

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discovery

About this Age Group

Younger children's imaginations are captivated as they learn to witness and give testimony by acting out stories in ancient scripture. As younger children explore the stories in their own words, they embody and speak their faith experience more clearly. Younger learners hear about natural disasters such as earthquakes, tornados, and hurricanes and fear these things in their lives. They also have fears relating to abandonment and the darkness. Younger children will be given confidence by turning to God and Jesus in times of fear, giving testimony to their faith.

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

Take time to write down goals you have for your time with the younger learners. Some goals may include activities, while other goals are not spoken in resource materials. If you feel a tug on your heart to talk to one or another, recognize that as a goal. Think about the families of the younger learners, and choose a family to call one day of the week to stay connected. Think about how God has moved in you as you work with the younger learners. As a leader you are also a learner. Children have much to offer leaders when the leader is ready to see and hear.

Prayer:

*Creating God,
 Bring me words to share your
 wisdom.
 Bring me energy to teach your will.
 Bring me joy to share with your chil-
 dren.
 And God, open my heart to
 receive their love.*

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 9 activities could

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Go Ahead (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Servant leadership can be taught to the youngest learner through example and practice. It is valuable to point out to young learners that God calls us to consistently put others before ourselves. Treating others first speaks very highly of both how Jesus taught and what God expects. Treating others first is a way that all people, no matter what age, can give testimony to God.

The first step of servant leadership is noticing the human need to be recognized. Only when we notice and can find humor in who we are, can we begin to turn around the behavior to intentionally act for others rather than ourselves.

Supplies:



(optional) servant leadership ideas for children, <http://ministry-to-children.com/servanthood-leadership-ideas-for-children/>

Begin a discussion about servant leadership by having the adult leaders talk about when they like to be first. Give examples that will make sense to your young learners. Then ask the entire group when they love to be first—at home, at school, and at church. If the group is reluctant, you can offer encouragement with some of the following examples: getting the first piece of cake, being first in line for lunch, grabbing the best new pencil with the sharp point, being the first to play a game or use a toy, getting the first present at Christmas.

Role play children standing in line waiting for lunch. Let one volunteer be the one who is first in line, but who gives up his or her spot for another. Let one volunteer be the one who gets to go first. Then ask: *How did it feel to be the one who gave up being first? How did it feel to be the one who got to go first? How did it feel to watch the drama unfold?*

Choose new volunteers, and act out the skit again so that each child is invited to play a role.



2 Rebekah Gives Testimony

Leader preparation: Younger children will enjoy the story of Abraham's servant finding Rebekah at the well and her openness as an act of testimony and witness (Genesis. 24:34–67). Familiarize yourself with this rich story and be prepared for some fun as the children bring their own interpretations to the dramatic retelling. The supplies below are only suggestions. Pieces of block and cardboard can be drawn on with a felt tip marker to create interest. You can also act out the roles, or use puppets or flannel board characters. Using what is at hand encourages creativity!

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Rebekah and the Stranger,” Attachment: Activity 2
- lots and lots of blocks
- thimble or a small container for scooping
- smaller bowl to hold water
- small objects to represent Rebekah and Abraham's chief; many churches have plastic figures in the nursery, or you can create people out of wooden sticks or cardboard



take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

- small plastic camels
- straw or bits of grass

Provide blocks and bits of straw for a field. Set up a bowl of water and a smaller bowl nearby. Encourage one or more adult leaders to tell the story from Genesis 24:34–67, the first time using the attachment “Rebekah and the Stranger.” Then let volunteers repeat the story as they remember it. Manipulate the people and the water for the well, offering a drink to the man and camel.

Afterward ask: What part of this story did you like the most? What part of the story surprised you? What part of the story did you not care for? Encourage all responses. This gives young learners their first experience at discerning scripture and finding words for the stories in the scripture. Talk about how the servant testified, or told about Abraham and Isaac, and how it was his storytelling that brought Rebekah to Isaac. Testimony is about telling stories of God and God’s people to others.



3 Witness to Baptism

Leader preparation: Consider your own baptism and the times you have participated in a baptism in church. Look at the picture by Hullis Mavruk. Reflect on the many types of baptism that include immersion, sprinkling, and standing by and being anointed from a baptismal font. If possible, arrange for the children to go to the place in your church where baptisms happen. Afterward, arrange with the pastor for the children to be present at a baptism in church. You might also encourage a pastor to come to your group as a special guest to tell about baptism.

Supplies:



artwork: “Baptism” by Hullis Mavruk

<http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=133832&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>

- bowl and water
- towel
- doll

Show the group the picture of “Baptism” by Hullis Mavruk. Spend time noticing the artwork together. Encourage learners to point out what they notice about this picture. Ask the group if any of them have been baptized. Encourage learners to remember what they were told about their baptism. Ask the group to think about times they have seen other people baptized.

Baptism is a gift of God. Through baptism a baby, child, or adult becomes a member of the church. During the baptism event, the congregation promises to help this person grow to know God’s love. Use specific examples of your faith tradition to explain baptism. Indicate that not all faith traditions celebrate baptism the same way.

Mention the words of baptism. Inclusive language can be introduced, naming God the creator, Jesus the redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as sustainer. You can also use the words “Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” Although these words may seem complicated for the young learner, introducing them will make it possible for the children to recognize the words when they are heard later in a worship setting.

After the discussion, encourage the group to role play a baptism with a doll and water. Note that the age of the doll needs to be appropriate to your tradition, that is, an infant, youth, or adult. Children love to play church! You could add



a song to this play acting. When everyone has had a turn, encourage the young learners to go home and ask their parents about their own baptism. Children can give testimony to God's love by encouraging others through questions about their baptism memories.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 What Does It Need? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In the story of Rebekah, she not only offers Abraham's servant a drink of water, she extends herself to the camels and gives them water, too. Anticipating what someone or something might need is a way of sharing testimony, witnessing through compassion. A heart that is turned toward the needs of others is a heart that welcomes God's inner guidance for the good of the community.

Supplies:

- paper and crayons
- (optional) selection of magazine pictures or photos of people and animals

Play "What Does It Need" by describing or showing a picture of a person. Ask the group, *What does this person or animal need?* Many of the answers will include food, shelter, and love. Finding how we all need food, shelter, and love will connect the youngest learners with what creation has in common. After several examples, encourage each learner to draw a picture of him- or herself. Then have each child ask, "What does she/he need?"

5 Children Go Where I Send Thee

Leader preparation: Though usually sung at Christmas, the African American spiritual in this activity can be sung any time of the year. "Children Go Where I Send Thee" has been recorded by many artists, depicting the joy of the birth of Jesus along with other characters and circumstances from our faith tradition. Paul and Silas, the main characters in the Focus scripture of Acts, are included in verse 2. This piece can be sung or chanted, repeating each verse while holding up signs.

Supplies:

- signs for the verses (construction paper or white paper)
- black marker



Sing: "Children Go Where I Send Thee," http://www.lyricsfreak.com/p/peter+paul+mary/children+go+where+i+send+thee_20107606.html

Create twelve signs, numbered from one to twelve. On the back of each, write a number and a specific verse:

- 1 for the little bitty baby
- 2 for Paul and Silas
- 3 for the Hebrew children
- 4 for the gospel writers
- 5 for the five that dressed so fine
- 6 for the six that couldn't get fixed
- 7 for the seven came down from heaven
- 8 for the eight that stood at the gate



- 9 for the nine that dressed so fine
- 10 for the ten commandments
- 11 for the eleven who came down from heaven
- 12 the twelve disciples.

Learners can hold a sign, raising it above the head whenever the verse comes to that number. In the case of small people who are not yet reading their numbers, volunteers can be chosen in pairs with one holding the sign and the other giving a signal.

It is not necessary to “make sense” of the words in this song. It is more important to convey the joy and storytelling ideas from the African American spiritual testimony. After each verse, say or sing, “Born, born, born in Bethlehem.” Repeat each verse one after the other, until all twelve are spoken or sung.

Hand signs can be used for “Born, born, born in Bethlehem,” waving open palms from side to side. After saying “hem,” you can clap and lead into the next verse.

6 Blessing Flags as Testimony

Leader preparation: For centuries Tibetan Buddhists have planted flags outside their homes and places of spiritual practice for the wind to carry invocations, prayers, and blessings to the world. Prayer flags are said to bring happiness to the flag planter and those in the vicinity. Prints bear traditional Buddhist symbols.

This beautiful tradition and artistic expression can be shared as blessings from a Christian perspective. Familiarize yourself with different prayer flags, and enjoy capturing the imaginations of the children while you create flags that can be shared with the entire community. Learn about prayer flags at this website, ed West Wind Flags: <http://www.westwindcollection.com/>. You might also use an Internet search engine to search for images of “Buddhist prayer flags.”

Along the way, connect the younger learner with a faith practice from a tradition other than their own in the spirit of sharing testimony while appreciating the testimony of others. Connect the congregation with the younger learner by describing the flag blessings in a worship bulletin.

Supplies:

- pieces of 5" × 7" cardboard, in a variety of colors
- markers
- magazines
- safe scissors
- glue sticks
- yarn or ribbon
- a sample prayer flag

Explain that a faith tradition called Tibetan Buddhism creates flags to offer blessings to their community and the world. Show pictures from websites. Show your example. Send the learners to art tables where they can create their own flags. Encourage each artist to draw a symbol, write words, or cut out pictures from the magazine that show something for which they are thankful.

Assemble each flag on a yarn or ribbon. Depending on the size of the group, you can make one or several rows of flags. Tie off the ends with a bit of a streamer. Hang the flags throughout the church, giving testimony and blessings to all who see them. Ask the learners how they felt creating the Flags of Blessings.



Sending & Serving Activities

**7 When I Am Scared (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: In the story in Acts of Paul and Silas, an earthquake occurs. Paul and Silas remain in the jail even when the doors are opened. This leads to their jailer's change of heart, resulting in a baptism in the name of Jesus.

Some children are unaware of natural disasters, and others may have heard about natural disasters in the news. Some younger learners may have experienced hurricanes, floods, fires, tornados, or earthquakes. Getting together in pairs or a small group to act out some scary circumstances helps young ones experience the presence of God, even when they are afraid.

Supplies: None

Have the children get together in pairs or small groups to act out scary situations. Some situations might be: thunderstorm, barking dog, monsters under the bed, the dark. After each role play, let volunteers name and then act out ways to let God help. Some ideas may include prayer, talking to their families, singing a song about God, and asking a family member for help.

Practice singing or chanting the refrain from the African American spiritual "Angels Watching Over Me." The words are:

All night, all day,
Angels watching over me, my Lord.
All night, all day,
Angels watching over me.

**8 Angels Watching Over Me**

Leader preparation: In the story of Abraham's servant being sent out to find a suitable daughter-in-law, the Bible tells us that an angel will guide his way. Consider that the word "angel" means messenger. Consider also that some people feel the presence of a guardian angel. Studies indicate that children feel and can see angels, where adults may not. This website tells stories of faithful



people who experience angels: <http://www.guideposts.com/angels>.

When you have a discussion about angels, remain open to the children's experiences even if they are not your own. Just as young children often pick up foreign languages easier than adults, they also remain sensitive to spiritual experiences adults have long forgotten or dismissed.

Depending upon your faith understanding, it would seem important to keep the discussion with young learners around how God loves us and sends us words of encouragement through God's angels. Another way to approach the topic is to consider how we can all be angels to one another, bringing words of testimony and encouragement to people we know and people we love.

Supplies:

- "Angel," Attachment: Activity 8
- construction paper
- other decorations tucked inside of drawers at your location, including stickers, glitter, and small buttons
- markers, crayons, pens, pencils



Talk about the many stories of angels in our sacred scripture. Explain that an angel led Abraham's servant to find Rebekah. Ask the group if they have ever seen an angel or sensed a presence of someone helping them. Let each one have a turn to speak. Invite quiet children to participate more than one time. Do not force those who do not want to share. Model listening, nodding, and encouragement rather than discussion. If you have had a sense of an angel present in your life, share your experience. After everyone has had a chance, summarize what you have heard in the group. When possible, use the words the younger learners brought to their experiences.

Go to the art tables. Encourage each learner to color and decorate an angel, using the outline on the attachment. Then encourage learners to turn the paper over and draw a picture of an angel they have experienced. When everyone is finished, invite the learners to share their angels with a person in their family, telling of their experience.

9 Cover Your Face

Leader preparation: Giving testimony and witness includes being open to other cultural practices. In the story of Rebekah, as she approached Isaac in the field, she pulls up her veil and covers herself. Women in the Hebrew scripture often cover their faces.

For centuries women have worn sheer veils under certain circumstances. Sometimes a veil was draped over and pinned to the bonnet or hat of a woman in mourning, especially at the funeral and during the subsequent period of "high mourning." Veils also have been used as an alternative to a mask, as a simple method of hiding the identity of a woman who was traveling. More pragmatically, veils were worn to protect the complexion from sun and wind damage (when un-tanned skin was fashionable), or to keep dust out of a woman's face, much as the *keffiyeh* is used today in the Middle East. Depending upon the culture, women may be required to wear veils when in public. Use this website to familiarize yourself with various cultural depictions of women wearing veils: <http://www.tosearch.com/photos-images/religious-veil.html>.

Supplies:

- various cloths and veils for the children to wear

Tell the story of Abraham's servant finding Rebekah. Describe in detail how Rebekah saw Isaac and immediately covered herself. Ask the younger learners if they have ever covered their faces and why. Some answers may include because they felt shy, or afraid, or ashamed.

Explain that it is very human to cover your face with your hands. Ask if anyone remembers playing peek-a-boo with a baby, holding hands in front of your face, saying "boo," and then exposing your face. Play with your group.

Pass out the scarves and help each one tie on a veil. Let the children wear the veils as they take a short walk through your community. When the time is up, return to the circle and remove the veils asking about each learner's experience. You may mention that some cultures require women to wear veils when they are outside their house. Conclude your time together by asking if anyone has seen a woman wearing a veil. Suggest that testimony and witness to God includes being open to other cultural practices.



Reflect

Think about the goals you set when preparing to lead this group of young learners. Take a moment to remember the group's faces as you consider God's work in all of your lives. What were the high moments of your time together? Reflect and thank God for those times. What were the low moments of your time together? Reflect and thank God again for those times. Life exists in the tension of high and low, soft and hard, sad and happy. Acknowledge the perfection of God's plan of creation and your desire to be aware of God's presence in all circumstances. Finally thank God for your young learners.

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Attachment: Activity 2

Rebekah and the Stranger

Adapted from Genesis 24: 35–67.

Narrator: One day Abraham called his chief to his cabin. When the chief entered the cabin, he bowed to Abraham and stood before him.

Abraham: Go to the land where I was born and find a suitable wife for my son, Issac. An angel of God will go with you to point out the way. Hurry up and do not be lazy. This is the important business of God and we must get going!

Chief: Yes, good master. I will get my camel and be on my way.

Narrator: When Abraham's chief arrived in his master's home land, his eyes first saw a woman standing by a spring. The woman had a jug of water on her shoulder.

Chief: I am so thirsty. Would you give me a drink?

Rebekah: Of course, good servant. Drink and I will also water your camel.
(Rebekah offers water from her thimble to the chief and the camel.)

Chief: *(after drinking)* Whose daughter are you?

Rebekah: I am the daughter of my father and my mother. We are God's people.

Chief: An angel has led me to you. My master Abraham wants a wife for his son and I think you are that very woman!

Narrator: After speaking to her parents, Rebekah decided for herself to return with Abraham's chief and become the wife of Issac. This may sound odd to listeners of today, but in those times this was not very unusual at all. Sometimes good marriages are made because you meet someone by a spring, and she offers you water.



Attachment: Activity 8



Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Scripture

About this Age Group

Younger children appreciate hearing sacred scripture read with conviction and passion. The one who reads and the one who listens learn to bear witness and give testimony to ancient stories of faith. Younger children engage scripture actively. They listen and then respond to what they have heard. Providing various opportunities for response becomes the goal for the leader. Young children love to talk, draw, act, sing, play, and explore their response to the words they hear. The following activities provide multiple opportunities for response to scripture for both the leader and the learner.

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 responses 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**Psalms 116****Leader Preparation**

Close your eyes and take two to three deep breaths. Picture yourself in a place where you meet God. Is God embodied? Describe the Creating Force you see before you. Hold your hands out to the Holy Presence, and ask for your words and actions to meet the needs of the learners who come to you each week. Take a moment to pause. What words or images come to your mind? Acknowledge the opportunity for God to speak directly to your mind and heart.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, bring me insight and wisdom to accompany my young learners on their path to knowing you. Keep my eyes and heart open to learn from them what they already experience of you. Bring us together in a time of sacred understanding as we come to know more fully your Holy Presence. Amen.

Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

Exploring & Engaging Activities**1 Eyes to See (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Read John 9:1–41. Practice acting out how Jesus stoops over, mixes his saliva and dirt together, and then pats the mixture on the eyes of the boy who is blind. Practice being the parents who are afraid to admit that Jesus healed their son. Practice words for the disapproving Pharisees.

Write on a piece of newsprint or a whiteboard “God’s works are revealed in . . .” This is for learners who are beginning to read. You can point to each word as you say it to help those transitioning from listening to reading.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) hats or costumes that can be quickly taken on and off in order to portray the boy who is blind, Jesus, the parents, and the Pharisees
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Explain to the group that Jesus was known as a teacher, a healer, and the son of God. One important thing that Jesus did was to heal people in the name of God.

Tell your learners that God’s works are revealed in other people. “Revealed” means “shown or discovered or uncovered.” When we do good for other people, we reveal (show, uncover) God. Invite the children to tell of a time when they did a good deed. When each is finished telling a story, announce “God’s works are revealed in...,” saying the child’s name at the end.

Tell the story from John 9:1–41. Invite the children to act out the story, dramatically playing the part of Jesus, the healed boy, the Pharisees, and the parents. Use your own words, except for the specific phrase “God’s works are revealed in you.” Use large hand motions and various voices. Other adult leaders can be included in the drama!

After you have acted the play out one time, repeat the performance. Remind the group to pay attention and raise their hands every time they hear the words “God’s works are revealed in him.” Make it a point to say “God’s works are revealed in you” a few times so that the listeners stay tuned in.

You can repeat this drama as often as time permits. Children do not tire of stories that continue to teach. Call upon willing participants to take the parts in the story.

2 Blindfold Circle

Leader preparation: Bring one or two clean bandanas to be tied gently over the learner’s eyes. Gather objects to be passed around the circle that can be smelled, touched, or heard. Some objects might be a key, puzzle piece, flower, apple, pencil, eraser, chalk, and napkin.

Supplies:

- bandana(s)
- objects to be passed around



- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

Ask everyone to sit in a circle and close their eyes. Explain that you are going to pass an object around the circle while each one uses the senses of smell, touch, and possibly hearing to discover something about the object. Encourage each person to share his or her discovery. Make the game more challenging by tying the blindfold around those who want to participate. Remind the others to sit quietly and then raise their hands if they want a turn. Do not give a person two turns until everyone has been given the opportunity to be the blindfolded person at least once. Accept refusal. Not everyone likes to be blindfolded!

Afterward, talk about what it would feel like to be sight impaired. Encourage everyone to respond at least one time.



3 Sing-along Psalm

Leader preparation: Sing “Row Row Row Your Boat” a few times to warm-up and get into practice.

Supplies:

- “Sing-along Psalm,” Attachment: Activity 3
- children’s Bible

Read Psalm 116 from a children’s Bible. Sing “Row Row Row Your Boat” with the group several times. Teach the “Sing-along Psalm” one line at a time, repeating back and forth. Each time you repeat a line, give a new reason for doing so. For example: *Listen while I sing the first line. Now you sing the first line. Let’s sing it again only louder. Let’s sing it again only softer. This time I want to hear the word “thank you” more clearly than the other words.* By the time you have sung the first line several times, go to the second line. Then combine both lines using the same pattern of listening first, then singing each time for another reason.

Add motions for each line when the words are learned. You can ask for suggestions for the motions. The motion suggestions for this psalm listed on the attachment are not exact sign language. Encourage creativity with the motions. Instead of motions, some children can clap the steady rhythmic beat when possible.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Jesus Is a Healer (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Reflect on times when healing is necessary. Examples include during your own illness, when an arm or leg hurts, when feelings are hurt, when someone you know is ill, when you see an accident on the highway, and when someone at school gets hurt on the playground.

Supplies:

- Bible
- posterboard, newsprint, or individual papers (that can be taped together)
- markers
- crayons
- pencils

With a broad-tip marker, in the middle of the poster board write “Jesus is a healer.” Tell the story of Jesus healing the boy who is blind in John 9:1–41. Then ask



the group to tell about a time when they needed healing or someone they know needed healing. After a few examples, summarize what you have heard, and then dig deeper with the examples. You might say, *John, Devon, and Stacey all told about a time they had the flu. Have you ever had your feelings hurt and wished to be healed? Have you ever hurt someone else's feelings and wished you could heal that person?* When the conversation reaches a point that everyone has shared as much as they want, point to the posterboard.

Invite learners to come up and draw about a time of healing for themselves or another. Welcome all responses. If there is not enough room for everyone to work on the mural, provide individual papers that can be attached to the larger piece of paper at a later time. Quietly visit each young artist, noticing color, texture, or content of their drawing. The Spirit readily works through our smallest participants when they are quietly supported.

5 An Action/Attitude/Affirmation Game

Leader preparation: You will need three rectangle-shaped boxes, such as tissue boxes. Read Psalm 116, focusing on the words “I will call on God as long as I live.” Write labels on the sides of each box:

- Label the sides of the first box with actions. Some actions might include: skipping, hopping on one foot, jumping, crawling, dancing, or holding hands with a partner.
- Label the sides of the second box with attitudes. Some attitudes might include: like a butterfly, a mother holding a baby, a person with a hurt leg, a girl on her birthday, or a man who stubbed his toe.
- Label the sides of the third box with directions for saying the words. Some directions might include: use a whisper voice, use a singing voice, speak very slowly, speak with a tiny voice, or use motions without speaking.

Supplies:

- 3 rectangle-shaped boxes labeled as directed above

Start in a circle, asking two participants to toss the first two boxes in the center. Read the directions for the participants. Ask the question, “How will you call on God as long as you live?” After each one has had a turn interpreting the directions with two of the boxes, add a third one to make it even sillier and more complicated. This can be played with two in a circle, or even as a relay. When all have had a chance, say to the group, *We can call upon God with every voice, every action, and in every circumstance for as long as we live!* Invite the response: *Praise be to God!*

6 God Gifted Me

Leader preparation: Make a list of gifts that God gives everyone. The list might include: eyes to see, ears to hear, days to live, nights to sleep, pets to protect, jobs to help, time for work, time for play, people who love us, people to love. Think of a memorable name for a hand puppet of your choice.

Supplies:

- hand puppet (an animal or wacky person puppet works best)

Gather in a circle. Explain to the learners how God gives us many gifts, beginning with the gift of our lives. Suggest that it is up to us how we are going to use those gifts. Then give an example such as, “God gives us eyes . . .” Let the



group fill in the response: “to see!” Repeat the list of gifts, while the group adds a response. Reverse the process and let them name the gift, while others name the response.

Then pull out your puppet with a great “Ta dah!” Use a different voice (you do not have to be a ventriloquist to keep the attention of young people!). Note that the puppet can play “dumb,” forgetting what eyes are for or work is for. The young learner loves to explain how puppets get things wrong. Repeat the list of gifts and ask one learner to point to her or his eyes or do a motion for each of God’s gifts. Let the rest of the group follow that motion. Encourage interested participants to use your puppet with their own voices.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Amazing! It’s a Miracle! (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: For those who are beginning to read, print on newsprint or a whiteboard “Amazing! It’s a miracle!” Point to each word as you say it to help those transitioning from listening to reading.

List for yourself the miracles of Jesus, which may include: fed five thousand people, made a boy who was blind see, calmed a raging storm, turned water into wine, walked on water, raised Lazarus from the dead, rose from the dead, and lives forever.

Supplies:

- Bible
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- list of Jesus’ miracles

Practice saying “Amazing! It’s a miracle” several times, beginning with a whisper. By the end, the children can shout! Say a miracle and invite the children to respond, “Amazing! It’s a miracle.” After you have listed a few miracles, let the children add other miracles to this litany. Select someone else to be the leader, or have different children take turns announcing the miracle while everyone does the response. If time permits, illustrations can be made on newsprint or a whiteboard of the times Jesus healed. Contact the pastor and ask if the children could share their litany with the entire congregation in worship, either as a call to worship or during the children’s message. The illustrations can be used on a church bulletin board or taped around the communion table when the children share their liturgy.

8 Guide Dogs for the Blind

Leader preparation: Introducing the children to someone who is blind in a safe environment will help them feel more comfortable when they see differently abled people in public. If you don’t personally know anyone who is blind, call your local social services and see if they can put you in touch with someone. Also, contact local guide dog agency to see if they would bring a dog for the learners to meet.

Supplies:



video clip: “Guide Dogs for the Blind,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AllcVB9rNAg>



- library books about guide dogs for the blind

Welcome any guest who may come for this opportunity. Show the YouTube video clip of “Guide Dogs for the Blind.” Ask group what they were surprised to learn. Ask them if anything in the clip concerned them. Show books from the library. Encourage discussion about how animals help people and people help animals. If time permits, encourage the learners to draw a picture of something they liked in the video, such as something that tells about people who are blind, about their dog companions, or about how a person could be helpful to someone who is sight impaired in the children’s own community.



9 Picture This!

Leader preparation: Sharing art with a group becomes even more valuable when you take time to experience the art for yourself ahead of time. View the work of art titled “The Blind Pedlar” by Robert McGregor. Notice the content, the people in the picture, the colors, and any design that stands out for you. Notice what attracts you and what pushes you away. If possible, place a copy of this picture on your desk or in your home for a few days before sharing with your group. Befriend the piece of art as it tells a story to and for you. Become aware of the process of art speaking to each person, which is similar to the way scripture speaks to each one. Notice how your opinions might change from viewing to viewing. Notice what does not change but remains the same.

Supplies:



Artwork: “The Blind Pedlar” by Robert McGregor

<http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=4254835&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>

- colored pencils
- blank art paper

Ask the group to look at the picture and to name the colors the artist uses. Invite someone to describe the people they see in the picture. Ask everyone to focus on the man with the basket. Encourage the group to wonder about the cane he has in his hand. Then ask about the child. *What might she be feeling standing next to the man?*

Reflect

Ask yourself what you have learned about God from working with younger children. Think about individual learners. Have any articulated their understanding of God more fully during your time together? Have you noticed anyone getting more quiet? Remember times when you included adult and youth volunteers with your group. Pay attention to the times when the group has interacted with the entire worship community. Acknowledge how God has worked in and through you to connect this particular group to a scripture and faith tradition that will have lifelong impact.

Remember that the bearded man may frighten some children. They may have been told not to talk to strangers, let alone touch a stranger with a hand. Some balance of being safe and being helpful can be discussed, even with the youngest of children. Some of the group may have seen homeless people on the street. A discussion of the time of this piece of art may be important. Young people who have not lived in small communities may not know that the blind peddler may have been well known in that community, and not a stranger.

Make the connection that helping other people is what God wants us to do, but we are also to keep safe. Encourage the learners to draw a picture of a time they helped someone else. If time permits, let each one talk about his or her picture and describe the helping incident.

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Sing-along Psalm

Adapted from Psalm 116.

Sing the psalm to the tune "Row Row Row Your Boat." The underlined words include hand motions. Change hand motions at your own discretion.

Thank you Cre-a-tor God.

(Touch fingertips to lips, and move hands down and back one at a time.)

For lis-ten-ing to me.

(Hold hands behind ears.)

Give me faith in your great love,

(Cross hands at wrist and press over heart.)

Open my eyes to see.

*(Touch middle finger to thumb, hold on each side of head near eyes,
open and close the hand.)*

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Discipleship

About this Age Group

Younger children learn to give witness and testimony as disciples of Jesus by articulating their own experience with words followed by actions. Testimony and witness as disciples begins with young learners exploring their individual awareness of thoughts, actions, and feelings, gaining confidence in speaking and acting as God's children.

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: 27-8**Psalms 25: 1-0****Leader Preparation**

For young children to be disciples they need good role models. Think about your own life and how you have modeled being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Who have been role models for you? Spend time thinking of what you can do, even in the smallest way, to model discipleship to your young learners. As you picture the names (and faces if possible) of your group, take time to pray.

Prayer: Holy Parent, the One who calls children to lead us to heaven, combine in me a joy to serve and the patience to notice the vocation of the young child. Assist me, as you would the smallest in your realm, O God, to follow before I lead, to listen before I speak, and to love as I am loved in your name. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities**1 The Youngest Disciples (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: More understanding of who and what you are on the outside and who and what you are on the inside helps younger learners come to see how a disciple of Jesus acts. A disciple of Jesus acts just like “Me!” Awareness of one’s own thoughts, actions, and feelings helps learners to discover that they can improve their own behavior with the help of God to be more and more like Jesus.

Supplies:

- hand puppet (use an old sock or a paper lunch bag with eyes and mouth drawn in black marker)

With everyone seated in a circle, hold up your puppet and interview the puppet with these questions: *What do you like about yourself? What do you do that makes you feel proud? What do you do that makes you feel uncomfortable or sad?* In the puppet’s answers, use examples to which your younger learners may relate such as, “I have beautiful curly hair, but I am mean to my baby sister and don’t let her play with my toys.” After interviewing the puppet, put it away and turn to your group.

Go around the circle, inviting each learner to speak. Ask each one: *What do you like about yourself?* If possible, ask the one who has spoken to call on another child by name. Let each one in your group contribute to the first question before letting someone share two times. After each learner has been invited, continue on to the next questions: *What do you do that makes you feel proud? What do you do that makes you feel uncomfortable or sad?*

Not everyone needs to share aloud to be a part of the group. Some learners are very quiet but completely tuned in to the discussion. After several have shared, offer answers to one or more of the questions from your experience. This is the time to demonstrate that being a disciple is not about how old you are. Everyone, no matter what age, can practice improvement as disciples of Jesus.

Explain to the group that followers of Jesus are called “disciples.” Followers of Jesus take time to think about how they are inside and outside by paying attention to their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Part of following Jesus is knowing that God expects us to try every day to be more and more like God’s son. This means noticing our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, then deciding to improve, and then acting upon our decision.

2 Lakeshore

Leader preparation: This beautiful hymn used in this activity, written by Cesareo Gabarain, is based upon the text of calling the disciples Peter and Andrew as recorded in the Gospels. It has been translated into more than eighty languages. The original tune, “Pescador de Hombres,” was known in Spain before Gabarain wrote the words. Gabarain was a Roman Catholic priest who lived in Spain, serving various parishes. He was also a leading composer of congregational music.

Many of your young learners will probably already have an ear for Spanish, because many children’s programs introduce multiple languages. You might also want to invite a congregation member to share the song with the group. This is a wonderful opportunity to invite a guest into your midst.



Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

Song: “Tú has venido a la orilla” (tune: Pescador de Hombres, 8.10.10 with refrain) <http://www.spiritandsong.com/compositions/15607>

Sing, or invite someone to sing this hymn with your group. Sing the hymn all the way through one time. In order to remember the story that the song tells, ask specific questions, such as: *Who is the song about?* When they discover the song is to and about Jesus, ask the group how the song says Jesus calls a disciple. *What happens when Jesus calls you? What happened to the man in the song who was fishing?*

If you feel comfortable with the hymn, sing the verse of the song with your group. “O Jesus, you have looked into my eyes; kindly smiling, you’ve called out my name. On the sand I have abandoned my small boat; now with you I will seek other seas.” Repeat it a few times so the children become familiar with it and more comfortable singing it.

If you are not as familiar with this hymn, act out the words instead. Invite the group to picture in their imagination Jesus looking into their eyes and calling them by name. While playing a recording of the song, have the group stand on one side of the room. Pick one learner to play the part of Jesus who looks into each one’s eyes, saying each name. Afterward have Jesus take each child by hand and lead them to the other side of the room. Don’t stop until everyone has been “called.” Let the actions come alive as the hymn is played quietly in the background. You may find that the group, after listening and watching several acts, will spontaneously pick up the chorus and sing in Spanish and English!

**3 Thumbs Up for Young Disciples**

Leader preparation: Young followers of Jesus benefit from experience in translating their day-to-day behavior with God’s will for all disciples. A lifetime of faith practice in giving testimony first asks us to be aware of our own behaviors and how we try to do better with God’s help. Psalm 25 asks God, “Teach me God’s paths.” This activity may help young learners become aware of their own thoughts and behaviors, leading them to paying attention to God’s teachings.

Supplies:

- “Thumbs Up for Young Disciples,” Attachment: Activity 3
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Demonstrate the three thumb responses for your group. A thumb extended up means “I do this all the time.” A thumb extended sideways means “I do this most of the time.” A thumb extended down means “I don’t do this at all.” Emphasize with your group that there are no right or wrong answers. The object is to participate and become more aware of your own behavior.

Select four or five of the examples from the attachment, noting each one’s response with eye contact. Afterward, talk about how we can continue to be Jesus’ disciples by intentionally improving our own behavior.

Demonstrate acting out a loving behavior to replace a mean one in different circumstances. One example may be acting out how to share toys. Other examples include helping others stay safe by looking both ways before crossing the street and not talking to strangers.

On newsprint or a whiteboard, write the title “We Are All Jesus’ Disciples.” Invite your group to name positive ways they can treat themselves and others. Write their ideas in one word or in short phrases under the title. Draw a connect-



tion between Jesus' example of treating every one respectfully and each person's individual positive behavior.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 Something's Fishy (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: In the early years of Christianity, believers met in one another's homes. Because they feared persecution, they couldn't advertise the meetings, so they would walk in the square and draw a simple outline of a fish (*ichthus*) in the sand. If someone responded, the believer would tell that person about the meeting time and place.

Supplies:

- "Fish Symbol," Attachment: Activity 4
- crayons, colored pencils, or markers

Explain to the children that in the early days of Christianity it wasn't safe to be a Christian because the authorities would put you in jail, harm you, or worse...kill you. Tell them how a believer would walk around the market square and draw a simple picture of a fish in the sand. If other people recognized the fish, the person would know it was safe to talk about his or her faith and to meet to worship. *We are very fortunate in our country because we can believe in anything we want. There are still some countries today where certain religions, including Christianity, are illegal.*

Hand out the fish outline, and have the children color or decorate the fish in any way they choose. Invite them to take it home as a reminder that we have the freedom to talk about our faith. Encourage them to put the fish in a place where they will see it often. *Tell your parents or other members of your family one thing you believe when you display your fish.*



5 Time Travel Adventure

Leader preparation: Exploring the inner imagination helps younger children give testimony for how they experience God through the five senses. To practice speaking and giving testimony in a group increases the comfort level for children as they gain confidence in their own witness.

Supplies:

- paper, pencils, crayons
- "The Earliest Americans," Attachment: Activity 5

Choose a quiet place where the learners can relax, either sitting on chairs or lying on a rug on the floor. Read the guided journey "The Earliest Americans" as the listeners follow along in their imaginations.

After the journey, ask the group about their experiences. Encourage each one to share at least one thing he or she noticed. *What question did you ask about God?* Distribute paper, pencils, and crayons and invite the learners to draw a picture of the journey. If time permits, invite the learners to share their drawings and describe their experiences.



6 Jesus the Star

Leader preparation: Think about all the words we use to describe Jesus as we give testimony to his life and work as God’s son, such as “Savior,” “teacher,” “friend,” “counselor,” and “prince of peace.” Younger learners naturally give witness and testimony to Jesus when they have diverse ways of describing him.

Ask other adult volunteers for help—this activity requires several hands. Prepare the pieces of the star mobile. Cut out one large star per learner from silver posterboard or paper. Cut out five smaller color stars per child (from the shiny cardboard of different colors). Print the name “JESUS” on a large label, making one JESUS label per learner. Now print the words “Savior,” “Teacher,” “Friend,” “Counselor,” and “Prince of Peace” (one title per label) on the smaller labels. Make one set for each learner.

Cut one 24-inch strand of silver ribbon per learner. Cut five additional silver strands of ribbon per learner, and vary the lengths of each of the five strands of ribbon so that some are 6 inches, 8 inches, 10 inches, 12 inches, and 14 inches. Punch one hole into the top and bottom of each large silver star. Punch one hole in the top of each colored star.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Star Patterns,” Attachment: Activity 6
- silver posterboard or paper
- colored shiny cardboard in red, green, blue, gold, orange, purple
- thin silver ribbon
- scissors
- hole punch
- large and small adhesive labels (glue sticks with plain paper can be substituted)

Read Mark 8:27–28 to your group. Repeat the question *Who do you say that I am?* Ask learners if they know different names for Jesus. Very young learners will need to be prompted on this.

Give each learner a large silver star, a 24-inch piece of ribbon, and the JESUS label. Have each learner stick the Jesus label on one side of the star. Have each learner thread the 24-inch strand of silver ribbon through the hole at the top of the silver star and tie a knot at the top.

Give each learner the five color stars (one of each color). Give each one a set of the five name labels for Jesus. Invite the learners to stick one name label on each star.

Give the learners the five additional pieces of silver ribbon. Help them thread one ribbon through each star, tying the ribbon in a knot by the hole in the star. With five stars threaded with various lengths of ribbon, have the learners gather all five strings. All ends need to be even. Invite the learners to slip the ribbons through the hole at the bottom of the large silver star. Tie the ribbons in one knot.

When finished, explain that Jesus is many things to many people. We can call Jesus “savior,” “teacher,” “friend,” “counselor,” and “prince of peace.” When you display the star mobiles in your room or in other locations of your worship space, you give written and artistic testimony to the many roles of Jesus.



Sending & Serving Activities

 7 How Do I Say “I’m Sorry”? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Since the first century, Christians have given witness and testimony to Jesus Christ through forgiveness. Young children come to a greater understanding of giving testimony through the specific practice of forgiving themselves and others. Practicing forgiveness in the light of a child’s intuitive understanding of justice can be powerful.

Think about your life and those whom you have forgiven. Ask God to open your heart to let go of a time when you have held on to a hurt that happened in the past. Forgive yourself by inhaling a breath of the hurt, holding it within for transformation, then exhaling out peace.

Acknowledge for yourself and your learners that learning to forgive does not mean you will never stand up for yourself. Learning to forgive does not mean you let people keep hurting you. Think about common situations for young learners that can be role played as a group. Gather props if necessary.

Supplies: None

Role play the following situation: A child is working on a puzzle at a table when another child comes up and dumps the nearly completed puzzle on the floor. Divide the group into two teams. One team is the puzzle maker, and the other team is the puzzle dumper. Ask the first team: *How would you feel if someone dumped your puzzle?* Ask the second team: *How would you feel when you are dumping someone else’s puzzle?*

Encourage each team to be quiet while the other team speaks. Now ask: *How can this situation be made right? Are apologies needed? Does saying “I’m sorry” help? Could the puzzle pieces be picked up by the offender? Do the words (I’m sorry) and the actions (picking up the puzzle pieces) help take away the hurt and anger?*

Explain that sometimes people hurt others on purpose and sometimes without meaning to. Explain that disciples of Jesus practice forgiveness as a testimony to God’s love. *At times you might not feel ready to forgive a person right away, but when you are ready you can say, “I forgive you.” If you mean it, you will feel peace inside. You can also do something nice for the person that shows you mean what you say. You could say, “Would you like to put this puzzle together with me this time?”*

 8 What Color Do You Feel?

Leader preparation: Spend time studying the painting “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong. What colors stand out for you? Review the song “This Is a Song about Colors.” You can use the song as a poem and speak the words if that is more comfortable. Think about ways to include recognition of colors and connection with feelings in your time together with your young learners.

Supplies:

 artwork: “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong <http://affiliates.allposters.com/link/redirect.asp?item=1518516&AID=1413628417&PSTID=1<ID=1&lang=1>

 song: “This Is a Song about Colors,” <http://www.songsforteaching.com/happalmer/colors.htm>



Display the artwork “Blind Feeling” by Diana Ong. Ask the group how many faces they see. Ask them what colors stand out for them. Ask them why they think the title is “Blind Feeling.”

After some discussion, help the learners connect feelings and color. You might begin by saying, *Sometimes when people feel sad, they say, “I feel blue.”* Other color feeling associations may be red with anger and sunshine yellow with happy. Encourage your learners to associate colors with feelings and experiences in nature. For example, say, *Sometimes when I am feeling sad and blue, I go outside and the sun is shining and I feel happy, like bright yellow all over.* Feel free to exaggerate. This is a wonderful opportunity to get in touch with feelings that may be uncomfortable for your young learners. Using color helps them to express their feelings more clearly.

Sing or speak the Hap Palmer song “This Is a Song about Colors.” Encourage the young learners to stand up, sit down, do a dance, and wave their hands. Improvise the actions and keep the energy high!

9 Trusting

Leader preparation: For the most part this age group is very trusting. They may show shyness around strangers, but usually if someone tells them something they will believe it is true. Psalm 25 talks about trusting in God. The psalmist also says, “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.” A simple game of “Simon Says” may help convey the meaning of this psalm to young learners.

Supplies:

- Bible or children’s Bible

Read Psalm 25 from a children’s Bible. Talk about what it means to trust in God and to follow God’s path. Tell them you are going to play a game called “God Says.” Have the group spread out so they have room to move freely. Play the game as you would “Simon Says,” but instead say, “God Says.” Some things that “God says” could be: shake your neighbor’s hand, shout “I believe in God,” say something nice to your friend, and so forth. An adaptation might be to shout out things that God wouldn’t say such as: take your friend’s toy or hit your friend (being quick to let them know God did not say that). Talk with the children about the kinds of things God asks us to do, in contrast to things a bully or a mean person says.

Reflect

Think about how your young learners have grown in the past weeks. Have they learned new words to describe their awareness of God and Jesus? What are some of those words? Now think about your own life during these past weeks, reflecting upon what the young learners have taught you about following Jesus. If time permits, jot down your reflection and share with your community’s monthly publication, inviting other leaders to explore the joy of sharing with our youngest congregation participants.

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Thumbs Up for Young Disciples

Read the following statements to your group. Wait for each young learner to respond before going to the next statement. Acknowledge each one's response by giving eye contact to each person in your group.

I am kind and care about helping others.

I like to help in my school.

I like to help with my family.

I take turns and cooperate with others.

I forgive people easily.

I tell the truth most of the time.

I am polite and show respect for others.

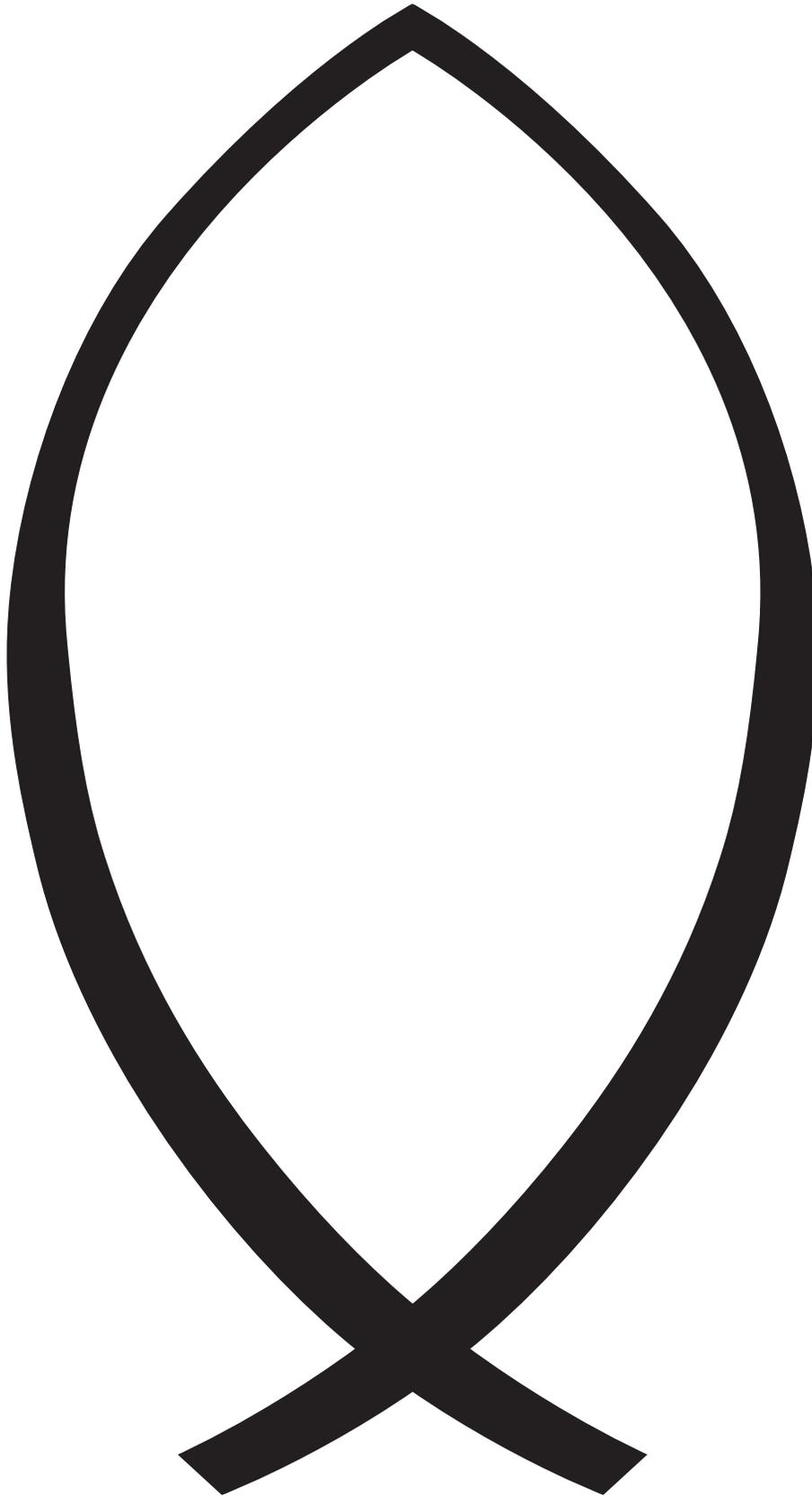
I do my homework.

I do my chores at home.

I play safely and try to keep others safe.



Attachment: Activity 4





Attachment: Activity 5

The Earliest Americans

Encourage your young learners to stretch and shake out their sillies. Show them how to make big yawns, exhaling to loosen up and relax.

Take a deep breath and as you exhale, show the group how to relax and let their arms go limp. Then with the next breath relax the shoulders and neck muscles. If your group is enjoying this exercise, continue with other muscles, tensing and relaxing.

Bring your breath back to easy inhale and exhale. Encourage everyone to sit or lie down and to close their eyes. Begin reading the following imaginary journey.

We are now going on a journey to a time long, long ago. We are taking a time-travel adventure together. To get to the place we are heading, we are going to create a travel car that can move through space and time.

Imagine you are a great inventor. What does your space car look like? How do you drive the car? Are there lots of controls in the driver's seat? Imagine the space car's color and shape, as well as what it sounds like when traveling full speed ahead.

Get into your space car and set the controls to go backward in time. Set the control dial to take you back to the time when the earliest people lived in America. Now blast off and feel the force fling you backward into your seat.

Land your vehicle. Look around. What do you see? Mountains? Ice? Snow? Water? What kind of dirt? Do you see any animals, like wild horses or deer? There are rivers, mountains, sheep, and beavers. Can you see those? Touch the water, smell the trees.

Notice there is smoke rising, and smell a small fire. Notice that around the fire people are wearing furs and skins of animals. Nearby, behind the fire, is a tent hut made of bones and covered with furs. Something that smells really good is cooking on the fire.

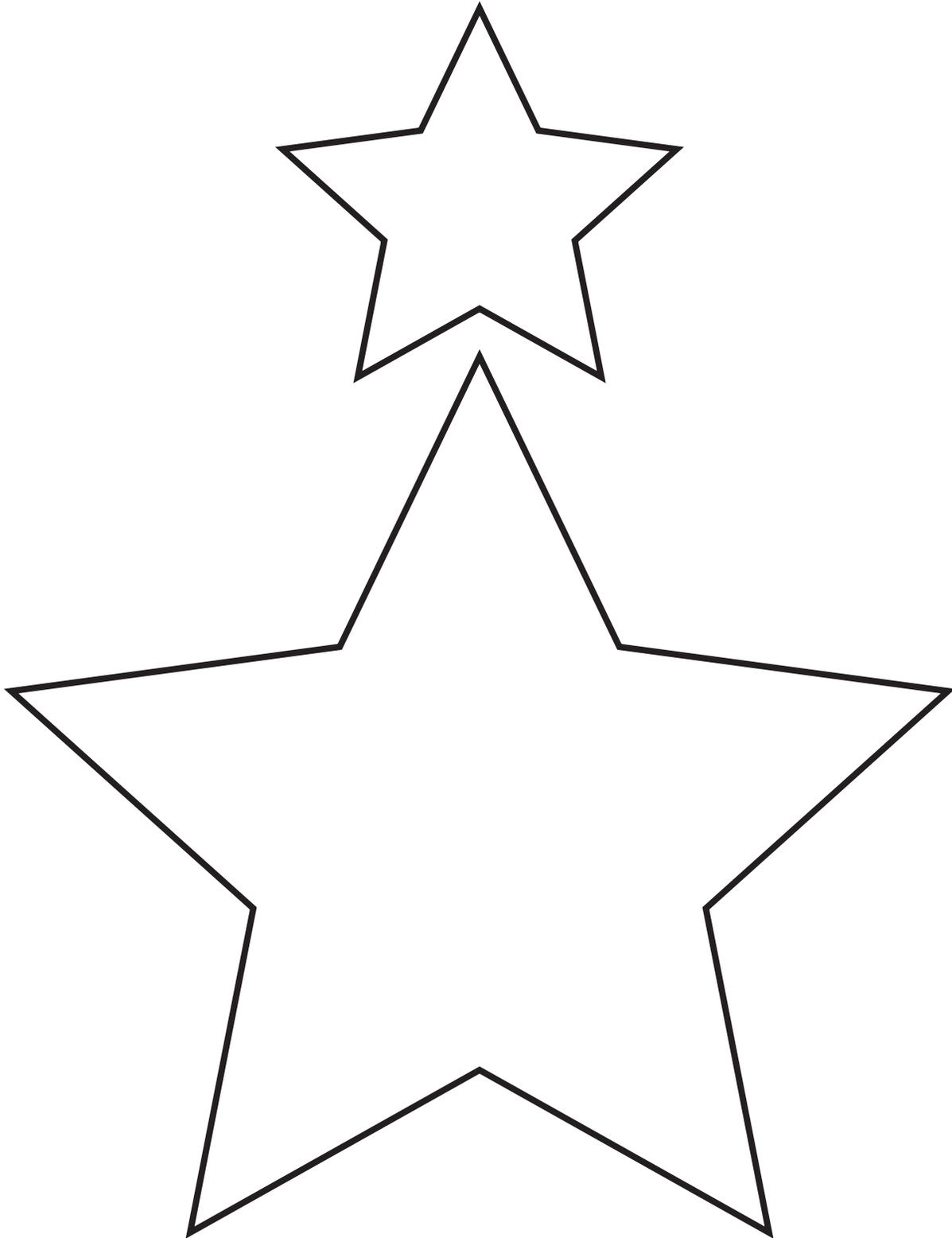
Explore this place by touching, smelling, and looking at the details. Seat yourself in the circle by the fire. Turn to the one in charge and ask a question about God. Listen for the response. Ask another question, and listen for the response.

It is time to return in your space vehicle. Say goodbye to everyone who is staying behind. How does it feel to be leaving? You feel the whoosh of the vehicle as it speeds back to our room.

As I count backward from ten to one, gradually open your eyes.



Attachment: Activity 6



Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Christian Tradition

About this Age Group

In the Christian tradition young children are considered natural messengers of God's love even when they do not use words to give a testimony. Singing and acting out the stories helps children learn to navigate their faith experience. Younger learners become messengers and a light to the world through their sharing of story in action and song, while being shaped for a lifetime of faith practice.

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:

Isaiah 52:7-9
2 Peter 1:16-18

Leader Preparation

Think about the light in your life this week. Connect your physical and emotional responses to light with the spiritual understanding that Christ is Light. Recognize the connection between the Christian tradition of celebrating Jesus as light, especially in the story of the transfiguration. Recognize the connection between the Christmas tradition of celebrating Jesus' birth as bringing the light of God to the world. Pray to be enlightened, moment to moment, day to day.

Prayer:

Holy Gracious Light of Creation:

Open my eyes to see how you bring light even into the darkest places.

Open my ears to hear the lightness of joy in the words of others.

Open my heart to connect myself with all of creation, and especially with you, as I seek your light in myself and the other.

Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Passing the Peace (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Make a list of various ways peace is passed in your congregation. This list may include a formal "passing of the peace," a smile, shaking hands, a bow of the head, and a bow of the body.

Supplies: None

Tell the group that the passing of the peace is something Christians have done since the very beginning. Explain that the peace is from God and that Jesus passed the peace to his disciples. Demonstrate how the traditional passing of the peace might go in your congregation. Also mention informal ways of sharing peace. Ask the children if they know any ways that peace is passed. Include the "V" sign (two fingers held high) made popular during the 1960s. Also include smiling and shaking hands. Ask anyone if bowing is considered a way to pass the peace in other cultures. You may want to mention how Native Americans passed a pipe of peace.

Encourage children from diverse cultures to share how their families greet one another. Connect greeting and passing the peace as Christian traditions of witness and testimony. After discussing various cultural practices, have learners pass the peace with a partner. Have the learners go around and pass the peace with everyone in the group, taking turns. Talk about how you feel when someone gives you a sign of peace.

If this is a tradition in your worship community, make arrangements for your young learners to pass the peace in a worship setting, sharing their testimony and witness with all.



2 Stained Glass

Leader preparation: Reflect on stained glass windows in your worship center, and/or collect pictures of stained glass windows to share with your group. Notice the colors and the stories depicted in the windows. Make copies of the attachment for your group. Explain to your group how stained glass is part of the Christian tradition of giving testimony and witness to God's colorful diverse light that shines in the world. If your building does not have stained glass windows, find out why (if you don't already know the reason). Some traditions wanted plain glass so the worshipping community could look out into the world where they could see their mission field.

Supplies:

- "Stained Glass Template," Attachment: Activity 2
- baby or vegetable oil
- cotton balls
- crayons
- dish or bowl
- paper punch
- ribbon or yarn
- oil cloth or newspaper to cover tables



Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

Have the children choose three or four crayons. Tell them to color the template in a design or a picture. Remind them to press heavily and fill the color completely in. *Dip a cotton ball in a dish of oil and spread it lightly over the back of your colored window. Then let your picture dry on newspaper.*

When dry, punch a hole at the top center. Hang a piece of ribbon or yarn through the hole. The windows can be hung or displayed at home or in your worship setting, giving testimony and witness to God’s colorful diverse light which shines through the world.

3 God’s Light

Leader preparation: Watch two videos of the sunrise. Make note of your feelings as you watch the videos. Practice moving your body as if you were the sun rising.

Supplies:

- Internet access and a means of projecting videos
-  video: Time Lapse Video of the Sunrise in Long Beach, http://www.metacafe.com/watch/411994/time_lapse_video_of_the_sunrise_in_long_beach/
-  video: Grand Canyon Sunrise, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzbZcOtg-hg>
- (optional) music for body movement exercise

Play both videos for your group. Ask them what they notice. Compare the videos. Draw attention to the music in the Grand Canyon Sunrise. Play a video again, or use other music you may have selected. Ask the children to pretend they are the sun rising. Start them stooping low and move with them until everyone is standing up tall with arms stretched over the head. Ask how they felt when they were small as compared to standing up with arms outstretched.

Remind the children that in our gratitude for God, we give testimony and witness by sharing God’s light with others.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 I Am Safe in God’s Light and Love (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: This week, each time you turn on a light, repeat to yourself, “I am safe in God’s light and love.”

Supplies:

- small cloth
- candle and matches, or a battery-operated candle

Invite the learners to sit in a circle around the cloth with the candle in the middle. Explain to everyone that God’s peace is available to them any time and any place. One way to ask God for peace is to pray by saying, “I am safe in God’s light and love.” Encourage each one to repeat the words after you, breaking the sentence into “I am...safe in...God’s light...and love.” Depending upon the age of your



group, you can have them spell G-O-D on the floor in front of them with their finger.

While still sitting in the same spot, turn in a complete circle, writing GOD on the floor until you have surrounded yourself with God's invisible love. Then choose one learner to blow out or switch off the candle. Repeat the prayer several times, "I am safe in God's light and love." Remind each learner that every time they repeat "I am safe in God's light and love," they are sharing testimony and witness with others.



5 Try to See this Picture!

Leader preparation: Take time to be in the presence of Van Gogh's work "The Sower"

Let the colors invite you into the picture. Wonder what you would feel like walking across that field.

Supplies:



artwork: "The Sower" by Vincent van Gogh

https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15625&store_id=1401

- drawing paper and sharpened pencils

Show the Van Gogh painting "The Sower." Invite the children to point to the sky in this picture and then to point to the ground. *Does the sky and the ground look like one or two different things? What do you see in the field? What do you think is in the hand of the person walking? How does the artist show movement in the field? How does the artist show aliveness in the sun?*

Let children touch the picture. *Does it feel the way it looks?*

Pass out paper and pencils. Ask the learners to draw their own sun and earth, putting themselves into the picture if they choose. Explain that every artist gives testimony and witness to God the creator in his or her own creative work.



6 Three In One

Leader preparation: Think about how younger children are messengers for God. Reflect on 2 Peter 1:16–1. Wonder what it would have been like to see Jesus lit up from within, showing his divine nature. Think about the complexity of Jesus' divinity and humanness and how children may not see this as complex at all! Children do not necessarily find the human part of God a difficult concept. Be aware of this thought and how children are natural messengers of God's love.

Supplies:

- "Three in One," Attachment: Activity 6

Talk about words that we can use to describe God. Explain there are three words the Christian tradition uses to mean God. God can be creator, father, or mother (accept other words from the group). Jesus can be the son of God, the son of man, the healer, or the teacher (accept other descriptions from the group). Finally, God is described as Spirit—something you cannot necessarily see, but you can feel



and notice its effects. Spirit is like the wind. Accept other examples from the children.

Teach the “Three in One” song to the tune of “Frere Jacques.” Begin by having the group echo you. Then divide the group into two parts for the echo. Switch which group will start off. Contact your worship leaders to see if this song can be shared with the entire community, teaching them the echo.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Lift Up Your Voices (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Read Isaiah 52:7–10. Take in all the imagery of raising voices and shouting God’s praise. This activity is going to get loud. So, if possible, you may want to go outside or get as far away from other groups as you can.

Supplies:

- Bible, preferably a children’s Bible

Before reading the scripture to the children, ask them to listen for familiar words or phrases. Read aloud Isaiah 52:7–10. *What phrases did you hear? Did you hear it talk about feet? Voices? Good news?* Explain to them that we are trying to understand what it means to testify or to talk about God in our lives. One thing we know about God is that God loves each of us very much. Tell learners that they are going to play a shouting game, to echo the sentiment of Isaiah.

Divide the group in two. Have the first group say, “Shout for joy!” Have the second group respond, “Because God loves us!” See which group can shout the loudest. Then have them do it again, but this time stomping their messenger feet while they are shouting, again seeing who can be the loudest. To get the group quieted down, turn the activity around and see who can be the quietest. If you have a worship service where you celebrate what has been learned in this Exploration, you may have the group share their little “litany.”

8 Walking in the Light

Leader preparation: “Marching in the Light of God” can be easily taught in its original language and in English. Written words are not necessary for your young learners. They learn from listening and watching your mouth form the syllables and through repetition. If someone who knows the song can come and help lead, it will help with the melody. The video played several times will also help with learning the melody.

Supplies:



song: “Marching in the Light of God,” also known as “Siyahamb’ ekukh-anyen’ kwenkhos” (tune: Siyahambra, irr South African song) <http://www.spiritandsong.com/compositions/30247>



video: phonetic spelling of words. <http://www.heartspace.com/sftss7.htm>

- hymnal or sheet with words printed in English and Swahili
- Bible



Read Isaiah 52:7. Talk about how sometimes when we share the gospel it is by walking with someone who needs a companion. Introduce the song. If your group is not familiar with it, sing it through a couple of times. Once learners can sing it, play a game of “follow the leader” as you sing the song. You can even improvise a little by changing the words to “walking,” “skipping,” and “jumping.” If you’re feeling really adventuresome, teach the song in Swahili.

9 Angel Messengers

Leader preparation: Angels are messengers of God in the Bible. Many religious traditions include angels, including Islam. Angels are known as spiritual beings, protectors, and those who guide. Tobin Hart notes in a recent book, *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*, that children commonly experience angels and are dismissed by adults who have no map for understanding them. The following cooking activity may give you a chance to bake and talk about angels with your group, leaving lots of room for their own understanding and experience.

Supplies:

- various sizes and shapes of angel cookie cutters
- several packages of ready-to-bake sugar-cookie dough
- cinnamon sugar and plain sugar to sprinkle
- preheated oven
- baking flour (so cookies don’t stick as they are rolled out)
- napkins
- spatula
- liquid hand sanitizer
- several baking sheets
- aprons or over-sized towels to wrap around the bakers

Have the children wash their hands and use hand sanitizer before handling dough. Give each child a hunk of dough. Lightly flour hands for working with dough. Let the children use their hands to flatten to a desired thickness, as described on the package. Use angel cookie cutters to cut angels out of dough. Place angels on baking sheets. Bake according to directions on package. Sprinkle while warm. Encourage eating a warm cookie with hot chocolate or milk. Save cookies to share. Cookies can be frozen to share next week, if time runs out!

No matter what time of year, angel cookies are welcome. Connect the children with their community by baking cookies and sharing (the cookies and their words) with the congregation during fellowship hour.

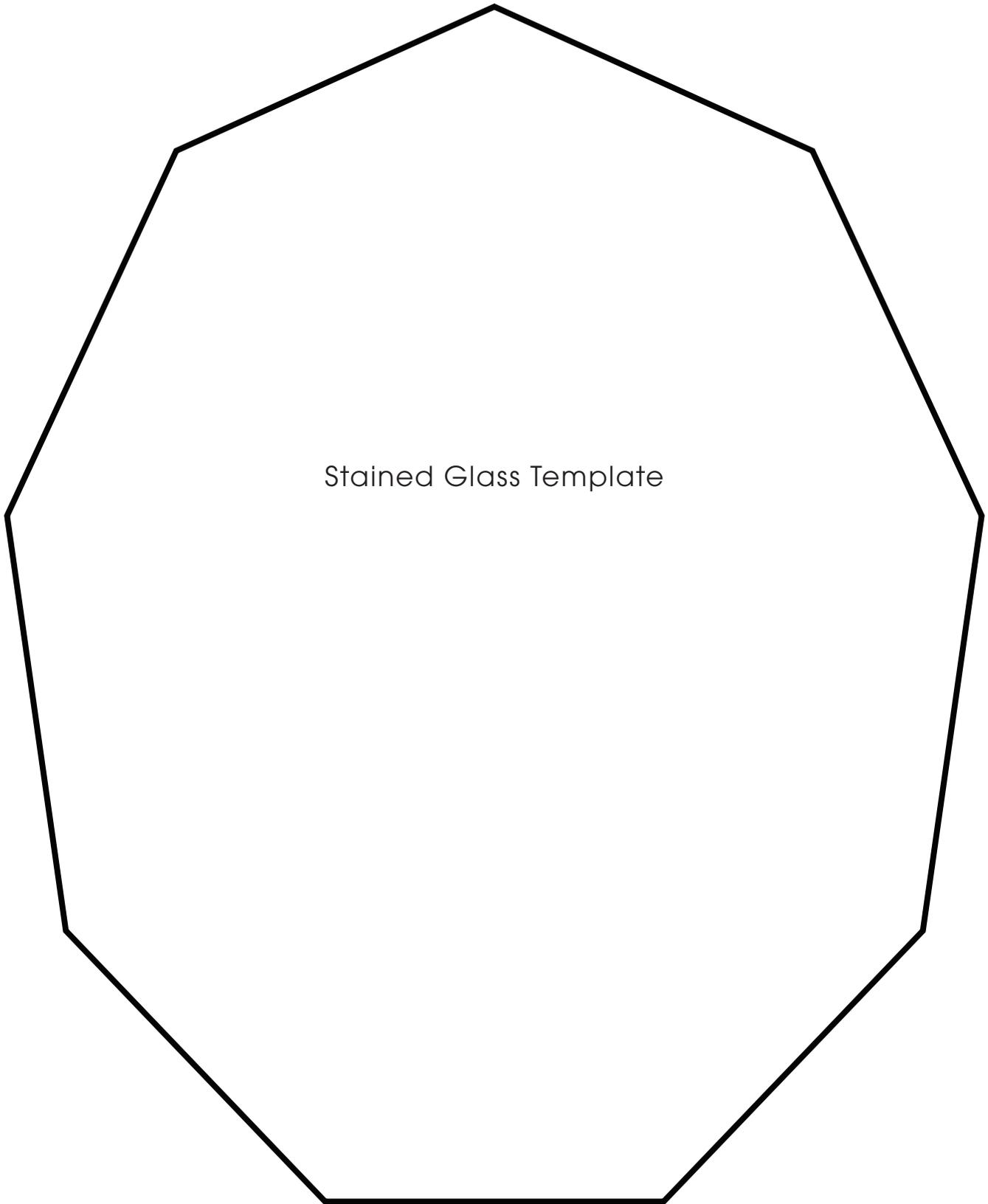
Reflect

Reflect on what you learned from your group. Reflect on what you shared with the group. As the adult leader, have you remained open to also being the adult learner? What do you feel when you relinquish the role of leader? Anxiety, fear, joy, excitement? Wonder about your feelings and God’s marvelous work in you and the younger learners in your care.

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Attachment: Activity 2





Three in One

Sing to the tune of "Frere Jacques."

Glory to God, Glory to God.

Jesus too, Jesus too.

Hurrah for Holy Spirit,

Hurrah for Holy Spirit,

Three in One, Three in One.

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Context and Mission

About this Age Group

Younger children hunger to explore their role of being salt and light to the world, giving testimony with people they can trust. Most young children have homes where their ideas and experiences are welcome. Many children come to rely upon a worshiping community to be their place of trust. Young learners begin to understand their own context by observing the world closest to them. Using words to describe home, then community, city, country, and world happens over time. Younger children also have a strong developing sense of right and wrong that is similar to the righteousness described in the Romans passage. Talking about relationships, including times of happiness and sadness, increases young learners' confidence in themselves and their context. The beautiful words of Romans, emphasizing faith rather than works, encourage children to see that even when they make a mistake God continues to love them.

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**

Exploring & Engaging Activities

**1 Cultivating Mindfulness (Easy Preparation)**

Leader preparation: Think about the question, “What do you love having in your life?”

Supplies:

- colored pencils, markers, or pens
- newsprint or whiteboard
- larger pieces of posterboard or newsprint

Gather the group for a brainstorming discussion. Begin by stating one thing you love having in your life. Then ask, *What do you love having in your life?* Invite each child to name one thing. It is okay if more than one child names the same thing, but encourage lots of different answers. Write their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard. After each child names a gift, have the group respond, “Thank you, God, for...” [the gift named]. When everyone has had a turn, invite anyone who wishes to add more gifts. Then, read the entire list that the group created. Have the group respond, “Thank you God, for all these gifts.”

Draw a huge heart on the posterboard or newsprint. If you have a large group, use more than one posterboard. Write “Thank you God!” in the middle of the heart. Let the group write or draw a picture to illustrate their favorite things. Testimony and witness to God’s world includes paying attention and expressing gratitude in various sensory ways.

2 Pass the Salt!

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 5:13–20. Gather supplies. Read about salt facts below.

Supplies:

- salt shakers in different sizes and shapes
- Bible

Read aloud Matthew 5:13–20. Ask the group to describe what salt tastes like and when they have eaten salt. Show them the salt shakers. Explain how each of us is like a salt shaker. We are all different shapes, but we are all able to shake our saltiness out at any time, because God makes us want to be salty!

Explain that salt in the time of Jesus was considered to be a spice given by God. Salt was used to keep meat safe, since they didn’t have freezers and refrigerators back then. The Romans believed that only the sun was more valuable than salt. Salt was also frequently used in the ancient Near East to bind a promise. Ask if anyone has ever done a pinkie swear to seal a promise. Historians tell us that some Roman soldiers were paid their wages in salt. In fact, the word “salary” comes from the word salt.

With this understanding in mind, the words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew become more approachable. Salt is of high value and importance. Help the group connect the idea that those who follow Jesus have value, like salt.

Since salt is best when combined with other foods, so we, too, are best when sharing God’s love with others. Ask the learners to tell about a time when they were “salt” to

Leader Preparation

As you consider God’s intention of making all God’s children salt and light, focus upon how you have been salt and light today. Select one experience where you felt connected to God’s desire and one experience where you felt disconnected. Breathe in both experiences with the confidence that both are from God, as you exhale peace for the other.

Prayer: O Holy Presence, help me to be awake to how children know your ways. Teach me to share my own experiences without self consciousness. Fill me with the confidence to know you as dearly as the ones you have sent me to lead. Give me salt and light and love as I seek to share your love with all. Amen.<>



Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

someone else, sharing with them or being a good influence. Take the time to act out a scene where a child helps another in school or at home. Encourage the children to find their own words in these small dramatic plays.

③ Lighten Up!

Leader preparation: Read Matthew 5:13–20. Reflect on how light symbolizes knowledge and learning.

Supplies:

- enough makers of light so that each one in your group can hold one example, such as various kinds of lamps, flashlights, candles, tap lights, nightlights, and lanterns
- table
- cloth



song: “This Little Light of Mine,” <http://www.kiddles.com/lyrics/t030.html>

Explain that today you are going to talk about how God wants us to be a light to the world. Show them the lights, and invite each learner to come forward and choose a light off the table and return to the circle. After everyone has a symbol, ask them to describe how their light device could be used to make light or about a time when light was important to them. As each learner describes his or her light, have him or her place it back on the table.

Share the song “This Little Light of Mine.” You can ask someone in the church to visit and sing the song if you are not familiar with it. After learning the music, add gestures that are suggested by the participants. Reflect upon how song and stories grow in the retelling, as they are shared generation to generation. Words change. Verses are added. This is part of the process of the oral tradition that is the basis for giving testimony and witness.

After the song, tell the children that God wants us all to be lights in God’s creation, showing by what we say and what we do that God is love.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



④ Nothing Can Separate Us (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Romans 8:31–39 a bit deep for this age group, so focus on what can separate us from God. Read the entire text for your own background, but with the children be prepared to use verses 38–39.

Supplies:

- Bible
- “Good and Bad,” Attachment: Activity 4

Read aloud Romans 8:38–39. Spend time talking about the things that can separate us from God. To simplify this, ask the children what makes them scared or what things are bad, such as hating someone, monsters, being naughty, hitting your brother or sister.

Divide the learners into two groups, and have the children stand in two straight lines, facing one another but across the room from one another. Explain that ev-



every time you say something “bad,” the children should take one step back. And every time you say something “good,” they should take three steps forward. Obviously, if you say one bad thing for every good thing, it won’t take long for the two lines to meet in the middle. When we testify (simply say a good word) when something bad is being said or done, we bring God’s love into difficult situations. Truly nothing can separate us from God.

5 The City of God

Leader preparation: The hymn in this activity, composed by Marty Haugen, can be used to walk around the room. The song tells of God’s mercy, peace, and justice. As people who are salt and light, we are called to bring God’s mercy, peace, and justice to the world for all people in God’s name. Younger learners will grow into these concepts as they move along their spiritual path. When God’s love is first introduced, young learners instinctively know that God’s love is for everyone and that God’s love can be shared. The words from the book of Roman rings true: “Nothing can separate us from the love of God!” Repeat this phrase often in your work with younger learners. Find someone from your congregation member who is willing to sing or play the hymn for your group.

Supplies:

 song: “You Are Salt for the Earth, O People” (tune: Bring Forth, irr. with refrain)

http://www.missionstclare.com/music/epiphany/you_are_salt/salt.html

- paper to make “thank you” cards if a guest comes to visit and help with the song
- markers or crayons

Invite a congregation member to come and sing or play this hymn for your group. You can also play a recording. Ask the children to listen to the refrain. Ask them to listen for the word “mercy.” *When they hear the word “mercy,” raise your hand.* Repeat the instructions for the words “faith” and “justice.” During the final refrain, have them stand with hands outstretched in the air when they hear “City of God!”

The final time through, have everyone stand and march around the room in a circle while the song is being sung or played. When the refrain says “City of God,” have everyone stop, turn toward the center of the circle, and raise their hands outstretched overhead.

Have the children make “thank you” cards for the guest. Encourage them to draw what they liked about the song and the march. They can use words and pictures. Write one of these phrases on the cards: “I am God’s child. I am bound for the City of God.” or “Nothing can separate us from the love of God.” Have each child sign the card to the best of his or her ability.

6 Animal Survivors

Leader preparation: Find a calendar of animals that are threatened by extinction. You can purchase this online, pick up inexpensive calendars with beautiful photos at local stores, or ask the congregation to donate used calendars with photos of animals.

Supplies:

- website: Endangered Wildlife of the World, [http://www.50birds.com/gen-](http://www.50birds.com/gen-wildlife1.htm)

 [wildlife1.htm](http://www.50birds.com/gen-wildlife1.htm)



- magazine photos, old calendar photos of wildlife torn from magazines, collected by congregation
- (optional) new calendar from the World Wildlife Fund, http://www.freelibrary.com/nwf_calendars.htm
- hand puppet of an animal

As participants in creation, people are called to give testimony and witness to parts of creation that have no voice. Show colorful photos of mammals, birds, fishes, and reptiles that are endangered. Talk about what endangered means. Pass out the photos. Ask the children to describe their animals and pretend that their animals can talk. Encourage the conversation by pretending you are interviewing the animals on a television news station. You can also use a hand puppet of an animal to do the interviewing. Encourage lively words and debate. This serious topic can be treated with humor. When everyone has had a chance to share his or her animal, pray for each one's individual beauty and contribution to God's world.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 God's Creation (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Young learners connect with God's creation by using their senses. Exploring various words for the experience of the senses increases each person's opportunity to find words to describe his or her experience of God. Words and testimony work hand in hand in experiencing the love of God with self and others. For this activity, you'll want to take your group outdoors if weather permits. You can also do this activity indoors by using a tree-like potted plant that can be touched and smelled.

Supplies:

- availability to the outdoors or a tree-like potted plant that can be brought indoors
- art paper and crayons
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

First, have learners use their hands to feel a tree's leaves and branches. Ask the group if they notice any wet or dry places. Then ask the children to close their eyes and focus their attention on the smell of the tree. Invite each one to share a word that describes the smell.

When you return indoors, write the words that were spoken about the tree on newsprint or a whiteboard. Then ask the group to name colors they associate with being outdoors. Ask: *Where else might we see trees? What other kinds of trees might we see?* Gather lots of descriptive words and phrases so they can be used to write a group poem.

Vertically spell out "c-r-e-a-t-i-o-n" on newsprint or a whiteboard. Tell learners they will create a poem from their descriptions of the tree. Pick from the learners' words and phrases beginning with the letter C, and write that word or phrase at the top. With each letter, then, write a feeling, color, or place beginning with the letter. Then read the newly created poem together while someone points to the words.



If time permits, young learners can draw pictures to accompany the poem using paper and crayons. Make arrangements with the editor of the church newsletter to publish the poem and pictures in the next edition. Pictures and words can be scanned if the newsletter is published on line.

8 Bowing

Leader preparation: The sacred art of bowing has roots in nearly every religion around the world. In different forms in different faiths, people bow as a physical expression of their spiritual hopes, their gratefulness to God, and out of respect to God and to one another. Incorporating bowing in daily life can be the beginning of a spiritual practice for Christians that is shared by other faith traditions as well. Bowing is the body giving testimony.

The greeting “Namaste” (nah-MAH-stay), from India, is derived from Sanskrit *namas*, meaning “to bow,” and *te*, meaning “to you.” When spoken to another person, one makes a slight bow of the head with hands pressed together, palms touching, and fingers pointed upward, in front of the chest. The other person can respond with the same bow. Sometimes people bow this way without saying “Namaste,” which has the same meaning.

For Christians, it is important to acknowledge the light in each of us that is a spark of divinity. The bow of “Namaste” is a way to include this understanding and also come to know another culture’s expression. Many Christians bow before the altar of God. Whether bowing to one another or to God in worship, the bow is giving witness to God’s powerful act of creation in love.

Supplies:

- meaning of “Namaste,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Namaste> or http://healing.about.com/od/n/g/g_namaste.htm

• (optional) Namaste Orphanage, <http://www.orphanagenepal.org/main.php>

Ask the children if they know what it means to bow. Ask the group when they have observed people bowing. Some answers may include: at concerts, after a performance, in church, during a movie, at karate practice, and at a Suzuki music lesson. Explain that some Christians bow when they come to or cross the altar in the church. Some Christians, mainly Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, kneel when they bow. Practice with the group what a bow and a kneel might look like. Explore what it feels like to bow and kneel, with words that name the experience.

Explain that bowing is a part of all cultures as a way of recognizing God, saying hello, indicating a beginning or an end to an activity. Introduce the word “Namaste.” Ask the group to repeat the word by syllables. Connect the physical act of honoring the God in each person as giving testimony and witness to God’s love for the world.

If time permits, you can show the group pictures of people bowing from various cultures. You can also talk about the Namaste Orphanage in Nepal. You might want to have children help to organize a fundraising project to send aid to the children there.



9 God's Love

Leader preparation: John Giuliana, a Roman Catholic priest, created the “Hopi Virgin Mother and Child” painting as an icon. Painting or drawing of an icon is how some artists paint to interpret God’s face. People throughout the history of the Christian church have used icons to contemplate and see the face of God. Icons can be used to open up our minds to experience God in many different ways. Icons encourage us to bring meaning to our experience of God through the images on the picture.

It is important to note that young learners may not be surprised that the mother of Jesus is an American Indian! They may think this is perfectly natural, especially if they have not been exposed to many other pictures of Mary and Jesus.

Supplies:



Artwork: “Hopi Virgin Mother and Child” by John Giuliani

https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401



Hopi Indian fact sheet, http://www.bigorin.org/hopi_kids.htm

Hold up the picture of “Hopi Virgin Mother and Child.” Ask: *What do you notice about this painting? What colors stand out for you? What draws your attention first?* Let each learner have an opportunity to respond. Encourage discussion about the light over the head of the mother and child. Explain that the light indicates this is Mary and Jesus. Consider the idea that Jesus is God and Mary is his mother, and the light over their heads indicates being Holy.

Reflect

Think about the activities and the individuals in your group. Ask yourself if you have found any new words for experiencing God. Have the learners expressed any new words? Review in your mind if everyone has been invited to share their opinions and feelings. If anyone is reluctant, spend a moment considering how they may be included in the future.

Reflect on possible ways to connect the younger learners with the entire congregation by sharing their art work, their music, or their insights in worship. Call parents who may want to help with a short activity that could be shared in worship. Pray for your community and the younger learners in your midst. Receive the sense of gratitude and satisfaction God sends you for your intentional sharing of the practice of giving testimony and witness to the young learners of the community.

Explain that the Hopi people are Native American Indians, who were among the first settlers of North America. Explain that the first Americans had their own ideas about God, some of which are included in our Christian tradition.

Take a walking trip around your church to see if you can discover any other pictures of Jesus and Mary on the walls or even in books. Include statuary in your discoveries.

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Good and Bad

“Good” Words and Actions List

Love
Happiness
Play together
Goodness
Share
Care
Sending someone a card
Helping a neighbor

“Bad” Words and Actions List

Hate
Anger
Fight
Evil
Makinge fun of someone
Monsters
Steal
Being mean to someone

Giving Testimony and Witness



Exploration: Future and Vision

About this Age Group

Younger learners give glory to God through their testimony in words and actions. Younger learners learn to call upon God for help in difficult times. While calling upon God, younger children learn to use actions and words to treat themselves and others with dignity. Learning about service as a testimony and witness to God begins with the youngest in our communities.

Giving testimony and witness to slavery creates opportunity for transformation. Children are not too young to understand the difference between slave and free in the time of Paul and in the history of other countries, including the United States of America. Difficult parts of our sacred scripture may be addressed without apology, in teaching younger learners that people are not perfect and that God calls us to be better than we are without ever giving up on us.

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 on-going 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

Spend time wondering about commitment to the spiritual life. Think about your own childhood and when you first realized that God could be called upon to help you in circumstances that were difficult. Remember what it is like to give up on something that seems too hard. Hold this sense of frustration for a moment while inhaling and holding your breath. for a moment. Now with an exhale, send out compassion for all those people, child and adult alike, who feel abandoned to their own resources, forgetting that God can be called upon for help. Inhale again, and then exhale again, the sense of compassion necessary for yourself, your immediate family, your community, and your world.

Prayer: May all glory be to you, O God, who creates both heaven and earth. Amen.

Exploring & Engaging Activities



1 Crowns of Righteousness (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Children know that crowns are meant for important people. Though they do not yet grasp how fruitful a life lived in faith can be, younger children can understand that God appreciates those who keep trying to do their best. Even younger learners can feel discouraged and want to give up. A discussion about times in the past when each one has given up may help younger learners know they can call upon God to help them finish what they have started.

A crown for a job well done leads to the understanding that God continues to renew us as long as we turn to God for help.

Supplies:

- blank paper and crayons, markers, colored pencils
- (optional) "Crown," Attachment: Activity 1

Gather the group in a circle. Talk about a time when you have given up on something you started. Encourage each one to think quietly for a moment. Ask the children to share a time they have given up something they started. Keep the discussion open without judgment. Encourage the group to see that people start and finish a lot of things, but rarely finish everything.

Pick one of the situations brought up by your group. For example, if one child admits she or he doesn't like to finish making her bed or cleaning her room, choose that situation, which is very common to most children. Ask: *How does it feel to finish a hard job?* Point out that hard work brings results that build upon each other. If you practice, you get better, and the job gets easier.

Use examples that children will relate to. When you throw a baseball a lot, you get better at throwing. When you do your homework every day, you get smarter and the work is easier. When you pray to God every day, praying becomes easier and more frequent.

Pass out a blank sheet of paper or the attachment, a coloring sheet with the outline of a crown. Invite the children to decorate the crown or draw and write about activities that require "not giving up."



2 Adoration of the Kings

Leader preparation: Giving glory to God, a theme in 2 Timothy, explores the season of Epiphany and the coming of the kings. In the painting by 16th century Dutch artist Brueghel the Elder, many people gather to bring their attention and gifts to the baby Jesus. The star shining in the sky points the way, as the gathered throng draws us into a moment that enriches our imaginations and helps us to see what glory to God can look like. Allow your group ample time to wonder about the painting. Encourage them to wonder at what they see and what they would hear if they too were a part of the group gathered to celebrate the birth of this extraordinary child.



Session Development

For each session, leaders may choose from 9 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 9 activities could take 90–120 minutes.

- To plan a session of 30–45 minutes, choose 3 activities using one activity from each category.
- To plan a session of 45–60 minutes, choose 4 or 5 activities using at least one activity from each category.

Supplies:

 artwork: “The Adoration of the Kings” by Jan Brueghel, the Elder
https://secure3.convio.net/ucc/site/Ecommerce/1801449515?VIEW_PRODUCT=true&product_id=15626&store_id=1401

- “Star,” Attachment: Activity 2
- crayons and markers
- glitter
- glue
- assorted stickers

Show the group the Brueghel picture “The Adoration of the Kings.” Pause for several minutes as they have a chance to focus on what they see. Ask: *What might you hear if you were in this picture?* Pause for this idea to be considered. Some responses may include: a baby crying, a dog barking, people mumbling, people sighing, people talking, music, horses who whinny, a cat saying meow, a rooster crowing, birds chirping, and feet dragging in the dirt.

Ask: *Who do you see? What would it feel like to be visiting the baby Jesus? How do you think Mary is feeling with all these people staring at her baby? Can you see the Kings in the picture? What surprises you about this picture?*

Explain to the learners that this picture celebrates a season that Christians call Epiphany. The season of Epiphany comes after Jesus’ birth. We give glory to God by celebrating the birth of Jesus and by celebrating how God sent a child to show us what God looks like in human form. The Kings bring gifts to celebrate God’s gift, as they bring glory to God. Point to the star in the picture by Brueghel. Explain that Epiphany celebrates Jesus who is the light of the word. The Kings found Jesus by looking at the stars. We celebrate the light, stars, and Jesus at Epiphany.

Hand each learner the “Star” handout to decorate with crayons and markers. If possible, on a bulletin board pin a poster with the handmade stars arranged around it to celebrate the season of Epiphany.

3 Follow the Drinking Gourd

Leader preparation: Philemon was a friend Paul. He sent his slave Onesimus to visit Paul. Soon Paul and Onesimus became friends, and they continued the ministry of Jesus Christ together. Paul was very concerned that Philemon would be angry with his slave, so Paul sent a letter on the slave’s behalf, asking Philemon to see Onesimus as a brother rather than a person who is owned.

This story directly addresses the role of slave and free. Though the condition of slavery was different in the time of Paul, slavery has historical ramifications that have given rise to ethical positions in the past and still give rise to ethical testimony and behavior in the future. Some experts agree that teaching children about slavery can prove difficult. Rather than sidestep the slavery content of this scripture, one can approach slavery from a literary point of view, even for the younger learner.

Review your public library for books on “The Drinking Gourd.” For more references, see the website <http://www.followthedrinkinggourd.org/>. Consider purchasing one of the books referenced on this website for your faith community’s library. Use the website to understand what the “The Drinking Gourd” was. Listen to the music and read about the history of the Underground Railroad. Familiarize yourself with the material so that you can help your young learners find words for slavery, to give testimony in the future for God’s desire for all people to be free.

**Supplies:**

- paper with large lines for young learners to write a letter
- large pencils
- erasers

Ask your young learners what they know about slavery. Their answers may surprise you. Listen carefully to their understanding, only correcting when necessary. Tell a brief version of the scripture story in Philemon. Explain that the story happened during the time after Jesus died.

Then connect slavery with the history of the United States. Read a picture book on “The Drinking Gourd.” Explain about the Underground Railroad in the United States and how people of faith helped African American people become free by providing a way for them to escape from their owners. Talk about the constellations and how the clusters of stars form pictures. Show your group “The Big Dipper,” which slaves called “The Drinking Gourd.” You might connect the Magi following a star to Jesus with slaves following stars to freedom.

Wonder with your young learners about gourds and how they would provide water for people who were thirsty. Wonder about how it would feel to be a slave and have to sneak away for your freedom, being separated from your family.

Continue this discussion in a way that does not make slave owners bad people. Point out how Paul does not consider the owner of Onesimus a bad person. Paul uses reason and careful wording to ask his friend to consider freeing Onesimus.

Discerning & Deciding Activities



4 How Can I Help? (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: We are surrounded with people who help, though we often do not recognize their gift. By taking a short silent tour of your church, you can teach your younger learners to pay attention to how members of their faith community help one another.

Supplies: None

Gather the group and explain that you are going to take a short tour of the church without speaking. Ask the group to see how many ways they observe people helping other people in their church. Say: *Every time you see someone helping someone else, pat your head two times.* Remind the group that you will ask about their observations when you return together.

As you walk together, show by example so the young learners will get the idea that they are looking for helpers. For example, if someone opens a door, hands out a bulletin, or helps in the kitchen, pat your head two times. Don't stop to talk to other church members. Keep this as a secret mission, giving the young learners the opportunity to be in on the silent game.

When you return to your meeting area, talk about what you observed. Explain that communities of faith are all about helping one another and people in our families and communities. Ask how the children's families help each other, and how each of them help their families. Explain that people who are helped now will become people who help in the future, as we learn to give silent witness and testimony to our faith in God.



5 Save the Eggs

Leader preparation: Younger learners have sensitive feelings that can be connected to actions, thoughts, and words. An attitude of “no injury” toward self and other gives testimony to God’s love. The following game will help young learners pay attention to the importance of treating everyone as gently as possible.

Supplies:

- newspaper
- cotton balls
- paper towels
- buckets

The object of this game is for players to save symbolic eggs and get them safely back to the next player. Scrunch newspaper into balls to make “eggs.” Use two to three pieces of newspaper per egg. Scatter the eggs around the room.

Divide the group into two teams. Give each team a bucket, called the “nest.” Also give each team one single paper towel. On a signal, players take turns rescuing an egg and bringing it back to the team’s nest. Eggs are fragile and must be handled with care. Show the group how they must put their paper towel on the floor, place one egg in the center, and carry the egg by holding the edges of the paper towel. After all the eggs have been rescued, count how many each team has in their nest.

As alternative play, you can give each player a paper towel and let everyone rescue eggs at once. You can also time how long it takes to get all the eggs.

Discuss how easy it can be to hurt others with our actions, our thoughts, and our words. Connect being sensitive to other people with how careful each one had to be to get the egg from the around the room and into the nest.

6 How Do We Serve?

Leader preparation: Help your young learners expand their understanding of service. Service includes doing good deeds, sharing possessions, having good thoughts, praying for others, and growing spiritually. Most children eagerly participate in games that teach helping others and share possessions. Most children will also eagerly participate in praying for others. Sharing a cheerful smile, giving a loving blessing, and having an attitude of “Can I help?” can lead to a sophisticated understanding of service that is not beyond our youngest members of community.

Supplies:

- tray with small paper cups
- small toy car and shoe box for gas station
- badminton rackets and shuttlecock
- variety of healthy snacks

Play games to explore all meanings of the word “service.” This word can bring up many images. Set up stations around the room and rotate the children to each station for a period of time. One station can be a tray with paper cups that are “served” to others. Another station can be a toy car that goes through a pretend “service” station. A third station can include badminton rackets that can be used to “serve” the shuttle cock over a net of chairs.



After the rotation activity, sit together and “serve” a snack. Be sensitive to any food allergies in the group. Bring a variety of small healthy snacks, and let each child have a turn serving something to the others. Ask each one how it feels to be the server or the one served. By serving others, we testify to God’s call in our lives to reach out to people in need.

Sending & Serving Activities



7 Praying for God’s Protection (Easy Preparation)

Leader preparation: Younger learners are not strangers to persecution. School bullies, older children down the street, ringleaders of gangs, and siblings who relentlessly tease can all be experienced by even the youngest among us. Sometimes when a person stands up and gives testimony for what is right in God’s eyes, other people pick on them. This is a realistic appraisal that provides an opportunity to show children how they can rely upon God for strength in difficult times, which is a form of giving testimony.

Supplies: None

Talk about a time of being bullied or criticized. Invite each learner in your group to share about such a time in his or her own life. After each one shares and is listened to without interrupting or making suggestions, remind the group that Jesus was also picked on for standing up for what was right in God’s eyes.

Emphasize how God expects us to keep trying, to remember God’s love, and to claim the relationship of being God’s child in what we say and what we do.

8 Hand Bouquet

Leader preparation: Help your group make a bouquet of hand-print flowers to share with someone in the congregation. The bouquet could also be brought to the altar during family worship. If time permits, children could make individual bouquets for their families. These tributes are for God’s glory, as they are given as testimony by younger learners who share their time and artistic expression with others.

Supplies:

- construction paper
- pipe cleaners
- pencil
- scissors
- inexpensive vase to hold handprint flowers

To make a hand bouquet, begin by tracing each child’s hand on a piece of colored construction paper. Cut out the tracing. Curl the paper fingers around a pencil. Form a cone with the palm of the handprint. Tape it together to hold. Slide a pipe cleaner into the end of the cone to make a stem. Cut leaves out of green construction paper and tape them to the stem. Put flowers in a vase as a bouquet from the entire group.

As you work on this activity, talk to the children about testimony. Sometimes we use our hands to help others, and that is a testimony. When people share their artwork with others, they share their testimony. As you work, see if the children can come up with any other ways we testify.



9 Glory to God

Leader preparation: 2 Timothy 4:18 concludes with a phrase indicating “to God be the glory forever.” With this in mind, direct your younger learners in writing a group prayer. As younger children experiment with words in prayer and praise, they come to know more certainly how to give testimony to God’s work in their lives. This activity is an opportunity to create a group prayer that can be shared with families or the congregation.

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- pieces of paper, one for each learner
- markers, crayons, colored pencils

Gather with your group in front of newsprint or a whiteboard. Ask for suggestions about writing a prayer that would be a “Glory to God.” Begin the first line of the prayer with answers to this question: *What shall we call God?* Encourage the group by suggesting ways we are thankful to God or ways we feel about God. Create a group prayer with as many ideas from your young learners as possible.

If time permits, let each child (some with the help of an adult leader) copy the prayer onto nice piece of paper with a border. Decorate the border with designs and colors. Encourage each participant to read the prayer to the rest of the group. Suggest that they take the prayer home and use it before a family meal.

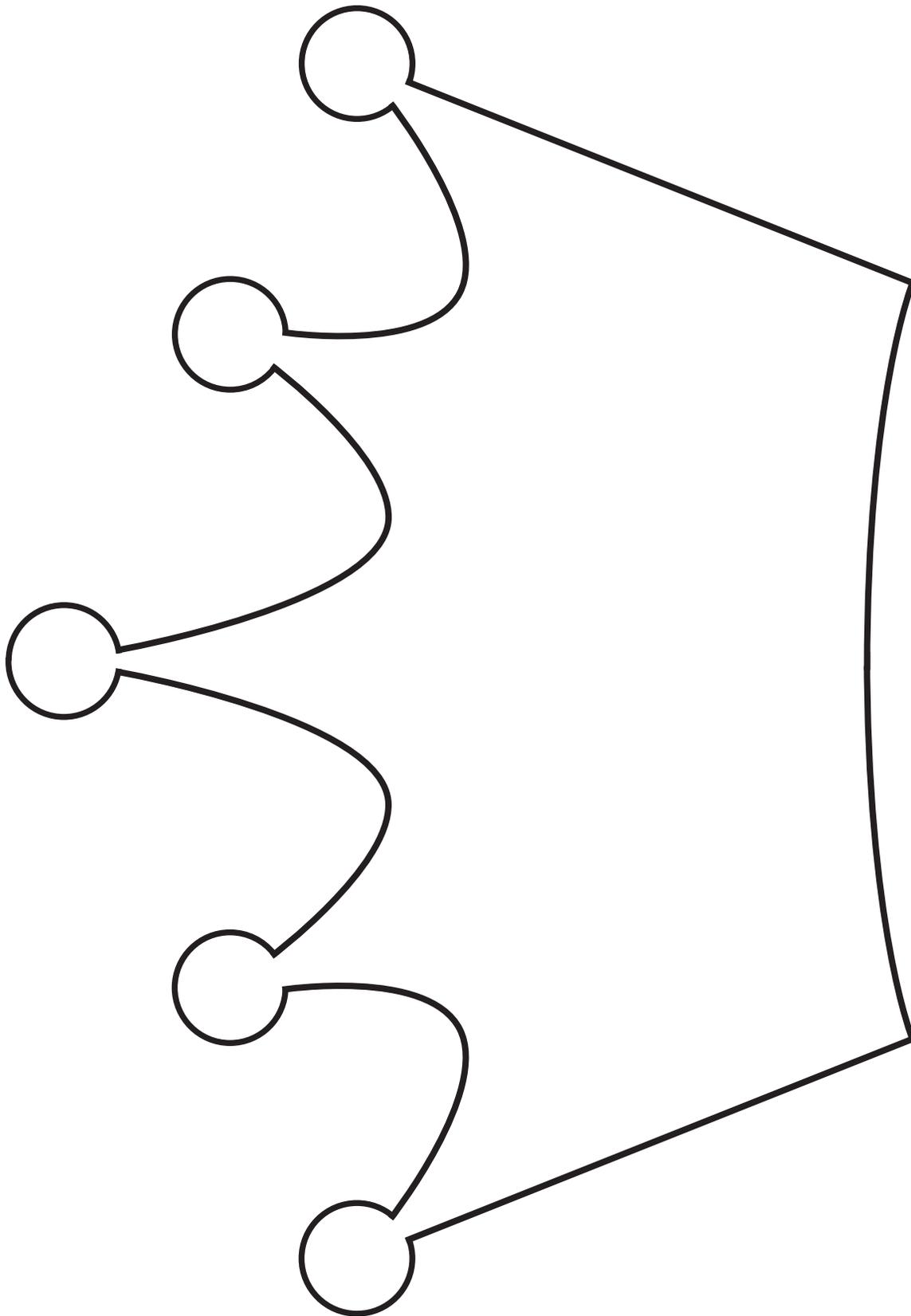
Reflect

Reflect on each activity you introduced to your young learners. When did they seem the most engaged? When did they seem the most restless? When did they surprise you the most? Understand that being engaged and being restless are all gifts from God, who wants us to be led by young learners to the presence of God.

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Attachment: Activity 1





Attachment: Activity 2

