Leader preparation: Acquire a recording of Bryan Sirchio's song “Table of Friendship & Love” from his *Artist's Hand* album, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2dwrpbhe>.

Supplies:

- song: “Table of Friendship & Love,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/2dwrpbhe>
- newsprint or white board and markers

Listen to the recording. Pose these questions: Think about your school or community. Name some of the “cliques” that you know in that setting; list them on the newsprint or white board. For each one, what is required to be included in these “cliques”? Which ones (if any) are you in? How are new members included?

Now, think about people who do not seem to fit into these “cliques.” Why don't they fit in? How are these people treated by others who are in the “cliques”? What would happen if you created a “table of friendship and love” like the one in the song?

Challenge: During the coming week, befriend (or at least make an effort to talk with) someone who doesn't seem to fit in. See if there is something you can do to make them feel more welcome.

9 Sharing the Good Stuff

Leader preparation: Research what food pantries or food banks are located in your local area. Call them before the group meets and acquire a list of specific items that people who use the facility seem to use often or enjoy the most (often items that the pantry/bank doesn't get often or can't seem to keep "in stock"). This list will be used for the challenge.

Supplies:

- a variety of canned and boxed goods, including some that could be "unpopular"

Imagine that you are going to the grocery store to buy something for dinner tonight. What would you buy? What if those items were unavailable? Would you buy name brands or "generic?" Would you buy things that are expensive or inexpensive? Is there something that you would never buy — something that you really dislike or that you are allergic to? Are there things you would buy as a "treat" for yourself or your family?

As you may know, food pantries and food banks provide food for those who cannot afford to go to the grocery store, and most of these facilities gladly receive donations from individuals, groups and organizations. In fact, they gladly receive *any* and *all* donations, year round, because frequently, the need is greater than the resources. These items are typical of food pantry/bank donations. If you came into a food pantry, and these were the items available to you, what would you take? What wouldn't you take and why?

Reflect

The basic reflections of a youth leader always begin not with "What have I taught them?" but with "What have I learned from them?" This is because the reception of youth to whatever you have presented is complicated by the amount of adolescent guardedness you encounter. As frustrating as this might be, you may wait years before you witness the effect of your leadership upon them!

For a moment focus on what you learned as a leader about your own definitions of hospitality. In what ways have you experienced hospitality from the youth that you lead? Has it been different from hospitality you've experienced before? How has the experienced influenced the way that you will practice the discipline of hospitality in the future?

Many people like to donate to food pantries and banks—it's an easy way to share with our neighbors in need. However, too often, people give little thought to who is receiving the items and what they might actually use or enjoy. Instead, we share our "leftovers," the things that we don't like anyway, the things that we haven't used (and probably won't use), the things that cost us as little as possible.

If possible, make arrangements to take the group to a food pantry to help sort food items.

Challenge: During the next week, do a special food drive, gathering specific items that are needed by your local food pantry/bank. Intentionally avoid sharing "leftovers."

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Perhaps it would benefit all of us to remember that God's Word is not limited to one text written several thousand years ago and that God still has a word to speak to us in the context of our complicated lives. This is particularly important for youth as the biblical text can seem outdated and not applicable to their lives. The foundational principles found in the Bible Focus Passages are still applicable, but must be engaged in culturally and technologically relevant ways to meet the needs of our youth.

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

Reflection on Genesis 18:1-15: Many cultures have stories involving the visit of strangers. In this one, Abraham offers hospitality to the three strangers in typical cultural fashion, but Sarah is also called to offer hospitality on a different level. How hospitable will Sarah be to the news these strangers bring? Abraham, unaware of the strangers' heavenly status, shows culturally appropriate hospitality—extending hospitality to strangers, following a specific protocol, giving the best he has to offer, and being attentive to their needs. Sarah, also unaware of the strangers' heavenly status, hears the message and therefore receives hospitality. Initially, Sarah responds with laughter until God intervenes, “catching her” in her cynicism and opening her eyes to a future beyond her imagination. In Genesis 21, Sarah is filled with joy as the birth of Isaac is proof that the hospitality of God may be unexpected and strange, but always faithful.

Reflection on Isaiah 25:1-9: This reading is infused with the kind of celebration that Sarah felt at the birth of Isaac and the fulfillment of God's promises to her—joy and celebration and gratitude. However, the context is different. Here, the joy comes not in the form of a beginning but in the form of an end, specifically, the end of oppression. The people of God have experienced hospitality in the form of freedom and relief. This relief and the abundance of bless-

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 This Is How We Do It (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity seeks to engage the youth in identifying how they show acceptance (or welcome) within their culture. This may inspire lively conversations about social pain, initiation, or even gangs. Be prepared to clearly present your own opinion; however, at the same time, listen openly and be sensitive to the needs of the youth for acceptance and identity.

Supplies:

- newsprint or white board and markers

With the entire group, identify groups of students with a common interest within their school (“cliques”) and list them randomly on newsprint or a white board. Leave some room around each one. Encourage the youth to describe the characteristics of each group: common interest, dress, similar characteristics or attitudes, etc. Be sure to record the responses accurately without interpretation or translation (i.e., if a group is referred to as “the nerds” or the “snarks” or “gamers” do not assume you know what this means — ask). Divide the group (or if working with a smaller group, divide the remaining time allotted for this activity) into three sections. Invite each small group to choose a “clique” and decide how to respond to each of the following scenarios:

- A new student comes to the school. How does that student learn about this group? How do they get invited to join the group? What do they have to do to remain a part of the group?
- Your friend wants to be a part of this group, but doesn't seem to fit in. How is this group likely to react? What demands does the group put on those who are different?
- You are not a member of this group, but belong to another group. Are there times and circumstances when different groups work together? What are they? How does that work?

2 Yeah, Right!

Leader preparation: This activity explores the dichotomy between “don't talk to strangers” and “extravagant welcome.” In the Genesis story, three strangers show up at Abraham's door (a dangerous situation for both the strangers and for Abraham's household) and yet these strangers answer Sarah's deepest desires. Standard boundaries (even for that time and culture) are breached and, thankfully, by God's grace, no one is hurt. The question for this activity is, “When is it possible and appropriate to trust what we receive from strangers?”

Supplies: None

Develop a contemporary version of the biblical story, using the following questions:

- What piece of news would shock you (in a good way) to receive?
- Who is the most unlikely person to deliver that piece of news?
- What would be the most intimidating way for you to receive it?

ings (symbolized by a bountiful banquet) will be available for all people.

Prayer: God of Abundant Surprises, press us to receive the strangers and strangeness in our midst, to listen beyond our comfort so that we might receive your hospitality, even as we extend hospitality to others. 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 Ants on a Log

Leader preparation: Hospitality is not just a matter of tolerating someone’s presence, but includes being open to new ideas for the purposes of working together. This traditional outdoor challenge-course activity is adapted for indoor use and challenges the youth to “think outside the box” as they work together to get everyone off the “log.” To do this activity, you must clear adequate space around the “log” — approximately 3 feet around the beam is a minimum. Additional adult volunteers can be used as “spotters”; however, adults should be discouraged from providing input as the youth work out strategies.

Supplies:

- a 12 foot 2" x 4" or 4" x 4" beam (the beam can be shorter depending on your space)

Form two teams and tell them to line up at either end of the beam. Inform them that the object is for both teams to cross the beam to the other end, at the same time, without anyone stepping or falling off the beam. Encourage them to verbally work out their strategy with one another as they work together to reach this goal. (You may increase the challenge by adding more rules, such as “Anyone who steps or falls off the beam must immediately go to the end of the line”).

After the activity, ask the group the following questions:

- a. What strategy did you use to get everyone across the log?
- b. Who offered new ideas? Were they heard and tried? Were there any ideas that were not tried? Why not?
- c. What was the biggest challenge? How did you overcome that challenge together?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Say What? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Because they were written in a different context and culture, passages of scripture sound strange and are difficult to understand. However, the Word of God is said to be eternal—written for all generations. This activity challenges the youth to “translate” Isaiah 25:1–9 into their own context. Again, while you are encouraged to participate in this activity, please remember that there are differences of experience between generations and within generations. Encourage more input from the youth than you offer. Write the verses of Isaiah 25:1–9 on newsprint, or print the handouts for each youth. You may want to either record the responses to the questions on a separate sheet of paper. (Suggestion: write out verse 1 at the top so that it appears you and the group are writing a translation.) You also could write the group’s “translation” in a different colored marker under each verse. For a greater challenge, begin with the King James Version.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- handout of Isaiah 25:1–9, Attachment: Activity 4
- *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (optional)

Distribute the handout of Isaiah 25:1–9, or have the youth find the passage in their Bibles. Read the passage aloud as a group. Use the Leader Preparation section to explain the context of this passage. Pose these questions:

- a. What “wonderful things” has God done for you? What reasons do you have to praise God?
- b. The person who wrote these words focuses not only on the “wonderful things” God has done for them personally, but also on the “wonderful things” God has done for their world. Are any of the things listed in verses 2–5 similar to what God does in the world today? What are examples in today’s world of those things?
- c. Starting with verse 6, the person who wrote these words uses images to describe what God will do in the future. What do you believe God will do in our future?
- d. Verse 9 records the response of God’s people to the “wonderful things” God will do. How do you think God’s people in our future will respond?

Invite the youth to write the verses in their own words using some of their experiences or what they know of the world today. Use the handout for individual work, or work together and write their suggestions on the newsprint or white board. If available, read the passage in *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Check with your worship leaders about an appropriate time for the youth to share their paraphrase with the congregation.

5 Go Online for Online

Leader preparation: This activity addresses the issues of the lengths to which people will go to in order to be accepted or welcomed in society. You will need to acquire a copy of Brad Paisley’s song “Online” (album: *5th Gear*). Providing a handout with the printed lyrics is optional.

As this is a popular, secular song, it is available at stores that sell CDs or online at sites such as amazon: <http://www.tinyurl.com/2b7xrhk>. Please be aware that rejection is a painful topic for many youth, so this activity may raise issues that warrant a referral.

Supplies:

- a recording of Brad Paisley’s song “Online” (Album: *5th Gear*)
- optional handouts with printed lyrics, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2aw3fc>
- computer with Internet access and projector to show video, <http://www.tinyurl.com/c2c6n2>

Play the song for the group and pose the “starter” questions:

- a. Do you consider yourself “cool”? If you do, what makes you “cool”? How does being “cool” make you feel? If you do not, what makes you “uncool”? How does being “uncool” make you feel?
- b. The person in Brad Paisley’s song does not feel “cool” being himself. What does he want to change about himself? Do you think he would be “cooler” if he changed those things?
- c. What risks does the person in Brad Paisley’s song take in order to be cool? What could happen to him? Do you think that it is worth the risk?
- d. What have you done to be accepted by your friends, or welcomed into a group? How did you change? How did those changes make life more challenging? How did those changes make life easier? Was it worth it?

6 Receiving Grace

Leader preparation: This activity uses a liturgy of confession and assurance to help the youth experience God's hospitality. Make sure you do this activity in a location with good air circulation (preferably outside) with appropriate containers and a handy extinguishing device (cover to the container, water in a pitcher, etc.). Also make sure that you honor the sanctity of confession by resisting the temptation to read or share any unburned confessions.

Supplies:

- small pieces of paper
- a non-flammable container
- a safety lighter
- pens/pencils

Invite the youth to sit in a circle and place the container in the center. Distribute pieces of paper and pens/pencils. Encourage the members of the group to write one confession on their piece of paper. Reassure them that no one (not even you!) will read or share this confession with anyone else, that this confession is strictly between them and God. When they are finished, fold the paper in half and place it in the container. Using the safety lighter, burn the confessions in the container. (You might have to gently "stir" so that all the confessions are burned). Although this process takes time, encourage the group to be silent during the burning. Share the following or your own words: "Like these confessions, in Christ, your sins are removed from you and remembered no more. You are forgiven and set free by God's grace in Jesus Christ."

After a moment or two of silence, invite the group to talk about this experience of receiving God's grace.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Welcomed by God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Although Sarah was not welcomed by her culture because she was unable to bear children, she was welcomed by God who blessed her with unexpected joy in her old age. Similarly, there are many youth who are not readily welcomed by their culture, and yet they are appreciated and blessed by God. This activity encourages youth to embrace the power of God's hospitality and to allow it to inspire perseverance.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Have the participants find the passage in their Bibles. Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 18:9–12 and 21:1–7. Pose these questions:

- In Abraham and Sarah's culture, women who could not have children ("barren") were considered to be useless or worthless. Sarah really had no control over her barrenness. What do you think of this? Who in our society is considered useless or worthless today? Are youth considered to be useless or worthless? Have you ever felt useless or worthless? How and why?
- On the other hand, God didn't think Sarah was useless or worthless at all. In fact, according to our reading, God blessed Sarah with a baby and through that blessing, created the very first community of God. In what

- ways does God bless people who our society rejects? What does God's acceptance of these people mean for us?
- c. Over and over again in scripture, we read that God loves youth. God blesses youth. God calls youth to ministry. God does amazing miracles with youth. Jesus surrounds himself with youth (his disciples were likely to be around 15 or 16 years old!) and it is those youth who start what would become the Christian church! In what ways is God blessing you and youth like you today? To what kind of ministry is God calling you?

8 New Ideas

Leader preparation: More than anything, the ultimate success of this activity depends on the openness of adults within the congregation to accept youth and put their ideas into practice. Ideally, this activity would be divided into two parts: first, the development of ideas and, second, the presentation of those ideas to either some influential and supportive church leaders or an appropriate, cooperative body within the church. However, it is presented here as one unit because, in some settings, it might be more effective to work with church leaders to get the ideas incorporated. Also, be prepared to answer questions about worship, or at least field the questions for a later answer, so that the youth understand why certain traditions are followed and what certain terms mean. Remember, "I don't know" is an acceptable answer only if it is followed by "I'll find out and get back to you." Following through with this promise is crucial with youth!

Consider inviting a church leader or the pastor to join your group for this activity.

Supplies:

- copies of the order of service

Distribute copies of your congregation's order of worship bulletin. Pose these questions to spark a discussion about worship:

1. What is important about a service of worship for you? What makes worship worth attending and participating in? What makes worship worth inviting people to join you? What parts of the service "work" for you—seem relevant, are interesting or fun, inspire you to do something, help you during your week, etc?
2. What parts of worship do not "work" for you—are irrelevant to your life, are boring or tedious, put you to sleep, could be done better, embarrass you from inviting others? How would you recommend this could be changed? What are new ways to address these problems?
3. How can these changes be made? Who makes the decisions regarding these changes? Would it be possible to try them once or twice — just to see how the congregation would react? Who decides to make them more permanent and what is that process?

9 Strange, but Not a Stranger

Leader preparation: In the Genesis text, Abraham had a huge banquet prepared for the strangers who appeared at the door. Likewise, we are called to offer an extravagant welcome to the many and varied strangers who appear at our church door. This activity challenges the youth to think about ways they might offer this extravagant welcome to strangers in their midst. Encourage the group to really use their imagination when "creating" the alien, making them different in every way—the weirder, the better! If it is helpful, consider having the group act out the scene, assigning roles as greeter, worshipper, alien.

Supplies: None

Imagine that aliens from another planet have landed their spacecraft in your church parking lot. These aliens are *very* different from *anyone* in your congregation. What does this mean? What would the aliens look like? What would the aliens sound like? How do the aliens communicate? What color is their skin? How do they move? What customs would they have? What do they believe in?

The aliens enter the church. How are they greeted? By whom? What happens next? Where do they sit? With whom? Does someone help them to worship? Who answers their questions? Who explains what is going on?

After discussing this situation (or acting it out), consider what might be done to better welcome this stranger from another planet in your congregation. Then, consider making these suggestions to church leaders or governing bodies responsible for hospitality.

Reflect

The basic reflections of a youth leader always begin not with “What have I taught them?” but with “What have I learned from them?” This is because the reception of youth to whatever you have presented is complicated by the amount of adolescent guardedness you encounter. As frustrating as this might be, you may wait years before you witness the effect of your leadership upon them!

In this section, focus on how you have interpreted scripture in the past and how similar or different the interpretation of the youth might be. For example, what factors influence your interpretation and use of scripture? Do you have a few well-known, well-loved passages that inspire you consistently? Have you read something new or something in a new way?

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Attachment: Activity 4

Isaiah 25:1-9 (NRSV)

¹O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name; for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

²For you have made the city a heap, the fortified city a ruin; the palace of aliens is a city no more, it will never be rebuilt.

³Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

⁴For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress, a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat. When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,

⁵the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place, you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.

⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.

⁸Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

As a typically “underrepresented” group, youth frequently are expected to do the chores that no one else wants to or is willing to do. Furthermore, they are reluctant about servanthood, especially when they are not invited, but assigned to serve. The image of a Savior who is willing to stoop to wash their feet is extremely powerful. This is a particularly important image for those youth who struggle with body image, as feet have been — and still are — considered to be one of those “lesser” parts better covered than exposed!

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.

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

Leader Preparation

Reflections on John 13:1–17, 31b–35: The first portion of the gospel text is the Passover foot washing scene where Jesus kneels at the feet of his disciples one by one and tenderly administers care that is usually either deemed the responsibility of oneself or extended by a servant, but certainly not offered by a mentor or teacher. There are several important elements of this scene that stand out for the purposes of our study. First, the tender care is not only administered to the beloved disciple, but to the betrayer as well. God’s hospitality is provided for all people, not just those whom we deem worthy of such a blessing. Second, this act of tender care replaces the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup in the Gospel of John. Hospitality shown to one another is more than a “nice gesture” of welcome; it is a sacramental act of care. Third, Jesus makes it clear to the disciples that their responsibility is to show this sacramental kind of care to one another as he has shown it to them. Hospitality is not a one time, “special” experience between strangers, but is a standard of everyday relationship between disciples. This third point is reiterated in the second portion of the gospel text.

Reflections on Acts 2:42–47: This text is a snapshot of life in the early Christian community. It is purposefully packed with hospitality—to the Word and Wisdom of God, to faith practices such as sacraments and prayer, and

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Eeeeeew! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity challenges youth to look at this story in a more realistic way. Feet can be gross — dirty, smelly, diseased, etc., and yet Jesus literally gets down on the floor to wash them!

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read John 13:1–17, 31b–35 together. Pose the following questions for discussion:

- a. Jesus’ time, a servant would wash the feet of weary guests—feet that were likely to be partially or completely bare most of the time. What kinds of things might that servant encounter as he or she washed feet? What kinds of interesting stories might that servant be able to tell about the feet he or she washed? What do you think the servant was feeling as he or she washed feet?
- b. By washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus takes the role of this servant. How do you think Jesus felt about washing their feet? What do you think he thought about as he was doing it? How do you think he reacted or responded to any “grossness” he encountered? What do you think was trying to communicate by washing their feet?
- c. The story is clear about the encounter between Jesus and Peter. But what do you think happened between Jesus and Judas when Jesus washed Judas’ feet? What do you think Judas did or said? What do you think Jesus did or said? How was that encounter different from other encounters between Jesus and the other disciples? Do you think Judas’ feet were more “gross” than that of the others?

2 Experiencing Foot Washing

Leader preparation: This activity is a reenactment of Jesus’ foot washing and his commandment to “wash one another.” If the youth are uncomfortable with baring their feet, substitute washing the hands for this exercise. For a more formal liturgical experience of this activity, or for more information on foot washing, refer to the foot washing liturgy in your denomination’s book of worship, or search online. Arrange the room by placing the chairs in a circle. Bring plenty of towels, or ask the youth to bring their own towels.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- basin with water
- towels
- disposable hand washing wipes (optional)

Create an environment for this activity by first talking about feet. Pedicures are popular. In the summer many people wear sandals. Remind the youth that in Jesus’ day all the roads were dusty, so people’s feet were usually dirty. As a sign of hospitality, a host would offer to have a guest’s feet washed. When guests come to our homes for a meal, we offer a place for them to wash their hands as a matter of hospitality and courtesy.

Ask for a volunteer to read John 13:1–17, 31b–35. As the story is read, “play the

to those within the community. Here, hospitality takes the form of justice, stewardship, mission, fellowship, and a praise-full attitude. For us in the contemporary church, it is interesting to note how evangelism is the result, and not the goal, of this hospitality.

Prayer: God who stoops to wash our dusty feet, create in us a giving heart that overflows with compassion, even for those who would betray us. Put within us a craving for community with those we know and with those whom we have not met yet. 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.

role” of Jesus, literally washing your feet (or hands). Invite the youth to wash one another's feet (or hands). An alternative to traditional foot washing is the use of disposable hand wipes. These will feel cold upon the feet, so warming with a towel is helpful even if the instructions say no towel is needed.

Pose these questions for discussion: How did it feel to have your feet (or hands) washed by the leader? Did you feel different — about yourself, about your leader, about your fellow disciple — after your feet (or hands) were washed? How did it feel to wash the feet of your “fellow disciple”? Without mentioning names, were there people with whom you felt more uncomfortable doing this? Why? Was it different because your leader washed your feet (hands) first?

3 What Is Included?

Leader preparation: This activity challenges youth to think about what is included in our hospitality using the Acts text. Familiarize yourself with the details of your church's ministries so that you can offer input where needed and appropriate.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers
- church “welcome” brochures or Web site (if available)

Read Acts 2:42–47 together. Pose these questions for discussion:

- The Acts text describes the ministry of the early Christian church under Peter's leadership. How did the church offer hospitality? What do you think they did to welcome new people? What did they do to make members feel included? (Write the responses on the paper.)
- Look at your church brochures or Web site together. How does your church offer hospitality? What does your church do to welcome new people? What does your church do to make members feel included? (Write the responses on the paper.)
- Compare the two lists. Is there anything that the early Christian church did that your church does not do?

Invite the youth to design a welcome packet for visitors. What materials do they think would be helpful for visitors to have? If that doesn't already exist, have them design the materials they think would be helpful.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Invited Guest Speaker (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity challenges youth to think about hospitality as not just something that is extended to people we like but is appropriately extended to *all* people. Before this activity, think about your own prejudices and biases. Who would you deem worthy to be welcomed, and who would not? Be prepared to participate in the discussion, but be careful not to make judgments based on differing opinions. On the other hand, make sure that you are familiar with your church's safe church policy and be prepared to answer why restrictions are sometimes placed upon certain people who wish to be included.

Supplies:

- local newspaper

Invite the youth to imagine that their youth group is having a fund-raiser dinner to support an upcoming mission trip. You want to invite a speaker for the dinner, someone with crowd appeal that will draw lots of people to the dinner. Look through the newspaper to help identify such a presenter. At this point in your imagination, you do not have to restrict your choices to local personalities. Make two lists:

1. People who would be good speakers, would be interesting or informative, would attract a large crowd or raise a lot of money; and
2. People who you think would *not* be good speakers, would be inappropriate for the occasion, would be boring or too controversial.

What criteria did you use to determine which list a person would be on? Are there names that could go on both lists? Why? How would other members of the congregation respond to your choices?

5 **Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?**

Leader preparation: This simple activity encourages youth to experience the hymn "Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant" (tune: SERVANT SONG) in a worshipful setting and then to discuss how it inspires them (<http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>). The supplies list below includes suggestions for the setting that you may adapt for your context. The hymn was originally published in 1977 by Richard Gillard of New Zealand and was inspired by Mark 9:35 where Jesus says to the disciples, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Ironically, this text comes immediately before Mark's version of Jesus embracing a little child, making it clear that "whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

Perhaps there is a member of the group who would be willing to bring an instrument to accompany the hymn.

Supplies:

- a copy of the hymn "Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?" (tune: SERVANT SONG) <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong3>
- worship center with a candle, Bible, cross, towel and basin

Invite the group to gather in the circle, and ask a volunteer to light the candle. Distribute copies of the hymn "Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?" and tell about the background of the hymn. Have the group sing the hymn paying particular attention to the words. Pose these questions for discussion:

- a. What does it mean to be like Christ to others?
- b. Why would someone "pray to have the grace to let you be my servant too"? Is it more difficult to receive or to give service? Why?
- c. The hymn refers to a journey that is taken by Christians. Where are we going? What is it like on that road? Why do we need each other?

6 **What Can We Do (or Do Better)?**

Leader preparation: If you did Activity 3, simply review the Acts text and the lists you made with the group. Then discuss "c" and "d" below. Familiarize yourself with the details of your church's ministries so that you can offer input where needed and appropriate.

Supplies:

- Bible
- newsprint or white board and markers
- church “welcome” brochures or Web site (if available)

Have the youth find Acts 2:42–47 in their Bibles. Ask for a volunteer to read the passage. Read the Acts text together. Pose these questions for discussion:

- a. The Acts text describes the ministry of the early Christian church under Peter’s leadership. How did the church offer hospitality? What do you think they did to welcome new people? What did they do to make members feel included? (Write the responses on the paper.)
- b. Look at your church brochures or Web site together. How does your church offer hospitality? What does your church do to welcome new people? What does your church do to make members feel included? (Write the responses on the paper.)
- c. Compare the two lists. Is there anything that the early Christian church did that your church does not do? Brainstorm ways your church could try that ministry. What resources would you need? Who would you need to help you?
- d. Think about the people in the congregation. Who is missing from your church? Why are they missing? Brainstorm ways your church could offer hospitality to them. Present your ideas to the appropriate board or committee.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 No Big Deal? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The act of serving others is usually a “selfless” act—it means more to the receiver than to the giver. Carrying an elderly person’s groceries might not be “a big deal” to the one who is carrying them, but it means a *great* deal to the one who otherwise could not get their groceries to their car or their house. This activity helps youth to realize that even the little things they do are a “big deal” to those who receive their kindness.

Supplies:

- newsprint or white board and markers
- small self adhesive notes, enough for five per person

Invite the group to brainstorm “random acts of kindness” that they might be able to do for people who are elderly or disabled. List their ideas on the newsprint or whiteboard. Their ideas may be simple or complex, something that one or two people could do or that it would take a whole group to do. Give each participant five self adhesive notes. Have them write the numbers 1 through 5 on the notes. Then invite them to place values on or by the acts of service: 1 for the least difficult, 5 for the most difficult.

Discuss how important these acts might be to someone who needs them — why they might need them done, what would happen if they couldn’t find someone to do them, etc. Highlight that even the least difficult are important.

Then have the group decide which of these “random acts of kindness” they would be willing to offer. Choose a day when the youth will gather at the church and make themselves available to do these acts for others in the congregation. Put an announcement in the church newsletter.

8 Reaching Out Online

Leader preparation: This activity is specifically intended for churches that either have a Web site or participate in Facebook, My Space, etc., or would be open to being more active online. Many youth have skills and knowledge in this area — usually beyond the skills and knowledge of adult church leadership! At the same time that this activity talks about hospitality, it also embodies hospitality by truly including the gifts of an important, but largely untapped resource within our church!

Supplies:

- computer with access to the Internet

Sign on to the church's Web site and review its contents with the group. For each page, ask:

- a. How does this page show hospitality to the stranger? to the member? Is it useful? Is it attractive? Is it effective?
- b. What would make it better? What is missing? What links are needed?
- c. Who has the skills to make corrections, make it more appealing or useful or effective? (If possible, connect these people to those in the church with the authority and ability to make these changes.)

Pose similar questions about your church's presence on Facebook, My Space, etc. Brainstorm other ways to offer your church's hospitality to the world.

9 Pay It Forward

Leader preparation: For this activity, you need to access the video clip "Pay It Forward" on <http://www.tinyurl.com/5ot4un>. This compelling scene from the movie *Pay It Forward* is the moment the teacher gives his class the assignment to change the world. In the movie, Trevor presents the secret to one person for successfully changing the world: the Power of Three. Essentially, the Power of Three is when one person helps three people and then those three people each help three more people and so on. The acts of service are multiplied exponentially. In only four "rounds" nearly 250 lives are touched.

Supplies:

- access to the Internet

Watch the video clip. Present the Power of Three concept. Pose these questions for discussion:

- a. You might have noticed that these youth were young (11 years old). Yet, they were challenged to change the world through their acts of service. What encouragement or discouragement have you experienced as you have thought about or tried to change the world?
- b. Do you believe that acts of service and kindness can change the world? Why or why not?
- c. If you could change one thing about your world, what would it be? What three things could you do to start that change? Whose lives would you touch? Make a plan to do these things and report your progress to the group at a designated time.

Reflect

The basic reflections of a youth leader always begin not with "What have I taught them?" but with "What have I learned from them?" This is because the reception of youth to whatever you have presented is complicated by the amount of adolescent guardedness you encounter. As frustrating as this might be, you may wait years before you witness the effect of your leadership upon them!

In this section, focus on what it is like to serve youth. Is it possible for you to look at youth as a mission field in the present, rather than a gene pool for the future? Is it possible for you (or your church) to serve the needs of the youth, to take their needs as seriously as Jesus did, to help them discern their God-given gifts, and then to call them to their own ministry?

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Giving and Receiving Hospitality



<http://www.tinyurl.com/Su4fur>

Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

If the biblical text can seem outdated and not applicable to the lives of our youth, tradition seems completely antithetical to the experience of youth! It is essential that tradition be framed in terms of a foundation from which current practice can and should grow. It is also essential that youth are encouraged to understand the “why” of tradition, to critique it, and, as much as possible, to be encouraged to work with the church to sustain those traditions that are important and to adapt or alter some tradition so that it is more applicable to their lives.

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

(see also

1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

1 Peter 4:1–11

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Communion = Radical Change! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The focus of this activity is to explore how traditions can be radically changed using communion as an example. You may find it helpful to research the Jewish practice of observing the Seder meal (see Activity 2). When talking about the second issue, you might want to mention that even Judas is included in the celebration!

Supplies:

- Bibles

Leader Preparation

Reflection on Mark 14:22–25 (see also 1 Corinthians 11:23–26): These words are most familiar as the “Words of Institution” heard during the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion or Holy Eucharist. While the Corinthian text offers the actual liturgical words, the Mark text offers the background that makes communion a sacrament. During their celebration of that particular Passover, Jesus makes the otherwise traditional Jewish Seder meal *very* personal, breaking the matzo with the words “This is my body” and lifting the final cup with the words “This is the cup of the new covenant.” It is important to note that in the Mark account, Judas does not leave the table, but is included in the blessing and promise.

Reflection on 1 Peter 4:1–11: Although this text might prove to be a bit “wordy” for youth, it does address two very contemporary issues youth have with following tradition. Verses 3–5 seem to deal with the issue of peer pressure. What is one to do when one’s friends are off doing things that seem counter to faith and “heap abuse on you” (v. 4, NIV) for not joining them? Verses 7–11 urge the reader to live a life of Christian discipline—to be serious and diligent about practicing one’s

Have the participants find Mark 14:22–25 in their Bibles, and read the text together. Review the details of the Last Supper, such as where it was held, who was invited, etc. Pose these questions for discussion:

- The Passover meal, called a Seder, was traditionally celebrated by a family at home. What makes Jesus’ celebration different?
- Although visitors were welcome, participants included in the Seder meal were devoted to the laws of Moses. What makes Jesus’ celebration different?
- In the traditional Seder meal liturgy, there were four cups (which represented the four ways God told the people that they would be delivered or rescued in the Exodus story—Exodus 6:6–7) and matzo (which represented the unleavened bread baked by the Hebrews during the Exodus because they were in a hurry to escape and couldn’t wait for the bread to rise). What makes Jesus’ celebration different?



2 The Tradition of the Bread and the Cup

Leader preparation: For this activity, you might seek out reference materials about the Jewish practice of observing the Seder meal. The entry for “Passover Seder” on Wikipedia (the free online encyclopedia), for example, begins with this basic definition:

The Passover Seder is a Jewish ritual feast held at the beginning of the Jewish holiday of Passover. The Seder is an intergenerational family ritual prescribed according to Jewish law and based on the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible verse commanding Jews to retell the story of the Exodus from Ancient Egypt. ... Seder customs include drinking of four cups of wine, eating matzo and partaking of symbolic foods placed on the Passover Seder Plate. With a Haggadah (Jewish religious text) serving as a guide, the Seder is performed in much the same way by Jews all over the world.

This, plus the information that follows, might give you a better understanding of the roots of our communion liturgies and confidence to answer questions that might arise from the youth.

Before you begin the activity, you will also need copies of the liturgy. You may also choose to make copies of the instructions. You should explain what is about to happen — the purpose of which is to experience the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper in a new way.

Three additional words about the liturgy used in this activity: First, although it is very different from our traditional Christian approach to communion liturgy, it was written in honor of the Jewish Seder tradition. This allows for children or

faith. While the list of appropriate behaviors doesn't seem all that difficult, it might be interesting to look at their "boredom factor" from a youth perspective.

Prayer: God of ancient peoples and traditional ways, engage us in the meaning of our traditions and infuse them with relevance so that we might discover their worth. 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.

youth to take a more active role in the liturgy. Second, the liturgy was intentionally written so that it does not require the presence of an ordained individual as the reading of scripture replaces the "Words of Institution." However, if you feel it is appropriate or necessary, please retain the blessing of such an individual or your church's governing body before you do this activity. Third, the liturgy was intentionally written to be inclusive of a wide range of youth and children. You may adapt it to meet the needs of your group; however, please note that the youth within the author's church don't mind it being simple and fun. The actions seem to help them focus on what they are saying.

Supplies:

- copies of the liturgy, Attachment: Activity 2
- bread (cubed or whole)
- juice in small cups
- worship center — a table covered with white paper, candles, a Bible, etc.

Distribute copies of the liturgy and celebrate communion. Pose these questions for discussion:

- a. How was this different from your church's traditional communion liturgy?
- b. Through this liturgy, what did you learn about the sacrament of Holy Communion?
- c. When you receive communion (if you are able to in your tradition), how does it make you feel? Why is it important (or not important) to you?
- d. What other traditions in the church are important to you? Why are they important?



3 Everything Old Is New Again

Leader preparation: Psalm 23 is a very traditional reading in most churches. There are generations of people who have memorized it; it is frequently used for funerals; people who consider themselves "non-religious" know parts of the psalm. This activity encourages youth to discover it anew or for the first time and to recapture its meaning by exploring a unique version from the Jewish Publication Society (JPS). Although it is a translation from the original Hebrew, this version is very, very new to the experience of contemporary Christians. The words printed in italics are not a part of the text, but are definitions offered as points of reference. Gather several other translations and paraphrases of the Bible, such as the New Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, The Message, and the King James Version.

Supplies:

- Bibles in several translations and paraphrases
- copies of Psalm 23, Attachment: Activity 3

Have the participants find Psalm 23 in the various versions of the Bible. A helpful hint for locating the Book of Psalms is to open the Bible to the middle. Invite volunteers to read Psalm 23 from each version. Pose these questions for discussion:

- a. What are the major differences among the versions?
- b. Why would we choose one translation over another?
- c. When have you heard these words before?
- d. Over time, if you have heard them often, has the meaning of the psalm changed for you? If so, how?

Distribute copies of the JPS translation. This translation is from the "traditional

Hebrew text" but is new to us. Read this translation together and then discuss:

- What is different about this translation? What is the same?
- How do you feel about this translation? Is it easier or more difficult to understand?
- Does it have more meaning for you than the more traditional translations? Does the fact that it is from the "traditional Hebrew text" make a difference to you?
- Do you think you might be interested in using this instead of the more familiar translations? How might you use it?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Tradition ... or Habit? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: "Tradition" comes from the Latin word for "handing over, passing on," and so traditions are beliefs or customs that usually have been taught by one generation to the next, and then to the next, and then to the next, usually by word of mouth or by practice. Traditions are a source of comfort in their consistency throughout time, particularly in moments of uncertainty and insecurity. However, it is said that the words "We've always done it like this before" are the seven deadliest words in the church! Traditions can lose their meaning and, therefore, their impact, becoming habits. (Habits are defined as actions that are repeated automatically without much thought or awareness.) This activity challenges the youth to consider the traditions and habits in their lives and within their church, and to think about returning some habits to tradition by remembering their meaning.

Supplies:

- newsprint or white board and markers

Define "traditions" and "habits" to make the distinction between them. If necessary, give examples of each. Invite the group to think about an "average" day in their life. On the newsprint or white board create two lists: one list of traditions (e.g. eating dinner as a family) and one list of habits (i.e., brushing teeth). Discuss how important the traditions are for the group. Discuss how habits are automatic and don't take too much serious thinking.

On a separate piece of newsprint, create a list of traditions in the congregation. (i.e., changing the paraments or banners to match the seasons, Christmas Eve worship with candlelight, etc.). Review the list and discuss how important these are for the church and why. Discuss how some of these traditions may have lost meaning or purpose and that over time, people may have even forgotten why they are done.

5 Simon Says: Extreme Version

Leader preparation: Most everyone has played "Simon Says," the childhood game the where players copy the leader's actions but only if "Simon Says." It is a fun game sure to gain giggles, but when applied to real life, "Simon Says" can get dangerous. This activity points out the essential need to use critical judgment when following a leader and encourages youth to exercise their faith in the difficult choice between popularity and doing the right thing.

Supplies: None

Play a simple game of “Simon Says.” Invite the youth to take turns being the leader. Caution the leader against suggesting dangerous or embarrassing actions. After a few rounds, discuss the following:

- a. What would you do if “Simon” asked you to do things you were not comfortable doing? What would happen to the game for you?
- b. What would you do if everyone else in the group decided to follow along? What would you think of them?

Read 1 Peter 4:3–5. The people at Corinth also were tempted to go along with friends who did things that were fun, but not right in the eyes of God. What does it mean that those friends would “have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead”? When you get an invitation to do something that you know isn't right, what do you do? Give examples, if you are comfortable. Without giving examples, consider the things that you and your friends have “always done “ that have not been right. Pray that you might have the courage to stop and that they might have the courage to follow you.

⑥ The Art of Boredom

Leader preparation: How many times have we heard the expression “I'm bored!” And yet, there was a time when people (no less youth) had fewer choices about how to occupy their time and even fewer resources to help them! Even in this age of simplification, the options for “busy-ness” seem endless. This activity addresses this dilemma and encourages youth to look at boredom as an opportunity for creativity and even hospitality!

You can search the Internet to find photos of people who look bored.

Supplies:

- pictures that illustrate people who look bored
- poster: “The Peaceable Kingdom” <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources> by John August Swanson

Display the pictures of people who look bored.

- a. What might the people in the pictures be feeling and why?
- b. What caption would you put on this picture?
- c. When have you felt the same way? (Be honest!) What did you do about it?

Now look at “The Peaceable Kingdom” poster.

- a. Do you think these animals are ever bored—why or why not?
- b. What do you think that they do when they are bored?
- c. What are the differences between the people in the photos and the animals in the “Peaceable Kingdom” poster?
- d. Keeping the animals in the poster in mind, what new ideas do you have about what to do when you feel bored?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Make It Work

Leader preparation: Although this activity is designed to “stand alone,” the results of Activity 6 could be included in the discussion. Encourage the group to consider things such as frequency of communion, or placement of the sanctuary furnishings, or changing of the paraments, or other traditions that have lost their meaning and become assumptions or habits.

Supplies:

- copies of the church's bulletin or newsletter

Review the contents of the church bulletin and/or newsletter, asking, “What are the traditions in our church?” Choose one or two traditions, preferably those that the group agrees have lost meaning. Brainstorm ways of reviving these traditions. What needs to be done and who is needed to do it? Make plans to work on reviving one tradition.

8 Come to the Table

Leader preparation: This activity is a worshipful experience using the words from “Table” by Andra Moran and Josh Elson’s album *If Not for This*. The CD (and specifically the song “Table”) is available for download at iTunes and Yahoo!Music as well as other online sources.

Supplies:

- song “Table” by Andra Moran and Josh Elson (album: *If Not for This*). A link for the song is <http://www.amazon.com/Table/dp/B0012P0IMQ>
- music player
- worship center — a table covered with white paper, candles, a Bible, communion elements

Listen to “Table” in a quiet worshipful setting and then discuss the following:

- a. Close to the beginning of the song, Andra sings about wondering “if this is where we’re supposed to be.” When have you felt out of place, unsure whether or not you belonged? What was that like for you?
- b. Throughout the song Andra sings about coming to the table of Christ (the communion table) being “tired and worn, broken and torn” and seeking understanding and peace. Have you ever felt this way? Has it ever occurred to you that you could come to the communion table with those needs? What do you think God would do if you did?
- c. In the refrain, Andra sings that we “come here to lay it down” and Christ “comes to lift [us] up” What does God expect from us when we worship? And what does God offer in return? Do you experience that when you worship? How could you experience it more?
- d. At the end of the song, Andra sings about the community being “forever bound ... at the table.” What “binds” your congregation together? How might the communion table be a better symbol of your congregation’s unity in faith?

9 Create Your Own Tradition

Leader preparation: The most important way to prepare yourself for this activity is to open your mind! In order for this activity to be effective, you must — all at the same time — give appropriate guidance and uphold policies to assure safety, listen carefully to the needs and desires of this generation, and step out of the way so that the group can wrestle with integrity. This activity challenges the group to establish (at least for a designated period of time) a tradition for themselves — one that has meaning for all and the possibility of including others. Be prepared to answer questions about groups outside the church—clubs, cliques and even gangs — who have specific traditions and identifying gestures.

Supplies: None

Inform the group that together they are to establish a tradition that defines them. Remind them of the difference between a tradition and a habit (see Activity 4). This could include something that is present at all meetings, or some greeting or action that they do during meetings (maybe even when they meet outside the meeting space!), or activity that they plan on a regular basis. Brainstorm some ideas and then discuss each one using the following:

- a. Is this easy enough to remember? Is this convenient?
- b. What is the meaning or purpose of it? Is the meaning or purpose easy enough to remember and explain to future members?
- c. If the plan is to use it outside the meetings, is it too embarrassing or difficult? How will it be explained to people who are not “in the loop”? How will members of the group deal with adversity toward them or their traditions?
- d. How will this be taught to new members? What will happen if the new members don't understand or appreciate the tradition? Can it or will it be changed or discontinued and if so, how?
- e. What meaning will this tradition have in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years?

Reflect

The basic reflections of a youth leader always begin not with “What have I taught them?” but with “What have I learned from them?” This is because the reception of youth to whatever you have presented is complicated by the amount of adolescent guardedness you encounter. As frustrating as this might be, you may wait years before you witness the effect of your leadership upon them!

In this section, focus on your own understanding of traditions. Do you understand all the traditions of your church? Are there some about which you need clarification? What new traditions are “begging” to be established (or re-established) in your life? Are there some traditions that you need to “let go”?

If possible, try the new tradition out for a month and evaluate. How is it working? Should this tradition be continued?

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Attachment: Activity 2

Children's Communion Liturgy

Setting the space: Cover a table with clean white paper. Place a candle and a Bible on the table.

Understanding the liturgy: Some churches traditionally invite children to stand with the minister at the communion table. These children participate (actually lead it) with a series of questions reminiscent of the children's role during a Passover liturgy done in the home. The liturgy that follows is based on this tradition.

The liturgy: Gather the children around the designated table. Make sure there is enough room for everyone to do the hand motions. Choose a child or a few children to read the "Child(ren)" part. Choose an adult or a few adults to read the "Adult(s)" part. Once the children are gathered, a designated adult or youth may light the candle.

Adult(s) (*extending arms and hands in the direction of the people*): The Lord be with you.

All (*repeating the adult's movements*): And also with you.

Adult(s) (*slowly raising hands on either side, palms up, in a lifting motion*): Lift up your hearts.

All (*repeating the adult's movements*): We lift them to the Lord.

Adult(s) (*bringing together both hands in a gesture of prayer*): Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All (*repeating the adult's movements*): It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Child(ren): Why do we give thanks and praise before this table?

Adult(s): It is our job and our joy that we give thanks and praise to God because God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. God made us in God's own image and shows us mercy and love every day. Because God is so awesome, we join the angels and all the faithful people from the past in praising God:

All: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest.

Adult(s): We also give God praise because God gave us Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who was born a baby, taught, healed and loved all people, and then died on the cross so that we and the whole world

might be saved from our sins. And while he was alive, Jesus gave us a special little meal so that we could remember.

Child(ren): What do we remember at this meal?

Adult(s): We remember that God loves us and that God is gracious to us. We remember how Jesus died on the cross and was raised on Easter for us. We also remember that the Holy Spirit cares for us and inspires all of us to be like Jesus for one another. But most of all we remember our holy history:

All: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

Child(ren): What is this special little meal?

Adult(s): (*Read Mark 14:12-16*) Today, Christians all over the world prepare a Communion table, and the special little meal is called the Lord's Supper.

Child(ren): Why do we eat bread at this table?

Adult(s): (*Read Mark 14:22*)

(the bread is served)

Children: Why do we drink from the cup at this table?

Adult(s): (*Read Mark 14:23-24*)

(the juice is served)

Adult(s): To say thanks to God for this special meal, let's say together the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray:

(Say together the Prayer of Jesus)

Psalm 23

from the Tanakh, the Holy Scriptures,
the new JPS (Jewish Publication Society)
translation according to the traditional Hebrew text

The Lord is my Shepherd; I lack nothing

He makes me lie down in green pastures

He leads me to water in places of repose (*rest and tranquility*)

He renews my life; he guides me in right paths as befits his name

Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness

I fear no harm for you are with me

Your rod and your staff -- they comfort me

You spread a table before me in full view of my enemies

You anoint my head with oil; my drink is abundant

Only goodness and hesed (*steadfast love*) **shall pursue me all the days of my life**

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for many long years.

Note: The words in italics are not a part of the text, but are definitions offered as points of reference.

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Fortunately, while servanthood is difficult for youth, mission is something that most younger youth embrace, especially if it is physically challenging and well balanced with fun activities! The problem is that youth are often limited by liability concerns—many volunteer opportunities are restricted to older youth! How ironic! The church has willing workers that are excluded because they are not old enough! The challenge for this component is to find opportunities for youth to fulfill their desire to practice mission in the name of Jesus while avoiding the experience of exclusion!

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

Reflection on Romans 12:9–18: The immediate context of this passage is Paul’s exhortation to the Roman Christian community to live in the unity of Christ’s spirit. In that spirit, they are to use their gifts for the common good. Love is at the top of the list, but more than just a feeling, Paul calls them to a practical love that looks for the good in others, outdo one another in showing honor, open their hearts, lives and even their homes to others. This hospitality is extended, not only to people who are receptive, but to people who “persecute”—to scoffers and oppressors and enemies.

Reflection on John 6:1–21: The story of the feeding of the multitudes appears frequently in other gospels. However, in the gospel of John, the meal fed to the thousands is not a potluck collection of items everyone happens to have with them. The meal comes from a single donation from a youth. In the hands of the Savior, a boy’s lunch is blessed and multiplied to more than adequately feed a large crowd. Who says that the simple generosity of one person cannot change the world!

Prayer: Creator God, who put within us special gifts and talents, inspire our creativity and fortify our courage so that we might continue to reach out so that others might know your grace and understand their special place in your Realm. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Put Yourself in Their Sandals (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity involves acting out the scripture; therefore, unless the group is particularly gifted at improvisation, you might want to outline the passage ahead for actors’ “parts.” You may add props to the experience (baskets, bread, plastic fish, etc.) if they are available, but as these are unnecessary, they do not appear on the supply list below. Make sure to emphasize that the donor of the food that feeds the thousands is a youth!

Supplies:

- Bibles

Have the participants find John 6:1–21 in their Bibles. Invite a volunteer to read the passage. After hearing the story, have the group dramatize the scene. Have the group identify the roles and volunteer for the parts. If you have a large group, anyone who does not have a specific part acts as the “large crowd.” Encourage one another to “ad lib.” After the group has acted out the story, have some of the youth be newscasters who interview each actor. These sample questions may be helpful:

- Why do you think the large crowd was coming to Jesus? What did they want or need?
- What do you think Jesus was thinking as the large crowd approached him?
- Where do you think the boy who had the food came from? Was he a part of the crowd? Was he there already? If so, what was he doing there?
- It is assumed that the boy offered the food to the disciples to use. What do you think the boy was thinking?
- What do you think the boy thought when he saw what happened to his food? What do you think the disciples thought? What do you think the crowd thought when they realized they were full and there were still fragments?
- Why do you think Jesus did this miracle? What was his point?
- Do you believe this kind of miracle happens today? If so, how? If not, why not?

2 Love One Another — Really!

Leader preparation: This activity pairs the Roman text with Jesus’ “New” Commandment in the gospel of John to challenge the group beyond a superficial definition of love. When you read the Romans text, emphasize the verbs in a way that is meaningful and appropriate for the age and maturity of the group. For example, if you have many in the group who are usually quiet and shy, it might be enough just to have them “shout out” all the verbs as you read. If you have a restless group that requires a bit more activity, allow them to “pop up” and shout the verbs as you read.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read John 13:34 together aloud. Discuss the meaning of “love one another.” How do we do that? What do we do for one another that demonstrates our love? Do we love some people differently than others — how so? What did Jesus mean by loving others as he loved us? What did he do for us that we are supposed to do for one another?

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.

Read Romans 12:9–18, emphasizing the verbs (see above). Challenge the group to act out each exhortation. Then discuss how each instruction shows love for others. How might others feel as you do these things with, for, and around them?

3 Seek and Find

Leader preparation: This activity challenges the group to look for human need. Make it clear that looking for need is different from “profiling,” and encourage the group to acknowledge and then set aside their biases and prejudices. On the other hand, this activity might also give you the opportunity to address the wrong assumptions many people make about needs (e.g., “successful” people don’t need anyone, wealthy people are happy, etc).

Supplies:

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

Invite the participants to study the poster “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker. Notice the clothing, the facial expressions, and the body language. Think about what each character might be feeling or thinking and what this group of people might be experiencing. Pose these questions for discussion:

- a. What feelings or thoughts are present in this picture? What might these people be experiencing?
- b. Why do they need each other? Why do they need peace (as the title implies)? What other things might they need?
- c. Do you know someone who has similar needs? What are some things you can do to meet those needs?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Who ... Me?! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The activity challenges the youth to image themselves in mission by encouraging them to focus on their strengths and gifts. Adolescence is a tender age of transition, so be sure to reassure your youth that they still have some unknown or untapped resources within them.

Supplies:

- large piece of white paper such as table covering
- markers
- self adhesive notes

On the large piece of paper, draw a bunch of stick figures or a group of faces to represent your group. Give each person in the group several self-adhesive notes. On each note they are to write a skill, talent, or interest. They may have as many notes as they want. If this is difficult for them, ask what they enjoy doing, what they are good at doing, and what they are “known” for. Assure the group that all of these skills, talents and interests — no matter how small or seemingly irrelevant — are necessary by reading 1Corinthians 12:12–26. Post the notes on the paper all around the figures or faces.

Brainstorm how these skills, talents and interests might be used to help other people. Identify ministries and missions within the church that might benefit

from having these members with these skills, talents, and interests. If possible, follow through by recommending these individuals to the proper church leaders.

5 Out ... Reach!

Leader preparation: This activity engages the youth in a physical way to understand the risks involved with outreach and mission. Please be prepared to assign two additional youth (or adults if they are handy) as “spotters” to prevent unnecessary injuries. You may also rotate volunteers so that everyone gets an opportunity to participate, spot and observe.

Supplies:

- two chairs each sturdy enough to hold the weight of a member of the group

Place the two chairs with the seats facing one another, about a foot apart. Have two volunteers stand on the chairs and face one another. Ask the volunteers to hold hands or to place their palms together. Is it easy for them to do this? Is it comfortable for them to do this? Have the volunteers return to the floor. Discuss what makes mission work (reaching out to help other people in a meaningful way in the name of Jesus) easy.

Move the chairs farther apart — perhaps a yard apart. Have two volunteers stand on the chairs and hold hands or place their palms together. Is it still easy for them to do this? Is it comfortable for them to do this? Have volunteers return to the floor. Discuss what makes mission work more difficult. Move the chairs even farther apart—beyond the comfortable reach of the volunteers. Have the two volunteers stand on the chairs and attempt to hold hands or place their palms together. What is the risk in reaching out to the other person? Have the volunteers return to the floor. Discuss what makes mission work feel like it is impossible and what risks we take in “stretching” to help someone.

Move the chairs so that the seats are touching. Have the two volunteers stand on the chairs and put their palms together. Is this a comfortable situation for either person? What is the risk in being too close? Have the volunteers return to the floor. Discuss what situations might make mission work feel uncomfortable or inappropriate.

6 Ready, Set ... Serve!

Leader preparation: This activity addresses the issue of competition within mission work. In most communities, particularly those where large numbers of people live, there are multiple agencies and efforts to address social problems. However, the Roman text says that we are supposed to outdo one another in showing honor. Youth can lead the way by understanding that the goal of mission is not to win in a competition to see who can address the issue most rapidly or effectively, but to address the issue with compassion. For this activity, you will need to be familiar with the social service agencies in your area. Ask your pastor for some suggestions or review a copy of a local United Way listing.

The movie “Cars” <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0317219> is available to purchase on DVD and Blu-ray from a variety of online and traditional stores. It is also available for Web streaming and downloads from online sources.

Supplies:

- video of the Disney movie Cars <http://tinyurl.com/2dbjmju> cued to the final race scene

Invite the group to identify some of the practical needs within your community. These could include, but are not limited to, the need for food, shelter, clothing, employment, education, health care, money, etc. Then encourage the group to name the different agencies and organizations that help people who are in need (don't forget to include the church!). Make the point that sometimes these agencies and organizations end up competing with one another for resources and funding, for status or reputation, even sometimes for people to help.

Watch the video clip. Discuss the following:

- a. In the competition to win, what was Chick willing to do?
- b. Why did Lightning McQueen stop short of the finish line? What do you think he was thinking or feeling?
- c. How did the crowd react to Chick winning the race? Why do you think they reacted that way?
- d. Why did Lightning McQueen help Tex (the King) to the finish line? What does that say about him?
- e. Why did the crowd react to Lightning McQueen doing what he did for Tex (the King)?
- f. Why did Dinaco offer Lightning McQueen the sponsorship? Why did Lightning McQueen turn it down?

Make the point that when agencies and organizations that help people end up focusing on competition, everyone loses, including the very people they are supposed to help.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 It Feels SO Good! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity is simply an opportunity for the group to do a simple mission project and reflect on what they receive from doing it. A food drive works best if you can get a list of some specific items needed by your food pantry or bank, so contact them ahead of time and publish the list liberally. You will also need to contact the recipients of the collection to arrange for delivery, especially if you will be volunteering. Most food pantries or banks have something meaningful for groups to do, even younger youth. If the specifics of this activity are not possible, practical, or desirable, adapt the mission project to fit your specific needs. However, do not neglect to do the reflection as it is an integral part of the activity.

Supplies:

- containers to collect goods

For several weeks, collect canned, paper and/or boxed goods (or specific items on a list) for your local food pantry or bank. At a predetermined and arranged time, deliver the goods and take a tour of the facility to learn about how the pantry/bank works, how many people are helped, etc. Have the group volunteer time, if possible. At a later time, discuss the following:

- a. What did you learn by doing this mission project? What did you learn about the needs of the community and how the community responds? What did you learn about the recipients of our mission project? If you were able to meet some of them, how did they respond?

- b. How did this experience change what you assumed, thought or felt before you participated? How did it feel to participate? What did you receive by participating?

8 Thank You

Leader preparation: A chief complaint about doing mission is the absence of expressed gratitude—and yet how often do we forget to thank those who have done so much for us! This activity challenges the youth to think about what they have received, the people who have welcomed them, listened to their needs and then responded, and then encourages them to make the effort to thank those people. A rather “old fashioned” (and for some, probably tedious) way has been very intentionally recommended here—an attempt to encourage a greater, more conscious effort to thank generous people. However, if the same spirit is maintained, “high tech” alternatives (email, IM, blogs, etc.) may be substituted.

Supplies:

- writing paper, envelopes, stamps

Encourage the group to consider all the “gifts” that each individual has received from another person. Help the group to think beyond that which can be wrapped to include physical “gifts” such as shelter, emotional “gifts” such as encouragement, or spiritual “gifts” such as prayer. Have each person consider one such “gift” and giver and write that person a thank-you note on writing paper. Once the participants are finished, put the notes in envelopes and distribute stamps. If addresses are known, have the participants address their envelopes and offer to mail them. If addresses are not known, have the participants take the envelopes with them with a promise to deliver or mail them at a later time.

Reflect

The basic reflections of a youth leader always begin not with “What have I taught them?” but with “What have you learned from them?” This is because the reception of youth to whatever you have presented is complicated by the amount of adolescent guardedness you encounter. As frustrating as this might be, you may wait years before you witness the effect of your leadership upon them!

In this section, focus on your understanding of mission and how the fresh ideas of youth might influence that understanding. What is your personal mission, informed by your faith, motivated by the Holy Spirit and shaped by your gifts? What difficulties have you had in carrying out that mission in the world? How has God provided opportunities for you to do mission?



9 Mission Totally Possible

Leader preparation: This activity challenges the youth to search for the worthiness of every individual to receive hospitality, especially those who are not pleasant or fun to be around. The deck of cards needs to be prepared ahead of time—there are two character sets (one for Butch the Bully and one for Sally the Snob) and each set contains 1 head, 1 heart and 1 hand card. Other character sets can be added with the following formula:

- head cards = thoughts, attitudes, what is learned by seeing or hearing
- heart cards = feelings, yearnings, dreams
- hand cards = abilities and activities

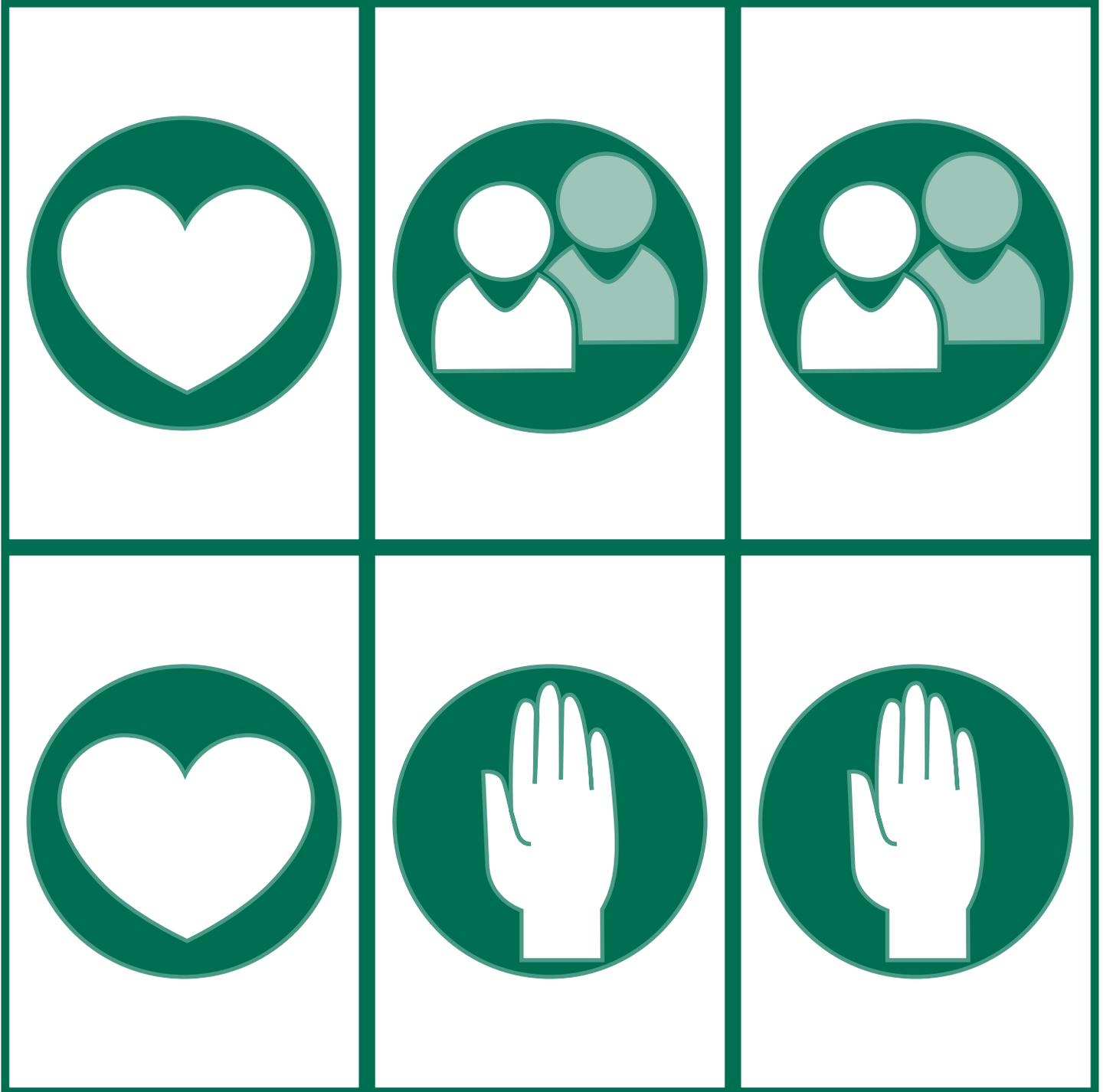
Supplies:

- cards from Attachment: Activity 9

Form two groups and tell them that they are on a mission to find and answer the hidden needs within two very difficult characters : Butch the Bully and Sally the Snob. Distribute one character set to each team. Give them ample time to read their cards and identify what their character needs. Have each half “introduce” their character to the whole group. Brainstorm ways that the group might reach out to those characters.

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Attachment: Activity 9



Attachment: Activity 9

(head card)

Butch thinks that he is dumb and ugly because his father tells him so A LOT. He has seen his father angry MANY times and sees how his father always gets what he wants—because he is bigger and meaner than anyone else.

(head card)

Sally thinks that she has to win at everything. After all, that is what her family expects. She has been told MANY times that members of her family are not losers.

(heart card)

Butch is scared of his father but he is also afraid of other things. Butch secretly loves to play the piano but is afraid his father might call him a sissy if he succeeds at music instead of football. Butch wants to be a veterinarian but he is afraid that the family won't be able to afford for him to go to school.

(heart card)

Sally feels like a failure most of the time because her older sister is REALLY good at everything. Sally would rather live in her jeans and t-shirts without all the makeup, but feels more approval from her mother when she looks like a model (and a grownup). She doesn't like ANYTHING about her body.

(hand card)

Butch isn't very coordinated; in fact, he's clumsy. It doesn't help that he is taller and fatter than most boys, but because he doesn't have much to do and is on his own a lot, Butch eats so that he doesn't feel so lonely.

(hand card)

Sally has discovered that you can't do much without breaking artificial nails and so she spends a lot of time doing nothing. Because her family are not losers (EVER!), she doesn't have many friends and the friends she has often seem ... unfriendly. She would really like to feel "normal."

Giving and Receiving Hospitality



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Youth are not the future of the church! They are the church, looking at the future through the lenses of newly recruited disciples, discerning whether or not they intend to stay and recruit others! How we practice hospitality is directly related to this reality! If we would like to know how to do hospitality better in the future, youth can and will give us the answer, but only if we invite them into the conversation! It would benefit us to remember, and to remind our youth, that the original twelve disciples, as well as many others, were close to their same age! The future is not the sole responsibility of the youth, but needs to include their voices, for “to such belongs the realm of God.”

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

Reflection on Luke 14:15–24: In the parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus tells about a wealthy host (someone who has a servant and can afford to present such a feast) who invites some rather influential friends (the “right” people) to a banquet. In short, the invitation is collectively rejected. Each invited guest has an excuse—the first two have polite but “lame” excuses involving material wealth and the third uses family as an excuse (perhaps the only one with which the host wouldn’t feel comfortable arguing). Feeling rightfully “dissed” by his friends, the host flings open the doors to include those whom none of the “right” people would ever invite. His inclusiveness insults and discredits privileged snobbery. Furthermore, a second wave of invitations goes out, reaching beyond the boundaries of relative security and safety (symbolized by the city gates). The host literally fills his home with outcasts so that there is no room for his privileged, self-absorbed friends; ironically, so many “wrong” people have been included that the “right” people are excluded.

Reflection on Mark 10:13–16: This is the second time that children have provided an “object lesson” for the disciples about priorities. The first time (see Mark 9:33–37), Jesus brings a child into their view, takes that child into his arms, and teaches them a lesson about welcoming—whoever welcomes a child welcomes Jesus. Apparently,

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 By Invitation Only (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity challenges the youth to think about their “agenda” when selecting friends. This may present the greatest challenge to those in the group who have been repeatedly rejected. If it is appropriate and necessary, you may want to address these issues as you are working on the activity.

Supplies: None

Present the following scenario: You are having a party and need to send out invitations. Whom do you invite?

- People who enjoy different kinds of party activities, or people who are not likely to embarrass themselves in front of someone else?
- People who enjoy different kinds of music or the same kind of music?
- People who do not know one another, who are from different neighborhoods, schools or social groups, or only those people who know and enjoy one another’s company?
- People you do not know, or only those you know and like?
- People of different ages? younger? older? Or, people your age?
- People who have differing abilities? disabilities? different skills? different interests?

Have the participants find Luke 14:15–24 in their Bibles. Invite a volunteer to read the passage. Discuss the following:

- a. The host of the great banquet invited his friends but none of them came to the party. Then he went out into the street and invited *everyone*. What would happen if you invited everyone in your neighborhood or school to come to the party?
- b. After the host invited *everyone*, the house was so filled with the “wrong” people, that there was no room for the “right” people. How do you think the people at the party felt? How do you think the people who were invited first and refused to come felt?

2 Seeing Through Colored Glasses

Leader preparation: This activity challenges the youth to think about their personal perspective (as well as the perspective of others) that, if allowed to be exclusive, might lead to prejudice. As the group makes their shopping lists, stress that they can include things whose packaging includes their assigned color - for example, the yellow group might list a box of Cheerios as well as a bunch of bananas.

Supplies:

- paper and pencils

Form five small groups and assign each group to a color: red, green, yellow, blue, and purple. Imagine you are going shopping for food for a party, but you can only see the color that you have been assigned. Make a “shopping list” of all the foods you would be able to buy. Have the groups share their lists and then discuss:

that lesson is forgotten because in this text, the disciples attempt to enforce an ancient standard of exclusion. So once again, Jesus brings the children into their midst, takes them into his arms and makes the point more emphatically—children are the keepers of God’s kingdom, and an example for all disciples who want to receive it.

Prayer: God of Radical Inclusion, help us to notice those who have been forgotten, to touch those who have gone untouched, and to give voice to those who for too long have been silenced. 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.

- Are your favorite foods on your list? What favorite foods are not on your list? Are there foods on your list that you do not like? What would it be like to *only* eat the foods on your list?
- What favorite foods are on other lists? How do you feel knowing that someone else has those foods on their list?
- What would happen if all of you were throwing a party together? (Remember you can only see—and therefore eat—the color that you have been assigned.) What would you be missing if you could not eat foods of another color?
- If you could convince someone else to see another color, what would you tell them about the foods in your assigned color? How would you persuade them to see and appreciate your color?
- Would you exchange colors or would you try to “collect” colors? What are the advantages to seeing one color at a time? What are the advantages to seeing and appreciating all colors?

③ The Church in Space

Leader preparation: Although the nation has been captivated by the exploration of space since the 1960’s, the church has remained silently removed from the fantasy of life in space. A recent commercial quips about building a Dunkin Donuts in space, but there is no chapel envisioned on the Starship Enterprise (even in on-line concept drawings) and no chaplain on the staff. You can expand this activity at many points depending on the skills and interests of your group.

Supplies:

- video clip: “Star Trek The Next Generation Theme”
<http://www.tinyurl.com/pzytxn>
- newsprint or white board and marker
- paper and pencils

Play the video clip and introduce the “mission” of the activity: to imagine what it would mean to for the church “to boldly go where no one has gone before.”

Instructions: This group has been chosen to develop “God’s Enterprise,” the first church in space aboard the Starship Enterprise. Discuss the following issues:

- What would worship be like on the Starship Enterprise? What technology would be used? Who would be invited to worship—just members of a particular denomination or faith, or members of different denominations or faiths?
- Would there be a chapel on the Starship Enterprise? What would it look like? How big would it be? What furniture would be in it? What symbols would be included?
- What other kinds of ministries would be necessary on the Starship Enterprise? Christian Education — for whom and when? What kinds of fellowship activities would be planned? How would you do “mission” and to whom — those on board, aliens on other planets?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Building A Church ... From the Floor Up (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity challenges the youth to think about the decisions that must be made when establishing a church and, therefore, the decisions that must be made when maintaining a church into the future. Give minimal instructions and then step back and allow the group to wrestle with the issues! If you (or other adults) assist, you need to let them “fail” so that learning can take place.

Supplies:

- masking tape
- folding chairs
- newspaper

If the group is large, form groups of 5 or 6 people per group. Distribute one roll of masking tape, a few folding chairs, and some newspaper to each group and assign them a designated area in which to work (this should be no larger than 10 foot by 10 foot space). Tell them that with these materials and the space they’ve been assigned (windows, doors, walls, etc.), they are to build a church. Don’t forget to consider: name, accessibility, symbols, and leadership.

After allowing several minutes (as many as 30, if you have that luxury), have the groups stop their work and explain their “design.” Allow questions from “prospective visitors” such as:

- a. How do I know where the door is (if it is not obvious)?
- b. What if I am differently abled (if, for example, everyone is expected to sit on the floor)?
- c. Who makes decisions in your church (or who made the decisions for the church you built)?

5 Excuses, Excuses

Leader preparation: This activity addresses the issue of making excuses in a silly way, but the point is serious. Excuses only whittle away our integrity with the people around us. The time allotted for “excuse development” was intentionally set so that an old-fashioned two minute egg timer (the one with the sand?) is sufficient.

The Russian folktale Little Red Hen is available as a children’s book on Amazon.com, <http://www.tinyurl.com/25qfplm>, or at your local library or book store.

A plot summary is available on Wikipedia: <http://www.tinyurl.com/71xnz3>.

Regarding the mini-skit at the end of this activity, other versions may have different or additional characters; you may also assign multiple people to each character. Read or tell the story slowly, allowing for the group to act out what you read or tell.

Supplies:

- a timing device
- a copy of the Little Red Hen folktale

For the following scenarios, challenge the group to come up with as many excuses as they can in two minutes:

- a. Someone calls you on Friday afternoon and says, “Hey there! The Stink-bombs are playing at the Community Center tonight!” This *definitely* does not sound like fun! What excuses do you have?
- b. Your neighbor invites you to help him put “fertilizer” on his garden — by the shovelful! You know what *that* means! What excuses do you have?
- c. You’ve been invited to a party, and *everyone* will be there ... but what’s planned is just not your “thing” and frankly, it sounds rather boring. What excuses do you have?

Assign roles: Hen, Duck, Cat, Dog. Have the group act out the story as you read or tell the folktale of the Little Red Hen. Then discuss the following:

- a. What is the moral of the story of the Little Red Hen? What did the Duck, Cat and Dog learn? What did the Hen learn?
- b. When have you made excuses for the right reasons? Why were they the right reasons?
- c. When have you made excuses for the wrong reasons? Why were they the wrong reasons?

⑥ I Always Feel Like ... Somebody’s Watching Me

Leader Preparation: The activity encourages the youth to embrace their responsibility as examples — not just for younger youth, siblings and peers — but also as Christian disciples who are called to build God’s reign. Although adults will patronizingly refer to them as “the future of the church,” this calling begins today, not when they are older.

Supplies:

- Bibles

Read aloud Jeremiah 1:4–10. Pose these questions for discussion:

- a. God says that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet from before he was born, but it seems Jeremiah didn’t know it. What do you think you might be called by God to be? What special gifts have you been told that you have? How do you think you could use those for God?
- b. Jeremiah didn’t think he had what it took to be what God wanted him to be because he was young. Have you ever felt like this—too young, not enough experience, not enough wisdom, not enough of something to do anything important?
- c. God told Jeremiah not to worry, that God would give Jeremiah all that he needed to fulfill God’s calling. Before you read this story, did you know that Jeremiah was “only a boy”? How do you feel now knowing that God calls people of all ages to ministry? How has God (maybe through other people) encouraged you to be faithful?
- d. Notice that God doesn’t say that Jeremiah “will be appointed over nations” but that “today, I appoint you over nations.” Before you read this story, did you know that God doesn’t call you to ministry in the future, but to do what you are called to do right now? How do you feel knowing that God doesn’t want you to wait until you are older or wiser or better or more experienced?

Read Mark 10:13–16 aloud. Pose these questions for discussion:

- a. When people brought their children to Jesus for a blessing, the disciples were unhappy. Why do you think that the disciples tried to discourage the people from bringing their children? Have you ever experienced being turned away or rejected because you were a child or a youth? What did that feel like?

- b. Jesus was offended by the disciples rejecting the children and encouraged the children to come forward. What do you think it was like for the children to come forward? What do you think the disciples felt in that moment?
- c. Before blessing them, Jesus made it clear that the children are the owners of God's kingdom. If children are the owners, what is God's reign like? How should they be treated? What responsibilities do they have?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 “Bring A Friend” Sunday (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This activity encourages youth to take the lead on hospitality by sponsoring a special Sunday on which everyone in the congregation is invited to “bring a friend.” In order for this to be effective, two things must happen. First, the youth must make a commitment to participate in this event — to follow through with their own plans by bringing a friend and, if desired, taking a lead in the reception following worship. Second, the youth must be supported by the faith community through their support, promotion and participation. Details of this event may vary with the input of the youth, the timing of the event, and the co-operation of the community, but the youth should be encouraged to take the lead.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or white board and markers

Read Luke 14:15–24 aloud and introduce the concept of “Bring A Friend” Sunday. Brainstorm ideas to plan such an event for your congregation—suggested dates, who greet guests and how, ideas for the worship service, possible reception after worship, leadership roles and supplies needed, etc. Assign someone to write up a proposal to be given to the appropriate church leader or governing body. The proposal needs to be clear that this group will provide leadership for the event.

After the event, evaluate. What did we learn? Was it a “success”? Do we want to do it again? What could be done differently or better?

8 Following in Ruby Slippers

Leader preparation: In this activity, the point is made using the story of Ruby Bridges, “the first African-American child to attend William Frantz Elementary School (New Orleans, LA), and the first African-American child to attend an all-white school in the South” (Wikipedia, <http://www.tinyurl.com/2t3uy6>). The recommended book has been selected because of its brevity; however, if there is time, other books about Ruby Bridges that are more age-appropriate may be used. Disney has also produced a film, *Ruby Bridges*, about her life. These resources may be found easily on <http://www.amazon.com>. Ruby Bridges is still living and has her own Web site: <http://www.rubybridges.com>.

You can find images of the Rockwell painting online. Search for it on Google or Yahoo. Make plans to project a photo of the painting.

Supplies:

- a copy of *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles and George Ford
<http://www.tinyurl.com/2a32cqt>

- painting: “The Problem We All Live With” by Norman Rockwell
<http://www.tinyurl.com/5p6u8o>
- computer with Internet access and a projector

Look at Norman Rockwell’s painting, “The Problem We All Live With.” Discuss the following:

- a. What do you notice about the little girl in the painting? What do you think is happening?
- b. Why did Rockwell name the painting “The Problem We All Live With”? What do you think the problem is? Why do you think he says that “we all live with” it?

Read aloud *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. Discuss the following:

- c. Ruby Bridges was only 6 years old when she changed history. How do you think that she felt? Do you think she knew she was changing history then?
- d. How could you change history? Whose help would you need? What resources would you need?

9 Let me Minister N.O.W.—No Other Way (to Survive)

Leader preparation: You might want to “buckle your seatbelt” because this activity encourages the youth to serve in real ways in your church! Most of the youth in your group are members or about to become members — remind them that this gives them (in most cases) the right to be a part of the decision making of the church. Before you start this activity, become familiar with your church’s constitution and bylaws regarding any age limitations for service on boards or committees. If there are restrictions, but you discover interest in serving within your group, you may want to find out the process for challenging these restrictions. In any case, it would be helpful to seek out a supportive church leader or pastor to help you follow through with any responses you might get from doing this activity. As the title implies, the only way the church will survive is to take the ministry of youth seriously ... now.

Reflect

The basic reflections of a youth leader always begin not with “What have I taught them?” but with “What have I learned from them?” This is because the reception of youth to whatever you have presented is complicated by the amount of adolescent guardedness you encounter. As frustrating as this might be, you may wait years before you witness the effect of your leadership upon them!

Focus on what your vision of the future looks like. From your perspective, is the future easier or harder? Better or worse? Filled with hope or despair? If you could change the direction you see the world heading, how would you change it? What will your role be in the future? And how will your present attitudes make a difference?

Supplies:

- copies of a listing of the committees, commissions, boards and governing bodies of your church including a description of their responsibilities. (Optional: you may also collect a panel of leaders from these groups for the youth to “interview.”)

Distribute copies of the listing and review the responsibilities with the group. Discuss the following:

- a. What are these bodies doing well? What are their strengths? What should they continue to do into the future?
- b. How could these bodies improve their ministries? What suggestions do you have?
- c. Are there ministries that these bodies need to consider? Why are these new ministries necessary?
- d. What bodies would you be interested in visiting ... and maybe serving with? Are there other ministries that you would like to try?

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