

# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

Young children experience being called each day. They are called from play time to meal time and from the latest video game to homework. The call might be initiated by parents, caregivers, teachers, peers, or God. Children are growing in their ability to listen, understand, and respond to a variety of calls. Sometimes, children may become distracted and fail to answer one or more of these calls. The text from Ezekiel is a reminder that persons of all ages are called, sent, and supported by God as they use their gifts with others. The letter to the Corinthians gives thanks for the gifts evident in the early Christian community. Paul reminds each person that God is the source of all gifts. Young children have an innate openness to God and to exploring their gifts. Each day is filled with new experiences. Home, day care, school, and other settings provide opportunities to explore their unique giftedness. Likes and dislikes, as well as skills and abilities, are revealed through these new experiences. As they grow, children recognize their gifts, learn to express gratitude for those gifts, and use their gifts to strengthen God's creation.

### About this Exploration

Throughout our whole lives we have the opportunity to discover our gifts of ministry. As we listen attentively to God's call and affirmation, identify our own passions, gifts, and skills, and participate in community where gifts are celebrated and shared, our gifts shape the unique ministry we have as we serve God and God's people. The process of discovery may involve prayer, community, scripture, nature, solitude, silence, and openness to the gentle nudging of the Spirit. We may be surprised by the Spirit, as well, and discover new and unexpected gifts along our journey.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**Ezekiel 2:1-5**  
**1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

**Leader Preparation**

Prepare an area in the space that reflects the holy and sacred. This “worship area” might include items that are visually interesting, as well as items that may be touched. Consider including art, faith symbols, and objects from nature.

“Grace to you and peace . . .,” as the writer of 1 Corinthians 1:4 thoughtfully states, as you discern how the activities in this Exploration will fit the interests, needs, and learning styles of your particular group. Read the texts from Ezekiel and 1 Corinthians. Consider how you have experienced God’s spirit drawing out your gifts and talents. Think about how your gifts have been nurtured in community. Reflect on particular skills that may be helpful when working with young children. Give thanks to God for the gifts you, and this particular group of children, will explore together.

*Prayer: Creator God, the gifts you give to your people are many and varied. I give thanks for the gifts these children bring to the group and for the opportunity to use my gifts in the midst of these children. May we listen carefully for your call and use our gifts in your world. Amen.*

**Gathering and Closing**

Young children are more comfortable with a consistent, predictable routine. The following gathering and closing are provided as options for leaders.

**Exploring & Engaging Activities**



**1 Acts of Ministry (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Create a list of actions, accomplished by children, that may be understood as ministry, such as setting the table, picking up toys, helping a friend with homework, drawing a picture, and walking a dog.

**Supplies:**

- prepared list of children’s actions

Gather the children and invite them to name an activity they enjoy. Tell the group that everyday activities are opportunities to use our talents and abilities in God’s world. Tell them that you will quietly name an action to a helper. The helper will show the action without using words. The group will guess the action. Continue to invite helpers to show actions until all have a turn to demonstrate. Children may be invited to act out their own ideas. Invite the group to “take a bow” or show their appreciation for one another by clapping their hands.

**2 A Gift—A Present**

**Leader preparation:** Look at your reflection in a small mirror or hand mirror and remember that you are one of God’s gifts. Surround the mirror with tissue paper and place in the box. Wrap the box with paper and secure with clear tape. Decorate the box with the ribbon and bow.

**Supplies:**

- prepared box wrapped with paper and decorated with ribbon and bow
- small hand mirror surrounded with tissue paper and placed in box

Gather the group around the wrapped box. Tell the group that inside the wrapped present is a gift. Pass the box to each child and invite him or her to carefully jiggle the box. Invite the children to guess what is in the box. Once everyone has guessed, unwrap the box. Create anticipation by unwrapping the box carefully and deliberately. Slowly lift the mirror out of the box and, one by one, invite the children to look at their reflection. As each child looks at the mirror, say to the child, “God gives the world gifts. You are a gift.” Invite the children to say together “I am a gift.”



**3 Sisters in the Wind**

**Leader preparation:** Spend time looking at the artwork “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard. What do you imagine about the two young girls in the picture? What call might they be answering? Read Ezekiel 2:1-5, and think about the importance of listening and responding to God’s call.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15626&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)

Invite the children to respond by touching an ear if they have experienced the following kind of call:

- A parent calls me when it’s time to eat.
- My friend calls me to come and play.
- My teacher calls my name at school.

## Gathering

Invite the children to form a circle. Teach the following response: “You are a gift of God!” Ask each child, one at a time, to say his or her name. The rest of the group will speak the response. Conclude by asking the children to echo these words: “We are gifts of God!”

## Closing

Tell the children that God hopes every person will bring light to the world as that person uses his or her gifts and abilities. Invite the children to hold up a pointer finger. Practice the phrases by asking the children to echo and then speak the words together.

This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

## Session Development

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

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

Ask the participants to name other times they are called. Show the group “Sisters in the Wind” by Ethan Hubbard, and invite the children to tell you what they see. Invite them to use their imaginations as you ask them the following questions.

- What might the sisters be doing?
- Imagine the girls are being called. Who might be calling them?
- How might they answer?

Tell the children that when we are called it is important to listen and answer. Ask the children to suggest ways of answering a call. One at a time, call the children and say, “[Name], listen and answer the call.” Encourage the children to answer the call in their own words. Close with a prayer of thanks for those who call, those who listen, and those who answer.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Listening Game (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on the words of Ezekiel 2:5 and consider times you have struggled to hear an important message. Think about the challenges of verbal communication. Careful listening takes practice! Brainstorm several simple sentences, such as “I like to sing,” “I have fun playing soccer,” and “I run with my dog.”

**Supplies:** None

Gather the children in a circle. Explain that the group will play a game involving whispered messages. Messages will be passed from one person to another around the circle. The last participant will say the message out loud. The person beginning the message will then state the original phrase. Remind them to whisper the message just to the person next to them. Begin the game with one of the brainstormed sentences. Enjoy the silliness created when messages received are not necessarily messages sent. Invite volunteers from the group to begin a message. Alter the game by speaking the message out loud and pass the message in that way. Invite the children to talk about the game using the following questions.

- What was helpful when delivering the message?
- What was important when receiving the message?
- What got in the way of passing on the message?
- What can we do to be better listeners?”

Tell the children that God invites us to listen carefully to God’s call. Speak out loud and pass one more message around the circle: “If you have ears, pay attention!”

### 5 Animals, Books, and Balls

**Leader preparation:** Gather a variety of children’s books, stuffed animals, and balls. Provide enough of each group of items so that everyone has an object if they choose that group. Think about your likes and dislikes, such as sports or styles of music, and how they may be the basis for some of your gifts and talents. Display each group of objects in a different area of the meeting space.

**Supplies:**

- variety of children's books
- variety of stuffed animals
- variety of balls

Show the group the collections of objects. Invite the children to choose one of the groups of objects and move to those objects. Once the children have chosen a group, invite them to choose at least one of the items, or more if there are enough available. Allow a couple of minutes for children to make their selections. Call the group back together and invite the children to show their selections and describe the reasons for their choices. Tell the group that people may like different kinds of objects and activities. God invites us to explore our likes and dislikes. God calls us to discover our unique gifts. Give thanks for chances to explore and discover our gifts.

**6 I Like...Collage**

**Leader preparation:** Cut out a variety of magazine pictures showing activities, foods, animals, and people. Have enough pictures so each child may choose several pictures of things he or she likes.

**Supplies:**

- large piece of mural paper or several pieces of newsprint taped together
- 8½" × 11" white paper for each child
- prepared magazine pictures
- glue sticks
- crayons

Distribute the white paper, and show the children the magazine pictures you prepared. Encourage the children to choose several pictures of things they like. Once the children complete their selections, have them glue the pictures on the paper. Encourage each child to write his or her name or draw a picture of his- or herself on the paper for identification. Invite each child to tell about his or her choices. Tell the children that things we like and enjoy can help us discover our gifts, talents, and abilities. Create a group collage by attaching all the pictures to the large piece of mural paper. Display in an area where others in the community may view.

**Sending & Serving Activities**



**7 Give Thanks (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Think about each child in this group and give thanks for his or her gifts. Consider using a translation or paraphrase of the Bible, such as the *Contemporary English Version* or *The Message* when reading scripture with preschool and primary-age children. Practice a simple gesture to express thanks, such as hands pressed together or one hand moving away from the lips.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Read 1 Corinthians 1:4 to the group. Mention to the children that the writer of this letter is thankful for people and their gifts. Explain that we, too, can give thanks to God for our gifts. Invite the children to name talents, skills, and abilities for which they are thankful. List the responses on newsprint or a whiteboard. Demonstrate the simple gesture expressing thanks to the group, and invite them to copy the movement. Tell the children that you will read an item from the list

and the group will give thanks for that gift by showing the movement. Once all the listed items have been read and thanks expressed, invite the children to echo “I give thanks to God always for you,” followed by the gesture.

### 8 I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

**Leader preparation:** Become familiar with the words and tune of “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (tune: I’m Gonna Live). Depending on your comfort level with music, you may choose to read the words to the group, invite a volunteer to assist in singing or playing the tune on an instrument, or lead the song yourself.

**Supplies:**

- song: “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me,” African American spiritual (tune: I’m Gonna Live), [http://www.hymnary.org/text/im\\_gonna\\_live\\_so\\_god\\_can\\_use\\_me?tab=about](http://www.hymnary.org/text/im_gonna_live_so_god_can_use_me?tab=about)
- computer with Internet access

Tell the group that God gives each of us gifts, like the ability to sing or pray. We use our gifts in our everyday lives. God’s world is strengthened when we use our gifts. Teach the children the words to the first verse of the song by saying a phrase and encouraging the children to echo the phrase. Invite the children to suggest a physical movement to express the word “live.” Invite them to sing or speak the words of the first verse using the suggested action with you. Ask the children to suggest other physical movements to express the words “work,” “pray,” and “sing.” Invite them to sing or speak each verse using the suggested movements with you. Ask participants to name additional abilities God can use. Create additional verses for the song with the suggestions. Conclude by singing or speaking the first verse of the song with movement one more time.

### 9 Seeking Gifts

**Leader preparation:** Gather a number of items that represent everyday activities, such as a ball, musical instrument, toy, paintbrush, board game, and book. Make sure that you have as many items as participants. Hide the items around the space.

**Supplies:**

- items, such as a balls, musical instruments, toys, paintbrushes, board games, books, and so forth; at least one item for each child

Gather the children in a circle. Explain that a blessing is something good, and it Tell the group that there are hidden items in the space that need help to be found. These items are reminders that everyday activities are an opportunity to use our gifts in God’s world. Encourage the participants to search the space. Ask the children to return with a single item so that everyone can participate. Once the items have been found, teach the participants the following response: “God sends us out to use our gifts.” One by one, ask the children to name the item and invite the group to say response. Offer the opportunity for volunteers to take turns hiding the items. Each time all the items are found, say the response phrase together as a group. Conclude by placing the items together and asking the participants to create a circle around the items. Say the response to bless both the gifts and participants.

**Reflect**

How are the children responding to opportunities to explore their abilities as gifts? What gifts are being revealed in your group? What activities generated excitement within the group? What might be adjusted before the next gathering? Celebrate gifts that are obvious and gifts that are yet to be discovered.

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# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

The lines between reality and dreams are often interchangeable in the vivid imaginations of children. In the text from 1 Kings, the young Solomon expresses great love for and trust in God and then experiences a significant dream. Solomon is growing in an understanding of how to make choices. Often, children learn about their abilities and skills by trial and error. Solomon carefully asks God to give him an understanding mind. Young children are growing in their ability to make careful choices about their unique gifts and talents.

Because young children have short attention spans, they often move readily from one activity to another. When a trustworthy adult calls a child to leave a familiar activity and join a new experience, most children will respond. Depending on the age of the child, leaving behind the safety and comfort of family may result in emotional challenges. Jesus calls to a group busy fishing. The story indicates those called follow immediately. They leave behind the familiar, travel using their existing gifts and skills and explore new opportunities. Young children can be encouraged to leave familiar surroundings and try out new skills, abilities, and talents.

### About this Exploration

Scripture provides many examples of people discovering God-given talents that help them not only in their own lives but also in ministering to or caring for others. As Solomon discovered, gifts such as knowledge and a discerning mind are to be valued more highly than riches, long life, or power. Scripture, along with the community, inspires and affirms people in recognizing the different gifts they possess. Gifts of ministry allow people to play important roles in this world, in faith-related settings as well as in homes, workplaces, schools, and places of recreation.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**1 Kings 3:3-15**

**Mark 1:14-20**

**Leader Preparation**

Consider having a variety of children’s books available in the space. Include some picture books and a Children’s Bible or Bible Storybook for children who arrive early, stay longer, or might need a “break.”

Close your eyes and remember a dream that had significant impact on your waking reality. What images or ideas from the dream do you recall? How did your life change as a result of the dream?

Open your eyes and read the text from 1 Kings. Give thanks for this story of a young person blessed with discernment. Close your eyes a second time and recollect a time when you were called from one activity to a new experience. Did you go willingly? What did you leave behind? What abilities or talents were revealed through the new experience?

Open your eyes and read the text from Mark. Give thanks for this story showing openness to new experiences and the discovery of new talents.

*Prayer: Loving God, you invite each and every person to thoughtfully consider the use of their gifts. Be with us as we cherish the familiar and give us courage to explore new possibilities. Celebrate with us as we make the most of our abilities. Amen.*

**Exploring & Engaging Activities**



**1 Follow the Leader (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** If unfamiliar with “Follow the Leader,” you may wish to do an Internet search for the game. Be aware that young children may need ideas for actions. Think back to the times as a child when you participated in a game of “Follow the Leader.” What do you recall about your experiences as the leader and as a follower?

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read Mark 1:16–20 out loud. Tell the group that Jesus called people who were fishing, and asked them to follow him. Those fishing answered the call and immediately followed Jesus. Invite the children to wonder how leaders and followers use their talents. Teach this simple chant: “We’re following the leader, the leader, the leader. We’re following the leader, wherever they may go.” Explain the game “Follow the Leader” to the participants. Explain that everyone will have the chance to be both a leader and a follower.

Begin the game as the leader and encourage the group to say or sing the chant. Show a simple action that the participants can mimic. Once everyone has demonstrated the action, choose a new leader to show another action. Continue vocalizing the phrase and showing actions until everyone leads the group or the group tires of the game. Invite the group to gather in a circle and give thanks for the gifts shown by leaders and followers.



**2 Solomon’s story**

**Leader preparation:** Review the retelling of the story of Solomon from 1 Kings using the attachment. Reflect on how you use your gifts and abilities as a leader.

**Supplies:**

- “The Story of Solomon,” Attachment: Activity 2

Gather the participants in a comfortable area to tell the story. Tell the children that the story is about a young man who wanted to use his skills and abilities to be a good leader for the people. Explain to the children that as the story is told, they will be invited to participate. Tell “The Story of Solomon” from the attachment. Remind the children that Solomon talked to God and made a thoughtful and careful choice about his abilities. Tell the participants that we can talk to God about our skills and gifts. Ask the children to close their eyes and prayerfully think about their talents. Say to the group: *God has given you gifts. May you make wise choices as you use your gifts thoughtfully and carefully in God’s world.* Ask the children to open their eyes and say together, *Amen.*



**3 Fill the Net**

**Leader preparation:** Read the text from Mark. Obtain a fish net. Make a copy the fish pattern for each child so that everyone may decorate two fish. Have extra copies of the fish attachment available so children may decorate more fish. Display the fish net on a wall or bulletin board. Younger children may need assistance cutting out fish.

## Gathering and Closing

Young children are more comfortable with a consistent, predictable routine. The following gathering and closing are provided as options for leaders.

### Gathering

Invite the children to form a circle. Teach the following response: “You are a gift of God!” Ask each child, one at a time, to say his or her name. The rest of the group will speak the response. Conclude by asking the children to echo these words: “We are gifts of God!”

### Closing

Tell the children that God hopes every person will bring light to the world as that person uses his or her gifts and abilities. Invite the children to hold up a pointer finger. Practice the phrases by asking the children to echo and then speak the words together.

This little light of mine,  
 I’m gonna let it shine.  
 This little light of mine,  
 I’m gonna let it shine.  
 This little light of mine,  
 I’m gonna let it shine,  
 Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

### Supplies:

- fish net
- “Fish Pattern,” Attachment: Activity 3 (at least one per child with extra copies available)
- scissors
- markers or crayons
- clear tape, staples or mounting putty

Gather the children around the fish net. Explain to the group that Jesus was traveling along the Sea of Galilee and saw people fishing. Jesus called to them, asked them to follow, and they did. Tell the children that Jesus invites everyone to follow and use their skills and abilities in God’s world. A person’s gifts, like fish, are many and unique. Show the participants the fish and invite them to write or draw pictures of their gifts or talents on the fish. Participants may decorate two or more fish. Attach the fish to the net. Invite the children to touch one of their decorated fish and echo this sentence: “My gifts are many and I use them in God’s world.”

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Often, Sometimes, Hardly Ever (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read the text from 1 Kings. Create a list of skills, abilities or talents appropriate to the ages represented in your group of children, such as singing, giving hugs, reading, drawing, listening, and being a friend. Make three signs with words on colored paper:

### Supplies:

- green paper—“Often”
- yellow paper—“Sometimes”
- red paper—“Hardly ever”

Place each sign in a separate area in your space.

### Supplies:

- prepared list of abilities
- prepared red, green and yellow paper

Scripture reminds us that God gives people gifts and abilities. God gave a young man named Solomon a choice about his gifts, and he carefully chose understanding and wisdom. Tell the children that each person has different gifts and abilities and uses them in different ways. Show the children the three signs on colored paper, and read the words on each sign out loud. Tell the participants that you will name a skill, talent, gift or ability. Each person will decide how often they use that ability—often (green), sometimes (yellow) or hardly ever (red)—and then move close to that sign. Read an ability from the list, and encourage the children to move to one of the three signs. Continue the process by naming additional skills and abilities. Offer the chance for participants to name additional abilities. Invite the group to gather in a circle, and say a prayer of thanks for gifts and abilities.

### 5 Drawing Dreams

**Leader preparation:** Read the story of Solomon’s dream from 1 Kings. Gather a variety of art supplies. For young children, art is a process and is not necessarily about the final product. Because creativity can be messy, a table cover may facilitate cleanup.

## Session Development

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

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

### Supplies:

- table cover
- variety of art supplies such as construction paper, scissors, crayons, markers, glue, glitter, and tissue paper

Tell the children that there are stories in the Bible about dreams. Invite the children to close their eyes and slowly inhale and exhale. Encourage the children to imagine they are asleep. Say:

Sometimes when we sleep, we dream. Once a young person named Solomon had a dream. God talked to Solomon and told Solomon he could choose any ability or talent. Solomon asked God for wisdom and understanding. God was pleased with Solomon’s choice. When Solomon woke up, he used his gifts to help God’s people. (*Invite the children to open their eyes.*) Like Solomon, we can dream of ways to use our gifts to help others.

Show the children the art supplies and encourage the children to create a “dream drawing” showing a talent they would like to use to help others. Once the pictures are created, invite the children to talk about their work. Display the art work where others in the community may view.



### 6 The Banjo Lesson

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on the figures in the artwork “The Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner. Remember a significant adult who helped you explore a gift or talent. Give thanks for guides, mentors and teachers. Consider Jesus’ role as a mentor and leader as described in the text from Mark.

### Supplies:

- artwork: “The Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner, <http://www.art.com/products/p10286254-sa-i677605/henry-ossawa-tanner-the-banjo-lesson.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6ce32fa19f9d47aaa58758970c9f0162&searchstring=banjo+lesson>
- paper
- markers or crayons

Invite the children to gather around “The Banjo Lesson” by Henry Ossawa Tanner and to tell you what they see. Ask them to talk about the artwork using the following questions.

- What abilities are shown in the picture?
- How might the man and child be related?
- What does the picture show us about skills, gifts and talents?
- How do you feel when you look at this picture?

Tell the participants that Jesus encouraged the gifts and talents of the fisher folk and taught them how to fish for people. Invite the children to name an adult who has encouraged their skills, gifts, or talents such as a parent, teacher or coach. Provide paper and markers or crayons and ask the children to draw a picture of a “lesson” they experienced with that adult. Display the pictures where the community may view.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 God Is Calling You To . . . (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Become familiar with the game instructions in the activity. As the game continues, remind the children to give everyone a turn as leader.

**Supplies:** None

Gather the children in a shoulder to shoulder line at one end of the space. Face the children, with approximately 10–12 feet of open space between you and the line of children. Tell the children that God called Solomon to use his abilities to lead God’s people. God calls us to use our gifts at school, home, and with friends and neighbors. Have the group practice the phrase “God is calling you to . . .” Explain that the leader will complete the sentence with a skill, talent, gift or ability that persons in the group might like, such as drawing, reading, or swimming. The participants who enjoy that ability or gift will move forward toward the leader. Each leader will say the phrase three times, naming three different abilities, and then choose a new leader.

Begin the game as the leader, modeling the phrase and naming gifts. Continue playing the game until everyone has the opportunity to name gifts, or the group tires of the game. Close with a unison affirmation, such as: *God calls us to use our gifts!*

**8 The Summons**

**Leader preparation:** Familiarize yourself with the song “The Summons.” Listen to the tune and write the following words to the first verse of the song on newsprint.

Will you come and follow me  
 If I but call your name?  
 Will you go where you don’t know  
 And never be the same?  
 Will you let my love be shown,  
 Will you let my name be known,  
 Will you let my life be grown  
 In you and you in me?

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- song: “The Summons” by John Bell (tune: Kelvingrove); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0aAkOe87mo&feature=related>
- prepared newsprint with first verse of “The Summons”

Tell the children that Jesus called people from fishing and asked them to follow him. Songs can help us remember stories and ideas from the Bible. The song “The Summons” reminds us that we are called to use our gifts and show Jesus’ love to all people. Tell the group that several words are repeated in the song. As the video plays, encourage the children to listen for those repeated words. Watch and listen to “The Summons.” Together, identify words like “call”, “follow”, “name”, and “love” that are repeated. Tell the children that these words help us remember our call to use our gifts. Read the first verse and ask the children to echo the phrases. Invite the children to sing the first verse with the video. Bless the children with these words: *Jesus calls us by name. We will follow Jesus’ way and show love.*



**9 Going Fishing**

**Leader preparation:** Read the text from Mark. Consider ways that words from scripture guide your sense of call. Cut ten fish from construction paper using the pattern. Write the following numbers and words on one side of each fish: 1. follow; 2. me; 3. and; 4. I; 5. will; 6. make; 7. you; 8. fish; 9. for; and 10. people.

Leave the other side of the fish blank. (Numbers in combination with the words will help as the children arrange the “fish phrase” in order.)

Cut additional fish, one for each child. Write the words “Follow me” on one side of the fish. Leave the other side of the fish blank. Create a “pond” for the fish using the blue fabric, and place the fish with numbers and words on the pond so that the blank sides are face up. (The process of catching and arranging fish could be repeated as there is interest.)

### Supplies:

- construction paper
- “Fish Pattern,” Attachment: Activity 3 (cut 10 fish for “fish phrase,” plus one prepared fish for each child to decorate)
- blue fabric
- markers or crayons

Invite the children to gather around the pond. Tell the children that Jesus saw a group fishing one day and called to them. Encourage the children to take turns choosing a fish, until all the fish have been “caught.” Ask the children to turn the fish so that the words are face up. Work with the children to arrange the fish in order, and then read the phrase to the group. Invite the children to echo the words. Mention to the children that words from the Bible can help us remember to follow Jesus’ way. Place these fish back on the pond, face up. Distribute a fish with the words “Follow me” to each child, and encourage them to decorate.

Gather around the pond. One by one, invite the children to show their fish. Encourage the group to say, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Invite the children to take home the fish as a reminder to follow Jesus’ way.

## Reflect

In what ways did the stories of Solomon’s choice and Jesus’ call invite the children to name and explore their gifts? What new or unexpected gifts and talents have emerged in the group? What choices did you make as a leader that supported the abilities of this group? Give thanks for stories of faith that encourage us to use our gifts.

Attachment: Activity 2

## The Story of Solomon

Solomon was the son of David, and he became the leader of Israel. This leader loved God and went to a holy place to give offerings to God. Solomon was at the holy place and fell asleep.

*Pause and ask the children to show "sleeping."*

Then Solomon had an important dream. In the dream, God appeared to Solomon. God wanted Solomon to use his skills and abilities to be a faithful leader. So God asked a question: "Solomon, ask for anything you want and I will give it to you."

*Pause and ask the children to name the skills Solomon might want.*

After thinking for awhile (*pause and ask the children to show "thinking"*) Solomon answered, "God, you know that I am young and haven't been a leader very long. I ask you to make me wise and help me know right from wrong. Then I will be able to lead your people."

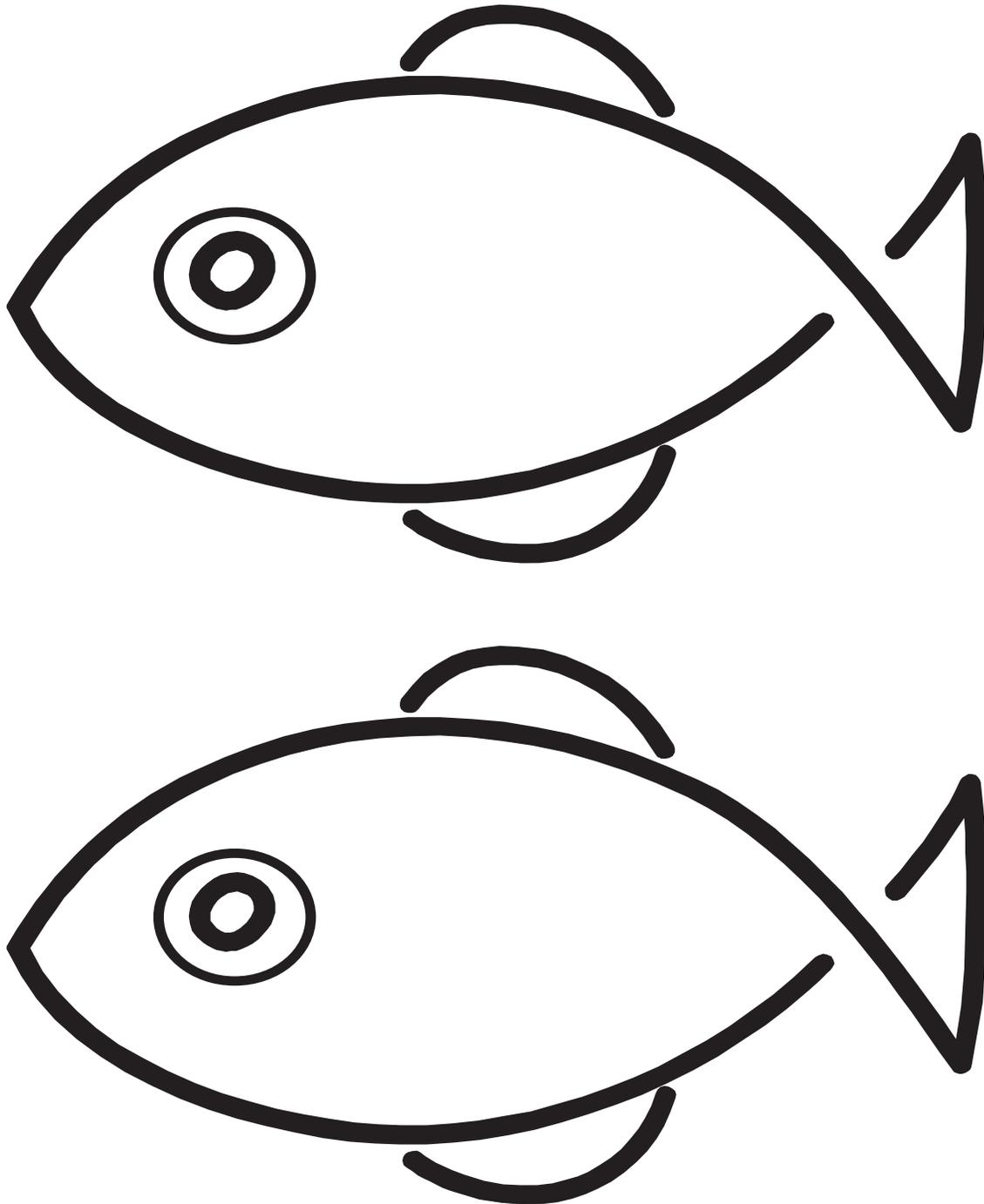
*Pause and ask the children how wisdom might help a leader.*

God said, "I'm pleased you asked for this instead of riches or long life. I will give you understanding and the ability to make wise decisions." Solomon was grateful to God.

*End by asking the children to show "thanking."*

Attachment: Activity 3

# Fish Pattern



# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

The experience of being known is central to human self-understanding. As young children experience loving relationships with significant adults, they grow in their understanding of God as loving and caring. The text from Jeremiah is a reminder that each person is completely known by God. Gifts, talents, abilities, and even individual faults and bad habits are known to God. Preschool and primary children sometimes make mistakes and can turn back and try again. It is comforting to know that a loving, caring God will be close even when the discovery of gifts creates challenges.

In the Matthew text, Jesus interacts with persons who were on the fringe of society, including a tax collector and a hemorrhaging woman. These stories are reminders that Jesus' call to ministry is open to all. Young children sometimes experience feeling left out or excluded. Those experiences may be the result of developing social skills, differing abilities, or individual choices. Jesus' message to follow, explore, and use unique gifts is for everyone.

### About this Exploration

Jesus extends the invitation to "come, follow me." We are asked to trust that our gifts, talents, and interests may be used by God for the ministry that is before us. We are not asked first to learn more or begin afresh in order to be noticed by Jesus, but rather to hear the Spirit's call and come just as we are. Through this invitation we are encouraged to place our confidence in God, who is able to work through our open hands and hearts that are offered to the church, community, and world. If we have doubts about our abilities or qualifications, we can be encouraged by the countless Biblical stories that remind us that God always chooses and uses the "least of these." Come, let's follow!

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Jeremiah 15:15-21**  
**Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26**

## Leader Preparation

Consider ways to affirm each child in your group. Create a climate where everyone is treated with love and respect. Show that everyone is included in God's family!

Reflect on the ways your gifts and abilities have changed over the years. Think back to your childhood and recall a gift or ability that particularly identified you.

- How do you make use of that ability now?
- What difficulties or tensions do you experience when drawing on your abilities or skills?

Sometimes using our gifts can be challenging. Read the text from Jeremiah and savor the message that God knows you completely. Perhaps your gifts and talents have led to times when you've felt excluded. Read the text from Matthew and be reminded that the call to discover gifts of ministry is for everyone.

*Prayer: God, you know all your children wholly and completely. You are close as I prepare to lead this group of children. Help me remember that mistakes are also opportunities to learn. Remind me that your call to ministry means no one is excluded. May each of your children answer your call faithfully. Amen.*

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 All Gifts Welcome Banner (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Write the words "All Gifts Welcome" on the piece of mural paper. In your mind, picture each of the children in your group. Give thanks for the gifts of each child.

**Supplies:**

- prepared mural paper with heading "All Gifts Welcome"
- markers or crayons

Gather the children in a circle. Explain that Jesus called all kinds of people to use all kinds of gifts and abilities. Practice the following phrase with the children, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I bring the gift of \_\_\_\_\_ to God's world." Model the phrase using your name and one of your gifts. One by one, invite the children to speak the phrase saying a name and a gift, talent, skill or ability. Acknowledge and affirm the variety of gifts named by the children. Show the children the mural paper, and read the printed words out loud. Invite the children to use the markers or crayons to write words and draw pictures of gifts, talents, or abilities they offer to God's world. Offer children the opportunity to talk about their work. Display the banner where others in the community may view.

### 2 All God's Critters

**Leader preparation:** Think about the Matthew 9 text and the inclusive way Jesus calls all to use their gifts. Watch the video "Makem & Clancy: A Place in the Choir" with the Bill Staines song "All God's Creatures Got a Place in the Choir"

**Supplies:**

- computer with Internet access
- digital projector
- video: "Makem & Clancy: A Place in the Choir," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NcG1JNpazN4>
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Tell the participants that every part of God's creation contributes gifts to God's world. All are included. The song "All God's Creatures Got a Place in the Choir" celebrates the gifts that animals add to God's world. Invite the children to view the video. Ask the children to name the animals shown. List responses on newsprint or a whiteboard, leaving space next to each animal's name. Once the animals have been listed, ask the children to name skills or abilities that each animal gives to God's world, such as birds sing. When the list is complete, play the video again, encouraging the children to use the gift of their hands to clap with the song.

### 3 On the Island

**Leader preparation:** Read the text from Matthew 9, and remember that Jesus' call to ministry includes everyone. Reflect on the ways inclusivity and cooperation are gifts of ministry. Consider using a translation or paraphrase of the Bible such as the *Contemporary English Version* or *The Message* with preschool or primary-school children. Using masking tape or chalk, outline a large square "island" on the floor of the space. The "island" will need to become smaller for each round of the game. Become familiar with the game instructions in the activity.

## Gathering and Closing

Young children are more comfortable with a consistent, predictable routine. The following gathering and closing are provided as options for leaders.

### Gathering

Invite the children to form a circle. Teach the following response: “You are a gift of God!” Ask each child, one at a time, to say his or her name. The rest of the group will speak the response. Conclude by asking the children to echo these words: “We are gifts of God!”

### Closing

Tell the children that God hopes every person will bring light to the world as that person uses his or her gifts and abilities. Invite the children to hold up a pointer finger. Practice the phrases by asking the children to echo and then speak the words together.

This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

## Session Development

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

### Supplies:

- Bible
- music player
- musical recording of lively music, such as “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me,” African American spiritual (tune: I’m Gonna Live), [http://www.hymnary.org/text/im\\_gonna\\_live\\_so\\_god\\_can\\_use\\_me?tab=about](http://www.hymnary.org/text/im_gonna_live_so_god_can_use_me?tab=about)
- masking tape or chalk

Call the group to the “island.” Read Matthew 9:9–13 to the participants. Explain that Jesus called a tax collector to follow him. Tax collectors were not accepted by everyone. The story reminds us that everyone has gifts and abilities and can follow Jesus’ way. Explain to the participants that the large square is a safe “island.” Around the island is a sea. When the music plays, it is safe to swim in the water. When the music stops, it means the tide has changed, it is no longer safe to swim and everyone must find a place on the island. Play the music and invite the children to “swim” around the island. Stop the music and encourage the children to gather on the island. Before beginning the music again, decrease the size of the island. As the island becomes smaller, the children will need to cooperate to make sure everyone is safe. Gather on the island and say, *Everyone is included. No one is left out!*

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Turn Back (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read the text from Jeremiah and think about a time when an ability required extra effort, practice, and even “turning back” and trying again. Create a list of talents, skills, and abilities that a child might find challenging or requiring practice, such as playing a musical instrument, including piano, violin, or flute; playing a sport, including soccer, basketball, or tennis; and doing house chores, including making the bed, setting the table, or taking out the trash. Write the words “Growing Gifts” on the green paper and “Try Again” on the blue paper. Display the blue sign on one end of the space and the green sign at the other end.

### Supplies:

- prepared list of challenging talents, skills, and abilities situations
- prepared blue and green paper

Gather the group in a shoulder-to-shoulder line, backs to the blue sign and facing the green sign. As leader, position yourself midway between the two signs and off to the side of the space. Tell the children that sometimes we must practice our skills and abilities. Some abilities take time and effort to learn. Sometimes we make mistakes and try again. Say: *God is always close, even when abilities take practice.* Tell the participants that you will read an ability that for some might take practice. Each participant will decide if the ability is something that he or she must practice. If it is, the participant will turn back and face the blue sign that says “Try Again.”

Invite the group to look at the green sign that says “Growing Gifts.” Read an ability, and pause for participants to make a decision. Offer the opportunity for those who turn back to talk about that choice. Ask everyone to face the green sign again. Continue reading gifts, pausing, and offering opportunities to explain. Close with a prayer of thanks for chances to turn back and try again.

church). Using all nine activities could take 90–120 minutes.

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



### 5 Farm Garden with Sunflowers

**Leader preparation:** Spend time looking at “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” (c. 1912) by Gustav Klimt. Read the text from Matthew 9, and remember that Jesus’ call to ministry includes all of creation. Celebrate the gifts of gardening and caring for God’s creation. Use an area in which you can be messy. Fill the flower pot with soil. Make plans to care for the flowers to assure their wellbeing and growth.

#### Supplies:

- artwork “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” by Gustav Klimt, <http://www.art.com/products/p15177883-sa-i3715775/gustav-klimt-farm-garden-with-sunflowers-c1912.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=klimt+farm+garden+with+sunflowers>
- potting soil
- flower seeds
- flower pot
- water in container

Invite the children to look at “Farm Garden with Sunflowers” by Gustav Klimt and tell you what they see. Encourage the children to name the colors used in the picture. Ask the children to look at the variety of flowers and choose one that they especially like. One at a time, invite the children to tell you about their choice. Tell the children that this garden is filled with unique flowers. Each flower contributes gifts to God’s world. Our world is filled with unique and special people. Each person contributes talents and abilities to God’s world.

Mention to the children that some people’s gifts are gardening or caring for God’s world. Invite the children to name ways to care for God’s world. Show the children the flower pot with soil. Distribute several flower seeds to each child. One by one, invite the children to plant seeds in the flower pot. As each seed is placed in the soil, ask the child to name something he or she does to care for God’s world. Water the seeds. Encourage the group to say, “Thanks be to God.”



### 6 Caring Acts

**Leader preparation:** Read the passage from Matthew 9. Consider the ways in which Jesus demonstrates care for others. Become familiar with the list of “caring actions” that children might perform. Cut apart the strips, fold each one, and place in a basket or other container. Add your own ideas in the blank strips. Some actions may be performed by individuals, some actions need a partner.

#### Supplies:

- “Caring Actions,” Attachment: Activity 6
- basket or other container
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Tell the group that caring for other people is a way of using our gifts and abilities. Jesus showed he cared about the tax collector by eating with him, even when others thought that was wrong. Everyone is called to use their gifts to show care for others. Tell the group that you will ask helpers to show a caring action to the rest of the group. Invite a volunteer to pantomime an action. Draw one of the slips from the basket or other container. Depending on the number of children in the group, you may need to repeat some of the actions. Once the caring act is complete, invite the “audience” to guess the action. Continue until all have the opportunity to show caring actions.

Ask the children to name a way they might use an ability, skill, or talent to show care, and record responses on newsprint or a whiteboard. One by one, read the ideas and encourage the children to celebrate each caring action by raising their hands in the air and twisting them, which is sign language for “Yay!” or “Hurrah!”

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Following feet (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Think about discipleship and the ways you use your gifts of ministry as a follower of Jesus. Trace both of your feet on a single piece of construction paper. If the size of the group is small, encourage the children to trace their feet on several pieces of paper and create a longer path.

**Supplies:**

- sample feet tracing
- construction paper
- markers or crayons
- masking tape

Tell the participants that Jesus calls us to use our skills, talents, and abilities as we follow Jesus’ way. Show the children the tracing of your feet. Invite each child to take a piece of construction paper and use a marker or crayon to trace both of their feet. Encourage the children to decorate the feet with words and drawings of their particular gifts and talents. Once the children complete their work, invite them to create a “path” using all of the feet drawings. Tape each set of feet to the floor. Teach the blessing: “[Name], follow Jesus’ way using your gifts.” Follow the footpath from beginning to end. Each time the group arrives at the next drawing, encourage the participants to say the blessing. Bless the children on their way: *Follow Jesus’ way, using your gifts.*

### 8 Healing Hands

**Leader preparation:** Read Matthew 9:18–26 and consider how you have experienced healing. Think about persons who have offered the gift of healing touch to you. Choose a translation or paraphrase of the Bible that will be easily understood by children. Consider that some children may be shy or uncomfortable receiving touch from others. Allow them to anoint their own hands. Pour lotion into the bowl. Place cotton balls in the basket. You may wish to play meditative music during the anointing process.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- cotton balls in a basket
- lotion poured in a bowl
- (optional) music and music player

Gather the participants in a circle. Read Matthew 9:18–26 to the group. Mention that even though some people considered women and children to be less important, Jesus healed them. Invite the children to reach out with their hands, palms down. Say: *Jesus calls us to reach out to other people.* Ask the children to turn their palms up. Say: *Jesus invites us to use our hands to help others.* Show the children the lotion and cotton balls. Teach the group the phrase “Hands help and heal.” Explain that each person will have the chance to give and receive a healing touch.

Demonstrate dipping the cotton ball into the lotion and rubbing lotion on your hand. Tell the children that each child may “pass” and choose to rub lotion on his or her own hand. Turn to a child next to you, say the phrase, and anoint a hand with lotion. Encourage the children to continue the process. Once everyone has participated, invite the children to say the phrase together one more time.



### 9 Care Kits

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on Matthew 9:18–26 and the way Jesus responded to both the woman and child and their particular needs. Contact organizations in your community that serve persons in need, such as a shelter for the homeless or those experiencing domestic violence, or a crisis nursery. Locate one or more that have need of personal care items such as soap, shampoo, lotion, hand sanitizer, and tissue. Collect basic information about the organization’s work. Make copies of the handout.

**Supplies:**

- “Personal Care Items,” Attachment: Activity 9
- samples of personal care items, such as soap, shampoo, lotion, hand sanitizer and tissue

Tell the children that Jesus used his gifts to help others. A parent asked Jesus to touch a child and make her well. A bleeding woman touched Jesus’ clothes so she would be healed. Jesus calls us to use our gifts to help others in need. Show the children the sample care items. Invite the participants to identify the items. Tell the children about the organization and the ways care items will help that organization’s work. Explain that each participant will have the opportunity to help others by bringing items to be given to the organization.

Distribute the handout, a copy for each child. Explain that the handout is a reminder with information about the organization, personal care items being collected, and the date of the collection. Tell the children that the handout should be given to a parent, grandparent, or adult caregiver. Gather around the sample care items, and invite each child to touch an item. *Say: Jesus calls us to help those in need.* Consider putting the handout information in the church bulletin or newsletter. You might distribute these at a fellowship gathering to involve the entire congregation in this discipleship outreach effort.

## Reflect

In what ways did you use your gifts and talents in this Exploration? In what ways did the children respond to the call to use their gifts and follow Jesus’ way? Think about your experiences with this group of children, and celebrate the variety of individuals and the gifts they bring to God’s world.

Attachment: Activity 6

## Caring Actions



Offering a band aid for an injury



Giving a high five for a success



Washing dishes



Assisting with homework



Giving a hug for support



Picking up litter



Offering a hand to someone who has fallen



Sharing a treat



Feeding a pet



Taking turns with a toy



**Attachment: Activity 9**

## **Personal Care Items**

**Date:**

**Dear Friend,**

**Our group \_\_\_\_\_, has decided to support  
the work of (name of organization) by providing the following care items:**

**Contributions are needed by \_\_\_\_\_.**

**Thanks for your support of this project.**

# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Names both identify and define persons of all ages. Young children are growing in their understanding of who they are as individuals and how they relate to others. For preschool and primary-school children, names can be sources of pride—and sometimes the basis for teasing. Children quickly learn the power and pain associated with language. The experience of being chosen is also familiar to children. A child might be chosen by a teacher as a special helper, chosen by a friend for a play date or chosen by a leader for a team. The passage from Isaiah provides the comforting message that God knows us, chooses us and calls us from the very beginning of life. Each person brings light to the world.

The world can be a distracting place for young children since it is filled with numerous activities, choices and opportunities. Because children are usually quite active, it can be challenging to focus on any one activity for a sustained period of time. Sitting and listening are skills which often require practice for young children. In addition, children enjoy being part of a group, so choosing different activities than their peers can be challenging. The story of the different choices and abilities offered by Mary and Martha affirm each person's unique and individual gifts.

### About this Exploration

Faithful Christian practices encourage a communal awareness that God calls, nurtures, and blesses the use of our gifts to strengthen God's work in the world. Our understanding of this partnership with God is always emerging. Traditional gifts, such as preaching, hospitality, music, and caring may be demonstrated in ways recognizable since ancient days. Christian tradition may also be informed and evolve to include modern forms of expression such as social media, video, legislative advocacy, and more. No matter the era or tradition, gifts of ministry are grounded in a desire to minister with and on behalf of Christ.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**

**Isaiah 49:1-7**  
**Luke 10:38-42**

Exploring & Engaging Activities

**Leader Preparation**

Consider ways that the space being used with these children might be made even more welcoming. Young children are more comfortable using furniture that is appropriate for their age and size, appreciate colors that are appealing, and sometimes need a cozy place to sit and be calm.

What is your name and how has your name defined you as an individual? Read the Isaiah text and be reminded that God called you before your birth and supports you throughout life. Next, read the passage from Luke 10 and reflect on persons you know whose gifts differ from yours. What do you learn from them?

*Prayer: Giver of all gifts, you know, choose, and call your children to share their light in your world. Throughout time, you have offered opportunities for persons of all ages to respond to your call and use their gifts. May the time this group spends together make it possible to multiply the gifts used for your work in the world. Amen.*

**Gathering and Closing**

Young children are more comfortable with a consistent, predictable routine. The following gathering and closing are provided as options for leaders.

**Gathering**

Invite the children to form a circle. Teach the following response: "You are a gift of God!" Ask each child, one at a

 **1 God Chooses. . . (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Read Isaiah 49:1-7 and remember that God chooses you and each and every child in your group. Consider the ways that language and worship are gifts of ministry. Simple gestures such as "thumbs to the shoulder" (me) and "fingers pointing" (you) could be added to the chant.

**Supplies:** None

Gather the group in a circle. Tell the children that people from many faith traditions, including Christians, offer praise to God by singing or speaking, also called chanting. Chants are a way to speak and listen to God. Teach the children the question and answer chant: "Me? Me? God chooses me?" and "You! You! God chooses you!" Explain that one at a time, participants will move to the center of the circle and say his or her name and the phrase "Me? Me? God chooses me?" All the other participants will repeat that participant's name and say, "You! You! God chooses you!" Begin the process by using your name and encouraging the group to respond. Choose the next participant and continue until everyone has taken a turn. Invite the children to talk about how it felt to speak and listen. Say together, "God chooses me."

**2 Name Art**

**Leader preparation:** Read Isaiah 49:1. Cut construction or tissue paper in a variety of colors into half-inch squares. Use chalk or crayon to write the name of each child in outlined letters on a separate piece of black construction paper. The children will fill in the letters with the squares of colored paper. Have extra black construction paper available for guests or new children. Create a "name art" sample using your name. Think about baptism and the experience of identifying people by name as they are welcomed to the faith community.

**Supplies:**

- bowl of water
- "name art" sample
- prepared sheets of large black construction paper with each child's name outlined using white chalk or crayon
- ½" squares of construction or tissue paper in a variety of colors
- glue or glue sticks

Gather the group in a circle around a bowl of water. Tell the children that water is used by the church when someone is baptized and welcomed to the faith community. Identifying persons by name during baptism is important. Names are a way we are called and known. Baptism reminds us that God knows us, calls us, and loves us. Pass the bowl of water around the circle and invite each child to dip a hand in the water and say his or her name out loud. Then show the children the "name art" sample. Distribute the appropriate construction paper to each child. Invite the children to "decorate" and "fill in" the letters of their name using the glue and paper squares. Offer the children the opportunity to show and talk about their work. Display the name art where others in the community may view.

**3 I Sing a Song of the Saints of God**

**Leader preparation:** Print "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God" (tune: Grand Isle) lyrics. Please note that the activity could be extended by including verse two.

time, to say his or her name. The rest of the group will speak the response. Conclude by asking the children to echo these words: “We are gifts of God!”

### Closing

Tell the children that God hopes every person will bring light to the world as that person uses his or her gifts and abilities. Invite the children to hold up a pointer finger. Practice the phrases by asking the children to echo and then speak the words together.

This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

## Session Development

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

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

However, the phrase “one was slain by a fierce wild beast” could be frightening for young children. Think about the “saints” you encounter along your faith journey, and give God thanks for their gifts.

### Supplies:

- song: “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” by Lesbia Scott (tune: Grand Isle); lyrics, <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh712.txt>;
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Tell the children that through the years the church has called persons of faith “saints.” Saints use their gifts to work in God’s world. Explain that the song “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” names many kinds of people who are saints. Invite the children to listen as you read the words of the first verse of the song. Ask the children to name the types of saints in verse one and record the responses on the newsprint or a whiteboard. Read verse three and invite the children to name places saints are found. Affirm that saints are many kinds of people and are found in many places. Teach the children this response: “And I mean to be one, too.” Write and then say the name of each child on the newsprint. After each name is voiced, invite that child to say the response. Conclude by saying the response together.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Words that Help and Harm (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Reflect on times when you encountered the power of words. How have you felt affirmed by helpful words? When have you been hurt by harmful words? Write the saying “Love your neighbor as yourself” at the top of the newsprint or whiteboard.

### Supplies:

- prepared newsprint or whiteboard with the heading “Love your neighbor as yourself”

Read the words of the saying to the children. Tell the children that Jesus used these words to remind people to treat others kindly. There are many ways to show love for our neighbors, including using words that help, instead of hurt, others. Loving words are a gift we can give to others. Invite the children to raise a hand if someone has called them a hurtful name. *How did that feel?* Encourage the children to “let go” of those feelings by shaking their bodies. Read the phrase on the newsprint or whiteboard again. Encourage the children to echo the words. Invite the children to name caring words that can be used when talking to our neighbors, and record those on the newsprint or whiteboard. One at a time, read the caring words and invite the children to respond with “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Encourage the children to turn to a neighbor and say “Love your neighbor as yourself.”



### 5 Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel

**Leader preparation:** Read Acts 2:1–4. Spend time looking at “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel.” Look particularly at the faces of the figures and the flames over their heads. Think about the unique gifts each individual brings to the faith community. Cut flames from construction paper using the pattern from Attachment 5a. Cut ovals from cream, tan, and brown construction paper using the pattern from Attachment 5b. Each child will need a flame and an oval.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: “Pentecost from the Rabbula Gospel” (Anonymous), [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=37962&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401)
- prepared flames from red, yellow, and orange construction paper, one per child
- “Flame Pattern,” Attachment: Activity 5a
- prepared ovals from cream, tan, and brown construction paper, one per child
- “Oval Pattern,” Attachment: Activity 5b
- markers or crayons
- large piece of mural paper
- glue or glue sticks

Show the children the artwork, and tell them the picture is called “Pentecost.” Explain that the day of Pentecost celebrates the beginning of the Christian church and God giving gifts of ministry to Jesus’ followers. Invite them to talk about the picture using questions such as:

- What do you see?
- What similarities are there in the figures?
- What differences are there in the figures?
- Why might the figures have flames over their heads?
- What gifts of ministry might the figures be given?

Show the children the construction paper flames and explain that the flames remind us of the many gifts of ministry God gives to people of faith. Distribute a flame and an oval to each child. Invite the children to write or draw a gift or ability on the flame. Ask each child to draw his or her face on the oval. Glue each oval face with the flame directly above to the mural paper. Gather by the mural and offer the children the opportunity to talk about their work. Display the mural in a place where others in the community may view.



## 6 Different Gifts

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 10:38–42, and consider the different gifts, talents, and abilities within this group of children. Consider using a translation or paraphrase of the Bible that will be easily understood by children. Review the attachment with lists of different gifts, and add your own ideas. Gather items that might represent the different gifts of Mary and Martha, such as a pillow for Mary who sat at Jesus feet listening and a plastic bowl (or other serving utensil) for Martha who was busy with many tasks.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- “Different Gifts,” Attachment: Activity 6
- items representing different gifts, such as a pillow and plastic bowl (or other serving utensil)

Gather around the items and invite the children to name the items. Read Luke 10:38–42 out loud. Explain to the group that the items represent the gifts and abilities demonstrated by Mary and Martha. Encourage the children to talk about what Mary and Martha did when Jesus visited. Christian tradition celebrates that everyone has unique gifts and talents.

Place the bowl and the pillow in the center of the space with the children gathered around them. Explain to the children that you will name two abilities that are different. Each participant will decide which skill he or she has and move to one end of the space or the other. If a participant has both gifts, he or she will stay in the center of the space. If a participant has neither gift, he or she will bring “pointer fingers” together in front of the chest and move the fingers away from each other, which is sign language for “different.” Teach the children the response “All gifts are good!” Read two gifts from the attachment, and encourage the children to choose the appropriate area or movement. Invite the children to shout the response. Ask everyone to return to the middle of the space. Continue reading gifts and making choices. Offer the children the chance to continue the game using their own ideas of different gifts. Say the response together.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 The Gift of Listening (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 10:39 and recall persons you’ve encountered who are careful listeners. Say a prayer of thanks for those people. Brainstorm a list of topics familiar to children for the “speakers” to talk about, such as a pet, a brother or sister, a favorite game, favorite food, and so forth.

**Supplies:**

- prepared list of topics

Tell the children that people have different gifts and abilities. The story of Mary and Martha reminds us of the importance of valuing all gifts. When Jesus visits these sisters, Mary sits and listens to Jesus. Listening is an ability that takes practice. Explain that through the years, persons of faith have valued the importance of listening to others. Invite the children to sit quietly and listen. Pause for about twenty seconds to allow for silence. Ask the children what they heard. Affirm the answers of the children.

Invite the children to find a partner. Explain that one partner will speak first and the other partner will listen. Once the “speaker” is finished, the “listener” will repeat what the speaker says. Tell the “speakers” the topic. Allow the “speakers” approximately twenty seconds to speak, and then call “time.” Allow approximately twenty seconds for the “listener” to repeat, and then call “time.” Change roles. Tell the “speakers” the next topic and repeat the process. Change partners and continue practicing with additional topics. Close by asking the group to listen and echo this phrase: “My listening ears are a gift for God’s work in the world.”

### 8 Light to the Nations

**Leader preparation:** Read Isaiah 49:6 and think about the ways you bring light to God’s world. Be prepared to demonstrate and remind the children to shine the flashlight toward feet or knees rather than in eyes.

**Supplies:**

- a working flashlight and a variety of other light sources, such as a light bulb, match, candle and so forth

Gather the group around the light sources. Invite the children to name each item. Ask the group what the items have in common. Encourage the children to name

other sources of light. Tell the children that Christians understand that people bring light to the world as they use their gifts, talents, and abilities. Show the children the flashlight, and tell them that you will point the light at someone. When the light shines on that person, he or she will name a personal gift, talent, or ability to use in God's world. Once the ability is named, the flashlight will pass to that person. Continue the process until everyone has the chance to name a gift and shine the light, or the group tires of the game. Close with the words from Isaiah: "I will give you as a light to the nations."

### 9 Showing Hospitality

**Leader preparation:** Read Luke 10:38–42. Think about persons you know that have gifts of welcoming and hospitality. Say a prayer of thanks for those gifts. Think about welcoming actions and be prepared to suggest ideas to the group.

**Supplies:**

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Tell the children that early Christians met together in homes. Showing care to others through welcoming actions is important to the faith community. Tell the children that Jesus visited two sisters, Mary and Martha. Martha used her gifts and abilities to welcome Jesus and help him feel comfortable. Ask the children to use their imaginations and name ways Martha might have welcomed Jesus. Record the ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. Invite two helpers to act as host and guest. Choose an idea from the list, and ask the actors to dramatize the idea for the group. Continue asking helpers to dramatize the welcoming actions until everyone has a turn. Invite all the actors to take a bow.

### Reflect

In what ways did the chosen activities affirm the children as unique individuals? How were your gifts as a leader tested? What might you do differently during the next gathering? What gifts or talents have come to light as a result of this time together? Remember, "God has chosen you!"

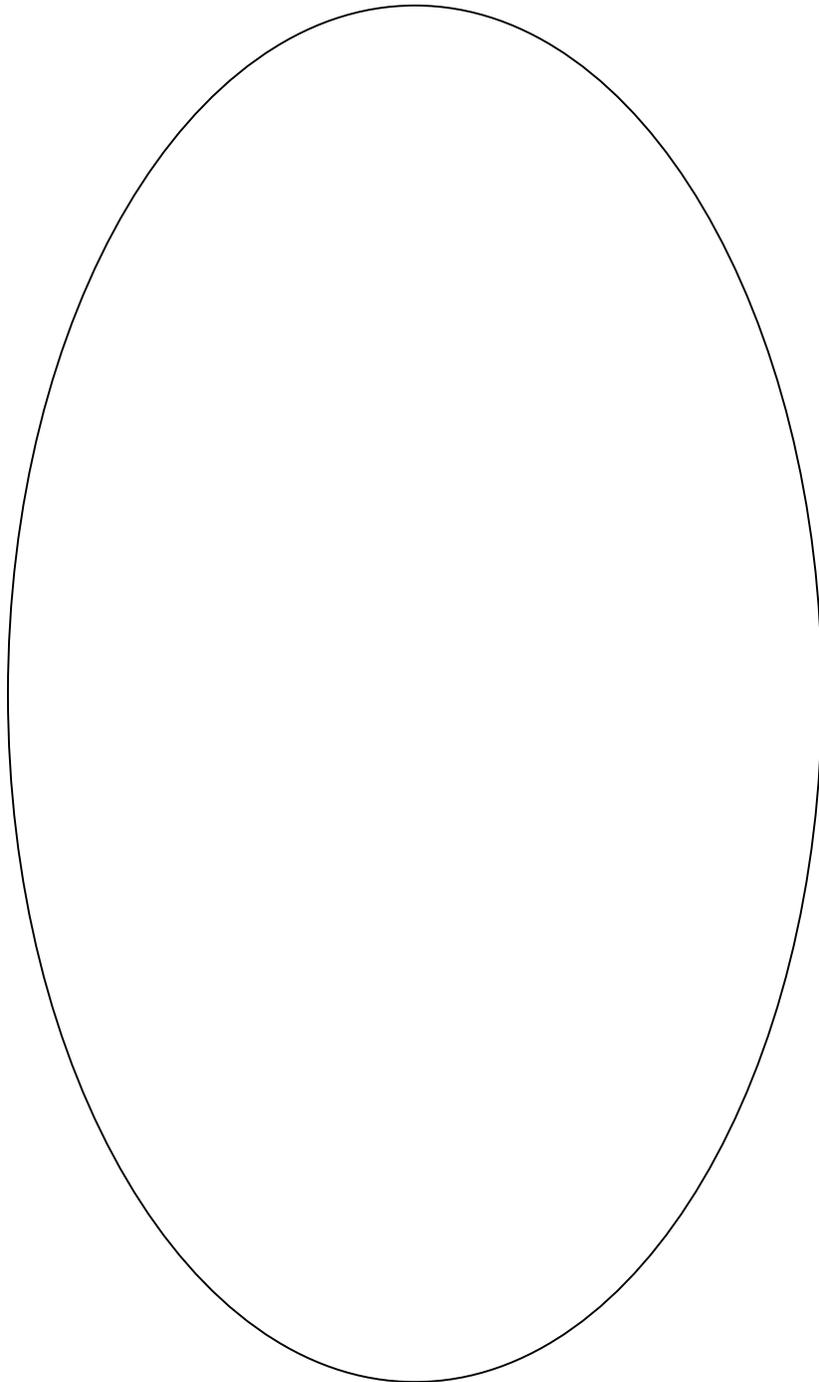
## Flame Pattern



!

Attachment: Activity 5b

## Oval Pattern



**Attachment: Activity 6**

## Different Gifts

**Reading**

**Listening to a story**

**Dance**

**Making the bed**

**Washing the dishes**

**Caring for a pet**

**Swinging**

**Picking flowers**

**Math**

**Hide and Seek**

**Drawing**

**Telling a story**

**Soccer**

**Taking out trash**

**Drying the dishes**

**Giving a hug**

**Sliding**

**Watering plants**

**Music**

**Tag**

# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

Young children are increasing in problem-solving abilities and have active imaginations. Using gifts of ministry is work that calls for creative thinking and innovative ideas. In the text from Nehemiah, the prophet begins by evaluating the damage to Jerusalem and then develops a plan. Young children are growing in their abilities to play and cooperate with one another. Using gifts of ministry is work that calls for collaboration. Once Nehemiah evaluates the situation, he brings people together to start building. There are times when children experience tension created by trying out gifts of ministry. Nehemiah and God's people are challenged as they begin the work of rebuilding. The people are reminded that God supports the gifts of God's people.

Self-esteem is a critical developmental issue for young children. Preschool and primary-school children often try out new skills and behaviors, sometimes succeeding and sometimes needing to try again. Children experience God's unconditional love through the love and care provided by significant adults. Parents and caregivers nurture self esteem and recognize accomplishments. The text from 2 Corinthians is a reminder that God's Spirit is at the heart of an individual's unique identity. The Spirit brings life, love and confidence as persons of faith expand gifts of ministry.

### About this Exploration

Each of us is like a "letter from Christ," as Paul says, sent to bring hope and healing wherever there is need. In all contexts, there are opportunities for us to share our gifts of ministry in a variety of ways, be it at home, at school, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, and at church. Over our lifetimes, the diversity of our gifts can emerge and grow, and may change, as we move into new places and spaces in our lives. Trusting that God can work through us right where we are is an exciting way to realize that the Holy Spirit is all around us.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Romans 12:9-18**  
**John 6:1-14 (15-21)**

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### Leader Preparation

Take time to let the children in the group know you are thinking about them by sending a note in the mail. Children enjoy receiving mail addressed directly to them. Relationships in a community are nurtured in a variety of ways.

Read the text from Nehemiah. Nehemiah uses his gifts to assess the damage to Jerusalem and then invites God's people to use their gifts for the common good. What situations do you encounter that require gifts of evaluation and cooperation? Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6. Think about how you feel when someone recognizes or appreciates your gifts or talents. Remember and celebrate that God's Spirit gives life to your unique individuality.

*Prayer: God, your Spirit brings love and encouragement to your children. May I use my gifts and talents in ways that will support the developing skills and abilities of this group of children. I celebrate your presence, which brings hope and confidence to our midst. Amen.*

### Gathering and Closing

Young children are more comfortable with a consistent, predictable routine. The following gathering and closing are provided as options for leaders.

#### Gathering

Invite the children to form a circle. Teach the following response: "You are

### 1 Hot and Cold (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Consider the ways communication and cooperation are used as gifts in God's world. Review the game instructions in the activity. Locate a simple object to hide, such as a marker or crayon.

#### Supplies:

- object to hide, such as a marker or crayon

Explain to the children that working together and speaking and listening are skills people use with one another. God's world is strengthened when we give good directions, listen carefully, and work together. Choose one child to hide the object. All other participants will cover their eyes as the object is hidden. Once the object is hidden, encourage the other participants to uncover their eyes and search for the item. As the participants search for the item, the child who hid the item will call out "[Name] is hot" if the seeker is close to the object or "[Name] is cold" if the seeker is far from the object. The participant who finds the object will hide the object next. Continue hiding and finding the object until all participants have a chance to hide the object or the group tires of the game. Say a prayer of thanks for those who work together.

### 2 Cooperative Building

**Leader preparation:** Read the text from Nehemiah. Think about the times you worked with others to build or create. Give thanks for opportunities to work with others. Obtain interlocking blocks. Remember that for young children the process of creating is as important as the outcome. The creation may be carefully dismantled and the process repeated as interest continues.

#### Supplies:

- interlocking blocks such as Legos®
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Show the children the interlocking blocks. Explain that building something together is a chance for everyone to use their gifts and skills. Each participant will add to the group's creation. Tell the children that after each block is placed, the group will support the use of that person's gifts with encouraging words. Invite the children to name encouraging words and phrases and write them on the newsprint or whiteboard. Once the list is complete, read all the suggestions. Encourage each child to choose a word or phrase to use a special "cheer." One by one, invite the children to place a block. Invite the group to respond with words of encouragement. Continue inviting children to place blocks and cheer for one another until all the blocks are used. Encourage the children to celebrate their creation by "cheering" again.

### 3 One Spirit of Love

**Leader preparation:** Read 2 Corinthians 3: 1-6. Obtain a musical recording of the song "One Spirit of Love." Be attentive to the words to the chorus: "Many gifts, one spirit of love, one spirit of love; Many gifts, one spirit of love, one spirit of love" and think about how a variety of gifts join together to express God's love. Depending on your comfort level with music, you may choose to read the words to the group, invite a volunteer to assist in singing or playing the tune on an in-

a gift of God!" Ask each child, one at a time, to say his or her name. The rest of the group will speak the response. Conclude by asking the children to echo these words: "We are gifts of God!"

### Closing

Tell the children that God hopes every person will bring light to the world as that person uses his or her gifts and abilities. Invite the children to hold up a pointer finger. Practice the phrases by asking the children to echo and then speak the words together.

This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

## Session Development

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

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

strument, or lead the song yourself. Gather rhythm instruments. Provide enough instruments so that each child has one. Remember that musical expression builds confidence and self esteem. God loves all kinds of noise!

### Supplies:

- hymn: "One Spirit of Love" by Paul B. Svenson (©1987/2011 Dad's Songbook Music LLC. All rights reserved. Used by permission, [www.dadsongbook.com](http://www.dadsongbook.com)); video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBg80JaNJ1M>
- "One Spirit of Love," Attachment: Activity 3
- music player
- (optional) song leader and/or accompanist
- rhythm instruments such as shakers, drums, rhythm sticks, and bells

Tell the children that the Christian community understands God's Spirit to be active as people use their gifts and talents in all kinds of places. God's people have many gifts. When God's people use their gifts together, they show God's love.

Invite the children to listen to the chorus of the song. Encourage the children to echo the phrases. Sing or say the words of the chorus together. Mention that the chorus helps us remember that many gifts come together to show God's love. Show the children the rhythm instruments, and invite them to choose an instrument to play with the chorus. Listen to the first verse of the song. Sing or say the chorus together, encouraging the children to play the instruments. Invite the children to exchange instruments with another participant. Listen to the second verse of the song. Sing or say the chorus with instrumental accompaniment. Conclude with the chorus one more time.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Gifts of Love (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read 2 Corinthians 3:1–6. Picture the children in your group, recalling something unique and special about each individual. Using a full sheet of red 8½" × 11" construction paper, cut a large heart for each child.

### Supplies:

- red 8½" × 11" construction paper
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- prepared heart for each child
- markers or crayons
- glue or glue sticks

Tell the children that everyone has the opportunity to share their special skills and abilities in many places in God's world. Ask the children to name skills they use in their homes and at school. Record the responses on the newsprint or whiteboard leaving spaces between the words. Show the children the paper hearts. Explain that these hearts are a reminder to show love in God's world by using our gifts. Invite the children to write or draw on the heart a picture of a skill or talent they use at home or school. One at a time, invite the children to show and then glue their hearts around the words on the newsprint. Display in an area where others in the community may view.

### 5 Working Together

**Leader preparation:** Consider the ways God’s world is strengthened when people use their gifts for the common good. Gather a variety of pairs of items that work together, such as the following: hammer and nail, pan and lid, knife and fork, baseball and glove, wash cloth and soap, and so forth. Provide enough items so that each child may find one or more. Place the items around the space.

**Supplies:**

- pairs of items that work together, such as hammer and nail, pan and lid, knife and fork, baseball and glove, wash cloth and soap

Explain to the children that there are a number of items located around the space. Invite the children to bring one or more items back to the group. Once all the items have been located, encourage the children to identify the items. Tell the children that these items could be used alone as well as with another item. Ask the participants, one by one, to identify items that work together. Mention to the children that there are times when people can work together, too. Explain that each person has different gifts and abilities, and when we work together more of our skills can be used. Invite the children to name games or activities that work better when more than one person participates. Ask the children to find a partner. Each pair will show an example of working together. Gather in a circle and say, “Our gifts work together!”



### 6 Beatrice’s Goat

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the book *Beatrice’s Goat* by Paige McBrier. The book is based on the true story of a family who receives aid from Heifer Project International. Become familiar with the work of Heifer Project International through the website [www.heifer.org](http://www.heifer.org). Consider collaborating with another group to help Heifer Project. The work of Heifer Project is special because each participating family “passes” the gift of the animal’s offspring to another family.

**Supplies:**

- book: *Beatrice’s Goat* by Paige McBrier (Atheneum, 2001)
- (optional) “Help Heifer Project International,” Attachment: Activity 6
- (optional) printable “Fill the Ark” bank, <http://www.heifer.org/atf/cf/%7Be384d2db-8638-47f3-a6db-68be45a16edc%7D/28333-FILL%20THE%20ARK%20BANK.W.PDF>

Gather the group in a comfortable area for viewing and listening to the book. Read the story to the children and offer opportunities to view the pictures. Talk with the children about ways the goat helps Beatrice’s family and village. Explain to the children that Heifer Project uses many animals to help hungry people, including sheep, chickens, cows, pigs and ducks. These animals are gifts that aid people in many parts of the world. Invite the children to name ways that these other animals might help hungry people. Tell the group that Heifer Project is supported by individuals and groups that give money for animals. Talk with the children about an appropriate way to support the work of Heifer Project. Remind the children that all gifts will work together to help Heifer Project. Distribute the handout (optional) and the “Fill the Ark” banks (optional). Close by mimicking the sound of Beatrice’s goat.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 What I Like About You . . . (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Think about times you felt your gifts were affirmed through positive statements or compliments. Remember that God’s unconditional love for each individual can be reflected through encouraging words.

**Supplies: None**

- Bible
- one paper grocery or lunch bag per child
- crayons or markers
- list of food items needed, one per child
- thank you card

Invite the children to gather in a circle. Remind the children that each participant is unique and special. Each person has gifts and talents. These skills and abilities are important to God’s world and need to be encouraged. Explain to the children that one at a time, each participant will move to the center of the circle. Each child making up the circle will say to the one inside the circle, “What I like about you is . . .” The sentence will be completed with kind or encouraging words, such as: “What I like about you is your smile.” Practice saying the words together. Invite the first child to move to the center of the circle, and encourage each child to complete the sentence. Continue the process until every child has been affirmed in the center of the circle. Bless the children with these words: *God gives gifts to everyone.*

### 8 Heart Stems

**Leader preparation:** Read 2 Corinthians 3:2–3 and reflect on the ways God’s Spirit encourages your gifts. Using a variety of red, pink, and white construction paper, cut out one 4-inch heart for each child. Create a sample heart stem. A visual example is provided on the attachment.

**Supplies:**

- “Heart Stem Pattern,” Attachment: Activity 8
- sample heart stem
- prepared construction paper hearts, one for each child
- large craft sticks, one for each child
- glue or glue sticks
- glitter
- markers or crayons

Invite the children to create a “heart” by placing their thumbs and pointer fingers together. Encourage the children to hold the heart in the center of their chest. Tell the children that God’s love is the heart or center of our skills, gifts, and abilities. Each person is unique and has different abilities. God encourages us to share love with others as we use our gifts to work in God’s world. Show the children the sample heart stem. Invite the children to create their own unique heart stem using the supplies provided. Offer time to show individual heart stems. Encourage the children to hold the heart stems in the center of their chest and bless the children with these words: *Share God’s love as you use your gifts.* Invite the children to take the hearts home.



## 9 Vision after the Sermon

**Leader preparation:** Spend time looking at “Vision After the Sermon” by Paul Gauguin, and consider the gifts or talents in your life that have presented challenges, as well as the role of prayer in those situations.

### Supplies:

- artwork: “Vision After the Sermon” by Paul Gauguin, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=37962&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1102072326?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=37962&store_id=1401)

Gather the children around the artwork, and use the following questions to invite them to talk about what they see:

- What colors are used in the picture?
- What might the figures in the picture be doing?
- How do you feel when you look at the picture?

Encourage the children to look at the posture and hands of the figure in the lower left corner of the picture. Imagine that figure is praying. Tell the children that gifts and talents are supported by prayer. Prayer is an opportunity to say thank you to God for gifts and talents. Prayer also offers an opportunity to talk to God when a skill or ability is challenging or hard. Invite the children to mirror the position of that figure. Invite the children to echo the following prayer: *God, thank you for my gifts and talents. Sometimes my skills seem easy. Sometimes my abilities are hard work. I know you are always close. Amen.*

## Reflect

How did the children “try out” or experience cooperation during the gathering? In what ways were the children affirmed during the activities? Were there times that individuals or the group struggled with an activity? Remember that God is always close as we discover and use our gifts in God’s world.

Attachment: Activity 3

## One Spirit of Love

$\text{♩} = 89$   
Muted strum  
Light Reggae Feel

Paul B. Svenson



1. Ma - ny are the won - ders of God ma - ny  
2. Some will be the tea - chers of life some the  
3. Li - ving as the bo - dy of Christ and the



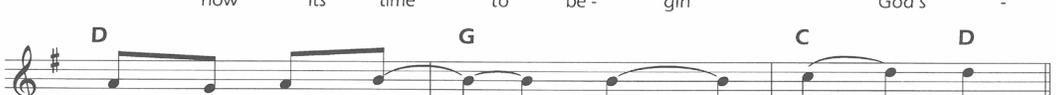
doors o - pen wide ma - ny roads that are still un -  
prea - chers of love some the fa - thers and some the  
heart of the earth and the hands that will break and new



tra - veled Ma - ny are the gifts that we share  
mo - thers Some will be the ones who will care  
gro - und Cel - e - brate the gifts from with - in



ma - ny bur - dens we bear ma - ny  
some will li - sten and share serv - ing  
now its time to be - gin God's -



my - ster - ies still un - ra - veled  
God as they serve each - o - ther  
peo - ple can turn the world a - rou - nd now!



**CHORUS** Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love



Ma - ny gifts One spi - rit of love one spi - rit of love

*"One Spirit of Love" by Paul B. Svenson, ©1987/2011 Dad's Songbook Music LLC—All rights reserved.  
Used by permission, [www.dadsongbook.com](http://www.dadsongbook.com).*

Attachment: Activity 6

## Help Heifer Project International

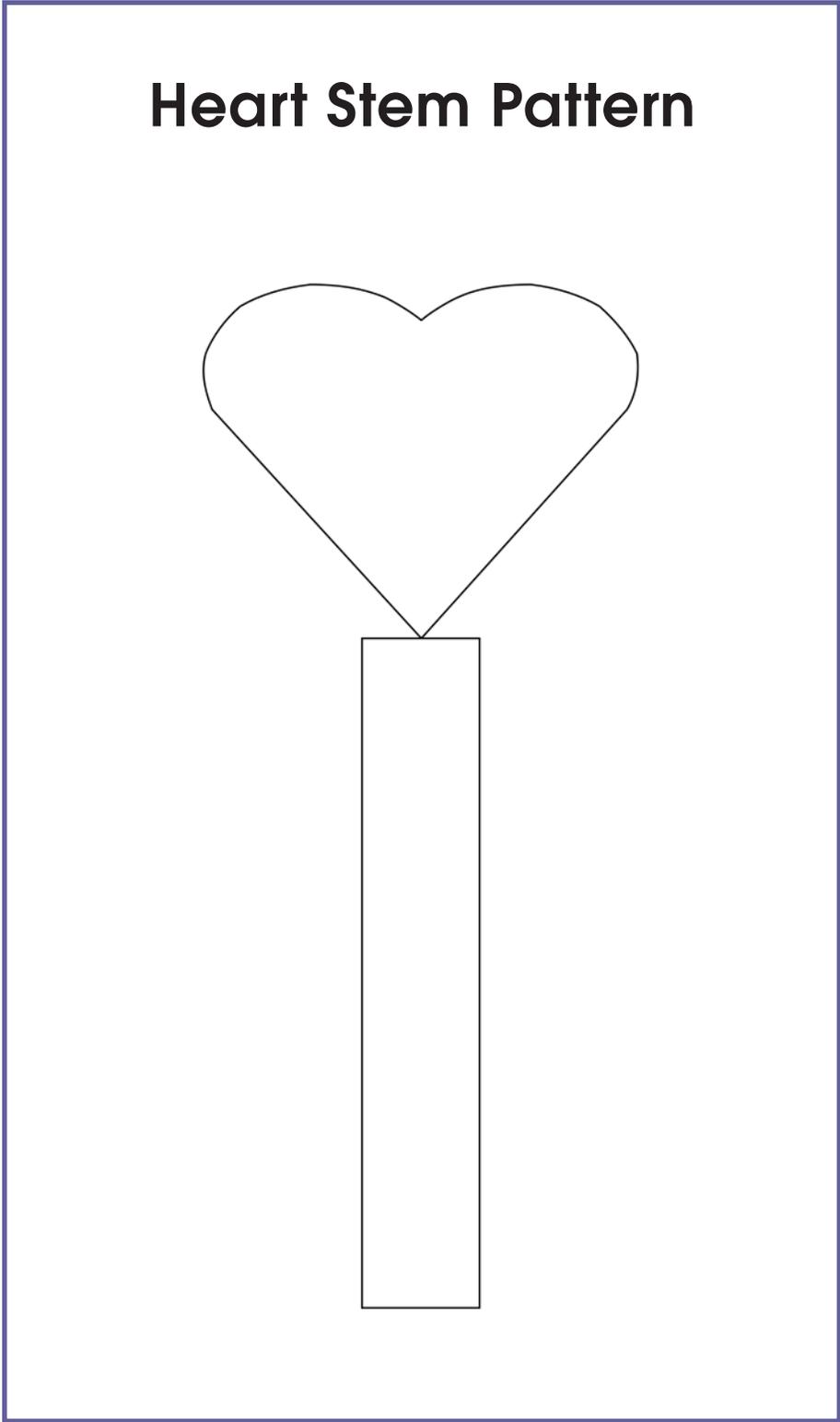
Date:

Dear Friend:

Our group \_\_\_\_\_ has decided to support the work of Heifer Project International by:

Contributions are needed by \_\_\_\_\_.

Thanks for your support of this project.



# Discovering Gifts of Ministry



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

Young children experience many kinds of “calls,” including “Sofia, it’s time to get up,” “Luis, it’s time for soccer practice,” or “A’isha, it’s time for dinner.” As they grow, opportunities to experience and respond to more specific “calls” to use their gifts of ministry also increase. The phrase “try, try again” is one that describes the work of growing young children. Preschool and primary children are gifted with the ability to try activities over and over as they gain proficiency. God calls repeatedly to the young child Samuel. Samuel believes his mentor Eli is calling, and responds over and over again with the words “Here I am!” Finally, with Eli’s help, Samuel responds to God’s call, is entrusted with a vision of the future and continues to develop his gifts.

Joy frequently radiates from young children. Their delight, awe and wonder is infectious. Young children are blessed with a natural curiosity which encourages them to try out new skills and abilities. Their innate confidence is supported by parents and caregivers who encourage them to take risks and learn. The letter to the Philippians reinforces a response of joy when gifts of ministry are revealed. Prayer provides the support of God’s love and care, as individuals take risks and explore new opportunities. The text encourages God’s people to keep on doing the things they have learned and reminds them that God’s peace will be with them as the journey continues.

### About this Exploration

We are not who we once were. We adapt and change along with the shifting circumstances we experience. Gifts of ministry develop throughout the duration of our lives. Our gifts are revealed, acquired, and developed as we encounter the present and are led toward expanding hope for the future. When we engage our gifts of ministry we join with God in making that hope reality, and we become the people God calls us to be.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**1 Samuel 3:1–10, 11–20**  
**Philippians 4:1–13**

## Leader Preparation

Keep in touch with the caregivers and families of the children in your group. Be aware of your role as a partner in the faith formation process with these significant adults. Read the text from 1 Samuel and think about times you have experienced a repeated call or request.

- How did you respond?
- What did you learn about yourself through that experience?
- What gifts of ministry surfaced as a result?

Say a prayer of thanks for the gift of persistence.

Read Philippians 4:1–13. Close your eyes and repeat the following phrase: “Celebrate God all day, every day.” Open your eyes and remember that God is close, supports your gifts and talents, and gives the gift of peace.

*Prayer: God of grace and peace, you call and your children answer. Your presence and support gives confidence as the journey continues. Bless the time with this group of children. May each one experience anew the joy that springs from using gifts of ministry. Amen.*

## Gathering and Closing

Young children are more comfortable with a consistent, predictable routine. The following gathering and closing are provided as options for leaders.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Listening for the Call (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read the text from 1 Samuel. Sit quietly and listen carefully. Consider times that you have received a call and remember Samuel’s enthusiastic response, “Here I am!” Become familiar with the game instructions in the activity.

**Supplies:** None

Gather the children in a large circle with space between each child. Mention to the children that a story in the Bible tells about a child named Samuel who answered God’s call. Samuel answered the call with the words “Here I am!” It is important to listen and answer when we are called to use our gifts. Invite the children to practice saying “Here I am!” Explain to the children that they will close their eyes. The leader will move around and among the group and finally stop and whisper one child’s name. Everyone will need to listen carefully. When a participant hears his or her name, that child speaks the response “Here I am.” If the participant is correct, the leader will reply with “Yes, I’m calling you.” If the participant is not correct, there will be no reply and the leader will whisper the original participant’s name again. When the correct participant responds, that participant will become the next leader. Continue the process of calling and responding until everyone has the chance to be both called and the leader. Invite the children to echo these words: “Here I am—I’m called to use my gifts!”



### 2 Diamond Peak

**Leader preparation:** Spend time looking at “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA.” Think about the ways that doing what one loves can be a gift to self and others. Recall one of your gifts that brings you joy. Review the attachment. Snowboarding may or may not be familiar to the children in your group and may need some explanation.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA,” <http://www.art.com/products/p13950276-sa-i2807680/diamond-peak-nevada-usa.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=55eedd136d4049bcaab8f63c70afd3e3&searchstring=diamond+peak>
- “Down the Mountain,” Attachment: Activity 2

Invite the children to imagine they are at the top of a snow covered-mountain. To get to the bottom of the mountain, each person will ride a snowboard. Show the children “Diamond Peak, Nevada, USA.” Encourage the children to mirror the position of the figure. Tell the children that as you describe riding down the mountain, they will be invited to participate. Read “Down the Mountain” to the group. Invite the participants to look at the artwork and describe what they see using the following questions.

- How do you feel when you look at the picture?
- How do you think the snow boarder feels?
- What might the snowboarder do next?

Tell the children that each person’s skills and abilities are always developing and changing. It is important to take risks, learn new skills, and try different activities. Tell the children that God hopes we will use our skills, gifts and abilities to

## Gathering

Invite the children to form a circle. Teach the following response: “You are a gift of God!” Ask each child, one at a time, to say his or her name. The rest of the group will speak the response. Conclude by asking the children to echo these words: “We are gifts of God!”

## Closing

Tell the children that God hopes every person will bring light to the world as that person uses his or her gifts and abilities. Invite the children to hold up a pointer finger. Practice the phrases by asking the children to echo and then speak the words together.

This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm gonna let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

## Session Development

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

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

bring joy to ourselves and others. Ask the children to name skills or abilities that bring them joy. Invite the children to show joy by smiling at one another.

## ③ Affirmation Letters

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 4:13 and think about ways you grow in confidence as you learn. Be reminded that “I can” use my skills and abilities for ministry in God’s world. Consider the ways encouragement is a gift of ministry. Print Philippians 4:13 on a piece of paper. Fold the paper and place in an envelope.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- prepared envelope with Philippians 4:13 paper enclosed
- paper
- markers or crayons

Show the children the envelope and invite them to guess what might be inside. Open the envelope and show the children the “letter.” Explain that letters are a way for people to pass on information and that letters are one way that people of faith send encouraging words to one another. Read Philippians 4:13 to the group. Tell the children that encouragement is a gift people can give to one another. Distribute paper and markers or crayons. Ask the children to choose a partner. Each partner will name one of his or her skills or abilities. Invite the children to write or draw a “letter” encouraging their partner’s skills or ability. Ask the children to exchange letters with their partners. Encourage the children to echo the words “I can use my gifts!”

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



## ④ What’s Your Gift? (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 4:4. Parties are usually joyful events. Think about the details which create a party. Many gifts and talents contribute to the event. Prepare a list of actions that contribute to a party such as blowing up balloons, wrapping gifts, giving out invitations, making punch, and decorating a cake.

### Supplies:

- prepared list of actions
- 8½” × 11” paper
- markers or crayons

Gather the children in a circle. Invite the children to raise a hand if they enjoy a party. Ask the children to name ways to get ready for a party. Tell the children that there are many skills and abilities that are needed to give a party. Explain to the children that you will quietly name to a helper an action that contributes to a party. The helper will show the action without using words. The group will guess the action. Continue to invite helpers to show actions until all have a chance to demonstrate. Ask the children to create “party invitations” showing a skill or talent they might contribute to the party. Once the invitations are created, invite the children to talk about their work. Display the invitations in an area where others in the community may view.

## ⑤ Puppet Story Telling

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 4:4. Think about a talent that brings you a sense of satisfaction or happiness. Create a sample puppet that shows a

**Supplies:**

- sample paper bag puppet
- paper bags
- markers or crayons
- glue or glue sticks
- construction paper
- scissors

Tell the children that when we use our skills, abilities, and talents we may feel satisfaction and happiness. A letter written to Christians reminds us to “Rejoice in God” as we share our gifts and talents with others. Show the children your puppet. Have your puppet tell about a gift of ministry that brings joy. Using the supplies provided, encourage the children to create their own puppet. Explain that the puppets will be used to tell about a gift or talent that they enjoy. Encourage the children to decorate the puppet to show the joyful gift or talent. Once the puppets are complete, invite the children and their puppets to tell about a skill, ability or talent that brings joy. Ask the children and their puppets take a bow.

**6 Try, Try Again**

**Leader preparation:** Read the text from 1 Samuel and think about how Samuel tried again and again to respond to God’s call. Perseverance can be helpful when developing gifts of ministry. The children will be playing a matching card game. Depending on the age of your children and the number of children in the group, determine how many and which cards you will use. With younger children, use smaller face value cards and a fewer number of cards on the table. With a larger number of children in the group, divide the children into small groups of three to four children. Some groups may need adult assistance.

**Supplies:**

- two decks of cards to create a matching game

Tell the children that a child named Samuel heard a voice calling him one night. Samuel tried over and over to answer the call. Explain that there are times when we must try again and again when using our skills and abilities. Practice the phrase “try, try again” with the group. Show the children the matching card game. Explain that, one at a time, a child will turn over two cards. If the cards match, the child will keep the pair and the next participant takes a turn. If the cards do not match, the child will turn them back over and the group will say the phrase “try, try again” That child continues the process until a match is found. Continue taking turns to locate matches until all the matches have been found. The process can be repeated until the group tires of the game.

Ask the children to talk about how it felt to play the game and locate matches after trying one or more times. Invite the children to echo this saying: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!”

**Sending & Serving Activities**



**7 Passing the Peace (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 4:7. Close your eyes, inhale, exhale and observe a moment of peace. Write the words “Peace be with you” and “And also with you” on the newsprint or whiteboard.

**Supplies:**

- prepared newsprint or whiteboard with peace blessing
- marker

Tell the children that God’s people have many gifts. Blessings and prayers are gifts people can use as individuals and offer one another. Read the phrases written on the newsprint or whiteboard to the group. Invite the children to talk about what “peace” feels like. Tell the children that saying the words “Peace be with you” is a way of blessing or praying for another person. When we say those words, we are asking God to give that person peace. When the other person replies with “And also with you,” the blessing or prayer is given back. Tell the children that this exchange of peace is often used in worship.

Invite the children to rehearse the words “Peace be with you” and then to practice the reply, “And also with you.” Ask each child to find a partner and exchange the greeting. Encourage the children to continue finding new partners and exchanging the greeting until everyone has passed the peace. Encourage the children to use this greeting with their families and friends.

## 8 Rejoice to Music

**Leader preparation:** Read Philippians 4:4 and consider the ways you experience joy as you use your gifts of ministry. Think about the ways that expressions of joy are gifts of ministry. Consider using a translation or paraphrase of the Bible which will be easily understood by young children.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- song: “Rejoice in the Lord Always,” <http://rockhay.tripod.com/worship/music/rejoicealways.htm> or <http://www.hymnary.org/hymn/PsH/228?media=text>
- computer with Internet access or a music player

Read Philippians 4:4 to the children. Tell the children that the word “rejoice” means to celebrate or be glad. Invite the children to name things that help them feel glad. God invites people to be joyful and to share that joy with others. Explain that when we use our talents, skills and abilities, we also bring joy to God and God’s world. There are many ways to show joy. We can express joy by using our voices. Invite the children to make a “joyful noise.” We can show joy on our faces. Invite the children to show “joyful faces.” We can communicate joy with our bodies. Invite the children to show “joy filled bodies.” Moving to music is another way to show joy.

Play the lively music and invite the children to move joyfully. After several minutes, exclaim “Rejoice in God always; again I say rejoice!” as the music plays. After several minutes, stop the music and encourage the children to echo these words: “Rejoice in God always, again I say rejoice!”



## 9 Samuel, Eli, and God

**Leader preparation:** Read 1 Samuel 3:1–10, 11–20. Think about the ways your gifts and talents grow and change over time. Review the story on the attachment.

**Supplies:**

- “Samuel, Eli, and God,” Attachment: Activity 9

Tell the children that God calls persons of all ages to use their skills and abilities. Explain that a young child named Samuel and an old man named Eli both used their gifts and talents to do God's work. Ask the children to find a partner to act out the story. One child will be Eli and the other, Samuel. Tell the story and cue the children as indicated. Repeat the story and reverse roles. Invite the children to close their eyes and listen carefully. Say the following words to each child; *[Name], God calls you to use your gifts, now and always.*

## Reflect

How have the gifts and abilities of this group of children grown, developed or changed during your time together? In what ways were skills and talents celebrated? Pray for the continued journeys of these children. Watch for the ways they respond to God's call and say, "Here I am!"

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Attachment: Activity 2

## Down the Mountain

It's cold up here on the top of the mountain. Even though I'm wearing warm clothes, I still feel a chill.

*Pause and invite the children to shiver.*

When I look down, I realize it's a long way to the bottom of the mountain!

*Pause and invite the children to look down the mountain.*

Time to warm up and get ready to ride.

*Pause and invite the children to stretch.*

I take a big breath.

*Pause and invite the children to breath.*

I get on my snowboard and bend my knees.

*Pause and invite the children to bend their knees.*

I lean forward and start moving.

*Pause on invite the children to lean forward.*

My board moves easily down the mountain. I feel the cold air rushing past. The trees are a blur!

I'm picking up speed. Here comes a jump. Time to bend my knees and up I go. I'm in the air!

*Pause and invite the children to mirror the position of the figure on the poster.*

Too quickly, the packed snow catches me and on I go. Down, down, down the mountain. What a ride!

Attachment: Activity 9

## Eli, Samuel, and God

Eli and Samuel lived in a holy place. One night Eli and Samuel were lying down ready for sleep. (*Show sleeping.*)

Samuel heard a voice call his name (*hold a hand to an ear*) and thought it was Eli.

He went to Eli (*move to partner Eli*) and said, "Here I am." (*Echo the words.*)

Eli said, "I didn't call, go lie down." (*Shake head "no" and point.*)

Samuel went back and laid down again. (*Move and show sleeping.*)

The voice called Samuel's name again. (*Hold a hand to an ear.*)

Samuel went to Eli (*move to partner Eli*) and said, "Here I am." (*echo the words.*)

Eli said, "I didn't call, go lie down." (*Shake head "no" and point.*)

Samuel went back and lay down again. (*Move and show sleeping.*)

The voice called Samuel a third time. (*Hold hand to an ear.*)

Samuel went to Eli (*move to partner Eli*) and said, "Here I am. You called me." (*Echo the words.*)

Eli realized it was God calling Samuel, and so Eli told Samuel to go lie down (*point*) and told him that if God calls again, say, "Speak, I am listening." (*Echo the words.*)

So Samuel went back and lay down. (*Move and show sleeping.*)

God called Samuel again. (*Hold a hand to an ear.*)

Samuel said to God, "Speak, I am listening." (*Echo words.*)

God spoke to Samuel, and Samuel listened carefully. (*Hold a hand to an ear.*)