

Blessing and Letting Go



Intergenerational

About this Setting

The church is one of the few places in today's culture where people of all ages gather together. In church it is possible for people of all ages to worship and learn together, and enjoy one another's friendship. An intergenerational event combines experiences of worship, learning, and fellowship, offering special opportunities for children, youth, and adults to be involved either as family units or as individuals. As people interact with one another in different activities, they listen to and respect one another's ideas and questions, discover and appreciate the talents of others, and form new bonds and relationships within the church family. A positive intergenerational experience not only blesses those involved, it also strengthens the church as a whole.

About this Faith Practice

The faith practice of blessing and letting go invites Jesus' followers of all ages to welcome the implications of living in a world of constant transition. This practice supports the ongoing, natural cycle of blessing and letting go, of embracing and releasing. It is a lifelong, hope-infused journey whose rhythm is grounded in God's eternal love, grace, and mercy. Mere words belie the complexity of this rhythm. At times it leads to excruciating pain, at times to joyous expectation. Sometimes segments of this journey are long and arduous, sometimes brief and joyful. In all circumstances, the freedom to bless and to let go are gifts from God—gifts that we can extend to one another. The activities in this resource for Blessing and Letting Go seek to shape this discipline of Christian life by engaging various aspects of this moving dance of grief, release, prayer, thanksgiving, and living anew.

Intergenerational Options

These activities may be used to build an intergenerational event for the commencement or conclusion of your series on “Blessing and Letting Go” (up to three hours). The activities may also be used independently (15–20 minutes each), interwoven with age-specific activities throughout the series. An intergenerational event might be used during a time of year that is already set aside as special, such as Advent, Kwanzaa, Lent, Vacation Bible School, or Forty Days of Prayer for Children.

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

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

Explorations



Discovery: In this Exploration we encounter the practice and look at how it intersects with human needs in community and personal life.



Scripture: Christian faith practices grow out of the biblical story of the people of faith. For each faith practice, twelve Bible stories (two for each Exploration) inform and give direction to practicing our faith.



Discipleship: Discipleship is about following. In this Exploration we consider what prompts people of faith to become disciples and probe how the Spirit leads us in the communal life of the Christian community and in our personal lives in the world.



Christian Tradition: Practices of faith have been shaped by those who have preceded us in the history of the Christian church. The future will be shaped by the way we practice our faith today. Just as a map provides the landmarks we need to follow when we navigate in the world, this rich history of the Christian tradition guides us as we practice our faith today.



Context and Mission: In order to claim a role in the mission God gives to the church, you have to know where you are, your local context. In the Context and Mission Exploration we consider ways to practice faith in our community and world.



Future and Vision: Practicing our faith leads us into the future. We seek to move into the future with a vision of where we are headed. In the Future and Vision Exploration we consider what impels us into the future. We know that we are still practicing our faith; we won’t do it perfectly. We are empowered to keep practicing.

Exploring & Engaging Activities

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

Discerning & Deciding Activities

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

Sending & Serving Activities

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

Intergenerational Leader Preparation

Review the twelve activities and select those that best fit your group and timeframe. The activities are suggestions that you may adapt. For example, if you prefer to use a “Sending & Serving” activity for “Discerning & Deciding,” please do that. Mostly, enjoy planning the intergenerational gatherings. Your joy and enthusiasm will set the tone.

BIBLE FOCUS PASSAGES:
1 Samuel 16:1–23
Ephesians 3:1–14
Colossians 3:12–17
Genesis 12:1–5
Luke 2:22–35

Prayer: Sustainer of All, as I plan these activities help me create options that encourage and empower people of all ages. May our gathering together deepen our faith and deepen our connections to one another. May I recognize your hand in my ministry and in my life. Amen.



Exploration: Discovery

1 Bible Blessings (Easy Preparation) (Exploring & Engaging)

Leader preparation: Write these scripture references on index cards, one per card:

1 Samuel 16:11–13
Mark 1:9–11
Mark 10:13–16
Matthew 21:6–9
Matthew 26:26–28

Write these questions on newsprint or a whiteboard:

Who is giving the blessing?
Who is receiving the blessing?
How and why was the blessing given?

As you form teams or pairs for working, plan to pair beginning readers with more experienced readers. Be ready to assist beginning readers as needed.

Supplies:

- index cards, prepared as directed
- Bibles
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard,
- (optional) pictures from Bible storybooks or old curriculum illustrating the verse cards

Begin by telling participants that there are many blessings recorded in the Bible. Form teams, and have each team draw one of the index cards prepared with a scripture reference. Ask teams to find and read the Bible verses and then respond to the questions on the newsprint or whiteboard.

After teams or pairs have finished their work, ask each one to tell their answers to the entire group. Together discuss: *Which of these blessings do we still use in our church today?* They may have sung “Hosanna” in a children’s anthem or waved palm branches in a processional hymn on Palm Sunday. They may connect the story of Jesus’ baptism with the sacrament of baptism, and his blessing of the bread and wine with communion. They may remember that Jesus laid his hands on the children and blessed them, and they may have witnessed the laying on of hands at an installation or ordination. Anointing with oil may be new to them. Explain that this blessing is sometimes used in a healing service.

Close with prayer: *God, thank you for the many ways you bless us. Make us blessings to you and to one another. Amen.*

2 Shalom (Exploring & Engaging)

Leader preparation: Be prepared to lead the children in singing “Shalom Chaverim.” If you think your group would like to sing the song in Hebrew, as well as in English, here are the Hebrew words.

Shalom, chaverim, shalom, chaverim, shalom, shalom!
Lehitraot, lehitraot, shalom, shalom.

Note: The Hebrew words are pronounced something like this:

shalom: shah-LOHM

chaverim: kah-vey-REEM

lehitraot: leh-HEET-rah-OHT

Plan to “line out” the words to this traditional Hebrew folk melody to help your group learn the song. That is, sing one line at a time for learners to imitate, then sing the first and second sections, and then the whole song.

Supplies:

- song: “Shalom Chaverim,” Traditional Hebrew blessing (tune: Shalom), <http://www.musickit.com/resources/shalomchaver.html>; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2pm6XGvnnnc>

Introduce the word “shalom” as a Hebrew blessing. Shalom means “peace,” not just the peace that comes when there is no fighting but also health and wholeness. The prayer for shalom is a prayer for the peace the world will know when no one is hungry or homeless, sick or lonely. The word “shalom” is related to the Arabic word *salaam*, which is used as a greeting and blessing in the Islamic community.

Teach the song as suggested above in Leader preparation. Once learners have mastered the song, try singing it as a canon, like a round. Divide the group into two parts, with a strong singer on each part, and have the second group begin singing as the first group begins to sing “Lehitraot.” Sing it twice.

Then form two groups and have each group form a circle, one inside the other. Have each person face a partner in the other circle. If your group is too small to divide into two circles, form one circle and modify the movement as suggested. Sing the phrases one by one with movement, and ask the group to repeat each phrase, as follows.

Shalom, my friends, (*Right hand over heart and nod to opposite*)

Shalom, my friends, (*Extend hands, palms up, toward partner*)

Shalom, shalom! (*Bring palms of hands together, fingers up, in front of chest, and nod*)

God’s peace go with you, (*Join hands within circle*)

God’s peace go with you, (*Each circle moves to its left, so that each person faces a new partner*)

Shalom, shalom! (*Shake hands with new partner*)

Note: If you are working with only one circle, have the children move left as they join hands and then back to the right. Have each shake hands with the person on his or her right.

Repeat the song until partners are back to their original places. Let this be your closing prayer.



Exploration: Scripture



3 What Will You Take? (Easy Preparation) (Discerning & Deciding)

Leader preparation: Read Genesis 12:1–9. Arrange chairs in a circle.

Supplies:

- Bible
- chairs
- paper and pencils
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite participants to sit in the circle of chairs. Invite the participants to pretend that they all have just been told that they are to leave home in one hour and that they can only take five things along with them. *What would you take and why?* Give everyone paper and pencils and have them write down or draw a picture of their five things. Go around the circle, and give everyone a chance to tell his or her list of five things. Record on newsprint or whiteboard what everyone will take.

Then introduce the scripture reading by saying: *Long ago, in a place called Haran, a man named Abram and his wife Sarai had a decision like this to make. The story is in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Listen to what they decided, what they left behind, and what they took along.* Ask a volunteer to read aloud Genesis 12:1–9.

As a group, discuss:

- What did Abram and Sarai decide to do when God told them to leave home and go where God led them?
- Why do you think they decided to go?
- Who and what did they leave behind?
- Who and what did they take along? (Note that Abram was a shepherd who followed his flocks, so he would probably have had among his possessions sheep and goats, tents, cooking equipment, clothing, and so on.)

Ask for a show of hands to indicate who thinks it was easy for Abram and Sarai to say “yes” to God’s call and who thinks it was difficult.

Close with this or a similar prayer: *God, as Abram and Sarai listened to your voice and followed your command, may we too be ready to hear your call to us and find the faith to answer it. Amen.*



4 Benediction, Another Kind of Blessing (Easy Preparation) (Sending & Serving)

Leader preparation: On newsprint or a white board, print the word “benediction.” Write the word as “bene - dictus” on the next line below. Below that line, write “Good Words.” Also write each of these biblical references on a separate index card:

- Numbers 6:24–26
- Romans 15:13
- 2 Corinthians 13:13

Ephesians 3:20–21
2 Thessalonians 2:16–17
Hebrews 13:20–21

If there is a worship resources section in the hymnal your church uses, select several benedictions for the group to read together.

Supplies:

- index cards, pen
- Bibles
- worship bulletins from your church showing a benediction
- several copies of your congregation's hymnal
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

Invite learners to read in unison the word “benediction.” Tell how this word is formed from two Latin words, *bene*, meaning “good,” and *dictus*, meaning “a saying or a word.” A benediction is a good word, another kind of blessing. It is spoken almost every time that Christians worship together.

Distribute worship bulletins, and look together for where a benediction is included. Explain that many of the benedictions we use in worship come from the Bible. Then ask volunteers to take an index card, look up the reference, and read it aloud to the group. If you there are other benedictions in your hymnal, explain that sometimes people write their own benedictions, and we have some of these in our hymnal. Show them the worship resource section, and ask one or more learners to read several of the benedictions aloud. Ask: *What do all these benedictions have in common?* (They send us out of worship with the “good word” that God is always with us wherever we go to do God’s work in the world.)

Invite the group to write its own benediction. Write their ideas on newsprint or a whiteboard and work together on composing the prayer. It may be as simple as “Go. You are not alone. God is always with you.” Let the group’s benediction be your closing prayer.



Exploration: Discipleship

5 Come, All You People (Discerning & Deciding)

Leader preparation: Read Colossians 3:12–17. In this letter to the followers of Jesus at Colossae, Paul reminds them that welcoming Christ into their lives fills them with such joyful peace and gratitude that they cannot help but sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. This is one of the tasks of discipleship. The song “Come, All You People” is from Zimbabwe in the Shona language. The video listed below provides a good way to learn the words in the Shona language. Learn it well enough to teach it by rote, with or without the keyboard accompaniment. You may want to ask a choir member or other musician to help you. Be prepared to teach the melody line and words to the group first and then add the Shona words. If rhythm instruments are available, gather some for the children to use with the song.

Supplies:

- song: “Come, All you People,” Alexander Gondo, translator (tune: Uyai Mose), http://www.hymnary.org/text/come_all_you_people_come_and_praise; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x94d238Zocg>
- (optional) rhythm Instruments
- Bibles

Teach the song “Come, All You People.” Teach the melody line and words first. Suggest that singers sway slightly to the left and right on beats one and three, in an African style. If available, invite learners to choose a rhythm instrument to play on those beats. If you don’t have rhythm instruments, encourage them to use their bodies to stamp, slap, or snap on these beats.

Explain that in many of the psalms in the Bible, the people blessed God for all the good things God had done for them. Close by reading Paul’s advice to the early Christians: “. . . and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.” Ask volunteers to read aloud Psalm 103:1–2 and Psalm 34:1–3. Sing the song one more time. Ask the worship leaders in your church if your group could sing this song as a call to worship in your congregational worship.



6 “I’m Sorry” and “I Forgive You” (Easy Preparation) (Discerning & Deciding)

Leader preparation: Conflicts arise in relationships among children and youth, and they often do or say unloving things that they regret later with shame, guilt, or both. Use this activity to help them discover that apologizing and forgiving can help God’s people let go of these uncomfortable feelings and help restore relationships. Read John 13:34 and Ephesians 4:32.

Supplies:

- Bibles
- artwork: “Forgiveness” by Thierry Ona, <http://www.art.com/products/p12191417-sa-i2792541/thierry-ona-forgiveness.htm?sorig=cat&sorigid=0&dimvals=0&ui=6c47c0957fdb4b65a64ba2cbe037088f&searchstring=forgiveness>

Together look at the artwork “Forgiveness.” Ask: *What do you think is happening in this picture? Who might be saying “I’m sorry”? Who might be saying “I forgive you”?*

Invite learners to tell about times when they have said “I’m sorry” or “I forgive you.” Be sure to tell a story of your own. Remind the group that Jesus gives us advice about getting along with others. Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 13:34. Review together the feelings they might experience when treating others with love and kindness, and the feelings they might have when they are unkind or do something that hurts others.

Wonder together how feelings of guilt and shame might be a blessing. For example, guilt and shame keep us on the right track; they point out that we have done something wrong; they point out that we need to make things right. Explain that feelings of guilt and shame also can make us feel miserable.

To start a conversation about the importance of apologizing and forgiving in letting go of these feelings, say: *Think of a time when you were ashamed of something you did or felt guilty about the way you treated someone. What did you do to try to make the situation better? What did the other person do?*

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 4:32. Pray aloud: *God, we want to love one another as Jesus loved us, but sometimes we don't. Give us the courage to say, "I'm sorry" when we have been unkind. Give us the love to say "I forgive you" to those who are sorry for hurting us. Amen.*



Exploration: Christian Tradition



7 Francis Bernadone, Blessed and Blessing (Easy Preparation) (Exploring & Engaging)

Leader preparation: Be prepared to read the story of Francis given below.

Supplies:

- drawing paper, crayons or markers

Invite the group to listen to a story about a man named Francis Bernadone who lived in the town of Assisi in Italy almost a thousand years ago. Tell the story below:

What a Change!

Young Francis Bernadone was blessed with a good life. His father was a wealthy merchant who sold expensive cloth in a town in Italy. Francis was able to go to school and spend time with his friends joking, singing, and playing the lute. Francis spent lots of money on parties and clothes.

When a war started, Francis and his friends joined the army and rode into battle with dreams of glory in their heads. However, they lost the battle, and they were captured and put in prison. Francis had plenty of time to think in that cold, damp prison. By the time his father bought his freedom, Francis had decided to change his ways.

Walking near his home one day, Francis noticed a church in ruins, and stopped to pray. He felt God was calling him to rebuild that church, but he had no money of his own. He took cloth from his father's store and sold it to get money for the repairs. His father was furious, hauled him up before the church leaders, and accused him of being a thief.

Right then and there Francis stripped off all his fine clothes and jewelry and laid them at his father's feet. He gave up his wealth, left his family, and became a traveling preacher. He had only one simple robe to wear. When he was hungry, he begged for food from those he met. Francis imagined that this was how Jesus' disciples lived, too. Other men joined Francis. Together they went around caring for people who were sick and poor, even the people with leprosy who had been abandoned by others. Everywhere they went, Francis joyfully preached about the love of God to the people, animals, and birds in God's world.

Ask the participants to talk about their reactions to Francis and the choices he made:

- Why did Francis let go of the wealth and privileges he had?
- What blessings do you think Francis found in his new way of living?

- What do you think his father thought about the changes that Francis made?

Summarize by suggesting that Francis chose to be a blessing to others, especially those in need. He was trying to follow the way of Jesus.

Pass out drawing paper and crayons or markers and invite learners to illustrate their favorite part of the story about Francis. They might want to draw two pictures, one to show how Francis lived before he went to prison and the other to show how he lived after that. If there is time, invite them to show their pictures to the group.

As learners work, encourage them to name people today who let go of personal things they enjoy in order to be a blessing to others. Be ready with some examples, such as:

- a boy gives up some of his free time each week to help students who just learning English
- a girl who gives up the chance to go to a movie with a friend in order to play her cello for residents in a retirement home
- a boy who gives up getting the cat he wants because his sister is allergic to cats
- a girl who gives up free time on a Saturday afternoon to help a grandparent

Conclude with a prayer: *God, bless us and guide us to be a blessing to others. Amen.*

8 All Souls' Day: A Time to Remember (Sending & Serving)

Leader preparation: Read Hebrews 11:1--12:2. Ask your pastor how your church celebrates All Saints' Day (November 1). Cut cloud shapes from white and gray artwork board. The shapes should be large enough for learners to decorate with pictures, words, or symbols representing a deceased loved one, neighbor, or member of the congregation. Make a sample cloud, representing one of your loved ones who has died. Plan how to suspend the cloud shapes from the ceiling of your meeting area.

Supplies:

- Bible
- artwork board, scissors
- markers
- paper hole punch
- fishing line or nylon thread

One of the days Christians celebrate during the church year is All Saints' Day. Invite the children to tell what they know about this day. (Some may know it as the day after Halloween and that it is a day to remember those who have died.) Recall how Christians have faith in what Jesus taught—when we die, it is not the end of our lives but the beginning of a new life with God, a spiritual life. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Hebrews 12:1. Invite comments and questions about this verse, affirming that even adults do not fully understand this mysterious and wonderful gift of life after death. Explain that God's Spirit connects us with those who have died and gone on before us. We feel their spiritual presence in our church.

Explain that on All Saints' Day, Christians remember men and women of great faith, from Bible times to the present, who served God. We give thanks for their lives and pray we may be as faithful. On the next day, November 2, some Christians celebrate All Souls' Day, a time to remember that this "cloud of witnesses" around us includes many ordinary people who lived as faithful Christians and made this world a better place. Their names are often unknown, except to those who loved them.

The custom of celebrating All Souls' Day began in a church in Cluny, France, around 1000 years ago. Over the next 300 years the custom spread to southern and eastern Europe and to the British Isles. In some communities church members place evergreen wreaths on the graves of loved ones and say prayers of thanks for those who have died. Some families remember their loved ones by cooking their favorite foods, looking at their pictures, reading their favorite stories, singing their favorite songs, playing games they liked, and sharing memories.

Invite the group to pretend that today is All Souls' Day. You are going to remember loved ones who are part of that "cloud of witnesses" surrounding us. Show the "cloud" you have made for your loved one. Invite the learners to think of a person who has died who was important to them—a family member, neighbor, or friend. *Note:* If there are learners who have not experienced the death of someone close to them, suggest they work with another learner on his or her cloud.

Have each learner choose a cloud shape and write the name of the person they are remembering on it. Encourage them to use words or draw pictures to show the things that person liked: favorite songs, stories, foods, games, places, colors. Have each include a picture of a favorite experience they shared with this person. Help learners punch a hole in the top of each cloud and add a length of fishing line or nylon thread for hanging from the ceiling.

When all have finished, invite learners to show their clouds and tell about one thing on it. Work together to hang up your "cloud of witnesses."

Close with a prayer: *God, for all those faithful Christians who have died, and for those who are living, we give you thanks. Surround us with their love, and encourage us to follow their example. Amen.*



Exploration: Context and Mission

🕉 Self-Control: Skits (Discerning & Deciding)

Leader preparation: Things happen that embarrass or hurt children's feelings and make them feel angry or sad. They need help in learning how to live with these uncomfortable feelings. They can learn that, while they cannot control everything that happens, they *can* control how they will respond. Developing self-control is a challenge Christians of all ages face in growing into a mature faith.

Read Colossians 3:12–14 and Galatians 5:22, 23b. Print the following list of situations on newsprint or a whiteboard:

When I eat my favorite pizza, I feel . . .
When I spill ketchup all over my shirt at lunch, I feel . . .
When I meet someone new at church camp, I feel . . .
When I lose my cell phone, I feel . . .
When my parents tell me that I can't do something I really want to do, I feel . . .
When my best friend moves away, I feel . . .
When the coach chooses someone else for the team, I feel . . .
When there is a bad storm during the night, I feel . . .

Write each of these responses on a separate index card:

talk to a grownup friend
punch a pillow
yell in the shower
play the piano
beat on a drum
write in a journal
go for a run or fast walk
mow the lawn
clean my room
pray
listen to music

Supplies:

- marker and newsprint or whiteboard
- index cards, pen

Gather the group around the list on the newsprint or whiteboard. Read the statements one at a time, inviting learners to complete each one. Accept all comments, and be careful that no one's feelings are mocked or judged.

Summarize the conversation by noting that we can't always change what happens, but we can choose how we will respond. Invite learners to draw an index card and read the response there to the group. For each response, ask learners who have tried it to stand up.

Form pairs. Without telling the others, ask each pair to choose one situation on the newsprint and one response card. The pair can then plan how to act out the situation and the response. After learners have shared their skits, talk together about people they can trust to listen to their feelings without making fun of them.

Conclude with a prayer: *God, you have blessed us with the ability to have feelings of all kinds. Be with us in every situation, guiding our words and our actions. Amen.*

10 Saying Goodbye (Sending & Serving)

Leader preparation: Life is full of goodbyes. A child is left in a babysitter's care for the first time, another goes off to preschool or kindergarten. An older child goes to a sleepover or a week at camp. Youth go on band or choir trips. Family members and friends move away or are lost to accidents, illness, divorce, or death. This activity is designed to help learners find positive ways to say goodbye to someone that they love.

Print this poem on newsprint:

Goodbyes are not forever.
Goodbyes are not the end.
They simply mean I'll miss you
until we meet again!
—Author Unknown

Choose a project that is most appropriate for the needs of your group: writing a poem about saying goodbye or, if you have a group member who is moving, making a goodbye scrapbook. With parents' permission, make a list of the mailing and e-mail addresses of group members to include in the scrapbook.

Supplies:

- lined paper, pencils, markers
- scrapbooking materials; digital camera, photo printer
- song: "Shalom Chaverim," Traditional Hebrew blessing (tune: Shalom), <http://www.musickit.com/resources/shalomchaver.html>; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2pm6XGvnncc>

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the poem on the newsprint. Invite learners to tell about the times they have said "goodbye" during the past week. Wonder together why sometimes it is harder to say goodbye than other times. Ask: *How do you feel about goodbyes?* Learners who have experienced divorce or military deployments in their family, or have experienced the death of a loved one, may respond in a different way than those who are sad at friend's moving away.

Goodbyes are sad for those who are leaving and those who are staying, but goodbyes do not mean that a relationship is over. We can still keep in touch, even when we are no longer together. And we can say goodbye with a special gift.

Introduce the project you have chosen.

Option 1: Form pairs or work individually to write a poem about saying goodbye. It might be funny or sad. Learners can illustrate the page with the poem with markers.

Option 2: Use scrapbooking materials to create a colorful first page of a farewell scrapbook and then add pages with learners' names and contact information (if parents allow). If this is not possible, have each learner write or draw a special memory on a page to include in the book. Together, write a goodbye prayer and blessing for the last page. Staple the pages together.

Close by singing "Shalom Chaverim."



Exploration: Future and Vision

11 A Blessing: Dramatizing the Story (Easy Preparation) (Exploring & Engaging)

Leader preparation: Read Luke 2:22–38. Prepare to tell the story in your own words.

Supplies:

- Bible
- (optional) props for dramatizing: baby doll wrapped in a blanket, dish towels to make head coverings, cane or walker
- marker and newsprint or whiteboard

The Gospel of Luke has a story about a blessing Jesus received when he was a baby. Read aloud the story in Luke 2:22–38 or tell it in your own words.

When you finish the story, invite children to ask any questions they have about it. Ask learners to name and describe the main characters. Record the list of characters on newsprint or a whiteboard. If it is helpful, read or tell the story a second time. On newsprint or a whiteboard, list the order of the action in the story: Parents bring Jesus. Simeon recognizes and blesses Jesus. Anna praises God for gift of Jesus. Parents leave with Jesus.

Invite the group to act out this story. Encourage suggestions for improvising dialogue that tells something about each character. For example, Simeon could say, “It’s about time he showed up. God has kept me waiting here long enough.” Ask how the children might use the props, if any props are available. Assign parts, with the group’s help. Since there were probably others in the temple watching the action, other learners could be bystanders. Be ready to give each one a name and a character, such as Leah, a mother, with her children. Let learners act out the story in their own words, prompting as necessary. If there is time, try it again with different role assignments.

End with a prayer: *O God, let us go in peace, for we too know Jesus as your Promised One. Amen.*

12 In the Bulb There Is a Flower (Sending & Serving)

Leader preparation: Read the following information about Natalie Sleeth and choose what may be interesting to tell the children.

Natalie Allyn Wakeley Sleeth was gifted both as a poet and a musician. Born into a musical family in Evanston, Illinois, in 1930, she began taking piano lessons at age four, participated in various choirs and ensembles in school, and graduated from Wellesley College with a B.A. in music theory. She married Ronald A. Sleeth, a United Methodist pastor and professor of homiletics, and served as an organist and children’s choir director in churches in the university communities in which they lived. A line from a poem by T. S. Eliot inspired Natalie Sleeth to write “In the Bulb There Is a Flower,” a song whose theme is something like “in our end is our beginning.” At the time

Natalie had been contemplating the changing of the seasons, life and death, Good Friday and Easter. It seemed to her that in the apparent opposites in life (death/resurrection, song/silence, seed/tree, winter/spring) one opposite is inherent in the other, though unseen, and will be revealed in God's own time. She even bought a yellow tulip plant to look at as she pondered the idea of a bulb leading to a flower, though the bulb itself seemed dead.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35–58, the text of which she used so carefully in her composition, comparing the mysteries of new life in nature with the mystery of death and resurrection. Plan to show the video of the hymn to the group.

Supplies:

- song: "In the Bulb There Is a Flower," by Natalie Sleeth (tune: Promise), http://www.hymnary.org/text/in_a_bulb_there_is_a_flower; music video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkWYubdnc7o>
- computer, projector or monitor
- markers and newsprint or whiteboard
- apples, enough for each learner to have one-fourth of an apple
- knife, cutting board, napkins

Gather everyone in a circle. Choose one person to be "It." "It" stands in the middle of the circle, points to a learner, says a word, and counts quickly from 1 to 10. If the person in the circle says an opposite word (a word that has an entirely different meaning) before "It" finishes counting, he or she becomes "It" for the next round. If this person fails to name an opposite in time, the first "It" has another turn. The game proceeds until all have had a turn. If a younger child needs help, whisper a suggestion in his or her ear. End the game by asking the group to name the opposite of "ending" ("beginning.")

Invite the group to listen to a hymn that uses pairs of opposites. Natalie Sleeth, who wrote both the words and the music, got the idea for her hymn from this line in a poem: "In our end is our beginning." Encourage children to listen for pairs of opposites in the hymn and raise hands when hearing a pair of opposites mentioned. Play the music video of the hymn.

After listening to the song, list the pairs of opposites learners have identified on newsprint or a whiteboard. Cut the apples in fourths, and give each learner a piece on a napkin. Have the children look at the seeds in their apples. *What will happen if we plant the seeds in good earth and water them?*

Explain that an apple seed looks dead to us, but God knows that the seed is not an end but a beginning. If it is planted and given proper care, it can become an apple tree that will bear more apples some day. Long ago, a follower of Jesus named Paul wrote a letter to his friends at Corinth to help them understand this mystery of death and life. He told them that when we die and are buried, it is not our end but the beginning of a new life with God. We are changed into something new and wonderful, just like a seed that looks dead becomes a beautiful apple tree.

Eat the apples and conclude with a prayer: *Thank you, God, for blessing us with life on earth, and when we die, blessing us with new life with you. Amen.*

Reflect

How did people respond to the activities you selected for this event, or events? Was there enough variety to interest all ages? How effective was the event in helping participants grow in their understanding of immigrant issues and the needs of individual immigrants? In what ways might your church further pursue this subject?

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