



Giving Testimony and Witness



Intergenerational

About this Setting

The church is one of the few places in society where intergenerational events take place. Gathering people of all ages together is a unique gift to all involved and a unique opportunity to explore a faith practice. For the event to be fulfilling for everyone, it is important to set a tone of welcome, encouragement, and anticipation. Each person who comes has something to offer and something to learn. Through this mutual experience of offering and receiving, all will leave with a deeper faith. Practicing testimony in an intergenerational setting also involves honoring each person by listening, speaking, and acting with love, grace, and honesty. Again, what a great gift to all involved!

About this Faith Practice

Testimony involves recognizing God's action in our lives and finding ways to express it meaningfully with others. This can take as many forms as the gifts that God has given us. It takes courage to give witness because of the deeply personal nature of faith journeys. For some this comes easily but for others it may be more difficult. To share our experiences in a public way involves the risk of becoming vulnerable. However, choosing to share our story creates opportunities for relationship and growth even in the face of resistance. Sharing our faith celebrates and honors encounters with the Holy and gives us a chance to deepen our awareness of God's work in our lives. Giving testimony invites others to do the same. Giving witness and listening to others' stories joins us to the universal story of God's ongoing transformative work in creation.

Intergenerational Options

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

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

For an event lasting one to two hours, choose three or four activities from the list of twelve. There are enough activities for three or four events! Or, choose a single activity (15–30 minutes) to use as the activity at a community meal or other gathering. Wearing name tags is a good idea, as often older and younger members of a church do not know one another’s names.

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

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

Exploring & Engaging Activities

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

Discerning & Deciding Activities

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

Sending & Serving Activities

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

Intergenerational Leader Preparation

As you prepare for an intergenerational event, remember that you do not need to do all the work alone. Invite church members of different ages to join you on a planning team and together determine the best time to hold the event. Depending on your context, look ahead three to six months. You will need ample time to deepen your own understanding of the practice of testimony and witness, and to discern what sequence of activities suits your setting best. You will also need time to publicize the event and gather the necessary materials. Consider the particular children and adults who may attend. What kinds of activities would they find most engaging and uplifting? Trust your intuition—and the Spirit’s guidance—as you develop a program. You may want to begin in the sanctuary with a short opening worship and then move to another space for the activities. Use simple, but festive decorations such as colorful tablecloths and fresh flowers to convey a sense of warmth and welcome. Whatever space(s) you use, invite volunteers to help set up and clean up. Intergenerational gatherings can build community at many different levels, including working together before and after the event.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:

Psalm 25:1-10
John 9:1-41

Leader Prayer: As I prepare to guide your people to a deeper understanding of what it means to testify to your love, O God, attune my heart to the promptings of your Spirit. Increase my trust in you and in those around me, that what we say and do together may witness to your life-giving will for human community. Infuse our words and actions with the mystery of your grace, that our community may be strengthened in the love of Christ. In his name we pray, Amen.



Exploration: Discovery

1 Learning to Testify (Exploring and Engaging) (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Testimony is truthful speech about our experiences of God's presence and love. When we recognize the activity of God in our lives and find ways to express it meaningfully, we are testifying. 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 share your testimony with the group as you prepare to ask participants the same questions. Depending on the size of the group and the acoustics of the space you use, secure a microphone or two to make sure you and everyone else can be heard.

Supplies:

- (optional) microphone

Begin with a short definition of "testimony", as in the leader preparation. Give your own testimony about a time you noticed God's presence in your daily life. Divide the group into smaller groups of three to four people with different ages in each group. Ask participants in these small groups to talk with one another about where they have seen, heard, or felt God in their lives: at home, at school, at work, in a book or a movie, with a friend, on a nature walk, singing a song, or 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. Who have they thanked for anything lately? Explain that 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 with others is how we testify about God. As time allows have the participants regroup and repeat the questions. After all have had an opportunity to contribute in a small group, ask those who are willing to give an example in the large group. What common themes or patterns in testimonies have they heard?

Closing prayer: Gracious God, we give you thanks for your faithful presence in our lives. When we are with other people and when we are alone, when we are happy and when we are sad, when we are inside and when we are outside, you are there. Through the grace of your Spirit, help us notice you more often and grant us the words to speak of your love. In Christ's name. Amen.

② Witnessing through Song (Exploring and Engaging)

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 5:13–20, the verses that inspired the hymn you will sing, “You are Salt for the Earth, O People.” If you plan to learn the hymn together in a worship setting, find several volunteers of different ages to read the Matthew text to the group. Familiarize yourself with the hymn. If it is not in your hymnal, use the link provided. Prepare to teach this lively hymn to the learners, inviting a guest song leader to join you if needed. Gather any hand instruments your church owns; if you do not have enough for all participants, in your publicity for this event ask participants to bring their own instruments.

Supplies:

- Bible
- hymn: “You Are Salt for the Earth, O People” (tune: Bring Forth, irr. with refrain) <http://tinyurl.com/fp-salt>
- maracas, tambourines, or other small hand instruments
- (optional) containers of salt, flashlights, watering cans

Begin with the reading of Matthew 5:13–20. Then introduce the hymn as a piece of music that was inspired by that passage. Review the lyrics with the learners. What does it mean to be salt, light, and seed for the reign or city of God?

Divide the group into three small groups and assign each group one of the images in the song: salt for the earth, light on a hill, and seed of the Word. Give time for each group to decide how it will demonstrate its image for the whole group. For instance, light on a hill might use flashlights or cell phones. As the group sings each verse, the small group will demonstrate its image.

In what ways can the learners imagine that they can help “bring forth the reign of peace?” Encourage them to continue bearing witness to God’s love in these ways.

“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 using the instruments. Encourage people to clap hands, snap fingers, turn around, and sing lively. Remind them that their collective song is a significant form of testimony and witness.

Closing prayer: *Holy God, through Christ you called us to be salt and light for the earth, showing and sharing your love wherever we go. But sometimes we hide under a bushel, afraid to speak of you and unsure of our own light. Grant us the courage to come out from hiding and increase our faith in you that we may contribute to the building of your reign on earth. Amen.*



Exploration: Scripture



③ Testifying through Action (Easy Preparation) (Exploring and Engaging)

Leader preparation: Read John 9:1–41 several times. Then read the script of this story on the attachment. Be prepared to summarize the scripture for the group and to invite participants to act out the story. Tell them that the Bible is full of amazing stories of testimony, and this story is one of the best. You can divide the group in different ways, depending on how much time and how many participants you have. Instead of one person playing Jesus, for instance, one part of

the room could play him, and the same with the other characters. Or you could divide the group into five small groups, each of which would be responsible for one scene.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- “I Was Blind, But Now I See,” Attachment: Activity 3
- (optional) costumes

Tell learners that they are going to tell an exciting story of healing that includes some powerful words about the love of Jesus. These words—words about someone’s experience of God’s love—are called testimony. Ask the learners to listen for those words as you give a synopsis of John 9:1–41. Then ask participants what words sound like testimony. Following a short discussion, divide your group in a way that makes most sense in your context. Distribute copies of the script and give participants ten minutes to review and practice their parts. Encourage participants to work together, helping any prereaders memorize a line or two. Make sure everyone is ready to come back to the big group. Then have the group tell the story by acting it out. Simple costumes such as a sash or belt or headdress make the story come alive.

Closing prayer: God of grace, you have given us many ways to see you. In the stories of healing and courage in scripture and in the stories of healing and courage we have heard in our own lives, you make yourself known. Open our eyes even wider, we pray, that we may see your life-giving light all around us. Grant us the courage to testify to your light and do your good works while we are able. In Christ’s name. Amen.

4 By Faith, Not Sight (Exploring and Engaging)

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)
- paper and pencil

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. Summarize John 9:1–41, and then invite the group to do an experiment with blindness. Ask for volunteers. Give each volunteer a partner. Have the volunteers sit at a table, and place a blindfold over their eyes. Pass around a bag or basket with the small objects, inviting the learners to pick up one object at time. They are to tell their partner what it is. The partner can write down the answer given. Repeat this process with the jars with spices or liquids, and invite the learners

to name what they smell. Again, the partners will write down the answer given. When everyone has had a turn, remove the blindfolds. Have the partners compare answers. Conclude by reflecting on the learners' experience. *How hard or easy was it to "see" while blindfolded?*

Closing prayer: *Gracious God, you have blessed us with many senses that we may see, feel, touch, hear, and even smell the people and the world around us. Through the power of your Spirit and the mystery of your grace, help us to experience the fullness of the gift of life. When our bodies seem to fail us, or when we struggle to sense your presence, lead us to new ways of seeing, that we may once again bear witness to your love. In Christ's name. Amen.*



Exploration: Discipleship



5 Learning to Follow (Easy Preparation) (Discerning and Deciding)

Leader preparation: Discipleship is about choosing to follow Jesus and placing our trust in God to be our guide through life. Testimony involves talking about our experiences as Christ's disciples. In this activity the learners will first practice asking God to be their leader and then talk about—testify about—their experience. Participants will walk slowly around the room, from one part of the church to another, or around the church campus, matching their steps with their breath. They will breathe out when they step down and breathe in when they take their foot off the ground. Once they have practiced walking this way, introduce a short prayer for them to repeat from Psalm 25:4, "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. Invite those persons with restricted mobility to take this walk around the room with their eyes.

Supplies:

- (optional) "Finger Labyrinth," Attachment: Activity 5

Describe discipleship and testimony as in the leader preparation. Then introduce the prayer walk and invite the learners to follow you, at least at first. After a while, they can go at their own pace. As time allows, discuss the experience with the learners. What is it like to ask God to show them the way? Who else would they want to follow? As they walked and prayed, did they have an experience of God's presence? What is their testimony about this experience? Remind participants that they can ask God to show them the way any time, since they are disciples wherever they go. Then ask learners if there is a location within or around your church where they would recommend establishing a prayer walk for all the disciples in your congregation. Consider the possibilities; in time, perhaps the learners can clear a path so that other members of the congregation can practice following and testifying.

Option: If your church has a labyrinth, or access to one, you could use that pattern as your prayer walk. Provide a finger labyrinth for those whose mobility is restricted. See "Finger Labyrinth," Attachment: Activity 5.

Closing prayer: *Holy God, you are our guide through the many paths of life. Wherever we go from this place, keep our hearts focused on you. When we do not know which way to turn, show us the way. When we forget about you and go our own way, lead us back to the path you set before us, that the path we choose may testify to your love and grace. Amen.*

⑥ Finding the Path (Discerning and Deciding)

Leader preparation: Discipleship is about finding the path God sets before us and then following it. 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? What we say about God's ways is discipleship testimony. 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 below, so that learners can begin to envision the discipleship 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 the activity by explaining that part of being a disciple of Jesus involves learning which path to take. Read the verses from Psalm 25 several times. Then talk with the learners about the fact that there are a lot of different directions people can go; some ways resemble the path Jesus shows us, and some do not. Ask the learners to name some examples. If some are willing, invite them to tell (testify) about a time when they might have followed the wrong path. *How did you recognize you were on the wrong path? How did you find your way back to a better path? Who helped you?* Telling our stories to one another is one way we give testimony and witness. Hearing other people's stories helps us learn to tell our own. This is an important part of living in Christian community. When we practice telling our stories in the safe space of the congregation, we gain courage to testify to our faith in other more public places, such as at the office, at school, at the senior center, at the gym.

Invite the learners to think about the path God wants them to follow. Remind them that what they say about that path is testimony. Invite learners to create a picture of the path they believe God wants them to follow using the supplies you have provided. Older learners may want to cut out different kinds of images and develop a more nuanced scene. *What might one see along the path that God wants us to follow? Who else will be on that path? Is there only one path to follow? Can different people follow different paths and still be going the way God wants us to go?*

Closing prayer: God of love and life, you sent Jesus to live among us to show us the way to follow you. Yet sometimes we choose to follow paths that lead us away from Jesus. Show us the path you would have us travel, that we may be the disciples you created us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Exploration: Christian Tradition

7 God's Messengers (Easy Preparation) (Discerning and Deciding)

Leader preparation: Christian tradition has been carried from one generation to the next through the testimony of believers. God's hope for peace on earth is a significant theme of that testimony. 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 testimonies of peace, either at church or during the week, and to help them think about a particular individual or group of people who could use some good news.

Supplies:

- Bible
- poster board and markers
- paper
- pens, pencils

Explain that as Christians we have inherited a strong and beautiful tradition of testifying to God's hope for peace on earth. Some of the most important testimony of this kind is given by the prophets in the Bible. Prophets are people who are 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 scripture, or ask for volunteers, asking learners to listen carefully for words of good news. Invite people to call out the words of good news that they heard. After each word, have the group respond, "Good news, indeed!" What else did they hear in this passage?

After discussion, tell the learners that we can all be God's messengers of peace. If people are sitting at tables for this activity, make certain that there are people of all ages at each table. As a table group they may create some messages of good news to give to others. Give each table group a large piece of poster board on which to write their messages. Display all the completed posters in the gathering space or in the sanctuary or in a hallway or in some place that is visible to all who come to the church.

Invite learners to write a note or draw a picture for a person or a group they know who needs encouragement and hope. These notes may be delivered to one another in the group. Write more notes to be delivered to people outside the group, outside the church.

Closing prayer: God of peace and joy, you call us to be messengers of your good news. Through the power of your Spirit and the grace of your love, grant us the vision to see your goodness and the words to proclaim it, that we may follow in the tradition of your faithful prophets from ages past. In Christ's name. Amen.

8 The Witness of Missions (Discerning and Deciding)

Leader preparation: Christian tradition has been carried to various parts of the world through the efforts of missionaries, from the time of Paul to the present day. Review the journeys of Paul and also research your denomination's history of missions. A link to an inspiring United Church of Christ missionary story is included. Select a few stories about the ministry in which current missionaries are engaged and locate their areas of service on a world map. Does your congregation support a particular missionary? If so, find out what supplies he or she needs and either purchase those items or invite participants to bring them to your event. Purchase some sturdy mailing boxes as well. If your congregation is not currently supporting a missionary, contact your denomination's regional or national office to find out which missionary you can support. Or, plan to give kits to Church World Service. See the website in the following supply list.

Supplies:

- maps of Paul's journeys
- maps of places where your denomination's missionaries currently serve
- A missionary's story
- supplies for care packages
- study mailing boxes
- (optional) Church World Service kits <http://tinyurl.com/bdmhg5>

Explain to the group that ever since the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20), Christian tradition has had a history of sending missionaries to foreign countries to witness to and spread the love of Christ. From the Apostle Paul onward, sometimes missionaries have been welcome, but sometimes they have not. Sometimes missionaries have been aggressive and insensitive to the culture they have chosen to live in, but sometimes they have adapted and served so fruitfully that they never returned home. Review the travels of Paul and show learners the map of current missionaries' areas of service. Imagine together how much courage it takes to travel so far from home to witness to God's love. This is what God calls some people to do. One way we can support missionaries' ministry of witness is to let them know we are thinking of them and the people they serve. Show the supplies you've gathered, and assemble the care packages. These packages are visible signs of our own testimony of God's love.

Closing prayer: *Holy and life-giving God, you send us into the world to bear witness to your love. Sometimes you lead us far from home, yet we are never far from you. May the gifts we offer to those who have followed your call to distance places remind them that you are near. And bless each of us with the courage to respond to your call, that we may testify to the love of Christ with our lives. Amen.*



Exploration: Context and Mission

9 Testimony Tour (Easy Preparation) (Sending and Serving)

Leader preparation: Testimony is offered in various spaces and contexts in congregational life, not just in the sanctuary during Sunday services. Consider the inside of your church building. What happens in different rooms on Sunday? What about during the week? Think about the church's grounds. What happens outside? Is there a memorial garden, playground, community garden, labyrinth? Think about how people from your congregation practice testimony in these loca-

tions, and prepare to lead the learners on a Testimony Tour (adapted from *Practicing Our Faith*, 2nd ed., Dorothy Bass, editor, 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: None

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. Divide the group into teams, with each team having a variety of ages. Remind them that others may be using some of the rooms you visit, so please respect their space and move about quietly. Have each team identify a recorder who will make notes of the team's observations. At the end of the tour, have each team recorder read that team's observations. Discuss what new ideas the participants learned about testimony. What suggestions would they make for increasing their congregation's testimony in and around the church?

Invite the group to create a television commercial promoting your church. *After looking around on the tour, what would you say to the community in a radio spot or 30-second commercial?*

Closing prayer: *Loving God, through your boundless creativity and grace you have blessed us with many ways to testify to your love. Thank you for the ways we are able to testify in this place. May the words we use and the actions we take bear witness to your grace, that our church may be a beacon of your light and hope for all who enter here.*

10 Candle Holders (Sending and Serving)

Leader preparation: In this activity the emphasis is on instilling in each participant the confidence that he or she is the bearer of God's light. Right here and now, in this immediate context, learners have the God-given ability to spread love and hope. Be prepared to convey that message to the learners. Gather the materials needed to make colorful candle holders. You may want to pre-cut the tissue paper. Learners will leave this session 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
- paint brushes
- votive candles
- Matthew 5:14a ("You are the light of the world.") written on small strips of paper
- song: "This Little Light of Mine"

Read Matthew 5:15a and explain that God has given each of us a light to shine all around us. We are all bearers of God's love, here and now. 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, then continue with different colors. It is okay if pieces of paper overlap. When the candle holder is covered, learners can affix the Bible verse.

When everyone is finished, have them all hold up their candle holders and sing together “This Little Light of Mine.” You could even have the group march around the room carrying their candle holders and singing.

As the learners leave, send them home with a votive candle so they can be reminded that they carry God’s light with them out into the world.

Closing prayer: *Holy God, you have blessed each of us with the light of your love. Through the mystery and grace of your Spirit, let the lights we have created here remind us to let our own light shine, that we may bear witness to your love wherever we go. In Christ’s name. Amen.*



Exploration: Future and Mission



① Acting Out the Vision (Easy Preparation) (Sending and Serving)

Leader preparation: One of the best ways 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. Ralph’s Milton’s *Family Story Bible* includes a version of this story that will be accessible to a multiage group. 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 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.

Find out if there is a food recovery program in your area. Food recovery programs use gleanings and the acquisition of goods that would be discarded to feed those in need. This antihunger movement continues to grow. While we may not be able to feed five thousand people with fish and loaves, we can work together to help alleviate hunger.

Option: Show the YouTube video clip “Jesus Feeds 5000.” This is told using Playmobile figures. The dialogue is an interpretation. This may be a model for using figures to tell the story in a contemporary setting.

Supplies:

- Bible (recommended: Ralph Milton’s *The Family Story Bible*)
- video: “Jesus Feeds 5000” <http://tinyurl.com/44uljwx>
- Food Recovery programs <http://tinyurl.com/3tbynay>

Sometimes the best testimony is action rather than words. Challenge the group to act out—without speaking—a vision of Christ’s love. Read John 6:1–14, or show the YouTube video clip. Encourage the participants to pay attention to the different characters and the action. 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? Ask: *How might the boy in the story have felt when Jesus took the bread and fish from him? What would his testimony have been? How did the people who received the meal feel? What would their testimony have been? What might the disciples have done with the twelve leftover baskets of food?* Following the discussion, work together or in teams to create silent dramatic interpretations.

Introduce the idea of food recovery programs. *How might this kind of program enable Christ's vision of a world in which all people have enough to eat? What might your congregation do to initiate or participate in such a program? In what ways is this giving testimony and witness?*

Option: Divide the group into teams. Give each team a set of plastic figures and have them create a contemporary setting for this story. Who would bring the fish and loaves? Would it be fish and loaves or some other food? Who would get the leftovers? Is your congregation part of the disciples, the person bringing the food, or those who get the leftovers? How might this apply to one of your church's fellowship dinners?

Closing prayer: God of grace and love, through Jesus Christ you have blessed us with a vision of the world where all people are fed and nourished by you. Open our hearts, that we may receive what you alone can offer, and increase our faith, that we may bear witness to your vision in this time and place. In Christ's name. Amen.



② Sowing Seeds for the Future (Sending and Serving)

Leader preparation: Testifying about our hope for the future involves starting something now in the faith that may grow into something else. We cannot know the outcome of our efforts, but when we witness with love and honesty we can trust that God will use what we do in ways beyond our biggest dreams. Look at Vincent van Gogh's "The Sower." It is not clear what the sower's mood is, but one gets the feeling that sowing seeds can be lonely work. What if the sower had companions on the field? Think about sowing seeds of faith. Sometimes we have to do it alone, but often we are encouraged and strengthened when we spread faith as a community. Reflect on your congregation's location and property. Is there a place to plant a garden? Or is there a community garden nearby? With your planning team, 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. There are several suggestions in the supply list. One way or the other, prepare to testify together to your faith in God's vision for the future.

Supplies:

- artwork: "The Sower" by Vincent van Gogh <http://tinyurl.com/fp-uCCR2>
- Starting a Faith-based Community Garden <http://tinyurl.com/3j7s25e>
- Supporting Agriculture in Haiti <http://tinyurl.com/ydwmwpo>

Display the poster so that all can see it. Invite the participants to reflect on the sower's work. *What is he growing? Is there any way we can know? Invite those who are able to stand and pose as the sower. Ask: How did you get to the middle of the field? What is the temperature in the field? What time of day is it? How heavy is your bag of seed? How big is your field? How much have you already sown, and how much more do you have to do? When will your crop come in? What do you have to do to tend your field? What are the challenges to growing in this field?*

As Christians we often plant seeds of faith and hope without knowing how those seeds will grow. This is how we testify about the future. Consider the sower's situation. *How might he feel out in the field by himself? What if he had companions? Like the sower, sometimes we testify by ourselves. But sometimes we testify as a community. Both ways are important and valuable. Today the learners will work as a community to grow seeds of hope for the future. Proceed with your particular plan to plant seeds of faith for the future.*

Closing prayer: Holy God, you planted the seed of faith within each one of us, not to keep for ourselves, but to share. Through the love and guidance of your Spirit, lead us to the

field you want us to tend, that together and alone we may testify to the bountiful harvest of your love. In Christ's name. Amen.

Reflect

Gather with your team to evaluate the event. Focus especially on when volunteers heard, saw, or experienced testimony. In what ways have they been changed by this event? When did the participants seem most or least engaged? How might you plan things differently next time? Make sure everyone has an opportunity to express his or her opinion, and take their reflections into consideration as you plan future events.

Attachment: Activity 3

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 3 (*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 3 (*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 5

Finger Labyrinth

