



MULTIAGE

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

The opportunity for learners of different ages to gather in one space and discover new insights about practicing faith is one of the unique gifts the church offers to its members. Where else do learners ages 5 to 14 enter into a collective journey of faith-centered discovery, testimony, and transformation? The time these learners have together is rich with possibilities for fresh observations and rare engagement with the practice of testimony and witness. The fact that most of the learners will likely be unfamiliar with this practice is a blessing; older learners will not necessarily have an edge of experience over younger learners. All learners will discover together what it means to speak and listen from the heart—to testify and bear witness.

About this Exploration

We are a people of story, built on the witness of our Bible and rooted in the testimony of our communities. Discovering the power of giving witness and testimony means recognizing that we each have a valid story, indeed, many stories, and that we can identify God's work within those stories. It takes courage to share one's own story; it takes openness to fully listen to the stories of others. Claiming this practice involves shaping a common language. Sharing our testimonies celebrates enriching traditions of communities and the particularity of personal experiences of grace.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Genesis 24:34–67
Acts 16:16–34

Leader Preparation

The practice of giving testimony and witness is grounded in the affirmation that each member of the community of faith has stories to tell about God's transforming presence in his or her life. You as leader have your own story, and all the learners who participate in these sessions will have stories, too. As you prepare to lead others through the process of articulating their personal experience of God's activity and grace, spend time reflecting on your own testimony and getting comfortable sharing it.

Make sure the space where you gather is welcoming for all ages, with appropriate chair and table heights for kindergarteners through eighth graders; the more hospitable the mood of the room, the more relaxed your participants will be. Be aware of the words you use. "Testimony" and "witness" are big words for many of the children in your group, so find substitute words or phrases such as "talking about our faith" and "doing things for God." The more at home the participants feel, the more likely they will be to express themselves. This is true for all age groups, but perhaps especially true for multiage and intergenerational groups.

Keep in mind that testimony has two interrelated audiences: God and the community of faith. As leader, you want to help elicit each participant's personal testimony, and you also want to pay attention to—and comment

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Talking about God (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Think about your own life over the past several months. Where have you noticed God's presence? In a comforting word? In a moment of joy? As you've done something for someone else? Have you seen the face of Christ in anyone you've encountered? Be ready to tell the group about these experiences, as you prepare to ask the children the same kinds of questions.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Begin by describing the times you have noticed God's presence in your daily life. Then ask the learners where they have seen, heard, or felt God in their lives: at home, at school, in a book or a movie, with a friend, on a nature walk, singing a song, playing a sport. Or simply ask what has made them happy or sad lately, and how they have responded—or how other people have responded to them. Have they thanked anyone for anything lately? Experiencing community in times of joy or sorrow, or feeling grateful, are some of the times we also experience God's presence. Talking about these things can help children begin to talk about God. Write down everything on the newsprint or whiteboard, and end by giving thanks for all the ways the children have noticed God in their lives.

② Our Community Talks About God

Leader preparation: Reflect on the kinds of testimony your church gives on a regular basis. Do you say an affirmation of faith each week during worship? Does your confirmation class or preparation for baptism group write a statement of faith? Has your congregation passed any service and justice-related resolutions lately, in favor of a shelter for the homeless, for instance? Do members offer testimony or transformation stories in worship services or in other congregational contexts, spoken or written (such as Advent or Lenten devotional booklets)? Collect several of these statements, choosing carefully for your multiage group, and cut them into strips with one sentence on each.

Supplies:

- church worship bulletins
- statements of faith written by a confirmation class or preparation for baptism group
- devotional booklets written by church members
- transcript of testimonies/transformation stories by church members

Introduce your church's testimonies, saying: *Our church talks about God all the time, in different ways. Here are some examples.* Divide the strips from the first statement among the readers; prereaders or those who don't want to read can listen. Invite the children to take turns reading the sentences, pausing to ask the group if they have any questions or comments. Repeat with the other statements, encouraging conversation.

③ Let Your Light Shine

Leader preparation: Review the music lyrics for the hymn "This Little Light of Mine." Study the song's history as well; it was an anthem of the United States' civil rights struggle of the 1960s. Youth will likely know the song, but they may

on—the way individual testimony shapes the community of learners in your care.

Prayer: Holy God, as I prepare to invite young learners to find words for your presence in their lives, make me ever more aware of your presence in my own life. Grant me the grace and courage to name you as the source and strength and joy of my life. Through the mystery of your Spirit, bless us all with a vision to see your love, with the language to testify to your love, and with the will to witness to your love. In Christ's name. 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.

not have thought about it in terms of its inspiration for faith-based justice movements. Younger learners will find it easy and fun to learn.

Supplies:

- candle
- matches
- candle snuffer
- newsprint or white board and markers
- writing implements
- lyrics to "This Little Light of Mine" <http://tinyurl.com/2cwbzzt>

Place a candle on a table in the middle of the gathering space. Once the learners are settled, slowly move to the candle and light it. Slowly move back to your seat, and invite the children to observe a few minutes of silence. End the silence with a short prayer and put out the candle with the snuffer. Tell the learners that the light of God is within them and God wants them to let it shine. Introduce "This Little Light of Mine," and invite the learners to sing it together. Use gestures if desired and invite the children to add new verses. As time allows, ask the learners to describe how they are going to let their light shine.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ Looking for God Where We Are (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity the learners will practice looking for God in the present moment, right where they are. To prepare, take a walk around your church, inside and out. Figure out a good path for you to follow with the children. What do you see along the way? Where would you stop and point to something that reminds you of God?

Supplies: None

Divide the group into pairs, and tell them that they are going to walk slowly around the church, inside or out, looking for things that remind them of God. The tricky part is that they will walk in silence, taking turns stopping and gesturing to the things that remind them of God. Maybe there's a dandelion growing through the sidewalk, or some food set out for the fellowship hour, or a choir rehearsing to sing—all of these can make us aware of God's presence and love. At the end of the walk, invite the learners to talk about the places they noticed God. Remind them that when we talk with others about the places we notice God, we are testifying to God's presence among us.

⑤ God Comes to the Lakeshore

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the hymn "You Have Come to the Lakeshore/Tú has Venido a la Orilla." No matter how rich or poor we may be, Jesus comes looking for us along the lakeshore and invites us to follow him. As followers, Jesus asks us to use our fishnets and our hands to spread his love. This hymn has been used by churches on mission trips, and by many different people who are bearing witness to Christ. Reflect on how this message is relevant to the learners in your group, and to your congregation's mission. Prepare to teach

the words and music to your group. If you know Spanish, consider teaching the learners the verses in Spanish as well as English. If you have access to a computer, you may want to show the children a YouTube rendition of the hymn.

Supplies:

- hymnbooks (if hymn is included)
- keyboard or piano, if available
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- computer connected to the Internet
- paper, pencils, markers, crayons
- song “Tú has Venido a la Orilla,” (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain) <http://tinyurl.com/fp-orilla2>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XDpRE9s08c>. This hymn was sung by Collin Nelson (age 14) and his father Mark Nelson during worship at the First Presbyterian Church of South Charleston on January 11, 2009.

Introduce the hymn, summarizing the lyrics. Ask the learners to think about what kinds of “fishnets” they might have to help spread Jesus’ love, and how they can use their hands to be witnesses for God. Assure the children that God has given each of them gifts to share. If desired, show the group a YouTube version of the hymn, preferably a version that includes children singing, and then learn to sing it together. After you have learned the hymn, invite the children to draw pictures of their own understanding of the hymn. Will they get in the boat with Jesus?



⑥ Finding God in the Story

Leader preparation: Read several versions of the story of how Rebekah became Isaac’s wife, in Genesis 24:34–67. Think about all the characters involved, and what each character’s testimony is. Imagine what else the characters might have said about their perspective on this drama. Study the script provided and collect the props you will need. Consider the learners in your group and how they will understand the story—and what parts they might want to play. The script, props, and characters can be improvised according to the number of people in your group and the supplies you have available. Tailor the story to make it most engaging and enjoyable for your learners and for you!

Supplies:

- “Isaac and Rebekah,” Attachment: Activity 6
- simple biblical costumes

Review the story and the script with your learners. Remind the children that this story takes place in cultures where marriages are arranged by people’s parents, and rich families have servants to help take care of the livestock, the fields, and even personal matters. Ask the children to listen to each character’s testimony and to think about how God is involved in the story’s unfolding drama. Invite the children’s questions, and ask them questions, such as: *The servant testifies that God answers his prayers quickly and exactly. How has God answered your prayers?* Then prepare the children to act out the story. Invite the learners to take the various parts. If available, simple costumes will enhance the drama. You may want to tell the story more than once to give learners the opportunity to play different parts each time.

Sending & Serving Activities

⑦ Guide My Feet

Leader preparation: As we go out into the world, it is important to ask God for guidance and to remember how we want to bear witness to God's love. Music can help us recall that God is there to lead us. Plan on singing the spiritual "Guide My Feet" with the learners. Research how this hymn has inspired people to testify to God's love over time, and be prepared to share a few stories. Write the words on newsprint or the whiteboard, but, if possible, also have hymn books available so you can show the learners where they can find the hymn on their own.

Supplies:

- hymn books
- whiteboard, newsprint, or large poster-size paper
- markers
- hymn: "Guide My Feet" <http://tinyurl.com/25hftj>
- background story on "Guide My Feet" <http://tinyurl.com/3l54643>

Give a brief background to the hymn, and ask the children to remember that God goes with them and encourages them to testify wherever they go. Teach the words to the group. Some hymnals include a new verse, contributed by fifth graders, that says, "Guide my wheels." This verse will be particularly relevant if one of the learners in your group uses a wheelchair. Connect gestures and movements to the words, and ask the children for their ideas. How would you demonstrate "Guide my feet" or "Guide my wheels"? Spend a few minutes reflecting on particular situations in which the children need God to guide them. Then divide the group into twos and ask them to trace one another's feet on the newsprint. At the top of the poster write, "Guide Our Feet!" Hang the finished product on the wall.



⑧ The Charge and Benediction

Leader preparation: Usually at the end of a worship service the leader gives a charge to the congregation and then offers a benediction. How does your congregation conclude its worship services? What are you charged to do? What are the words of the benediction? Collect some recent examples from your own congregation, as well as some examples from scripture. Several are included on the attachment.

Supplies:

- recent bulletins, or your own compilation of charges and benedictions
- small bowl
- baby oil or scented oil
- "Charges and Blessings from Scripture," Attachment: Activity 8

Tell the learners that there is a particular way that Christians conclude our gatherings. Ask the learners what they remember about the words said at the end of a worship service. Remind them of the way your congregation ends its services, and give some examples. Give a few examples from scripture as well (see the attachment for suggestions). Discuss the meaning of the charges and how the learners relate them to their own lives. Invite the group to create its own brief charge. How would they encourage one another to testify to God's love through-

out the week? As a group, create a short charge that the learners can repeat to one another. If desired, pour some oil in a small bowl, and show the children how to make the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads as, one at a time, they charge each other to go out into the world and bear witness in God's name.

⑨ Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

Leader preparation: Read several versions of Acts 16:16–34, including a few children's Bible versions. This is a powerful story, but there are a few parts of it that may be a bit mature for the youngest children in your group. Plan to share the story with the group in a way that all the learners will find engaging. Divide the text into several different sections, so that the readers in your group can volunteer to read a section. Then listen to several versions of the song, "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" ("Eyes on the Prize"), an inspirational song sung during the civil rights movement, the lyrics of which begin with Paul and Silas. Mavis Staples, Bruce Springsteen, Mahalia Jackson, and Pete Seeger are among the singers who have recorded "Eyes on the Prize." Pick your favorite recording, and plan to play it for the group. Or find someone in your congregation who knows the song, and invite him or her to teach it to the learners.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- song: "Eyes on the Prize" <http://tinyurl.com/2zhlu5>

Give the Bible story you have chosen to all the learners, telling them that this is a story about followers of Jesus who stayed faithful to him even when they were sent to jail. They kept their eyes on the prize of love and freedom in Christ. Ask for volunteers to read the text. Between readers, invite all the learners to respond, "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize!" After the story ends, describe how this story inspired people who struggled for civil rights, many of whom were put in jail, and play the song for the group. Aim to learn the first verse, and sing it together, clapping with the music, at the close of the session. Send the learners off with the charge to keep their eyes on the prize.

Reflect

As you reflect on your time with the learners, think about where God's presence was most pronounced. Consider the learners' questions and comments. What insights emerged from the group? Do the learners have a better understanding of the practice of testimony and witness than they did when you began?

Attachment: Activity 6

Isaac and Rebekah

Characters: Narrator; Abraham's servant; Abraham animals: sheep, goats, cows, camels, and donkeys; Rebekah; Bethuel; Rebekah's mother; Rebekah's brother, Laban; Isaac; servants and traveling companions for Abraham's servant; servant women who travel with Rebekah

Props: Simple tunics for boys and girls; Animal masks for sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys; silver and gold coins, real or pretend; treasure chest or bowl for the coins; small water jug; well; ring and bracelet; woman's scarf or shawl; a few gift boxes; sheet for making a tent

Abraham's Servant: I am Abraham's servant. We live in a land called Canaan. As you can see, God has been good to my master Abraham and he is very rich. (*Abraham steps forward, looking well-off and proud.*) God has given him a lot of sheep and goats and camels and donkeys. (*Animals come forward and surround Abraham.*) God also gave Abraham a lot of silver and gold (*Abraham runs his fingers through the coins.*) and a lot of servants (*Other servants come forward.*). Abraham's wife, Sarah, did not have any children until she was very old, and then she had a son named Isaac. My master gave Isaac everything he ever needed. When Isaac grew up, Abraham thought it was time for him to get married. So one day Abraham told me to leave Canaan and go to the land where he was born. Abraham wanted Isaac's wife to come from his hometown, from his own big family. My job was to find a woman there who would agree to marry Isaac. I had promised to do whatever Abraham asked me to do, but I was a little worried about this new assignment, so I asked Abraham, "What if the young woman refuses to come with me?"

Abraham: I have always done what God has asked me to do. God will send an angel to help you find a wife for Isaac from my many relatives. But if they do not let the woman come back with you, you are free from your promise.

(Servant "travels" and stops at the well. Then he kneels and prays.)

Servant: O God you are the God my master Abraham worships. Please lead me to a wife for his son while I am here at the well. When a young woman comes to get water, I will ask her to give me a drink. (*Rebekah comes quietly to the well, with a small jug on her shoulder. She shows up before the servant finishes his prayer.*) If she does, and if she offers to get some water for my camels, I will know she is the one you have chosen.

(Rebekah fills the jug and hands it to the servant.)

Rebekah: Have some water. Then I'll get more water for your camels.

(The servant studies Rebekah for a minute.)

Servant: Who is your father?

Rebekah: His name is Bethuel, the son of Micah and Nahor, Abraham's brother.

Servant: (*bowing down and praying*) Thank you, God! Rebekah is the daughter of Abraham's nephew; she is part of Abraham's big family! O God, you have led me to the right place!

Narrator: Then the servant gave Rebekah new clothing and fancy jewelry. (*Servant gives Rebekah a fancy scarf or two, a ring, and bracelets.*) And he told Laban, Rebekah's brother, and Bethuel, Rebekah's father, about the job Abraham had given him to do, and how everything had worked out.

Attachment: Activity 6 (*continued*)

Laban and Bethuel: This is God's doing! Rebekah may go and become the wife of Abraham's son.

Narrator: Then the servant gave expensive gifts to Rebekah's mother and brother. (*Servant gives them gifts as well.*) Rebekah's relatives gave the servant and his companions a good meal, and he spent the night at their house. (*Servant and companions go to sleep.*)

(*The next morning*)

Servant: (*getting up from sleeping and speaking to Rebekah's relatives*) I would like go to back to Abraham now.

Rebekah's mother and Laban: Please let Rebekah stay here for a week or ten days, then she'll go.

Servant: But I am ready to go today! God has helped me do my job. Don't make me stay here any longer.

Rebekah's mother and Laban: Let's ask Rebekah what she wants to do. (*They turn to Rebekah.*) Are you willing to leave with this man right now?

Rebekah: Yes, I am.

Rebekah's relatives: (*gathering around her and putting their hands on her to bless her*) May God be good to you and protect you and give you many children and grandchildren.

Narrator: So Rebekah and the women who were traveling with her to help her left with Abraham's servant. At that time Isaac lived in the southern part of Canaan, near a place called, "The Well of the Living One Who Sees Me." He was walking out in the field when he saw the group of people coming his way. (*Isaac looks out over the field.*)

Rebekah (*sees Isaac and speaks to Abraham's servant*): Who is that man?

Servant: He is my master, Isaac.

Narrator: The servant told Isaac everything that had happened. Isaac took Rebekah into the tent where his mother had lived, and Rebekah became his wife. (*Isaac and Rebekah go to the tent.*) Isaac loved her very much, and she loved him.

The End

Attachment: Activity 8

Charges and Blessings from Scripture

Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Rejoice in the Lord always. Let your gentleness be known to everyone, for God is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

As God's own, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, and patience, forgiving each other as God has forgiven you. Crown all these things with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:12-14)

Be at peace among yourselves. Encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all. Do not repay evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all things. (1 Thessalonians 5:14-18)

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Learners of all ages love a good story. The focus text for this Exploration of giving testimony and witness, John 9:1–41, is just that. This dramatic story of a man who was blind and is healed and proclaims, “I was blind, but now I see!” is fertile ground for a multiage group to explore scriptural models of this practice. Elements of the story will speak to younger and older learners alike, expanding their understanding of what it means to testify.

About this Exploration

Our lives are part of the tapestry of God’s larger story in the world. Scripture contains testimonies of people who aren’t perfect, which invites us to tell our stories in response. In John’s account of Jesus and the blind man, the man’s witness sparked a process that touched on people’s relationships, different understandings of God, the role of religious authority, and viewpoints within the community. The healed man’s testimony inspired dialogue and, ultimately, transformation. Similarly, our stories may shape other people’s response to scripture and draw out their testimonies. The experience of hearing scripture varies according to our experiences, situations, traditions, and settings.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

John 9:1-41

Psalm 116

Leader Preparation

In this Exploration learners will examine the testimony and witness of healing as found in several selections from scripture. The story of the healing of the man born blind in John 9 and the prayer of thanksgiving for healing in Psalm 116 provide the biblical expression of testimony that result from grace-filled transformation. As you prepare to guide the learners through the activities, keep in mind that there are many forms of healing, literal and spiritual. Be sensitive to the fact that there may be participants in your group who have prayed for healing and have not received the answer they hoped for; be prepared to respond to questions about why some people experience physical healing while others do not. Throughout, focus on deepening learners' understanding of themselves both as recipients of Christ's healing grace and as witnesses of that grace.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Amazing Grace (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Find your hymnbook and review all the words for "Amazing Grace." Consider the history of this hymn, which was written by an Englishman named John Newton during the eighteenth century. Newton began working on a ship at the age of eleven and became the captain of a ship used for slave trading in his early twenties. One stormy night on the ship he began reading *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, and his eyes were opened to the cruelty of the slave trade. He changed his life and eventually became a minister. The year he died, England abolished slave trading. Be prepared to tell this story to your learners and to teach them (with a musician, if needed) "Amazing Grace." If time allows, borrow several different recordings of the hymn to demonstrate how significant its words have been for many different communities of faith. As an option, show the movie *Amazing Grace* <http://tinyurl.com/22oswo>.

Supplies:

- hymnbooks or copies of the song "Amazing Grace"
- (optional) recordings of "Amazing Grace"
- (optional) music player
- (optional) Blind Boys of Alabama YouTube video <http://tinyurl.com/yhrherh>

Tell the story of the song "Amazing Grace." Invite the learners to read the lyrics out loud, one verse at a time, listening for the testimony embedded in the words. Pause between verses for questions. If available, play a few samples from the recordings you brought. The Blind Boys of Alabama, a group of African American men who are blind, have recorded "Amazing Grace." What might the hymn mean to them, for instance? Conclude by singing the hymn as a group.

② By Faith, Not Sight

Leader preparation: How do we experience the world when we lose one of our senses, namely our sight? In this activity we will explore how we can use our other senses to get our bearings. The aim is to nurture compassion among the learners for those who are blind, and to help them "see" even while blindfolded. As you prepare, read John 9:1-41 for background. Think about the blind man's healing, but also about the people in the story who could see and yet were spiritually blind. Jesus calls all of us to keep our eyes open. Reflect on your own experiences with this kind of transformation.

Supplies:

- napkins or bandanas to use as blindfolds (enough for each person in the group)
- a variety of small, ordinary objects (such as stones, small fruit or food, electronic devices)
- small jars with several different scented liquids or spices (such as vinegar, scented liquid soap, chili powder)

Explain to the learners that Jesus wants all people to see, even people who are blind. Ask if anyone knows someone who is blind, and if so, how that person functions in the world. Then describe the concept of spiritual blindness, that sometimes people who can see are blind to God's love for them—or for others. Tell the group that you are going to do an experiment with blindness. Place a

Prayer: *Life-giving God, through the power of your amazing grace, bless my time of preparation that, as I guide this community of your beloved sons and daughters, I may be a vessel of your love and truth. Open my eyes, my ears, and my heart to the message of your word in scripture. Grant me the wisdom to express that message with clarity and conviction to each person who gathers here. Make your Spirit known to us all as we explore the witness of healing together, that our faith in you and our love for one another may be deepened beyond all human effort. In the mystery of your holy name, 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.

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blindfold over each person’s eyes. Then pass around a bag or basket with the small objects, inviting the learners to pick up one object at a time and name it if they can. Next, pass around the jars with spices or liquids, and invite the learners to name what they smell. When everyone has had a turn, remove the blindfolds and conclude by reflecting on the learners’ experience. How would learners testify about temporarily losing their sight and using other senses to function? Did being blindfolded reveal any new ways of “seeing” Christ or of empathizing with neighbors who are blind?



③ The Blind Pedlar

Leader preparation: Study the painting “The Blind Pedlar” by a relatively unknown British artist named Robert McGregor. His subjects, an elderly blind man and a young girl who acts as his guide, are unconventional for his era. These two people would have lived on the margins of late-nineteenth-century English society. Yet they are in relationship with one another and appear to be going somewhere together. Prepare to show the painting to the learners and solicit their responses. Plan on developing the learners’ responses into a story about faith. What is the old man’s testimony? What is the young girl’s testimony? Did God bring them together for a purpose?

Supplies:

- artwork: “The Blind Pedlar” by Robert McGregor (several copies) [www.tinyurl.com/fp-aprm](http://tinyurl.com/fp-aprm)
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Hold up the painting and give a brief description of it. Then pass around the copies so that all the learners can spend a few minutes looking at it; invite the group to do this in silence. Ask for any immediate responses, then begin piecing together the characters’ testimony. Start with either character and go around the circle asking each learner to contribute one sentence to the story. The rule is that the testimony must mention God at least once. *Where did the characters grow up? How did they meet each other? Are they related? How has God helped them along the way? What do they hope and pray for?* Be open to the learners’ creation of an exciting pair of testimonies!

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Listen and Respond to the Story (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read John 9:1–41 several times from a children’s Bible. Practice reading it out loud, trying to capture the mood of the story and the characters’ inflection. The story has five distinct scenes: 9:1–12; 13–17; 18–23; 24–34; 35–41. Be prepared to pause between each scene. You are going to read one or two scenes to the learners several times, asking them to listen carefully for the characters’ testimonies. In this activity, learners will practice a modified version of the ancient method of lectio divina, sacred reading.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- markers and pens
- newsprint or whiteboard

Ask the learners to close their eyes and listen carefully as you read John 9:1–12. You may want to turn out the lights to enhance the experience of listening without seeing. When you are finished reading, invite the learners to open their eyes and respond to the story. Invite them to retell the story, making it clear what happened. What comments or questions do they have? What testimony did they hear? Then invite the learners to close their eyes and listen to the text again. This time, ask them to listen for a word or phrase that stands out or makes them wonder. Hand out paper, markers and pens and give the learners several minutes to draw or write their responses. Invite learners to share what they have done. Ask the learners to close their eyes again and listen to the text once more, this time paying attention to any special way God may be speaking to them, as individuals or as a group, through the story. What is the testimony of this passage? If the participants struggle to respond, prompt them with a few questions. For example, Jesus says, “We must work the works of the one who sent me while it is day.” What works or forms of witness might God want the learners to engage in? Or, in the story, Jesus heals a blind man who used to beg by the side of the road. Have the learners ever seen someone beg or known someone who needs healing? How would Jesus want the learners to bear witness? Make a list on the newsprint or whiteboard and keep it as inspiration for future activities.

If desired, use this method to read another scene from the story. For variation, ask learners to work in pairs to respond to the passage by acting out the most meaningful phrase or by writing a short poem or prayer. Through this kind of engagement with scripture, learners may develop a deeper sense of the range of testimony available to them.

5 Being Blind Today

Leader preparation: Consider what it is like to be blind today. What resources are available? Where do you go to school if you’re blind? How do other people treat you? How do you walk from one place to another? What is it like to come to church? The answers to all these questions depend on where you live and what resources and support are available to you. Research what it would be like to be blind in your community; then learn what it would be like to be blind in another country (a link to the documentary *Blindsight*, about blind children in Tibet, is in the supply list). If there is a member of your congregation who is blind and who is willing to speak to your group, invite him or her to join you. If not, find the testimony of a person who is blind to share with the group (a few suggestions are listed). If you can, borrow a white cane with a red tip and a sample of Braille to show the learners.

Supplies:

- movie: *Blindsight*, National Federation for the Blind website <http://tinyurl.com/3n82s77>
- Beth Finke, *Safe and Sound* (West Bay Shore, NY: Blue Marlin Publications, 2007) [<http://tinyurl.com/3uaz8jm>] Book Link
- Diane Winters-Johnson, *The View from Under the Pew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) Book Link

With the learners, imagine what it would be like to be blind in your community and in your church. If you have a guest presenter, ask that person to share his or her story. If not, read or tell the story of someone else (several suggestions are listed). Show the white cane and the Braille sample to the learners, describing them as tools of freedom and independence. Blind mountain climber Eric Weihmayer says, ‘Just because you lose your sight, doesn’t mean you lose your

vision." What do blind people have to teach full-sighted people? How different are blind people from sighted people? How much the same? If God could testify to or about blind people, what would God say?



⑥ Acting Out the Story: A Play Based on John 9

Leader preparation: Read John 9:1–41. Then download the script below, "I Was Blind, but Now I See." Reflect on the learners in your group and how you might divide up the roles in the drama. Consider your gathering space and how you might arrange the scenes. Gather any costumes you have, such as simple tunics and head scarves. Be prepared to explain the story to the learners and to describe how you are going to act it out.

Supplies:

- "I Was Blind, but Now I See" Attachment: Activity 6

Summarize John 9:1–41 for the learners; then explain that you are going to do a play about the story as a group. Pass around the script and ask for volunteers to read different parts. If there are more learners in your group than there are characters in the play, different learners can play the same character in different scenes. Younger learners can be the blind man's neighbors or the religious authorities who drive him out of town. Read the script several times, asking the learners to think about all the characters' testimonies. *What is the testimony of Jesus, of the Pharisees, of the blind man, of his parents?* Following the discussion, act out the drama.

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Testimony of Praise (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 116, considered a psalm of thanksgiving for recovery from illness. As Old Testament scholar Claus Westermann says, this psalm is in the genre of "praise reports." We are not sure what specific malady afflicted the author, but we do know that his heart is full of gratitude for God's bounty. The author testifies to his own pain and suffering and to God's renewal and grace; he wants to celebrate the gift of healing in the community of faith. Prepare to read the psalm responsively with the learners, verse by verse; prereaders can listen in. Also be prepared to explain some of the vocabulary and phrases to the younger learners. After listening to the psalm, be ready to invite the learners to talk about their own testimonies of thanksgiving.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Pass around the Bibles and invite participants to find Psalm 116. Young learners may not be familiar with many of the psalms, so explain that a psalm is a song or prayer to God and that many of the psalms were written by King David. Some of the psalms were written by other people whose names we do not know. We do know that the psalms testify both to the hard things people go through and to God's unending love and faithfulness. In fact, some people say that the psalms are the heart of the Bible because when you open up the Bible up in the middle, the psalms are what you find. Some of the psalms, like Psalm 116, can be thought of as testimony of praise, or "praise reports"—descriptions of things that make the psalmist so happy that he wants to say, "Thank you, God!"

After a brief introduction, read the psalm responsively, encouraging the learners to listen for words of praise or thanks. On newsprint or a whiteboard make a list of the words as you go. When the reading concludes, divide the group into twos, and invite the learners to take turns pretending to be a reporter who is writing a story about the reasons people have thanked God in the last week. Each “reporter” must discover at least two reasons his or her partner has thanked God. All the “reporters” can share their “stories” at the end. At the activity’s conclusion, invite learners to do some mutual “praise reporting” with a friend during the week or invite younger children’s families to thank God for something specific each evening before dinner or bed. Encourage these young Christians to keep practicing their testimony of thanks and praise.



⑧ Healing Balm

Leader preparation: Contact your pastor and gather a list of people in your congregation who need pastoral care and would welcome a small gift from your group. Review the recipe below and collect the supplies you need to make bath salts. Determine how you will deliver the gifts. Perhaps several learners and a parent can set up visits with the people on the pastoral care list, and bring the gifts with them.

Supplies:

- “Bath Salts Recipe,” Attachment: Activity 8
- old paper or plastic cover for tables
- card stock, cut into gift card size pieces
- pens or fine-tipped markers
- hole punch

Introduce the activity by telling the learners that one way Christians bear witness to God’s love is by showing love for other people, especially people who are feeling sick or lonely. Ask if the learners know anyone who might need some special care. Then share the names of the people on your pastoral care list with the group. Pray for all the people you have named.

Describe the process of making bath salts. While some learners are making bath salts, others can write the names of the people who will receive them on the card stock. Encourage them to include a comforting Bible verse or paraphrase on the card, such as this, from Psalm 116: “Our God is merciful, for God delivers our eyes from tears and lifts us up when we are brought low.”

⑨ International White Cane Safety Day

Leader preparation: Review the links below regarding the history and observance of White Cane Safety Day and other resources for the visually impaired. Be prepared to present this information to the learners. Find out if White Cane Safety Day is celebrated where you live. If so, how? If not, whom can you contact about establishing an observance? Have the answers ready before you begin the session.

Supplies:

- White Cane Day website <http://www.nfb.org>
- a white cane
- paper, envelopes, and stamps
- pens

Show the white cane to the learners and describe its significance as a tool and symbol of independence for people who are blind. Then describe the history of White Cane Safety Day, observed every October 15. While the observance began in the United States, White Cane Safety Day is celebrated in a number of countries around the world. If the day is celebrated where you live, describe the celebration to the learners. Then invite the learners to write letters to the people responsible for organizing the event to thank them. If the day is not celebrated where you live, ask the learners for ideas. *What would this kind of celebration involve?* Then write letters to the appropriate authorities to ask them to establish an observance of White Cane Safety Day in your local schools or community, and volunteer to help.

Reflect

On your own or with another leader, review the session focusing on where you witnessed God's presence. Were your own eyes opened to God's grace at any point during the session? Where did you see or hear God among the learners' conversations and responses? When did the learners seem most engaged? Did they lose interest at any point? What might have held their attention? Did the activities flow together smoothly? If not, how could the transitions have been strengthened? Keep your reflections in mind as you prepare for your next session.

Attachment: Activity 6

I Was Blind, but Now I See

A drama based on John 9

Characters:

Narrator
Jesus
Blind Man
Disciples
Neighbors
Pharisees
Blind Man's Parents

Scene I: Jesus Meets the Blind Man

Jesus, Blind Man, Disciples, Narrator

Narrator: One day Jesus and his disciples were walking along the road when they saw a man sitting by the side of road, asking for money. The man had been blind since the day he was born. The disciples asked Jesus,

Disciples: Why was this man born blind? Did he do something wrong, or did his parents do something wrong?

Jesus: This man is not blind because he or his parents did something wrong! God will do great things through him. We all need to work together to do great things for God. I am the light of the world, and I am going to share my light with this man.

Narrator: Then Jesus spat on the ground and made a paste out of the mud. He rubbed the paste on the blind man's eyes (*Jesus rubs blind man's eyes*) and told the man to go to the pool of water at a place called Sent. (*Jesus points in the direction of the pool, and blind man goes to the pool to wash.*)

Scene II: Blind Man and his Neighbors

Narrator, Neighbors, Blind Man

Narrator: When the blind man came back from the pool, he could see for the first time in his life.

Blind Man: I can see! I can see!

Neighbors (among themselves): Isn't he the man who used to sit by the side of the road and beg us for money and food?

Narrator: The neighbors couldn't agree whether the man who could now see was the same man who used to beg by the side of the road. But the blind man tried to convince them, saying,

Blind Man: I am the one! I am the one!

Neighbors: Then how in the world can you see again? How were your eyes opened?

Attachment: Activity 6 (*continued*)

Blind Man: I know it sounds strange, but the man named Jesus put mud on my eyes and told me to go and wash in the pool at Sent. After I washed, I could see.

Neighbors: Where is Jesus now?

Blind Man: I have no idea.

Scene III: The Blind Man and the Pharisees

Narrator: Since the healing of the blind man was very suspicious, the neighbors brought him to the religious authorities, the Pharisees, to investigate. The problem was that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath, when no one is supposed to work. The Pharisees asked the blind man to testify about what happened.

Pharisees: How did you get your sight?

Blind Man: Let me say it again. Jesus put mud on my eyes. He told me to go wash in the pool at Sent. Now I can see.

Some Pharisees: In our judgment, Jesus cannot be a man of God, since he worked on the Sabbath.

Other Pharisees: Well, in our judgment, only a man of God could perform this kind of healing. Jesus must be a man of God.

All the Pharisees: (*to the Blind Man*) What do you think? You're the one who was blind but now can see.

Blind Man: I truly believe that Jesus is God's messenger.

Scene IV: The Pharisees and the Parents

Narrator, Pharisees, Blind Man, Blind Man's Parents

Narrator: The religious authorities still did not believe the blind man's story. They thought he was making it up, and that he had not been born blind at all. So they found the man's parents and asked them for their testimony.

Pharisees: (*holding on to Blind Man, to Parents*) Is this your son? Was he really born blind? If so, how can he now see?

Parents: Yes, this is our son. Yes, he was born blind. But we have no idea how he can now see, and we have no clue who opened his eyes. He's a grown man. Ask him.

Narrator: The truth is that the man's parents were afraid of the religious authorities. There was a rule that anyone who said that Jesus was a healer sent by God would be not be welcome at the synagogue, and the blind man's parents did not want that to happen to them.

Attachment: Activity 6 (continued)

Scene V: The Pharisees and Blind Man, Take Two Narrator, Pharisees, Blind Man

Narrator: After talking with the blind man's parents, the Pharisees asked the blind man the same questions all over again. This time, all the Pharisees agreed that Jesus had broken the law by healing on the Sabbath, and that Jesus was not a man of God.

Pharisees: Praise God, we are right! We know that Jesus is a sinner! He broke the law!

Blind Man: Well, I don't know if he is a sinner, and I don't really care. What I do know is that I was blind, and now I see.

Pharisees: Tell us again how Jesus healed you.

Blind Man: I already told you. Why should I tell you again? Do you want to follow him?

Pharisees: No, we don't. We follow Moses, because we know for a fact that God spoke to Moses, and Moses led the people of God from slavery in Egypt into freedom in the Promised Land. But we don't know where Jesus came from.

Blind Man: What matters is not where Jesus came from, but that he opened my eyes. This kind of miracle has never happened since the beginning of the world! Only a man of God could do it!

Narrator: The Pharisees would not believe the blind man's testimony. Instead they said,

Pharisees: You were born blind because everything about you is against God's way.

Narrator: And the Pharisees drove the man out of town.

Scene VI: Jesus and the Blind Man, Take Two Narrator, Jesus, Blind Man, Pharisees

Narrator: It wasn't long before Jesus heard that the Pharisees had kicked the blind man out of his own town. Jesus went looking for him everywhere, and when he found him, he said,

Jesus: Do you believe in the Son of God?

Blind Man: Who is he? Tell me. I want to believe.

Jesus: You have seen him with your own eyes. He is standing right in front of you.

Blind Man: I believe!

Jesus: God sent me to earth give people who are blind the chance to see. I am the light of the world!

Attachment: Activity 8

Bath Salts Recipe

6 cups Epsom salt
4 cups sea salt
2 cups baking soda
(optional) 2 cups dentritic salt or 1 cup natrasorbath
1 ounce skin safe fragrance
food coloring or colored liquid soap
metal or glass mixing bowls, 1 large and 5–6 small
whisk or metal spoon
small metal scoops,
1/8 or 1/4 cup
10–12 glass jars or sturdy plastic containers
wide, decorative ribbon

Mix together all the salts; then add the fragrance and stir. Divide the salt into small bowls, and add a few drops of food coloring or liquid hand soap to tint different colors. Leave one bowl plain white. Each learner can make his or her own container of bath salt, with different layers. When the container is full, close the lid and tie a ribbon around it.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

A disciple is someone who learns from a teacher, so anyone who wants to learn from Jesus is his disciple. Multiage group participants will understand the meaning of discipleship in those terms. Once they begin to identify themselves as followers of Jesus, learners will also begin to make connections between their discipleship identity and their choices of words and actions. This Exploration will enable learners to see that testifying and bearing witness are natural expressions of discipleship.

About this Exploration

When giving testimony and witness, a disciple becomes both learner and leader. In response to God's prompting, disciples serve the community through speaking and acting faithfully.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Mark 8:27-38

Psalm 25:1-10

Leader Preparation

As you prepare for this Exploration, consider your own path of discipleship. What prompted you to respond to Christ's call to be his disciple? How does your life testify to the choice you have made to follow Jesus? What sustains you as you live out your calling? Reflect on your spiritual autobiography and discern what parts of it you feel comfortable sharing with the learners in your group. As much as by the activities below, learners will be engaged and moved by the true story of someone they know.

Prayer: As I prepare to lead your people to a deeper understanding of discipleship, O God, open my heart to your teaching. Show me your ways, and guide me to the paths that will take us all to your holy presence. Through the mystery and grace of your Spirit, inspire us to name Jesus as the one whose life sets the pattern for ours. 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.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Follow the Leader (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity you will play an adaptation of an age-old game, Follow the Leader. To prepare, review the basic rules: one person (or, in the interest of safety and community, two people) volunteer(s) to go out of the room for a few moments while someone from the rest of the group volunteers to be the leader. The leader chooses several motions or postures and everyone else copies. The volunteer guessers are invited back into the room, and they have three chances to identify the leader. The game continues until everyone has a chance to be the leader.

Supplies: None

Describe the game to the learners, rotating through guessers and leaders until everyone has had a turn. Encourage leaders to use gestures they have seen in church. When the game is over, discuss how hard or easy it was to discover who the leader was, and what it was like to be the leader. Ask learners what they think it means to be a follower or a leader in our faith. *What do followers and leaders say (testify about) and do (bear witness to)? How hard or easy is it to follow Jesus or lead like he did? What kind of choices does being a disciple entail?*

② You Are Salt for the Earth

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the hymn "You Are Salt for the Earth, O People," by Marty Haugen. If it is not in your hymnal, use the link below. Out of interest, review the YouTube recording (link below) of a Chinese choir singing this hymn. The hymn's lively melody and inspiring lyrics have touched people around the world. Prepare to teach "You are Salt for the Earth, O People" to the learners, inviting a guest song leader to join you if needed. If time allows, invite learners to bring in a used, small plastic bottle to make an instrument.

Supplies:

- song: "You Are Salt for the Earth, O People" (tune: Bring Forth, irr. with refrain) www.tinyurl.com/fp-salt
- (optional) <http://tinyurl.com/3wpvfnd>
- maracas or other simple instruments
- small plastic bottles
- dry beans or rice

Review the hymn's lyrics with the learners. What does it mean to be salt, light, and seed for the reign or city of God? In what ways can the learners imagine they can help "bring forth the reign of peace"? Learn the hymn together, adding simple instrumentation to imitate the sound of salt in a shaker. Learners can make their own instruments by filling small, clean bottles with dry beans or rice. "Salt for the Earth" was originally used as a processional song for outdoor worship. Once the learners know the hymn well, consider processing around your gathering space with the learners while they sing and play their instruments.

- 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 Finding the Path

Leader preparation: Read Psalm 25 several times. The psalmist asks God to teach him God's paths and ways. Reflect on the content and shape of God's ways. How do they differ from human or secular ways? Some of the psalm's language may be challenging for the younger learners in your group, but be prepared to read at least verses 4 and 5 with the learners. Pull together the supplies so that learners can begin to envision the path God sets before them.

Supplies:

- Bible
- pictures of different kinds of paths
- paper for drawing
- construction paper
- markers, colored pencils
- small leaves or leaves cut out of construction paper
- old magazines
- tissue paper
- glue, scissors

Introduce Psalm 25 by explaining that part of being a follower of Jesus involves learning which path to take. Read the verses from the psalm several times. Talk with the learners about many different choices people may make, like paths we can travel; some of them lead to God and some of them do not. Ask the learners to name some examples. Then ask the learners to think about the path God wants them to follow. Invite them to create a picture of that path, using the supplies you have provided. Older learners may want to cut out different kinds of images and develop a more nuanced scene.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ The Hard Part about Following Jesus (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Mark 8:27–38. If possible, find a children's Bible that includes this text. Some suggestions are: *The Family Story Bible* and *The Lectionary Story Bible, Year B*, both by Ralph Milton. Each contains a version of the text that will be easier for younger learners to understand. If you do not have access to a children's Bible, prepare to describe the passage in ways that will connect with all the learners in your group. In this text Jesus tells the disciples that he will suffer and be killed; he also says that anyone who wants to follow him must deny themselves and take up their cross. These are critical theological statements, but statements that will be overwhelming for early elementary learners. As you prepare to introduce the text to your group, focus on Peter's testimony about who Jesus is—the Messiah, the savior the people of God have been waiting for—and on what it means to live for the sake of the gospel.

Supplies:

- Bibles, if possible *The Family Story Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) or *The Lectionary Story Bible, Year B* (British Columbia: Wood Lake Publishing, 2008)

Introduce the text, explaining that when people first started following Jesus they were not sure who he was. The people of God had been waiting and hoping for a Messiah, a savior who would build the city of God on earth. They were trying to figure out if Jesus was that savior. Peter was the first disciple to say out loud that

Jesus was the Messiah, so Peter's testimony is very important. But Jesus surprises Peter with a description of what will happen to the Messiah and what it means to follow him. Jesus asks his followers to take a difficult path. After reading the text, ask the learners to wonder how Peter felt when he realized who Jesus was. *When he heard Jesus say how hard it would be to follow him, what might Peter have said?* Then ask how the learners think about Jesus. Who do they say Jesus is? What hard choices might they make in their own lives to follow him? Who would support them as they make those choices? Friends, family, peers at church?



5 Sowing Seeds

Leader preparation: Gaze at a print of Van Gogh's painting "The Sower" (see the link in the supply list). Van Gogh used his art to express his faith. He once said, "I have a terrible need of religion. Then I go out and paint the stars." The scenes he painted are full of intense colors and movement, and "The Sower" is no exception. He used yellow to represent faith, love, and the triumph of the spirit; he used cobalt blue to represent God. Where do these colors show up in the painting? What might that mean? The sower is alone in the field. Have you ever felt like you are sowing alone? Obtain a copy of the print and be prepared to introduce the painting to the learners. Gather the supplies, and prepare the room for an art activity.

Supplies:

- artwork: "The Sower," by Vincent van Gogh www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr2
- 8½" x 11" card stock in white or yellow
- pastel crayons
- finger paint, if desired
- back construction paper
- glue
- scissors
- smocks or old T-shirts
- newspaper or other covering for the tables
- (optional) supplemental resources: *Van Gogh and the Sunflower* by Laurence Anholt (Hauppauge, NY: Barrons Educational Service, 2007); *Vincent van Gogh: Sunflowers and Swirly Star* by Joan Holub (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 2001. Metropolitan Museum of Art); *Vincent's Colors* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005)

Introduce the painting to the learners. Ask them to think about the sower. *What might his testimony be? Why is he alone? How long has he been a sower? What is he sowing? What does Jesus ask his followers to sow?* How do the learners do that? Ask the learners to think about the colors, too, explaining what yellow and blue meant to Van Gogh. Encourage the learners to think about their own experience. What color reminds them of faith? What color reminds them of God? After the discussion hand out the paper, pastels, and paints (if desired) and invite the learners to create their own scene of a sower on a field. Some learners may choose to cut figures or objects out of black construction paper and glue them on top of the scene for a shadow effect. To conclude this activity, ask learners to describe how their pictures remind them to sow seeds in Christ's name.



⑥ A Modern Day Disciple

Leader preparation: Acquire a children's biography of a well-known follower of Christ, someone who placed ultimate trust in God and risked everything for justice and the love of neighbors. Look over the list of recommended resources, or draw from your own collection. Choose someone you think your group would enjoy learning about. Be prepared to share that person's story with the learners.

Supplies:

- "Suggested Biographies," Attachment: Activity 6
- magazines
- scissors
- paper
- glue

Explain to the learners that they are going to learn about following Jesus by acting out the life of a well-known disciple. Read the story you have chosen, lifting up the most vivid acts of faith and compelling testimony. Ask the learners what stands out from their perspective. *What choices did this person make to follow Jesus? What happened as a result of these choices?* When learners have a firm understanding of the sequence of events in the disciple's life, divide the group into teams of three or four. Each team will develop a montage of a specific, pivotal moment in the disciple's life. After the teams have presented their montage, conclude by asking learners how the modern day disciple's example might influence their own choices to testify and bear witness.

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Prayer Walk (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In this activity the learners will walk slowly around the room or from one part of the church to another, or around the church grounds. Learners will practice matching their steps with their breath; breathing out when they step down, and breathing in when they take their foot off the ground. Once they have practiced walking this way, introduce a short prayer for them to repeat, such as "Teach me/your ways," or "Show me/your paths." They will say or think the first two words stepping up and the second two words stepping down. Think about the space you have available to do this and prepare the best path to follow.

Supplies: None

Describe the prayer walk to the learners and invite them to follow you, at least at first. After a while, they can go at their own pace. Walk for five to ten minutes, and then discuss the experience with the learners. How would the learners testify about the experience of walking while praying? What did God teach them in this exercise? *How do we find the path God calls us to follow as disciples of Christ? Is the path only on the outside, laid out in what we can see? Or has God given us an inner path as well? Do we always have to walk in step with the people around us?* As time allows, ask the learners if they can imagine a location on or around your church where they would recommend creating a prayer path. In time, perhaps the learners can clear a path for other members of the congregation to use.

⑧ Psalm 25 in Song

Leader preparation: For this activity you will need to purchase an arrangement of Psalm 25 written by Marty Haugen. The link is below. The cost is minimal. Haugen has set Psalm 25 to the tune "How Can I Keep from Singing." You will teach the refrain ("To you, O God, I lift my soul; O keep me free from shame. I place my trust in you, O Lord, Your promise and Your name.") to the learners. If you wish, teach the American Sign Language signs that match the words, as suggested in the article in the supply list, and talk with your congregation's choir leader about singing this piece in an upcoming worship service; the learners could lead the refrain. For this activity, find a song leader to join you as needed.

Supplies:

- hymn: "To You, O God" Gia Publications
- Psalms 13, 25, and 33 <http://tinyurl.com/4x5s9o8>

Begin this activity by telling learners that an important part of being a disciple is trusting God's goodness. Sometimes it is hard to be a disciple, no doubt, but sometimes being a disciple makes us want to testify by singing. Whom do the learners trust? Since we can't see God, how do they know they can trust God? What are some times when they have experienced God's goodness? Explain that the person who wrote Psalm 25 sang the words as a response to God's love. Review the music and lyrics with the learners, and sing it together. Conclude by reminding learners to trust God as they travel along the various paths they take during the week.

⑨ Walking for Hunger and Justice

Leader preparation: Review your congregation's outreach efforts with an eye for efforts that lend themselves to intergenerational engagement. Does your congregation participate in any annual walks that raise funds and awareness about people in need at home and around the world? For instance, many congregations take part in the annual Church World Service CROP Walk to raise money for people who have limited access to food and water. If your church does not participate in the CROP Walk, is there any equivalent kind of commitment, or an outreach effort your denomination endorses that your congregation might be interested in supporting? Prepare to educate the learners about this effort. Invite one of the leaders of your outreach committee to join you, if desired.

Supplies:

- poster board
- markers
- Church World Service

Introduce the cause you have selected. Ask the learners why they think your church is committed to this form of outreach. Who benefits? How is this particular effort a good way to follow Jesus? How do former and present participants testify about their experience? After discussion, invite learners to discern their own involvement. If appropriate, ask them to sign up and help spread the word about the upcoming event. Make posters as time allows. Or, if the congregation does not yet participate, determine how to present the idea to your church's leadership. Talking about a concrete way of following Jesus is precisely where testimony and discipleship intersect.

Reflect

As you reflect on your session, consider the paths that God opened for you and the learners. What new understandings of discipleship emerged? What insights about following Jesus did the learners offer as they participated in the activities? Were there moments of confusion or misunderstanding? If so, how might those be addressed in the future? Think about the impact the session had on you personally. Has your own identity as a disciple deepened? Have you had any new insights about the connections between testimony and discipleship? Make a note of these things, honoring them as gifts of grace from a generous God.

Attachment: Activity 6

Suggested Biographies

Giovanni, Nikki. *Rosa*. New York: Henry Holt, 2005.

A poetic and well-illustrated biography of Rosa Parks.

Kent, Deborah. *Dorothy Day: Friend to the Forgotten*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Chronicles the life of Dorothy Day, the leader of the Catholic Worker Movement, whose faith guided her to live among the poor and work for social justice.

Krull, Kathleen. *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez*. New York: Harcourt Children's Books, 2003.

Tells the story of Cesar Chavez, the leader of the farm workers movement and an advocate of nonviolence.

Pinkney, Andrea Davis, and Brian Pinkney. *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*. New York: Disney Jump at the Sun Books, 2009.

A colorfully illustrated depiction of a woman of faith who overcame the challenges of slavery and sexism.

Rappaport, Doreen. *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2001.

An award-winning presentation of the life and witness of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Sanderson, Ruth. *Saints: Lives and Illuminations*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Contains forty brief biographies of scholars, hermits, and martyrs whose faith shaped the early church. For older learners.

Schmidt, Gary. *William Bradford: Plymouth's Faithful Pilgrim*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

A biography of the man who became governor of Plymouth, depending largely on his faith to see the community through. For older learners.

Shaw, Maura. *Ten Amazing People and How They Changed the World*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002.

Includes short biographies of people like Mother Theresa, Desmond Tutu, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. For older learners.

Visconti, Guido. *Clare and Francis*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

The story of a brother and sister, Francis and Clare of Assisi, who left behind their wealthy upbringing to preach and heal.

Weatherford, Carole Boston. *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2006.

An award-winning presentation of Harriet Tubman's faithful journey to freedom, and her brave guidance of many others along the underground railroad.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

Participants in a multiage setting are still learning what it means to be a Christian. The word “tradition” will likely be unfamiliar to the youngest participants in your group. Thus, there is plenty of ground to cover in this Exploration! The good news is that the ground is fertile. Young learners are often more likely than older learners to soak up new teachings.

About this Exploration

In addition to the witness of scripture, our faith story continues to be told through the holy and imperfect journey of the Christian church. From the day of Pentecost to the current day, people have testified to God’s work in our lives and in the world. In this exploration, we will look at how the varied expressions of the Christian tradition over time and around the globe shape our testimony and witness today.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56
Isaiah 58:9b-14

Leader Preparation

In this Exploration we will examine how the practice of testimony and witness has developed over time, from the earliest days of Christianity to the many expressions of Christianity today. The activities cover some of the fundamental identity-forming prayers and rituals of the Christian church, including baptism, communion, and the Prayer of Our Savior (Lord's Prayer), with an eye toward deeper understanding of how the words and actions testify to what we believe. Learners will also be invited to examine the past history of the church and to experience worship in different settings in the present, again with an emphasis on the many ways that the practice of testimony and witness has been expressed over time. As you prepare to lead, reflect on the tradition or traditions that have shaped your faith experience. How have your own beliefs and life choices been formed by believers of the past? Young learners will be curious about your personal story, so consider how you might weave it into the sessions.

Prayer: *Holy God, as I prepare to lead your people to a deeper understanding of the tradition of your church, open my own heart to the gifts that the forbearers in the faith have to offer. Through the blessing of your grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, may my words, actions and presence flow from your love. In Christ's name. Amen.*

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① The Prayer That Jesus Taught (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: The prayer that Jesus taught has been a cornerstone of Christian tradition from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, they wanted a prayer that would distinguish them as his followers, a prayer they could say regularly when they gathered. This is the prayer he gave them. The prayer Jesus taught, also known as the Lord's Prayer, has been used in Christian community ever since. To prepare for this session, pull out the scriptural references to the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4; Matthew 6:9-13) and the version your congregation uses. Be ready to compare and contrast the versions, with the aim of understanding the fundamental message of the prayer.

Supplies:

- Bible
- church bulletin
- newsprint or whiteboard and markers
- (optional) Lord's Prayer Gestures

Ask the learners if they know the prayer that Jesus taught (older learners will likely know it; younger learners may not). *Does your congregation pray this prayer in worship each week? If so, in what part of the service?* Establish when and how your congregation says the prayer, and then look at the scriptural references. Ask for volunteers to read the two different versions. How do they compare with the version your church uses? On newsprint or a whiteboard make a list of the main points of the prayer. *What does Jesus teach us to ask for? What does that say about who we are as a community? To what does this prayer testify?* The tradition about this prayer continues to evolve! Pray the prayer together.

Optional: If time allows, review the gestures for the prayer in the link supplied, or create your own.



② The Testimony of Baptism

Leader preparation: Study the print "Baptism" by Hullis Mavruk. He was born in Turkey in 1952 and began painting professionally at age six. He had a gallery and portrait studio on Incirlik Air Force base, where many of his customers were African American United States Air Force officers who paid him to do portraits. When he moved to the United States in 1972, Mavruk continued his connection with African Americans. He represents African American heritage and achievement with a sense of reverence and pride in his art. In terms of "Baptism," what do you see? When might this particular baptism have taken place? Where? Do you know anyone who has been baptized by immersion? How and when does your own community baptize people? Find the description of Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:29-34) and be prepared to refer to it as you introduce the conversation.

Supplies:

- artwork: Baptism by Hullis Mavruk www.tinyurl.com/fp-aphm
- Bible

Introduce the activity by asking the learners if they remember anything about their own baptisms, or about witnessing a baptism. What do they recall? What

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.

was said or done? Hold up or pass around Mavruk’s print, and ask the learners what they observe. *How does the image of baptism in the painting differ from the way your congregation celebrates baptism? How is it similar?* Then remind the learners that Christians celebrate baptism because Jesus himself was baptized. Read or summarize one of the biblical accounts, emphasizing the words of the Holy Spirit, “You are my beloved son; with you I am well pleased.” No matter what practice we follow, in baptism the community celebrates the Spirit’s testimony that we are all God’s beloved sons and daughters. If time allows, go to your congregation’s baptismal font or baptistry, and review the service of baptism you use.

③ Variations of Testimony

Leader preparation: Christian tradition has been shaped and nurtured by one of the classic forms of testimony: preaching. The testimony of preaching, like other forms of testimony, is part talking and part listening. In this activity the learners may practice listening. Prepare an audio collage of sermons or sermon excerpts from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Henri Nouwen, and Rev. Lillian Daniel, respectively, using the links in the supply list or other recordings you prefer, and be ready to present these sermons to the learners.

Supplies:

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. <http://tinyurl.com/3qg6h28>
- Rev. Henri Nouwen <http://tinyurl.com/3jhse4p>
- Rev. Lillian Daniel <http://tinyurl.com/4y4vray>

Introduce the activity by asking the learners what they remember from hearing sermons. Explain that sermons are a central form of testimony and have been a part of Christian tradition since the time of Jesus. Since then, many people have testified to the love of God through preaching. The styles of preaching vary greatly from one generation to another and from one denomination to another. Play the sermon excerpts for the learners, pausing between each one to ask what the learners notice about the differences and similarities between the preachers, and what message they remember.

Discerning & Deciding Activities

④ God’s Messengers (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Isaiah 52:7–10 about a messenger who announces peace. What good news of peace have you heard lately? What good news have you delivered? Prepare to lead the learners in a conversation about hearing and giving an announcement of peace, either at church or during the week, and to help them think about someone in particular who could use some good news.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- marker, pens, pencils

Introduce the activity by explaining that some of the most important testimony in the Bible is given by the prophets. Prophets are people appointed by God to be God’s messengers, to speak for God to God’s people. Isaiah was one of the main prophets who spoke to the people of Israel. Read the text to the learners, or ask for volunteers, asking learners to listen carefully for good news words. After discussion, invite learners to write a note or draw a picture for someone they know

who needs cheering up. Remind them that each time they offer someone words of comfort and encouragement in God's name they are testifying to their faith.



⑤ Tradition, Testimony, and Art

Leader preparation: Study the print "Adoration of the Kings" by Flemish artist Jan Brueghel the Elder. This portrayal of the wise men delivering their gifts to Jesus was painted in 1598 and hangs in London's National Gallery. "Adoration" is not just about the kings; it is full of all kinds of people and animals and even tools. Can you find the woman with the baby on the left side of the painting, or the carpenter's tools on the right side? Why does the artist include them? How do you respond to the way Brueghel depicts this famous episode in the life of Christ? As time allows, look at some other paintings of the wise men (Jan Brueghel's father, Pieter, painted one) from that same era or other contexts. How has this one scene been painted by artists over time? Be prepared to introduce "Adoration" to the learners and, as time allows, also show them several other images of the magi.

Supplies:

- artwork: "Adoration of the Kings" by Jan Brueghel the Elder www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr
- Print of Three Wise Men <http://tinyurl.com/3syve9m>
- parchment paper
- markers, pens, pencils

Introduce the print to the learners, telling them that various parts of the Christian story have been told by many different artists over time. Can the learners remember seeing any art that portrayed Jesus or other figures from the Bible? See if the learners can recognize what is happening in Brueghel's print. *Who are all the other people in the scene? Why are tools there? What about all the animals?* Show the learners several other portrayals of the magi's presentation of their gifts then invite the learners to take a piece of parchment paper (similar to the kind of paper Brueghel used) and their drawing implement of choice. How would the learners carry on the tradition of using art to testify?

⑥ Table Testimony

Leader preparation: The table is one of the central symbols of Christian tradition. From welcome to wedding feasts to the Last Supper, table gatherings and Jesus go together. As a sign of Christian hospitality, grace, and transformation, the table testifies to who Christians are and what we believe. In this activity learners may explore the role of the table in Christian tradition and in their own faith practices. To prepare, find these scripture references in a picture Bible: Luke 14:7–14, the parable of the wedding feast; Luke 14:15–23, the parable of the great banquet; Luke 15:23–24, the feast for the prodigal son; John 2:1–11, the wedding at Cana; Luke 22:7–20, Mark 14:20–24, Matthew 26:26–29, the Last Supper. As time allows, go to your local library or search online for other images of these texts. Reflect on the contexts in which people in the gospels sit around tables. Then consider the uses of the table in your congregation, and be ready to ask the learners about their experiences around tables at church and at home.

Supplies:

- picture Bible such as *My Little Picture Bible* (New York: DK Publishing, 2008); Selina Hastings, *Children's Illustrated Bible* (New York: DK Children, 2005)
- additional pictures of specified Bible texts



- bread and juice

Begin by asking the learners to name the various places where they come to a table. What happens at the table at church, at home, or elsewhere? What is said and done at these tables? Summarize the scripture references to table gatherings, explaining how important such gatherings are in the ministry of Jesus and in Christian tradition. Show the learners the images of Christians seated around tables and ask the learners what they notice. *Who is there? What might they be feeling? What might their testimony be?* Share the bread and juice with the group, saying a blessing and using words similar to the words your congregation uses for communion. You are not serving communion, but you are learning about Christian tradition by rehearsing communion. With young learners in the room be careful about dwelling on Christ's broken body and poured out blood. Emphasize that the meal Jesus prepares for us is a joyful feast. Invite the learners to take their time eating and drinking. When you are finished, reflect with the learners on their experience. *Was there anything different about sharing this kind of meal at church? What words in the blessing caught your attention? How would you describe this meal to a friend? That is, how would you testify about it?*

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Tradition and Letters (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Christian tradition rests largely on the testimony of those who have seen Christ and been moved and transformed by his love and grace. Read 2 Peter 1:16–21, which refers to the apostles as eyewitnesses of Christ's glory. Most scholars believe that this letter was not written by the apostle Peter himself, but by someone in the second century who studied under and learned from Peter, and thus attributed the letter to him. Therefore, the letter itself is part of the tradition of testimony and witness. In fact, twenty-one books of the New Testament are in the form of letters. Have you received any significant letters recently, letters that assured you of God's love in Christ? Have you written any? In this age of electronic communication, the art of letter writing has dwindled! Prepare to read the 2 Peter text with the learners, and to spend time writing letters about the love of God.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- envelopes, if readily available
- markers, pens, and pencils

Introduce the 2 Peter text, explaining that 2 Peter is one of more than twenty letters in the New Testament. Read the passage with the group. Ask the learners if they all understand what it means to be an eyewitness. "Glory" may be a confusing word for younger learners; describe it as wonder, excitement, and amazement. Then ask the learners if they have seen or heard anything recently that reminded them of God's love. Specifically, ask if they have received any letters or notes lately that made them feel loved. Have they sent any? Pass around the paper and writing tools, and invite participants to make a picture or compose a letter about the amazing love of Jesus for someone they care about.

⑧ Experiencing the Breadth of Tradition

Leader preparation: Contact nearby churches from other denominations in your community and find out when their worship services are held. Plan to attend a service that is different from your own, as you will contrast and compare with the learners. When you have chosen a church to visit, research their denomination's basic beliefs about the role of testimony and witness in the life of the community of faith. What might you expect when you attend one of their services? Prepare to share this information with the learners.

Supplies:

- information you gathered about the faith community you want to visit
- permission slips (if needed)

Present the information you have gathered. Ask if the learners have friends who attend the church you have selected and if they know anything about the church. Explain that all churches testify to the love of God in Christ, but every church does that a bit differently. Tell the learners what they can expect on their visit in terms of music, preaching, and prayers. Send learners home with information about the visit and any permission forms your church uses, encouraging parents or guardians of the youngest learners to accompany their children. After the visit, plan a time to discuss the experience with participants. What did they notice? What kinds of testimony did they hear? Emphasize how amazing it is that the love of Christ can be expressed in so many different ways.



⑨ Tradition and Mission

Leader preparation: Ever since the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20), Christian tradition has had a history of sending missionaries to other countries to witness to and spread the gospel. From the Apostle Paul onward, sometimes missionaries have been welcome, sometimes they have not. Some missionaries have been aggressive and insensitive to the culture they have chosen to live in, but some have adapted and served so fruitfully that they never return home. Review the travels of Paul, and look over the attachment. Look up your own denomination's history of missions. Does your congregation or your regional governing body support any missionaries now? Where do they serve? Do they ever come home and tell the local churches what they do? Find out how you can support their work, and plan on collecting supplies for a care package for the learners to send.

Reflect

After exploring various expressions of Christian tradition over time, have you had any new insights about your own connection with the witnesses from the past? Where do you see yourself in the arc of your own tradition? What do you cherish about tradition and what would you like to change? Think over the learners' experience. In what ways did they demonstrate their understanding of testimony and mission? What new insights did they offer to you?

Supplies:

- "Some Well-known Missionaries," Attachment: Activity 9
- Bible with maps of Paul's journeys

Summarize Christians' response to the Great Commission, including Paul's journeys. Review the examples on the attachment and any other examples you wish to present. Describe your denomination's current understanding of the role of missionaries in foreign countries, and share information about some particular people who are serving today. Give the learners some choices about how they can support the missionaries and develop a plan to collect items for a care package.

Attachment: Activity 9

Some Well-known Missionaries

William Carey, 1761–1834. “Father of modern missions.” English missionary and Baptist minister. Served in India. Translated the Bible into Bengali, Sanskrit, and many other languages and dialects. Famous quote: “Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God.”

Amy Carmichael, 1867–1951. Born in Ireland. Served as Protestant missionary to India for fifty-five years. Founded an orphanage and cared for many suffering children. Famous quote: “One can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving.”

Frank Laubach, 1884–1970. Born in Pennsylvania, USA. Known as “the Apostle to the Illiterates.” Served as missionary for the Congregational Church (now United Church of Christ) in the Philippines, and developed a literacy program called “Each One, Teach One,” which has helped more than sixty million people learn how to read.

Lottie Moon, 1840–1912. Born in Virginia, USA. Southern Baptist missionary to China. Was one of few single women to go into the interior of China to spread the gospel. Developed great sensitivity to Chinese culture and issues. Faced famine, war, and plague.

Hudson Taylor, 1832–1905. British Protestant missionary to China; lived there for fifty-one years. Said to be as influential as the Apostle Paul. Famous quote: “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.”



MULTIAGE

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Learners in the multiage group will have varying degrees of experience with the church's context and mission. Some participants may not yet know the name of your congregation and may just be learning the name of your town and state; other participants will be very familiar with your congregation and the role it plays in your area. Thus, activities in this Exploration will provide opportunities for all learners to practice compassionate listening and speaking.

About this Exploration

We live in circles of context, one of the richest of which is the local church. This Exploration investigates webs of relationships that call us beyond family, workplace, congregation, or community out to a mission of sharing and listening with all people. Testimony can be a tool for building justice when we engage in dialogue beyond our usual circles. The body of Christ is strengthened when our witnessing is intertwined with those whose situations are vastly different from our own.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Matthew 5:13–20

Romans 8:31–39

Leader Preparation

In this Exploration you will help learners understand the history and role of your church within your local community and beyond. To prepare, do a little research. If there is a written history of your congregation, read it. If not, invite one of the older members to give you an oral history. Also, familiarize yourself with your congregation's current mission commitments. How does your church bear witness to God's love today locally and globally? Be ready to share this information with your group. Drawing courage and inspiration from your church's context, learners will develop confidence to testify to the love of God themselves.

Prayer: *Gracious God, as I enter into this time of reflection and activity with those whom you bring to church today, may I be fully present. Open my eyes, that I may see your light in each child. Open my ears that I may hear your voice amid the many voices around me. Through the gift of your grace, lead us all to a place of deeper faith, greater purpose, and wider joy, that we may spread your light here and now. In Christ's name. Amen.*

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① Salt and Light (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 5:13–16, the part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which he refers to his followers as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The place for salt to be used and light to shine is in the here and now, in our current context. Reflect on how you add God's flavor and brightness to those around you. In what ways do you hide? If salt loses its flavor, or if light is hidden, their purposes are not fulfilled. Is there some hidden potential waiting to be used at your church, among the learners? Think about these things, and be prepared to encourage your group to be God's salt and light.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) song: "This Little Light of Mine" <http://tinyurl.com/2cwbzzt>

Read Matthew 5:13–16 with the learners. If you have enough volunteers, ask each one to read one sentence. Enter into conversation about the text by asking learners to think about the tastiest food they have ever had. Go around the circle, so everyone has a chance to name one favorite thing to eat. Describe testifying to Jesus' love as sharing something very good to eat with the people around you. In what ways might they do that? Prompt them to name several specific ways they bring joy and comfort to other people's lives. Then ask learners to think about the brightest light they have ever seen, or the brightest light in town. What have they noticed about this light? Discuss: *God has given each of us a special light to share with others. Testifying to Jesus' love is like being a bright light on a hill. But sometimes we find a good hiding place for our light.* Invite the learners to name the best hiding place they have ever found. When have they felt like hiding in a place like that rather than offering their companionship and love to the people around them? Conclude by reminding the learners that Jesus doesn't want us to hide, but to shine. As time allows, sing "This Little Light of Mine," adding verses about your particular setting.

② Your Church's Timeline

Leader preparation: For this activity you will help the learners develop a timeline of your congregation. Gather information about your church's history. When was your congregation founded? How many pastors have you had? What are some key decisions your congregation has made, as far as witnessing to God's love within your community? Find any relevant newspaper articles or pictures. Is there a church member who has memories of the congregation from a long time ago? Invite him or her to join your group.

Supplies:

- pictures and written history of your church
- paper
- markers
- tape
- camera

Ask learners what they know about your church's history. Tell them you are going to make a witness and testimony timeline of your congregation. If you have a guest member join you, invite that person to tell a few stories about significant events from the past. Pull out the information you have gathered, and begin writ-

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.

ing down the history on the paper, taping pieces of paper together as you go. At the end, take pictures of the learners and bring the pictures in next time to add to the timeline. Conclude by reminding learners that they are part of the long story of Christian witness and testimony, a story that extends back to Bible times and extends forward into the future.

③ Testimony Tour

Leader preparation: Consider the inside of your church building. What happens in different rooms on Sunday? What about during the week? Think about the church grounds. What happens outside? Is there a memorial garden, playground, community garden? Think about how people from your congregation practice testimony in these locations, and prepare to lead the learners on a Testimony Tour (adapted from *Practicing Our Faith*, 2nd ed., Dorothy Bass, ed., San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010, 212–15). In advance of the tour, advise any groups who will be using the spaces to expect you.

Supplies:

- paper, pencil

Introduce the plans for the tour, asking learners to think about the many different ways members of your church, and perhaps your community, talk about God in your building during the week. Point out that when others come into your church, the art, the bulletin boards, the fliers or brochures all testify to your belief in God and Jesus. Remind them that others may be using some of the rooms you visit, so please respect their space and move about quietly. Carry some paper with you to make note of the learners’ observations. At the end of the tour, spend several minutes discussing what new ideas the participants learned about testimony.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Mission Brainstorm (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Many young learners care about people who are hungry and homeless, about animals who need attention, about the state of the natural world, and about war and peace. During this activity you will develop a list of the issues learners are concerned about, and then think of some ways they can address those issues from the context of the church.

Supplies:

- newsprint or whiteboard and markers

Ask the learners what makes them sad. When do they worry about people, animals, and/or nature? What bothers them at school? What do they do to respond on their own? Remind learners that sometimes when we are sad or even angry about the way a person or a living creature is being treated, it is sign of our love—and maybe a prompt from God to say or do something to make things better. In one column on newsprint or a whiteboard make a list of concerns. Brainstorm some ways individual learners, your group as a whole, or your whole church might testify and bear witness to God’s love in response. Write these ideas in a second column. Invite the learners to vote on which ideas they might be able to pursue.

⑤ What Are We to Say?

Leader preparation: Read Romans 8:31–39, which begins, “What are we to say about these things?” The passage ends with the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. What do you say about your faith? How do you describe it to other people? Have you ever felt that something you did or something that happened to you could have the power to separate you from the love of Christ? Reflect on these questions then read the “This I Believe” statement by six-year-old Tarak McLain. Tarak makes thirty “I believe” statements. Prepare to help the learners name at least ten things they believe about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Supplies:

- Bible
- paper
- markers, pens, pencils
- “Thirty Things I Believe” <http://tinyurl.com/3scn78t>

Read Romans 8:31 and 8:39 to the learners. Ask the learners what they would say to someone who asked them about their faith. How do they imagine God and God’s presence in the world? What do they know or believe about Jesus? Have they ever done anything that made them wonder if Jesus would still love them? Assure the learners that nothing can separate us from God’s love.

Read “Thirty Things I Believe” by Tarak McLain. Invite the learners to write a “This I Believe” statement as individuals, with a partner, or as a group. The idea is to write a series of short sentences, though learners can be as creative as they like. Prereaders can draw pictures. Conclude by sharing the statements and encouraging the learners to keep finding ways to say what they believe.

⑥ Context and Images of God

 **Leader preparation:** In this activity you will compare and contrast images of Mary and the Christ Child, helping learners to see that where they live and who they are plays a big role in how they envision—and testify about—God. Father John Giuliani is a Catholic priest who paints iconic depictions of Native American people. His work has been displayed in churches throughout the United States. Look the print of his painting, “Hopi Virgin Mother and Child.” How does the depiction of Mary and Jesus compare with other images you have seen? Icons are meant to give a human face to the presence of God. What stands out for you in that regard in this painting? Gather two or three other images of Mary and Jesus, including figures from a nativity set, from your own home or church, a picture Bible, or from the links provided. Be prepared to share these images with the learners and to invite them to paint their own depictions of the Mother and Child. Mix up small portions of condensed milk with different colors of food coloring to make a paint similar to the paint used by Giuliani.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Hopi Virgin Mother and Child” by John Giuliani www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr
- Hopi Indians Information <http://tinyurl.com/y8lxfgn>
- “Virgin Mother and Child” <http://tinyurl.com/3p4hvhx>
- card stock, poster board, or foam board
- condensed milk
- food coloring
- paint brushes and small bowls

Ask the learners what they think God looks like. Do they have specific images? What about Jesus and his family? Show the Giuliani print. If the learners are not familiar with Hopi history and culture, provide some background information (see the link to Hopi Indian Facts for Kids). What do the learners notice about the Mother and Child, in terms of clothing, posture, facial expressions? Pass around several other images of Jesus and Mary. What similarities and differences do the learners see? What does this tell them about the cultures in which these other images were made? Conclude by distributing painting materials and encouraging participants to make their own images of Mary and Jesus, being sure to let the artwork dry overnight.

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Serving through Prayer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: For whom have you prayed lately in your congregation or in your community? What particular concerns and joys are on the minds of your church's members? How are these matters made known to the congregation (in worship, newsletters, electronic communication) and prayed about? Be prepared to share this information with the learners and to ask them who or what they would like to pray for today.

Supplies:

- paper and pen to keep track of prayer concerns and joys

Review some of your congregation's most recent prayer concerns and joys. Naming these things before God and one another is an important way of testifying to our trust in God's loving presence. Remind learners how your church responds to these matters. Ask them what or whom they want to pray about. Include yourself in the conversation. Make a list, and then conclude by saying aloud each prayer request, incorporating a response such as, "Lord, hear our prayer," between each one.

⑧ Marching in the Light of God

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the lively hymn "Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos/We Are Marching in the Light of God." If this is not in your hymnbook, see the link in the supply list. This South African freedom song was first recorded in 1980 when South Africa was still governed by a policy of apartheid. Now people in many contexts sing this song as testimony to God's love and light. Assure learners that they can go out in God's light right where they are. Invite a song leader to join you, if needed. This hymn goes well with simple homemade instruments, so gather enough materials for each learner to make one instrument (one container, plus dry rice or beans, beads, or small stones).

Supplies:

- song: "Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos" (tune: Siyahambra, irr. South African song) www.tinyurl.com/fp-siyahamb
- recycled water or juice bottles with lids
- dry beans
- old beads
- small stones

Introduce the hymn, including a description of the context in which it was recorded. For the people who first sang this song, the words were testimony to the power of God's love even in very cruel and unjust circumstances. Ask learners what they imagine it means to walk or march in God's light. Invite them to reflect on the way music and song are unique forms of testimony and witness. *How do we feel when we sing a good song together? Happy? Courageous? Inspired? How is God honored by our music and singing?* Practice the song several times; try both the English and Zulu versions. Then make instruments, simply filling the containers with as many objects as desired. Invite the learners to use their instruments as you testify and sing together about God's light one more time.

⑨ Candle Holders

Leader preparation: Gather the materials needed to make colorful candle holders. You may want to pre-cut the tissue paper. Learners will leave this activity with a reminder that they are the light of the world.

Supplies:

- small glass candle holders or baby food jars
- various colors of tissue paper, cut or torn in small pieces and placed in bowls
- school glue
- paintbrushes
- votive candles
- Matthew 5:14a ("You are the light of the world") written on small strips of paper

Read Matthew 5:14a to the learners. Tell them that they carry God's light within them and that God wants them to share that light. Testifying and bearing witness are important ways of doing just that. Distribute the glass candle holders, bowls of tissue paper, Bible verses, glue, and brushes. Instruct learners to brush a bit of glue on the glass and then cover it with a piece of tissue paper. It is okay if pieces of paper overlap. When the candle holder is covered, learners can affix the Bible verse. Send the learners home with a votive candle so they can be reminded to spread God's light wherever they go.

Reflect

Review the entire session. What new things have you learned about your own context, and about how your church can and does serve your community? Name several of the key insights about the practice of testimony and witness that emerged in your group's time together. What surprised you? In what way has your own understanding of testimony and witness changed? Make a note of your reflections as a way to pay attention to your own growth in faith.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Discussing the future with a group of learners that includes people who have only been alive for five years presents some interesting challenges. Younger learners are just beginning to comprehend the concept of time while older learners will have a clear understanding of past, present, and future. Older learners may be a helpful resource, as their insights and explanations may help younger ones deepen their comprehension of the future. Other resources to draw from include pictures of different seasons, pictures of people they know at different stages of life, and child-oriented calendars. Younger learners will be helped by these literal depictions of the passage of time.

About this Exploration

A glimpse of God's realm becomes possible every time we practice testimony and witness. In this Exploration we move daily to express the presence of God through language, symbols, and rituals, as we increase our hope and vision for ourselves and future generations. By sharing our experiences of God's love day to day, we pass on the all-encompassing grace that sets a foundation for the church of tomorrow. Acknowledging that the practice of testimony and witness is an ongoing process, we focus our attention upon God's continuing revelation, as we move toward the future "kin-dom" (the realm of God where all are kin).

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

**2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
Philemon 1:1-25**

Leader Preparation

In this Exploration learners will reflect on God's hopes for the world and on their own role in bringing those hopes to fruition. Articulating the dreams our faith inspires, making choices that reflect those dreams, and planning to witness to those dreams are all ways to testify to our vision for the future. Whether or not they are aware of it, young learners have much to share in this regard. Throughout this Exploration your role is to nurture their confidence and encourage their testimony. In your preparations consider the future that may lie ahead for the learners in your group, especially the future of the church. How might the next generation be called upon to testify and bear witness? Reflect on ways you might introduce your own ideas into the learners' conversations.

Prayer: *As I prepare to nourish the seed of faith within the learners around me, Holy God, lead me to the still waters that calm my soul. Drawing strength and joy from those waters, may I be a vessel of your love for the young people in my midst, and may I receive the gifts of grace they offer me. In Christ's name. Amen.*

Exploring & Engaging Activities



① A Vision of Freedom (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Paul's brief but passionate letter to Philemon, in which Paul appeals for the freedom of Philemon's slave Onesimus. Onesimus has run away and Paul asks Philemon to welcome him home as a beloved brother. We do not know the outcome of Paul's request, but we do know that he made it based on his faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Think about someone you know who is in a difficult situation, or about a vulnerable group of people in your area (homeless families, immigrants, poor children). If you had to write a letter on their behalf from the perspective of your faith, what would you say? Prepare to read or summarize Philemon with the learners and to prompt them to think about people they might support through letter writing.

Supplies:

- Bible (the *Lectionary Story Bible, Year C*, by Ralph Milton [Kelowna, BC, Canada: Woodlake Publishing Inc., 2009] has a helpful interpretation of Philemon)
- paper and pen

Introduce and read or summarize Paul's letter to Philemon. Ask the learners what they know about slavery, making sure they understand that God did not intend for people to live in that kind of relationship with one another. Then invite the learners to think about someone who needs support. *Is there someone who is being punished unfairly, whose voice is not being heard? What would God think? How would followers of Jesus respond?* As a group, compose a letter on behalf of that person; ask for a volunteer to be the scribe. Paul appeals to Philemon through love, so be sure to write your letter in the same spirit.

② Testify to Your Dream

Leader preparation: Read Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and watch a video clip of it (a link to the text and to a brief video clip is in the following supply list). This speech was delivered in 1963, yet it continues to inspire people to dream of a world where all people are equal. Dr. King refers to Isaiah 40:4 ("every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low") as he describes his dream of racial justice. What dreams do you have for society, and which images from scripture shape your vision of a more just world? Be prepared to share Dr. King's speech with the learners and to ask them to write or draw their own dream speech.

Supplies:

- video: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have a Dream" <http://tinyurl.com/y4acg5>
- printed text of the "I Have a Dream" speech <http://tinyurl.com/3ts9lh3>
- paper, markers, and pens

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.

Introduce the text of Dr. King’s speech, making sure the learners know who Dr. King was and in what context he delivered the speech. Divide the text among the learners so that each person who volunteers can read several sentences. Reflect with the learners on how this speech helped change relationships between African American and white people for the better. Affirm that God wants all of us to say our dreams out loud. Invite the learners to picture or describe their wishes for the world. At the close of the activity ask the learners to share their dreams with the group.



③ Beginning to See

Leader preparation: Study the print “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong. How many faces do you see? How many eyes? What might they be looking at—or at least trying to see? Think about Jesus’ vision of the world as a place where those who hunger and thirst will be filled and where the merciful, the peacemakers, and the pure in heart will be blessed. How is that vision blocked today? What are some ways you, your church, and the learners in your group can diminish the “blind feeling” regarding Jesus’ hopes for human community? Prepare to show the print to your group and gather materials for making “beginning to see” collages.

Supplies:

- artwork: “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong, www.tinyurl.com/fp-apdo
- magazine images of hopeful or comforting scenes
- magazine images of selfish or destructive scenes
- 8½” x 11” paper
- glue
- scissors

Present “Blind Feeling” to the learners and ask for their first impressions. What do they notice? Have they ever wanted to see something, but the view has been blocked? How did that make them feel? Remind them that Jesus had a vision for the world in which all people lived together in peace but some of the things people do to one another block that vision. Distribute the paper and ask learners to draw a line down the middle. Pass around the magazine images and ask learners to glue the selfish or destructive images on one side of the line and the hopeful or comforting scenes on the other. Explain that the selfish/destructive side represents ways that people block Jesus’ vision for the world; the hopeful/comforting side represents ways people testify and bear witness to Jesus’ vision. When collages are done, ask learners to think about how to bridge the gap between the blocked and clear visions of Jesus’ reign on earth. How will they themselves testify and bear witness?

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Acting Out the Vision (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: One way to understand Christ’s vision of a world in which all people have enough to eat is to act out that vision. Read John 6:1–14, the story of the feeding of the five thousand. In John’s version of the story, Jesus takes five loaves and two fish from a boy and turns this into more than enough food to feed five thousand men, women, and children. Prepare to read this version with the learners and to create a silent, dramatic presentation of the story with them. How

will you act out hungry people, the disciples' unbelief, the boy who offers his own portion of food to help Jesus feed others? Be ready to help the learners think through the text this way.

Supplies:

- Bible

Explain to the learners that their challenge is to create a silent dramatization of a very important Bible story. Read John 6:1–14 together, pausing to make a note of the different characters, the background, and the dialogue. Compare Jesus' faith that he can feed all five thousand people with the disciples' lack of faith. If the learners had been there, would they have trusted that Jesus could feed that many people? *How might the boy in the story have felt when Jesus took the bread and fish from him? What would the boy's testimony have been? How did the people who received the meal feel? How would they have testified? What might the disciples have done with the twelve leftover baskets of food?* Following the discussion, create a silent dramatization of the story, matching movements and gestures with the actions and testimonies. If the learners enjoy performing the drama, offer to present it to the congregation.

⑤ From Stranger to Family

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the materials and websites about *Three Cups of Tea* and “Pennies for Peace,” provided in the supply list. As mountain-climber-turned-child-education-advocate Greg Mortenson learned, when someone visits someone else for the first time in Afghanistan the tradition is that the first cup of tea they share is as strangers, the second cup is as friends, and the third cup is as family. This tradition has shaped Mortenson’s relationships with people in small Afghani villages and inspired him to care for them as he would his own family. As Christians, we remember how Jesus blessed the children (Mark 10:14–16) and called his disciples his own family (Matthew 12:46–50). How can these examples help us develop a vision of a world where strangers become family and where all children can go to school?

Supplies:

- *Three Cups of Tea*, Young Readers edition, by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin (New York: Puffin Books, 2009) (for ages 9–12)
- *Listen to the Wind* by Greg Mortenson (New York: Dial Books, 2009) (for ages 4–8)
- *Three Cups of Tea* website <http://tinyurl.com/43aylep>
- “Pennies for Peace” <http://tinyurl.com/3rl2byd>
- computer
- large empty jar

Summarize the *Three Cups of Tea* story for the learners and watch the YouTube video together. Imagine together what life would be like with no school. How would Jesus care for children who had no one to teach them? How can the learners begin to care for other children in the same way, bearing witness to Christ’s love? Bring out the empty jar and imagine how heavy it would be if it was filled with pennies. Make plans to organize a Pennies for Peace offering in your congregation.

⑥ A World without Slavery

Leader preparation: Due to an increased awareness of where our food comes from and how workers are treated, a number of denominations promote fairly traded coffee. Most young learners do not drink coffee, and they may not know about the significance of this kind of deliberate choice. Chocolate is another matter! The chocolate industry is rife with unjust treatment of child laborers, especially in the Ivory Coast. Several informative links are provided in the supply list. Prepare to explore these matters with your group, being sensitive to the youngest learners. Some of the stories are heartbreaking for adults to read and will overwhelm young children. Emphasize that our choices are one of the most important ways we testify and bear witness. Read Mark 10:13–16, the verses about Jesus welcoming children. How do our choices reflect Jesus' love for children? Learners can testify to this love, choosing to improve the situation of child slaves, namely through promoting or selling fair trade Halloween or Easter chocolate.

Supplies:

- Bible
- information about Fair Trade Chocolate <http://tinyurl.com/3l943pd>
- chocolate samples

Ask learners if they know where their food comes from. *Who grows it? Who prepares it?* Explain that in some places children work in the food industry where the work is very hard and the pay is very low. Summarize the concerns with certain chocolate makers. Remind learners that Jesus loves all children. He said, “Let the children come to me, for the kingdom of God belongs to them.” Tell learners that they can testify to Jesus’ care for all children. Pass around samples of fair trade chocolate. Talk about the premise of fairly traded goods. Together make a plan to promote this chocolate at church or in your local community.

Sending & Serving Activities



⑦ Passing on the Gift (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18. These are moving verses from Paul’s second letter to a younger colleague who will continue to witness to the gospel after Paul is awarded the “crown of righteousness.” Prepare to describe the purpose of Paul’s letter and to summarize these specific verses for the group. Think about how the learners in your group can pass forward the gift of faith. Find a used cardboard box around the church and an old ribbon to decorate it, improvising as necessary to create something that resembles a gift.

Supplies:

- Bible
- empty box with ribbon tied around it, like a gift

Ask the learners what special gifts, big or small, they have received from family and friends. How did they feel when they received a special gift? What did they do with it? What special gifts have they given to other people? How did it feel to give a gift that meant a lot to someone else? Explain that faith is a gift we receive from God and learn about through the testimony of people around us. Our responsibility is to keep passing on that gift. Discuss Paul’s letter to Timothy, in which Paul talks about keeping faith until old age and then being ready to pass along faith to a younger person, Timothy. Timothy will pass along faith in turn. In fact, one reason we have faith today is that Timothy passed it along to the next person! Give the gift box to one person. Go around the circle asking each learner

to name one gift of love he or she has shared (maybe canned goods for the area food bank, a card or phone call to someone who is sick or sad, a hug for a friend, parent, or sibling). That person then passes the box to the next person, who names a gift he or she has given, and so on around the circle. Remind learners that when they talk about their experience of receiving and giving God's love, they are testifying. Encourage learners to keep giving gifts of faith and love!



⑧ Sowing Seeds for the Future

Leader preparation: Look at Vincent van Gogh's print "The Sower." What do you think the sower's testimony might be? What if he had companions in the field? What are his worries, hopes, and dreams? Think about sowing seeds of faith. We may not know the outcome of our work. We simply have to trust that when we sow in love and honesty, God will make good use of our efforts. This is our testimony for the future. Sometimes we sow alone, but often we are encouraged and strengthened when we spread faith as a community. In this activity you and your group will literally sow seeds as testimony to God's vision of sustenance and health for humankind. Reflect on your congregation's location and property. Is there a place to plant a garden? Or is there a community garden nearby? Determine if your group can sow seeds right where you are, or if you would prefer to support an organization that plants trees and vegetables elsewhere. Several suggestions follow.

Supplies:

- artwork: "The Sower" by Vincent van Gogh www.tinyurl.com/fp-uccr2
- Organization for the Rehabilitation of the Environment <http://tinyurl.com/ydwmwpo>
- Starting a Faith Based Garden <http://tinyurl.com/3j7s25e>
- Trees for Life International <http://www.treesforlife.org>

Show the print to the learners. Reflect on the sower's work and how he has to trust that what he plants now will grow into something he cannot see. His planting is his testimony of trust in the future. Testimony about God's future is like that. Testifying to God's love is like sowing seeds; we do not know what the outcome will be. Sometimes like the sower we testify by ourselves and sometimes we testify as a community. Both ways are important and valuable. Today the learners will work as a community to grow seeds for the future. Discuss the available options and make a decision as group. Committing to sowing seeds for others is the learners' testimony of hope for the future.

⑨ I Will Be a Witness

Leader preparation: Familiarize yourself with the spiritual "Who Will Be a Witness?" The lyrics and a link to a performance of it follow. Review the biblical witnesses named and be prepared to explain who they are to the learners. Find a song leader, if needed, and be ready to teach the song to the group. Once they know the chorus, invite the learners to go around the circle and name one another as witnesses for Jesus.

Supplies:

- lyrics for "Who Will Be a Witness?" <http://tinyurl.com/3tcf5vf>
- "Who Will Be A Witness?" Performance <http://tinyurl.com/cewwwo>

Explain that we can all be witnesses to God's love—today and tomorrow and the day after that. Go over the lyrics to "Who Will Be a Witness?" If there is a learner who does not know who Samson or Nicodemus are, pause and explain. Talk about ways each learner in the group can be a witness. Watch the suggested YouTube performance, or another one of your choosing. Sing the song together, unless there are learners who want to sing a solo, and finish by including each learner's name in the refrain.

Reflect

As you pause to reflect on the different activities of this Exploration, what stands out? What attracted the learners' attention? When did their attention wander? Make note of those reflections for next time. In what ways were you able to create a vision of God's future together? Remember that vision as you practice your own faith in the week ahead.