

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Discovery

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages 7–11) possess a strong sense of justice and injustice, often expressed as knowing “right” from “wrong” and knowing for certain whether or not a situation is fair. They think concretely about justice. They may have experienced justice or the lack of it in their daily lives, so it is important to provide an environment that is open and safe for the children to ask questions and talk about their own experiences as they hear the stories of the faith and explore ways to work for justice.

### About this Exploration

Working for justice is vital in the personal and communal lives of God’s faithful people. God desires and requires the faithful to work for justice. Through that work, we creatively level the playing field, break down walls and nurture environments so that all may experience a whole and holy life. A holy life is free of oppression, degradation, and exclusion. We encounter stories, interpret scriptures, and participate in activities through which we discover how to engage actively in justice work in the home, church, community, and world.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Isaiah 1:1, 10–18**  
**Luke 4:14–21**

## Leader Preparation

Read Isaiah 1:1, 10–18 once silently. Pause. Read it again, and let the words sink into your heart. Now read the passage allowing your voice to express the feelings of anger that are expressed through the words. Isaiah gives voice to God’s anger at empty worship that does not do justice. Now you have given voice to this anger. Consider how you felt hearing about offerings described as futile and Sabbath assemblies as unendurable. Imagine God is angry on behalf of the older children whom you will guide in working for justice. For some children, worship and participation in the faith community may likewise seem pointless because they are not included or made to feel welcome in a meaningful way. Now consider how it felt to hear God’s commands, recorded in Isaiah 1:16–18, about how a community can repair its relationship with God. How do you live out these commands in your own life?

Children have a strong sense of justice as well as ideas about how to repair relationships. Be open to their teaching as you guide them to do justice in their daily lives. Read Luke 4:14–21. Hear Jesus echo Isaiah’s words, and consider how Jesus will live out this call in his own ministry. How is each of us called to live it out now? Conclude your time of preparation with the following prayer or a prayer of your own.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Proclaiming the Good News (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Children will have the opportunity to speak the good news of Jesus. In Luke 4:14–21 Jesus identifies his mission, using the words of the prophet Isaiah. By speaking and hearing these powerful words, children have an opportunity to own the words and actions for themselves. Encourage the children to make their voices powerful. Ask them what they think Jesus is saying and what they think it might mean to follow the words today.

**Supplies:**

- Bibles
- indoor or outdoor space with enough room to move about

Gather the participants. Explain that working for justice is the way of life for followers of Jesus. The Bible tells us about Jesus. Today they will hear what work Jesus said he came to do in the world. Read Luke 4:14–21 together. Take time to answer any questions the children may have about the passage. Depending on reading ability, you may follow this either with a round robin where each child reads a verse of the entire passage, or you may read verses 18–19 phrase by phrase and have the children echo your words. Next, invite them to turn to a neighbor and repeat the phrases of verses 18–19 to one another. After everyone has practiced, have the group stand up and walk about the space proclaiming the words in unison with power and joy. You may invite some children to listen as each one takes turns proclaiming Jesus’ words from scripture.

### 2 Following God—Stories of Faith and Justice

**Leader preparation:** Knowing stories of children and adults who are faithful to God in the face of injustice gives children reference points as they make decisions in their own lives. Read both the story of Daniel in scripture and the true life story of Ruby Bridges. You may wish to become familiar with Daniel’s story in Daniel 6:1–28 in order to be able to paraphrase the story, emphasizing Daniel’s faithfulness to God and his prayers to God as a source of his strength. Note similarities in the character and action of both Daniel and Ruby. As you lead your group in noting similarities, they will be naming faith practices that sustain one in times of injustice.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- access to the Internet to view the website “Ruby Bridges,” <http://www.rubybridges.com/story.htm>
- markers and newsprint or a whiteboard
- (optional) book: *Daniel and the Lion* by Sekiya Miyoshi (Pilgrim Press, 2001)
- (optional) book: *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges (Scholastic Press, 1999)

Share the stories of Daniel in scripture and Ruby Bridges from her home page. Have the children note similarities in the character and faith of each young person. Make two lists on the newsprint or whiteboard. Talk together about the injustices Daniel and Ruby faced and how their faith helped them. Then ask the children to name injustices they see. Conclude with a group prayer created by the children in which they use their own words to call on God, to identify an injustice, to ask for God to work with everyone involved, to ask for God’s strength to guide them, and to thank God for justice.



Prayer:

*God of justice,  
show me the way to live justly.  
Give me words to speak and the  
wisdom to listen to  
the children [or insert the names  
of the children] in my care.  
In all things let us work together,  
following Jesus,  
to bring your realm of justice and  
love into this world.  
Amen.*

## Session Development

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

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

### 3 Painting God’s Delight

**Leader preparation:** God delights in justice. Justice is described in Luke and Isaiah. In this activity children are encouraged to paint pictures that show actions or objects that represent justice, such as people helping one another, a table with enough food to share with neighbors, and children playing peacefully together. They may also choose to paint God or the feeling of happiness. By painting and identifying what delights God, children are then empowered to focus on delight and justice. If they can visualize it or imagine it, they can do it.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- 8½” × 11” or larger blank paper
- watercolor paint sets

Read aloud Luke 4:14–21. Invite the children to paint a scene from scripture or to paint something that might delight God. They may even choose to paint a picture of God or the feeling of delight. After everyone has something on paper, invite the children to take turns sharing what they painted and why. When the pictures are dry, use them to decorate your space, or encourage the children to take the pictures home and talk to their families about what delights God. Alternatively, the pictures can be delivered to a seniors’ care facility, used in worship, used as a bulletin cover, posted on the church website, or shared in the newsletter.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Justice Talk (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Adapt the reflection questions at the end of this exploration to have a meaningful conversation with your group (see the sidebar Reflect next to Activity 9 below). In order to do justice, it is necessary to define or describe it. Children will no doubt have many ideas about justice in a criminal or courtroom sense because of television and other media popular in these last several years. God’s justice is something more than and different from this. God insists that those with more must share and that whoever is being mistreated is to be helped, treated with dignity, and given a place in society.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- (optional) markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Gather the group in a circle. Begin a conversation with the children about justice. *What do you think justice is?* (Expect answers to deal with criminal justice or the law.) Read scripture together, such as the Parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25–37 or the Feeding of the 5,000 from Mark 6:30–44. Ask the children what they heard about justice in the passages. How is the justice enacted by Jesus on God’s behalf different from their first answers? After discussion, read aloud Isaiah 1:10–17, which describes both injustice and justice from God’s point of view. Conclude the conversation by having each participant describe God’s justice in his or her own words.



### 5 Extra! Extra! Read All About It!

**Leader preparation:** Gather local and national newspapers and news magazines with pictures and stories that are particularly faith related. Do not bring an entire newspaper—the comics and the want ads would be distracting. Children will have the opportunity to look through these materials and cut out pictures or stories that show or relate to justice. They will look for positive images in which justice appears and other images in which something unjust is happening. This activity is directly tied to discernment. Your local library, church office, and newsstand are places to ask for discarded materials.

#### Supplies:

- copies of local and national newspapers
- news magazines with pictures
- faith-related magazines, newspapers, publications
- scissors
- glue sticks
- large sheet of blank paper for making a mural
- tables on which to work

Place the craft and news materials in the center of the tables, including glue sticks to share and enough scissors for each child to have a pair. Explain that in this activity the children will be detectives looking for acts of justice and acts of injustice in the world. Invite the children to take two or three magazines or newspapers. In this activity, you may wish to pair readers with emerging readers. Give all the children a choice of cutting out news stories or pictures. When everyone (including you) has found two or three items of both justice and injustice, gather in a circle and share the findings. Ask: *Which was harder to find, justice or injustice? Why do you think one is easier to find than the other?* Help them to see that as people of faith it is important to share good news and do justice and tell other people about justice, because justice is underreported yet happens all the time. Invite the children to glue their pictures of justice and injustice on the mural. They may choose to separate the pictures or make a big collage.



### 6 Does God Feel Sad?

**Leader preparation:** In this activity, you will invite the children to consider the abstract picture “Kopf” by Joan Miro. As you facilitate this time, it is important to be open and intentional and not to rush. There are no right or wrong answers for the children to give. This exercise is about noticing and making meaning for one’s self. All the answers contribute to a greater understanding of the work.

#### Supplies:

- artwork: “Kopf” by Joan Miro, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt18>
- Bible
- a stick

Gather the children together to stand in a circle and take time to breathe deeply. Explain that everyone is going to look at a picture and all will have a chance to talk about what they see. To give everyone a chance to be heard, introduce the talking stick. Only the person holding the stick may speak. When that person finishes speaking, the stick is passed to someone else, until all have had a turn.

Invite the children to sit anywhere they like as long as they can see the picture. Ask them to put all their senses silently to work. Then ask the following questions in order, allowing discussion for each one.



1. What is the image about—what is the story?
2. What are two details from the picture—what colors, shapes, or objects do you see in the picture?
3. What does this picture make you feel?
4. How do you relate to this picture? Do you see yourself in the picture? Where? How?
5. What does it mean?
6. What does this work of art call us to do? Are we moved to justice? Compassion?

Thank the children for their attention and good answers. Explain that some people see this as a picture of sadness, or affirm the children's discovery of it as a picture of someone who is sad or worried. Invite the children to listen as you read Isaiah 1:10–17. Then ask if there were parts of the scripture that sounded like Miro's picture. While we can't see God, God knows emotions and feelings. *What made God angry or sad in the scripture? What are we called to do instead?*

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Singing a Prayer (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Singing is an ancient faith practice and one of the primary ways of transmitting the Christian faith across the centuries. In this activity, children will sing “Guide My Feet,” an African American slave spiritual that was used by the slaves to stay strong while in bondage and waiting for justice. Become familiar with the lyrics and the tune so that you can help children to sing this song with power. It is a song and also a prayer asking for God to guide our feet throughout our lives. (If you have access to the Internet, there is a YouTube video you may use.) After learning the words and appreciating the people and their struggle for justice out of which this song arose, work with the children to include verses that reflect their reality and places where they need God to guide their feet.

#### Supplies:

- “Guide My Feet,” Attachment: Activity 7
- (optional) song: “Guide My Feet,” African American traditional (tune: Guide My Feet), <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>
- (optional) YouTube video: “Guide My Feet,” <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong20>

Introduce the children to this song and its history. Practice singing it through. You may sing it as a round. Consider the words with the children and their meaning as a prayer. You may need to help the children see the metaphor of running a race as equal to moving through one's life. For the early singers of this song, moving through life was a race for justice. When everyone knows the first four verses, introduce the fifth verse suggested in *The New Century Hymnal*: “Wheel with me, while I run this race,” which was created by a 5th-grade group to include persons using wheel chairs. Create additional lyrics for their time and place, such as “Guide my feet, while I go to school,” “Guide my feet, while I play with friends,” and “Guide my feet, while I do justice.” Sing each new lyric through all four verses so that children gain a sense of being able to ask God's guidance and so that being a child of God is woven through their whole lives.



## 8 Feed the Hungry—Serving Communion

**Leader preparation:** An important symbol of justice that occurs in worship is communion. Jesus invites all who wish to come to his table. He made no distinctions among people. Serving communion to one another and to whomever is hungry is an act of justice. Make arrangements for your children to assist in serving communion in worship or perhaps to seniors in a retirement home or to younger children in the church.

**Supplies:**

- chalice, plate, and pitcher
- bread and juice

Follow the communion tradition of your faith community for the prayers and actions in communion. Talk to the children about communion as an act of justice. Give each child a chance to participate in a portion of the preparing, blessing, and serving communion to people who are not a part of the group. Conclude by having the children serve one another.

## 9 Follow the Justice Path—Walk Like Jesus

**Leader preparation:** Children often work by playing. Here they will play a kind of Follow the Leader game in which they imitate Jesus' justice actions. Building muscle memory of helping is a way to prepare for a life of doing justice. Having fun while learning and working can translate into joy at justice work as the children grow up.

**Supplies:**

- open area, either indoors or outside, with plenty of room for moving about
- a Bible

Read aloud Luke 4:14–21. Have the children create motions involving their bodies to match each action described in Luke 4:18–19. Once the actions are created, pick someone to be Jesus. This child then leads the group around the space, performing the actions. All the children imitate “Jesus” and switch to a different motion when “Jesus” changes. Let everyone have a turn being “Jesus.” You may invite the children to call out the action—such as “restoring sight to the blind”—as they switch motions.

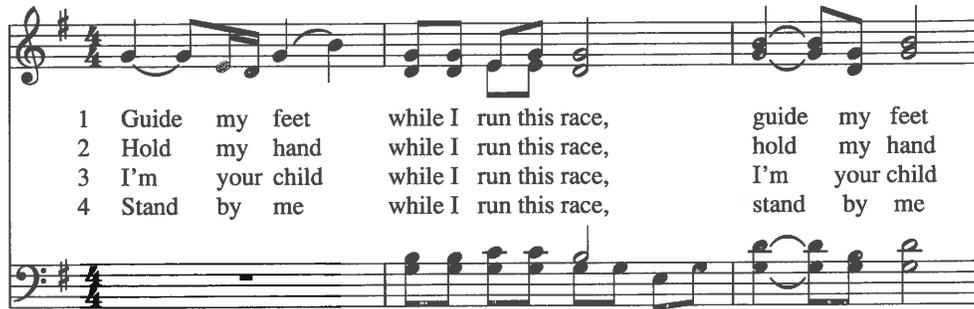
### Reflect

Consider this statement: “Working for justice is the way of life for disciples.” It is not *a* way of life, but *the* way of life for those who follow Jesus. What is God’s justice? How is it different than secular justice? How can all of us who are participating in this Exploration work for God’s justice in our daily lives? What are injustices faced by children in the church, community, and world? Who are the oppressed, orphans, and the widows where I live? How might I rescue or defend them? How might I plead for them?

Attachment: Activity 7

## Guide My Feet

*African-American traditional; alt.*



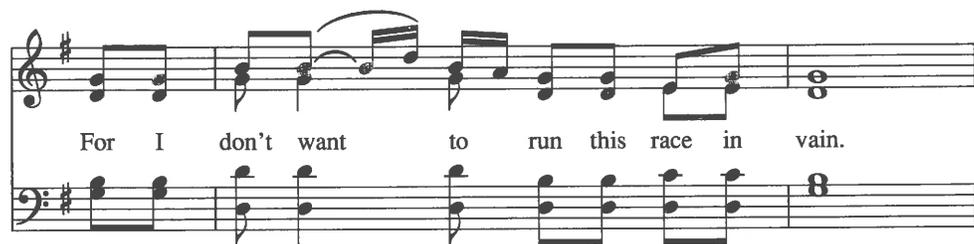
1 Guide my feet while I run this race, guide my feet  
 2 Hold my hand while I run this race, hold my hand  
 3 I'm your child while I run this race, I'm your child  
 4 Stand by me while I run this race, stand by me

Yes, my God.



while I run this race, guide my feet while I run this race,  
 while I run this race, hold my hand while I run this race,  
 while I run this race, I'm your child while I run this race,  
 while I run this race, stand by me while I run this race,

Yes, my God.



For I don't want to run this race in vain.

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# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Scripture

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages 7–11) are literal and concrete thinkers. They will benefit from hearing the scripture read aloud since some will be in the beginning reading stage. Do offer them the chance to read aloud. Be aware of difficult words, ideas, or new persons and stories that you may need to explain or discuss with the children. Leaders who approach the scripture activities with a sense of wonder model for participants how scripture can inspire their response to injustice.

### About this Exploration

Scripture asks what does God require of us and answers the question with marching orders and a road map. It admonishes against oppression, reminds us that we are created in the image of God, and demands that we work for a just world rooted in love. In Jesus we see the embodiment of loving justice, which, like an ever-flowing stream, grows to encompass the whole creation. We discover God's disappointment and anger with injustice, God's care for the poor and disenfranchised, God's zeal for justice as a way of life, and God's expectation that we structure our lives and relationships in the way that Jesus did.

## BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**Micah 6:1–8**  
**Amos 5:18–24**

## Leader Preparation

Take your Bible and go outside into nature. Sit near flowing water. Breathe. Listen. Look. Be still and take in the wonder of creation. Remove your shoes and feel the earth beneath your feet. Think about your feet and the places they have carried you. How have you been walking in your life? Consider what it might mean to walk humbly with God the creator of the world all around you. What kind of shoes make for humble walking? Are shoes even necessary? Moses took off his sandals on holy ground. Consider what fun children take in being barefooted and how much fun it might be to wash feet as an act of justice and loving kindness after a walk in the muddy mess of injustice. How does one praise God and give thanks for creation and all creatures in it?

Scriptures for this Exploration tell us that God wants justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Dip your feet in the water where you are, even if there is a sign that says “no wading”! While in the water, open your Bible and read Amos 5:18–24 as a reminder that justice work takes courage. Next turn to Micah 6:1–8 and read it in thanksgiving for the world around you and as a reminder that the natural world is included in working for justice. Take delight in the song calling the faithful to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our creator. Bring your reflection time to a close with the fol-

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Scripture Parade (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Become familiar with Micah 6:1–8. You may want to help your group look for the ideas it contains in the other scripture passages throughout all the Explorations. After sharing the full scripture passage with your group, you will lead them in a parade marching and reciting the scripture as a way for your group to commit scripture to memory using both their minds and bodies.

**Supplies:**

- Bible

Read Micah 6:1–8 with your group. Ask them if they know the story God speaks about in verse 4. Tell how God saved Moses and the Hebrew people when they were in slavery in Egypt. Explain that Micah was a prophet who lived after Moses and before Jesus but always followed God. He was concerned because people were forgetting all of God’s blessing and justice. In this scripture God calls the people of Micah’s time—and calls all of us today—to be responsible for how we live. Ask the learners about their understanding of verse 8. *How would you describe doing justice? Loving kindness? Walking humbly with God?* Have the children create ways of moving to represent doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly. Put all the movements together and then march around your space performing the movements and reciting Micah 6:8.

### 2 The Weight of Justice

**Leader preparation:** Read Amos 5:18–24. Here the prophet Amos, like the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah, is a mouthpiece for God. In verses 18–20, Amos warns that the way of justice is not light and easy. In Amos 5:21–24 God is not pleased with empty worship or living that is not about justice. Be aware that your children may be confused by the imagery. They may be more familiar with the ideas Jesus expressed—that Jesus is the light of the world and that God’s realm is a place of light and happiness. They will need your help to understand that God does not hate singing or music. God hates injustice and wants us to work for it. Assure them that Jesus provides a light to guide our feet. God’s realm will be a place without injustice. In the meantime, the work to get there takes courage and strength.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- bean bags or shoe boxes or other heavy objects that can be used as weights
- a tray, such as a serving tray or the top of a TV tray

Read Amos 5:18–20 with the children. You may want to let each of them take turns reading, passing the Bible and reading a verse. Lead a conversation with them about the scripture using the Leader Preparation notes that begin this Exploration.

Gather the children and pick one person to begin a contest of strength. They will experience firsthand that working for justice is not always an easy task. Dim the lights and invite the group to load weights onto the arms of the person picked to go first. After two or three weights have been added, ask her or him whether the load is heavy yet. Have the person demonstrate that she or he can still walk around freely. Then have the group put on more weights. Continue until the per-



lowing prayer or one of your own.

Prayer:

*Creator God,*

*Thank you for this earth and all who dwell here.*

*Thank you for the gift of scripture:*

*words of joy and sorrow, challenge and encouragement,*

*words that show us how to walk in the world.*

*Give me and the children in my care the courage and strength to joyfully follow your leading and to live in just ways.*

*Amen.*

## 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.

son drops the weights. (Be careful that no one shows off and carries too much.) Repeat this activity with one or two more children. Then raise the lights and give the children a tray. Have them work together to hold the tray, add weights to it, and carry it together across the room.

Conclude the exercise by talking about the “weight of justice.” *What makes following God possibly a difficult or challenging task? What are the barriers? Was it easier or more difficult to “work for” (carry) justice alone or in a group?*



### 3 Ever-Flowing Justice Poems

**Leader preparation:** In this activity you and the children will create cinquain poems related to justice, as inspired by Amos 5:24. A cinquain poem contains five lines in this configuration:

*Line 1:* One word as the subject/title of the poem (a noun)

*Line 2:* Two words that describe the noun in line one (adjectives)

*Line 3:* Three words that express action related to the noun (verbs)

*Line 4:* Four words that express feelings evoked and or provoked by the noun

*Line 5:* One word that is a synonym of the first noun

Think ahead of time about adjectives, verbs, and feeling words that relate to justice. Give the children their first word—“justice.” You may wish to brainstorm words with your children before they begin to write. Develop an example of your own to share if learners need an example.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- 8½" × 11" plain paper
- “Cinquain Poem,” Attachment: Activity 3
- colored markers
- tables and chairs for the group
- (optional) markers and newsprint or a whiteboard

Gather the children at tables with writing and painting supplies. Explain that they will create poetry inspired by scripture. Share Amos 5:21–24 with the children. Talk about justice. Introduce the cinquain poetry form. Distribute copies of the handout. Read the example. Ask the children if they would like to brainstorm some words before they write. Brainstorm and print the words clearly on the newsprint or whiteboard, in lists of adjectives, verbs, feeling words, and synonyms. Give the children time to write. When everyone is finished, gather in a circle and invite each member of the group to read a poem. Be sure to lead appreciation for the work completed. With the authors’ permission, share these writings with the wider faith community in the bulletin, newsletter, or online or by any other method you can imagine to spread the word about justice.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Plead Before Mountains—Nature Walk (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** In Micah 6:1–8 God uses Micah to issue a challenge to the people of Israel. The people have stopped following God’s ways of justice. God calls the people to speak and plead their case for disobedience. God asks the people to make their case, with mountains and hills as witnesses. In light of very present concerns that all people have a role to play in preserving the God’s creation, this seems like an appropriate time to talk with children about care for the earth. You will lead the group on a nature walk and allow the setting to begin a conversation related to what actions people do that either harm or help creation.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- (optional) a place to walk outdoors
- (optional) a trash bag or other container for litter
- (optional) rubber gloves for each child
- (optional) access to hand sanitizer or water and soap for washing hands after the walk

This activity can be an indoor conversation, or it can occur outdoors. The best option is an outdoor walk with your children. Find a good spot to stop and share Micah 6:1–8 with them. Whether indoors or outside, discuss how God asks the people to state their case outdoors in verses 1–2. *Why do you think God might want the people talk to God in front of mountains and in voices that the hills can hear?* You may wish to pass the Bible around and let the children read a verse or two in a voice they think the hills would hear (might be loud, might be as soft as the wind). Talk about how God is not pleased with animal or human sacrifices in verses 6–7 and as seen in Isaiah 1:10–17. See if the children can point to similarities in both passages. Invite the children to follow you and to observe nature and think about actions that could help nature. Ask for their thoughts as you move along.

*Option:* If the children see litter and have gloves to wear, have them pick it up and place it in a trash container. Invite everyone to pitch in to pick up any litter you find on the walk and properly dispose of it. Whether or not you are able to pick up trash, explain the importance of leaving no trace in order to preserve God’s creation for all people and creatures to enjoy. Each time the children choose not to litter—or when they help pick up litter or recycle—they are doing justice for the earth.

Conclude with a prayer in which each child thanks God for a favorite place or creature in nature and asks God’s help that he or she may always help the earth.



### 5 Who Am I?

**Leader preparation:** This activity is the start of a longer commitment. The children will interact with a piece of art and scripture. They will plant seeds. Over the following weeks, the children should help care for their plants with a final session can be planned at harvest time. You may also want to have some already sprouted flowers or vegetables to plant so the children can observe growth and change more immediately. This activity is designed to think about the idea of sowing justice in a concrete way. In the end, when the children share their harvest, they are sharing justice.



### Supplies:

- artwork: “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15625&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15625&store_id=1401)
- Bible
- a large wide pot or planting box or access to a small garden plot
- flower or vegetable seeds
- spades or trowels
- (optional) flower or vegetable plants (such as tomatoes) that are already sprouted
- (optional) recycled materials to build a bird bath

Invite the children to look at “The Sower” by Vincent van Gogh, without giving away the name of the painting. Invite the children to answer questions about the painting, such as the following.

- What is the story?
- What do you notice in the picture?
- What is the person doing?
- What can you tell about or imagine about the person based on what you see in the picture?

Then share the title of the picture. Affirm their observation that the person is planting seeds, or explain that in farming the way to grow things, especially in Bible days, is to spread seeds over the ground. The sower then nurtures the seeds with water and takes care of the field for crops to grow. Just as a sower sows seeds in a field, Christians are to sow justice in the world and help grow it in their homes, communities, and the world. Share the Parable of the Sower and its explanation from Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23.

Invite the children to plant seeds and already sprouted plants. Let them feel the dirt as they cover the seeds or plant the flowers or vegetables. Then have the children water the ground. You may also wish to have them construct a bird bath as part of this project. Conclude with a prayer that the planted seeds will grow into good plants like our hope that acts of kindness and faith will grow into mighty works of justice.

This will be an ongoing project. When the seeds have sprouted and grown, have a harvesting party. Perhaps the children can cut their flowers and share with persons in a shelter or senior home. If they grew vegetables, perhaps they can make a salad or a meal and serve it to the community. Invite the children to leave some of their crop in the ground for the birds or other animals to eat or for people to harvest. Share scripture from Leviticus 19:9–10 and Ruth 2:1–9, which explain the justice practice called gleaning.



## 6 Humble or Not? Role Playing with Scripture

**Leader preparation:** This activity will contrast the character traits of humility and humble living before God with opposite traits—arrogance, contempt, and rude behavior. You should become familiar with the Bible scenes included in the attachment in order to share a short synopsis of the story with the children. You may want to include more scenes, and your children may even wish to act out or create scenes from their everyday life at school or home that show the difference between walking humbly and being arrogant or rude. Before the session, make a copy of the handout and cut it up into individual scenes that the children may select during the activity.

**Supplies:**

- “Humble or Not?” Attachment: Activity 6
- indoor or outdoor space with room for pairs to perform and for others to sit and watch

Gather in a circle and talk about humility and arrogance. Perhaps you could contrast the passages for this exploration, Micah 6:1–8 and Amos 5:18–24. *Where in the passages do you see or hear humility or humbleness? Where do you see arrogance or rudeness?* Invite the children to act out the differences. Let them randomly draw a scene slip from a basket or out of your hands and work in teams to practice their scene. Then come together as a group to watch each scene. When each scene is finished, instruct the actors to ask in dramatic voices, “Humble or Not?” The children in the audience can then yell “Humble,” applaud, or give the thumbs-up sign for these scenes or yell “NOT,” make the thumbs down-motion, or boo for scenes of arrogance or rudeness. You may wish to conclude by inviting the children to create impromptu scenes from their own lives that show humility versus arrogance.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Washing the Feet of Our Friends (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** As recounted in scripture, Jesus modeled Micah 6:8 in his daily life. Jesus walks humbly with God when he serves his friends by washing their feet. You will share this story with your children and trace the practice from the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament to John 13:1–15, using a concordance. Examples include: Genesis 18:4, 19:2, 24:32, 43:24; and 1 Samuel 25:41. Your church, pastor, or public library should have a concordance you may borrow. You may also search online to find passages related to foot washing. Help children understand that washing feet is an ancient practice in the Middle East. The Hebrew people, who are the ancestors of contemporary Jews, washed feet as a sign of hospitality. Muslim people of faith wash their own feet before entering a mosque to pray. Jesus did not invent foot washing, but he helps us to see through his practice of this custom what it truly means to be humble.

**Supplies:**

- basin and pitcher
- cool water
- hand towels
- Bible

Have a conversation with the children about what it means to be humble. What are their thoughts? Share the story of Jesus washing the feet of his friends in John 13: 1–15. Explain that Jesus lived in ancient Israel and the practice of washing feet existed in his culture. He showed servant leadership by washing his friends’ feet himself rather than just providing water and a servant to perform this action. Introduce the children to the concordance as a tool for finding scripture passages. Demonstrate its use. Break into small teams of two or three to look up passages listed in the concordance and share various passages about foot washing by reading aloud from the Bible. End the activity by practicing foot washing or hand washing.

Foot washing in Jesus’ time was important because people wore sandals and walked on dusty roads. Today a major health concern is hand washing to pre-



vent the spread of germs. You may decide to do hand washing instead of foot washing, if that is more comfortable for the children. Girls sometimes wear tights that would make foot washing difficult or embarrassing to do. As the adult, you demonstrate by washing the feet or hands of one child. Then have each learner wash the feet or hands of her or his friends. Conclude with a prayer or a reading of Micah 6:8.

## 8 Stream Team

**Leader preparation:** Through Micah, God asks the people to plead their case to the mountains. Christians must extend their work for justice among people to include doing justice to the environment. Locate a local stream team or river cleanup group, and make arrangements for your children to participate in cleaning a section of a stream or river or lake. Your local waste management facility or water department staff may be useful resources for you to arrange your own cleanup project. These facilities make interesting field trips for older children. The optional book listed in the Supplies below may be available at your local public library.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- gloves and bags for each child for collecting debris
- rubber boots and old clothes
- hand sanitizer or access to hot water and soap at the end of the activity
- (optional) Internet access and computers for the children to explore the website of National Geographic, <http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/freshwater-101/>
- (optional) book: *Clean Water* by Beth Geiger (Sally Ride Science) (Roaring Brook Press, 2009)

Arrange for the children and their parents or other adults to meet at a stream or river for cleanup day. Invite everyone to wear rubber boots or sturdy shoes and old clothes. Share Amos 5:21–24 with the group. Talk about how justice is needed not only by people but also in the natural environment. Ask them about where they think their drinking water comes from, and talk about the water cycle. Discuss whether or not justice can roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream if the waterways are polluted with garbage and debris.

To further make the link between the metaphor of justice as a stream and how caring for the earth is part of justice, ask them how they would feel if the waterway they are about to clean up was their only source of water and somebody dumped garbage upstream. *Would you want to drink dirty water? Would it be safe to drink? What happens when people don't have clean water?* Explain that animals, including fish, are also harmed by dirty or polluted water. Talk about how the trash got into the river or on the banks in the first place.

Distribute buckets and gloves, and have the children work with their parents or other adults to pick up trash and debris from the waterway and its banks. When everyone has finished and the trash has been properly disposed of, conclude the activity by having the children read Micah 6: 1–8. *When God asks the people to plead their case before mountains or in nature, how do you want to be able to answer God?* Invite the children to write to the local paper to tell about their work and to ask others to take care and not pollute the environment.



## 9 Humbly Guide My Feet

**Leader preparation:** It is possible to do this activity entirely within your group and without special musical training. The children will create something wonderful. However, if you are able to arrange the help of a pianist or children's music teacher, you may do so. Familiarize yourself with the words to "Guide My Feet" and with the song and scripture for multiple voices on the attachment. Work with children to help them find a role in this "mini-cantata."

A *cantata* is a composition for one or more voices that usually includes solos, duets, recitatives, and choruses, which are sung to instrumental accompaniment. In this activity, children will sing "Guide My Feet" interspersed with spoken words of scripture. The musical accompaniment can be as simple as using shakers and drums, clapping hands, or having a small group of children continuously hum the tune to "Guide My Feet" during the narration of scripture. In addition, you may wish to have one or more children compose a letter about justice they want to send to adults or a letter to God asking for help in a situation of injustice. This letter could be read between verses 3 and 4 of "Guide My Feet." Be creative—this handout is merely a guide. As the leader you will read the part assigned to reader 5, or you may wish to have another adult read this part.

### Reflect

In the Book of Psalms, one finds a person pleading with God for help or forgiveness. In Micah 6:1–8, the compass scripture for this faith practice, God calls to humans to plead their case before the mountains and hills. Then God speaks to God's human creatures, calling them to a life of justice. Amos 5:18–24 reminds us that living such a life is not for wimps. It takes courage and it will often be difficult. Perhaps working for justice looks most difficult before one begins. What does it take to move from merely dipping one's toes into the stream of justice to wading in up to one's neck despite the cold and the currents? What does taking the plunge look like for you and your community? How can you help your children to carry the words of Micah in their hearts? In Amos, God asks humans to plead our case before the mountains. What can a person say to the mountains to explain human ignorance and lack of loving kindness for the natural world and for each other? How is justice tied to care of the natural world? How is caring for the natural world an act that brings justice and kindness to the least and the lost?

The suggested number of people who will sing or read each part is listed on the handout. When the trio or duo are singing, the remaining children can be getting ready to speak their scripture passages and or humming the tune along with those who are singing. Depending on the numbers of your group, you may want to make this an intergenerational activity. It could extend beyond one session. If possible, you may want to arrange an opportunity for the children to perform the piece for others.

#### Supplies:

- song: "Guide My Feet," African American traditional (tune: Guide My Feet); words and music: <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>
- "Song and Scripture for Multiple Voices," Attachment: Activity 9
- (optional) hand drums, shakers, or other percussion instruments
- (optional) assistance from a choir leader or member or a pianist

If you sang this song as an activity in the Discovery Exploration, remind the children of the song "Guide My Feet." If not, you'll need to teach it. Explain (or remind them) that it was a song sung by African American slaves calling on God to guide their feet or, in other words, to be with them throughout their lives as they waited and struggled for justice. People sang this song again in the Civil Rights Movement as the descendants of slaves and people of good will continued to work for their freedom and justice. We sing this song today to guide our feet in working for justice. Remind them too of Micah 6:8. In the song we ask God to guide our feet and in scripture God asks us to run our race or walk through our lives humbly. Have a short conversation about humble living. Then explain that they will have a chance to call on God in song and to remind themselves and others to walk humbly. Let the children pick their parts and practice the piece. Perform it as a group.

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Attachment: Activity 3

### Cinquain Poetry

A cinquain poem is not rhymed and contains five lines, in this pattern:

- Line 1:* One word as the subject/title of the poem (a noun)
- Line 2:* Two words that describe the noun in line one (adjectives)
- Line 3:* Three “-ing” action words related to the noun (verbs)
- Line 4:* Four-word phrase that captures feelings about the noun
- Line 5:* One word that is a synonym of the first noun

Think about adjectives, verbs, and feeling words that relate to justice. Here is a sample:

Stream  
Cool, wet  
Running, flowing, bubbling  
It’s fun to splash  
Creek

Use the form below to write your cinquain poem about justice. These are words related to justice you may want to use:

Justice	Fairness	Equal	Right
Honest	Lawful	Proper	Truthful

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Humble or Not?

*Note to Leader:* Make a copy of the scenes below and cut them apart so that you have four scenes. You may wish to make additional copies so that each actor will have easy access to his or her lines. You may create additional scenes as needed. Divide the group into four teams. Put the scenes in a basket or arrange them face down, and let teams pick at random. Provide time for each team to practice its skit. Encourage the children to be dramatic. If you have access to costumes, let the children dress up. Come together and invite one team to go first. The children can guess whether the persons in the skits are acting humbly or not.

### Scene 1: Ruth and Naomi

Adapted from Ruth 1:1– 2:18

**Narrator:** In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The man died, and his wife, Naomi, lived with her sons. One son married a woman called Orpah, and the other a woman called Naomi. Then the sons died, and the women had to find a new place to live.

**Naomi** (*in a kind voice*): Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the Lord grant that you may find safety. I will go to Moab.

**Orpah** (*acting fearful*): I am afraid to go all that way. I am leaving to go back to my mother's house.

**Ruth** (*leaving Orpah's side and standing close to Naomi*): Do not send me away. For where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people; your God, my God.

**Narrator:** So Ruth traveled with Naomi to Moab. Ruth helped her mother-in-law by gathering food from the fields and finding shelter for both of them.

**Narrator:** Was Ruth humble or not?

### Scene 2: Jesus Washing the Feet of his Friends

Adapted from John 13:1–15

**Narrator:** During supper Jesus—knowing that God had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God—got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe the feet with the towel that was tied around him.

*Jesus performs the motions described by the Narrator, with two people seated in front of him. He washes one set of feet during the narration. The second person is Simon Peter.*

**Simon Peter** (*pulling his feet out of the way*): Lord, what are you doing? You should not wash my feet. You are our teacher and master.

**Jesus** (*calmly*): Peter, I must wash your feet to show my care for you and to show that you are faithful to God.

**Simon Peter** (*enthusiastically holding out his feet and hands*): Then wash all of me!

**Jesus:** You are a good friend; I need only wash your feet.  
(*Jesus makes the motion of feet washing.*)

**Jesus:** Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

**Narrator:** Was Jesus humble or not?

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### Scene 3: Haman and Mordecai

Adapted from Esther 3–8

**Narrator:** In an ancient kingdom, there were two men who served a king. One was named Mordecai and one was named Haman. Mordecai was a good servant and loyal to the king and faithful to God. He was Jewish, but the king and his servant Haman were not. One day Haman was promoted for his good work.

**Haman:** What a great day! Everyone must worship me. I am in charge.

**Small group** (*bowing*): Haman, you are wonderful. We bow before you.

**Mordecai** (*standing up*): I cannot bow down to a person. I only worship God.

**Haman:** I am so angry with you Mordecai! I will punish you by killing all of your people and you, too. I will not even ask the king for permission. You are all going to die.

**Narrator:** Haman made serious threats. Mordecai worked with his cousin Esther, who was the Queen, to stop Haman from his evil plan. When the king learned of Haman's plot, he put Haman to death.

**Narrator:** Was Haman humble or not?

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### Scene 4: Pharaoh and the Israelite People

Adapted from Exodus 1:1–5:10

**Narrator:** In Egypt there was a ruler called a Pharaoh. He and his people had slaves who were from Israel. There were more slaves than Egyptians. The Pharaoh and his people were afraid of the slaves.

**An Egyptian Slave Owner:** Let us make the lives of the slaves bitter. Let them suffer. They will make all the bricks with straw we need for building and shall work in our fields.

**Pharaoh:** This is not enough punishment. I order all the boy children who are born to slaves to be thrown in the Nile.

**Narrator:** Now Moses was born and was not thrown in the Nile. The Pharaoh's daughter rescued him and raised him as her own child. Moses grew up and decided to fight the injustice of Pharaoh. He asked Pharaoh to let the slaves go free. Pharaoh would not listen.

**Pharaoh:** Who is this Lord that I should do what God asks and let the slaves go? I do not know the Lord and will not let the people go. In fact I will make their work harder. From now on they must make the same number of bricks as before but with no straw. If they do not do it, they shall be punished.

**Narrator:** Was Pharaoh humble or not?

## Song and Scripture for Multiple Voices

**Reader 1:** Hear what God says: Rise, plead your case before mountains and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains and you enduring foundations of the earth, for God has a controversy with all people.

**Whole Group Sings:**

Guide my feet while I run this race.  
Guide my feet while I run this race,  
Guide my feet while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

**Reader 2:**

O my people, what have I done for you?  
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!  
For I, your God, brought you up from the land of Egypt,  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,  
and I sent before you Moses, Aaron,  
and Miriam that you might know my saving acts.

**Trio Sings:**

Hold my hand while I run this race.  
Hold my hand while I run this race.  
Hold my hand while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

**Reader 3:** With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high?

**Duo Sings:**

Stand by me while I run this race.  
Stand by me while I run this race.  
Stand by me while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

**Reader 4:** *(Read the letter composed by the children.)*

**Solo Sings:**

I'm your child while I run this race.  
I'm your child while I run this race.  
I'm your child while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

**Reader 5:**

Shall I come before God with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?  
Will God be pleased if I bring thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rives of oil for the offering? Shall I give my most precious possession, the fruit of my body, my child for the sin of my soul?

**Whole Group Sings:**

Search my heart while I run this race.  
Search my heart while I run this race.  
Search my heart while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

**Reader 6:**

God has told you, O mortal, what is good. God requires of you to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

**Whole Group Sings:**

Guide my feet while I run this race.  
Guide my feet while I run this race.  
Guide my feet while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

Guide my feet while I run this race.  
Guide my feet while I run this race.  
Guide my feet while I run this race,  
For I don't want to run this race in vain!

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Discipleship

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages 7–11) need to feel valued by their community. They enjoy active participation, and they delight in meaningful work. Working for justice is at the heart of discipleship; yet children are often told, both in and out of church, that they are too young to help. Activities in this Exploration provide learners with experiences of meaningful work as advocates and helpers of those Jesus calls all of his disciples to serve.

### About this Exploration

When Jesus bids us come and follow, what does he mean? It means following Jesus in justice work. Disciples are invited to practice their faith by making conscious choices, exploring ideas, and acquiring skills for the lives to which Jesus calls us. The activities in this exploration lead disciples to ask: How do our daily plans and routines show our commitment to working for justice?

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22**  
**John 10:11–18**

## Leader Preparation

Following Jesus in justice work is an awesome journey with many dimensions. Children want to participate in this work. They face their own needs for justice in their daily lives. A crucial justice issue for many children is that of safe schools and communities in which bullying does not exist. News reports and official studies indicate that bullying is a very real problem, going deeper than mere name calling. Adults are complicit in bullying when they do nothing. In Jeremiah 14:7–10, 19–22, you can hear the pleadings of the ancient Israelites as they confess they have not acted justly and call on God to be present with them. Like the ancient Israelites, we adults can examine our own lives for times when we, too, were not actively just. When we confess, God can work with us to action.

As part of your preparation for this Exploration, become familiar with an article on the UCC’s website entitled “Bullying: What can We Do to Stop It,” <http://www.ucc.org/justice/children-and-youth/what-can-we-do-to-stop.html>. Also become familiar with the federal government’s website “StopBullying,” <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/>. Both websites provide resources to talk with children about bullying and its prevention. After you have studied the online materials, read John 10:11–18. This gospel passage shows Jesus as the good shepherd who welcomes

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Wanted: Good Shepherds (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Read John 10:11–18. Notice the qualities of care and compassion Jesus exhibits as a good shepherd. Jesus is constant and faithful and true to all who already follow his teachings, and he extends his care to those whom he has not yet met. He is gladly willing to lay down his life for those in his care. He is the model for our discipleship. You will help children to explore these qualities. You may need to help children understand the shepherd metaphor, especially if you are living in an urban area. Be prepared to share with the children some examples of persons in your community or the wider world who are good shepherds.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- (optional) pictures of shepherds and sheep
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Gather the children in a circle around you. Invite them to get comfortable. Ask them if they know what a shepherd is or if they have ever seen sheep. If available, show a picture of a shepherd and sheep. Or, on the newsprint or whiteboard, draw some sheep. Read aloud John 10:11–18, in which Jesus describes himself as a good shepherd. *What do you notice about how a good shepherd acts? Write these descriptions on the sheep. How could you be a good shepherd at home and at school? How could you use the descriptions written on the sheep in you relationships at home and at school?*

Draw some figures of people on the newsprint or whiteboard amidst and around the sheep. It’s fine if these drawings are stick figures. *What friend or adult do you know who acts like a good shepherd? Invite children to offer names of friends or adults who act like good shepherds. Write the names on the people figures. Close with a prayer, blessing shepherds and the people who need care and asking Jesus to help everyone present to live like good shepherds.*

### 2 The Sounds of Justice

**Leader preparation:** An important part of Christian discipleship is singing hymns and songs of faith. Through singing and music, discipleship practices—such as communion, baptism, and healing—are ingrained in our memories, even after we are adults. When we sing the songs, we recall the sacraments and traditions as well as the story of God’s amazing love for the world through the word made flesh in Jesus Christ. Learn the words and music to “Dream God’s Dream,” in which singers are invited to imagine what the world would look like if we all lived as God intends. Sing with the children until this song becomes written into their memory and yours. You may wish to sing it often to start your sessions in this and other Explorations for this Faith Practice. If we know something through singing, then we can begin to live it in other aspects of our lives. In times of trouble, the words and music will help us overcome.

all to be his companions; no one is a stranger. Older children can look to the good shepherd as their model for living a bully-proof life and helping their friends to do the same. As you conclude your study and reflection time, close with the following prayer or a prayer of your own.

Prayer:

*God, you call us to justice work.*

*Through Jesus, you showed us that justice is for all people.*

*I confess that I have not always acted justly or advanced the cause of justice.*

*Help me to be a good shepherd for [insert the names of the children in your group].*

*Help us all to make visible your realm of justice by our faith and our works.*

*Amen.*

## 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:

- song: “Dream God’s Dream” by Bryan Sirchio; find lyrics at <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong19a> and <http://www.sirchio.com/index.php?page=songs&category=&display=179>
- (optional) music player
- (optional) simple musical instruments such as shakers, drums, bells

Gather the children around a piano or music player. Explain that a big part of discipleship is singing the songs of our faith. Today they will learn a new song about the kind of world God dreams of and how they can help God make such a world. Play the tune one time or listen to it. Next, teach the children the chorus and sing it a couple of times. Then go verse by verse until the children are comfortable with the words and music. Sing it all the way through. Conclude with a conversation about what the lyrics mean to them. *What are your dreams and fears?* Close with a prayer and a final singing of the chorus.

### 3 Bully Proof

**Leader preparation:** Bullying is a serious problem in schools and communities. It can exist even in the church. Study the resources online at <http://www.ucc.org/justice/children-and-youth/what-can-we-do-to-stop.html> and the website for children provided by the U.S. Department of Health, <http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/>. Read John 10:11–18. The good shepherd, Jesus, would not condone bullying. Jesus did act to prevent bullying, such as in the case of the Gerasene demoniac, who is both bullied by an unclean spirit and shunned by his community (Mark 5:1–20), and when he rebuked the disciples for wanting to send away children (Luke 18:15–17). Your task will be to help the children know what bullying is, what to do about it, and how to be good shepherds with one another at home, school, and play as well as in the faith community.

### Supplies:

- Bible
- computers with Internet access
- website: “Stop Bullying”

Meet with the children at a place where they can access the website, such as the church office. Begin by reading the children the description of Jesus the Good Shepherd in John 10:11–18. Then talk about what it means to be a shepherd. As followers of Jesus we are called to be shepherds, too. Ask them about what they know about bullying. Explain that bullying is not a part of discipleship. Jesus invites everyone to be a part of the community, regardless of differences. Encourage them to do likewise. Explore the website, play the games, and test one another’s knowledge of bullying, how to prevent it, and what to do if it happens. Close with a prayer inviting the children to be shepherds and to uplift those who have been bullied.



## Discerning & Deciding Activities

### 4 Signs of Justice (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** An important part of justice is nonviolent protest, including using signs to state a position and to call attention to injustice while standing or sitting in solidarity. In this activity, you will help the children make signs demonstrating God's love for all people and calling for an end to bullying. You may wish to arrange for the children to hold a justice vigil during a church service or in a public place. Coordinate this activity with parents, your pastor, or school officials. If you have time and access to the Internet, you may wish to print and hang samples of peace and protest signs in the room where you will meet for this activity. Alternatively, you may wish to draw some sample signs.

#### **Supplies:**

- blank sheets of 8½" × 11" or larger card stock or poster board
- colored markers or crayons or paints
- (optional) tape or push pins for hanging signs on bulletin boards
- (optional) wooden stakes to attach to signs for carrying

Invite the children to look at the sample signs hanging in the room, if these are available. Explain that Christians and other people have worked for justice by using a practice called nonviolent resistance. Jesus calls us to love, and violence is not part of love. Suggest to the children that one big way they can show their discipleship is by being good friends to children at school whether or not they know one another. Another way is to make new children feel welcome. What ideas do the children have?

Talk about steps to prevent bullying. Invite the children to make signs with messages of love and peace, calling for an end to bullying. Have them take their signs outside and do a vigil for peace in schools, homes, and churches. Conclude the time by asking the children to name another child in their school or neighborhood who needs a friend. Invite and encourage them to be a friend to the person they named. Lift up in prayer the children and the ones they named.

### 5 Jesus Welcomes

**Leader preparation:** Jesus welcomed all people to follow him and invited all sorts of different people to eat with him. As his disciples, we are called to extend friendship and welcome to all people regardless of how different they may be from ourselves. In fact, the more different a person is the more we are encouraged to share and be in community with her or him. Differences can be frightening. When fear rules, it is easy to bully those who are different, ignore them, or fail to act justly toward them. In this activity, you will encourage children to talk about their differences and to view difference in a positive light, as did Jesus. The story *It's Ok to Be Different* should be available at your local library. You may substitute other books or stories you may know in which difference is celebrated. Read Jeremiah 14 and note how serious God is about justice. This passage may be too difficult for the children, but it can help you understand the seriousness of God's expectation, which you can help your learners understand.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bible
- book: *It's Ok to Be Different* by Todd Parr (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2001)



Gather the children for story time. Invite them to sit or lie down anywhere, as long as they can see you and the book you will share. Talk to them about Jesus' habit of making friends with all kinds of people who were different from himself. He gathered with men and women and boys and girls. He ate with people who had all different kinds of jobs. He was not afraid of people who were different. He healed people with all kinds of illnesses whom others were afraid to touch. Being a disciple and working for justice gives all of us an opportunity to meet and befriend people different than ourselves.

Read *It's Ok to Be Different* by Todd Parr and share the pictures. Ask the children if they see themselves in the book. *What are things all people share no matter how they are different?* Read aloud Matthew 7:1–5, in which Jesus reminds us not to judge other people, and Matthew 7:12, which is popularly referred to as the Golden Rule. These teachings of Jesus guide people not to bully but to befriend all people including those who are different. Then share the story of Jesus and the centurion's servant in Matthew 8:5–13. It is a story about the great faith of the centurion. It is also about Jesus and the centurion choosing to work together despite their differences.



## 6 Embrace of Peace

**Leader preparation:** In this activity, you will invite the children to consider the painting “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker. Tooker was raised in the Catholic faith and named the picture after the part of the Catholic Mass when the priest invites people to exchange the peace of Christ. Be familiar with your own community's tradition of passing the peace in worship in order to share it with the children. If you do not regularly pass the peace, you may read about the Catholic practice at the website “The Order of Mass,” <http://catholic-resources.org/ChurchDocs/Mass.htm>. The peace is passed during the portion of the service during which communion is taken. As you facilitate this time, it is important to be open and not to rush. There are no right or wrong answers for the children to give. This exercise is about noticing and making meaning for one's self. All the answers contribute to a greater understanding of the work.

### Supplies:

- artwork: “Embrace of Peace” by George Tooker, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=15626&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401)
- Bible
- stick

Gather the children together and stand in a circle. Take time to breathe deeply. Explain that everyone is going to look at a picture and everyone will have a chance to talk about what they see. To give everyone a chance to be heard, introduce the talking stick. Only the person holding the stick may speak. When that person finishes, the stick is passed to someone else until all have had a turn. Invite the children to sit anywhere they like as long as they can see the picture. Ask them to put all their senses to work silently. Then ask questions such as these.

- What is this image about? What is the story connected to this picture?
- Name two details of this picture. What colors, shapes, or objects do you see?
- What does the picture make you feel?
- How do you relate to the picture? Do you see yourself in the picture? Where? How?
- What is the meaning of this picture?



- What does this work of art call us to do? Are we moved to justice? Compassion?

Thank the children for their attention and good answers. Explain that the artist named this picture “Embrace of Peace” after the part in the worship service in which we are called to turn to our neighbors and say, “The peace of Christ be with you.” The listener replies, “And also with you,” and the two neighbors greet one another with a handshake, hug, or kiss on the cheek. Invite the children to practice saying “The peace of Christ be with you” and “And also with you” and to shake hands. Following this, ask them how this experience changes what they think about the picture. *Who are you called to share the peace of Christ with?*

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Prayer of Confession (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Working for justice sometimes takes a back seat to regular routines of work and family life. In the United States it is easy for many people to conduct their lives far removed from injustice. Yet inactivity or ignorance of injustice is not part of discipleship. Jesus calls us to follow God and to confront injustice. The practice of the prayer of confession in worship and in our individual lives provides an opportunity to identify injustice and to call on God for help and strength to take action. Be familiar with your own community’s tradition of confession in order to share it with the children. You may use a local prayer, one you write, or the simplified one below to guide your children in learning this form of prayer.

#### Supplies:

- (optional) copies of the prayer of confession for children below, the one you write, or the prayer of confession used in your community

Gather the children in a circle. Ask them how their week has gone. *Did you do something for fun or learn something new at school?* Ask them whether they had an opportunity to help out at home or at school. Thank them for their actions. Next, ask if anyone had difficulty being helpful or kind at home or school. If no one has anything to share, ask a broader question: *Has anyone ever sometimes acted badly with a brother or sister or friend or parent?* Let them know that everyone has times when he or she do not behave well or forgets to be a disciple of Christ. Assure them of God’s love and Jesus’ care. In our lives as followers of Christ, we say a prayer of confession in order to say what we did and ask God to help us get back on the path of right actions and justice.

Teach the children in your group the Children’s Prayer of Confession below or a prayer of confession your community uses.

God, who is ever present with us,  
 thank you for your love.  
 We know that this week we have not always lived  
 the way Jesus taught us.  
 Forgive us if we have caused hurt to others.  
 Give us help to apologize and make amends.  
 Help us to live as your friends.  
 We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

## 8 Balloons, Not Bullies

**Leader preparation:** Acquire a copy of the film *The Red Balloon*, directed by Albert Lamorisse. Your local library should be able to loan you a copy, or you may find it online or at a local movie rental store. The film follows a young boy around the streets of Paris. He is accompanied by a red balloon. They have adventures, and when some bullies attack him and pop the balloon, other balloons appear out of nowhere and the boy floats above the bullies to safety. The film provides a way to indirectly explore how faith and hope win over bullying. Be ready and open to hear how the children see the action and understand the film. You will need time for showing this film and for discussion afterward. The film itself has a running time of 35 minutes. Perhaps you could invite the children to your home for this activity.

### Supplies:

- Bibles
- film: *The Red Balloon*, directed by Albert Lamorisse
- movie player and projection device
- a red balloon and ribbon for each child

Have the children take turns reading John 10:11–18. Talk about the Good Shepherd and what he does (loves, shares about God, gives up his life for his friends). Invite the children to watch *The Red Balloon*. After watching the film, invite the children to say anything they would like to say about what they saw. Then ask if they saw Jesus in the film: the boy, the balloon, or anyone else. Other questions you might ask are about what they thought of the bullies and about how the group of balloons rescues the boy. *How can you be like the balloons with your friends in a bullying situation?* Conclude by saying a prayer that the children always be lifted up by knowing Jesus as their friend and savior. Have everyone blow up red balloons, tied with red ribbons, to share with other children.

## 9 Welcome Kits

**Leader preparation:** Work with your community to provide the necessary supplies for this activity. For each welcome bag you plan to make, you will need a small tote bag, a pencil, a package of crayons, 3–4 pipe cleaners, a bendable “smiley” face toy or another toy with a “smiley” face, and a youth Bible or paperback Bible storybook. Work with your pastor and others responsible for new member care to create a simple letter that welcomes a child to the community. It might include an invitation to children’s programs and should include some verbatim words from children already in the community telling what they like about being there. A copy of this letter will go in each bag and should be signed by one of the children in your group. Bring all supplies to your meeting space and lay them out as described in the activity description. Children will have the chance to prepare a welcome for newcomers whom they have not yet met. This activity will take some advance planning and might be part of a weekend party event.

### Supplies:

- small tote bags
- fabric markers in a variety of colors
- Christian stickers
- pencils with a Bible verse or the message “Jesus Loves Me” or “Welcome”
- crayons
- blank paper
- pipe cleaners in a variety of colors
- bendy “smiley” face

- copies of a welcome letter
- copies of a youth Bible or paperback Bible storybook

Gather the children around tables and give each one an undecorated tote bag. Tell the story from scripture of Jesus welcoming a child. Ask them if they like to be invited to parties or to play games. Ask them how they feel when they are new somewhere. Explain that as followers of Jesus they can help welcome new children to the faith community. Today they will help make welcome bags for new children. Invite them to decorate the bags with “smiley” faces, rainbows, doves, or children holding hands.

When the children have decorated the bags, invite them go around the table and put in pipe cleaners, a youth Bible, paper for drawing, a pack of crayons, a pencil, some stickers, and other quiet fidgets into the bags. Have each child write a welcome letter and sign it with his or her name and place it in the bag. Ask a blessing for these gifts, or have the welcome bags dedicated during a worship service and placed in a prominent place in the sanctuary or narthex. When a new child visits, be sure he or she receives a welcome bag.

## Reflect

For some communities of faith, justice work is an essential part of their everyday lives; in other communities, justice work is seldom linked with discipleship. In some communities, justice is understood only as charity for people far away rather than as an active daily part of one’s faith journey. Reflect on your own and the level of your community’s involvement in justice work. Where are you on this spectrum? What are the injustices in your area that need a response? What would a faithful response look like? Does the call to justice arouse feelings of fear, discomfort, or excitement? How do you take the plunge despite fears? How do you invite God to guide you and Jesus to inspire your efforts or those of your community? How can you model justice with older children both personally and in community? Who are the shepherds of your life or in your community? Who would you point to as living shepherds to inspire your older children? Do you know children who are shepherds?

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# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Christian Tradition

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages 7–11) are beginning to be aware of the larger world outside themselves. Christian tradition is rich with examples of practices that aid one in working for justice, both in one's immediate community and in the wider world. In this Exploration children will experience Christian traditions such as gleaning, sharing, and praying as means to work for justice. They will hear the stories of real people of faith who do these practices today.

### About this Exploration

In working for justice, as in everything, our past is our prologue. Christian tradition calls the church to confess its participation in the creation and perpetuation of injustice. It also calls us to celebrate as Christian people who claim and test our heritage through doing the work of justice. Grounded in this history, we follow God's lead and discover new ways to practice our faith working for justice.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Psalm 34:15–22**  
**Ephesians 2:11–12**

## Leader Preparation

Christian tradition is full of practices and events designed to tear down old ways of thinking and living and build up new ways of being together in community. To prepare for this Exploration, perhaps you can take your Bible and go to either the sight of a condemned building waiting to be torn down or to a fresh construction site in which the foundation is being laid and building is in process. In either spot, take time to read Ephesians 2:11–22, in which Paul describes the reconciling work of Christ and the building up of a united community of faithful followers. Consider your community and what attitudes or practices might have to change in order to welcome new people as brothers and sisters in Christ. Next consider Psalm 34. Hear in it God's call for and love of those who do justice as well as God's disdain for those who do evil or hinder justice.

What are some justice traditions of your community? What new traditions would you like to grow and nurture to support the involvement of children in justice work in your community? Pick up a stone or scrap of building material from either the site of a building that will be torn down or the one that is being built new. Keep it with you as you lead activities in this Exploration to remind you of the need to break down walls between people and to build up community. Conclude your preparation time with the following prayer or one of your own.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities



### 1 Breaking Down the Walls (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Reading scripture and sharing it with others is a centuries old Christian tradition. Ephesians 2:11–22 is rich in imagery and provides a chance to talk about Jesus and Paul and their time and place on earth. Both Jesus and Paul were of the Jewish faith. In their time, people who were not Jewish were called Gentiles. Paul is writing a letter to Jewish followers of Christ to make sure they know that everyone, regardless of their background, has a place with God. The justice lesson is helping children to know that this scripture is about breaking down barriers. It is not, however, in the modern context, a command that all people must be Christians in order to be loved by God. When we all work for peace and justice regardless of faith, we are acting to bring God's realm into reality.

#### Supplies:

- Bibles

Gather the children in a semicircle around you, pass out Bibles, and help them find Ephesians 2:11–22. Explain that this scripture is part of a letter written by Paul, who was a follower of Jesus. Paul lived after Jesus' time and before the Christian church was fully established. Like Jesus, Paul was a Jew. People who were not Jewish were called Gentiles. At the time, some Jews were afraid of Gentiles and were not sure Jews and Gentiles should worship God together. Paul writes to assure the Ephesians that Jesus welcomes all people to follow him and that God loves all people regardless of who they are. Read the scripture once aloud. Next have the children take turns, each reading a verse or two. Ask them what they notice or what words seem important to them. Read it one more time with some children sitting close together in one place and others standing far off in the room. When finished, draw them all together and close with a prayer thanking Jesus for uniting people who are near and far away.

### 2 Building a House for God

**Leader preparation:** In Ephesians 2:17–22 the Apostle Paul speaks of Christian unity, both through time and across national boundaries, by describing the household of God as built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets who have gone before the present generations. Christ is its cornerstone. In this activity, your children will have fun working together to build "a dwelling place for God." Read Ephesians 2:17–22 and provide building blocks or construction tops, such as Tinker Toys or Legos®, that have many different-sized parts that can be put together into one structure.

#### Supplies:

- building blocks or construction toys
- Bible
- lyrics to verse 1 of "Lord, Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary," words and music by John W. Thompson and Randy Scruggs
- (optional) YouTube video: "Lord Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LiTy7ndOzw&feature=related>

Gather the children on the floor and share Ephesians 2:17–22 with them. Talk about how we are all united in Christ no matter what we look like, where we come from, or any other factor. Assure them they are loved by God and are God's



Prayer:

*Christ Jesus, cornerstone of the household of God,*

*I give thanks for all the brothers and sisters I have through faith in you.*

*Guide me as I lead [insert first names of the children] to know you and one another.*

*Help us all to be faithful disciples, making your love visible to all the world.*

*Amen.*

## 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.

children. Dump out the construction toys and invite the children to work together to build “a dwelling place for God” using all the parts—every piece must be used. Leave it up to the children to create any shape they want. Conclude the activity by singing “Lord, Prepare Me to Be a Sanctuary.”

*Option:* As an alternative, you may want them to have fun using their own bodies to build a house for God. Have some children lie down and be the foundation, have one curl up and be the cornerstone, and have the other children stand around the foundation and stretch their arms across to form an arch or roof.

### 3 A Place to Call Home

**Leader preparation:** God calls us and Jesus leads us to be a household of faithful brothers and sisters. With open eyes and a mind for justice, adults and children know there are people who are literally without homes. Working for justice means addressing the root cause of the need for homes. Millard and Linda Fuller, people of faith, decided one way to address the need was to work hand in hand with poor and homeless people to provide houses. Visit the Habitat for Humanity website at [www.habitat.org](http://www.habitat.org) or your local Habitat office to learn more about his story in order to share with the children.

In this activity you will share a story of hope and courage displayed by a young girl as she and her mother build a home for themselves with the help of volunteers. The book listed below should be available at your local library. You may also wish to take your children on a field trip to a local Habitat building site.

#### Supplies:

- book: *You and Me and Home Sweet Home* by George Ella Lyon (Atheneum/Richard Jackson Books, 2009)
- Bible

Share Ephesians 2:11–22 with your children. Help them understand that God calls us to be a family and to shelter one another in our faith. Sometimes people have no actual homes. *Can you imagine that? Have you experienced homelessness?* Share the story of *You and Me and Home Sweet Home*. Talk to the children about Habitat for Humanity and Millard and Linda Fuller. If you are able, take the children to visit a Habitat building site. Perhaps they can bring some refreshments they have made to help the workers. Conclude with a prayer giving thanks for their homes and for people sharing to build homes for others.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 Thanking God for Help (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Calling on God with thanksgiving and for help is another long-standing faith tradition both inside and outside Christianity. The psalms are songs that we speak as prayers. Prayer is a regular practice for people working for justice. You may want to share the story of Ruby Bridges or remind the children of her story, which they may have heard in Activity 2 of the Discovery Exploration. Ruby prayed that God would help the people who were prejudiced, and her prayers helped her survive.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- (optional) book: *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges (Scholastic Press, 1999)
- (optional) Internet access to view the website “Ruby Bridges,” <http://www.rubybridges.com/story.htm>

Share Psalm 34 with your children. Invite them to talk about what the text means. Perhaps they would like to act out the actions described in the psalm. After they have acted out the psalm, invite them to say or write the psalm in their own words. *What fears or concerns do you have for which you would like comfort from God? What are the joys for which you would like to thank God?* Conclude by praying Psalm 34:1–10.

*Option:* Tell the Ruby Bridges story. When she was going to school amid the hatred of racial prejudice, her mama assured her, “Remember, if you get afraid, say your prayers. You can pray to God anytime, anywhere. God will always hear you.”

**5 The Pineapple Seller**

**Leader preparation:** A core justice issue for Christians is combating poverty and hunger. To begin to understand this issue, children need to understand where the food they eat comes from and how many people take part in bringing food to their table. They may never have thought about how people in other places help grow and sell the foods they eat. They may or may not have experienced hunger themselves. This activity combines art and the sense of taste to begin a conversation about food and justice. Hang the poster “Vendedora de Piñas” in your space so all the children can see it. Keep the fruit hidden until after the art has been discussed.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: “Vendedora de Piñas” by Diego Rivera, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt17>
- Bible
- a fresh pineapple
- pineapple juice
- a can of pineapple, a knife and cutting board, and a can opener
- cups, plates, napkins

Gather the children and invite them to study the poster of the pineapple seller. Invite the children to sit down anywhere they like as long as they can see the picture. Ask them to put all their senses to work silently. Then lead a discussion of the artwork through questions such as these.

- What is the image about? What is the story being told?
- Name one detail from the picture. What colors, shapes, or objects do you see in the picture?
- What does this picture make you feel?
- How do you relate to this picture? Do you see yourself in the picture? Where? How?
- What does this picture mean?
- What does this work of art call us to do? Are we moved to justice? Compassion?

Thank the children for their attention and good answers. Explain that the woman in the picture is from Mexico and that artist who painted the picture was Diego



Rivera. He painted pictures of ordinary people in daily life. *What do you imagine about her life? Is she rich or poor, happy or sad?* Invite the children to create a story about the woman.

Ask the children if they have ever helped grow food. Show them the fresh pineapple. Let them hold it and smell it. Explain that a person who grows food has to prepare the soil, plant the seeds, weed the field, and then harvest the food. In some places, all this work is done completely by hand. In other places, machines help with all parts of the work. Show them the canned pineapple. Cut up the fresh pineapple and open the canned pineapple chunks. Invite the children to taste each kind. *What do you notice about the difference between the hand prepared fresh pineapple and the canned variety?* There is a biblical practice called gleaning, in which people gather leftover crops from farmers' fields. Farmers and the workers do not harvest every edible item from the field. Rather, they leave some for hungry people and in some cases for hungry animals to eat. Share the Bible passages in Leviticus 19:9, 23:22, Deuteronomy 24: 19–21, and Ruth 2:2–23. Invite the children to take the pineapple that is left over and share it with another group.

### ⑥ Take Some, Leave Some Relay

**Leader preparation:** Gleaning is part of our scriptural heritage. Gleaning, the tradition of gathering leftover crops from farmers' fields, is spoken of in Leviticus and Deuteronomy in the Hebrew scriptures. It is also part of the story of Ruth. Jesus commands the disciples to feed hungry people in one lake-shore teaching. Five loaves and two fishes feed multitudes with some left over. The idea of leaving some crops unharvested runs counter to the cultural messages of hoarding and greed. In this activity the children will play a game to practice leaving some items behind for others to gather. The practice of gleaning, or food recovery, is alive and well, yet underreported in most media. You may wish to explore a Christian-based gleaning mission sponsored by the Society of St. Andrew at [www.endhunger.org](http://www.endhunger.org) and incorporate the story into your time playing the game. You will need to set up the game field ahead of time. This activity could easily take place outdoors.

#### **Supplies:**

- large blue tarp, or another way to mark off a large rectangle
- plastic grocery sacks, one per child.
- 40 lbs of potatoes
- Bible
- food bank or soup kitchen to donate the potatoes to after the game
- Leviticus 19:9 and Leviticus 23:22 printed on separate index cards

Lay out the tarp or mark off a large rectangle of open space, preferably outdoors. The space should be at least 10 × 15 feet. Scatter the potatoes across the “field.” Divide the children into two groups, one called Harvesters and the other Gleaners. The Harvesters should be a smaller group than the Gleaners. Pick one child to be the referee.

The game begins as the referee reads Leviticus 19:9. The referee then instructs the Harvesters to gather potatoes and put them in sacks. The Harvesters fill their sacks but leave enough behind for the Gleaners, remembering there are more hungry people than those with enough to eat. After a few minutes, the referee blows a whistle and reads Leviticus 23:22. Now it is the Gleaners' turn to gather potatoes. They should fill their sacks but remember to leave a few potatoes behind for hungry creatures that also depend on the generosity of humans. End the game by counting the potatoes. Harvesters should have fewer potatoes than the Gleaners, and there should be some potatoes left in the field. Finally, everyone



puts the potatoes in a big box, including the potatoes left in the field. These will be taken to a local food bank or soup kitchen.

End the game with a prayer that God will help all those who are hungry and will give the children strength to always take some and leave some as they grow up. Travel with the children to the donation site and let them give the gift. Share with them the work of the Society of St. Andrews, in which people of faith just like them work to end hunger.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Singing for Justice (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Christians have been singing their faith for centuries. In Acts 16:20–31, we read the story of Paul, who was in prison for his faith, singing at midnight. By his action, he brought other people to faith in Christ. This tradition of singing about the faith is also important in justice movements. The Civil Rights Movement led to the advancement of rights for African Americans. The soundtrack of that era is rich with faith and justice songs, such as “We Shall Overcome” and the African American national anthem, “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Likewise, gay and lesbian people and their allies have fought for gay and lesbian persons to experience full civil rights in the United States, and an anthem has been written about that struggle. If you have time, share the lyrics to “Singing for Our Lives” with your children. Watch the video in the list below. If you are not able to access the Internet, please use your community’s hymnal to find hymns and songs such as “We Shall Overcome” and “Lift Every Voice and Sing” to share with the children.

“Singing for Our Lives” was written following a tragic event in San Francisco. On November 27, 1978, San Francisco City Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone were assassinated by Dan White. A part of the motive was that Harvey was a homosexual and the mayor had openly supported the human rights of homosexuals. Their violent death stunned the gay community in San Francisco and the world. Folksinger Holly Near was moved to write the song “(We are Gentle Angry People) Singing for Our Lives” as a memorial for the fallen men. It was sung in a candlelight vigil in memory of the men shortly after their murders and continues to be an anthem for gay rights and other justice movements today. The title can also describe how we are called to be as disciples working for justice. We are gentle as Jesus was gentle and angry as he was angry at injustice. In this activity, or in a follow-up session, teach the words of this song to your children and watch the video of Holly Near and the Men’s Chorus, singing the song at the 2008 Moscone Milk Memorial.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- copies of your community’s hymnal
- (optional) “Singing for Our Lives” by Holly Near; lyrics on Holly Near’s website, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong21a>
- (optional) video: “Moscone Milk Memorial 2008—Holly Near,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbXq0oU5osg>
- (optional) images of Harvey Milk and George Moscone

Read the story of Paul singing at midnight in Acts 16:20–31, and explain how singing about faith and for justice has long been a part of Christian life. Invite the children to open a hymnal, and direct them to songs of protest or justice. Pick one



to sing. If you are able to access the video of Holly Near performing “Singing for Our Lives,” share this with the children and show pictures of Harvey Milk and George Moscone. Explain that the two men were friends and worked together to make their city, San Francisco, a welcome and safe place for all people, including people who were gay or lesbian. Harvey and George were different from one another, but they both wanted San Francisco to be a great city. One person was jealous that City Supervisor Milk and Mayor Moscone were friends. His name was Dan White. He was afraid that if the city was a welcoming place for gay and lesbian people, there would not be room for heterosexual people. He killed Mayor Moscone and Harvey Milk. Killing is wrong. Dan White was also wrong in his thinking.

Making a city, school, church, or a home a welcome place means there is room for everyone. To remember Milk and Moscone, Holly Near, a folk singer, wrote a song to capture how people loved the two men and how much they missed them. Learn to sing the song. As Christians, we sing with people who are facing injustice. Gentle like Jesus, we welcome all people and are angry at injustice that stops people from loving one another.

### 8 Sharing All Things in Common

**Leader preparation:** Prior to this activity, invite the children, their parents, and the congregation to save their spare change for a week and give it as an offering to your children. The children will see how “spare change” can change a life by addressing poverty at its root. Sharing what we have with one another in times of need is one of the first traditions of the early Christians. See the story of Pentecost in Acts 2:43–47. You will also want to create an account with a micro-loan bank ahead of time. This activity will require some follow up, as the children will be interested to see how their spare change helped someone change his or her life.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- a bucket for gathering the spare-change offering
- access to the website [www.Kiva.org](http://www.Kiva.org) or another micro-finance site

Gather the children and collect their spare-change offering. Ask God’s blessing on those who gave and for the money will be used for good work. Count the money with the children, and talk about what they might buy with it if it were their own money. Explain that this money is meant to be shared, and by sharing the money rather than hoarding it the children can help a person overcome poverty. Tell the story of the first Christians in Acts 2:43–47. Visit [www.Kiva.org](http://www.Kiva.org) or a micro-finance site sponsored by your denomination. Help the children to find a person to help. Deposit the funds and then revisit the website to learn what happens.

### 9 Taste and the See the Lord Is Good

**Leader preparation:** Christians eat together when they take communion. In Christian tradition and history, the faithful eat together and prepare community meals to feed those without food. In this activity the children will celebrate God’s gift of food by preparing a simple meal to share with hungry people in the community. You will need to arrange a visit to a local soup kitchen or food bank prior to doing this activity.

**Supplies:**

- Bible
- paper sacks, napkins, and sandwich bags
- bread, peanut butter, and jam
- apples, carrot sticks, and cheese sticks
- bottled water
- individually wrapped cookies

**Reflect**

God in Christ breaks down barriers and establishes communities of love and care. Jesus was particularly interested in establishing community among and between unlikely neighbors. He ate with tax collectors and befriended widows and children. His disciples expanded the mission by inviting people from other nations to become disciples. Scripture tells us that there are no aliens or “others” among the followers of Christ. Who are your brothers and sisters in Christ whom you know least about? What denominations worship in your area? Have you ever worshiped with believers outside your own local church or in a different denomination? Consider doing so in order to experience the breadth and depth of Christian witness and tradition.

You may wish to take your children on a visit to a different Christian community, to a synagogue, or to a mosque, so they may experience how people worship and live faithful lives in other ways. God created diversity in the world, and, to be faithful to Christ and his vision of justice, it is important to move outside one’s own community and connect in friendship with others. How else is your local church or denomination connected to people in other countries? What does it mean to be related to other Christians in other places? How do you act out your kinship to other Christians in other places?

As in an assembly line, lay out the ingredients for making sack lunches. Begin by decorating the lunch sacks. Have the children draw a “smiley face” or a heart on the bag and write “Handmade for you with love” or some other message of care and concern. If you have really young children, you may provide stickers instead of markers for drawing. Next, have each child make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and place it in a plastic sandwich bag. Have them then add an apple, carrot sticks, string cheese, and cookies to each paper bag. Keep the bottled water cold in the refrigerator. Share Psalm 34 with the children, in which we are called to “taste and see the Lord is good.” Also share Acts 2:43–47, in which followers of Jesus eat together and share what they have with those in need. Ask a blessing on the food the children have prepared. Travel to the place where they will distribute the lunches, and invite the children to share with those in need. If possible, have the children eat lunch with those to whom they have given lunches. Conclude with prayer thanking God for the food and all who will eat it.

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Context and Mission

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages 7–11) come hardwired with a sense of what is fair or not, what is just or not, particularly as it relates to their own situation. In this Exploration, participants are invited to practice compassion and to extend service to one another and those in need in their immediate community.

### About this Exploration

All are created in the image of God and are children of God, unique and diverse in our own context. Jesus imagined a different reality from the one in which he lived. Jesus imagined the realm of God, rooted in love and justice. When working for justice, we see the face of God in others around us. God is angered by injustice and we are called to respond. When we explore context and mission, we wake up to the just and unjust realities of our local communities and world—and are called to action.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:  
**Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9,  
 22-23**  
**Romans 13:8-14**

## Leader Preparation

Read the “About this Faith Practice” statement in the “Getting Started” file so that you understand how this “Working for Justice” Faith Practice is described. The Context and Mission is captured in this statement. Justice requires us to be in active partnership with those in need. In the process, we work to change both ourselves and also the systems or institutions that perpetuate injustice. Justice can exist only by making these changes. In weeding a garden, one needs to get to the roots and pull out the whole weed in order to keep it from returning. In justice work, we must go to the source of injustice and change the environment to allow justice to flourish. The result is not only justice for the oppressed, but also for the oppressors.

Context is the ground in which either justice or injustice may grow. Mission is the activity that addresses the needs of those in a particular context. Sometimes, such as in a natural disaster, there is an immediate need for charity in the form of food and other basic necessities freely and directly given to those in trouble. For chronic needs, such as poverty and homelessness, simply to provide the occasional hot meal or shelter bed does not change the conditions or source of those suffering.

Scripture for this Exploration, from Proverbs and Romans, clearly calls us to deeper action as disciples of Christ and believers in one God who loves all

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Dancing in the Light of God (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Working for justice can be serious and difficult work. In order to persevere, Christians need to cultivate an attitude of joy. The work is for the glory of God, and when performed with love and joy even the most difficult work can be made fun and obstacles overcome. In this activity you and the children will dance and sing and ask God to guide your feet as you explore context and mission together.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- song: “Guide My Feet,” African American traditional (tune: Guide My Feet); words and music, <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2208>
- (optional) video: “Guide My Feet,” <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong20>
- (optional) see also “Guide My Feet,” Attachment: Activity 7 from the Discovery Exploration

Read the portion of Paul’s letter to the Romans found in 13:8–14. Help the children understand that Paul is reminding the Romans of his day—and us today—to love our neighbors as ourselves and to choose to live good lives in which we care for ourselves and one another with hopeful and joyful attitudes. One way to stay focused on Jesus is to praise God and ask God’s help in all we do. We can do that by praying, and we can pray while we are singing and dancing.

If you can access the Internet or have the words for the song, invite the children to stand and practice singing “Guide My Feet.” Once they have learned the song, invite them to march and dance around the room while singing. Otherwise, invite the children to get up and dance. While they are dancing, have them call out prayers to God. After 3–5 minutes, invite everyone to relax and take a seat. Conclude with a discussion about the benefits of putting aside wrong actions or bad deeds and putting on an armor of light or doing good deeds, as described in Romans 13:12–13.

### 2 Who Am I? Body Art Project

**Leader preparation:** A critical part of understanding context is to know “Who I am” as a person. This activity will help each child examine her or his own personhood and to reflect on what part being a Christian plays in daily life.

#### Supplies:

- butcher block paper, enough for each child to lie down and trace an outline of his or her body
- markers
- scissors, at least two pairs
- crayons or colored markers

Have the children work in pairs. One lies down on the butcher block paper and the other traces around the first person’s body with a marker. Then the two switch, and the tracer lies down on a fresh sheet of butcher block and has her or his body traced. Everyone then cuts out his or her body outline. They may use crayons or colored markers to draw their faces. On the stomach area of the outline, have the children write their names, age, family names, where they live (is it the city or the country? apartment or house?), and at least one hobby or inter-

creation. Read Proverbs and consider how failing to address the root causes of poverty may indeed be robbing “the poor because they are poor.” Consider the hopeful news in Paul’s letter to the Romans. When we wake from sleep and see with clear eyes our context and that of others, salvation is nearer to us than even on our baptism day. We are ready to fully embrace Jesus’ truly great commission to love our neighbor as ourselves and thereby keep all God’s commandments.

Children are ready, willing, and able to help in justice work. They have good ideas about how to address injustice and inequalities. Take quiet time to open yourself to hear their thoughts and to partner with them in the activities that follow. Consider, too, how they might become more active participants in your faith community’s work for justice. You may wish to journal your reflections. Conclude your preparation time with the following prayer or a prayer of your own.

Prayer:

*Lord God, maker of us all,  
I give thanks for your wakeup call to  
live a life of justice.  
Loving all my neighbors, both those  
near and far off, as myself  
helps me to clothe myself always  
in the armor of light that is  
Christ Jesus,  
and to guide the children [name  
them] in my care to do likewise  
so that your realm of healing and  
wholeness for all creatures may be  
visible in this world.  
In your holy name, I pray.  
Amen.*

est. Have them draw a large heart on the chest. Inside the heart have them write “love, neighbors, and Jesus.” Have them write on the outline’s arms and hands descriptions of different ways they can use their arms and hands to help others. Likewise on their legs and feet, have them list the ways their feet can help them serve others as they follow Christ. Finally, on the top of the head have them list things they can do with their brains, eyes, ears, and mouths to accomplish justice and to love to one another and their neighbors and creatures in the world. Spend time talking about how realistic these self-portraits are and how often we use our bodies to help others.

### 3 What’s Happening in the Neighborhood?

**Leader preparation:** To understand context and mission it is important to look around where one lives and to notice what is happening. Who needs help? Where is injustice? How are we called by Christ to respond? The children will be invited to consider what’s happening in a neighborhood of Houston called the Third Ward as they view “Shotgun Third Ward” by John Biggers. After looking at the art, they will be asked to describe what they know about their own neighborhoods. Be open to their conversation. There are no right or wrong answers.

#### **Supplies:**

- artwork: “Shotgun Third Ward” by John Biggers, [https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW\\_PRODUCT=true&product\\_id=17101&store\\_id=1401](https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=17101&store_id=1401)

Gather the children together, stand in a circle, and take time to breathe deeply. Explain that everyone is going to look at a picture and have a chance to talk about what they see. Invite the children to sit anywhere they like as long as they can see the picture. Ask them to put all their senses to work silently. Then discuss the picture with questions such as these.

- What is happening in the picture?
- Name one or two details from the picture. What objects or people do you see?
- How does this picture makes you feel?
- Do you relate to the picture? Do you see yourself in the picture? Where? How?
- What is the meaning of this picture?
- What does this work of art call us to do? In what ways are we moved to justice and compassion?

Thank the children for their attention and good answers. Invite them to listen to Romans 13:8–14. After reading the scripture, ask them where they see love in the picture and where do they see works of darkness or injustice. *Who has on the armor of light? Who is afraid in the picture? Who is joyful? Who is missing from the picture? (The persons who set the fire, firefighters, helpers) What would make God angry or sad in the picture? What are we called to do to help in this neighborhood?*

## 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.

## Discerning &amp; Deciding Activities

**4 Who-Is-My-Neighbor Game (Easy Preparation)**

**Leader preparation:** Before we can love our neighbors and join them in mission, we need to know them. This is an ice-breaker to help older children get to know their friends in the group better. As they practice getting to know one another, they may find it easier to reach out to others as they grow up.

**Supplies:**

- 5" × 7" lined or blank index cards, one card per person, or sheets of paper cut in half
- markers

Gather the children together and share Romans 13:8–10 with them. Ask them who their neighbors are. They might not know, or they might name actual people who live next door. Explain that the people who live next door are one type of neighbor and that Jesus includes them in the people we are to love and care for and care about. By “neighbor,” Jesus really means that anybody you meet is worthy of God’s love. So, as followers of Christ, we are to love or care for people in general. (Remind them, as children, that if they see someone in need or if they or a friend their age is in trouble, they should get help from an adult before offering aide.)

They will now play a “getting to know one another” game. Give each child an index card (or sheet of paper) and marker. Count them off in pairs. Have each learner interview his or her partner using four questions:

1. What is your name?
2. What makes you happy?
3. What makes you sad?
4. If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go or who would you see?

When the interviews are over, form the group into circle and ask members of each pair to introduce their partners. The first person says to the group, “This is my neighbor [name].” The speaker then says, “My neighbor is happy when . . .” and so on. Then the roles reverse and the speaker is introduced by his or her partner, and so on around the circle.

**5 Movie Night**

**Leader preparation:** Obtain a copy of the film *Because of Winn-Dixie* from your local library or video store. Set up the player and screen and prepare the snacks ahead of time. This activity can be a session in itself, or you may wish to watch the film ahead of time and show select scenes for discussion. The film originated as the short chapter book *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo (Candlewick, 2001). Instead of a movie night, you could also share the book with older children, either reading to them or as a book club in which each child reads the book outside the meeting time and then meets to discuss it. (This could also be an activity for a night at your home or the home of one of your children.) When providing snacks, be sensitive to any food allergies.

**Supplies:**

- film: *Because of Winn-Dixie*
- DVD projector or player with screen
- healthy snacks

Gather to watch the film, which contains the adventures of a preacher's daughter and an adopted dog named Winn-Dixie. Invite the children to notice the different people the girl meets and how she befriends them. Enjoy a healthy snack while watching the movie. Afterward, ask the children what they noticed. *Does the girl ever meet a stranger? What does she do to bring everyone together? What does Winn-Dixie do to help her? Who is like Jesus in the story? Where do you see justice or injustice in the story? Who helps whom?* Thank the children for their attention and good conversation. Invite them to consider how they can be friends to all they meet and ways to be helpful in their own homes, at school, and at church.

## 6 Friendship Day

**Leader preparation:** Arrange to meet with children your own group's age from another church to share a day of friendship. Ideally this will be a two-session activity with your children visiting and attending services at your sister church and then returning the hospitality by hosting the other group the following week.

Arrange for ice-breaker games and to sing songs of faith together, to share similarities and differences in worship, to eat together, and to share prayers together. The idea is to help children form connections with children from outside their immediate context. Gaining an appreciation for similarities and differences builds bridges to cooperating with one another in mission as the children grow up. You may wish to build on Friendship Day and coordinate a group mission project. Who knows where the connections made on this day may take you and your children as you work for justice. (You might also want to make this an annual event.)

**Supplies:**

- snacks
- camera
- ice-breaker games
- friendship bracelet or friendship key-chain materials
- copies of the words to "Dream God's Dream" by Bryan Sirchio, <http://www.sirchio.com/index.php?page=songs&category=&display=179>

Arrange with parents to carpool to the hosting church. Let children know ahead of time that they will be meeting children their own age who attend another church. They will have fun and attend worship together. Once at the other site, gather all the children together and welcome them to a day of friendship. Share the Pentecost text in Acts 2:43–47, in which the early followers of Christ were together in one place, sharing fellowship and a meal. Pray for them to have fun getting to know one another and growing in Christian friendship. Play ice-breaking games. Mix the groups into teams, with one person from each church on a team, to make friendship bracelets or key chains. Take pictures of the pairs. Tour the church and sanctuary, and learn about the pattern of worship in the new place. If possible, have your children teach the other children to sing "Dream God's Dream," and let your children learn a song taught by the other youth. Attend worship together. Share a snack or simple lunch together and talk about worship.

Issue an invitation for the other group to come to your church the following week or another time. Make four copies of the photos of each pair: one each for each church's activity room and one each for each member of the team. You can con-



tinue to build links by having the children become prayer partners and snail or e-pen pals.

## Sending & Serving Activities

### 7 Become an Advocate (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** One way to work for justice is to be an advocate for those in need. An advocate is one who speaks, pleads, or argues on behalf of another person or cause. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to be an advocate for his followers. In John 14:15–31 he assures them of the presence of the Holy Spirit as a guiding force and protector for all time. In this activity children will practice being advocates on behalf of a justice cause or for persons in need in your local community. You will need to identify ahead of time the cause or the people who need help. Write down contact information for whichever business, civic, governmental agency, or person the children will write to plead for help. As a follow-up, you will want to make copies of their letters and share any responses you receive with the children and your faith community.

#### Supplies:

- Bible
- paper and pens
- (optional) access to multiple computers so the children may compose their letters and send them as e-mail
- (optional) stamps and envelopes and the addresses of elected, civic, or business officials to whom the children might write

Share John 14:15–31 with the children. Explain that the Holy Spirit is a mighty advocate for all people. As followers of Christ, the children can also become powerful advocates for people in need. The power of advocacy is not in weapons, but in words. Practicing nonviolent advocacy is part of working for justice. Explain to the children the local cause or need they will address in this activity. Invite conversation about the issue. Then distribute pens and paper, or have children use computers, to compose letters to advocate on behalf of the cause, need, or persons. You may wish to divide the group into pairs to work together on writing the letters.

Conclude with a prayer that the need be addressed and that the receivers of the letters be open to change. As a follow-up, make copies of the letters before they go into envelopes. Be sure to stamp the envelopes and use your own or the church address for the return address. Additionally, you may wish to share the children's letters (with their permission) with your faith community and/or the local paper. This sharing of the call for justice is a witness activity. Be sure to share responses to their letters at a later session.



## 8 Valentines for the Home Bound

**Leader preparation:** A hallmark of Christian life is the love we show to one another and the world. In times or places of injustice, love is often absent. In this activity children will prepare Valentine Day cards to share with persons in homeless or emergency shelters or with those who are confined to hospitals or assisted living centers. Your pastor will know of persons in the church who are in such need. Perhaps the children will have relatives or neighbors who need this kind of love as well. Sharing compassion and love is part of working for justice. Although this activity may fit best in February, there is no reason to send Valentines only then.

### **Supplies:**

- construction paper
- scissors
- glue sticks
- heart or Christian-symbol stickers
- markers
- pre-printed copies of John 13:3–35

Tell the children about the persons for whom they will make cards. Explain these persons' predicament or reason for needing care. Explain that God calls us through Jesus to love one another. Share the text of John 13:34–35 and also Romans 13:8–10 with the children. Lay out the craft supplies, and invite the children to make Valentine heart shapes or "smiley" face shapes and to decorate them with markers, stickers, glitter, and the like. Somewhere on the shape, they should glue a copy of John 13:34–35. Have the children show one another what they have made. Gather up the creations and either distribute them yourself or, if possible, arrange for the children to go with you to deliver the cards.

## 9 Walking for Justice

**Leader preparation:** Those who practice justice often need sturdy walking shoes. One way to protest injustice is to march carrying signs. In like manner, one way to work for justice is to participate in a walk-a-thon to raise awareness of an issue and to raise funds to address the root cause of need. One such event is the Church World Service–sponsored Crop Walks, which raise funds and awareness about hunger and food inequalities in the United States. Visit Church World Service's website to learn more about Crop Walks in your area. If you do not have a local walk organized, then you may want to work with your church to start one.

This activity can also be completed by participating in your community's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day walk or by participating in other walks or marches that relate to issues in your community. The point is to have your children participate in a walk with other people of all faiths to work for justice. You will need to contact the parents of your children ahead of time to be sure they are available on the day of the walk. Pledge sheets should be available to all walkers at least three weeks in advance so they may gather sponsors to list on their pledge sheets.

### Reflect

Context is a complex concept. We all exist in and are affected by multiple contexts, such as where we work, live, play, and worship or where we were born. Our experiences and attitudes are shaped by context. Yet context is so much a part of our everyday life that

### **Supplies:**

- access to the World Church Service website, <http://www.churchworldservice.org/>
- pledge sheets
- adult chaperons, at least one for every three children
- backpack with bottled water, a small first aid kit, extra socks, trail mix or other light snacks

we do not always realize its implications. Context is often easier to see as existing for other people, and we assume our own context is normal or typical. For instance, in Christianity, the Western European understanding of church and Christ are assumed as normative by many in the United States. Yet Christianity in India predates Rome and Western Europe by centuries.

Until recently, people in the West assumed the Western views and traditions were correct and the Indian or South East Asian were somehow less than or more primitive. This view prohibits dynamic sharing among all God's people. We are prevented from having an expanded view of Christ and enriching our faith. Such blindness to context also makes it possible to be blind to justice issues and to conduct charity projects for those who are "less fortunate" rather than to work alongside our brothers and sisters for justice. Blindness to context also prevents us from receiving help and Good News from distant shores. It assumes that only we can be givers and that we have no need of justice, healing, and wholeness.

Take time to reflect on your context. Make a list of concrete details to describe yourself and your roles. Consider how you know what you know about the world. Who told you or what authority guides your thinking? Consider the children whom you work with in these activities. What are their contexts? How are they similar to or different from you? Who in your community is poor or in need of help? Who are your neighbors to whom Jesus calls you to love? How can you work with them to address justice issues? What are your own needs for healing and justice?

Gather with your older children and adult chaperons at the start of the walk. Begin with prayer in which you ask God is to protect the walkers and to care for the poor and the hungry (or whatever the issue or need is) who will be helped by the walk. Begin at a good pace. As the leader, you will carry the backpack with first aid supplies, water, socks, and light snacks. As the children walk, you may wish to share information about hunger and poverty with them and ask them about their experience of hunger or poverty (or whatever the issue or need is). Share Proverbs 22:1–2, 8–9, 22–23 with them, and talk about how Jesus walked everywhere he went as he preached and taught people to love one another and care for the poor. Perhaps you can sing with your children as you walk. Any of the songs from this Faith Practice, such as "Guide My Feet," "Dream God's Dream," or "Singing for Our Lives," would be possible to sing on this walk.

# Working for Justice



## Exploration: Future and Vision

### About this Age Group

Older children (ages 7–11) are concrete thinkers, but they also possess imagination. Just as they may think of yesterday as the distant past, so too the farthest forward they may be able to project is the next day or next week. Fortunately, Jesus speaks of the realm of God as one that comes near as well as being a future event. In this Exploration, all participants will be invited to imagine a just world through art, drama, and music. By first imagining a just world, all might live, work, and play more justly.

### About this Exploration

Imagine a world where all are in right relationship with God, with other human beings, and all of God's creation. Jesus calls us to help create this future where we live out God's love in all that we are and all that we do. We do justice because we are inspired by God's vision of healing and reconciliation, restoration and wholeness, and abundance for all. As a people of hope, we accept the call to be God's hands and feet. In this Exploration, we are challenged to stay focused on this hope as we live out God's call to do justice.

**BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:**  
**Matthew 25:31–46**  
**Isaiah 58:1–14**

## Leader Preparation

Working for justice should be time consuming, for it is what we are called to do as followers of Christ. In addition to taking time, working for justice can be heartbreaking and nerve wracking because it can be so slow. There are often setbacks. In the midst of working for justice, sometimes unexpected allies turn up and sometimes trusted friends let us down. Yet, as we read in Isaiah 58:6–9, when one is dedicated to justice one’s light shall break forth like the dawn, and God will answer one’s cries for help. Gloom will be cast aside and the justice worker will be hailed as a repairer of the breach and the restorer of streets. In Matthew 25:31–46, Christ Jesus promises eternal life to those who work for God’s justice.

Read these texts this week as you prepare for guiding the older children in your care. How will you describe God’s vision or dream to the children? How can they help God’s dream to become a reality and to bring about a peaceable city or realm where all people are free from violence, fear, and want? You may wish to journal your reflections. What do you imagine the “kingdom” or realm of God to look like? You may wish to sketch your ideas or search for art that reflects your imagination. When you have finished preparing, conclude with the following prayer or a prayer of your own.

## Exploring & Engaging Activities

### 1 Gospel Drama (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** Matthew 25:31–46 is a dramatic scene in which Jesus judges the people by their efforts at justice for the most vulnerable in society. You may complete this activity in a simple Reader’s Theater format. In this format, you read the scripture through once and talk with the children about what it means. Then you assign each a “role” (or part) to a learner to read from the passage. If you have the time, you might also consider making this activity into a skit by adding the props suggested in the supply list.

Since all supplies with the exception of the Bible passage are optional, you may do this as either an Easy Preparation or a more involved activity.

#### **Supplies:**

- Bibles, or copies of Matthew 25:31–46 for each child
- (optional) for a more elaborate presentation:
  - plate with bread or crackers
  - cup with water
  - jacket or sweatshirt
  - welcome sign or mat
  - piece of paper with bars drawn on it, suggesting a prison door
  - piece of paper that says “Visitor’s Pass”

Gather the children in a semicircle and read aloud Matthew 25:31–46. Ask them how they understand the passage and what they think Jesus is asking people to do in order to live in the realm of God. Then assign the children different parts of the scripture to read. Give them a few minutes to practice their parts. If you are doing a Reader’s Theater, have the children stand up in a line or semicircle in the order of their parts, and have them read the gospel dramatically and clearly. If you prefer to use props, hand them to children to hold and assign one person to be Jesus. As Jesus names the ways in which he has appeared and been helped, the child holding that prop will lift it up so all can see. In the verses that say people have failed to provide certain items, the child holding the named item can hide it behind his or her back. At the end of the performance, thank the children for their effort and affirm the path of righteousness and justice.

### **2 “Dream God’s Dream” Guided Meditation**

**Leader preparation:** The outcome of working for justice is life in a peaceable kingdom, free from war, strife, and want. It is a world in which justice flows like an ever-flowing stream. In this activity your children who have worked hard to learn about and practice justice are invited to lie down, rest, and dream dreams with God.

Provide a place with enough floor space for the children to spread out and lie down on beach towels or sleeping mats, with enough space between that the children feel safe but are not tempted to talk. Have at least one other adult present. It is helpful if this activity can happen in a room where you can dim the lights. You may wish to arrange to use a chapel or chancel for this activity. Contact the parents or caregivers the week before and night before to remind them to bring a beach towel and pillow for a child to use on the day of this activity. If the girls are wearing skirts or dresses, have extra towels to cover their legs as they lie on the floor.

Prayer:

*Christ Jesus, light of the world,  
 Help me to meet you in the hungry, the  
 thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the  
 sick, and the imprisoned.  
 Do not let me turn away without offer-  
 ing food, drink, welcome, clothing,  
 healing, and fellowship.  
 Keep my feet on the path and guide me  
 and [insert the individual names of  
 each child] as we work for justice in  
 order to bring you near and make your  
 love visible in the world.  
 Amen.*

## 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:**

- song: “Dream God’s Dream” by Bryan Sirchio; lyrics, <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong19a>
- video: “Dream God’s Dream,” <http://tinyurl.com/FPSong19>
- popsicles
- beach towels or sleeping mats
- pillows
- small bell
- reading light
- chair

Invite the children to spread out their towels or mats in the space you have. Make sure each child leaves room around his or her towel and pillow. Ask the children to sit on their towels or mats when they have found a spot. Explain that God calls us all to work for justice in order to create a peaceable realm where all people and creatures are free from war, strife, and injustice. God dreams of such a world. Invite the children to relax and dream a dream of peace with God. Ask the children to take off their shoes and get comfortable lying down on their towels or mats. Explain that you will dim the lights and invite them to close their eyes. Tell them they are to relax and breathe and dream. You will speak the words of the song “Dream God’s Dream” and invite them to picture the images in the song in their heads. They will know the quiet time is done when they hear your bell ring (or whatever signal you devise). Ring it for them so they will know what it sounds like. Invite them to get quiet.

Have the children take three deep breathes before you begin to read the words of the song. Read them slowly enough for the children to imagine the images. Pause between lines. When you are finished, invite them to a time of quiet, and ask them to picture a favorite place in their home or town. After a minute or two of quiet, ring the bell. Invite the children to open their eyes and sit up. Pass out popsicles or glasses of juice or water. Invite them to talk about what they dreamed or felt during the experience. Thank them and close with a prayer.



### 3 Imagining Justice

**Leader preparation:** God’s realm, or heaven, is often pictured as a peaceable kingdom in a rural setting. Many children and adults live in cities, and the rural setting is far removed from their experience. Author Faith Ringgold’s story *Tar Beach* contains the dreams and imaginings of a young girl who wishes for an end to racism and poverty and for whom the peaceable kingdom is a roof-top garden of her apartment building. You will need a copy of *Tar Beach* for this activity. It should be readily available at your local public library and in paperback from your local bookseller, if it is not already in your church library. Faith Ringgold has also written books about Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., which you may also wish to share with your children. See Activity 6 below, which also uses the same artwork.

**Supplies:**

- book: *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold (Dragonfly Books, 1996)
- Bible
- artwork: “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt16>

Gather the children together and share Habakkuk 1:1–4 and 2:1–4 with them. Talk about waiting for justice and how long it can take to achieve justice. Sometimes in order to get justice, you have to dream about what justice looks like before you can make it a reality. Share the story *Tar Beach* with the children. Invite them to notice the injustice as well as to note details about how the heroine describes her



peaceful realm. *Who is included in her dream? What do they do?* Ask the children to describe a favorite family gathering of their own.

## Discerning & Deciding Activities



### 4 A Peace Pledge (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew 5:1–6, Jesus describes how blessed are people who suffer from injustice and poverty of the spirit because they will be helped by God. In verses 7–9, Jesus describes the qualities and actions of faithful people who will be God’s helpers in providing relief to those suffering from injustice. In verses 10–11, Jesus reminds the disciples that the way of justice is not easy but that God will be with them even when others try to persecute or stop their efforts at being just. Help your children learn these verses, and ask them to pledge to do their best to be merciful, pure of heart, and peacemakers.

#### **Supplies:**

- 8½" × 11" pieces of card stock paper
- scissors
- a one-hole punch
- glue stick
- ribbon or yarn
- colored markers
- copies of the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1–10

Review the Leader Preparation notes at the beginning of this Exploration. Gather the children at a table, and talk to them about one of Jesus’ most famous sermons, called the Sermon on the Mount. Tell them that the beginning of the sermon is a section called the Beatitudes in which Jesus describes people who need justice and people who help work for justice. Jesus says that both those in need and those who help will be blessed by God. Read aloud Matthew 5:1–10. Talk about the scripture.

Then have each child take a verse and read it out loud. Invite each to cut a strip of card stock and paste a copy of the Beatitudes on the strip to make a bookmark. Use a hole punch to make a hole at the top of each bookmark, and have the children wind ribbon or yarn through the hole for decoration. On the back of the bookmark, each child can write a simple prayer, such as “Jesus, help me to be a peacemaker.” Then invite each child to sign or print her or his name under the prayer.

### 5 Silent Night Candles

**Leader preparation:** In the book of Revelation 22:1–5, the writer describes his vision of heaven. It is a beautiful passage that describes a peaceable city through which flows a river of life and in which the leaves of trees provide healing to all nations. In this city, the faithful will finally see Jesus and God face to face. There will be no more darkness, and the Lord God will be their light. In this activity, your children will light candles to represent God’s light in the world and to remind them of this vision of God’s realm.

**Supplies:**

- votive candle and holder for each child
- candle lighter
- Bible
- song: “Dream God’s Dream” by Bryan Sirchio; lyrics, <http://tinyurl.com/FPong19a>

Gather the children together, and invite each of them to take a votive candle and holder. Share Revelation 22:1–5 with the children as well as the lyrics to “Dream God’s Dream.” Invite conversation about similarities between the scripture description of God’s realm and the images in the song. Practice singing the song. Then dim the lights and pass around the candle lighter. Help the children light their candles. Then invite the children to sing “Dream God’s Dream.” Invite one child to re-read Revelation 22:1–5 aloud. Conclude with prayer in which each child names a person or situation in need of God’s light or love or justice. As the children leave, have them take home their candles and holders as a reminder of God’s light in the world.

**6 “Tar Beach II”**

**Leader preparation:** In this activity the children will take time to explore a picture created by Faith Ringgold, which is an image from her series that became the book *Tar Beach* (see Activity 3 above). After the children explore the picture, they will create their own “Tar Beach” painting to depict their idea of what God’s peaceable realm would look like, using images of people and places that make them happy and remind them of justice. Hang up the “Tar Beach II” at the children’s eye level. Set up the painting supplies at tables ahead of time.

**Supplies:**

- artwork: “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt16>
- book: *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold (Dragonfly Books, 1996)
- Bible
- watercolor paper and watercolor paints
- cups of water
- brushes
- paper towels

Invite the children to look at the picture “Tar Beach II.” If you read the story for Activity 3, the children will already be acquainted with the story. Otherwise, give a short synopsis of the story as follows. If you have time, you might read the whole story again.

Cassie Louise Lightfoot has a dream: to be free to go wherever she wants for the rest of her life. One night, up on “tar beach”—the rooftop of her family’s Harlem apartment building—her dream comes true. The stars lift her up, and she flies over the city. She claims the buildings as her own, even the union building, so her father won’t have to worry anymore about not being allowed to join because of his race. As Cassie learns, anyone can fly. “All you need is somewhere to go you can’t get to any other way,” she says. “The next thing you know, you’re flying above the stars.”

It is important to the story and for purposes of this Faith Practice to explore the injustice in 1939 that blocked Cassie’s father from joining the union because of his race. In Cassie’s dream she fixes this injustice by making her father the owner of the building. God calls us to work for justice, and God dream’s of a just world. Invite the children to explore this picture of Cassie flying over Tar Beach. Lead a discussion by asking questions such as:



- What is happening in the picture?
- What people or objects or colors or shapes do you see?
- Who is in the picture?
- Where do you see yourself in the picture?
- What is the meaning of this picture?
- How are you called to respond?

Share Matthew 25:31–46 with the children. Where do they see peace in the picture? Where do they see justice in the picture?

Distribute the watercolor materials, and invite the children to paint their own version of “Tar Beach,” showing where they live, where they would fly, and what they dream of seeing.

## Sending & Serving Activities



### 7 Prayer Flags (Easy Preparation)

**Leader preparation:** In this activity children will make Christian prayer flags to hang in their bedrooms to remind them of their commitment to take care of the “least of these,” as Jesus does in Matthew 25:31–46.

#### **Supplies (for each set of prayer flags):**

- 6 sheets of 8½" × 11" construction paper in a variety of colors (if construction paper is unavailable, white printer paper will suffice)
- markers for drawing the symbols
- (optional) 7' length of ribbon, yarn, twine, or rope

Read Matthew 25:31–46 with the children. Have them name the activities that Jesus describes as helping those in need (feeding, giving drinks, welcoming, clothing, healing, and visiting). Invite the children to make prayer flags to help them remember what Jesus asks us to do to help the least of these. On the construction paper, the children can draw a plate with bread, a chalice or cup, two “smiley” faces or a handshake, a coat, a band aid, and a visitor’s pass. If you have a small group, invite each child to make one additional flag so that you can display these in your meeting area.

Make sure the construction paper is placed horizontally, so that it is 11 inches across the middle (in landscape mode). A child could cut the paper into a different shape if she or he likes, such as a pennant or a triangle. If you have ribbon, yarn, twine, or rope, have each child come to you after drawing the symbols. Cut two 1-inch horizontal slits near the top corners of each flag. These are the holes through which you will pass the yarn or twine. Help the child slide the flags onto the yarn or twine. Make slip knots on either end to form loops.

When the children get home, they can ask a parent or caregiver to help string up the flags, using to nails or push pins spaced about 7 feet apart. The slip knots will act as loops that can be hooked to the nails or push pins to hold up the string of flags. If you do not have access to the optional materials, invite the children to take their flags home and hang them in their rooms. When everyone is finished with their flags, gather together again to recite Matthew 25:34–41.

## 8 Making Noise for Peace

**Leader preparation:** In Isaiah 58:1 God calls on the prophet to shout out and not hold back about the injustice being committed by the house of Jacob. In this activity children will practice shouting and drumming as a call for an end to violence against children and a prayer for peace. Visit the Children’s Sabbath website for information and ideas for blending this activity into a worship series for the whole faith community: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/faith-based-action/childrens-sabbaths/>. If you have a drummer in your community, you may wish to enlist her or him to help teach the children to drum. Otherwise, go freestyle.

### Supplies:

- empty plastic pickle or paint buckets (check with a paint store or food wholesaler for empties that you may take)
- set of drum sticks for each child

## Reflect

Of all the various guises in which Jesus says we can meet him in Matthew 25:31–46, perhaps the most difficult one for many in the United States is to know that Jesus is to be found in prison and that the compassionate response is to visit him there. Our prisons are overflowing, and we may have many stereotypes of the people who are behind bars, based on the media rather than our own experience. Rather than offering reflection questions for this Exploration, you are encouraged to visit a juvenile detention center to discover what it is like to be there. As you tour the facility, what do you notice? Are there chaplains in the prison? Is there a worship service? Who else is visiting? What are the needs of the inmates? Is there a library or other place where the youth might be able to study scripture? With whom might you partner to help the youth who are serving there? To offer comfort to them and to their visitors? How could you show them the same care you will provide to the older children in your group when you meet to do these activities? Go loose the bonds of injustice, for if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness. Go and let your light shine!

Distribute the buckets and drum sticks. Have the children take a seat with their drums. Explain that they will get to make noise for peace in this activity. Let them practice freestyle drumming on their buckets. Then help them drum together in unison, at both a fast and slow pace. Work with them to watch your signal so they can all stop at the same time. Explain that you will read some scripture. When you pause, they are to drum with all their might. Use Isaiah 58:1–14 as your text. Read it in sections, and at each pause guide the children to drum in unison or in small groups or solos and to stop when you give a signal. If you are doing this activity in conjunction with Children’s Sabbath, then instead of scripture you may use a prayer for the safety of children or other liturgical readings. You may wish to give the children a speaking part as well as the drumming.



## 9 Creative Dramatics with *Tar Beach*

**Leader preparation:** Faith Ringgold’s book *Tar Beach* tells the story of one girl’s dream of justice in her urban neighborhood. Use the story from the book as the basis for a creative dramatics activity. Read the story ahead of time to be familiar with the plot. Gather the simple props, and then be ready to act as a director leaving the action and the narration to the children.

### Supplies:

- book: *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold (Dragonfly Books, 1996)
- artwork: “Tar Beach II” by Faith Ringgold, <http://tinyurl.com/FPArt16>

In this activity the children will pantomime the action of the story *Tar Beach*. Read the story to the children. Then assign one child the role of narrator, one to play Cassie, and another to play her father. Enlist the other children to be Cassie’s neighbors or to act as living props (such as the bridge and the union building). As the narrator reads the story, each person pantomimes the actions that go along with the words. When the children finish their drama, invite them to sit down and share what injustices they dream about fixing and their ideas to make the world a better place.