



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.

Playing and Living Joyfully

- 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

Writing Team for Playing and Living Joyfully

Kirk Moore	<i>Worship, Music, Arts, and Story</i>
Maren Tirabassi	<i>Adults</i>
Joyce Hollyday	<i>Seekers and New Church Participants</i>
Steve Case	<i>Young Adults</i>
Steve Case	<i>Older Youth</i>
Wade Zick	<i>Youth</i>
Lorrie Kovell	<i>Older Children</i>
Susan Chesley	<i>Young Children</i>
Alyson Huntly	<i>Multiage and Intergenerational</i>
Penelope J. (Penny) Stokes	<i>Living Practices in Daily Life</i>
Claudette Spence	<i>Workshop Rotation</i>
Kathy Clark	<i>United Church of Christ Identity and History</i>
Donald Schmidt	<i>Editor</i>
Patrice L. Rosner	<i>Managing Editor</i>
R. Kenneth Ostermiller	<i>Project Coordinator</i>

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Discovery

About this Setting

How do we live and play joyfully in our church worship? In discovering the world of playing and living joyfully we will begin to stretch our understanding to incorporate a sense of joyous exuberance into worship that is often more contemplative. We will look for ways to include folk of all ages, backgrounds, and stories in the worship experience. The different categories of activities—Exploring and Engaging, Discerning and Deciding, Sending and Serving—all provide opportunities to discover new ways to bring music, arts, and story into worship in playful ways.

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. Rather, 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 1 John 1:1-2:2 and Psalm 30, focusing on what it means to live and to play joyfully. What keeps us from experiencing joy? What obstacles do we have to experiencing playtime? How do the Bible readings reflect a movement away from the obstacles and toward fully experiencing joy and play?

Prayer: God of endless joy, please help me to understand, to experience, and to express your joy and your playfulness through this time of worship. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Songs for Playing and Living Joyfully

Part of liturgy: Singing

Leader preparation: The Bible readings in the “Worship, Music, Arts, and Story” resource contain images and stories that can well be expressed as joy and playfulness. The community celebration of music is a natural way to express it. Choosing songs that invite those gathered to experience play and joy as it relates to the readings is an important part of worship planning.

Supplies:

- hymnals or songbooks containing the songs you wish to use

The following songs work with this Exploration of Discovery, as well as with all the Explorations in the faith practice “Playing and Living Joyfully.” Repetition helps in remembering.

Title	Music	Lyrics	Tune Name
“Center of My Joy”	Gaither		
“Clap Your Hands”	Hanson, Murakami		
“Come O (Thou) Fount of Every Blessing”	Wyeth	Robinson	Nettleton
“Dance into Joy”	Camp		
“De Colores”			De Colores
“Every Time I Feel the Spirit”	spiritual		spiritual
“Gather Us, O God”	Brown		
“God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale”			Roeder
“Halleluja”			Halleluja Caribbean
“I Come with Joy”		Wren	Dove of Peace
“I Was So Glad”	Grundy		
“I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy”			traditional
“In the Bulb There Is a Flower”	Sleeth	Sleeth	Promise
“Joy to the World!”	Handel	Watts	Antioch
“Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee”	Beethoven	Van Dyke	Hymn to Joy



Title	Music	Lyrics	Tune Name
"Let Loose the Spirit"	Porter		
"Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ"			Linstead
"Lions"	Lost and Found		
"Little Country Church"	Girard		
"Lord of the Dance"	(Shaker tune)	Carter	Lord of the Dance
"My Life Flows on in Endless Song"			Endless Song
"O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing"	Gläser	Wesley	Azmon C. M.
"Over My Head"			Music in the Air
"Say It! Sing It!"	Miller, JoEllen		
"She Flies On"	Light, Gordon		
"Simple Gifts"	(Shaker tune)		Shaker Dance Song
"You Are Welcome Here"		DeMan, Gerard	

2 Beach Ball Call to Worship

Part of liturgy: Call to worship

Leader preparation: Calls to worship are rarely memorable. This experience gives a playful twist to the traditional practice of a worship leader ("One") reading one line while the congregation ("Many") responds with another. A flying beach ball is a playful way to decide who reads next.

Supplies:

- beach ball

Using a selected weekly call to worship, change the identifying titles for who reads ("one," "many," "all," and so on) to "First," "Next," "Next," and, for the last line, "All." The first reader holds a beach ball in hand and says (with enthusiasm) the first line of the call to worship. After reading, the first reader throws the ball into the congregation. The one who catches the ball begins (with the whole section where the person is seated) to read the "Next" part. The person who caught the ball then throws it to the "Next" person and the process continues. The catcher of the ball for the last ("All") line invites all to speak together. Then the beginner of the beach ball Call to Worship requests the ball back as the opening song begins.

Follow up: Beach ball "greet those around you" is a possibility, as well as a Beach Ball Benediction. Use your imagination!



③ Playful Invocations

Part of liturgy: Prayer of invocation

Leader preparation: Does prayer have to be somber and subdued? Why not invite a student or person with dramatic talent to lead the congregation in a prayer that is playful and joyful? Use these prayers as they are, or let them lead you to other ideas for playful and joyful invocations.

Supplies: None

Invocation ideas:

We're not sure that we feel it right now, God, but we are praying that all in this worship today are filled with joy. We pray that in our worship we would experience a playful game of seeking you from where we thought you were hidden from us. May our time here fill us with the glee of riding a roller coaster, sliding down a slide, or spinning on a merry-go-round. Give us your joy this morning, O God, and let us encounter your playful spirit. Amen.

We come this morning to praise you, God. Thank you for hearing us when we cry for help. Thank you for comforting us when we are in tears, and celebrating with us when we are bounding with joy. Thank you for inspiring us to dance, to sing, to play, and to praise your holy name. Please help us to sing, shout, clap, jump, and maybe even turn a few somersaults in celebration. Amen.

Hey God! Are you listening? Sometimes we feel like we've got to shout loud for you to hear. Other times folks tell us that we've got to be more quiet to be sure we hear you and that you can listen. Thank you for listening to us when we are loud and when we are quiet, God. Please be with us in our worship today, helping us to praise you loud and quiet, smiling and frowning, jumping up and down and standing still, always ready for a celebration of praising you. Amen.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ Are You Just Going to Read from the Bible Again?

Part of liturgy: Bible reading

Leader preparation: Standing in the pulpit and reading the selected Bible passage helps folks prepare to listen to the sermon. All too often, it also prepares them to nestle down for a great sermon nap. Use these ideas to make the Bible reading playful, joyful, and memorable.

Supplies: None

On a week where a short Bible reading is appropriate or possible, have one of the youngest readers stand in the pulpit (be sure to have boosters available) and present the reading.

Have a teenager interpret the Bible passage as you read aloud. Read a verse or thought and have the "interpreter" put it into language that makes sense in teen speak.

Have an unseen person—possibly with a very deep voice (sort of like James Earl Jones)—read the Bible passage.

Read the Bible passage both forward and backward. You can announce that you'll be doing this and then read it facing the congregation and then with your back to



the congregation, or you can read it forward and then read the words backward. Either way, you'll present something playful, joyful, and memorable.

5 Point-Counterpoint

Part of liturgy: Sermon idea

Leader preparation: As part of a sermon experience relating to Psalm 30, arrange for two speakers to present the different experiences expressed by the psalmist.

Supplies: None

Have the speakers be dressed differently from each other, speak differently from each other, and even stand or sit differently from each other. Have the speaker who expresses more negative images play them melodramatically negative. Have the speaker who portrays more positive images play them with joy that is over the top. Encourage the speakers to get the congregation involved with responses to their presentations.

Emotions and experiences to express:

- death vs. life
- anger vs. favor
- weeping vs. joy
- mourning vs. dancing
- silence vs. shouting

Remind the congregation throughout to have fun with the presentations and to use the opportunity to thank God for the gift of joy and play. Encourage them to recite the phrase "I will give thanks to God forever" throughout and at the end of the sermon.

6 I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy

Part of liturgy: Children's sermon idea

Leader preparation: Be ready to sing the children's song and to encourage children to share about the things that bring them joy. Have a piece of paper and a writing tool with you. You can find the lyrics and tune at

<http://www.tinyurl.com/3xdezsl>.

Supplies:

- paper and pen or pencil

Invite young ones to the front and center of the worship area. As they are arriving, start clapping your hands, stomping your feet, and perhaps even dancing around a bit as you sing "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy" with all the emotion you can express. Encourage the children to sing with you as you sing verses like: "I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy"; "I have the peace that passes understanding"; and maybe even "I have the wonderful love of my blessed redeemer way down in the depths of my heart."

After singing these or any other verses you know, ask the children why that song makes them happy or gives them joy. After a few have responded, ask them what other things give them joy. Be sure to listen and to respond to each description the children give. In the event that no children will share, ask them whether presents, good music, sweets, or friends give them joy. Write each response on your paper. After a short time for children's answers, repeat the list. At the end of the



list, include “Because Jesus loves me” and remind the children that Jesus loves them, no matter what. Wrap things up by saying, “Hearing about the things that give you joy has really helped give me joy. I think you should tell that to your parents and friends, too, so they’ll be able to have that same joy, joy, joy, joy down in their hearst!” Close with a prayer.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Playful Invitation to the Offering and Prayer of Dedication

Part of liturgy: Offertory invitation and prayer of dedication

Leader preparation: Arrange for the congregation to sing “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ” (tune: Linstead) during the offering. You can find the lyrics and the tune at <http://www.tinyurl.com/3ab8ch4>.

Supplies:

- musical accompaniment for the hymn

Say: Thank you for your willingness to live and play joyfully, bringing energy and vitality to our congregation. Thank you as well for being willing to extend that playful joy to this time of receiving tithes and offerings. Today, as you put your checks (large and small), cash (from pennies to hundred dollar bills), and notes (telling us that you gave online), in the offering plate, sing along with today’s offertory, “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ.”

Prayer of dedication: *In what we speak, may we share life. In celebration of Jesus, may we be one. Through these gifts, may all experience your love, O God. May this offering today be a part of a joyful beginning where all may have enough and where loaves may abound. Amen.*



8 Revealed and Hidden

Part of liturgy: Just before the Benediction

Leader preparation: Display the poster “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard.

Supplies:

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

Choose two or three of the following questions and ask the congregation to think about them as they look closely at the poster. Give significant time for thought for each question.

- What is revealed in this picture?
- What is still hidden?
- What do you think the two girls anticipate?
- What call might they be answering?
- Who might they be inviting to join them?
- What have you learned today?
- What are you still thinking about?
- What are you anticipating?
- In what way have you decided to answer a call today?
- Who would you like to invite to join you here?
- Where will God’s playful and joyful spirit lead you?



Either close with an additional benediction, or simply end with “Amen.”

9 Playful Benedictions

Part of liturgy: Prayers of Benediction

Leader preparation: When we are sent out from worship and into our daily lives, we may forget what we have experienced in worship. During the benediction we often start thinking about our agenda for the rest of the day. These benedictions invite people to think. They can also challenge them to live playfully and joyfully no matter where or when they are.

Supplies: None

Benediction ideas:

Today we have experienced joy. It's been like a playful game of hide and seek. Some of us have experienced the thrill of a roller coaster, others running around in an open meadow, and still others the fun and uneasiness of spinning on a merry-go-round. May we leave this place ready to share our joyful and playful experience in worship with those we meet. May God's joy go with us as we live and play joyfully. Amen.

We came here today with as many emotions as there are people here. Thank you, God, for meeting us right where we are and for challenging us to continue to experience those emotions as we together spent time singing, shouting, dancing, and playing joyfully. Help us as we leave here, God, to know your joy in the midst of all of our feelings and experiences. Help us to remember to dance to express our sadness and our joy. Help us to sing a song of mourning as well as one of celebration. Help us to reach out to those we meet today with your unconditional and uncontainable love. Amen.

Following the Church Year

Pictures

Part of liturgy: Contemplation exercise—Benediction

Leader preparation: John 1:1–2:2 appears in the Revised Common Lectionary as a Bible reading for Easter 2b. Plan to take pictures, and arrange for a method to display these to the congregation.

Psalm 30 makes several appearances in the lectionary as either the main psalm or alternate psalm reading several times over the course of years A, B, and C. (Easter Vigil A, Epiphany 6B, Easter Vigil B, Proper 8/Ordinary 13B, Easter Vigil C, Easter 3C, Proper 5C/Ordinary 10C, Proper 9C/Ordinary 14C) Use this worship element to help folks acknowledge both what brings them sadness and what brings them joy.

Supplies:

- camera

Take several close-up pictures of faces. Suggested emotions to express in the pictures:

- revealed
- hidden
- lie
- truth
- sin



- forgiveness
- sadness
- joy
- life
- death
- anger
- gladness
- mourning
- dancing

Display the pictures for the congregation. It may be helpful to identify each picture with a one-word description. Invite the congregation to think about the emotions expressed. Let each picture be displayed for a significant amount of time. When you are through displaying the pictures, either say nothing or say, “God walks with us through every emotion—all the days of our lives.”

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Scripture

About this Setting

We're continuing to live and play joyfully in our church worship. In the Scripture Exploration of "Playing and Living Joyfully" we begin to understand more of the joy and play woven throughout the Bible. We will celebrate that joyful play in worship with people of all ages. Each category of activities—Exploring and Engaging, Discerning and Deciding, Sending and Serving—helps us to engage the scripture playfully and joyfully through music, arts, and story in worship.

About this Exploration

The history of our faith, recorded in scripture, 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

Read Mark 9:30–37 and Philippians 2:1–13. As you read, focus on what it means to live and to play joyfully. How do arguments and power struggles keep us from experiencing joy? What does an invitation to those who are seen as less important do for the corporate worship experience? What encouragement do you need to experience God’s joy? What encouragement can you give? How will encouraging others to lead change the way you experience living and playing joyfully?

Prayer: God of encouragement and play, please guide my thoughts and encourage me as I seek to encourage all on our worship experience together. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Welcome

Part of liturgy: Welcome

Leader preparation: Use these ideas to welcome the congregation at the beginning of the worship service.

Supplies: None

From Mark 9:30–37: I’m so glad you’re here today. It’s going to be the greatest! The greatest what? What do you think? The greatest music? (*congregational reaction*) The greatest preaching? (*reaction*) The greatest prayers? (*reaction*) The greatest offering ever? (*reaction*) Today we’re going to explore the idea that being the greatest is all about not worrying about being the greatest. It’s about the first being last and being willing to let everyone play. Are you ready? Here we go!

From Philippians 2:1–13: Good morning, (*insert congregation name*). Welcome to our worship. Today is about being encouraged. It’s about joy. It’s about generosity. It’s about thinking like Jesus—and knowing that when we live and play and serve joyfully we make Jesus smile. Are you ready? Here we go!

2 Playful Call to Worship

Part of liturgy: Call to Worship

Leader preparation: This Call to Worship is based on Mark 9:30–37. Print words in the bulletin, or use another method to display them for the congregation.

Supplies:

- copy of the Call to Worship for the congregation

One: When was the last time you were in an argument? Was it a week ago? A few days ago? This morning? Right now?

Many: It’s been all of those. Why do you ask?

One: What were you arguing about? Was it being late? Was it money? Was it politics? Was it family?

Many: It’s been all of those. Again, why do you ask?

One: For this reason: Today we all have reasons we might be angry or not ready to worship. We may think some here need church more than we do. We may be happy other people aren’t here.

Many: Again, it all sounds true. But is there more to your point?

One: Yes! No matter what your feelings this morning, God welcomes you! God calls you to share that same welcome with everyone! Let’s get ready to worship joyfully together.

All: Good point—let’s worship joyfully together.

3 Playful Call to Worship

Part of liturgy: Call to Worship

Leader preparation: This Call to Worship is based on Philippians 2:1–13 Print words in the bulletin or use another method to display them for the congregation.



Supplies:

- copy of the Call to Worship for the congregation

One: Complete joy. What does that look like? Take a moment and try to express complete joy with your face. *(allow time for the congregation to do this)*

One: Impressive! Now let's encourage one another to do better! How about joy and laughter? Turn to your neighbor and smile so big it makes them laugh out loud! *(allow time for the congregation to do this)*

One: Today let's be a people who are filled with joy and who are working for in God's joy.

All: Praise God!

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ The Most Important

Part of liturgy: Sermon idea

Leader preparation: How do we determine what are the most important things in life? How do we determine who are the most important people? Arrange to display the list to the congregation.

Supplies:

- way to display the list

Use this thought-starting list to invite the congregation to think about what is really important:

- children
- those who are old
- people who are disabled
- those who are sick
- those who are illiterate
- those who are unemployed
- undocumented immigrants
- prisoners
- those who are homeless
- people with mental illnesses
- those with no health insurance
- single parents
- gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people
- panhandlers
- minorities
- those who are deaf
- those who are blind
- people with autism or Asperger's syndrome
- people with facial deformities
- overweight people
- prostitutes
- Goth kids

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”



Although Jesus was talking about a child when he said this, he was not just talking about children. Jesus used the example of a child to represent any in society who are seen as insignificant or worthless. He was saying that a welcome to any who are seen to have little or no value is as significant as welcoming God.

Most important? Every person on the list—and everyone else.

⑤ Make My Joy Complete

Part of liturgy: Bible reading

Leader preparation: Prepare for a creative Bible reading from Philippians 2:1–13

Supplies:

- Bibles

Ask a person with a gift of exuberance to stand up and shout out “Make my joy complete!” several times as indicated during the Bible reading.

Philippians 2:1–13, NRSV (*Note: You may prefer to use a different translation. If so, simply change the responses as needed.*)

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, **make my joy complete!**: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. **Make my joy complete!** Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. **Make my joy complete!** Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. **Make my joy complete!** And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Make my joy complete!** Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; **Make my joy complete!** for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. **Make my joy complete!**



⑥ Encouraged and Consoled

Part of liturgy: Art viewing and reaction

Leader preparation: Sometimes joy is not only elusive, it is absent. Sometimes play is not only difficult to make time for, it is completely gone from our minds. But joy and play are necessary and help us experience hope, delight, and celebration. The image of the children playing on a bombed out street in Afghanistan expresses that hope, delight, and celebration in the midst of chaos and tragedy.

Supplies:

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

Display the picture “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan.” Invite those gathered to react to the picture without any questions. After a short



time, invite them to contemplate these questions as they continue to look at the picture.

- How is this picture encouraging?
- What consolation can you find in viewing this picture?
- How does the word “compassion” relate to this picture?
- Think of several ways you see joy in this picture.

Before removing the picture from view, say, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Communion for All

Part of liturgy: Communion invitation

Leader preparation: Although practices vary, some congregations and denominations believe the sacrament of Holy Communion should only be received by those who have reached an age where they can understand what is being celebrated and remembered. The following communion invitation challenges the idea of excluding anyone from partaking.

Supplies:

- communion elements

Invitation:

Jesus gathered with his disciples for a meal. These disciples were the same ones who had been passed over by other rabbis as unworthy to be their disciples. They weren't the ones who excelled or who were sought after. With Jesus they made mistakes, acted without thinking, often treated others poorly, and didn't get what was really going on much of the time. But Jesus celebrated with them regardless of what they knew or how properly they had been taught. He celebrated with those who would deny and betray him. Today Christ welcomes all to his table. No matter what you've learned, whether or not you “get it,” or what your motivation is for joining in the celebration, you are welcome at Christ's table. Always.

8 Benedictions

Part of liturgy: Benedictions

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

From Mark 9:30–37: If we are arguing about “who is the greatest,” may we be gently taught that true greatness comes in serving others. When we are seeking greatness in serving others, may we remember that it is not about being great, but serving others. May we leave this place ready to offer an extravagant welcome and unconditional love to all God's children. Amen.

From Philippians 2:1–13: Encourage one another! Love one another! Be compassionate! Be generous! Be selfless! Be a people who seek to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Does it sound overwhelming? Make it into a daily game. On different days celebrate things like love, encouragement, compassion, and so on. Following Jesus may be overwhelming at times, but it can still be something that is filled with fun and joy! Let's dance out of here with joy. Amen.



9 The Grand March

Part of liturgy: After worship “handshake time”

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

Instead of the usual “greet the pastor with a handshake and a ‘nice sermon’ comment” time, invite as many children as are willing to greet people as they exit the worship area with high fives, low fives, fist bumps, and smiles. If you’re in a time of year when you’re trying to minimize germ transmission, have the children offer “air fives,” elbow bumps, and parade waves that are silly, but proper. Be sure every person who attended worship is greeted playfully and joyfully.

Following the Church Year

Part of liturgy: Responsive Bible reading

Leader preparation: Mark 9:30–37 is a lectionary reading for Proper 20B/Ordinary 25B/Pentecost 16. Philippians 2:1–13 is one of the lectionary readings for years A, B and C on Passion Sunday. It also occurs for Proper 21A/Ordinary 26A/Pentecost +20. Print the reading in bulletins or use another method to display the reading for the congregation.

Use this responsive reading idea to bring life to the Philippians reading for Passion Sunday or on Proper 21A.

One: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

Many: How do we do that? We’re not Jesus! We’re just ordinary people!

One: Jesus emptied himself and was born in human likeness.

Many: Jesus looked human, but was still God. We simply cannot do that!

One: Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Many: We do not want to die! We are just ordinary people! This is too much!

One: It is too much. Jesus emptied himself and knows what it is to be an ordinary person.

Many: An ordinary person that we worship?

One: This is getting too hard.

Many: How do you think we feel?

One: Confused, overwhelmed?

Many: Yes!

One: So what do you think we should do?

Many: Let’s try to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus—and trust that God can guide us.

One: I couldn’t have said it better myself.

Many: You didn’t. But let’s stay focused on Jesus.

One: Amen.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Setting

Following Jesus is serious, but it doesn't have to be tiresome or tedious. In the Discipleship Exploration of "Playing and Living Joyfully," we consider what prompts us to follow Jesus and seek to understand how the Spirit leads us in worship. Each category—Exploring and Engaging, Discerning and Deciding, Sending and Serving—will help us to engage playfully and joyfully the journey of discipleship through music, arts, and story in worship.

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

Read Galatians 4:4-7 and Revelation 7:9-17 focusing on what it means to play and live joyfully. Imagine the joy of a child running into the arms of a loving and joyful parent. Imagine that same unbridled joy filling the hearts of everyone in your worship service. Imagine any who are filled with tears of sorrow being comforted and invited to celebrate the love of God and the love of our communities with joy. How will encouraging others to embrace exuberance help you to experience living and playing joyfully?

Prayer: God of exuberant and unbridled joy, please fill my thoughts with joy and encourage me as I seek to encourage all on our worship experience together. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Welcome

Part of liturgy: Call to Worship

Leader preparation: Print calls in the bulletin, or prepare another way to display them.

Supplies:

- copies of the Call to Worship for the congregation

From Galatians 4:4-7:

One: God sent us Jesus—and welcomes all to the family. We are God’s children!

Many: May we enter today with the joy that makes us want to run and jump and shout and laugh.

One: God celebrates with us!

Many: God also calls us to times of rest and contemplation.

One: In God’s family we can find rest and peace and safety, too.

All: As God’s family we gather this morning to worship.

From Revelation 7:9-17:

One: We worship today not just with those gathered here, but with all of Christ’s church.

Many: Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!

One: Wow! That’s a whole lot to begin with!

Many: Well, it was written there, so we said it!

One: Did you mean it?

Many: What? Aren’t we just supposed to read the call to worship and then get to the next part?

One: Let’s try it again—only a little slower...We worship today not just with those gathered here, but with all of Christ’s church.

Many: Blessing and glory...

One: Think about that.

Many: Wisdom and thanksgiving...

One: Think a little more.

Many: Honor and power and might...

One: Think some more.

Many: Be to our God forever and ever!

One: Amen!

All: Amen!

2 Prayer of Invocation

Part of liturgy: Prayer of invocation

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

Thank you, loving God, for your love for all the people. Thank you for being the giver of salvation to all the people. We bless you and give glory to you and thank you and honor you and worship you. Yet, please help us, God, to get past merely reciting the words today.



Please give us your Spirit of joy. Please help us to experience playfulness and unbridled exuberance. Move us and fill us with the joy of your salvation. Amen

3 Dancing with a Hymn

Part of liturgy: Song with dance moves

Leader preparation: Choose a hymn and make preparations for someone(s) to lead the congregation in dancing to the hymn. Encourage dancing that is free and fluid, that is not rehearsed, and that invites people to let themselves go with the Spirit. Some sample hymns might be “You Gotta Move When the Spirit Says Move” (traditional African American) or “Let Loose the Spirit” (Phil Porter). You may think of others.

Supplies: None

Encourage the congregation to sing and dance with joy, and to let themselves go.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Over My Head

Part of liturgy: Song with motions

Leader preparation: Invite several people from all ages to lead the congregation in these motions as you sing “Over My Head” (spiritual; tune name: Music in the Air).

Supplies: None needed

Lyric	Motion
Over my head, I hear music in the air; (3 times; repeat each time this line is sung)	Swirl both arms over your head, then lower in front of chest and hold one hand palm up. Sweep the other hand perpendicularly over the hand that is palm up.
There must be a God somewhere. (repeat each time this line is sung)	Move both arms upward and then spread them out toward all.
Oh, when the world is silent, I hear music in the air; (3 times)	Cover ears. Then repeat motion above for “Over my head...”
And when I’m feeling lonely, I hear music in the air; (3 times)	Cover face.
Now when I think on Jesus, I hear music in the air (3 times)	Stroke chin and then point to the middle of your palms, one at a time.



5 Children's Sermon: I'm so glad to see you!

Part of liturgy: Children's Sermon

Leader Preparation: Gather children at the front of the worship area.

Supplies: None

Message:

How many of you have a dog? I think it's great that whenever I come in my front door, my dog runs up to me to say "hello." She wags her tail and even cries a little until I pet her and scratch behind her ears. It's nice to have a greeting like that when you come home, isn't it? I remember when I was little I would do the same kind of greeting for my grandparents. As soon as they would arrive at my house, I would run as fast as I could toward them. One time I was moving so quickly I ran into my grandpa and almost knocked the wind out of him.

God loves that kind of greeting. It's hard to run as fast as we can to say hello to God every day, but when we show that kind of excitement in greeting everyone here at church, it's as if we were showing that excitement to God. Let's try that right now. Everyone run somewhere here in the sanctuary and then put a big smile on your face and say, "I'm so glad you're here!" to five or six people around you. You don't have to run into anyone or knock the wind out of them, but show them how happy you are that they're here.

(After children have greeted the congregation, invite them back up to the front and close with prayer.)

6 Sermon idea: What do you care about?

Part of liturgy: Sermon idea

Leader preparation: Use these questions to explore what was and was not important to Paul in the reading from Galatians 4:4-7.

Supplies:

- Bible

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law..."

- Nothing about a virgin birth?
- Why wouldn't Paul mention that in these verses?
- Could it be that it wasn't important to him? Could it be that it wasn't part of the story that Paul was sharing?

"in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

- How does it feel to shout out "Daddy!" or "Mommy!" with the expectation of love, joy, and even playfulness in return?
- Is that the emotion you think Paul is trying to express here?

"So you are no longer a slave, but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God."

- How do you think a statement like this would affect those who heard it in Paul's time?
- How about a couple of hundred years ago?



- How does it affect you today? What would happen if instead of “slave” we used any term that represents a person who is marginalized or exploited?

It seems in this text Paul cares about inclusion, welcome, and joy rather than about using rules to exclude.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Offering

Part of liturgy: Invitation to the offering

Leader preparation: We talk about tithes and offerings, expenses, and even a little bit about cheerful giving when we give an invitation to the offering. Do we ever invite people to be playful, joyfull, and maybe even dance during the offering? Show the congregation this video before the offering and invite all to give not only cheerfully, but also with playfulness, joy, and dancing!

Supplies:

- video clip: <http://tinyurl.com/yjrlfmv>

Make arrangements to display the video while people bring their offering forward.

8 Benediction Litany

Part of liturgy: Benediction

Leader preparation: Send the congregation out with this playful responsive benediction.

Supplies:

- copies of the benediction for the congregation.

One: Leave this place with a spirit of joy and celebration.

Many: Joy and celebration!

One: Leave this place inspired and ready to praise God everywhere.

Many: Praise God everywhere!

One: Leave this place to share God’s love with all of God’s family.

Many: Everyone!

One: Everyone.

All: Amen.

9 Disciples in Community

Part of liturgy: After worship

Leader preparation: Challenge the congregation with these ideas for living as followers of Jesus outside the building walls.

Supplies: None

- Get together with six or eight or more neighbors and sing fun or even inspirational songs in your front yard.
- Get a group together to make a significant donation to an adoption agency.



- Join or form a community dedicated to learning another language—preferably another language spoken by some in your neighborhood.
- Encourage your faith community to get involved with a project that helps feed those who are hungry or bring water to those who thirst.

Following the Church Year



Part of liturgy: Art viewing and contemplation

Leader Preparation: Galatians 4:4–7 is a lectionary reading for Christmas 1b in the RCL. Revelation 7: 9–17 is one of the lectionary readings for years All Saints A and Easter 4C in the RCL.

Supplies:

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

Display the poster. Ask the congregation to look closely and to think. Give significant time for thought for each question.

- What emotions do you see expressed in the painting?
- What rituals do you see expressed in the painting?
- In what ways do you see life expressed?
- In what ways do you see death expressed?
- In what ways do you see joy expressed?
- What music do you hear when you look at the painting?
- What emotions do you feel when you see the painting?
- What else do you see in the painting?

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Setting

We learn from those who have come before us, and we are called to practice our faith in ways that not only respect and celebrate what we can learn from the past, but also how it gives us life in our practices of faith today. In the Christian Tradition Exploration of “Playing and Living Joyfully,” we look back to what is precious and seek to live it anew and joyfully. Each category of activities calls us to remember our Christian tradition and also to live it with a playful and joyful spirit through music, arts, and story in worship.

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 Songs 2:8–13

Leader Preparation

Read Isaiah 11:1–10 and Song of Songs 2:8–13, focusing on what it means to live and to play joyfully. Imagine a scene where children and adults of all different backgrounds are playing and laughing together. Imagine phrases such as “that’s not appropriate for worship; it’s not serious enough” being absent from every time of worship. Imagine being able to bound around the worship area with an excitement and an expectation of something wonderful arriving. How will encouraging others to dream of playing together and joyfully worshiping together help you to experience living and playing joyfully?

Prayer: God of reconciliation and celebration, please fill my thoughts with joy, and encourage me as I seek to encourage all on our worship experience together. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

❶ Congregational Greeting Time

Part of liturgy: Congregational greeting

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

During your time of greeting or passing the peace, encourage all gathered to make a point to greet at least ten to fifteen people, making sure to greet several people they either do not know or whom they rarely, if ever, talk to in church or in the community. Encourage them to greet people with whom they may have had arguments and people they may try to avoid. Invite people to greet one another with these words: “God calls you precious. I call you precious. Christ’s peace be with you.” After a few minutes, invite people back to the place where they were sitting. Say: “May this place and this day be a time where we see one another as partners in Christ’s service. May the peace of Christ be with you.”

❷ Calls to Worship

Part of liturgy: Call to Worship

Leader preparation: Display words in the bulletin or with another method.

Supplies:

- copies of the words for the congregation

From Isaiah 11:1–10:

One: Sometimes people don’t play well together;

Many: Yet God knows how to turn things upside-down.

One: Folks who could never get along together can laugh and sing together.

Many: People can experience joy and play in worship together!

One: All can praise God together—no matter what.

All: Praise God!

From Song of Songs 2:8–13:

One: Some came running—perhaps even bounding to church today.

Many: Worship is a celebration!

One: Some came shuffling their feet—ready for a still and peaceful time of worship.

Many: Worship is a contemplative experience!

One: No matter what your reason today, let’s celebrate that we are here as one body.

All: Let’s praise God together—celebrating God’s unconditional love for all!

❸ Prayer of Invocation

Part of liturgy: Prayer

Leader Preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None



God who can turn everything upside-down, thank you for joining us in this morning's worship experience. As we remember and celebrate what those who have come before have taught us, please help us to live and celebrate not just our past, but how our past helps us to live and play joyfully together now and in the future. Help us to worship together instead of apart. Help us to worship joyfully instead of "chorefully." Thank you for your unconditional love for all. Amen.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ Celebrating with Drama

Part of liturgy: Bible exploration

Leader preparation: The two Bible readings for this Exploration lend themselves well to an interactive pantomime featuring members of the congregation. Arrange for some of the most playful participants in the worship service to express the feeling of the readings in a game of reverse Bible charades. As you read, the actors will mime or act out the words. Use any or all of the bulleted suggestions.

Supplies:

- Bible

Ideas for Isaiah 11:1–10:

- An actor pretends to be a plant growing up from the ground.
- Another actor shows delight while carrying a Bible.
- For verse 4, an actor will stand there and look confused, not knowing what to do.
- Actor will put on pantomime belts.
- Actors with animal masks will get along with each other.
- During the nursing child verse, everyone will stop and look slightly awkward, but will then continue getting along and playing with one another.

Ideas for Song of Songs 2:8–13:

- One puts a hand to his or her ear.
- Another bounds down the aisle of the church, running about, and even playing some hide and seek.
- Another beckons someone to bound down the aisle.
- Actors portraying flowers and trees wave their arms, sing, and grow.
- All express happiness and joy.

⑤ Fun Theory

Part of liturgy: Worship re-imagining

Leader preparation: When we introduce fun, those tasks, experiences, or events that have become mundane, uninspired, or tedious can and will become interesting, exciting, and life-affirming. Show one of the following videos to the congregation.:

Piano Stairs: <http://www.tinyurl.com/yclbbf9>

The World's Deepest Trash Bin: <http://www.tinyurl.com/y8grub>

Bottle Bank Arcade: <http://www.tinyurl.com/yhsrtdl>



Supplies:

- a way to show the video clip during worship

After showing the video(s), ask the congregation to shout out ideas for how to re-imagine various elements of worship and make them playful and joyful. Take notes and incorporate their ideas into a future worship service.

6 Sermon

Part of liturgy: Sermon idea

Leader preparation: Several verses in Isaiah 11:1–10 bring up funny images. Use these ideas to bring some fun into the sermon.

Supplies: None

Some silly ideas:

- Real plants will not grow out of Jesse, but the visual is still funny.
- God’s breath will kill the wicked. That’s some pretty powerful halitosis.
- Two belts? God is such a fashion setter.
- Is anyone thinking about *Ghostbusters*?
- Cats and dogs living together—mass hysteria
- If the child is nursing, wouldn’t the mother have something to say about it playing over a snake hole?

Some less silly thoughts:

- God’s breath is about words instead of weapons.
- The unlikely pairing of animals shows how everything is completely out of order with the way folks think.
- Peace instead of war.
- Nature doing what is unnatural.
- A little child leading the whole thing.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Art Viewing

Part of liturgy: Art viewing

Leader preparation: Arrange to display the poster to the congregation.

Supplies:

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

Display “Children Play in the Old Town of Kabul, Afghanistan” for the congregation. Invite the congregation to consider what challenges are waiting for them as they leave the worship service. Offer one or two of these questions for parting reflection:

- What is playful and joyful about this picture?
- What is dangerous about this picture?
- In what ways can you serve God joyfully with the challenges before you this week?
- What does this picture tell you about the history of the area where it was taken?



- What does the game tell you about the future of the area?
- In what ways does your own history and perception of the future affect how you will live out your faith this week?
- What is out of order in this picture?
- How can these children lead people to peace?
- What is holding you back from living joyfully and peacefully this week?

8 Intergenerational Planting

Part of liturgy: Intergenerational activity

Leader preparation: This activity will work well with either Isaiah 1:1–10 or Song of Songs 2:8–13.

Supplies:

- flower seeds
- flower pots or garden area on the church grounds
- Bible

Read the selected Bible verses to the congregation. Send out teams of people from different age groups to the church grounds to plant flower seeds in the early spring. In the event there are no places to plant on the church grounds, have them plant flower seeds in small pots. If they are willing, have each team take care of their small flower garden on a weekly basis, taking pictures of the plants' progress each week. Alternatively, have one or two people take care of each of the small gardens and take regular pictures. Give regular updates to the congregation and, when the flowers are in full bloom, show pictures showing the growth.

Read or show selected verses from the Bible readings as you show the pictures to the congregation. Invite participants to share their experiences.

9 Benedictions

Part of liturgy: Benediction

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

From Isaiah 1:1–10:

We have a rich faith tradition. In it we have learned that God's ways turn our ways upside-down. As we leave this place of worship today, may we go ready to reach a hand across what can seem like an impossible divide and invite someone to laugh and to play. May we sing songs of peace. May we celebrate every opportunity to follow God's call to love God and to love everyone else. Amen.

From Song of Songs 2:8–13:

Be inspired, beloved. Be challenged to bound from this place to places all around this community. Be a refreshing and fragrant presence of God's love. Look both ways before you cross the street and be filled with God's joyful spirit. Amen.



Following the Church Year

Lions

Part of liturgy: Song

Leader preparation: Isaiah 1:1–10 is a lectionary reading for Advent 2a.

Supplies:

- musical instruments, singers

A song idea to explore the Isaiah passage during Advent:

Church hymns and even contemporary praise songs bring with them soothing harmonies, inspiring melodies, and a general feeling of “rightness,” that the song feels like “church” for many. Sometimes it is necessary to let the congregation experience something that is turned a bit upside-down and is extraordinarily playful.

Teach and lead the congregation in singing the song “Lions” from the band Lost and Found (words and music by Michael Bridges and George Baum © 1994 Lost and Found), Lyrics, chord books and mp3s can be purchased from their website at <http://www.speedwood.com>. You can see a video describing how to sing the song at <http://www.tinyurl.com/37nahx5>.

Some song details:

The “Slinky” is used as a percussive instrument during this song. Use short extensions of the spring for the main percussive rhythm and then extend the spring wide, creating a longer “fwup” sound just after the word “can’t” and before the word “swallow” or “get,” depending on the place in the song you are singing.

For best results, learn this song from watching the band perform live. Their concert schedule is available on their website, <http://www.speedwood.com/concerts>.

Song of Songs

Part of liturgy: Sermon idea

Leader preparation: Song of Songs 2:8–13 is a lectionary reading for Proper 9A/Ordinary 14A as well as Proper 17B/Ordinary 22B.

Supplies: None

An idea to further engage the congregation in the Song of Songs passage: Is the Song of Songs an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel or of Christ and the Church? (Both of those are traditional—although often questionable—understandings of this unusual book.) Is it a manual for marriage? Is it a series of love notes between two amorous lovers? Invite members of the congregation to imagine it as any of these, and encourage them to write their own love poetry that expresses love as they experience it. Give permission for them to write playfully and joyfully, reflecting the playful joy found in the Song of Songs.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Setting

We are a people of community. We are also a people who seek God's guidance for how we are to live and what we are to do as we follow Jesus. In the Context and Mission Exploration of "Playing and Living Joyfully" we consider ways to practice faith in our community and world. Each category of activities—Exploring and Engaging, Discerning and Deciding, Sending and Serving—provides help for us to seek God's way joyfully as we celebrate through music, arts, and story in worship.

About this Exploration

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



BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

John 12:20–36

Luke 1:39–56

Leader Preparation

Read Luke 1:39–56 and John 12:20–36, focusing on what it means to live and to play joyfully.

What is it about worship that makes you want to leap for joy? What greeting can you give or receive that gives that “leap for joy” feeling? Have you ever been experiencing celebration in one moment and then confusion and anguish in the next? How is it possible to live and play joyfully in times like those? How will encouraging others to live authentic lives that include leaping for joy in celebration and confusion and anguish help you to experience living and playing joyfully?

Prayer: God who is with me when I leap for joy and also when I experience confusion and anguish, please fill my thoughts with joy and encourage me as I seek to encourage all in our worship experience. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

1 Welcome

Part of liturgy: Call to Worship

Leader preparation: Both of these calls to worship are conversational. They invite the congregation to enter worship in a playful manner. Print calls in the bulletin, or use another method to display words for the congregation.

Supplies:

- copies of the Calls to Worship for the congregation

From John 12:20–36:

One: Are you ready for your best life now?

Many: Absolutely! Where do we pick up our checks?

One: What? Your checks? No checks. Instead, I want you to give up the lives you’re living.

Many: Give it up? How is that about living our best life now?

One: The best life isn’t what the world has told you, but what Jesus gives.

Many: Are we supposed to do this joyfully, too?

One: You betcha!

All: All right then—let’s play! Your plan, O God, not ours.

From Luke 1:39–56:

One: Our souls glorify God.

Many: Our spirits rejoice in God.

One: God has done great things!

Many: Holy is God’s name!

One: This kind of sounds like Mary’s song from Luke!

Many: We were thinking that, too.

One: It’s part of today’s worship service.

All: Then let’s worship!

2 Prayers of Invocation

Part of liturgy: Prayers

Leader preparation: None needed

Supplies: None

God of glory and love, thank you for being with us in worship and celebration. When we are troubled, frightened, and confused, help us to keep our focus on Jesus. Help us to have childlike minds that joyfully follow Jesus through all seasons and times. Help us to live, to play, and to worship as people seeking you. We worship and praise your glory today. Amen.

When we came into this place of worship today, O God, some of us jumped for joy. Some of us squealed with excitement and others shared the widest smile and the warmest of handshakes. Some of us just showed up—not sure how we feel about being here today. In our time of worship, O God, fill us with your presence and help all gathered here to experience your joy and your blessings. Help our hearts to leap with joy. Amen.



③ Bo Diddley Magnificat (Or Mary's Song done Bo Diddley style)

Part of liturgy: Song

Leader preparation: Play the song “Bo Diddley” style with guitar or piano—encouraging the congregation to repeat each line.

(Listen to <http://www.tinyurl.com/38uefm5> for a sample of “Bo Diddley” style.) Print words in the bulletin or use another method to display words for the congregation.

Supplies:

- “To My God I Lift All Praise!” (Mary’s Song), words and music by Kirk Moore

To My God I Lift All Praise! (Mary’s Song)

To my God I lift all praise. *(echo)*
 Words of glory I will raise! *(echo)*
 God is mighty—Holy one! *(echo)*
 Great is all my God has done! *(echo)*
 Such mercy here for all who fear. *(echo)*
 God’s the one I hold so dear! *(echo)*
 To my God I lift all praise. *(echo)*
 Words of glory I will raise! *(echo)*
 Words of glory I will raise! *(echo)*
 To my God I lift all praise. *(echo)*
 To my God I lift all praise. *(echo)*

(© 1998 Kirk Moore. All rights reserved. Permission granted for inclusion in the “Worship, Music, Arts, and Story” setting Playing and Living and Joyfully faith practice.)

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ Spontaneous Melodrama

Part of liturgy: Drama

Leader preparation: Recruit several members of the congregation to act out the reading from Luke 1:39–56.

Supplies: None

Parts you’ll need:

- Mary
- Elizabeth
- door
- leaping child
- someone with a strong arm
- Abraham
- other parts to be played by the rest in the congregation

Encourage all the players to overact as they portray the action described in the readings. Some suggestions are included here. This shows the New Revised Standard Version; however, use a translation you prefer. Make this a memorable and playful Bible experience.



Luke 1:39–56

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, *(Mary runs around)* where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. *(Mary knocks on the door first.)*

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit *(Child leaps.)* and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. *(All can stand and look a little confused.)* And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. *(Child leaps.)*

And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; *(Congregation shouts “You are blessed!”)*

for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. *(Arm makes a muscle.)*

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” *(Abraham shows that the entire congregation is family.)*

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home. *(Mary leaves by the door.)*

5 Worship at the Festival

Part of liturgy: Sermon idea

Leader Preparation: Use these ideas to craft a sermon for John 12:20-36.

Supplies:

- Bible

Jesus had a pretty heavy message for his followers in this Bible reading. He shared some troubling things going on with him. A loud voice came from heaven, and Jesus offered words of comfort and hope. It’s hard to find something playful in the reading. Yet the whole scene was taking place while people were celebrating all around. Focus on the first verse: Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. Those who were celebrating still sought Jesus. The message Jesus shared was an important one. It ultimately offered hope and new life. How often do we remember to keep ourselves open to Jesus hope and new life when we’re having a fun time at a festival?

Encourage the congregation to think of times when they’ve been at a county fair, amusement park, vacation tourist stop, or someplace similar. Ask them if they’ve ever looked for, or seen a chapel or prayer area somewhere at that place. Share with them places you know that have chapels and areas where you’ve experi-



enced “thin places” or places where the boundary between heaven and earth seem thinner.

Encourage those gathered for worship to be aware of ways to experience God’s presence not only in church or in settings where it seems appropriate, but also in places you’d never expect or didn’t know were there.

6 Art

Part of liturgy: Art viewing and contemplation

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies:

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

Display the poster “Shotgun, Third Ward #1” by John Biggers for the congregation. Ask those gathered to reflect on one or more of the following:

- What is playful and joyful about this picture?
- What is dangerous about this picture?
- What about the painting troubles your soul?
- Where in the photo do you see hope in the midst of devastation?
- How do you experience the terms “light” and “dark” in this painting?
- How does this painting move you to live and play joyfully?

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Playful Prayers of Dedication

Part of liturgy: Prayer

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

From John 12:20–36:

Sometimes we give, God, because everyone else at the party is giving. Sometimes we give because we think that if we give up enough, you’ll give us riches beyond our wildest dreams. Sometimes we give because we want to feel better about how we’ve treated others horribly. We hope that these offerings will bring your hope and joy to others. We hope that we can learn to give because we are your children. Amen.

From Luke 1:39–56:

We’ve come here from all over to worship you, O God. We’ve leapt for joy and rejoiced as we have encountered your Holy Spirit, and we have given these tithes and offerings out of that joy. Please bless these gifts, that they would be used to share with others the joy we have in you. Amen.



8 Joyful, Joyful

Part of liturgy: Invitation to singing

Leader preparation: You can find the lyrics and tune for “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You/Thee” at <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>.

Supplies:

- words and music to the song “Joyful Joyful We Adore You/Thee” (tune: Ode to Joy), <http://www.tinyurl.com/FPSong10>
- a method to record answers to congregational descriptions of joy

Before the closing hymn, invite those gathered to offer descriptions of things that bring them joy. As they share the descriptions, write them for all to see. After several have been shared, invite the congregation to share facial expressions that go with the descriptions. Tell the congregation to sing the closing hymn while remembering the joyful descriptions—and while keeping the joyful expressions on their faces. Encourage all to sing, celebrate, and make a joyful noise to God.

9 Playful Benedictions

Part of liturgy: Benediction

Leader Preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

From John 12:20–36:

We’ve worshiped, O God, and now we’re ready to go back to our homes, to restaurants, and maybe even to a festival. Send us out as children of light, ready to share good news, joy, peace, new life, and love with all of your children everywhere. Amen.

From Luke 1:39–56:

We’ve been here awhile, and now we are getting ready to return to our homes. Send us out, O God, with spirits ready to leap for joy. Please send us from this place to lift up the lowly, feed the hungry, and share your love with all your children. Amen.

Following the Church Year

10 Whistler’s Mary

Part of liturgy: Song

Leader preparation: John 12:20–36 is a lectionary reading for Lent 5B. It is also a lectionary reading for Holy Week Tuesday ABC. Luke 1:39–56 is a lectionary reading for Advent 3A, 3B, 4B, and 4C. Print words in bulletins or use another method to display the song for the congregation

Try this playful rendition of the Magnificat—Mary’s Song. Sing it to the tune from the theme of the Andy Griffith Show.

My soul magnifies my God,
 My spirit rejoices in God,
 My soul magnifies my God,
 My spirit must rejoice.



Oh God has done great things,
Holy is God's name,
Yes God has done great things,
Holy is God's name.

My soul magnifies my God,
My spirit rejoices in God,
My soul magnifies my God,
My spirit must rejoice.

Playing and Living Joyfully



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Setting

Where are we headed? As we practice our faith we look ahead to where God is leading. We seek to move into the future with vision that is God-breathed. In the Future and Vision Exploration of “Playing and Living Joyfully,” we explore where God is leading and how we can practice our faith in ways that lead us to God’s vision of the future. Each category of activities—Exploring and Engaging, Discerning and Deciding, Sending and Serving—provides help for us to practice God’s way joyfully as we celebrate through music, arts, and story in worship.

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
Psalm 112

Exploring & Engaging Activities

Leader Preparation

Read Mark 16:1–8 and Psalm 112. As you read, focus on what it means to live and to play joyfully.

What is it about worship in your context that seems impossible? What terrifies you? What good news do you want to share, but are afraid of how people will react? What do you think it would look like for you to really delight in God’s commandments? How will encouraging others to delight in God’s commandments even when it seems impossible or terrifying help you to experience living and playing joyfully?

Prayer: God, who can accomplish the impossible, who can calm our fears, and who delights in the praise of your people, please lead me as I seek to share your vision with others. Fill my thoughts with joy and encourage me as I seek to encourage all on our worship experience together. Amen

1 Welcome

Part of liturgy: Congregational welcome

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

From Mark 16:1–8:

Invite someone to share these words, before someone else reads the Gospel reading: Today is a day to be joyful! But I wonder if it is also a day that we can look back and laugh a little. “You should have seen your face when you thought someone had taken my body! You ran away from that tomb like a hare running away from a fox!” It’s great to be able to look back on our life experiences and smile and laugh. Today I invite you to make a memory—not a memory of something that scared you once and now makes you smile, but one that brings you joy and in the future will make you smile, laugh, and celebrate.

From Psalm 112:

Welcome to today’s worship service. Today we’re exploring the faith practices of one who follows God. We’ll hear about wealth and blessings and we’ll probably think, “Yeah! I can really get into this!” But we’ll also discover God’s desire that we practice mercy, grace, generosity, justice, and care. We’ll also learn that when we practice those things, it makes some folks angry! Are you ready to do good? Are you ready to play and live joyfully? Let’s go!

2 Prayer of Invocation

Part of liturgy: Prayer

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

We’re here for a celebration, God, but we’re not sure where to begin. In some ways we feel as if we are skipping along on our way to discover that you’ve been raised. At the same time we wonder how we can roll away the stones that seem to keep us from seeing you. Help us, O God, to experience this morning’s worship celebration with the same anticipation we might have in getting together with a friend to play. Please help us to celebrate as if we were running and playing joyfully, even if we are feeling afraid. Please help us, O God, to experience the joy of the resurrection through every emotion we feel today. Amen.

3 Art

Part of liturgy: Art viewing and response

Leader preparation: Invite the congregation to celebrate the beginning of worship by viewing and reacting to art.

Supplies:

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

Display “Dancing ‘Til Dawn” by Marianne Millar for the congregation. Ask those gathered to reflect on one or more of the following:



- What is playful and joyful about this painting?
- What emotions do you see expressed in the painting?
- What are the people in the painting expecting?
- How could the sunrise affect the emotions of those in the painting? How does it affect you?
- Where do you see new life and resurrection in the painting?
- How does this painting move you to live and play joyfully?

Discerning & Deciding Activities

4 Responsive Bible Reading

Part of liturgy: Bible reading

Leader preparation: Print the responsive reading in the bulletin or use another method to display the words for the congregation.

Supplies:

- copies of the responsive reading for the congregation

Read Psalm 112 with the congregation, inserting a few reaction lines in the process. (Included here is the New Revised Standard Version. Feel free to substitute a preferred translation.)

One: Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments.

Many: Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

One: Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.

Many: They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.

One: It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice.

Many: For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever.

One: They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the LORD.

Many: Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

One: They will love God and love their neighbor as themselves.

Many: That part isn't in the psalm. Why did you say it?

One: Just to remind all of us not to get too wrapped up in winning—because that isn't what our faith is about. It is about loving.

Many: We knew that. But now you've distracted us. Can we get back to the reading?

One: Sure. But remember that loving God and one another isn't a distraction. It is what we are called to do.

Many: Fine. We're with you. What's next?

One: They have distributed freely, they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor.

Many: The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing.

One: And God loves everyone. No exceptions.

Many: We got it. Everyone!



5 They Were Afraid

Part of liturgy: Sermon idea

Leader preparation: Use these ideas for a sermon from Mark 16:1–8.

Supplies: None

Use these thoughts as pump primers to put together a joyful and perhaps even playful sermon for Easter or anytime you preach about this reading:

- The young man dressed in a white robe said, “Do not be alarmed.” However, the women who were at the tomb reacted by fleeing in terror and amazement: “they were afraid.”
- The Gospel of Mark, from the earliest and most reliable manuscripts, ends right there without any understanding of what has happened. There is no appearance of Jesus to the disciples, no ascension into heaven, no promise or great commission. It ends with fear. Other endings to Mark, from later manuscripts, wrap up things a little better: Jesus appears to many, commissions the disciples, and then ascends into heaven. It follows the other three gospels more closely. But this ending—this ending without closure—reflects well what the earliest followers of Jesus spoke of and wrote down. They didn't know what really had happened, and they didn't know what any of it meant. Yet they still followed Jesus.
- Following Jesus is not about knowing all the details or understanding the resurrection completely or even at all. It's about the life Jesus offers. It's about the two greatest commandments. It's about loving God with all that we are and loving our neighbor as ourselves.
- Jesus is risen! And whether we know that, get that, or even believe that, we are God's precious ones. Everyone is precious and loved by God—no exceptions.
- The instructions: Go and tell. The reaction: fleeing in fear.
- The story of God's people continues: God creates, we mess up; God revives, we mess up; God forgives, we mess up . . .
- It seems we never stop doing what we do. God never stops what God does.

6 Acting

Part of liturgy: Children's sermon idea

Leader preparation: Use these ideas for a children's sermon from Psalm 112.

Supplies: None

Gather the children near the front of the worship area. Tell them you'd like to describe some things to do that God likes. Ask them to show you and the entire congregation what that looks like. If children have difficulty showing what the things look like, offer suggestions similar to the ones described in parentheses.

- delighting in God's commandments (big, determined smile)
- being merciful (giving someone a hug or pat on the shoulder)
- being kind (giving someone a smile and a “thumbs up” signal)
- being good (helping to clean up toys)
- acting with justice (sharing something equally with all the children)
- not being afraid of bad news (holding hands with a friend and taking a deep breath)
- trusting God in everything (praying and reading the Bible)



- giving generously to people in need (taking off your coat and giving it to someone who doesn't have one)

After the children have reacted, offer the same things to the whole congregation and ask them to show what they look like.

Close with prayer.

Sending & Serving Activities

7 Playful prayers of dedication

Part of liturgy: Prayer

Leader preparation: Print prayers in the bulletin or use another method to display the words for the congregation.

Supplies:

- copies of the prayers for the congregations

From Mark 16:1–8:

We've brought our tithes and offerings today, God, and we wonder how they're going to go from these offering plates to serving you and serving all whom you love. Please show us your way and help us to follow your way and to take these gifts and use them to share your mercy, hope, compassion, and love with all. Amen.

From Psalm 112:

We've been called to give. We've responded. As we joyfully give today we ask that you would multiply these tithes and offerings so that they would be used to help those who are in need. We ask that you would bless these gifts, bless your people, and shower all with your grace, your mercy, your justice, and your love. Amen.

8 Joyful Benedictions

Part of liturgy: Benediction

Leader preparation: None needed.

Supplies: None

We're leaving here. We're fleeing from this place. We're not sure if we're amazed at the joy of Christ's resurrection, or if we're terrified about it. Send us out, O God, as a people who seek to share your love and your joy when we are amazed and terrified. Send us out to run playfully as your children. Amen.

We've seen what it looks like to delight in your commandments: to be merciful, kind, and good; to act with justice; not to fear bad news; to act with justice; to trust you; and to give generously to people in need. Send us out remembering and celebrating. Send us out with your joy. Amen.

9 Stay for the Postlude or Post-service Music Event

Part of liturgy: Music listening and reaction

Leader preparation: Recruit several creative people from all ages to participate in this playful experience. Invite them to develop motions or dance moves that will go with a preplanned postlude. Encourage them to develop moves that the entire congregation can follow.



Supplies: None

Use this idea to encourage folks to stay, listen, and participate with the post-service music by making it joyful and fun instead of an obligation or punishment. Before the benediction, tell the congregation that instead of leaving the worship service right away, you're going to have several folks from the congregation come up and direct them in motions or simple dance moves that help them to fully experience the music being played. Participate yourself as well!

Following the Church Year

10 Backward Worship Service.

Part of liturgy: Worship service

Leader preparation: Mark 16:1–8 is a lectionary reading for Easter Day B and Easter Vigil ABC. Psalm 112 is a lectionary reading for Epiphany 5A and Proper 17C/ Ordinary 22C.

Supplies:

- bulletins with the order of worship displayed in reverse order

A playful and joyful worship service sometimes grows from a change in perspective. As Christ's resurrection changed the direction for the disciples, so this backward worship service can offer a new perspective on the new life we have in Jesus. Reverse the order of your typical worship service, or follow this reverse template.

- Post-service music
- Benediction
- Closing song
- Prayer of dedication
- Doxology
- Offering
- Prayer of Our Savior
- Pastoral prayer
- Silent prayers
- Joys and Concerns
- Song
- Sermon
- Bible Reading
- Children's Sermon
- Announcements
- Gloria
- Invocation
- Song
- Call to Worship
- Praise Song/Introit
- Greeting
- Welcome

Copyright ©2010 The Pilgrim Press. Permission is granted for use by a single congregation for one (1) year from the purchase date of the subscription. No part of this download may be reproduced or transmitted—beyond the group using these materials—in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without the written permission from the publisher.

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?

Copyright ©2010 The Pilgrim Press. Permission is granted for use by a single congregation for one (1) year from the purchase date of the subscription. No part of this download may be reproduced or transmitted—beyond the group using these materials—in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without the written permission from the publisher.



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! —

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.

From *Sing! Prayer and Praise*®, Copyright ©2009, The Pilgrim Press.
Words and Music: JoEllen Miller, Copyright ©2007. All rights reserved. Used by permission.