



## Playing & Living Joyfully

### About this Faith Practice

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

### Let's Begin...

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

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



**Discovery**



**Scripture**



**Discipleship**



**Christian Tradition**



**Context and Mission**



**Future and Vision**

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

**2** Locate the Exploration you've chosen

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

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

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

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

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

### Use of Art, Music, and Scripture in Faith Practices

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

#### Ordering Posters

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

#### Art

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

#### **From Imaging the Word Poster Sets:**

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

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

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

#### **From AllPosters.com:**

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

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

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

#### Music

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

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

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

Over My Head, Tune: African-American traditional

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

### Scripture

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

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

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# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

Many children have a natural spontaneity and playfulness that can be contagious, and many have the capacity to share the gift of holy joy simply by being themselves. As children get older, they may become more self-conscious about playing and less able to spontaneously let go for fear of ridicule by their peers. Multiage groups can be a place of freedom for older children and teens because there may be less expectation that everyone has to “act their age.” Thus, young children can be leaders and older ones can re-learn the delight of simple things. Leaders can model a playful spirit in how they introduce activities. While it is important to involve older children and youth in leadership by giving them responsibilities, do not assume that anyone is too old to play or too young to lead.

### About this Exploration

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



## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**1 John 1:1–2:2**  
**Psalm 30**

## Leader Preparation

Read Psalm 30 slowly, in a quiet place. What images from this psalm speak to you today? What parts of this psalm do you wonder about or question? Think of a time in your life when you felt that mourning or sadness would last forever. When have you ever experienced “mourning turned to dancing”? Where or how was God present in that time for you?

Read 1 John 1:1–2:2. What is the letter writer’s purpose? What “good news” does the writer proclaim? Imagine that you were going to write a letter about the joy you find in your faith. To whom might you write? What would you write about? Take a moment to think about each of the learners in your group; pray that you might play a part in making their joy complete.

*Prayer: God, I give thanks for your healing and leading in my life. Help me to guide my learners from a place of joy. I know you are with me and with them wherever we are and however we are feeling in this moment. Give me the strength to try new activities. Keep me open to the Spirit’s leading in the happy accidents, momentary wonders, and spontaneous joy that comes from playing for you and with you. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Tell a Good News/Bad News Story (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** None needed.

#### Supplies:

- Bible

Gather the group in a circle. Explain that a good news/bad news story goes something like this:

One person says: “The good news is that I finished all my homework.”

A second person says, “But the bad news is that I lost it on the way to school.”

The next person says, “The good news is that someone found it.”

And the next person says, “But the bad news is that I had forgotten to put my name on it.”

This continues until the story has gone around the circle and ends with a good news ending.

Invite the group to make up their own “good news/bad news” stories, going from one person to another around the circle. If someone gets stuck, ask another person or the group to make a suggestion.

Suggest that Psalm 30 is a kind of “good news/bad news” story. Slowly read the psalm aloud and have learners identify “good news” or “bad news” parts of the psalm as you go along. Use these or similar questions to discuss the psalm:

- What were some of the bad things that were mentioned in the psalm?
- What was the good news?
- How do you think God might help turn our sadness around?
- How can we help others to turn their sadness around? (Invite learners to suggest examples.)

### 2 Playing with Light

**Leader preparation:** Make a scroll from a roll of newsprint, and write on the scroll the paraphrase from 1 John 1 below. Alternatively, you may print the paraphrase on paper using a computer; you may also want to enlarge it to 11” x 17.”

#### **Paraphrase from 1 John 1:1–5:**

We have seen it, we have touched it and now we’re passing on the good news to you. We are writing this to make our joy complete. We are telling you this so that we can all be together as one family—sisters and brothers with God as our loving parent.

Love appeared, the love that was there at the very beginning of creation. We saw it with our own eyes and we know for certain that love will never die. God is light. Walking with God is like walking in endless sunshine, not a shadow of a doubt, not a single cloud to rain on our parade. There is no darkness, only light, only God.

#### Supplies:

- pillar candle and holder
- matches
- kaleidoscopes, if available
- empty cardboard wrapping paper rolls or paper towel rolls



### Session Development

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

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

- black construction paper
- pins
- masking tape

Invite the participants to pretend that your group has received a letter written long ago by one of the early followers of Jesus. Unroll your scroll, and invite an older learner to read aloud the letter.

Repeat the phrase “God is light.” Wonder together what this might mean. Light the candle. Invite the group to look closely at the flame. Notice how it is always moving, almost dancing.

Look through the kaleidoscopes, if available. Enjoy the different images the light makes.

Give each learner a cardboard tube. Ask them to cover one end with a piece of black construction paper, taped firmly in place. Next wrap a piece of aluminum foil over the construction paper so that all light is completely blocked. Look through the tube. Next, make tiny pinprick holes in the covered end. Carefully pierce through the two layers. Make about 15 holes, in a pattern if you wish. Now point the covered end of the tube up to a light source and look through the open end again. Ask learners what they notice. Enjoy making tiny pinprick patterns of light—they will look like stars twinkling in a night sky.

Talk again about why the writer of the letter might have suggested light as a way to think about God.



### 3 Make a Beautiful Rainstorm

**Leader preparation:** Review the instructions for making a rainstorm so that you can teach it to the group. See the “disappointment” examples on Attachment: Activity 3, and choose one or two that would be appropriate examples to talk about in your group.

#### Supplies:

- “Make a Rainstorm,” Attachment: Activity 3

Invite learners to think about how they deal with a big disappointment. Give some examples, and ask them to suggest how they might feel in this situation. Invite the group to consider whether disappointments are simply bad things that happen or which, if any, of these examples could be turned around in some way. What ideas do they have for the characters in these situations that might help? How might they be creative and hopeful in the face of their disappointment?

Ask the group to imagine a rainstorm as a big cause of disappointment. Suggest they “make a beautiful rainstorm” as a way of showing how some disappointments can be turned into something else, maybe even something good or beautiful.



## Discerning &amp; Deciding Activities

#### 4 Sadness to Dancing: Body Sculpture (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** None needed.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read aloud Psalm 30:11–12. Explain that sackcloth was rough fabric worn by people who were sad because someone they loved had died. Ask learners to pair up. Have one person be the sculptor and the other person be the “clay.” The sculptor shapes the clay by gently positioning the person into a shape or motioning for them to move into a certain position. Make sure sculptors know to move gently and respectfully, taking someone’s elbow and guiding an arm into position, gently placing a hand on someone’s head to tilt it forward and so on. Ask sculptors to shape their “clay” into a position of someone who is mourning or sad. Invite people to look around, taking turns to see the other sculptures.

Then, have the sculptors shape the person who is mourning into a dance, or some other representation of joy. Again, pause to look around at what others have made. Switch roles so that the person who was the sculptor becomes the clay and vice versa. Repeat the activity.

Questions for conversation: What did it feel like to be in the position of sadness? Of joy? When have you felt sad recently? Who helped you to feel better? What did he or she do (or what might someone do)? How does God work through people to turn sadness into a dance?

#### 5 Exploring an Image of Sadness and Joy

**Leader preparation:** Put up the poster “Shotgun, Third Ward #1” (by John Biggers, from the *Imaging the Word* poster set) at eye level for the learners

**Supplies:**

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

Invite learners to gather around the poster. Ask them look at it in silence for a few moments. As a group, turn away from the picture and invite learners to recall what they noticed. Turn back to look again. Ask: What do you notice now that you didn’t see before?

Ask everyone to choose some character in the picture and to imitate the way that person is standing. Have everyone pose for the others. Give learners each a moment out of their position to take a “gallery tour” and look at the positions of the others. When everyone has had a chance to take a pose, gather in a circle to talk about what you think might be happening in the picture. Ask questions such as the following: Does this seem like a happy picture to you? Why or why not? What do you think is happening? How do the people in the picture feel about that?

Tell the group that the title of the picture is “Shotgun, Third Ward #1.” Explain that “Third Ward” is the name of a part of the city of Houston, Texas, where the artist, John Biggers, lived. Most of the residents of that part of the city were African Americans. “Shotgun” is the name of the kind of houses in the picture. They



are very simple houses with two or three rooms. If you open the front door and the back door, and the doors of the rooms in between, a nice breeze can blow right through the house. Some people say they are called shotgun houses because you could shoot a shotgun right through from one end to the other, but that doesn't completely make much sense since shotgun pellets scatter and go everywhere, not in a straight line like a bullet. Other people say that "shotgun" comes from a word from West Africa *shogun*, which means "house of God." Which explanation seems likely to you? Why? What "houses of God" do you see in this picture?

Explain that a long time ago, a songwriter wrote a song that is in our Bible, saying, "God, you have turned my sadness into dancing." Ask: What does it mean to turn sadness into dancing? What do you see like that in this picture of "Shotgun Third Ward #1"? When have you ever had a time when something sad got better for you? What was that like?

### 6 Search for Happiness

**Leader preparation:** Arrange for access to computers with Internet connection.

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access

Invite learners to search for happiness or joy on the Internet. Younger learners can collect images of joy or happiness. Older learners might look for quotations. Collect your images and quotations onto a PowerPoint or a into a text document. Add your own text to say why happiness or joy is an important part of our faith.

Example:

"God wants us to be happy." —Anne Frank

"Joy is the simplest form of gratitude." —Simone Weil

**Hints:** Use "Google Images" or a similar search engine. Search for terms such as "quotation + joy" or "quotation + happiness." To find images you need to be more specific: for example, "smile" or "people laughing." To copy an image, right click on the image, and left click on the words "copy image."

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Share a Laugh (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** As the children play "chuckle belly," be aware that learners wearing skirts may be uncomfortable lying on the floor. You might want to provide some towels or blankets to cover their legs to protect their dignity and privacy.

**Supplies:**

- towels or blankets

Ask learners to pair up facing one another. Without touching them, one person tries to make the other person smile or laugh while the other person keeps a straight face. See how long you can hold out. Have a serious playoff.

Play "chuckle belly." The whole group lies down on their backs in close proximity. The first person places his or her head on the lower abdomen of the person



next to them, who in turn places his or her head on the next person. Continue until the whole group is linked up. Ask the group to try very hard to keep still and silent. Say, “Nobody laugh.” Inevitably someone will, and the chuckle will pass through the group in a domino effect.

For conversation, use some of the following questions: Ever wonder about how contagious laughs and smiles are? Why is this? How does laughter help us feel better? When might laughter make someone feel badly? Do you think God values laughter? Why or why not? In what way is laughter important in our life?



### 8 Learn a Song to Share Joy

**Leader preparation:** Arrange for an accompanist if needed, or someone to teach the song.

#### Supplies:

- song: “Say It! Sing It!” Attachment: Activity 8
- rhythm instruments

Teach the group the song “Say It! Sing It!” Add rhythm instruments. Plan a time when you can share this song with others, perhaps at a senior’s residence, by making a digital recording to e-mail to grandparents or to sing with others in your congregation.



### 9 Psalm 30: a Popcorn Psalm

**Leader preparation:** Make a copy of the “A Prayer Based on Psalm 30,” Attachment: Activity 9, and cut apart short phrases as indicated.

#### Supplies:

- scissors
- pens
- paper
- “A Prayer Based on Psalm 30,” Attachment: Activity 9

Hand out the cut-apart phrases of the prayer based on Psalm 30. Distribute the phrases evenly among the group members. Give nonreaders a simple phrase such as one of the “thank you”s and tell them what it says.

Gather in a circle. Explain that you are going to read the psalm you have distributed “popcorn style”—that is, each person will read aloud his or her phrase when it seems a good time. Sometimes there may be two or three phrases at once, sometimes just one or none, sometimes a whole lot (a bit like popcorn popping). Invite them to listen to the phrases others have and fit theirs in.

When the psalm has been heard, ask learners to say what they think it was about. Say the phrases again, going around the circle with each person reading in turn. Then read the psalm as it is printed on Attachment: Activity 9.

Use these or similar questions for conversation:

- Who helps you when you are hurt or sad or being picked on?
- Who do you help out in this way?
- The writer of the poem says this feels like “taking my tears and turning them into a dance.” What do you think it feels like? (Encourage learners to



### Reflect

What were some of the joyful or celebratory moments in your exploration with the learners? What did you encounter that surprised you? What were some of the learning moments for you or for group members? As you think back over the activities you have done together, you may want to consider how you and your group were able to experience God's life-giving, joyful presence in your midst. What will you do this coming week to continue to "tune in" to the joy and wonder of God's spirit in your life?

suggest other possibilities.) If necessary give prompts, such as "you have turned my frown into a..." or "You have turned my whining into..." or "You have turned my tantrum into..."

**Option:** Invite learners to write their own short psalm based on the phrases they have been given.



Attachment: Activity 3

# Make a Beautiful Rainstorm

## Examples of Disappointments

*Choose several that suit your group, or think of your own examples that would be the kinds of things learners in your group might experience as disappointments.*

1. José had been excited for weeks, waiting for the day his uncle would be taking him to the ballgame in the city. He picked out his clothes; he even knew which shoes and cap he would wear. Two days before the game, José started to get a cough. By Saturday, he had a fever and he ached all over. He tried to pretend he was fine, but he couldn't stay awake. His dad said that he would have to stay home. "It's too far to go when you're sick, and besides, you don't want to give the whole city the flu," said his dad. "I'm really sorry but you'll have to do this another time when you're feeling better."

2. "If it doesn't rain, we'll go to the beach on Saturday," Mom promised. But it rained. It rained so hard that Marcie and Kent could hardly see across the street. "It always rains when we've got something good planned," moaned Kent. "Can't we go anyway?" Marcie begged. "Maybe it will stop by the time we get there." "It's too far to go just to sit in the rain," Mom replied.

3. Calvin was working on a painting at school. Just as he was almost finished, Kagunda went past to go to the bathroom and bumped his elbow. "Look out!" yelled Calvin, but it was too late. A big blob of green paint landed right in the middle of what was supposed to be a house. Calvin was so disappointed he felt like ripping up the whole canvas.

4. Celia and Farah were looking at the ice cream flavors on the sign. Celia took a long time to decide, but Farah always knew exactly what she wanted. "I'd like a chocolate cone, one scoop," she said. "Sorry, we're all out of chocolate," said Mrs. Chopra. "How about vanilla?" "But chocolate is the only kind I like," said Farah. "The cherry is very nice. Why don't you try that for a change?" Mrs. Chopra suggested. Farah frowned with annoyance. She hated cherry!

5. Kate had promised she would go to the show with Michael on Friday night. On Thursday she texted him to say she had way too much homework and she had a game all day Saturday so she couldn't go. "See you at church," she added. Michael stuffed his phone in his pocket in disgust. "How could she do that to me?" he muttered.

6. Sylvie looked at the muffins fresh from the oven. They looked terrible. The bottoms were blackened and they had hardly risen at all. "I was looking forward to those," she declared in annoyance, "and that's the very last of the chocolate chips. What on earth is wrong with that oven?"

*(Make a Beautiful Rainstorm continued)*

### **Make a Rainstorm**

Everyone sits in silence in a circle. The leader stands in the middle of the circle, makes a sound, and slowly turns clockwise to face each group member in turn until everyone is making the first sound; then the leader makes a new sound and continues turning clockwise to face everyone until all are making that sound.

Directions to the group: "The leader will make different sounds. When the leader faces you, copy what the leader is doing and keep doing it until the leader comes back to you again; don't start a new sound until the leader reaches you, and remember to keep going until the leader gets back around the circle to you."

Sounds the leader makes, in this order:

1. Soft swishing sound made by slowly rubbing palms together.
2. Gradually increase the volume of the swishing sound by rubbing hands more rapidly.
3. Softly and slowly click finger and thumb together.
4. Increase volume and speed of the clicking.
5. Slowly slap palms on thighs.
6. Increase speed and volume of the slapping.
7. Add thumping of feet on the floor.
8. Stop thumping; but continue slapping palms on thighs.
9. Gradually decrease speed and volume of slapping.
10. Return to clicking fingers and thumbs.
11. Slowly decrease speed of clicking.
12. Rub palms together.
13. Slow the rubbing of palms until you stop completely.
14. Pause for a moment of silence once everyone is still again.



Attachment: Activity 8

### Say It! Sing It!

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

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

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

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

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## A Prayer Based on Psalm 30

There I was, face down in the mud of the playground,  
but you didn't let the bullies laugh at me.  
You picked me up and set me back on my feet.  
Thank you.

I felt so sick I thought I was going to die.  
I don't think I've ever felt that bad in my life.  
But you were right there beside me, wiping my face with a cool cloth,  
taking away the pain and helping me to get well again.  
Thank you.

I was so sad that I cried all night long.  
I thought I would feel this way forever, but you never left my side.  
You wiped my tears and rubbed my back and  
in the morning, things didn't seem so bad.  
Thank you.

You picked me up from the mud puddle,  
you took care of me when I was sick,  
and you comforted me when I was sad.  
You took my tears and turned them into a joyful dance.  
Thank you.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

For all human beings, but especially for children and youth, play time is learning time. Through play children learn social, physical, and conceptual skills. Through play we can simulate possibilities without having to risk the actual consequences of the real life situation. We can experience the emotions and learn the skills in a safe space. But play also expands the bounds of our imagination and our spirit. Thus, in a multiage learning group, the boundaries between play, art, and spirituality merge.

### About this Exploration

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



## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

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

## Leader Preparation

Philosopher Ellen Dissanayake suggests that playful, spiritual, and artistic behaviors have much in common—they are universal human activities that we seem to need as much as we need to eat, sleep, or drink. Through play and art and spiritual expression we expand the bounds of our vision. We begin to imagine life and the world (and ourselves) as they might be rather than live resigned to things as they are. Playfulness enlarges the spaces of possibility for God to act in our midst. Perhaps this is why Jesus pointed to children as signs of God’s realm in the here-and-now. Perhaps this is why Jesus urges us to welcome the child as a way of welcoming God. Read Mark 9:30–37. Ponder what it means for you to “welcome the child” in this Exploration. Pray for playfulness and openness to God-with-us as you prepare to meet with the children and youth in your group.

*Prayer: God of wonder and creative imagination, I give thanks for the words and stories of faith and praise and for the words of lament and questioning in our scripture. Help me to share joyfully the assurance of your faithfulness, forgiveness, and healing with my learners. Open my ears and heart to receive their questions. Open my eyes to see the Bible in a fresh way. In all things encourage all of us to grow in faith. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 “Shoe” and Tell (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Check out the church kitchen for dish towels or the education supply closet for fabric to use as blindfolds.

#### Supplies:

- blindfolds (folded scarf or dishtowel)

Ask everyone in the group to take off one shoe and put it in a pile in the middle of the group. Have everyone sit on the floor in a circle around the shoes. Blindfold everyone (or blindfold half the group at a time if the group is large). Mix up the pile of shoes a bit, then have everyone crawl forward and select a shoe (by touch only). Make sure people move carefully on hands and knees so they don’t bump heads. When everyone has a shoe, make sure no one has his or her own shoe (change shoes if necessary). Then have everyone remove the blindfolds.

#### Instructions:

- Find the person who is wearing the matching pair shoe you picked.
- Find out two things about this person that make her or him special (these don’t have to be things the person is the best at, just things that are interesting)—be sure to remember the things he or she tells you.
- Someone will also find you and find out interesting or special things about you.
- Gather back in the circle.

One person starts the process of reporting by telling the two things about the person whose shoe he or she has and then returns the shoe to its owner. That person tells two things about the person whose shoe he or she has, then returns the shoe, and so on until all the shoes are returned.

Ask: Do we have to be or do anything in order to be special or important to God? If so, what? If not, explain why you think this. Encourage different opinions and ideas.



### 2 Explore a Poster

**Leader preparation:** Study the poster for yourself before working with the children. What do you see in the poster? How does the picture make you feel? Which sister (or character in the picture) are you? Is the other girl a sister relative or sister friend? What difference would it make if these two were brothers, or a brother and a sister?

#### Supplies:

- poster: “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- Bible

Display the poster where everyone can see it. (Do not reveal the title of the poster at this point). Ask people to gather around and look carefully at the picture. Ask: What do you notice in this picture? What does this picture remind you of? How does it make you feel?

Invite learners to work in pairs, one older and one younger learner. Ask them to



### Session Development

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

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

look very carefully at the two girls—noticing their hand positions, their heads, their facial expressions, and so on. Ask them to pose in the position of the two sisters. Have them pause for a moment to notice how this feels. Ask: What does their body position suggest about what they might be feeling? What do you think they are doing? What title might you give to this picture? (*Note:* you can tell the learners what the artist called the photograph after affirming their own responses).

Read aloud Mark 9:36–37. Ask learners to look quietly at the photograph for a moment. Ask: Is there anything else you notice in the picture?

### 3 A Cooperative Game

**Leader preparation:** Be aware if there are any in your group that are uncomfortable with being in close proximity to others. Honor each one’s personal space.

**Supplies:**

- a length of heavy rope
- Bible

Play some games in which there are no winners and no designated leaders. Everyone works together at the same time to achieve a goal. First, have the group sit in a circle with their legs pointing in toward the center. Pass the rope around the group so that it forms a circle, with everyone holding on with both hands. Work cooperatively to slowly tighten the rope until it pulls all into a standing position at once. It takes a bit of practice to get this right, and everyone has to hold onto the rope and work together. See if they can slowly lower themselves back to seating position in the same way.

Then try this: everyone forms a line with each person close and directly behind the person in front, hands firmly on the shoulders of the person in front. Then form the line into a small circle so that the first person in the line now has his or her hands on the shoulders of the last person. Finally, see if the whole circle can sit down all at one time without breaking the hold on each other or the circle. When it works, everyone will sit on the lap of the person behind.

Read aloud Mark 9:33–34. Ask: What were the disciples doing? How did Jesus want them to behave? In our games, what might have happened if someone had tried to “win” or “be the greatest?”

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Hearing Scripture: At the Name of Jesus (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Print a copy of the paraphrase of Philippians 2:1–11, Attachment: Activity 4.

**Supplies:**

- newsprint or whiteboard and marker
- “Philippians 2,” Attachment: Activity 4

Read the paraphrase of Philippians 2:1–11. Invite an older learner or youth to read the hymn that is in the letter. Explain that this is based on a letter in our Bible. It is a letter written very long ago by someone named Paul to one of the first Christian churches. Invite older children or youth to find the passage in the Bible. Ask one



of them to read aloud Philippians 2:9–11. Ask: What did the Paul want the people of this church to do? Record ideas on newsprint or whiteboard. Imagine this letter came to you today, in this group or at home or at school. What would it want us to be like with one another? How might we be different if we all did what Paul asked this church to do?

Invite learners to work in groups of two or three, with at least one older learner or helper in each group. Ask each group to make up a little scene in which a group of kids are *not* doing what Paul would want. Have groups present the scene. Then say: Let's imagine the group got the letter from Paul and decided to change. What might they do differently? Act out revised versions of each scene.

Close by reading the paraphrase of Philippians 2:1–11 again.

### 5 Draw a Story

**Leader preparation:** Prepare slips of paper on which you have written the following words, one word per card: Jesus, friends, walking, road, day, town, talking, say, argument, best, servant, first, last, child, hug, welcome.

#### Supplies:

- paper slips
- markers
- newsprint
- basket or other container
- Bible

Divide into two teams. Each team will try to illustrate a word for the other team to guess. Teams take turns picking from the slips of paper you prepared, and a different person on the team can draw a picture of the word on newsprint (other team members can help if asked to do so). When their word is guessed, the other team picks a slip of paper. When all the words have been guessed, go through the papers and find the picture that goes with each word. See if learners can recall the word that goes with that picture.

Tell the story from Mark 9:33–37 using the following text. However, whenever you come to an underlined word, pause and point to one of the pictures. Have the learners fill in the missing word.

Jesus and his friends were walking down the road one day. When they came to a town, Jesus asked. "What were you talking about?" They didn't want to say because they had been having an argument about which one of them was the best. Jesus said, "If you want to be the best, be like a servant. If you want to be first, be the last." Then Jesus took a little child and gave her a hug. "Whoever welcomes a little child welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."

Ask questions such as the following to help learners reflect on the story:

- How did Jesus feel about what his friends were doing?
- Why, do you think, he chose a child and not a grown-up as an example of people welcoming him?
- What does this story remind you of?
- What do you like about this story? Why?



## 6 Art Response

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies.

**Supplies:**

- a watercolor paper, approximately 8" x 10", for each learner
- masking tape
- watercolor or high quality tempera paint
- flat trays such as pie plates to use as pallets
- brushes
- water in plastic cups
- lots of soft clean rags
- Bible

Read aloud Mark 9:36–37. Show learners how to tape the paper to the surface of the table so that it does not wrinkle when they paint it. (If paintings are left taped in place to dry they will be flat.) Give ideas for using the paint materials, such as the following: Create a very faint background by using a wet brush to wet the surface of the paper before you begin; then use a very wet brush and only a tiny bit of paint to spread a thin, almost transparent wash over the whole paper. Pat the surface dry with a clean cloth. This will give a nice textured background. Then, use a fine tipped brush to work with darker colors on top of the background. Do not try to paint fine lines—let the colors blur and wash into each other. If you get too much of a color somewhere or don't like the effect, you can remove a lot of color by patting the picture with a dry, clean rag.

Invite learners to paint whatever they feel like painting. Do not suggest a theme or topic. Simply let this be a time of uninterrupted creativity. If learners wish to show you or others what they have created, invite them to do so, but do not force them to explain or talk about their art.

*Note:* Although these activities have a suggested time frame of 15–30 minutes, artistic work can take much longer. If possible, allow at least 40 minutes for this so that learners can really get into the art experience rather than having to feel rushed. Allow them to enjoy themselves!

## Sending & Serving Activities



## 7 Be Like Jesus: A Cinquain Poem (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies. Write your own cinquain poem.

**Supplies:**

- writing paper
- pens
- pencils

Explain that one of Jesus' followers named Paul wrote a letter to one of the first churches saying, "Make my happiness complete; be like Jesus." Actually, it was a very long letter, but it could be reduced to a short form. Read (or recall) the paraphrase of Philippians 2:1–11, Attachment: Activity 4.

A cinquain is a very short poem. In its simplest form, it has five lines:



line 1: one word  
line 2: two words  
line 3: three words  
line 4: two words  
line 5: one word

Example:

happiness  
is when  
just like Jesus  
we show  
love

Invite learners to write their own cinquain poem short versions of Philippians 2:1–11. Give those who wish the option of working individually or in pairs. Give help to those who need assistance writing their ideas.

### 8 Over My Head: A Song

**Leader preparation:** Learn the hymn “Over My Head” (traditional African American) and prepare to teach it to the group.

You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>.

Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song. Alternatively, arrange for an accompanist or someone who can teach this song to the group.

**Supplies:**

- song: “Over My Head” (tune: African American traditional)

Listen to a recording of the song “Over My Head.” Alternatively, have someone teach the song to the group. Recall the context in which this traditional African American song was first sung. During the time of slavery, African American slaves sang songs as a protest, as a source of hope and encouragement, and sometimes as a form of coded communication, for example, that some action for freedom was planned. The song was also part of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s. Talk together about the messages of hope, comfort, or encouragement this song might have conveyed. What difference might it make to believe “there must be a God somewhere”? Recall Paul’s letter from Philippians 2:1–13. Read this passage aloud. Invite the group to think about what difference it makes in their lives to know that the Spirit of God is with us.

### 9 Give a Blessing to One Another

**Leader preparation:** Prepare slips of paper in a hat or basket with names of all the learners who are present. Be sensitive to any food allergies as you provide cupcakes.

**Supplies:**

- newsprint or whiteboard
- marker
- cupcakes
- frosting
- plastic knives
- decorations such as sprinkles, tiny candies, or chocolate chips

Invite the group to think about ways in which we sometimes tell some people



they are better or greater or more important than others (such as report cards or sports trophies). Make a list on newsprint or whiteboard. Ask them now to think of some way in which they could honor each person in the group without choosing some to be “best” and others as not so great. Say something like: Imagine that we’re going to have a special ceremony to honor and recognize true greatness, but instead of singling out just one person, we’re going to honor everyone. What might we do? What might we say?

### Reflect

Consider some of the moments of joy or blessing during this exploration. How were you able to “welcome the child” through your interactions with the learners in your group. How did they welcome or awaken the child or the childlike within you? What did you learn from the Christ-like presence of children in your group? Consider how you will continue to welcome, honor, and affirm the gifts of creativity, joy, honesty, and authenticity that children offer. How will you cultivate those gifts in yourself?

Have everyone draw a slip of paper from the basket. This is the name of the person each one will honor as “truly great” today. Ask them to decorate a cupcake for the person whose name each one has. Encourage them to make the cupcakes extra special. Have a ceremony to present the cupcakes and honor and bless all group members with words such as: “You are made in God’s image. God’s spirit is in you. You are truly great.”



## Philippians 2

(This letter to one of the first Christian churches contains part of the oldest surviving part of a Christian worship service. The “hymn” has been rewritten as a paraphrase, as has the letter.)

The Spirit of Jesus fills us all. Isn't it great to be part of Jesus' family? Isn't it wonderful to feel the love all around us? Doesn't it make you want to share the love with everyone? Doesn't it make you happy? So, dear friends, here's how you can make me completely and totally happy:

Stop arguing with each other. Don't think that you're better than other people. Don't always try to be the most important. Remember to take care of yourself, but help other people too.

And most important, try to be just like Jesus. He didn't go around saying, “I'm God,” even though he was so full of love that he was exactly like God. And he didn't go around saying, “I'm the boss over you,” or “I'm king of the castle.” Instead, he became like a servant. He didn't care that people looked down on him; he cared more about love and compassion. Then they killed him, just like a common criminal. But God lifted him up and gave him a name that we love more than any other. Just saying his name aloud fills us with a feeling that Jesus is right here with us. You know, it's like the hymn we sing:

*Jesus, just to say your name  
Helps us feel your love again.  
In this gathering today  
We will live the words we pray:  
In the circle of your love  
None are scorned by those above;  
None are greater than the rest;  
No one's told that they're “The Best.”  
As we gather in this place  
All of us are touched by grace;  
As we bow on bended knee  
All become one family.*

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

With this age grouping (ages five through fourteen), competition can be a significant factor in daily life. From the time they begin school, children experience being evaluated, graded, ranked, and compared with their peers. Media highlight our society's pressure to win with the emphasis on sports heroes and cultural celebrities. Even for those who "do well," such experiences can be stressful and diminishing. But for those who are rated different or lower on the scale or inadequate, such experiences may be soul-destroying. Children and youth need places apart, safe space for their spiritual nourishment and "soul care." Church can provide such a place, a place without judgment and without discrimination, where worth is not measured in talents or accomplishments. Such places are rare in our society and must be carefully cultivated if they are to survive.

### About this Exploration

In the Exploration of discipleship we focus on play as an experience of taking turns, learning every position on the field—from goalie to coach, from forward to cheering fan. In discipleship there are no benchwarmers. In Christian community all experience the amazing joy of Special Olympics, as each participant is embraced at the finish line by Jesus Christ.



## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Galatians 4:4-7**  
**Revelation 7:9-17**

## Leader Preparation

Consider the many ways you have been judged, ranked, or evaluated in your lifetime. What were marks of success? When did you experience the humiliation of not measuring up, of not being considered worthy, or of being labeled a “loser”? Which of these experiences have behind left scars or markers? By what measure do you look at yourself now? How does God see you? Read Galatians 4:4-7. How do you experience being welcomed by God as one of God’s children, as an heir? How will you help the learners in your group to experience the unconditional love and acceptance of the Spirit?

*Prayer: Jesus, light of the world and bread of life, I give you thanks and praise for becoming one of us and reminding us that we are all God’s children. I give thanks for the practices you taught directly or by example: baptism, communion, prayer, and praise. Aid me now as I prepare to pass along these practices to the children in my care. Help us to hear you inviting us by name, to follow you, to love God, and to feel the leading of the Holy Spirit in all we say and do. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Child of God (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Bring a recording of joyful music, or invite a musician to play music for the group.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- recording of joyful music

Say aloud a paraphrase of Galatians 4:4, such as “You are a child of God. God’s spirit is in your heart. You are not a servant or a nobody with God. You are a child, an important and special member of God’s own family.” Ask learners to mill about the room while the music is playing. When the music stops, they say to the person next to them, “You are a child of God. God’s spirit is in *your* heart.” Play the music again, and have people move about. Repeat a few times. Then, have people say to one another. “I am a child of God, God’s spirit is in *my* heart.”

Then try this: One person is the leader. They say the phrase “You are a child of God” to as many people as possible before the music stops. See how quickly they can do this. Or have one person start and everyone else passes the word along as quickly as possible.

Talk about how it feels to hear and say these phrases. Ask questions such as the following to start a conversation: What is it like for you to think of having God’s spirit in your heart? What do you think it means to be children of God?

### 2 Play a Game with Grace

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies.

#### Supplies:

- simple games such as dominoes, Snakes and Ladders, Go Fish, X’s and O’s, and more complicated games of skill for older learners such as checkers or Yahtze
- a snack to share (check for allergies)
- markers and paper, or modeling clay

Show the games you brought. Ask learners to talk about which games they like and why. Encourage conversation about winning and losing. Suggest that learners practice winning and losing with grace. Ask the group to make two lists: (1) a list of things that help them to handle the feeling of losing (see suggestions below) and (2) a list of things that winners can do to be graceful and gentle (such as not bragging). Encourage older children and youth to talk about how they have handled difficulties in the past. Acknowledge that we all struggle with this to some degree. Ask: How can we focus on the joy of playing without our feelings about wanting to win taking over? How can we have fun and enjoy ourselves in situations of winning and losing? Invite learners who wish to do so to form groups to play a game together. If you know that some learners will have difficulty with losing, have an adult present to play along and model playing gracefully, and to suggest a break if necessary. For those who do not wish to play a game, provide an art alternative such as markers and paper or modeling clay.

Some ideas to help manage feelings of disappointment or losing:

- make a joke



### Session Development

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

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

- take a stretch break (and make silly faces all around the room)
- say a feeling aloud
- ask for help
- breathe deeply and relax
- make a mental image (for example, some children can learn to use a visual “umbrella”—when they imagine putting up their “umbrella” bad feelings slide off it like rain off an umbrella and the bad feelings don’t stick)

At the end of the game time, share a snack together. Talk about what happened and how it felt.



### 3 Say It, Sing It

**Leader preparation:** Learn the song “Say It! Sing It!” by JoEllen Miller if you do not already know it, and prepare to teach it to the group (or arrange for someone to do so).

**Supplies:**

- copies of the song “Say It! Sing It!” Attachment: Activity 3

Teach the song “Say It, Sing It” to the group if you have not yet done so. Enjoy singing it together. Invite the group to make up some simple actions to go with the song.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Share a Dream (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Revelation 7:9–14 and think of how you will describe the dream in vivid detail to the group.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Explain that a long time ago someone named John was in prison on a Greek Island because of his faith. The Roman emperor Domitian was determined to wipe out the church. John had no way to escape, but he prayed to God. He had a dream that gave him hope. He wrote down the dream, and someone smuggled it off the island to share with other Christians. Tell about John’s dream. Ask an older learner to find Revelation 7 in the Bible and read aloud verses 13–14. Ask questions such as the following:

- Who or what is the Lamb?
- How do you think God might wipe away people’s tears?
- How do you think this dream helped John feel more hopeful?
- Why do you think John decided to send his dream to other Christians who were also afraid?

Invite learners to invent a dream that might make someone feel better in a time of great trouble. Ask: What are ways that we can help people feel better?



### 5 Share a Story: You Are Special

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the children’s picture book *You Are Special* by Max Lucado (Good News Publishers, 1997) or download a narrated version of the story from <http://www.tinyurl.com/3282f3g> to play for the group.

**Supplies:**

- stickers (preferably dots and stars)
- a toy bear
- story: *You Are Special* by Max Lucado

Read aloud or listen to the story *You Are Special* by Max Lucado. After the story, have young learners take turns pretending to put stickers and stars on the bear. Talk together about how it might feel to get dots or stars. Talk in the group about the different ways people get or “give stars or dots” in school, at home, when we play with friends, even at church. Younger learners may not initially get the metaphor, but they will certainly understand at a feeling level. Older learners can help by talking about particular situations and experiences in their lives. Wonder together about how we can help one another feel special “just because we are” rather than for what we look like, our talents, or what we accomplish. Ask: Do you think God “gives stars and dots”? If not, how do you think God feels about people?

### 6 Share the Joy: Make Pop-up Happy Face Cards

**Leader preparation:** Make a sample card; see directions in Attachment: Activity 6.

**Supplies:**

- yellow poster board
- colored construction paper
- crayons or markers
- scissors
- glue

Show learners how to make a pop-up card following the directions on Attachment: Activity 6. Make cards with a smiley face to give to the pastoral care teams that visit the sick.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 A Joyful Dance (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the poster “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>.

**Supplies:**

- poster: “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>
- recording of lively, traditional music such as a reel, square dance, or polka

Invite learners to gather around the poster and look at it together. Have them find a partner and talk together about what they notice and what they like about this picture. Ask questions such as the following for further conversation: What do you think this painting should be called? What is going on in the painting? How does this picture make you feel?



Play the music. Ask learners to close their eyes and move to the music. An option is to try hand dancing—participants remain seated, and move a hand and arm in response to the music. Those who are shy can simply close their eyes. Start with one hand, and add another if you wish.

**Option:** Have older learners help the younger ones to make up a simple circle dance to go with the music.



### 8 Make a Joyful Painting

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies. Obtain a copy of the poster “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>.

#### Supplies:

- poster: “Joyful Dance,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>
- art supplies: either acrylic paints, medium-width brushes, and prepared canvas boards, or oil pastels (a type of crayon available in art supply and craft stores)
- heavy-weight paper
- cups of water for wetting and washing brushes
- paint smocks
- access to a sink for clean up

Display the poster “Joyful Dance” and invite learners to look at the image. Pay attention to the way the artist has used the colors in short wide strokes, with the colors overlapping and blending in. Ask: How does this help make the painting feel like a joyful dance? Invite learners to copy this technique in their art. Give lots of time for learners to experiment with color and form. Try to resist the urge to praise or compliment them on their art. Instead, acknowledge it by noticing what is there: “I see how you have used red overlapping with yellow in this section.” Invite young artists to talk about what they have created. Give lots of uninterrupted and unhurried time.

### 9 Decorate a Tissue Box Lamb

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies. Make a sample of the tissue box craft.

#### Supplies:

- new boxes of facial tissues (long boxes, not cubes, are needed for this)
- white tissue paper or cotton balls
- glue sticks
- black construction paper
- scissors
- Bible

Recall or read Revelation 7:16–17. Notice the lamb in the text and the idea of wiping away tears. Explain that you are going to make a “lamb” out of a tissue box to comfort someone when they are not feeling happy or when they are sick.

Remove the cardboard from the opening at the top of the box (this will be the head). Glue black construction paper onto one side of the cardboard strip and trim it into a more rounded shape. Glue the head onto the outside of the tissue box so that the black face is forward. Cut two circles of black construction paper for ears and glue them onto the head. Cover the outside of the box and the back of the head with crumpled bits of tissue paper (rip a piece about 2” x 2” and crumple it loosely) or cotton balls. Put a dab of glue onto the box and glue the tissue or cot-



ton ball in place rather than trying to put glue onto the ball itself. Make a tail by crumpling a length of tissue or tissue paper and gluing it on the back end of the “lamb.” Use the decorated boxes as gift for people who are homebound, or give them to pastoral care staff or clergy to have in their offices.

### Reflect

What new insights did you gain from this exploration about your own spiritual practice of playing and living joyfully? Consider what blocks you from playing and what opens you up to joy and to play. Which activities in this exploration were particularly meaningful for you or for the learners. Which are “keepers”—that is, activities that you might do again? What will you do differently in future explorations with your learners?



Attachment: Activity 3

### Say It! Sing It!

$\text{♩} = 132$

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

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

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

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

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**Attachment: Activity 6**

## Directions for Pop-up Happy Face Card

**Supplies needed:**

- two pieces of construction paper for each card
- scissors
- glue
- something to draw around to make a small circle
- markers or crayons

**Make a pop-up card:**

You will need three pieces of construction paper (one of them yellow).

Fold two pieces of construction paper in half.

Cut slits in one piece (but don't cut a piece out—just cut four parallel lines about half-way through the width of the folded paper).

Fold the paper flat. Then bend the two flaps the other direction so that they stand up inside the card.

Cut out two yellow circles and draw happy faces on them.

Glue one to each of the fronts of the folded flaps.

Glue the second piece of construction paper on the outside of the card to cover up the holes, but make sure you don't get glue on the folded flaps.

Write a "thinking about you" or "get well" or "blessings" message on the outside of the card, or draw a happy picture.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Children and youth do not necessarily have the life experience to understand the full significance of the Isaiah passage, but the image of a shoot growing from a stump can be meaningful. While children and younger youth tend to be concrete thinkers, this does not mean that they are literal thinkers. Even young children are capable of thinking metaphorically, as Lakoff and Johnson (*Metaphors We Live By*, 1980) point out. They are adept at making connections between one idea and another and understanding how an image can point beyond itself to larger meanings. The image of something that seems dead growing a new shoot may connect with events in their lives. They know about disappointment and discouragement and, more importantly, they are also discovering that situations that seem hopeless can sometimes turn around. As they mature, they are learning about hope—that is, they are discovering that life, while full of adversity, is also rich with promise and possibility.

### About this Exploration

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



## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

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

## Leader Preparation

Read Isaiah 11:1–10. If possible, look outside at a single branch of a tree. Notice the details—perhaps there are tiny buds of growth or a gentle stirring of breeze. If you find your thoughts wandering, gently bring your attention back to the tree branch. Notice all that is to be noticed in this singular and particular part of creation. Think of all the ways a tree heals the earth and provides for its creatures. Consider how, even in the midst of cities, trees are growing and the earth is being replenished. Reflect on the image in Isaiah 11:1–10 of a shoot springing from a stump. What do you think this image may have meant to people living in a small nation in the midst of civil war and on the brink of annexation by foreign powers. How does this image speak to you today? What world events do you think of as you consider the idea of a stump growing a new, green shoot?

*Prayer: Creator God, you spoke, and the world began. You brought forth a glorious diversity of creatures and land and made us in your image. Help me to celebrate your artistry and to learn from my brothers and sisters past and present and from followers of Christ and those who reach you following other stars. Open me and my learners to the wonder of Christian tradition that we might bring your peaceable kingdom into being. In the name of Christ Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Sing a Song of the Tradition (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Arrange for a few older adults (perhaps an adult Bible study group or a seniors group) from the congregation to come and sing “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Hymn to Joy) with your group. You can find the lyrics and the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/6j5e3>.

#### Supplies:

- copies of the hymn “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy), <http://www.tinyurl.com/6j5e3>

Sing “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You/Thee” together, or have the adults sing it for the group. Invite older adults to share what this song means to them personally, perhaps saying when they first heard or sung it, or a time when it had particular significance. Invite learners to share their responses and feelings about this hymn.

**Option:** Invite older learners to research the history of the hymn (Who wrote it? When was it first performed? How did the audience respond? How did the composer feel about this hymn?)

**Alternative:** Find an orchestral version of the end of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with the Ode to Joy and listen to it together. See <http://www.tinyurl.com/7h8xu2>.

### 2 Reflect on an Image of Hope

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the poster “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan,” <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters10>.

#### Supplies:

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

Display the poster and invite the group to look at the image. Ask them what they notice. Ask questions such as the following: What do you think is happening in this scene? Where do you think this might be? What feelings do you have as you look at this picture?

Give the learners background on this image. The photograph was taken in color in November, 2001. This is the old section of the city of Kabul. The past twenty years of fighting have left much of the city in ruins. The city of Kabul is more than three thousand years old. Throughout its history, Kabul has been fought over by many empires because of its location on important trade routes. Since the 1980s, it has almost constantly been under attack from militants and armed rebels. It is now in the early stages of reconstruction.

Ask questions such as the following:

- What do you see in this photograph that seems sad or hopeless?
- What do you see that seems joyful or hopeful?
- Read a paraphrase of Isaiah 11:1 such as the following: “A shoot will grow from the dead stump of our nation; from its roots, a branch will grow green leaves.” Wonder together what the writer of Isaiah may have meant. How is this verse like the picture of the children playing in Kabul?



### Session Development

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

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

### 3 Walk Where There Are Trees

**Leader preparation:** Ahead of time, arrange for the learners to bring clothing suitable for walking outside. Plan a route that will take you past some trees in the neighborhood.

**Supplies:**

- magnifying glasses
- binoculars (optional)

Go for a walk to visit some local trees. Spend time looking at one tree in particular. Invite learners to investigate the tree very carefully. Look at the grooves of the trunk through a magnifying glass; look high into the branches with binoculars. Give the tree a hug and notice how it feels. Smell the leaves, needles or bark. Notice the texture of the leaves or needles. If the tree is leafless, notice whether there are any signs of budding on the twigs. Invite learners to challenge one another to notice and point out details others may have missed or to comment on interesting things about this tree. Ask: What do you like about this tree? What is this tree offering to the world?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Make an Invitation (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies.

**Supplies:**

- plain paper
- crayons or markers
- construction paper
- Bibles
- other art supplies such as glue, scissors, and magazine pictures (optional)

Read aloud Song of Solomon 2:8–13. Explain that this is a very old song that is in the Bible. The songwriter has received an invitation from his or her lover. What is the invitation? Read the song again. What season is it? What does the song say are some of the special things about that season? Invite the learners to think about their favorite season. Ask: What do you like best about this season? Suggest learners make an invitation (like a party invitation) asking someone to come and enjoy that season with them. Like the Song of Solomon, they will have to make it sound like a really nice idea to go and enjoy this season. Encourage them to decorate their invitations with the art supplies you have provided. Some people think that the songwriter is like God, inviting us as God’s beloved people to enjoy this beautiful world. Have learners read aloud their invitations (if they are comfortable doing so) and think of these as invitations from God to us.

### 5 What Kind of Leader?

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies.

**Supplies:**

- lots of old newspapers
- an assortment of clothing, including: hats, gloves, socks, shoes, as well as a child-sized pants and a sweatshirt or shirt with long sleeves; other items



- such as sunglasses, ties or scarves, a pair of clean pantyhose
- large safety pins

Explain that the Isaiah passage talks about a leader who will come to care for the people. Read or tell about the leader from Isaiah 11:2–5. Discuss with the children what this leader is like. How would you feel about having someone like that as a leader?

Invite the group to work together to make a child-sized figure of the leader:

- stuff the pants and shirt with crumpled newspaper; pin these items together
- make a head by stuffing one of the pantyhose feet with newspaper. Stuff the rest of the pantyhose down the neck of the shirt
- add a hat, gloves for hands; socks stuffed with newspaper can be pinned inside the cuffs of the pants; add shoes
- add other accessories

Have the children take turns asking the leader’s advice about problems in the world; the children can also take turns pretending to be the wise leader and suggesting answers. Use questions such as the following for conversation:

- How is this “wise leader” like Jesus? (Christians often think of this Isaiah passage as being a good description of Jesus, even though it was written many centuries before Jesus was born.)
- What are some things that a leader needs to be able to do?
- What are some qualities that make you a good leader?



### 6 Travel through Time

**Leader preparation:** Make an imaginary “time traveling” device—perhaps a small self-standing tent draped with a Mylar emergency blanket (found in many first aid kits); a decorated appliance box; or a table draped with a large piece of black fabric.

#### Supplies:

- copies of “Time Travel Letters,” Attachment: Activity 6
- copies of song “Over My Head”

Explain that you are going to take an imaginary journey through time, visiting some people who have experienced trouble or persecution. At each stopping point, you will hear something that might give hope to the people who are facing that situation. Invite learners to enter the “time travel machine” and travel with you to the first stop. At each place you visit, read the first part of the letter that tells where you are. Invite learners to imagine the scene. Then, read the second part of the letter. Gather back in your own time zone to talk about the places you visited. Ask learners to think about what gives hope or comfort to people in difficult situations in the past, or today.

Sing “Over My Head.” You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>. Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song.



## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 A Litany of Joy and Hope

**Leader preparation:** None needed.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read aloud Isaiah 11:6–9. Have learners create a series of movements to retell the text using only their bodies. Encourage them to be creative and experiment with different possibilities. When they are finished, act out the text in silence.

**Option:** Work in two groups and have each group present their movements to the other group. Read the Isaiah text again. Send the learners out, commissioning them to bring hope and joy to others, with words such as the following:

- Go in peace. Go to create peace.
- Go in love. Go to share love.
- Go in hope. Go to bring hope and joy to everyone you meet. Amen.

### 8 Make Flowers Bloom from a Bare Branch

**Leader preparation:** Make a paper flower following the instructions below.

**Supplies:**

- tissue paper in a variety of colors
- bare twigs
- thin wire
- transparent sticky tape or florist tape
- scissors
- Bible
- use pipe cleaners instead of wire and tape (optional)

Make paper flowers to bloom on a bare twig:

1. Cut five circles of different sizes from different colors of tissue paper.
2. Arrange the circles in a pile from smallest to largest with the largest circle on the bottom.
3. Fold the pile of circles in half and then into quarters so that the smallest circle is inside and the largest circle is outside. You will now have a pie-shaped bundle of tissue paper.
4. Fold the pie in half again (to form a pie-shaped piece narrower than the previous one). Pinch the pointed end of the “pie” and twist it so that it forms a thin stem about 1–2 inches long.
5. Wrap the stem tightly with florist tape, thin wire, or transparent sticky tape (children will need assistance with this step).
6. Wrap tape around the stem and around the twig so that the flower stem is securely attached to the end of the twig.
7. Gently unfold the tissue paper at the wide end of the flower, pulling the layers apart and spreading them wide, so that the flower is opened up.

Read aloud Isaiah 11:1–2. Consider all the ways flowers bring joy or comfort to people. Have learners decide to whom they will give their flowers.



### 9 Make an Isaiah Dream Quilt

**Leader preparation:** If you will be making cloth squares, arrange for someone to quilt the pieces together.

#### Supplies:

- Bible or children's Bible
- fabric paint
- white cotton cloth cut into 8" x 8" squares
- a large piece of cotton print cloth (large enough to accommodate the squares the learners will decorate)
- provide paint smocks or cover-ups if you are using fabric paint
- use square pieces of paper and markers instead of cloth and fabric paints (optional)

Explain that long, long ago, in a time of civil war, a prophet named Isaiah wrote a song of hope. He wrote of a time when the leader of the people would be fair and compassionate and everyone would live in peace. Read aloud Isaiah 1:3–9 (or older learners could read aloud verses 1–10). Ask learners to recall some of the images of peacefulness and joy in the text. Read it again or point out some of the images for them if necessary. Talk about which images they like and why.

Have learners each choose an idea to illustrate. Give everyone a square of fabric or paper and have them create a picture for a square. Explain that the pieces will be put together into a dream quilt. When the pieces are finished, spread out the fabric and arrange them like a quilt. Paper pieces can be glued in place (use glue sticks if you are using paper—put glue onto the back of the paper) so the “quilt” can be hung on a wall. Or have someone stitch fabric squares in place. Talk about what the learners dream of or hope for in our world today.

### Reflect

Recall the experiences you have had with the learners in this Exploration. Give thanks for moments of joy and blessing. Which activities helped you to live and play joyfully? Which activities inspired a sense of hope in you? What did you discover from this experience about yourself or about the members of your group? Pray for the presence of the spirit of the risen Christ to fill you with joy and power as you continue to teach and learn together.



Attachment: Activity 6

## Time Travel Letters

### Letter 1: Judah (southern Palestine) 740 BCE

Greetings, time travelers.

You have traveled about 2,750 years back in time. You are in the kingdom of Judah, near the place where Jesus was born, but Jesus won't be born for another 740 years. This is a dry, deserted place. The sun is hot and the brown hills seem to shimmer in the heat. The people of this region are very worried. A brutal civil war has just ended in this tiny little kingdom and giant nations all around are gathering their armies and gaining strength. If you look into the distance you can see a cloud of dust. An army is on the move. *(Pause to imagine the scene.)*

Other nations want to claim Judah as their own. The little kingdom has no hope—it cannot possibly defend itself. War is inevitable. Or is it? The prophet Isaiah hasn't given up hope. You hear him cry out in his clear, deep voice:

“Do not give up hope. Turn back to God. God promises that a good leader will come to power, someone who isn't corrupt like our kings, someone who really cares about the poor and the weak. He will make good decisions; he will lead with strength and wisdom. Soon, peace will come.”

### Letter 2: Christian Catacombs near Rome, 205 CE

Time travelers, I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ. The year is 205. We are standing in a cool dark passageway, deep underground, just at the edge of the city of Rome. This is a catacomb; see those little alcoves dug into the walls—those are burial places for Christians. The only light comes from torches placed in the walls. In the dim light, you can see simple paintings and carved designs. Carved into some of the walls are shapes that look like fish. Here, Christians gather to celebrate their

funeral rites, and the anniversaries of the martyrs and of the dead. *(Pause to imagine the scene.)*

Look, a small group is gathering at the end of the passageway. They are here because another Christian has been tortured and killed by the Romans in the recent persecution of the Christians. If you draw closer, you will hear that they are singing a hymn. The words remind you of something you heard in the Bible.

A shoot will grow from the fallen tree,  
A leaf of green for the world to see,  
The Spirit of justice and wisdom and power,  
The Spirit of Jesus is with us this hour.

### Letter 3: Charleston, South Carolina, 1769

Greetings, time travelers, you have arrived in Charleston, South Carolina. The year is 1769. You have arrived at a brutal time in the history of this little town. A slave auction has just taken place. Ninety-four slaves—39 men, 15 boys, 24 women, 16 girls—who were captured in Sierra Leone were sold at the dockside today. They have been harshly treated since their capture—beatings and torture have left many scars both inside and out. They have watched many family members and friends die in the long journey to America. And now they are being separated once again. *(Pause to imagine the scene.)*

As the slaves stand in chains in the blazing sun, they hear someone singing. Listen carefully, and you will notice that the singer is also an African slave. This is what you hear:

Over my head I hear music in the air  
Over my head I hear music in the air  
Over my head I hear music in the air  
There must be a God somewhere.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

This Exploration is centered on the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth and Mary's song of praise. Children and youth will connect with the story of Mary and her song of joy at many different points, depending on their age, their social location, and their life experience. For some, her song may be about the sheer delight they feel at times of celebration in their lives—outside in the natural world, in their families, at play, making music, with their friends, or creating art. Some of your group members may live in difficult family circumstances or have experienced bullying; some may have experienced racism or homophobia; some may struggle with mental or physical illness. For these learners, Mary's song may be a mirror of their own experiences or a sign of hope. Still other learners may feel strongly about hurts and injustices in the world and may hear Mary's song as call to compassionate action in the world. It is important to honor the variety of ways learners engage the text and to let the diversity in the group be a source of challenge and growth.

### About this Exploration

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



## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**John 12:20–36**

**Luke 1:39–56**

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### **1 Make a “Jump for Joy” Obstacle Course (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies.

### Leader Preparation

Read the story of Mary visiting Elizabeth from Luke 1:39–56. What do you notice in the story? Think of how this story connects with your own experiences over the past week. Perhaps there has been a moment of joy, a visitor, a journey, an experience of injustice, a moment of revelation, a time when you felt like praising God. Who are you in the story? Reflect on what you know about the children and youth in your group. What joys are they experiencing? What may some of the real or potential struggles, injustices, or difficulties in their lives be? Take a moment to read again verses 46–49. Take some time with a pen and paper (or a musical instrument, crayons and paper, or in a dance) to compose your own song of praise to God.

*Prayer: Magnificent Creator God, Light-bearing Jesus, Path-guiding Spirit: I rejoice in being your child. My heart sings in praise of your glorious work. Guide me and the children to use our hands and our hearts in your service and to your glory. Amen.*

#### Supplies:

- masking tape
- paper
- markers or crayons
- a rope or skipping rope, chairs, pillows, gym mats, or other items readily available in your learning space that may help create an obstacle course (optional)

Ask learners to pair up. Each pair must come up with an interesting way to jump: for example, making a hopscotch pattern with masking tape to jump through, jumping off a step, creating a pretend “river” to jump across, a way of skipping or jumping on the spot. When every pair has come with a jumping idea, create a kind of jumping obstacle course together—something that includes a sequence of jumps. Use chairs or whatever is available to mark off the course and tape up signs with numbers or instructions for each part of the course. For example, learners might have to jump like a kangaroo to get from point A to point B, then they may have to jump over a rope (or use a skipping rope), then jump backward for another section or do five jumping jacks, and so on.

Have everyone go through the jump course. Then gather in a circle to talk about jumping for joy.

Tell or read the story of Mary visiting Elizabeth from Luke 1:39–44. Explain that Elizabeth was going to have a baby and that babies move when they are in their mother’s womb. Some children who have younger brothers or sisters may have been able to feel the movement of a baby in their mother’s womb and may be willing to talk about this experience. Ask questions such as the following to guide the conversation: Have you ever felt like jumping for joy? What made you feel that way? What kinds of things make you especially joyful? What kinds of activities help you to express your joy or happiness?

### **2 Act Out the Story of Mary and Elizabeth**

**Leader preparation:** Gather some biblical style costumes. If you don’t have costumes use pieces of cloth and ties for head scarves; simple robes can be made from pieces of fabric with a slit cut at the neck, with a belt or strip of cloth tied around the waist.

#### Supplies:

- biblical style costumes (see note above)
- Bible

Read or tell the story of Mary visiting Elizabeth from Luke 1:39–44. Invite the children to make up their own dialogue between Mary and Elizabeth. Have younger children take turns playing the parts of Mary and Elizabeth. While they are doing this, ask older learners to work together to put the text of Luke 1:39–56 into their own words. You could supply them with different versions of this text



### Session Development

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

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

and have them select words and phrases that they like, or put the whole thing in their own words.

### ③ Create a Song of Joy

**Leader preparation:** Gather supplies.

**Supplies:**

- recording of dance music
- water glasses or glass jars
- teaspoons
- jugs of water
- a skipping rope
- collection of rhythm instruments

Read a version of Mary’s song of praise from Attachment: Activity 3. Spend a few moments talking about Mary’s song. Ask: Why do you think Mary was praising God?

Explain that learners have a choice of groups they can work in to create their own “song of praise” using sound, movement, rhythm, or words. Some possibilities are: A skipping song with movements; a water glass xylophone (fill glasses at different levels to make different tones and tap them gently with the teaspoons); a dance; a soundscape using rhythm instruments. Give the groups time to work on their projects. Do not rush this creative process.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### ④ Everyone Can Play (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Choose a game that the group can play together.

**Supplies:**

- items needed for chosen game
- Bible

If you have access to a large play area, play tag or dodge ball. If you have a small learning area, play human tangle. Join hands in a circle; one person is “it.” “It” hides his or her eyes while the others tangle themselves up—keeping hands linked they step over or under one another’s arms to make the circle into a knot. “It” then gently untangles the circle without breaking the hand holds.

Gather back to talk about games. Ask questions such as: What made this game fun (or not)? How could we change it to make it more fun? What are fun games you play with your friends? What makes a game fun or enjoyable? What kinds of things make playing a game not so fun? Talk about ways to play that are fun and inclusive for everyone.

Tell the group the story of John 12:20–21. Ask: Why do you think the Greeks wanted to see Jesus? Do you think the disciples let them do so? How might Jesus have responded? Explain the rest of the story, in words such as the following: The Greeks were excited to see Jesus. Jesus said to them, “I am going to be lifted up in glory.” The Greeks thought Jesus was going to become a mighty king. “No,”



said Jesus, “It won’t be like that at all.” When he said he would be glorified, Jesus was talking about his death. “Whoever follows me will have to follow where I am going and that won’t be a fun and easy path.” Say: I wonder what the Greeks thought about that. Do you think they still wanted to be with Jesus, even though it wasn’t going to be so fun?

### 5 Song of Praise with Pictures

**Leader preparation:** Make a copy of “Magnificat—Mary’s Song of Praise,” Attachment: Activity 3. Arrange for computers with Internet access.

**Supplies:**

- “Magnificat—Mary’s Song of Praise,” Attachment: Activity 3
- computer with Internet access

Read “Magnificat—Mary’s Song of Praise” from Attachment: Activity 3. Talk about this text (if you have not yet done so) and recall the context of this song: Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth. Invite learners to illustrate lines of the text using images they find on the Internet. Encourage them to choose pictures that connect with times when they have felt joyful or full of praise or times when they have felt that a situation was “reversed”—from exclusion to inclusion, from sadness to joy, from need to fulfillment, and so on.

**Option:** Create a PowerPoint presentation, blog, or brochure, or you could add what you create to your congregation’s web page.



### 6 Paint a Picture of Saints

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the poster “Allerheiligen” (“All Saints”) by Wassily Kandinsky, <http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>.

**Supplies:**

- poster: Allerheiligen (“All Saints”) by Wassily Kandinsky  
<http://www.tinyurl.com/UCCResources>
- poster paints
- paper and brushes
- drinking straws
- whisk
- paint shirts or cover ups
- dish detergent (optional)

Look at the poster together. Invite learners to look at the images. What does this picture make you think of? What title would you give this picture? Explain that the picture is called “All Saints.” Discuss what the title means. (The phrase “All Saints” usually refers to faithful Christians who have died, although originally it referred to those who had been killed for their beliefs.) Invite children to discuss whether or not they think this is a good title for the picture. Encourage a variety of opinions. Ask: If you were going to paint a picture of “all saints” what would you paint? Invite learners to create their own “all saints” paintings.

**Option:** Show the learners how to paint bubble pictures. Mix dish detergent in with liquid tempera paint. Whisk vigorously with a whisk until bubbles form. Spoon a few drops of the bubbly mixture onto paper. Blow the paint bubbles around with a straw until you have spread the paint out on the paper. (Cut a small notch near the bottom of the straw to avoid the paint being sucked up by the person painting.) Repeat with a different color. Let the painting dry before moving it. *Hint:* finger painting paper works well for this.



When the art is complete, gather to talk about saints. Ask: who are some saints you know about? What do you think it is that makes someone a saint? Who are saints today? How can we be saints in the world?

### Sending & Serving Activities



#### 7 Make Origami Jumping Frogs

**Leader preparation:** Learn how to make an origami frog using the following link (or ask one of your older learners to show others how to make origami frogs): <http://www.tinyurl.com/2ujrw2y>. For a slightly more difficult frog, follow this link: <http://www.tinyurl.com/5wxaz3>.

**Supplies:**

- crayons or markers
- rectangular pieces of paper
- Bible

Make origami frogs to share the “jump for joy” feeling of Mary’s song of praise. Recall the story of Mary visiting Elizabeth from Luke 1:39–56, or tell it if you have not yet done so. Children age approximately eight and up can usually make frogs easily. Younger children can decorate them by adding eyes, spots and so on. Identify people to whom you can give frogs as a gift.

#### 8 Take a Community Photo Tour

**Leader preparation:** Obtain loans of some easy-to-use digital cameras that can be used by the group; arrange for a printer and paper and computers if necessary. Ensure that learners come in clothing suitable for a walk around your community.

**Supplies:**

- several digital cameras

Divide learners into teams of two or three. Ask them to imagine they are an intergalactic delegation, visiting earth for the first time. They are here to prepare a scientific report on the human species—in particular, they are examining what makes humans happy and what problems or troubles they face. Ask the space delegations to tour the area (arrange for adult accompanists or have the whole group visit the same areas). Delegations take photographs of things that will be interesting to scientists on their home planet. Have the intergalactic teams report back and show their pictures to the other groups. You may wish to have them print the pictures, or you might have them download them to the computers to display them to the group. Ask the space visitors, still in role, what advice they would give humans about what they should do to increase happiness and well-being on earth.

**Option:** This tour could take place throughout the church building rather than in the church neighborhood.



### 9 Share a Blessing

**Leader preparation:** Download a version of the traditional Irish blessing “May the Road Rise to Meet You”:

<http://www.tinyurl.com/363ksz3>,

<http://www.tinyurl.com/d2ulbt>,

or <http://www.tinyurl.com/39hm3n4>.

You can find the lyrics and tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2wrfvt9>.

#### **Supplies:**

- copy of “May the Road Rise to Meet You”

*May the road rise to meet you.*

*May the wind be always at your back.*

*May the sun shine warm upon your face,*

*The rains fall soft upon your fields,*

*And, until we meet again,*

*May God hold you in the hollow of his hand.*

Listen to the blessing together. Invite each person to turn to the person beside him or her and say a blessing such as “May God bless you,” or simply “Blessings.” Encourage learners to think of ways they are a blessing for others.

### Reflect

What new insights did you discover from this Exploration about Mary’s song of joy? In what way did this text connect with your own life? How did it resonate with the experience of your learners? As you make plans for future Explorations, consider which activities seemed to work particularly well with your learners. What did you need to adapt or change? What might you do differently in another Exploration?



## Magnificat—Mary’s Song of Praise

*(A version of Luke 1:46–55)*

My heart is singing praises. I am bubbling over with joy because  
God cares for me.

**From now on, everyone will say that God has blessed me.**

God blesses the poor ones, the ordinary people, the little ones,  
**People like me.**

The power of the Holy One scatters the proud  
**And holds up the humble.**

Mighty rulers tumble from their thrones  
**And unimportant people are given power.**

The hungry have good food to eat  
**But the rich are sent away empty handed.**

God made this promise to our ancestors:  
**God’s people will be blessed.**

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

The children and youth in your group may differ widely from one another. They are at different stages of development, physically, socially, and cognitively. Some may read fluently, while others are still struggling to master this practice. Some may already be able to take into account the perspective of others, while some may still see the world unidimensionally. Some may have strong self-control and capacity to defer gratification, while others live purely “in the moment.” As you work to build a cohesive group, it will be important to be aware of different needs and abilities in the group. The learners will also have widely differing responses to the resurrection experience that the gospel writer attests to in Mark 16. They may well understand the women’s response of fear and awe, or they may be puzzled as to why the women didn’t react with immediate joy and delight. Still others may be skeptical and questioning. Honor all their responses and questions, without judging them as right and wrong, while honestly sharing your own beliefs and questions.

### About this Exploration

We understand from Jesus that the heart of a child invites us into the realm of God. Living and playing joyfully propels Christian congregations, families, and individuals to respond to this invitation with imagination, creativity, spontaneity, wonder, delight, and hope. Thus equipped we enjoy God’s creation—of which we are a part—and confront adversity, scarcity, and fear. Our joyful living leads us to acts of compassion and social justice; our joyful playing makes space for peace.



## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Mark 16:1–8**  
**Psalms 112**

## Leader Preparation

Read Mark 16:1–8. What does this text mean to you in your life today? With what experiences does it connect? Have you ever responded to good news with doubt, fear, or denial? What did it take for you to believe that the good news was for real? The Gospel accounts of resurrection differ widely. Compare the text from Mark with the account of women visiting the tomb in John 20:11–18 and Matthew 28:1–8. Imagine, if you can, that you were with those women. Which response do you think would have been most like your own. The Spirit of the risen Christ was and is experienced by Jesus' followers in many different ways. Consider how the children in your group may respond to this good news.

*Prayer: Holy God, Creator of heaven and earth, I thank you for the amazing never ending gift of love and grace you bestow upon us. Your light shines before us so that we may follow without fear. The light is constant even in hard times. Help your light to shine through me and through [name your learners aloud] as we continue to bring your realm near with acts of love, justice, peace, and compassion towards ourselves, our neighbors, and your earth. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Act Out a Story (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Plan ways to help the learners dramatize the story of the women at the tomb. Arrange for extra helpers if necessary.

#### Supplies:

- biblical costumes (optional)
- Bible

Invite learners to work in small groups to plan a way to tell the others the story of Mark 16:1–8 using a short dramatic presentation. Make sure that every group includes people who can read, or adult leaders, to help with the reenactment. Suggest the following tips to make the drama more exciting:

- exaggerate the movement of your body—make your movements larger and a little slower than you would in real life to create more feeling
- use facial expressions
- pretend your audience doesn't know anything about the story, so tell them the whole story of what has happened
- if you speak, exaggerate everything, just like you do with movements—speak louder, exaggerate the feelings
- be creative—find some movements or words that will be surprising or unusual, to keep your audience wide awake

Invite groups to present their dramas for one another. Ask questions such as the following: What did the women do, say, feel? Why do you think they reacted this way? How do you think you would have reacted if you had been there? Then talk about what might have happened next in the story.



### 2 Imagine Dancing 'Til Dawn

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the poster "Dancing 'Til Dawn" by Marianne Millar, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters12>.

#### Supplies:

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

Before displaying the poster, talk with the group about different kinds of dance. Ask questions such as the following: When have you danced? When, if ever, do you dance now? What kind of dancing do you like to watch (if any)? Why do people dance? If you practice a particular style of dance, talk about what dancing you do and why you do it.

Now, invite learners to look at the poster "Dancing 'Til Dawn." Ask them what they notice about the picture. Ask for a few volunteers to form a pose in the position of the dancers in the poster. Then ask: What do you like about this poster? How does it make you feel?

Spend a minute in silence and have everyone imagine a situation in which someone might dance until dawn. Talk about the different ideas learners have. Read aloud Mark 16:1–8. How is this passage similar to the poster? How is it different?



### Session Development

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

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

### 3 Enter a Tomb

**Leader preparation:** Create a tomb-like space where learners can gather, such as: a self-standing tent draped with a dark blanket; an area under a table, with one side draped with a dark cloth; a small darkened room. Place a small light such as a battery-powered candle or a flashlight in the space; place a folded white sheet in the space.

**Supplies:**

- a tomb-like space (see above)
- small flashlight
- Bible

Invite the group to pretend to be a group of Jesus’ friends, going to the tomb after his death. Gather outside the “tomb” you have created. Read aloud Mark 16:1–4. Then ask the group to enter the tomb quietly. Read aloud Mark 16:5–8. Pause for a moment of silence. Use questions such as the following to talk about the story: How does this story make you feel? What do you wonder about as you hear this story? What do you think is important about this story? What would you tell other people about Jesus?

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Hopscotch Resurrection (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Use sidewalk chalk or masking tape to create the outline of a hopscotch game (two squares in a row to begin, then two squares side by side, then one square, then two squares side by side, then one square to end). Use more than one hopscotch outline if your group is large (one for every four to six learners). Use the rules in the attached version of the game or ask a learner to teach the version commonly played in your region, “Hopscotch,” Attachment: Activity 4.

**Supplies:**

- colored paper (learners each need a different color)
- crayons
- masking tape or chalk
- Bible

Read or tell the story of Mark 16:1–4 if you have not yet done so. Ask children to consider what it means to say that the spirit of Jesus is alive in our world. Ask: What difference does it make to know that Jesus’ spirit and love are still alive even though people tried to kill him? Invite learners to think of a word or picture that expresses this idea. Hand out pieces of paper and ask learners to write or draw their ideas. Crumple the paper into small, tight balls. These will be the stones for playing hopscotch. Have a learner who knows explain the rules for hopscotch. Play hopscotch with the paper stones. (Make more paper stones if necessary.)



### 5 Children and Youth Working for Peace

**Leader preparation:** Arrange for access to computers with Internet connection. Bookmark the URLs below for easy access.

**Supplies:**

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- computer with Internet access

Invite the group to brainstorm ways children and youth can help to build a more peaceful world. Record their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard.

Gather at the computers. Have learners form age-level groups of two to three learners. Have younger learners play the antibullying game on this website: <http://www.play4good.org/play>. Have older learners research the site for Children and Youth as Peace Builders (CAP), <http://www.tinyurl.com/2wcrn6b>, to discover what youth and children who have experienced war and conflict are doing to work for peace in their own context. Have them look at the site for War Child <http://www.warchild.ca> to discover what youth in North America are doing to support children in situations of armed conflict.

Gather back as a group to share what you discovered. Add new ideas to the brainstorm list.

### 6 Make Resurrection Rolls

**Leader preparation:** Download the recipe for resurrection rolls from Attachment: Activity 6. Gather supplies for making resurrection rolls; test the recipe first if you are not sure how to make the rolls.

**Supplies:**

- flat cookie tray
- prepared dough for crescent rolls and other ingredients on the recipe “Resurrection Rolls,” Attachment: Activity 6
- lifter/spatula
- access to a stove or toaster oven

Make resurrection rolls according to the recipe on Attachment: Activity 6. Do another activity while they are baking. The rolls take about 15 minutes to bake, but will need to be placed on a cooling rack and cooled before eating. Gather back to enjoy the rolls together. Talk about the resurrection story. Ask: What signs of “new life” do we see in the world around us?

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Write a Haiku (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Write a sample haiku on the theme of “imagine a world.”

**Supplies:**

- paper and pencils, or large sheet of newsprint and markers

Explain the form of the haiku as follows: Haiku is an ancient form of Japanese poetry. When adapting a haiku in English, the form is usually represented as sev-



enteen syllables arranged in three phrases of five, seven and five syllables each, as in this example:

imagine a world  
children laugh and sing for joy  
everyone at peace

Count and mark the syllables together on the sample haiku you have prepared. Invite learners to work in groups of two or three to create a haiku about the world as they hope or dream it could be. Make sure each group has at least one person who can read and write to record the group ideas. Or work in a whole group to create a collective haiku. Some learners may prefer to work on haikus individually.

Have learners read aloud the haikus they create. Pause for a moment of silence after each haiku. Thank the learners for their visions.

### 8 Add to a Song

**Leader preparation:** Learn the song “Over My Head.” Arrange for an accompanist. You can find the lyrics at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12>. Go to <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong12a> to hear a choir sing the song.

#### Supplies:

- copies of the song “Over My Head” (African American traditional)

Teach learners the song “Over My Head” if you have not already done so, and sing it together. Ask learners to create new lines for the song that suggest hope for the future. Sing them together. Make up actions to go with the new verses.

### 9 Play with Butterflies: A Mime

**Leader preparation:** You can read the lyrics and hear the tune for “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2uzg9lh>.

#### Supplies:

- recording of joyful music
- the book *Water Bugs & Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children* by Doris Stickney (Pilgrim Press, 2004)
- hymnbooks with the hymn “In the Bulb There Is a Flower” (tune: Promise)

Talk about butterflies. Invite the children to talk about butterflies they have seen. Talk about the symbolism of a butterfly. For example, some children may know that there are many cultures in which the butterfly symbolizes new life or love. In Christian traditions, the butterfly has been a symbol of resurrection, because it disappears into a cocoon and appears dead, but emerges later more beautiful than ever before. The ancient Greeks thought butterflies were the souls of those who had died. The ancient Greek word for butterfly means “soul” or “mind.”

Invite the children to “play with butterflies” in their imagination:

**Option 1:** Play some joyful music and invite the learners to pretend they are in a beautiful flower garden surrounded by butterflies. Ask them to move slowly around the learning area, following the butterflies or let-



ting them land on their outstretched hands, but being careful not to harm them. Invite the children to play or dance with the butterflies.

**Option 2:** Invite learners to close their eyes and imagine a flower garden. Butterflies are fluttering from flower to flower. Stretch out your hand. Let a butterfly gently alight on the back of your hand. Feel the soft tickle of its legs on your skin. Another butterfly brushes past your cheek. You feel the soft flutter of its wings. Watch the butterflies. Enjoy their beauty.

**Option:** Read the storybook *Water Bugs & Dragonflies: Explaining Death to Young Children* by Doris Stickney (Pilgrim Press, 2004) or the words to “In the Bulb There is a Flower.”

### Reflect

Consider what ideas about resurrection were conveyed in this session. What signs of “new life” did you encounter with your learners? As you consider the faith practice of “living and playing joyfully,” reflect on what you have learned through these Explorations. What have you discovered about yourself? What helps you to play and live joyfully, or what blocks you? How do you ensure that you take time for creativity and play into your life (or how might you do so, as a result of this Exploration)? How is play important to you as a person of faith? Consider how joy and play will be a part of future Explorations with your learners.



Attachment: Activity 3

## Hopscotch

Create a pattern with eight squares and number them.

Sometimes a dome-shaped area is added on the far end of the hopscotch pattern where the player can rest for a second or two before hopping back through.

Each player has a ball of paper. The first player stands behind the first box and throws his or her paper ball into square 1. Hop on one foot over square 1 to square 2, and then continue hopping to square 8, turn around, and hop back again. Pause in square 2 to pick up the ball of paper, hop in square 1, and out. Continue by tossing the stone in square 2 and so on. All hopping is done on one foot except where the hopscotch pattern has two squares are side by side. Then you can put one foot in each square. Players must hop over a square with a marker in it.

If the ball of paper doesn't land in the right square, if the player loses balance and puts a second hand or foot down, if the player steps on a line, if the player lands in a square where a ball of paper is, or if a player puts two feet down in a single box, then the player puts the ball of paper in the square where he or she will be playing on the next turn, and the next player begins.



**Attachment: Activity 6**

## Resurrection Rolls

These rolls are baked with a marshmallow inside. When they are baked, the marshmallow melts, leaving behind an empty space like the empty tomb.

**Ingredients** (increase quantities for larger numbers of learners)

- 1 (10 ounce) can refrigerated crescent dinner rolls
- 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 8 large marshmallows
- ¼ cup melted butter
- Oil for greasing baking sheet

**Directions**

- Preheat the oven to 400° F (200° C).
- Grease a baking sheet with oil.
- Separate the crescent rolls into individual triangles.
- Put cinnamon and sugar in a small bowl. Stir with a small spoon.
- Dip a marshmallow into melted butter, then roll it in sugar mixture. Put the marshmallow in the center of the triangle of dough. Wrap the marshmallow in dough by folding up the edges of the triangle. Pinch the seams together tightly so the marshmallow is completely sealed in. Place each completed roll on a baking sheet.
- Bake in a preheated oven until rolls are light brown, about 15 minutes.

# Playing and Living Joyfully



## Intergenerational

### About this Setting

For all human beings, play time is learning time. Through play, children learn social, physical, and conceptual skills. Through play, we can simulate possibilities without having to risk the consequences of the real life situation. As adults, when we playfully engage in sports or watch movies or read novels, we can experience emotions, gain insights about ourselves or others, and even gain insights about the world. When people are learning a new skill (such as how to use a new computer program) we often use experimentation or trial-and-error learning. These, too, are dimensions of play.

Intergenerational gatherings offer rich opportunities for playful and joy-filled interaction. Older people and youth often find it much easier to be playful and spontaneous when there are children around. And children and youth delight in opportunities to interact playfully with people who are older. This kind of encounter stimulates and expands the range of experiences available to them and provides a quality of attention that they do not usually receive from adults (most adult attention is focused on discipline or teaching, not on play).

### About this Faith Practice

In today's world people of all ages need to give themselves permission to play. We believe God seeks to awaken a playful spirit among us. We invite God into this process as we seek recreation and re-creation. While it can lead us into other things, play is inherently its own reward; the experience of playing and living joyfully is—in its essence—pure hope,



delight, celebration, and song. Playing and living joyfully moves beyond prescribed forms and places. It includes ways of doing justice and moves us outside ourselves into sharing one with another. Joy is contagious; come and play!

### Intergenerational Options

These activities may be used to build an intergenerational event for the commencement or conclusion of your series on “Playing and Living Joyfully” (up to three hours). Or the activities may be used independently (15–20 minutes each), interwoven with age-specific activities throughout the series. An intergenerational event might be used during a time of year that is already set aside as special, such as Advent, Kwanzaa, Lent, Vacation Bible School, or forty days of prayer for children.

Familiarize yourself with all twelve activities, four from each of the categories of “Exploring and Engaging,” “Discerning and Deciding,” and “Sending and Serving.” Consider the age of participants and the time available for this event, and choose a group of activities that will meet your needs.

For an event lasting one to two hours, choose three or four activities from the list of twelve. There are enough activities for three or four events! Or choose a single activity (15–20 minutes) to use as the activity at a community meal or other gathering. Wearing name tags is a good idea, as often older and younger members of a church do not know one another’s name.

Each activity ends with a prayer appropriate for the end of the session.

Gather as a church family to grow together and have fun!

### Exploring & Engaging Activities

Whether we are new to a particular faith practice or an old hand with much experience, all of us benefit from new opportunities to explore the shape of the faith practice and to engage the issues of faith that the practice offers. Sometimes this is a matter of learning new ideas about the practice. Sometimes this is more about reflecting on what we have done in our practice. The activities in Exploring and Engaging help us figure out how a faith practice intersects with our life and the life of the community of faith.

### Discerning & Deciding Activities

Practicing our faith always involves discernment: naming the realities of our community and world and seeking the will of God for our lives and for the world. We then decide how we will act, what we will do, what values move us forward, what faith has called us to do. The activities in this section give us opportunity to practice by discerning and deciding.

### Sending & Serving Activities

Practicing our faith involves serving others and being sent out as empowered disciples of Jesus Christ. We need time in our exploration to plan how we will serve. We need moments that send us forth blessed by the community from which we venture out. The activities in this section offer opportunities to practice our faith through sending and serving.



## Intergenerational Leader Preparation

Philosopher Ellen Dissanayake suggests that playful, spiritual, and artistic behaviors have much in common; they are universal human activities that we seem to need as much as we need to eat, sleep, or drink. Through play and art and spiritual expression we expand the bounds of our vision. We begin to imagine life and the world (and ourselves) as they might be rather than being resigned to things as they are. Playfulness enlarges the spaces of possibility for God to act in our midst. Perhaps this is why Jesus pointed to children as signs of God’s realm in the here and now. Perhaps this is why he urged us to welcome the child as a way of welcoming God. Read Mark 9:30–37. Ponder what it means for you to “welcome the child” in this exploration. Pray for playfulness and openness to God-with-us as you prepare to meet with the intergenerational group that has gathered for this event.

Prayer:

*Creator God,*

*May your Spirit blow through us as it did at the birth of creation.*

*Keep us attuned to your presence and alert to your wisdom.*

*Help us to honor one another as bearers of your holy imprint;*

*Inspire us as we seek to share the gifts you have entrusted to our care. Amen.*



## Exploration: Discovery

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Mark: 9:30–37**



### 1 “Shoe” and Tell (Exploring and Engaging) (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Be aware that some people are very sensitive about their feet.

**Supplies:** None

Gather in a circle. Ask everyone in the group to take off one shoe and put it in a pile in the middle of the circle. Mix up the pile of shoes; ask everyone to select a shoe that is not his or her own. Give these instructions:

- find the person who is wearing the shoe you chose
- find out two things about this person that make him or her special (ask people to tell things that most people in the room don't know)
- someone will also find you and ask you to tell two things about you that most others in the room don't know
- gather back in the circle

One person starts, tells the two things about the person whose shoe she or he has, and then returns the shoe to its owner (it is fine for the owner of the shoe to prompt if the person introducing needs help remembering). That person tells two things about the person whose shoe he or she has, then returns the shoe, and so on until all the shoes are returned.

Ask: Do we have to be or do anything in order to be special or important to God, or is it okay just to be ourselves? Invite people to explain their responses. Encourage different opinions and ideas.



## 2 Share a Laugh (Exploring and Engaging)

**Leader preparation:** If you play “Chuckle Belly,” be sensitive to those who are wearing skirts or dresses. Provide towels or blankets to cover their legs and to protect their dignity and privacy.

**Supplies:**

- towels or blankets

Ask learners to pair up facing one another. Without touching, one person tries to make the other person smile or laugh while the other person keeps a straight face. See how long you can hold out.

Or play this version of the game. Two players face one another while the rest of the group watches. The first player says: “Honey, if you love me, won’t you please, please smile?” “To which the second player replies: “Honey, I love you, but I just can’t smile.” The first player is allowed to smile, but the second player must get through the line without smiling.

Play “Chuckle Belly”: The whole group lies down on their backs in close proximity. The first person places his or her head on the lower abdomen of the next person, who in turn places his or her head on the lower abdomen of the next person. This continues until everyone is linked up with two people and the whole group is in a chain. Ask the group to keep still and silent and to concentrate. Inevitably someone will begin to laugh and the chuckle will pass through the group in a domino effect, belly to belly (hence the name “chuckle belly”).

For conversation, use these or similar questions: Ever wonder about how contagious laughs and smiles are? Why is this? How does laughter help us feel better? Can laughter ever make someone feel badly? Does God value laughter? In what way is laughter important in your life?



## Exploration: Scripture

### 3 Tug of Peace: A Cooperative Game (Exploring and Engaging)

**Leader preparation:** Depending on the size of the group, you may want to divide into teams of no more than ten people each. Be sure there is an intergenerational mix on each team.

**Supplies:**

- a length of heavy rope or nylon strap, one for each team
- Bible

Play some games in which there are no winners or losers. In “Tug of Peace” everyone works together to achieve a goal. First, have the group sit in a circle with their legs pointing in toward the center. Pass the rope around the group so that it forms a circle, with everyone holding on with both hands. Work cooperatively to slowly tighten the rope until it pulls the whole group up into a standing position at the same time. It takes a bit of practice to get this right and everyone has to hold onto the rope and work together. See if they can slowly lower themselves back to seating position in the same way.



Then, try this: Everyone forms a line with one person directly behind the person in front, hands firmly on the shoulders of that person. Then form the line into a small circle so that the first person in the line now has his or her hands on the shoulders of the last person. Finally, see if the whole circle can sit down all at one time without breaking the hold on each other or the circle. When it works, everyone will sit on the lap of the person behind his or her.

Read aloud Mark 9:33–34 or tell the story to the group. Ask: What were the disciples arguing about? How did Jesus want them to behave? In our games, what might have happened if someone had tried to “win” or to be “the greatest”?

### ④ Images of Greatness: Body Sculpture (Discerning and Deciding)

**Leader preparation:** Be sensitive to those who need lots of personal space. They may not want to be sculpted. Perhaps they could be a photographer of the sculptures.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible

Ask learners to pair up. Invite one person to be the sculptor and the other person the “clay.” The sculptor shapes the clay by gently positioning the person into a shape or motioning for that person to move into a certain position. Make sure sculptors know to move gently and respectfully, taking someone's elbow and guiding an arm position, gently placing a hand on someone's head to tilt it forward. Have the sculptors shape their “clay” into a position of someone who is mourning or sad. Invite people to look around, taking turns, to see the other sculptures.

Then have the sculptors shape a person who is full of joy. Again, pause to look around at what others have made. Switch roles so that the person who was the sculptor becomes the clay, and the other the sculptor. Repeat the activity.

Read aloud Mark 9:33–34. Invite sculptors to create an image of “greatness” the way the disciples thought of it. Now create an image of greatness the way Jesus intended. Again, give the participants time to look at what others have created.

Questions for conversation: What did you notice in the sculptures that people made of greatness? Why do you think Jesus choose a little child as an example for the disciples?

Option: Have the whole group make a collective sculpture of “welcoming the child.” Ask: What do you like about this sculpture? What are some ways that we can welcome children?

### ⑤ Child of God (Sending and Serving)



## Exploration: Discipleship

**Leader preparation:** Bring a recording of joyful music.

**Supplies:**

- a recording of joyful music

Say aloud a paraphrase of Galatians 4:4, such as: “You are a child of God. God’s spirit is in your heart. You are not a servant or a nobody with God. You are a child, an important and special member of God’s own family.” Ask learners to mill about the room while the music is playing. When the music stops, they say to the person next to them, “*You* are a child of God. God’s spirit is in *your* heart.” Play the music again and have people move about. Repeat a few times. Then, have people say to one another. “*I* am a child of God, God’s spirit is in *my* heart.”

Talk about how it feels to hear and say these phrases. Ask questions such as the following to start a conversation: What is it like for you to think of having God’s spirit in your heart? How can we help others experience a feeling that they too are children of God?

### 6 Make a “Jump for Joy” Obstacle Course (Exploring and Engaging)

**Leader preparation:** Make accommodations for persons with mobility restrictions, such as people who use walkers or wheelchairs or who have leg braces. How will everyone be able to participate in this activity?

**Supplies:**

- masking tape
- paper
- markers
- crayons
- a rope or skipping rope, chairs, pillows, gym mats, or other items readily available in your learning space that may help create an obstacle course (obstacles)

Invite learners to pair up. Each pair must come up with an interesting way to jump: for example, making a hopscotch pattern with masking tape to jump through, jumping off a step, creating a pretend “river” to jump across, a way of skipping or jumping on the spot. When every pair has come with a jumping idea, create a kind of jumping obstacle course together—a sequence of jumps. Use chairs or whatever is available to mark off the course and tape up signs with numbers or instructions for each part of the course. For example, learners might have to jump like a kangaroo to get from point A to point B, then they may have to jump over a rope (or use a skipping rope), then jump backwards for another section or do five jumping jacks.

Have everyone go through the jump course. Then gather in a circle to talk about jumping for joy. Ask questions such as the following to guide the conversation: Have you ever felt like jumping for joy? What made you feel that way? What kinds of things make you especially joyful? What kinds of activities help you to express your joy or happiness? How can we share that joy with others?



## Exploration: Christian Tradition



### 7 Make Resurrection Rolls (Exploring and Engaging)

**Leader preparation:** Make copies of the recipe for resurrection rolls, Attachment: Activity 7. Gather supplies for making resurrection rolls; test the recipe first if you are not sure how to make the rolls.

#### Supplies:

- recipe: "Resurrection Rolls," Attachment: Activity 7
- flat cookie tray
- prepared dough for crescent rolls and other ingredients on the recipe
- lifter/spatula
- access to a stove or toaster oven
- Bibles

Make resurrection rolls according to the recipe. While the rolls are baking, talk about the resurrection story. Ask: What are some of the different resurrection stories you know from the Bible? Invite participants to share a story if they know one. Then read aloud Mark 16:1–8. Ask: Why do you think the story of the resurrection is so important in our Christian tradition? How does this story connect with your life today? Gather back to enjoy the rolls together. Ask the younger participants why they think the rolls might be called resurrection rolls? (*Note:* they may come up with a variety of interesting responses—prepare to be surprised!)



### 8 Travel through Time (Discerning and Deciding)

**Leader preparation:** Make an imaginary "time traveling" device such as a small self-standing tent draped with a Mylar emergency blanket (found in many first aid kits); a decorated appliance box; and a table draped with a large piece of black fabric. Be sure to provide a device in which people with limited mobility can enter.

#### Supplies:

- copies of the letters from "Time Travel Letters," Attachment: Activity 8

Explain that you are going to take an imaginary journey through time, visiting some people who have experienced trouble or persecution. At each stopping point, you will hear something that might give hope to the people who are facing that situation. Invite learners to enter the "time travel machine" and travel with you to the first stop. At each place you visit, read the first part of the letter that tells where you are. Invite learners to imagine the scene. Then read the second part of the letter. Gather back in your own time zone to talk about the places you visited. Ask learners to think about what gives hope or comfort to people in difficult situations in the past, or today.



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### ⑨ Build a Church that Welcomes the Child (and Youth) (Discerning and Deciding)

**Leader preparation:** To adapt this activity for people with arthritis or other joint and muscle limitations, use building blocks and create a large church. They may want to use chairs and tables as well as the building blocks.

**Supplies:**

- play dough or modeling clay
- wooden craft sticks
- toothpicks
- plastic to protect work surfaces (if needed)

Divide the participants into groups of three to five people. Give each group supplies. Ask groups to use the craft supplies to make a model of a church that truly welcomes children. When groups are ready, take a “gallery tour” of the creations. Ask those who are viewing to talk about what they see. Then ask the creators to talk about what they made and what it represents to them.

Consider together what it might mean for your faith community to be truly welcoming of the child—the child in each one of us, the children of the congregation, children and youth in our community.

Allow lots of time for the creative process, but encourage participants to work with the clay as they decide what to create rather than talking about their plan first. Encourage groups to play with the modeling clay and let the experience guide them into a vision of what such a church might be like. Don't sit and talk about it; do it!

### ⑩ Take a Community Tour (Discerning and Deciding)

**Leader preparation:** Designate areas of the Fellowship Hall as places in the community where people gather, such as a grocery store, a shopping mall, a movie theater, a school, a church, a park. Put up a sign to identify each area.

**Supplies:**

- signs for public places

Divide learners into teams of five to eight. Ask them to imagine they are an intergalactic delegation, visiting earth for the first time. They are here to prepare a scientific report on the human species—in particular, they are examining what makes humans happy and what problems or troubles humans face. Ask the space delegations to tour the area in which you have designated public places. In each place, the team is to make a list of what they might observe in that public place. Have the intergalactic teams report back and share their lists with the other groups. Ask the space visitors, still in role, what advice they would give humans about what they should do to increase happiness and well-being on earth.



## Exploration: Future and Mission

### ① Song Fest (Sending and Serving)

**Leader preparation:** Invite an accompanist to assist the group in singing the songs. You may want to prepare PowerPoint slides of the lyrics of the songs. Invite different age groups to lead each song.

**Supplies:**

- songs: “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy); “Over My Head” (African American traditional); “Say It! Sing It!” (Attachment 11); “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy”; “If You’re Happy and You Know it”
- a variety of rhythm instruments
- hymnbooks

Enjoy singing all the songs together. Make up simple actions to go with some of the songs. Use rhythm instruments to accompany the songs. Invite the participants to name other joyful songs to sing. Look through your congregation’s hymnal to find joyful songs.



### ② Make a Joyful Painting (Sending and Serving)

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the poster “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong. Set up different stations with room for six to eight painters at each station.

**Supplies:**

- poster: “Joyful Dance” by Diana Ong, <http://www.tinyurl.com/AllPosters11>
- art supplies: either acrylic paints, medium width brushes and prepared canvas boards or oil pastels (a type of crayon available in art supply and craft stores)
- heavyweight paper
- cups of water for wetting and washing brushes
- paint smocks
- access to a sink for clean up

Display the poster “Joyful Dance” and invite learners to look at the image. Pay attention to the way the artist has used the colors in short wide strokes, with the colors overlapping and blending in. Ask: How does this way of using the brush strokes help make the painting feel like a joyful dance? Invite learners to copy this technique in their art. Give lots of time for learners to experiment with color and form. Try to resist the urge to praise or compliment them on their art. Instead, acknowledge it by noticing what is there. For example, “I see how you have used red overlapping with yellow in this section.” Invite all the artists to talk about what they have created. Give lots of uninterrupted and unhurried time.

For those who don’t want to paint, set up a poetry station where they can create cinquain or free verse poetry.

A cinquain is a very short poem. In its simplest form, it has five lines:

*line 1:* one word

*line 2:* two words

*line 3:* three words



*line 4: two words*

*line 5: one word*

Example:

happiness  
is when  
just like Jesus  
we show  
love

Plan time for everyone to share their creations for the whole group. Perhaps the paintings could become cover art for future worship bulletins. Publish the poetry in the church newsletter. Celebrate all the gifts with applause that gives praise to God.

### Reflect

Recall some of the highlights of this intergenerational experience. What did you enjoy most? When did you notice participants feeling free to play and enjoy themselves? When did you feel that participants were most engaged with the activity or with one another? How was the session able to involve learners of all ages? When did you feel that some were left on the margins? What might you do differently another time? Take note of your own learning from this event. What did you discover about playing and living joyfully in your own life?

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Attachment: Activity 7

## Resurrection Rolls

These rolls are baked with a marshmallow inside. When they are baked, the marshmallow melts, leaving behind an empty space like the empty tomb.

### Ingredients (increase quantities for larger numbers of learners)

- 1 (10 ounce) can refrigerated crescent dinner rolls
- 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- 8 large marshmallows
- ¼ cup melted butter
- Oil for greasing baking sheet

### Directions

- Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C).
- Grease a baking sheet with oil.
- Separate the crescent rolls into individual triangles.
- Put cinnamon and sugar in a small bowl. Stir with a small spoon.
- Dip a marshmallow into melted butter, then roll it in sugar mixture. Put the marshmallow in the center of the triangle of dough. Wrap the marshmallow in dough by folding up the edges of the triangle. Pinch the seams together tightly so the marshmallow is completely sealed in. Place each completed roll on a baking sheet.
- Bake in a preheated oven until rolls are light brown, about 15 minutes.



Attachment: Activity 8

## Time Travel Letters

### Letter 1: Judah (southern Palestine) 740 BCE

Greetings, time travelers.

You have traveled about 2,750 years back in time. You are in the kingdom of Judah, near the place where Jesus was born, but Jesus won't be born for another 740 years. This is a dry, deserted place. The sun is hot and the brown hills seem to shimmer in the heat. The people of this region are very worried. A brutal civil war has just ended in this tiny little kingdom and giant nations all around are gathering their armies and gaining strength. If you look into the distance you can see a cloud of dust. An army is on the move. (Pause to imagine the scene.)

Other nations want to claim Judah as their own. The little kingdom has no hope—it cannot possibly defend itself. War is inevitable. Or is it? The prophet Isaiah hasn't given up hope. You hear him cry out in his clear, deep voice:

Do not give up hope. Turn back to God. God promises that a good leader will come to power, someone who isn't corrupt like our kings, someone who really cares about the poor and the weak. He will make good decisions; he will lead with strength and wisdom. Soon, peace will come."

### Letter 2: Christian Catacombs near Rome, 205 CE

Time travelers, I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ. The year is 205. We are standing in a cool dark passageway, deep underground, just at the edge of the city of Rome. This is a catacomb; see those little alcoves dug into the walls—those are burial places for Christians. The only light comes from torches placed in the walls. In the dim light, you can see simple paintings and carved designs. Carved into some of the walls are shapes that look like fish. Here, Christians gather to celebrate their

funeral rites, and the anniversaries of the martyrs and of the dead. (*Pause to imagine the scene.*)

Look, a small group is gathering at the end of the passageway. They are here because another Christian has been tortured and killed by the Romans in the recent persecution of the Christians. If you draw closer, you will hear that they are singing a hymn. The words remind you of something you heard in the Bible.

A shoot will grow from the fallen tree  
A leaf of green for the world to see  
The Spirit of justice and wisdom and power  
The Spirit of Jesus is with us this hour.

### Letter 3: Charleston, South Carolina, 1769

Greetings, time travelers, you have arrived in Charleston, South Carolina. The year is 1769. You have arrived at a brutal time in the history of this little town. A slave auction has just taken place. Ninety-four slaves—39 men, 15 boys, 24 women, 16 girls—who were captured in Sierra Leone were sold at the dockside today. They have been harshly treated since their capture—beatings and torture have left many scars both inside and out. They have watched many family members and friends die in the long journey to America. And now they are being separated once again. (*Pause to imagine the scene.*)

As the slaves stand in chains in the blazing sun, they hear someone singing. Listen carefully, and you will notice that the singer is also an African slave. This is what you hear:

Over my head I hear music in the air  
Over my head I hear music in the air  
Over my head I hear music in the air  
There must be a God somewhere.



Attachment: Activity 11

### Say It! Sing It!

$\text{♩} = 132$

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

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

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

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

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