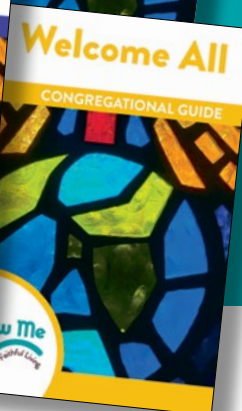
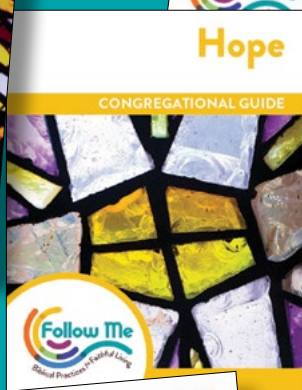
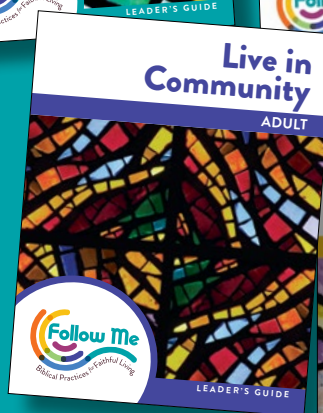
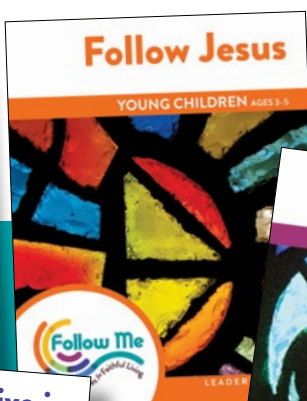


INTRODUCING

A NEW CURRICULUM
FOR YOUR WHOLE
CHURCH



A living faith is so much more than simply believing in God. Jesus called all sorts of people to follow him to God, showing concrete ways to love God and one another. When we do these actions together, faith develops, lives change, and communities transform.



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Introduction

Following Jesus is a lifelong journey where we learn and do what Jesus said and did. It takes more than the head, checking off boxes of belief. It even takes more than the heart, feeling deeply about another person or a cause. Following Jesus is about these things and more. It is also about doing. And it takes practice. And practice. And more practice. We are not practicing for perfection, however, but practicing to put faith and love into action. As we explore faith practices, we are diving into the essence of what makes us Christian, those who follow the one who practiced what he preached!

Follow Me: Biblical Practices for Faithful Living is a curriculum that spans thirty-six units over three years, helping people of all ages follow Jesus. This study is for lifelong Christians and those beginning to ask questions. Each unit centers around something Jesus told his followers to do. Take a look at the list of practices. You will notice many familiar words associated with the Christian faith and, to be honest, with just being a good person. Jesus, however, took these well-known behaviors, feelings, and attitudes and showed those around him—people throughout history, and us today—how we can love God and love others. In each unit, aspects of the practice are explored; biblical stories illustrate them and how the Christian community has understood them through more than two thousand years. More important, there are ample opportunities for you to practice these actions, both individually and in community.

Some other Bible studies may overwhelm us with complex matters of doctrine or a list of prescriptive behaviors: what we should believe and who can belong to our community. But followers of Jesus were attracted to him because of his actions: he welcomed everyone, he spoke truth to power, and he invited all to follow him to God. It was later, after following him, that some came to believe he was indeed the Messiah, God's messenger, the Christ. Faith develops as we practice following what Jesus did, embodied, and taught.

A foundational essay on this unit's practice is included in each age-level leader's guide, the *Congregational Guide*, and the *Adult Reflection Guide*. It is written by a biblical expert with both the learned and the new explorer in mind. It provokes deep thought, and yet is quite understandable. It is bonus reading that we think you will enjoy. Many of its ideas are reflected in the sessions of the unit.

May this study and your practices of faith strengthen you and help you live a life of discipleship!

Most studies are four sessions in length. A few studies are six sessions, making them ideal for study during the six weeks of Lent, before Easter. Three units are available each quarter, and will remain available to form a library of studies. You may use the units in this fashion or create your own sequence based on your needs.



A living faith is so much more than simply believing in God. Jesus called all sorts of people to follow him to God, showing concrete ways to love God and one another. When we do these actions together, faith develops, lives change, and communities transform.

Follow Me: Biblical Practices for Faithful Living is a thirty-six-unit curriculum based on practices Jesus did and taught us to do as faithful followers. Written for people of all ages who wish to live out their faith, this new curriculum examines where these practices are found in the Bible and how they have been used in Christian faith then and now.

COMPONENTS

- ✦ Leader's guides for young children (ages 3–5), multiage children (ages 6–10), youth (11–18), and adults
- ✦ *Adult Reflection Guide*
- ✦ *Congregational Guide*
- ✦ Infographic poster sets



LEADER'S GUIDE SESSION PLAN

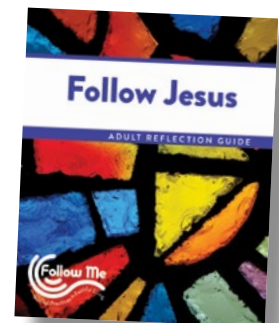
The flow of the session is the same for all ages.

- **Getting Started** provides an opening ritual for each session.
- **Introducing the Practice** invites participants to encounter an aspect of the practice.
- **Finding the Practice in the Bible** explores how the practice was lived by Jesus (Gospels), his faith tradition (Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures), and his followers (New Testament).

- **Finding the Practice All Around Us** (for children and in the intergenerational session) or **Finding the Practice Then and Now** (for youth and adults) names how the practice has been lived out by Christians through the centuries.
- **Practicing the Practice** provides activities to try out the practice.
- **Following Jesus** sends participants out to follow Jesus.

ADULT REFLECTION GUIDE

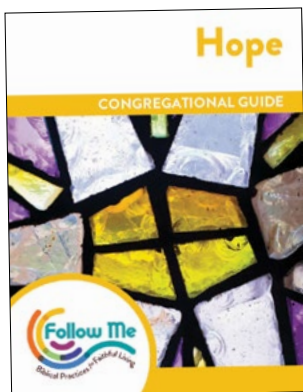
Think of the *Adult Reflection Guide* as a workbook or journal for adults. It has the same session flow as other age groups, but it is filled with information about the practice. This guide engages adults through study, reflection questions, space for writing or drawing, and suggestions for practicing the practice. It is available only in print because it is meant to be written in!



The *Adult Reflection Guide* may be used in an adult study group along with the Adult Leader's Guide. It is also a great resource for individuals who wish to learn about a practice as a self-study or who are unable to attend group meetings.

www.pcusastore.com/FollowMeCurriculum

YEAR 1 PRACTICES (2021–2022)	YEAR 2 PRACTICES (2022–2023)	YEAR 3 PRACTICES (2023–2024)
Available July 2021 Follow Jesus Welcome All Confess	Available July 2022 Honor Sabbath Pray Forgive	Available July 2023 Take Up Your Cross Worship God Feed Others
Available October 2021 Hope Baptize Live in Community	Available October 2022 Announce the Realm of God Lament Do Justice	Available October 2023 Sing a New Song Do Not Fear Comfort Those Who Mourn
Available January 2022 Practice Spiritual Disciplines (six sessions, ideal for Lent) Practice Joy Honor God's Diversity	Available January 2023 Love God, Neighbor, Enemy (six sessions, ideal for Lent) Celebrate Communion Break Boundaries	Available January 2024 Use Spiritual Gifts (six sessions, ideal for Lent) Share the Good News Serve Others
Available April 2022 Renounce Evil Make Peace Practice Generosity	Available April 2023 Make Disciples Care for Creation Walk Humbly	Available April 2024 Heal the Sick Practice Gratitude Speak the Truth

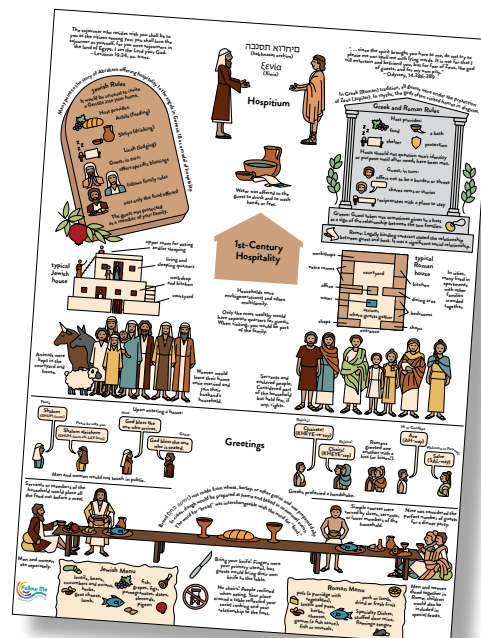


CONGREGATIONAL GUIDE
The *Congregational Guide* provides materials for the pastor, educator, and church leaders to connect the practice with congregational worship and life. Faith communities with a limited educational program may use this resource to plan a congregational focus on each practice.

Follow Me: Biblical Practices for Faithful Living is for worshipping communities of any size, both seekers and longtime disciples, people of all ages, and all denominations.

INFOGRAPHIC POSTERS

Sets of twelve 18" x 24" full-color posters are available in print or download. Individual posters in download format can be found at www.pcusastore.com/FollowMeCurriculum. The Bible Basics Set can be used with any Bible study group. The Follow Me Set includes one poster for each practice in a year.



PRICING INFORMATION

(per unit pricing)

Congregational Guide	\$45	\$40D
Adult Leader's Guide	\$15	\$12D
Adult Reflection Guide (print only)	\$8	N/A
Youth Leader's Guide	\$35	\$30D
Multiage Children Leader's Guide	\$35	\$30D
Young Children Leader's Guide	\$35	\$30D
Infographic Poster Sets (12 posters)	\$80	\$70D
Individual Infographic Poster (download only)	N/A	\$10D

Infographic Posters

Bible Basics Set

FM0000 FM0000D

Individual Posters (download only)

Books of the Bible	FM000AD
Books of the Old Testament	FM000BD
Books of the New Testament	FM000CD
Ten Commandments	FM000DD
The Old Testament Stories	FM000ED
The Prophets	FM000FD
The Gospels	FM000GD
Stories of Jesus and the Early Church	FM000HD
Stories and Parables of Jesus	FM000JD
The Holy Spirit	FM000KD
Sacraments	FM000LD
Lord's Prayer	FM000MD

Follow Me Year 1 Set

FM0001 FM0001D

Individual Posters (download only)

Follow Jesus	FM0001AD
Welcome All	FM0001BD
Confess	FM0001CD
Hope	FM0001DD
Baptize	FM0001ED
Live in Community	FM0001FD
Practice Spiritual Disciplines	FM0001GD
Practice Joy	FM0001HD
Honor God's Diversity	FM0001JD
Renounce Evil	FM0001KD
Make Peace	FM0001LD
Practice Generosity	FM0001MD

YEAR 1 PRACTICES (2021–2022)

<i>Available July 2021</i>	<i>Print</i>	<i>Download</i>	<i>Available January 2022</i>	<i>Print</i>	<i>Download</i>
Follow Jesus			Practice Spiritual Disciplines (six sessions)		
Young Children	FM0101	FM0101D	Young Children	FM0701	FM0701D
Multiage Children	FM0102	FM0102D	Multiage Children	FM0702	FM0702D
Youth	FM0103	FM0103D	Youth	FM0703	FM0703D
Adult	FM0104	FM0104D	Adult	FM0704	FM0704D
Adult Reflection Guide	FM0105		Adult Reflection Guide	FM0705	
Congregational Guide	FM0106	FM0106D	Congregational Guide	FM0706	FM0706D
Welcome All			Practice Joy		
Young Children	FM0201	FM0201D	Young Children	FM0801	FM0801D
Multiage Children	FM0202	FM0202D	Multiage Children	FM0802	FM0802D
Youth	FM0203	FM0203D	Youth	FM0803	FM0803D
Adult	FM0204	FM0204D	Adult	FM0804	FM0804D
Adult Reflection Guide	FM0205		Adult Reflection Guide	FM0805	
Congregational Guide	FM0206	FM0206D	Congregational Guide	FM0806	FM0806D
Confess			Honor God's Diversity		
Young Children	FM0301	FM0301D	Young Children	FM0901	FM0901D
Multiage Children	FM0302	FM0302D	Multiage Children	FM0902	FM0902D
Youth	FM0303	FM0303D	Youth	FM0903	FM0903D
Adult	FM0304	FM0304D	Adult	FM0904	FM0904D
Adult Reflection Guide	FM0305		Adult Reflection Guide	FM0905	
Congregational Guide	FM0306	FM0306D	Congregational Guide	FM0906	FM0906D
<i>Available October 2021</i>			<i>Available April 2022</i>		
Hope			Renounce Evil		
Young Children	FM0401	FM0401D	Young Children	FM1001	FM1001D
Multiage Children	FM0402	FM0402D	Multiage Children	FM1002	FM1002D
Youth	FM0403	FM0403D	Youth	FM1003	FM1003D
Adult	FM0404	FM0404D	Adult	FM1004	FM1004D
Adult Reflection Guide	FM0405		Adult Reflection Guide	FM1005	
Congregational Guide	FM0406	FM0406D	Congregational Guide	FM1006	FM1006D
Baptize			Make Peace		
Young Children	FM0501	FM0501D	Young Children	FM1101	FM1101D
Multiage Children	FM0502	FM0502D	Multiage Children	FM1102	FM1102D
Youth	FM0503	FM0503D	Youth	FM1103	FM1103D
Adult	FM0504	FM0504D	Adult	FM1104	FM1104D
Adult Reflection Guide	FM0505		Adult Reflection Guide	FM1105	
Congregational Guide	FM0506	FM0506D	Congregational Guide	FM1106	FM1106D
Live in Community			Practice Generosity		
Young Children	FM0601	FM0601D	Young Children	FM1201	FM1201D
Multiage Children	FM0602	FM0602D	Multiage Children	FM1202	FM1202D
Youth	FM0603	FM0603D	Youth	FM1203	FM1203D
Adult	FM0604	FM0604D	Adult	FM1204	FM1204D
Adult Reflection Guide	FM0605		Adult Reflection Guide	FM1205	
Congregational Guide	FM0606	FM0606D	Congregational Guide	FM1206	FM1206D

YEAR 2 PRACTICES: 2022–2023

YEAR 3 PRACTICES: 2023–2024

HOW TO ORDER EACH UNIT (PRACTICE)—PREORDERING WILL BE AVAILABLE IN MARCH.

1. **Choose the age-level leader's guides, *Adult Reflection Guide*, and *Congregational Guide* that you need.** Curriculum has been conveniently packaged for ease of ordering. Remember to order infographic posters or poster sets separately.

Small-Scale Package Includes:		Large-Scale Package Includes:		Individual Guides:	
1 Congregational Guide		1 Congregational Guide		Congregational Guide	\$45 \$40D
1 Multiage Children Leader's Guide		1 Young Children Leader's Guide		Young Children	\$35 \$30D
1 Adult Leader's Guide		1 Multiage Children Leader's Guide		Leader's Guide	
5 Adult Reflection Guides (print only)		1 Youth Leader's Guide		Multiage Children	\$35 \$30D
		1 Adult Leader's Guide		Leader's Guide	
Small-Scale Package:	\$120 \$100D	10 Adult Reflection Guides (print only)		Youth Leader's Guide	\$35 \$30D
		Large-Scale Package:	\$220 \$200D	Adult Leader's Guide	\$15 \$12D
				Adult Reflection Guide	\$8 N/A
				(print only)	

Adult Reflection Guides:

- These can be ordered individually. Order one *Adult Reflection Guide* for each adult participant.
- Bulk pricing is available: 10 or more for \$7/guide, 25 or more for \$6.50/guide.

Infographic Poster Sets:

- There is one infographic poster for each unit (practice) available in a year (twelve posters).
- Poster sets for each year (Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3) can be purchased in print or download format.
- Individual infographic posters are available only in download format.
- A helpful Bible Basics infographic poster set is also available (12 posters).

2. Choose your format.

Print Curriculum

Print pieces will be shipped to you once the curriculum is published and your order is processed.

- Individual unit posters are available only in download format.

Download Curriculum

Download pieces will be available immediately when the item is published. To download your product, go to your account page, click on the Products and Downloads section, and then click on the title of the resource you want to download.

- *Adult Reflection Guides* are available only in print form.

3. Place your order.

Go to www.pcusastore.com/curriculum to place your order online.

Call our customer service team Monday to Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m. EST at 800-533-4371.

www.pcusastore.com/FollowMeCurriculum



SAMPLE SESSION



FOUNDATIONAL ESSAY

Each practice is based on a foundational essay written by a biblical scholar. The essays explore what the practice means and identify aspects or dimensions of the practice with biblical examples. They also tell how it has been practiced in the life of Christians then and now. These essays guide curriculum writers and are placed in every piece of the curriculum for optional reading by leaders. Preachers may use them to develop a sermon series.

WORSHIP HELPS

Find hymn and song suggestions with a brief explanation of their context, ideas for ways to incorporate the practice into the worship setting, and prayers and litanies for parts of worship. Pastors, musicians, worship leaders, worship committees, and faith formation leaders will find these to be extremely useful.

CAFÉ DISCUSSION GUIDE

Café Discussion Guides provide a self-guided, brief (two-sided, single page) study for each aspect of the practice. These no-prep, easy-to-lead sessions are perfect for college and young adult groups, church council meetings, retreats, women's or men's groups, and informal social gatherings. Any participant may lead them with little preparation.

INTERGENERATIONAL SESSION

Each practice offers one intergenerational session, or event, to explore and practice the practice as a whole church. This session varies according to unit. It may be suggested to use it to kick off or wrap up the unit, or it may be your choice when to use it. It may be around a meal, a special season of the church year, a service opportunity, or in a Sunday school setting.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Take note of what is going on in each age level with these highlights from the curriculum.

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE AT HOME

A reproducible page to copy (or email from the downloadable curriculum) for families with suggestions to practice the practice at home. Ideas for families with younger children, older children, and mixed ages are included. This page is also provided in the Young Children and Multiage Children Leader's Guides.

CHILDREN'S WORSHIP BULLETINS

A fun activity page to welcome children in worship is provided for each week of the unit with practice ideas, a game, an adapted Bible story, and a coloring picture. These special children's leaflets connect their worship experience to the practice.

INFOGRAPHIC POSTERS

First-century hospitality is the theme of the infographic poster for the *Welcome All* unit. It explores Jewish and Roman/Greek customs of welcome, the expectations of hosts and guests, common greetings, and table hospitality.

Infographic posters provide additional information to engage learners of all ages. Posters (18" x 24") are available for purchase: as a twelve-poster set (one of each practice each year) in print or download; as individual posters, download only. For more information, see page 6.

Foundational Essay

WELCOME OTHERS

LYNNE BAAB

INTRODUCTION

If Christians are known for anything, it is how we welcome others. Greeters welcome visitors and members to worship with a smile and a handshake or hug. Churches enthusiastically proclaim that all are welcome to our worship community. We take extra efforts to make others comfortable, especially those who are new or visiting. Communal meals seem to happen all the time, providing an inviting space for all to share food and fellowship.

A helpful definition of Christian hospitality lays out the gift and challenge of this practice. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes, “Hospitality creates a safe, open place where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another.”¹

Welcoming others is certainly core to the Christian life. It is not always so easy to practice, however, even with those we love the most. It can be a joy, but it can also be a challenge to create that open, safe space, especially when people impinge on our own comfort levels or are different or feared. This essay invites you to reflect on various dimensions of welcoming others as we strive to follow Christ and practice welcoming others the way Jesus did.

At the very heart of hospitality is a commitment to welcome one another, those who are like us and those who are not. The God we learn about in the Bible and from our faith ancestors desires a loving relationship with us. This relationship goes both ways; it’s not just one sided. There are responsibilities for both parties. In the Old Testament, we learn about God’s continual establishment of covenants with people. God promises to be with people and protect them if they, in turn, protect the vulnerable (i.e., provide hospitality) in their midst. People continually fail to live up to their side of the pact, and covenant is broken. The prophets continually remind people they are not living up to their part of the bargain and may lose God’s favor. After some time and much grief, God approaches them again, offering to be their God if they will, in turn, protect others.

“Hospitality creates a safe, open place where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another.”¹

The “Foundational Essay” is included in each leader’s guide, the *Adult Reflection Guide*, and the *Congregational Guide*.

1. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 161.

Jesus had a lot to say about hospitality as he had learned about it in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it was a central practice in his life and teachings. He was often dependent on the hospitality of others, and biblical accounts of his visits show how hospitality is sometimes more complex than a host inviting someone in for dinner. Sometimes, the guest turns out to be the host. The seemingly unequal relationship of host and guest gets blurred as relationships deepen.

The practice of hospitality was, and still is, a matter of survival in societies where refugees and travelers were dependent on the host society to provide safety and lodging. In the ancient world, welcoming and providing hospitality was not just an option. Hospitality was—and in many places still is—deeply embedded in the culture.

We live in a time when social expectations of hospitality and welcome can no longer be taken for granted. No one is immune from the possibility of being uprooted and dependent on the mercy of others when disasters strike. Pandemics such as the recent coronavirus remind us of how vulnerable we all are. Global climate change, wars, and economic crisis have all initiated a new wave of global migration, forcing many to move to new lands in order to survive. The absence of pervasive social expectations related to hospitality, along with the great needs many people experience today, has created a climate where the Bible's teaching about hospitality is more relevant than ever.

Let's look at four core aspects of Christian hospitality:

- ✦ Welcome others as God welcomes you.
- ✦ See Christ in every person you meet: friend, stranger, enemy.
- ✦ Know your gifts of hospitality and encourage others' gifts.
- ✦ Challenge "othering."

WELCOME OTHERS AS GOD WELCOMES YOU


In his life and teachings, hospitality was central to Jesus and his Jewish faith. As a Jew, he was informed by the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) and frequently lifted up its imperative to welcome strangers. Hospitality is central to the history of ancient Israel and found throughout our Scriptures.

Perhaps the place to begin is the beginning. The two biblical accounts of creation (Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–25) emphasize different aspects of God's actions. The first story describes how God created every living thing and saw that it was good. God affirms everything and everyone. In the second account, God places the two humans, Adam and Eve, in a garden and tells them to take care of everything.


In both creation stories, humans, like all other living things, are created and welcomed by God. A relationship is established. So a fundamental truth about hospitality is that we can welcome others only because we have first been welcomed and had a place prepared for us by God. The writer of Psalm 8 marveled at the fact that, considering the incredible splendor of the universe, God would even pay attention to mortals.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
—Psalm 8:3–4

A fundamental truth about hospitality is that we can welcome others only because we have first been welcomed and had a place prepared for us by God.



Hospitality is not a choice for Christians. It is part of our covenant with God. God welcomes us, and we are to welcome others. *All* others.



We belong here. We all do. This attitude is essential when we find ourselves in the position of host. We avoid any feelings of superiority over the guests because, at heart, we believe them to be fellow creatures who have been created by God and are loved by God as we are. We treat them as we want to be treated when we are the vulnerable guests.

Welcoming others may seem relatively simple when we offer hospitality to people who look like us or pose no threat. But what about those outside our comfort zone, whatever that zone is? This was a common situation in ancient societies, where travel and immigration often forced people to cross other people's land or temporarily reside there. Rules of hospitality arose to protect both hosts and guests. Hosts were obligated to receive guests, but only for a certain amount of time. And guests were expected to follow some rules while knowing they were within their rights to expect accommodation. In ancient Israel, these rules were taken very seriously. Many stories in the Old Testament illustrate how hospitality worked, and God's insistence that the vulnerable be protected.

One theme that recurs throughout the Hebrew Scriptures relates to the Exodus.

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.


—Leviticus 19:33–34

God kept reminding the ancient Israelites to remember that God had rescued them from slavery when they found themselves in a foreign country, forced to provide free labor for the king. Eventually God heard their cries for help and led them to Israel. The book of Exodus tells that they had once been oppressed aliens; they were to treat others well, especially others who were oppressed or living at the margins, including widows, orphans, those who were sick or poor, and immigrants.


Centuries later, when the Israelites were forced to evacuate their country and live in another foreign land, many biblical prophets believed this (the exile) occurred because Israel had failed to provide hospitality to the vulnerable. So, in a way, for Christians, hospitality isn't a choice. It's just part of who we are and what we do. We welcome others as God has welcomed us and made part of our covenant together.

Jesus was formed in this tradition where hospitality was taught as a religious principle. And he carried it out in his entire ministry. Time and again in the Gospel stories, we see Jesus befriending strangers and defending those who are marginalized and blamed for their condition. He insisted on welcoming children. He embodied our definition of *hospitality* by being that safe, open place where friends and strangers alike could enter. Christians are called to model ourselves after Jesus, remembering God's abundant provision for us in creation and God's desire to walk with us in intimate relationship. When we know that we have been profoundly welcomed by our Creator and by Jesus, our Redeemer, we can extend an honest, rich, abundant, and expansive welcome to others whom God created.

Congregations can create climates of welcome by extending a warm welcome to visitors and strangers, at the door and in the pews Sunday morning. This can take many additional creative forms, including:



Jesus disrupted many cultural and religious practices as he welcomed and related to many people considered outsiders, including children.



- The use of a variety of languages in worship services, such as in the welcome, singing, Scripture readings, and prayers
- Signage in several languages
- Providing accessibility for people with disabilities
- Meals for people far from home, especially on holidays
- Support groups for people who are vulnerable, such as people with disabilities or people who are LGBTQ+

In addition, congregations often look beyond their own faith community to discover needs in their city or region. Some congregations conduct demographic studies to reveal patterns of vulnerability. Many congregations engage in ministries to international students, refugees, migrants, people experiencing homelessness, and other vulnerable groups.

Today we are called to remember God's welcome to all humans and animals. We are called to extend a welcome to everyone, including strangers, others who experience need, and those on the margins of society.

SEE CHRIST IN EVERY PERSON YOU MEET: FRIEND, STRANGER, ENEMY

The second aspect to consider as we welcome others is related to the first but takes it a step farther. The first aspect reminds us to treat all others as fellow creatures of God. We especially look out for the vulnerable as we remember God cares for all. This second dimension of hospitality really gets at the type of relationships we begin to form when we welcome others or are welcomed by others. Being a host often brings a wonderful surprise. When we welcome others, we often benefit from the relationship as much as or more than those we welcome. How often do groups returning from mission trips report that they were given much more than they provided? They thought they were going to give of their plenty to those without, yet the reverse seems to happen.

Toward the end of his life on earth, Jesus tells his disciples about the future day "when the Son of Man comes in his glory" (Matthew 25:31). All the nations will assemble before him, and he will separate all people into two groups. The ones who will inherit the "kingdom," Jesus says, are the ones who gave him food when he was hungry, clothing when he was naked, and care when he was sick. In addition, they visited Jesus when he was imprisoned.

In Jesus' story about the future, the ones who will inherit the kingdom are baffled, because they don't recall doing this for him. These bewildered "righteous ones" receive this reply: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). Jesus implies that followers are to go out and serve others on the margins of society. In so doing, they will minister to him. Think about that. What are the implications for welcome and hospitality? It seems to mean that more is required than providing a warm welcome when people come to our church. In addition, we must go out and minister to those on the margins. In so doing, we will see Christ and perhaps not even realize it.

Where are the most marginalized people in your town: Prisons? Certain sections of town? Public schools? People wandering the streets and homeless? What sort of welcome and hospitality does Matthew 25 suggest we offer to these people?

"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). Jesus implies that followers are to go out and serve others on the margins of society. In so doing, they will minister to him.

An example of this type of welcome can be found in all the many people and groups who helped enslaved African Americans escape the South during the 225 years of chattel slavery in the United States. The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and houses where individuals risked their own lives to help people they didn't know to escape to freedom in free states or Canada.

A congregation in Seattle hosts a weekly dinner that is free and open to all. Many people experiencing homelessness attend the dinner. Volunteers at the dinner report the ways that they feel blessed, week after week, by their conversations with the people who attend. The woman who directed the dinner for more than a decade is awed by the way she experienced Jesus' presence in the guests at the dinner.

Congregations can nurture an atmosphere of reflection, encouraging members to consider who are the people for whom they feel most compassion, the most discomfort, and the most dislike. These marginalized and perhaps even disliked groups of people might include those of different ages, socioeconomic strata, ethnic backgrounds, political convictions, or many other characteristics. Christians can ponder what it would look like to provide some sort of caring hospitality for someone in one of those groups. The hospitable response might be as seemingly simple as extending a warm welcome to the most irritating member of a sports team or neighborhood book club, or it might involve something as challenging as visiting a prison or traveling to the southern border of the United States to help migrants. Many Christians in the southern United States have left water and provisions in the border areas where refugees from Latin America risk death to reach safety.

When hosts and guests are open to the presence of God in each other, an unexpected and truly miraculous thing happens: God knits hearts together in new and powerful ways. This can happen with family members and friends, but seeing Jesus in everyone usually requires that we leave our comfort zones. We simply cannot be hospitable with only our own small community of people like ourselves. We need to stretch into settings where we feel vulnerable.

An ancient Celtic saying emphasizes the benefits of pushing ourselves to relate across boundaries: "Often, often, often goes the Christ in the stranger's guise."² Hebrews 13:2 encourages us to extend ourselves: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." In order to find Christ—or angels—in others most unlike ourselves, we need courage as well as community support. We cannot do this alone.

KNOW YOUR GIFTS OF HOSPITALITY AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS' GIFTS

We have to take into account our own gifts, strengths, and resources when we consider welcoming others. Some enjoy hosting people for meals in their homes. Perhaps someone doesn't have a home or feels stressed when hosting meals but enjoys volunteering at a community dinner for homeless people. Some people find it painful to greet people at church but have no problem writing follow-up notes to visitors or cooking a meal for a community gathering. None of us excels at every kind of welcoming ministry, and Jesus affirmed the diversity of hospitality gifts.

2. Kenneth Macleod, "Two Celtic Runes," *Celtic Review* 7, no. 25 (February 1911): 51.

Luke 10:38–42 tells the story of two sisters, Mary and Martha, who each possessed different gifts of hospitality. Martha had invited Jesus to her home, which probably included cooking a meal and perhaps offering him lodging. Her sister Mary was home and sat at Jesus' feet to listen to him speak. Martha was distracted by all the things she felt she needed to do to make Jesus welcome and got upset that her sister was just sitting there listening to him. Martha pointed out to Jesus that she was alone doing all of this and asked him to tell her sister to help her. Jesus replied that he had noticed Martha being worried and distracted, and Jesus affirmed Mary's listening role. Both women's actions were forms of hospitality. Martha prepared her home, and Mary paid attention to her guest. Both were necessary and contributed to the guest's welcome in the home. We need to experiment with what works for us and feels doable. The connection between giftedness and hospitality is visible in one of the New Testament letters: "Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (1 Peter 4:9–10).

Congregations can encourage their members to consider their spiritual gifts related to hospitality. For each individual, which patterns of caring come easily: Behind the scenes serving in the kitchen? Talking with newcomers? Planning events that welcome people? Organizing an outreach to the wider community? Congregation members should definitely be encouraged to serve using their spiritual gifts.

Congregations can also help members think about which groups of people on the margins pull on their hearts: the older, the younger, the hard-of-hearing, the wheelchair bound, the child, the "not dressed for church," the one who speaks with an accent. All Christians should be encouraged and equipped to answer these questions: Who are the groups and individuals for whom God has placed compassion in your heart? How can you serve them with the resources and gifts God has given you?

In addition to considering our resources, gifts, and heart compassion, we also must acknowledge that the entire Bible urges and models a kind of hospitality that requires us to stretch ourselves. Jesus asked his followers to move beyond comfort zones many times, but especially when he talked about loving our enemies: "For if you love those who love you . . . if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others?" (Matthew 5:46–47).

Christian communities must be vulnerable with each other about the challenges of a truly hospitable approach to people who are difficult for us to love. We need the prayers and support of others on this journey, and we need others' eyes to help us see the blessings we are receiving when we stretch ourselves to be hospitable in uncomfortable settings.

Jesus' command to love our enemies has enormous relevance in this time of political polarities. Congregations can encourage members to imagine what it would look like to host a meal or receive a meal from someone who stands opposed to one's strongest values. Even to start with prayers of willingness may feel like a bit of a challenge for some.

Both Mary and Martha showed hospitality to Jesus.

One listened. The other served. We all have to identify the unique gifts and strengths we have to offer others and to practice them.

Jesus' command to love our enemies has enormous relevance in this time of political polarities.



other [uhth-er] (verb): the verbal process of setting up another group of people as different, separate, and inferior

CHALLENGE OTHERING

Throughout recorded history, humans have used language to create and describe groups of people as *other*. In communication studies, the word *other* is used as a verb, describing the verbal process of setting up another group of people as different, separate, and inferior. This behavior directly contradicts the practice of hospitality—to see Christ in the other—yet we find *othering* being practiced in our own faith communities and fall into the trap ourselves. God’s frequent commands in the Old Testament to care for the alien were necessary because of the tendency of many Jews to *other* people who were not members of their faith, the Gentiles. European settlers in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, and many parts of Africa *othered* the people who were already living there. In recent times, Nazis *othered* Jews.

In the United States, language has been used to *other* many groups at different times. White Americans have *othered* African Americans for four centuries. Off and on throughout American history, Protestants *othered* Roman Catholics. During World War I, Americans *othered* German-Americans, and during World War II, Japanese-Americans were *othered*. In the US, the current political climate has become horribly polarized, to the point that *othering* happens simply by knowing the political affiliation of another.

To be hospitable means to pay attention to *othering* and to challenge and resist it. Christian individuals and congregations challenge exclusion and *othering* in many ways, such as showing solidarity with Jews whose synagogues have been targeted by those who wish to *other* them, co-hosting events with mosques, taking anti-racism tours to see places like the Lynching Memorial in Alabama, and supporting people who are LGBTQ+. Some congregations offer sanctuary to vulnerable immigrants who are being treated as enemies rather than as strangers who need to be welcomed.

All four Gospels contain a story where Jesus is anointed by a woman with costly perfume. In the version in Luke 7:36–50, Jesus is the guest of a Pharisee named Simon. The woman, who is denoted as a sinner (*other*), comes in uninvited with a jar of perfumed oil. She bathes Jesus’ feet with her tears and the ointment. The host is judging her quietly, and probably judging Jesus for allowing her to do this in his home where Jesus is just a guest. Jesus points out to the host that, actually, he’s a bad host. This uninvited *other* has shown Jesus more hospitality than the host; Jesus forgives her sins and wishes her well.

Mark 10:13–15 paints a beautiful picture of Jesus welcoming children, despite his disciples’ rebukes of the parents who brought the children (see also Mark 9:36–37). Children had no status in Jesus’ time, and Jesus’ welcome of them presents one more picture of his abundant love and hospitality for people with no power: others.

Congregations can encourage members to notice the times they are tempted to *other* individuals or groups of people. Appropriate responses might include prayers of lament and confession, as well as prayers for open hearts to the people Jesus loves. Leaders of congregations can do an audit of the congregation’s spoken, written, and visual communication to see if groups of people are being *othered*. This tendency to separate ourselves from certain groups of people must be addressed in our Christian communal settings: worship, prayers, small groups, and classes. Congregations where

Jesus points out to the host that, actually, he’s a bad host. This uninvited *other* has shown Jesus more hospitality than the host; Jesus forgives her sins and wishes her well.

people of diverse socioeconomic status attend welcome all to participate fully in all areas of ministry. To faithfully challenge exclusion and *othering*, we need the support of others to stay strong in the face of opposition that comes both from within and without.

“We Choose Welcome” is an awareness campaign of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which is an expression of personal and corporate commitment to welcome refugees and immigrants who are in the United States. The following is from its statement:

To welcome others is a central value of the Christian faith, shared by most of the world’s religions. The call to welcome the stranger is so common in the Bible that one must wonder if it is so oft repeated because of its importance, or because we are so quick to disregard it. In this time of great global and domestic conflict, perhaps both are true.

- In the midst of fear of terrorism and radicalism, we choose to welcome those who flee from terror and tyranny.
- In the midst of hate speeches and hate crimes, we choose to welcome those who are rejected because of their skin color or their foreign dress.
- In the midst of anxiety about our own economic prosperity, we choose to welcome those who come from distant lands to labor in our fields and our warehouses.
- In the midst of political debates which seek to divide us between those who are born here and those who are not, we choose welcome, a welcome for all children of God, proclaiming one household.³

When we challenge exclusion and *othering*, and when we practice hospitality that crosses over boundaries, we may be criticized and even imprisoned if it requires breaking unjust laws. Sadly, some of that criticism will come from within our own families and communities. Some of it will come from outside our community. Some people who challenge exclusion and *othering* will lose their jobs. When we refuse to build walls between God’s children, and when we advocate for God’s extravagant welcome of all people no matter who they are, we put ourselves in a vulnerable position because these actions confront religious and political power. God can strengthen us for this task, because care for the vulnerable and marginalized is so close to the heart of God, but we must not ignore the challenges and expect things to be easy. Following Jesus seldom is.

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CONCLUSION: PURSUING CONNECTION

In 2020, *Good Morning America* interviewed Chase Hansen, a ten-year-old boy from Salt Lake City, who was passionate about caring for people experiencing homelessness. Chase and his father provided meals and have established a nonprofit called “Project Empathy.” In the interview, Chase recommended getting involved in person, rather than giving money, because then “you can create a connection, a bond.” When asked how to start, he suggested smiling, saying hello, introducing yourself, and talking. Then, he said, you can invite your conversation partner to a meal.⁴

3. “We Choose Welcome!” Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), www.presbyterianmission.org/we-choose-welcome/.

4. *Good Morning America*, January 23, 2020, <https://abc.com/shows/good-morning-america/episode-guide/2020-01/23-thursday-jan-23-2020>.

In the interview, Chase used the word *connection* several times. The Christian practice of hospitality creates a safe, open place for connection because we remember the ways God has connected with us.

We remember that, after the resurrection, two dispirited disciples were walking from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. They were joined by a stranger, whom they invited into their home. At the meal, when the stranger broke bread, they suddenly recognized him as Jesus (Luke 24:13–35). In the same way, when Christians practice hospitality, we expect to meet Jesus in those we host and those who host us. When we do meet Jesus in friend, stranger, and enemy, we say with the disciples from Emmaus, “Were not our hearts burning within us?” (v. 32).

The definition of hospitality mentioned earlier sums up the themes of this lesson: “Hospitality creates a safe, open place where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another.”⁵ God is present in beautiful ways in small, easy, big, and hard acts of hospitality.

5. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 161.



Welcome Others as God Welcomes You

SCRIPTURE

Young Children: Genesis 1; Luke 18:15–17

Multiage Children: Genesis 1:1–2:2

Youth: Genesis 18:1–10

Adult: Genesis 1–2:4a; Genesis 2:4b–25

HYMNS AND SONGS

GtG: Glory to God: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs
(Westminster John Knox Press, 2013)

Note: Hymns and songs may also be found in other
hymnals and songbooks, and at www.hymnary.org.

GOD WELCOMES US IN CREATION

- “All Things Bright and Beautiful” (*GtG*, #20): *The diversity of creation is praised in this hymn.*
- “God of Great and God of Small” (*GtG*, #19): *God of all holds all together and is present to all.*
- “Many and Great, O God, Are Your Works” (*GtG*, #21): *We are welcomed into creation in this Dakota melody.*
- “O Lord, Our God, How Excellent” (*GtG*, #25): *Using a paraphrase of Psalm 8, God’s creation is praised.*

WE WELCOME ALL

- “Come All You People (Uyai mose)” (*GtG*, #388): *A calling song from Zimbabwe invites people to worship, in English and the Shona language.*
- “For Everyone Born” (*GtG*, #769): *God’s hospitality transcends the barriers created by human society.*
- “God Welcomes All” (*GtG*, #399): *Creating a setting of welcome, this song can be sung several times.*
- “Help Us Accept Each Other” (*GtG*, #754): *We seek to see one another as Christ sees us.*
- “Here in This Place (Gather Us In)” (*GtG*, #401): *All are welcomed and gathered for worship.*
- “I’m Gonna Eat at the Welcome Table” (*GtG*, #770): *This African American spiritual celebrates God’s welcome of all at the great feast.*
- “Let Us Build a House (All Are Welcome)” (*GtG*, #301): *All are welcome in our worship.*
- “We Gather Here in Jesus’ Name (Come, Share the Lord)” (*GtG*, #510): *As we share the Lord’s Supper, no one is a stranger, all are family.*

CHORAL ANTHEM

- “For the Beauty of the Earth” by Philip Stopford

LITURGICAL ACTIONS

- Create a graphic design for the cover of a worship bulletin or slide for a screen of a word cloud with the word *Welcome* in many different languages, particularly ones spoken in your church and community.
- Incorporate the song “God Welcomes All” (*GtG*, #399) in worship each week. All age groups in the four sessions for this practice use it as an opening ritual. Try different methods such as using various rhythms, singing in a round, and adding rhythm instruments.
- As an opening for worship, show the YouTube video “Learn to Say Welcome in 15 languages” (bit.ly/FMWelcome15, 0:44) or invite people to lead the congregation in saying “Welcome” in various languages.
- Regularly incorporate languages other than the dominant language of the congregation in the liturgy. Many congregations do this on Pentecost or World Communion Sunday. However, incorporating other languages with regularity makes it feel less novel and more integral. To make decisions about which languages to include, consider the following:
 - who is present in your congregation and what languages they speak,
 - languages that are spoken in your community and surroundings, and
 - mission relationships the congregation has in which other languages are spoken.
- Engage an American Sign Language interpreter as a regular part of worship leadership.
- Include a Minute for Mission to celebrate the ministries of the congregation that are specifically geared to welcome people to worship and fellowship, such as greeters, ushers, shepherds, and those who prepare for a time of fellowship.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.

LITURGIES

FOWWC: Feasting on the Word Worship Companion, Year B, Volume 2 (Westminster John Knox Press, 2014)

CALL TO WORSHIP

- ✦ In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
And the Word became flesh and lived among us.
Let us worship God.

(John 1:1, 14)

- ✦ This is the day the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it!
God made the world and welcomed us in it.
Let us welcome all as well.
Let us worship God.

- ✦ Remembering God's abundant welcome for us
in creation,
Friend or stranger, enter and welcome.
Let us worship God together.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

- ✦ **Loving God, you created us to live in relationship with you, to love and serve one another, and to care for all your creatures. Yet, in the hardness of our hearts, we dismiss your commandments and seek to go our separate ways. Lord, have mercy on us. Redeem us, restore us, and re-create us, for the sake of Christ our Savior. Amen.**

(FOWWC-B2, p. 195)

- ✦ **Creator God, you breathed, and this world and all that is in it came into being. You called it good, very good. You welcomed us to this home and called us very good. Forgive us when we treat your creation like a doormat, dirty and forgotten. Forgive us when we close the doors and shutter the windows of our homes, our places of business, and our very lives to those equally your very good creation. Forgive us when we forget that we are also very good and will always be welcomed by you. Create in us a renewed spirit of welcome for the world, for others, and for ourselves. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.**

CHARGES AND BLESSINGS

- ✦ Go out today and greet everyone you meet as a child of God, welcoming them as God has welcomed you.

- ✦ Brothers and sisters,
go out in joy!
Aim for restoration,
comfort one another,
find common ground,
live in peace and harmony;
and the God of love and peace will be with you.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
Amen.
(inspired by 2 Corinthians 13:11, 13)

- ✦ May God's welcome be a place of shelter for you;
may Christ's welcome enfold you,
and may the Spirit's welcome create community
among all.
Amen.

- ✦ May the God of steadfastness and encouragement
grant you to live in harmony with one another,
in accordance with Christ Jesus,
so that together you may with one voice
glorify the God and Father [and Mother]
of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
(Romans 15:5–6 alt.)



WHAT DOES “WELCOME ALL” MEAN?

When Christians welcome others, they also welcome Christ. Christian hospitality is not simply about welcoming people who are similar. Rather, it is about welcoming all people: friends, neighbors, strangers, and even enemies. Hospitality challenges the practice of *othering* and proclaims that all people bear the *imago Dei* (image of God), belong, and deserve to be welcomed and celebrated.

In this unit, we will explore four aspects of hospitality:

- ✦ Welcome Others as God Welcomes You
- ✦ See Christ in Every Person
- ✦ Know Your Gifts of Hospitality
- ✦ Challenge *Othering*

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

The practice of hospitality is displayed across the breadth of Scripture. It is found in the ways God initiates relationship with humans from the earliest stories in Genesis through the closing imagery in Revelation. Hospitality is actually a mandate from God in the Hebrew Scriptures. Part of the covenant with God involves this mandate to care especially for immigrants, widows, and orphans.

Jesus modeled hospitality throughout his ministry, even though he was usually a guest in others' spaces. The apostle Paul always opened his letters with words of hospitality and encouraged early Christians to welcome one another in the name of Christ.

In this four-week study, we limit our focus to a few select texts from the Hebrew and New Testaments that help highlight four aspects of hospitality mentioned in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

- One: Welcome Others as God Welcomes You
In Genesis 1 and 2, God's abundant welcome is offered in the creation stories.
- Two: See Christ in Every Person
In Matthew 25, Jesus claims that we do unto him as we do for those who are poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, or estranged. We are to see Christ in all persons.
- Three: Know Your Gifts of Hospitality
We consider people's differing gifts for offering hospitality as shown in the actions of Mary and Martha in Luke 10.
- Four: Challenge *Othering*
Finally, in Mark 7, we see how Jesus rejected others treating some as less than worthy of God's love.



THEN AND NOW

Hospitality was a significant cultural practice in many ancient societies, including Israel. Travel and immigration often forced people to cross other people's lands or temporarily reside there. Rules of hospitality were created to protect hosts and guests. Hosts were obligated to receive guests, but only for a certain amount of time. Guests were expected to follow certain rules while knowing they were within their right to receive accommodation. Jesus was formed in the Jewish tradition, of which hospitality was a central tenet, and practiced it throughout his life.

Christians have a long history of practicing hospitality. During slavery, Christians provided hospitality to Black Americans escaping chattel slavery in the American South via the Underground Railroad. Today, many Christians provide food, water, and sanctuary to migrants crossing the US-Mexico border. Many congregations also extend hospitality by preparing and sharing meals with those who are hungry, visiting those who are sick or imprisoned, and working to change laws and practices that exclude and marginalize immigrants and other marginalized communities.

HOW TO USE THE CAFÉ DISCUSSION GUIDE

Café Discussion Guides may be used in a variety of circumstances. College and young adult groups, church council meetings, retreats, women's or men's groups, and informal social gatherings. Each session takes one aspect from the practice and provides brief information to be discussed in a self-guided way with a group. It is best to have one person facilitate and lead the gathering, although they do not need to be an expert. Groups may rotate leaders whose role is mostly to bring copies of the guide and encourage discussion and participation by all.

Following are some minimal preparation suggestions for the leader to do before each gathering.

- If possible, distribute the discussion sheets to participants before gathering. Otherwise, bring copies and encourage people to read the information on the back of this page as they arrive. Always bring extra copies of the guide and pens for newcomers.
- Ask participants to bring pens and print or digital Bibles if they have them. Have at least one Bible available at each gathering.
- Be prepared to summarize the information on the back of this page.
- Once gathered, lead the group through the numbered activities on the front page. Encourage questions and further investigation to find answers, although often there may not be one answer.
- Pray for all who may come and yourself, that the experience may deepen faith.

Welcome Others as God Welcomes You

CAFÉ DISCUSSION GUIDE

1

GENESIS 1:1–2:4A AND GENESIS 2:4B–25

1 GATHER

As you gather, read the other side of this page about the topic for today. Once gathered, spend a few minutes introducing everyone. Say this prayer or one of your choosing:

Dear God, thank you for your love, hospitality, and care. As you welcome us with kindness and compassion, may we welcome others. Amen.

2

Prepare to respond in three minutes or less to one of the following discussion prompts. The person whose birthday is closest to June 1 goes first. When finished, that person invites another; and so on.

- ➔ Tell about a time when you extended hospitality to or received hospitality from someone. What made it memorable?
- ➔ Tell about a time when you felt unwelcomed or excluded.
- ➔ Why do you think we hesitate to welcome people who are different from us?
- ➔ Name some challenges and opportunities of welcoming and extending hospitality to people who are different from you.

3

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

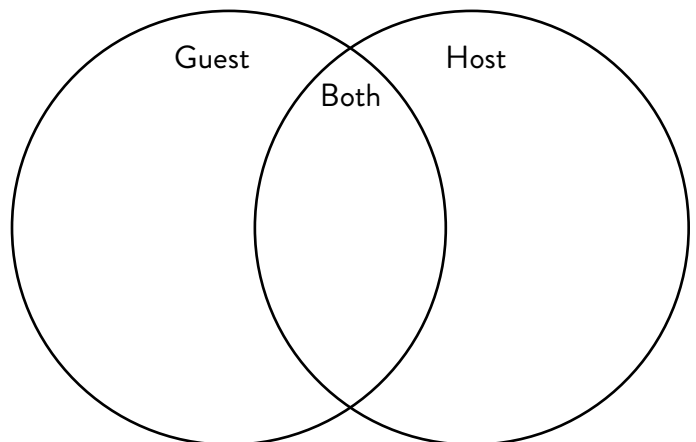
Discuss the “Finding the Practice in the Bible” section on the back page.

Read the two accounts of creation found in Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–25 and discuss:

- a. How does God extend hospitality to creation, including humanity?
- b. How is humanity called to care for creation?
- c. React to the statement that we can show hospitality to others only because God has first extended hospitality to the entire creation.

4

Fill in the diagram with the characteristics of a good host and guest, noting overlap between the two categories. Then go back and circle the aspects of being a host or guest that you do well. Draw rectangles around the aspects you would like to do better. Take turns naming something you wish to improve.



5

WAYS TO EXTEND HOSPITALITY THIS WEEK

List ways to extend hospitality this week.

- ➔
- ➔
- ➔

SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

Christians believe that we can welcome others because God first welcomes us—all of us. In the first stories in the Bible, God creates and welcomes all living things, including humans. A relationship is established. As Christians, we are called to extend this same hospitality to one another and all living things, recognizing the welcome and hospitality that we have received from God. When we find ourselves in the position of host, we avoid feelings of superiority over our guests because, at heart, we believe them to be fellow creatures who have also been created by God and are loved by God just as much as we are. We treat them as we want to be treated when we are vulnerable guests.

Hospitality was central to Jesus' life and ministry. As a Jew, he was informed by the Hebrew Scriptures and their imperative to welcome strangers and care for the poor. Jesus befriended strangers and broke bread with those who were marginalized. He both received and extended hospitality, often blurring the lines between guest and host.

We welcome all people, both those with whom we agree and disagree and those who are similar and different from us. There are no exceptions. Just as God welcomes us all, we are called to welcome one another. This is both a joy and a challenge.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Hospitality is central to the Scriptures. In the two biblical accounts of creation (Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–25), God creates and welcomes humans and all living things. In these accounts, we are reminded that we belong here. We all do. These accounts also demonstrate a fundamental truth about hospitality: we can welcome others only because we have first been welcomed and had a place prepared for us by God.

Jesus, informed by the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), frequently lifted up the imperative to welcome strangers and care for those who were marginalized. For example, see Deuteronomy 10:19 or Leviticus 19:34. A list of twenty-two Bible verses on welcoming immigrants (strangers) may be found at sojo.net/22-bible-verses-welcoming-immigrants. In his life, Jesus extended welcome to the rich and poor, men and women, and insiders and outsiders. Jesus welcomed all.

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE: THEN AND NOW

- In many societies, including ancient Israel, hospitality was an important cultural practice.
- Rules of hospitality arose to protect both guests and hosts in ancient societies.
- Churches minister to and with people experiencing poverty or food insecurity in their community.
- Greeters warmly welcome visitors, strangers, and long-time members to worship.
- Churches include hymns, prayers, and signage in different languages.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS GUIDE

If possible, distribute this sheet to participants before gathering. Be prepared to summarize the information on this page. Bring extra copies, some pens, and a Bible.

6

CLOSING PRAYER

Before saying the prayer together, invite people to share any prayer request or concern with the group. Continue in prayer:

Dear God, we especially ask for your presence and love to be shown in all prayers expressed aloud and in our hearts. Open our eyes to see Christ in every person we meet this week. Help us to extend love and welcome to others as you extend it to us. Amen.

Welcome All: The Big Table

LUKE 14:15–24



GOAL

Participants will engage the image of the “big table” by discussing and interacting with the biblical story of the great banquet from Luke 14 and by comparing and contrasting this story with other types of meals and service.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- AT** Abstract Thinking
- C** Conversation
- CT** Concrete Thinking
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Lord, help me to welcome all to this event, as you have welcomed me into this church. Make me aware of those who are excluded, and help me to extend the hand of friendship. Amen.

WHAT IS THIS SESSION ABOUT?

How do we welcome all people, both within and outside of our families, the church, our community, and our nation? Hospitality often occurs around tables. Family and guests are welcome, bread is broken, and food is shared. God’s desire is that our tables be large enough to include many, to welcome the outcast, the stranger, and those who may be different from us. This intergenerational event is centered around a communal meal, just as the Bible story is.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE STORY?

The parable of the great dinner is told by Jesus around a dinner table. It is a story about expected guests giving excuses why they can’t come, and the invitation being offered to those with disabilities, those who are poor, and those who do not expect an invitation. This story helps us explore the *all* in “welcome all.”

HOW WILL WE CONNECT WITH THIS PRACTICE?

We are practicing God’s big, wide, expansive invitation and welcome and providing a place for all who show up, with room for more.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE THE SESSION?


- Make announcements well in advance, inviting people to the event and asking them to bring their favorite “comfort food” to share potluck-style. Ask attendees to make a sign to display with their contribution with their name, the name of their food, and the ingredients (for those with food allergies or sensitivities).
- Prepare coded name tags to correspond with tables indicating where people will be seated. Different colors or pictures of elements of creation could be used for the name tags and table designations. Prepare a space with tables set for a meal.
- Ask people of all ages to be greeters.

Depending on the choices you make:

- For “Welcoming All to Mission” on page 29, contact local agencies and ministries (and partners in other locations who could be present via video conferencing) that your church supports through financial contributions and volunteer service. Invite a representative from each mission partner to attend your event and let them know they will need to give a brief talk (no more than five minutes) several times to rotating groups about how their agency or ministry welcomes others (including children, if that is possible) to participate in their ministry. Explain that they will have an opportunity to recruit volunteers as well.

GETTING STARTED

- ☐ People of all ages who are greeters
- ☐ Index cards, pens
- ☐ Prepared name tags, markers



Collect pictures of past church meals and times of fellowship around food and put these on a repeating slideshow presentation as people enter.

- ☐ Cards with conversation prompt: Talk about the food you or your family brought and its significance or a favorite meal.
- ☐ Paper, markers, crayons, colored pencils

- ☐ Music player

As people arrive, have greeters welcome them warmly, take their potluck dish and sign to place in the serving area, and hand them a coded name tag. If a sign wasn't provided for their dish, give the guest an index card and ask them to write their name, the name of their food, and the ingredients (for those with food allergies or sensitivities) on the card. Invite participants to find the table with the same designation as their name tag.



Try to hand out name tags randomly, mixing families at different tables, but honor if it is important to a parent/caregiver or child that they be together.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

FAVORITE MEALS

C T

Place cards with the conversation prompt on the tables and invite introductions and table conversation using the prompt. Provide paper and drawing supplies for those who would like to draw a picture of a favorite meal or food. Encourage people to share stories about these meals that might have been at a holiday or celebration, eaten in a restaurant, or home-cooked.

WELCOME TO THE TABLE

AM

Play a game to widen the circle of introductions. Explain that people will move to different tables for a bit, but then everyone will return to their original table. Play music for a brief amount of time. When you stop the music, give the following directions:

- The person who has a birthday next at each table gets up and moves to an open seat at another table.
- The people at the tables welcome the new person by saying, "Welcome to the (*table color or element of creation designation*) table! We're glad you are here."
- The new person responds by introducing themselves and their favorite meal.

Continue the play by starting and stopping the music and calling out people to move. Ideas might be the oldest or youngest at the table, who had the most recent birthday, who lives closest to the church, and so forth. At the end of the game, have everyone return to their original tables.

OPENING RITUAL: GOD WELCOMES ALL

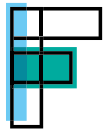
M T

Welcome all to this intergenerational event and meal. If you have guests from the agencies and ministries your church supports, introduce them. Let people know they will have an opportunity to hear from them later in the session.

Introduce the song “God Welcomes All.” If singing, use the *Glory to God* hymnal, #399, or listen to the tune at bit.ly/FMWelcomesAll. Sing the song a few times so that everyone becomes comfortable singing together. If you are not singing the song, invite people to speak the phrases after you.

God welcomes all, /
strangers and friends; /
God’s love is strong /
and it never ends. /

Invite people of different ages to teach motions to go with the words of the song using Resource Page 1 (on p. 30). Sing or speak the song once again with motions.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

ENACTING THE STORY

D AM

Invite volunteers of all ages to act out the Bible story as you read it aloud. Volunteer actors needed:

- Host
- Servant
- Group of people giving excuses
- Group of people to be poor and disabled
- Group of people to be homeless or passers-by

Instruct the actors to pantomime the story as it unfolds and repeat spoken words as directed. Read Luke 14:15–24, pausing as necessary so people may act out their scenes or speak their lines.

After the Scripture is read, thank the actors. Invite tables to wonder together how each of the characters in the story might have felt about the invitation to a meal.

EATING TOGETHER AND WALL OF EXCUSES

F C

Invite people to repeat after you as you pray:

God, our Host, we thank you /
for welcoming us to your table. /
We give thanks this day /
and for this meal we share together. /
May we remember /
the many who are hungry /
or don’t have tables /
where they are welcome. /
May we be a welcoming presence to all. /
Amen. /

- ☐ *Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device
- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 1

Hand out copies of
Resource Page 1 (on p. 30)
and crayons to anyone who
would like to color.

- ☐ Bible

- ☐ Potluck meal
- ☐ Paper and tape (or extra-large sticky notes) and markers for each table
- ☐ “Talking stick” for each table (optional)

Encourage people to make sure that all people at their table have a chance to contribute to the conversation. Consider providing a “talking stick” for each table, suggesting that the one holding the stick speaks and then passes it to someone else. Everyone gets a turn, and anyone has the option to pass.

- ☐ Internet-connected device
- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 2
- ☐ “Talking stick” (optional)

- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 3

Dismiss people, table by table, to get food. As people are waiting to get their meal, eating, or waiting for the meal to conclude, invite them to brainstorm excuses that people might use today for not coming to a great dinner. Have a recorder at each table write down the excuses, circle their favorite one, and display them in a designated spot. At the conclusion of the meal, invite a representative from each table to share their favorite excuse with all.

Have the people wonder together at their tables what people using these excuses might miss if they didn’t attend the meal. Ask people to consider how they might respond if they were the host of the meal and heard these excuses. Invite representatives to share some of their table discussion.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

THE LONGEST TABLE

T C

Watch the YouTube video “The Longest Table 2019” (bit.ly/FMLongestTable, 2:20). After the video, hand out a copy of Resource Page 2 (on p. 31) to each table and ask people to imagine what a “longest table” might look like in this community, using the questions provided. Use the “talking stick” if that is a helpful way for all at the table to have an opportunity to speak.

COMMUNION INVITATION

C AT

Tell people that communion can be viewed as a big table meal with Christ as our host. Explain that, every time the church celebrates this meal, the communion liturgy begins with an invitation. Hand out a copy of Resource Page 3 (on p. 32) to each table and invite volunteers to take turns reading some of the invitations that are used. Then ask each table to gather the excuses they posted earlier and write an invitation to the Lord’s Table that might welcome those who gave the excuses. Have a volunteer at each table read their invitation to the table.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- ☐ Mural paper
- ☐ Poster board, wooden dowel sticks, tape
- ☐ Painting supplies
- ☐ Sidewalk chalk

WRITE THE VISION

A

Tell the participants that there is a verse in a short book in the Old Testament called Habakkuk (which some people pronounce “HAB-a-cook” while others say “huh-BACK-hook”) that says, “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it” (Habakkuk 2:2b). Wonder together that the vision might be about God’s invitation or welcome to all people at your church. Work together, using the painting supplies and mural paper or poster board, wooden dowel sticks, and tape, to make banners or yard signs with message(s) large enough so that they might be seen by those outside of your church when displayed. As a coinciding activity, some people may like to use sidewalk chalk and write messages and draw pictures on the sidewalks, parking lot, or entrance steps to your church, if your church is so situated.

WELCOMING ALL TO MISSION



Again, introduce the representatives from the agencies and ministries your church supports. Explain that the table groups will meet with each representative to hear briefly about their agency or ministry and how they welcome others to participate. Point out that sign-up sheets are available for those who are interested or want more information about ways to volunteer. Suggest that people visit this table at the end of the event.

Assign each representative a space where one or more table groups can gather. This may be breakout rooms or spaces in the room where you are meeting. Designate which table(s) begin with each representative and have them move accordingly. Depending on how many ministries you have represented, determine your time limit, but give no more than five minutes per station. Let everyone know how long they have at each ministry station. Ring a bell when it is time to rotate to a new ministry station.

- ☐ Representatives from agencies and ministries supported by your church
- ☐ Table with sign-up sheets for each agency or ministry
- ☐ Bell



- ☐ Internet-connected device



FOLLOWING JESUS

Invite people to sing “For Everyone Born,” found in the *Glory to God* hymnal, #769, or show the YouTube video “For Everyone Born by Shirley Erena Murray” (bit.ly/FMEveryoneBorn, 2:13) and invite people to sing along.



The video has images of different people, including children. Show the video if you have the capability to do so.

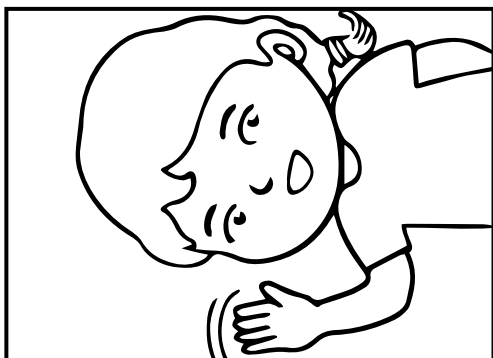
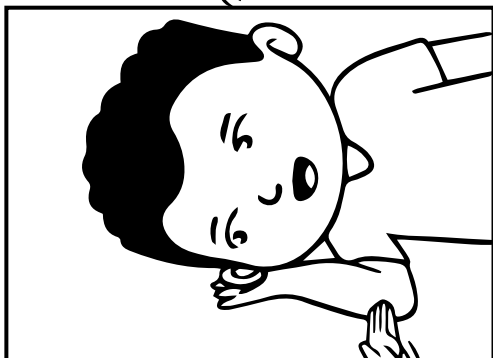
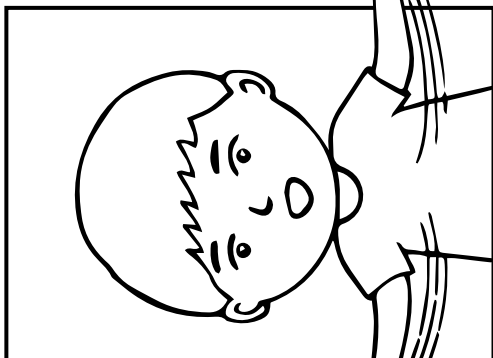
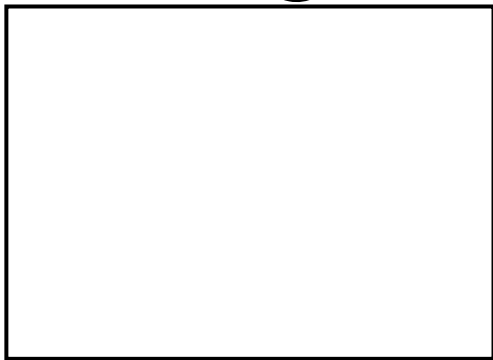
Ask people to stand, as they are able, around the space in a large circle. Chairs may be added for people who need to be seated. Have them cross their right arm over their left arm and hold hands with the people on either side. Close with a blessing, explaining that, as you say, “Go out today . . .,” people should raise their right arms as they turn to the right and under their arm. The whole circle will make this movement, turning from facing in to facing out. If people are seated, have people assist them to turn outward as well.

Go out today [*pause*] and greet everyone you meet as a child of God, welcoming them as God has welcomed you. Amen.



If your group is too large to form one big circle, have people stand around their tables.

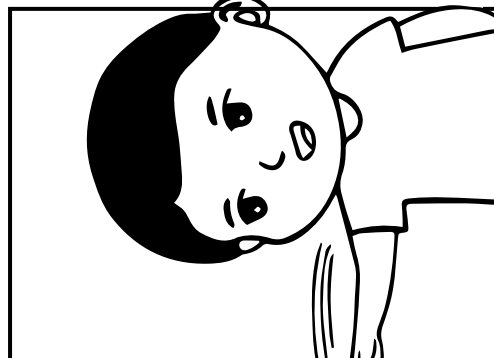
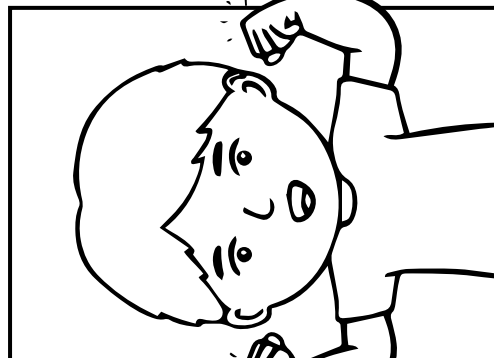
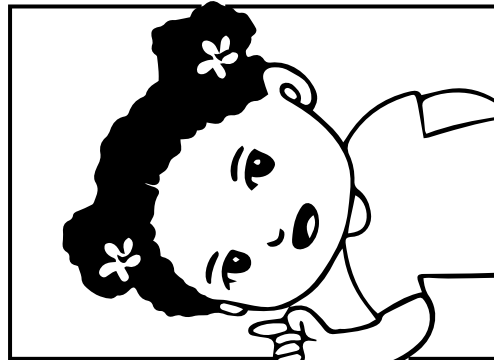
God Welcomes All



God

welcomes all, strangers and

friends.



God's

love

is strong and will never

end.

The Longest Table

Wonder together what a longest table would look like in this community.

Who would you invite?

Who would come?

What would you do?

What would you talk about?

How would the people at the longest table feel?



Invitations to the Lord's Table

BCW: *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2018)

✦ This is the joyful feast of the people of God!
People will come from north and south
and from east and west
to sit at table in the kingdom of God . . .

✦ . . . This is the Lord's Table.
Our Savior invites those who trust him
to share the feast that he has prepared.
(BCW, p. 26)

✦ Jesus said: Come to me,
all you that are weary
and carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
(BCW, p. 119)

✦ Blessed are you who hunger for justice,
for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who thirst for righteousness,
for you will drink deeply of the cup of joy.
Blessed are you who yearn for reconciliation,
for you will find peace.
Blessed are you who are persecuted in the name of religion,
for yours is the commonwealth of heaven.
Blessed are we—for Christ calls us to his table,
where there is room for everyone, and plenty for all.
(BCW, p. 120)

✦ Come, not because you are strong
but because you are weak.
Come, not because of any goodness of your own
but because you need mercy and help.
Come, because you love the Lord a little
and would like to love him more.
Come, because he loves you
and gave himself for you.
(Iona Community)¹

✦ We are here because Jesus has called us—
strangers and friends,
locals and visitors,
believers and doubters,
the certain and the curious.
It is always a mixed company that Jesus gathers
and invites to his table where, in bread and wine,
he meets us
and through him we, who are different,
are joined to each other.
So come,
not because you understand,
but because you are understood.
Come,
not because of how you feel,
but because God has food for you.
Come, not because you deserve a place,
but because Jesus invites you,
just as you are.
(Iona Community)²

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Welcome All

SESSION 1 YOUNG CHILDREN

Welcoming God's Creation: Children are invited to take a nature walk and spot different things that God created. As each one is named, everyone says, "God welcomes you, (*item*), and I do too."

Welcoming in Other Languages: The children learn how to say "welcome" in several different languages that may be heard in your church or community and are encouraged to greet people in these languages.

MULTIAGE CHILDREN

Depicting God's Garden: Children are invited to consider the world God created for us and make a collage depicting its beauty.

How I Am Welcoming: The children consider how they are welcoming, how they struggle with welcoming others, and an action they can take in the coming week to be welcoming to others.

YOUTH

Watch a Video about Immigration: Youth hear a youth describe her experience as an immigrant in the US.

Review the Welcome Timelines: Youth review a timeline of Christian denominations struggling to include welcome to others.

ADULT

Church Welcome Statements: Adults create ideal welcome statements for their worshipping community.

Sanctuary Offers Welcome: Adults see how various denominations insist on welcoming all strangers.

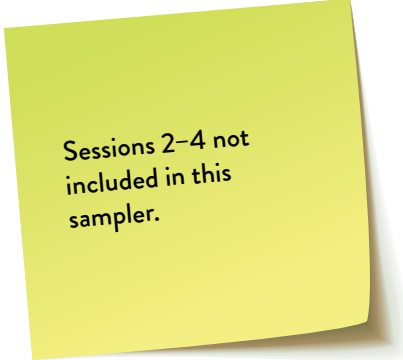
Know Your Implicit Bias: Adults take an internet test to learn about their implicit biases.

SESSION 2 YOUNG CHILDREN MULTIAGE CHILDREN YOUTH ADULT

Sessions 2–4 not
included in this
sampler.

SESSION 3
YOUNG CHILDREN
MULTIAGE CHILDREN
YOUTH
ADULT

SESSION 4
YOUNG CHILDREN
MULTIAGE CHILDREN
YOUTH
ADULT



Sessions 2–4 not
included in this
sampler.



WHAT IS “WELCOME ALL” ABOUT?

Hospitality. Welcome. These words are a part of our culture, but they often mean a beautifully set table or a “Martha Stewart” worthy meal. Here, we are not so worried about achieving the perfect “Instagram-worthy” holiday table, or the fanciest recipe (although those can, for sure, be a treat that will make guests feel special). In naming this unit *Welcome All*, we are grounding ourselves in the faith practice of hospitality; the idea of being intentional and authentic as we offer a genuine welcome to all God’s people—both stranger and friend. As we open our hearts, our homes, our churches, and our capacity for friendship and community to not only those who are like us but also those who are different from us, we are affirming the worth of all of God’s people. This is the very heart of the practice of hospitality.



STRANGERS TO FRIENDS

Perhaps as you or your children have been participating in this unit, *Welcome All*, you have noticed individuals, families, or children who you may have seen at church but don’t know much beyond a brief chat in coffee hour. As a way to put the theory into practice, extend an invitation. Avoid the temptation to reach out just to people with children the same age or adults of a similar generation. Instead, why not:

- ➔ Gather in a park for a walk or picnic after worship to bring together families of all ages as well as individuals who may not have had an opportunity to spend time together outside of the church walls.
- ➔ Host a potluck dinner for participants in your group (or in your children’s groups) for this session.
- ➔ Arrange to attend a free or low-cost community gathering as a church group (a street festival, community theater, concert, or art show).
- ➔ Adopt a “grand-friend.” Many families are spread apart geographically, leaving grandparents and grandchildren, alike, missing out on regular companionship with another generation. If this is the case for your family, consider inviting an older adult in your congregation who has taken an interest in your children to be your “grand-friend.”

SERVICE WITH A SMILE

It is often hard for families with younger children to find opportunities to be involved in community service. Things like construction-based projects and

many soup kitchens have minimum ages. Hospitality, however, is an area where children can excel and bring much joy to those being served. Consider seeking the following types of volunteer jobs (if you are not sure where to start, talk with your pastor or the chair of your church’s mission committee or do some research online):

- ➔ Staffing a water stop at a road race is a wonderful one-off opportunity suitable for all ages. Children can not only hand out water to thirsty participants but also cheer them on with homemade signs, cowbells, and shouts of encouragement!
- ➔ Inquire about helping in the dining room at a local soup kitchen. While cooking and kitchen work is often restricted to teens and adults, there are many tasks to do, including setting tables, greeting guests, and even making centerpieces or placemats to brighten up the dining room. Often in the busyness of preparing and serving meals, there isn’t much time to simply connect. Enter into conversation with guests, share stories or jokes—let the boundaries between guest and host come down for moments of human connection.
- ➔ Put your coloring and baking skills to good use for community first responders and church helpers. Purchase some simple cardboard bakery boxes that can be decorated with messages of thanks, and pack up homemade treats to be delivered to local first responders (fire, ambulance, and police) and/or church helpers (not just the pastor and musician, but also the secretary, custodian, and other “behind the scenes” workers).



SPEAKING UP FOR THE OTHER

Supplies: sturdy poster board and markers or pre-made signs (find examples at <https://www.letsbeneighbors.org/> or <https://hatehasnohome.org/>)

In times when society seems polarized, there is always room for a message of love. Think about your family's values, what a welcoming message for your community might be, and, with those in mind, either purchase or create a sign sharing that for your lawn or a front window. "Jesus Loves You," "All Are Welcome Here," and signs decrying racism and hate are some great options.

CREATE FAMILY RITUALS FOR WELCOME

As a family, think of things that you love to do and that you are good at. Could your gifts and talent be a way for you to offer hospitality within your congregation and beyond? Might your family even become known for these personal gifts of welcome? Some unique ways you could offer welcome to others include:

- ➔ Bringing a plant from your garden, like daylilies or hostas, to every new neighbor who moves in on your road.
- ➔ Knitting receiving blankets for newly baptized infants in your congregation.
- ➔ Hosting a barbecue for returning college students each spring.
- ➔ Sending drawings to people who are hospitalized or to shut-ins on a seasonal or monthly basis.

WELCOMING ART

Supplies: stretched canvas (one per family member), permanent markers or acrylic paint (for a lower-cost option, this could also be done on paper with craft markers)

As a family, create a "word art" message of welcome, with one word per canvas to form a multi-canvas grouping that could be displayed in a front foyer, dining room, or other communal area. Depending on the number of family members, you could do a simple "Welcome All" (for a household of two) or a longer message for a larger family ("Welcome to the Johnson House"). Favorite Scriptures or hymn texts could also be included.

FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

- ➔ What do we do in our own home to make a guest feel welcome?
- ➔ What kinds of guests have we had in our home? Whom might we like to invite in the future?
- ➔ When you visited a friend or another family member's home, what is something they did that made you feel welcome?
- ➔ If Jesus were to come to our home, how could we make him feel welcome?
- ➔ Have you ever been to a place where the welcome was different from what you are used to? Maybe you have traveled to a different country or experienced a different culture that practices hospitality differently than you do? If no one in your family has experienced a different culture, try to find someone who has and would be willing to share about their experience of being welcomed in a new way.

"Practicing the Practice at Home" is also included in the Young Children Leader's Guide and Multiage Children Leader's Guide.



PRAYER

Dear God, help us to admit our own mistakes so that we may draw closer to you. Amen.

1 Welcome All

INTRODUCTION

God welcomes all of creation, and God welcomes us too! We can follow Jesus' example. As he welcomed children to come to him, we can welcome all we meet as God's children.

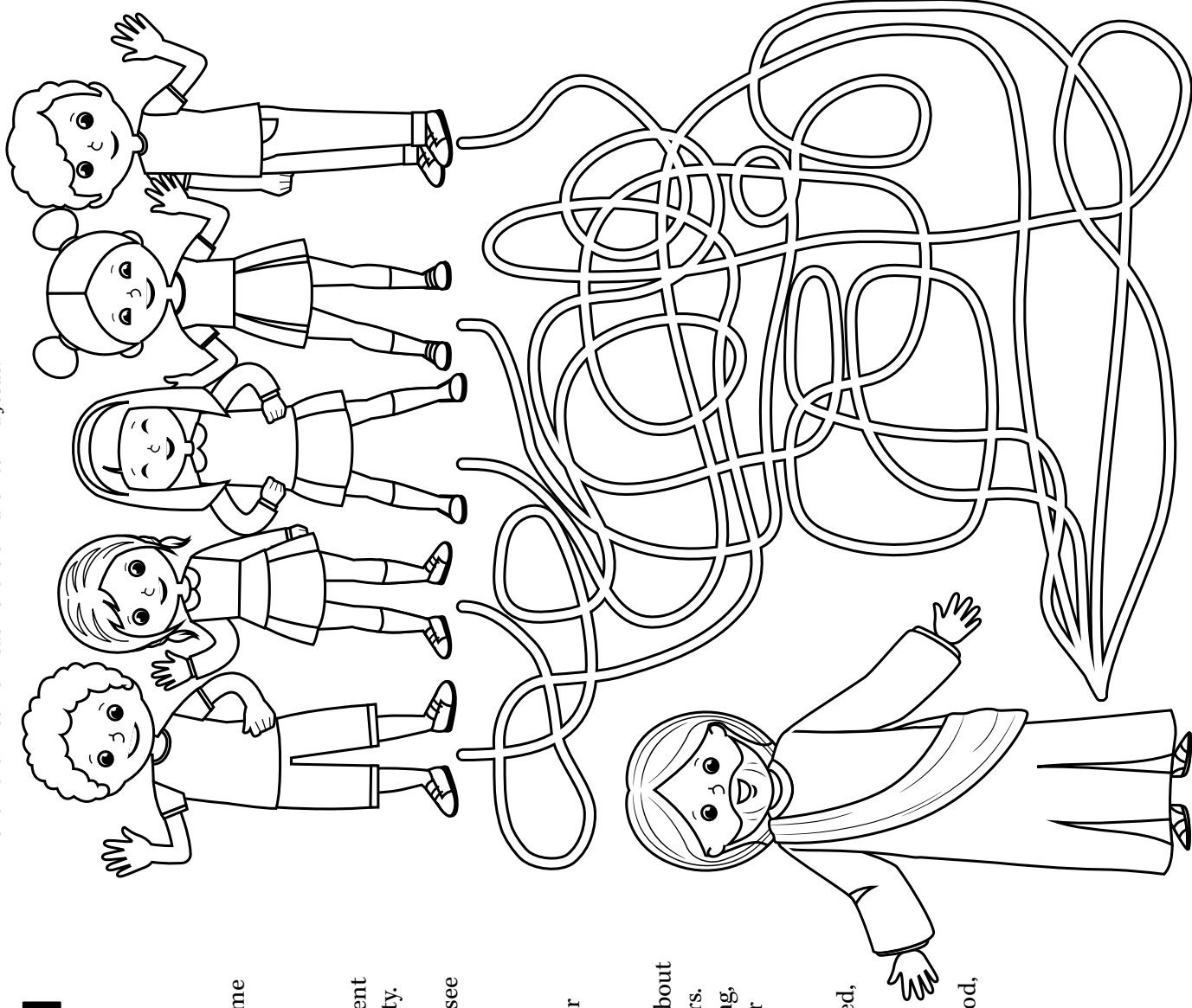
WAYS TO PRACTICE "WELCOME ALL"

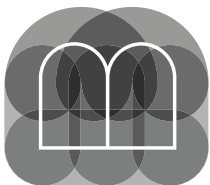
- Teach the children how to say "welcome" in several different languages that may be heard in your church or community. Encourage the children to greet people in the church and community who might know these languages when they see them during the week.
- Adopt a "grand-friend." Many families are spread apart geographically, leaving grandparents and grandchildren alike, missing out on regular companionship with another generation. Consider inviting an older adult in your congregation to be your "grand-friend."
- Take a look at the entrance to your home. Talk together about how it is welcoming or could be more welcoming to others. Consider changes you might make, such as adding lighting, trimming back foliage, or making a welcome sign for your front door.
- Take a nature walk or a walk around your neighborhood. Call out things that God has created. As each one is named, together say, "God welcomes you, (*tree*). I do too!"

CLOSING

Go out today and greet everyone you meet as a child of God, welcoming them as God has welcomed you.

Follow the lines from each of the children to find Jesus.





BIBLE STORY

Based on Genesis 1 and Luke 18:15–17

In the beginning, God smiled and began to create. God swept over the waters like a wind while deciding what to make first. “Let there be light,” God said. Light and darkness became two separate things—day and night. God welcomed the light and the darkness and said they were good, and that was the end of the first day.

The next day after the light came, God decided to separate the water that drops from the sky in rain and snow from the water that is down below in rivers, lakes, and the ocean. God welcomed both the water in the sky and the water below and said they were good, and that was the end of the second day.

On the third day, God looked at the waters below and gathered them into particular places so dry land could appear. God planted all kinds of flowers, bushes, and trees on the land that produced yummy fruits and vegetables. God welcomed the land and all that grows on it, and God saw that these things were good.

On the fourth day, God gathered some of the light together to create the sun and the stars. God called the moon into being for the night. God welcomed the sun, moon, and stars and saw that they were good.

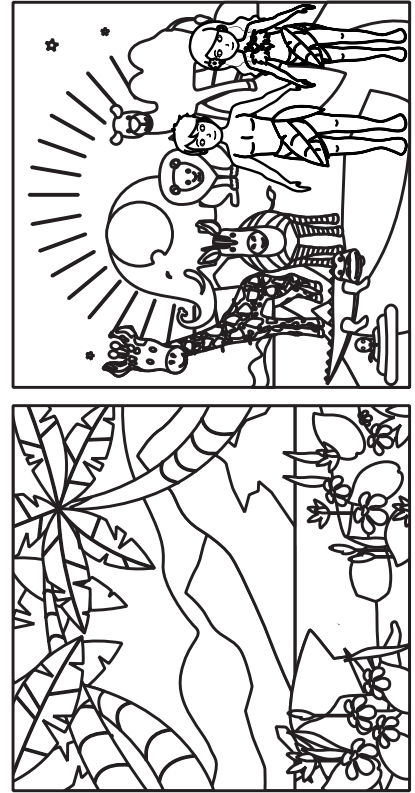
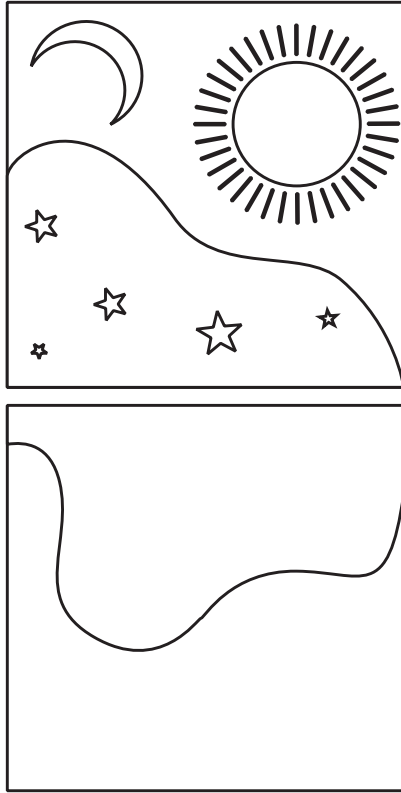
On the fifth day, God began to create the creatures of the sea, everything that swims, and the creatures of the air, everything that flies. Can you name some of these creatures? God welcomed all of these we have named and all the others whose names we don’t know, and God saw that they were good.

On the sixth day, God created the creatures of the land, all kinds of creatures. Some were tall, and some were short. Some had spots, and others had stripes. Some ate meat, and some ate plants. Can you name some of these land creatures? God welcomed all of these we have named and all the others whose names we don’t know. But God wasn’t done yet. God created humans to be in God’s image and to continue to welcome all of God’s creation.

Does God welcome you? How do you know?

Many years after all these things were created, God’s Son, Jesus, came to earth, and one of the things he made sure to do was to welcome children. “These young ones are very good,” said God, as Jesus talked to them, hugged them, and blessed them and their families. We continue to welcome each other today through smiling, waving, and baptizing new people into God’s community.

GOD WELCOMES US. LET’S WELCOME ALL!



The sojourner who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the sojourner as yourself, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.
—Leviticus 19:34, au. trans.

מִיחְרוֹא תִסְנַבָּה
(hakhnasat orchim)

Ξενία
(Xinia)

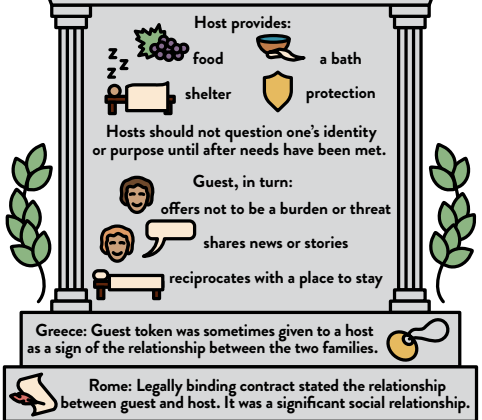
Hospitium

"... since the spirit brought you here to me, do not try to please me nor spell me with lying words. It is not for that I will entertain and befriend you, but for fear of Zeus, the god of guests, and for my own pity."
—Odyssey, 14.386-389

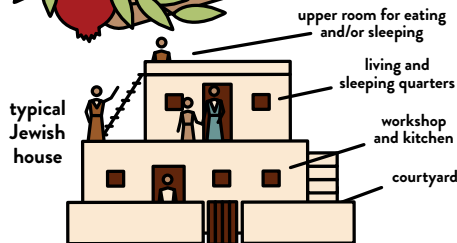


In Greek (Roman) tradition, all guests were under the protection of Zeus (Jupiter). In myths, the gods often visited homes in disguise.

Greek and Roman Rules

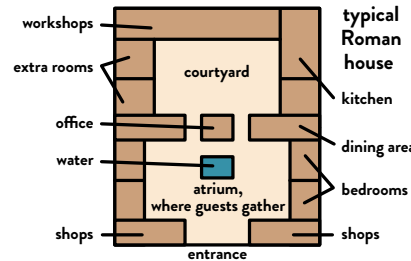


1st-Century Hospitality



Households were multigenerational and often multifamily.

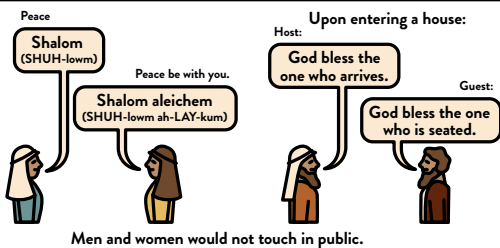
Only the most wealthy would have separate quarters for guests. When visiting, you would be part of the family.



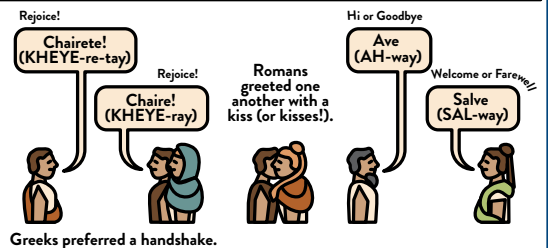
In cities, many lived in apartments with other families crowded together.



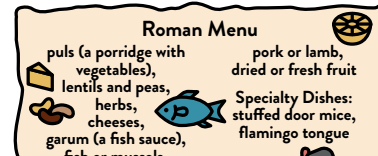
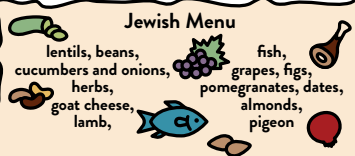
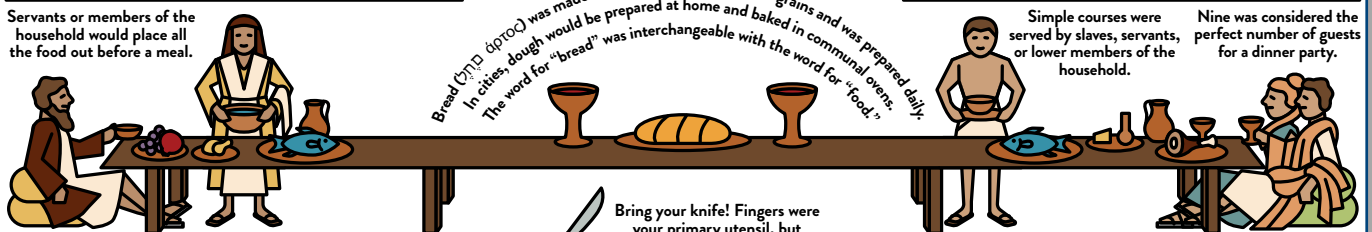
Servants and enslaved people: Considered part of the household but held few, if any, rights.



Greetings



Servants or members of the household would place all the food out before a meal.



Men and women dined together in Rome; children would also be included in special feasts.



SAMPLE SESSION



BIBLICAL PRACTICES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Young children learn by practicing. They are observing and mimicking the world and people around them to discover their own identities. Learning the words and actions of our faith may seem beyond a young one's abilities, but this is where faith practices are rooted and grow.

ACTIVITY SYMBOLS

Symbols indicate the type of activity at a glance. Leaders can customize sessions by using what works best for their participants.

- A Art:** invites creativity in hands-on arts and crafts.
- AM Active/Movement:** allows time for children to move their bodies.
- C Conversation:** allows time to talk and share thoughts, feelings, and questions.
- D Drama:** uses skits and role play to engage with the story/practice.
- F Food:** engages children in cooperating, measuring, and making foods to eat and share. Be mindful of food allergies.
- G Games:** allows for cooperative play.
- M Music:** engages children with music and rhythm.
- NS Nature/Science:** utilizes experimentation and the world around us.
- QC Quiet/Contemplative:** provides spaces and time for thought and reflection.
- S Service:** provides opportunities for children to offer help to others.
- T Technology:** uses an internet-connected device.
- X Extra Prep:** requires additional time or materials.

INCLUDING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Create an environment that helps children of all abilities experience God's grace by making a space of welcome and accessibility. You can adapt an activity by process, product, or environment: the way something is done, what is done, or the setting in which it is done. If you think a child may struggle with an activity, ask the question "How can I help this child be successful?"

Adapting the Process: Giving extra support to complete activities is an example of changing the process.

Adapting the Product: Having children make or do something different is an example of changing the product when the original plan is inaccessible for a child.

Adapting the Environment: Thinking about the room where you gather helps children feel welcome and included. Considering lighting, space, and furniture and displaying children's projects help children feel that the room is a place where they belong.

NOTE ABOUT SUPPLIES

The following is a list of basic supplies used throughout this curriculum: Bibles, paper, mural paper, construction paper, newsprint, card stock, sticky notes, pencils, pens, markers, crayons, colored pencils, painting supplies, glue, glue sticks, scissors, tape, play dough, paper plates, cups, and napkins. Specific supplies are listed next to the activity where they are used.

Internet-connected devices are used throughout this curriculum to access music, videos, art, and websites.

FLYAWAY BOOKS

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Welcome All Overview

WHAT DOES “WELCOME ALL” MEAN?

When you think of hospitality, you may think of preparing for a guest who is entering your home or serving as a greeter in a church setting, but there is so much more to this practice. If we think of hospitality as Jesus embodied this practice, we need to talk about who gives and who receives this practice. If we want to follow Jesus, we can’t offer hospitality only to those we know already or those who look like us or worship like us. Jesus crossed many boundaries in his offering of hospitality to others and in accepting the hospitality of others. Think of the Samaritan woman at the well or Zacchaeus; Jesus engaged and valued people who would be shunned by any Jewish man in good standing at that time.

We also need to consider how hospitality is offered. Is it offered with some expectation of return, or is it freely given and freely received? Think about the *who* and the *how* of hospitality as you engage these lessons with young children.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Only a few places in the Bible address the practice of hospitality by name. In 1 Peter 4:9, we are cautioned to offer hospitality without complaining. Several passages lift up the importance of offering hospitality to strangers. Probably the most famous of these is Hebrews 13:2, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Both of these thoughts give the sense that offering hospitality is a sacrificial act that we do with joy as an outgrowth of our faith.

HOW DO YOUNG CHILDREN UNDERSTAND “WELCOME ALL”?

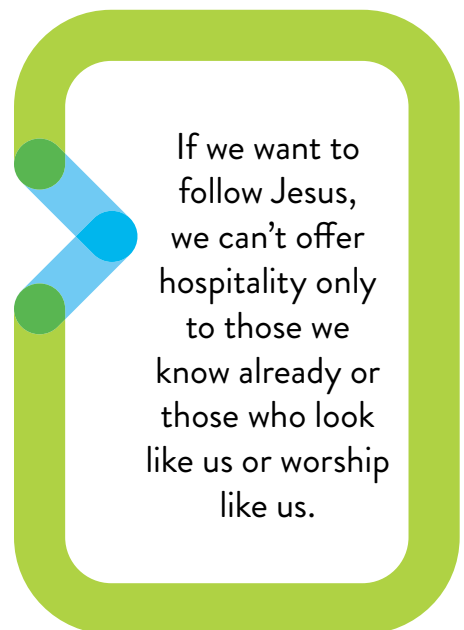
Young children are great observers. They will notice what you do more than what you say. They will see how you treat guests in your home, how you respond to people during the passing of the peace at church, and how you respond to someone in need in the wider world. They are also capable of assisting with tasks related to hospitality for others or in learning how to receive hospitality graciously. Think of learning such things as saying “please” and “thank you” as an example of this. We often think of young children as wrapped up in their own concerns, but they are capable of kindness to others, when they see it modeled for them by those around them.



INFOGRAPHIC POSTER

First-century hospitality is the theme of the infographic poster for the *Welcome All* unit. It explores Jewish and Roman/Greek customs of welcome, such as the expectations of hosts and guest, common greetings, and table hospitality.

Infographic posters provide additional information to engage learners of all ages. All posters (18" x 24") are available for purchase—as a twelve-poster set (one of each practice each year) in print or download; or as individual posters for download only—at www.pcusastore.com/FollowMeCurriculum.



If we want to follow Jesus, we can’t offer hospitality only to those we know already or those who look like us or worship like us.

1

Welcome All, as God Welcomes Us

GENESIS 1; LUKE 18:15–17



GOAL

Children will explore the way that God welcomes creation, including us, by enacting ways to welcome others in the group, at home, in the larger church, and in the community.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Lord, help me to show my welcome of these children through my words and actions that, through me, they might welcome God and their neighbors. Amen.

WHAT IS THIS SESSION ABOUT?

This session begins a unit on the faith practice of hospitality. Here we look at how God welcomes all of creation, and we're assured that God welcomes us, too, through Jesus' welcoming of children. These stories cause us to follow Jesus' example by welcoming all we meet as God's children.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE STORY?

Hospitality begins at creation as God welcomes everything from light to animals. This reading of Genesis 1 shows that hospitality includes all of God's creation, not just people. In coupling this with the story of Jesus welcoming the children, we see that, even though God's hospitality is vast, God still cares for each of us and welcomes us to the world.

HOW WILL YOUNG CHILDREN CONNECT TO THIS PRACTICE?

Young children are practicing the art of welcoming here. They are learning how to greet others and to welcome all of God's creation as they encounter it.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE THE SESSION?

- Learn the songs in "Getting Started" (on p. 44) and "Following Jesus" (on p. 47) and the motions for "God Welcomes All" on Resource Page 1 (on p. 48).
- Set up the following centers for "Centers" on page 44:
 - Play kitchen area with cooking and table-setting items
 - Nature encounter table with different non-sharp natural objects that the children could explore through touch and smell
 - Puzzle center with simple wooden puzzles of different parts of God's creation such as fruits or animals

Depending on the choices you make:

- Contact several church members who are involved with greeting people and hospitality and invite them to visit your group for "Greeting at Church" on page 46.
- Explore the Omniglot website, "Welcome in Many Languages" (bit.ly/FMManyLanguages), and choose three languages found in your faith community or neighborhood to teach for "Welcoming in Other Languages" on page 47. Write the phrases and pronunciation, if necessary, on cards.



GETTING STARTED

-
- ☐ Play kitchen area
 - ☐ Nature encounter table
 - ☐ Puzzle center

CENTERS

AM D NS

As the children enter, greet them by name and welcome them into the space. Invite them to play in the centers you have set up. If the children are new to you, you may want to use name tags, so that you can readily address them individually. Knowing children's names is a fundamental action in this practice of hospitality. Having several centers set up for individual or small group activity is helpful as children arrive.

-
- ☐ Resource Page 1
 - ☐ *Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device (optional)

GOD WELCOMES ALL

M

Teach the children the words and motions for the song “God Welcomes All” on Resource Page 1 (on p. 48). This is the opening song for each of the sessions of this unit. If you are not familiar with the tune, this song can be found in the *Glory to God* hymnal, #399, or you can hear it at [bit.ly /FMWelcomesAll](https://bit.ly/FMWelcomesAll) or watch the YouTube video “God welcomes all” ([bit.ly /FMWelcomesAllVideo](https://bit.ly/FMWelcomesAllVideo), 1:15). You can also speak the words and have the children repeat after you, following your motions.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

-
- ☐ Jack-in-the-box toy (optional)

JACK-IN-THE-BOX NAME GAME

G AM

To begin this practice of hospitality, play a name game. Invite the children to sit in a circle. Tell them that each will have a turn to make themselves as small as possible and then to jump up like a jack-in-the-box. Show how the toy works or have a leader or volunteer demonstrate the action. Then invite the children to welcome this person by name. Say the following rhyme with the child's name, repeating the process for each person in the room:

(*Name*) in the box, sits so still.
Will they come out? Yes, they will (*child jumps up*)!”

The children respond, “Welcome, (*Name*)!”



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Two stories, one from Genesis 1 about God welcoming all of us in creation, and the other from Luke 18:15-17 about Jesus welcoming the children, are combined in this session and in the adapted Bible story on Resource Page 2 (on p. 49). This shows two aspects of God, both God's power and greatness and God's close personal concern for each person.

WELCOMING THE STORY

AM

☐ Resource Page 2

Read the adapted Bible story on Resource Page 2 (on p. 49), inviting the children to throw their arms wide open each time they hear the word *welcome* or *welcomed*. These words are bolded in the story so you can use added emphasis on those sentences.

WELCOME POSTERS FOR CREATION

A

☐ White paper or construction paper
☐ Crayons and/or markers

Invite the children to think about their favorite plant or animal and to share their choices. Tell them that they will be making welcome posters for those plants and animals and that their posters will include a picture of them too. Provide paper and crayons and/or markers and have them draw the plant or animal they mentioned along with a picture of themselves. You may want to write the word "Welcome" on top of their posters.

When all are finished, display the posters in the room to remind the children that hospitality is for all of God's creation, not just for people.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

Hospitality is something we practice every day, whenever we greet another person or take care of God's good creation. Young children can move from their own welcoming to the welcoming of others.

SEEING AND CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION

T QC C

☐ Internet-connected device

Watch the YouTube video "Beautiful Nature Images—Relaxing Music" (bit.ly/FMBeautifulNature, 5:33). Ask the children what they saw. Comment that God calls us to not only welcome creation but also care for it. Encourage them to offer suggestions about how we might keep the places they have seen beautiful and the animals safe. You might offer actions such as picking up trash and recycling, if they don't come out in the discussion.

WELCOMING GOD'S CREATION

NS

Take a nature walk with the children around the church grounds or block. Have them spot different things that God created. As each one is named, say something together like, "God welcomes you, tree, and I do too."



If you know the specific name of a plant or animal, feel free to use it and teach it to the children. If not, you can just use broad categories like "tree," "bush," "flower," and "insect" to describe God's creation.

- ☐ One or two people who are involved in your church's hospitality ministry
- ☐ Any greeting items particular to your church such as member and/or visitor name tags, a welcome book, or pew pad

GREETING AT CHURCH

D S X

You may have particular people at your church who are designated to show hospitality to members and guests who come to the worship service. Invite them to your session. Welcome your guests and introduce them to the children, modeling hospitality. Ask your guests to share their role in the church and to demonstrate how they greet people when they come through the door of the church. Have them show any items that your church uses in welcoming people. After they have demonstrated various verbal and physical greetings, as well as handing out a worship bulletin (if this is their role), then invite the children to role-play these various ways of greeting.



If your group meeting precedes worship, notify parents/caregivers that the children may be invited to be greeters at the worship service. If not, they could be invited to do so at another time.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Practice welcoming others as you prepare young children to take hospitality beyond the doors of the church and into the world. Choose one or more options.

- ☐ Napkins, small paper cups
- ☐ Snack items such as crackers or fruit

MEAL HOSPITALITY

F

This is snack time with a twist, linking it to the practice of hospitality. Invite several children to assist you in serving the other children during snack time. One person could pass out napkins; another could provide small cups of juice or water; a third could serve the crackers or fruit. All should wait for the prayer, which could also be led by a child, before eating. This can also be a time of gathering prayer requests from the children of their own joys and concerns or a time to teach them a new table grace that they could use at home. Look at "Children's Dinner Prayers and Mealtime Blessings" (bit.ly/FMDinnerPrayers) for some ideas for table blessings.



Check with parents/caregivers regarding any food allergies and plan accordingly.

WELCOMING IN OTHER LANGUAGES



Teach the children how to say “welcome” in several different languages that may be heard in your church or community, using the phrases you learned from the Omniglot website, “Welcome in Many Languages” (bit.ly/WelcomeManyLanguages). You may want to form a small group for each language with a leader practicing with the children. Then have the children greet one another with the *welcome* they learned. Or, as one group, learn two or three *welcomes* and practice with one another. Encourage the children to greet people in the church and community who might know these languages when they see them during the week.

- ☐ Cards with “welcome” phrases (optional)



If you have photos or a church directory of people within the church who speak the languages the children have learned, show the children their pictures so they can identify and greet them sometime. You could also invite them to stop by at the end of the session so the children can welcome them in their language.

“SEEDS OF WELCOME” STORYBOOK



Provide the children with crayons or colored pencils and the two-sided copies of Resource Pages 3 and 4 (on pp. 50–51). Assist them in folding their paper in half to form a book. Read through the book with the children and invite them to color the pages. Wonder together how the characters are feeling in the story. Ask them who is showing hospitality and how they are showing it. Imagine together what might happen in the next part of the story. Encourage the children to read their storybook with family members.

- ☐ Two-sided copies of Resource Pages 3 and 4
- ☐ Crayons or colored pencils



FOLLOWING JESUS

Teach the children the Hebrew word *shalom*, and explain that it can mean “hello,” “goodbye,” or “peace to you.” Then teach them the song you will use to close each session of this unit, “Shalom, Chaverim!” If you are not familiar with the song, it can be found in the *Glory to God* hymnal, #540, or you can watch the YouTube video “Shalom Chaverim: A Jewish Kids’ Sing Along” (bit.ly/FMShalomSong, 0:48). Note that the video has the words “We’ll see you again,” where the hymnal uses “Till we meet again.” You may also choose to speak the words and have the children repeat after you.

Shalom, chaverim! Shalom, chaverim! Shalom, shalom!

(sha-LOHM ha-ver-EEM! sha-LOHM ha-ver-EEM! sha-LOHM! sha-LOHM!)

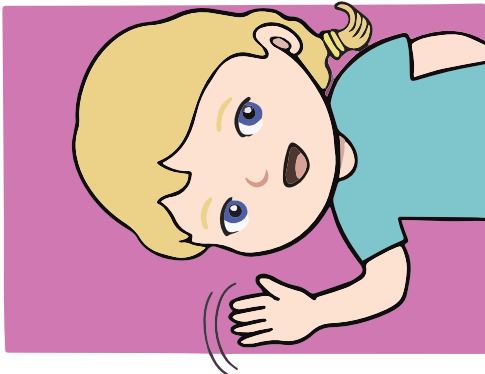
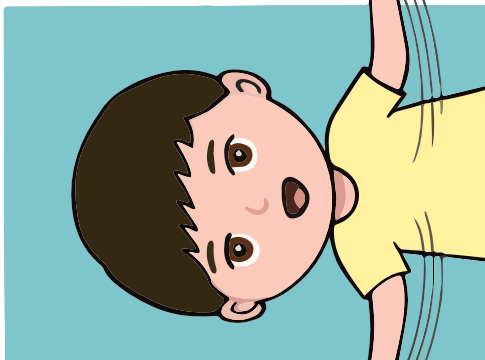
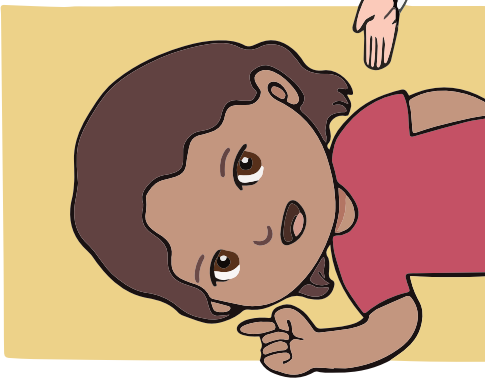
Le-hit-ra-ot, le-hit-ra-ot, shalom, shalom.

(La-HEE-tra-oat, La-HEE-tra-oat, sha-LOHM, sha-LOHM)

Farewell, good friends! Farewell, good friends! *Shalom, shalom!*

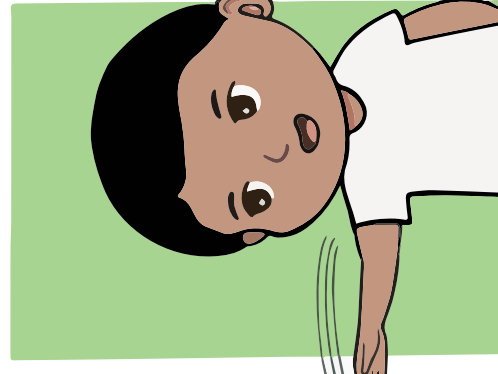
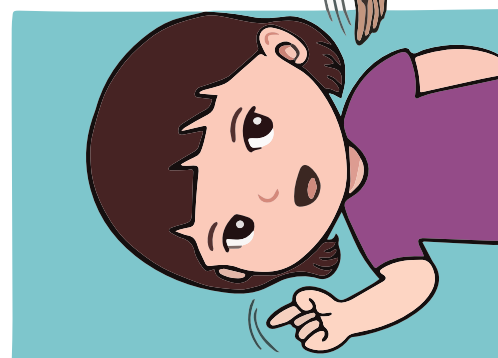
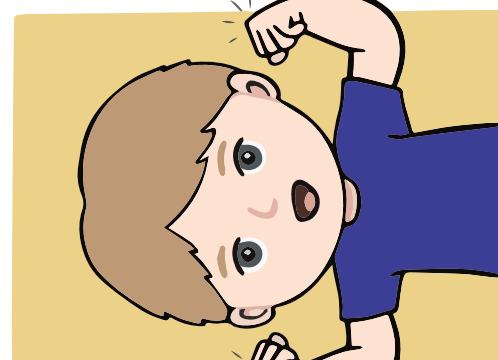
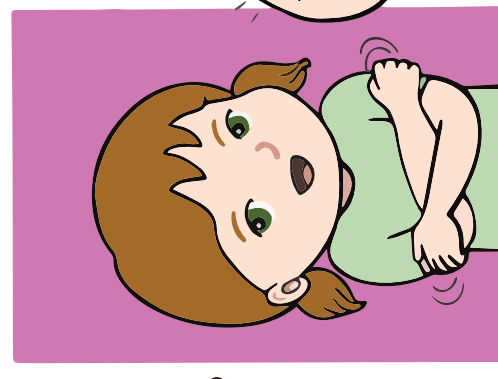
Till we meet again, till we meet again, *Shalom shalom.*

God Welcomes All



God

welcomes all, strangers and friends.

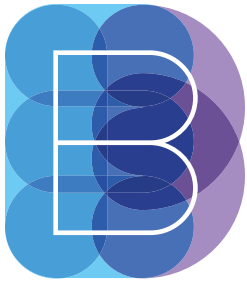


God's

love

is strong and will never

end.



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON GENESIS 1 AND LUKE 18:15–17

In the beginning, God smiled and began to create. God swept over the waters like a wind while deciding what to make first. “Let there be light,” God said. Light and darkness became two separate things—day and night. God **welcomed** the light and the darkness and said they were good, and that was the end of the first day.

The next day after the light came, God decided to separate the water that drops from the sky in rain and snow from the water that is down below in rivers, lakes, and the ocean. God **welcomed** both the water in the sky and water below and said they were good, and that was the end of the second day.

On the third day, God looked at the waters below and gathered them into particular places so dry land could appear. God planted all kinds of flowers, bushes, and trees on the land that produced yummy fruits and vegetables. God **welcomed** the land and all that grows on it, and God saw that these things were good.

On the fourth day, God gathered some of the light together to create the sun and the stars. God called the moon into being for the night. God **welcomed** the sun, moon, and stars and saw that they were good.

On the fifth day, God began to create the creatures of the sea, everything that swims, and the creatures of the air, everything that flies. Can you name some of these creatures? God **welcomed** all of these we have named and all the others whose names we don’t know, and God saw that they were good.

On the sixth day, God created the creatures of the land, all kinds of creatures. Some were tall, and some were short. Some had spots, and others had stripes. Some ate meat, and some ate plants. Can you name some of these land creatures? God **welcomed** all of these we have named and all the others whose names we don’t know. But God wasn’t done yet. God created humans to be in God’s image and to continue to welcome all of God’s creation.

Does God welcome you? How do you know?

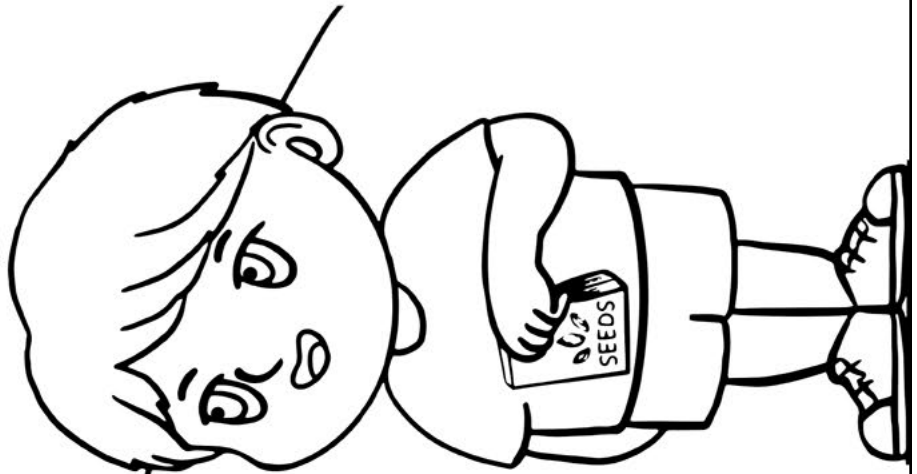
Many years after all these things were created, God’s Son, Jesus, came to earth, and one of the things he made sure to do was to **welcome** children. “These young ones are very good,” said God, as Jesus talked to them, hugged them, and blessed them and their families. We continue to **welcome** each other today through smiling, waving, and baptizing new people into God’s community.

Session

1

Seeds of Welcome

Today is a good day
for planting seeds.



Now we can both
welcome these plants to
their new neighborhood.

I've never
planted seeds
before.







SAMPLE SESSION



THE BENEFITS OF A MULTIAGE SETTING

Multiage curriculum places spiritual development in a church family model and recognizes that age and development are not synonymous. It can appeal to all church sizes, with “family groups” spanning the various ages found in larger groups. There is the opportunity for the development of skills and character through encouraging disciples who support and care for one another; providing leadership and mentoring occasions; and supporting cooperation, rather than competition, as well as patience, tolerance, and compassion for those who are of a different age or ability.

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Welcome All Overview

WHAT DOES “WELCOME ALL” MEAN?

Welcome all is the way we are describing the faith practice of hospitality. It is the idea of being intentional and authentic as we offer a genuine welcome to all of God’s people—both stranger and friend. When we are intentional about welcoming *all*, we are affirming the worth of all of God’s people. A commitment to opening our hearts, our homes, our churches, and our capacity for friendship and community to, not only those who are like us, but also those who are different from us is at the very heart of the practice of hospitality.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

From the moment of creation, to the risen Christ walking unrecognized alongside his disciples, and even beyond to the early church, our Scriptures are full of stories of God’s people practicing welcome. At the core of each reference to biblical hospitality is the idea that we welcome the stranger because we were once strangers (Exodus 23:9; Deuteronomy 10:19; Matthew 25:35; Romans 12:12–13; Hebrews 13:2). It is not a stretch to say that hospitality, especially to the stranger, is God’s mandate.

HOW DO CHILDREN UNDERSTAND “WELCOME ALL”?

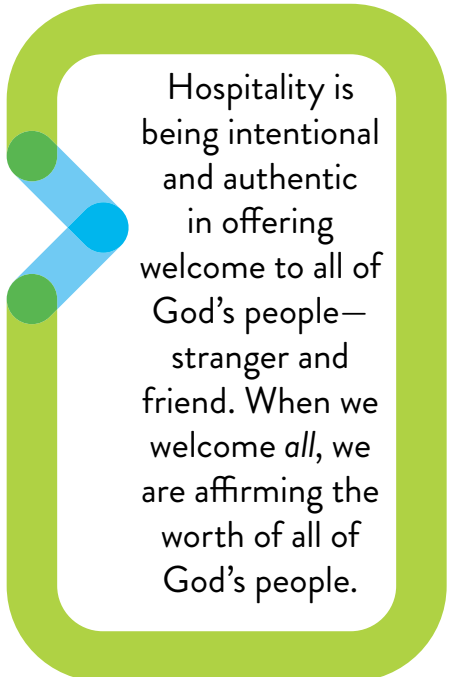
Children are often the recipients of warm welcome. From grandparents buying special treats to teachers creating a space where students feel special and recognized as individuals, we hope that the children with whom we minister carry an experience of what welcome feels like. From the playground to the lunch table, we also hope that children will be able to bring experiences of being welcoming out into their communities. Conscious of personal boundaries (that are especially important for children) around the idea of “stranger danger,” we can still help our children consider how they can reach out past the comfortable to practice hospitality with those who are different from themselves.



INFOGRAPHIC POSTER

First-century hospitality is the theme of the infographic poster for the *Welcome All* unit. It explores Jewish and Roman/Greek customs of welcome, such as the expectations of hosts and guest, common greetings, and table hospitality.

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Hospitality is being intentional and authentic in offering welcome to all of God’s people—stranger and friend. When we welcome *all*, we are affirming the worth of all of God’s people.

1

Welcome to God's World!

GENESIS 1:1-2:2



GOAL

By hearing about God's care in creating a diverse and beautiful world, children will envision ways to embody that welcome in their interactions and participation in the life of the church and community.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
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- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Creator of all, as I prepare to share your word, create in my heart the space to receive the children's perspectives, so that together we understand this familiar text in ways that inspire us to share your welcome today, this week, and each day. Amen.

WHAT IS THIS SESSION ABOUT?

Although the story of creation may be familiar, with hospitality and welcome as our lens, we will be coming to this story from a different angle. This story affirms the worth and belonging in each part of creation, and that is something to celebrate and lift up for our children.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE STORY?

The creation story is actually told two different times in the first two chapters of Genesis. While Genesis 1 focuses on creation over seven days, with God creating every living thing and seeing that each was good, the second account's focus is on the humans that God created, placed in the garden, and entrusted with the care of everything. God's care was evident in the variety and diversity of each creation—most especially in the garden full of everything God's people needed. Is anything more welcoming?

HOW WILL CHILDREN CONNECT TO THIS PRACTICE?

God's welcome is as abundant as God's creation is! In the session, the children will notice ways they have experienced welcome, and use those experiences to find ways to practice the same kind of welcome, both in our church and in their own daily lives.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE THE SESSION?

- Write the words to the song "God Welcomes All" on a sheet of newsprint. The words may be found in "God Welcomes All" on page 56.
- Depending on the choices you make:
- Look at the church website, brochures, or kiosks, and note how these things show welcome. Could children's contributions enhance the spirit of welcome? Based on your choices for "Welcoming People to Our Church" on page 58, talk with your pastor or your church's evangelism or outreach ministries to see how these craft projects could be used.



GETTING STARTED

-
- ☐ Resource Pages 1 and 2
 - ☐ Tape

CONNECTING WITH CREATION

AM C

Cut apart the pictures on Resource Pages 1 and 2 (on pp. 60–61) and tape them at the children's eye level in four corners of the room. Invite everyone, including leaders, to walk around the room and look at each picture, standing by the one that is their favorite.

Ask each person to share what they liked about the picture. (If this is a new group gathered for the first time, also have them share their name and grade.) Once everyone has shared, ask what the pictures might all have in common. Affirm any answers that make sense, but until someone mentions that they are all things that God created, continue to ask, "What else?"

Invite everyone to move to the seating area in a way that is inspired by the picture (*floating, crawling, gliding, and so forth*). Tell the children that our next four sessions will focus on the theme of "Welcome All."

-
- ☐ *Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device (optional)

GOD WELCOMES ALL

M

Display the words and introduce the song "God Welcomes All." If singing, use the *Glory to God* hymnal, #399, or listen to the tune at bit.ly/FMWelcomesAll. Sing the song a few times so that the children become comfortable singing together. If you are not singing the song, invite the children to speak the phrases after you.

God welcomes all, /
strangers and friends; /
God's love is strong /
and it never ends.¹ /



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

-
- ☐ Newsprint
 - ☐ Markers
 - ☐ Colored construction paper
 - ☐ Tape

WORDS OF WELCOME

QC C

Engage the children in conversation about a time that they felt really welcomed, using the following questions:

- ✦ When was a time you felt welcome because of something someone said?
- ✦ When was a time you felt welcome because of something someone did?
- ✦ When was a time you felt welcome because you were given something?
- ✦ When was a time you felt welcome because of your surroundings?

1. © 2008 WGRG, Iona Community (admin. GIA Publications, Inc.). All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Use newsprint to collect their ideas. Circle the words or ideas that came up the most. As a group, pick three to five words or phrases that describe *welcome* best. Have volunteers write each word on a sheet of colored construction paper. Display these in a visible area of your meeting space.



You will be building upon and revisiting the words of welcome throughout this unit. Keep them displayed or save them and repost them for each session.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

DEPICTING GOD'S GARDEN

C A

Read aloud the adapted Bible story from Genesis 1:1–2:2 on Resource Page 3 (on p. 62) or invite volunteers to read. Wonder together, using the following questions or some of your own:

- How do you think Adam and Eve felt to be asked to take care of God's creation?
- How do you think it would feel to come into this new place as the only people there?
- How do you think God felt about sharing the beautiful garden with Adam and Eve?
- If God is powerful enough to create everything and anything, why might God have needed to rest?

- ☐ Resource Page 3
- ☐ Newsprint
- ☐ Glue sticks
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Magazines

Provide magazines for the children to cut out pictures of things that might have been found in God's garden. Have the children glue the pictures on the newsprint to make a collage. While they are working, continue to wonder together about the story.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

ROLE-PLAYING WELCOME: GETTING IT RIGHT AND MISSING THE MARK

D

Tell the children that there are many areas of life where we have the opportunity to extend and/or receive welcome. Ask for volunteers to role-play scenes, each of which will be done twice: once to show not being very welcoming and a second time to show welcome. Use the following scenarios, or invite the children to make up their own:

- Going out to eat at a restaurant and being greeted by the hostess
- Getting lost on a hike in a park and asking another hiker for help
- Walking into a new cabin at summer camp where all the kids have been together for many years
- Trying to find a partner for the water balloon toss at a neighborhood party

“I’M GOING TO CHURCH . . .”

G

Play a game based on the I’m Going to Grandmother’s House game where participants have to name something that they are bringing that begins with the same letter as their first name.

In this game, there will be three rounds. Arrange the children in a circle, giving the following instructions before each round:

- Round 1: Name an attitude or quality that you will bring to church to be welcoming that begins with the same letter as your first name (for example, “I’m Lydia, and I am going to bring my best listening skills to church”).
- Round 2: Name an activity that you love to do that you will invite people to participate in (for example, “I am Kamau, and I am going to invite people to go sailing with me”).
- Round 3: Name a treat that you will bring to coffee hour in the same number as your age (for example, “I am Ryan, and I am going to bring nine candy bars to coffee hour”).

As the children share, affirm their answers and look for qualities, activities, and treats that could be brought to the communal life of the church to create an atmosphere of welcome.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- ☐ Paper lunch bags or plain gift bags
- ☐ Crayons, markers, and colored pencils
- ☐ Blank notecards with envelopes
- ☐ Mural paper or newsprint

WELCOMING PEOPLE TO OUR CHURCH

A

Invite the children to create a craft project that will fit with your church’s evangelism, outreach, or welcoming efforts, or for use in your space.

Choose one or more options:

- Decorate bags: Brainstorm together ideas for welcoming pictures and have the children draw them on paper lunch bags or plain gift bags. Suggest they write the words “Welcome to [your church’s name]” and/or your church’s tagline if you have one. Wonder together what could go in the bags that would be helpful to visitors or those new to the congregation. Give the bags and the children’s suggestions to the appropriate leaders.
- Make notecards: Tell the children that pastors and church volunteers send notes of welcome to visitors. Brainstorm together messages that would be welcoming for the cards, such as “We are glad you worshiped with us.” or “Please, come again!”
- Create a welcome sign for your room or Sunday school area on mural paper or newsprint.

HOW I AM WELCOMING



- ☐ Three sticky notes for each child
- ☐ "Words of Welcome" signs from page 57
- ☐ Pens, pencils

Give every child three sticky notes and the following instructions:

- On sticky note #1, write or draw one way that you are great at welcoming others (such as I always say hello to my neighbors when we go for walks).
- On sticky note #2, write or draw one way that feels hard to be welcoming to others (such as I don't like it when people not in my friend group sit at our lunch table).
- On sticky note #3, write or draw one action you can take to be welcoming to others (such as I could make a point to ask the new person in my class to be my partner in gym class).

Have the children:

- Place sticky note #1 on one of the signs they made in "Words of Welcome" displayed around the room.
- Give sticky note #2 to you or another leader.
- Take sticky note #3 home with them as a reminder of a welcoming action to try to take in the coming week.



Encourage children to help those who need assistance with writing to add a description of their picture on the sticky note below the drawing.



FOLLOWING JESUS

Holding the children's sticky notes #2, encourage them to remember the area where it can feel hard to be welcoming, and keep that situation in their prayers. Comment that, although it may feel scary to think about changing the situation, remember that God made the whole world to welcome us, and we, too, can welcome others.

Pray the following prayer, or one of your own:

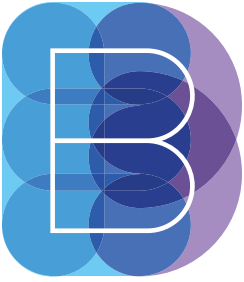
Creator God, we are in awe of all you created, and we are grateful that you created us to live in your world. There are so many ways that we are welcomed, and so many opportunities for us to be welcoming. We know you are with us as we welcome all. May we be challenged this week to go out with your word in our hearts and your love in our words as we welcome others. Amen.



Keep the signs with welcoming words from "Words of Welcome," page 57, for the rest of the sessions in this unit.







BIBLE STORY

ADAPTED FROM GENESIS 1:1–2:2

At the beginning of time, God created the world. Before God created the world, there was nothing but darkness, and a wind from God swirled around. In this darkness and wind, God decided that there should be not just darkness but also light. God separated waters and sky and land, and on that land, God created plants and trees. God made days and years and seasons. God made the sun and moon and stars.

From darkness and just a whisper of wind, God made a world full of so many different things—but God was going to do even more!

God created animals: fish that could swim, birds that could fly. God created every kind of different animal to walk the earth that you could even imagine! God welcomed all of these creatures, born of God's creation, to live in this wonderful world being created.

From darkness and just a whisper of wind, God made a world of so many different things and creatures—but God was going to do even more!

God created humans in God's own image and gave them names: Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were created by God to be partners and to work together. God told them to create families and care for all of God's creation: the birds and fish and creepy crawlies. God told Adam and Eve to tend the plants, to help them grow. And having worked so hard to create a world full of every kind of different thing God could ever imagine, it was time for God to rest.

From darkness and just a whisper of wind, God made a world of so many different things and creatures and people—but God was going to do even more!

In creating every thing and being, God created a diverse world, and then God welcomed people to care for this creation. Just as God welcomed people into God's beautiful creation, we, too, can welcome others into our lives, our community, and our church so that they, too, may know of God's love.



SAMPLE SESSION



LEADING YOUTH

Adolescence is a time of great developmental and faith growth, but that growth may be very different for each person. Questions of identity, belonging, and purpose are explored as youth try on new behaviors and identities and figure out their place among peers and in the world. Primary relationships expand from family to peers. Youth need space to question and experiment, yet also clear and loving boundaries to know appropriate limits of behavior. In very general terms, younger youth are more active and concrete, and seek new interests and affirmation. Older youth have settled more into themselves, can handle abstract thinking, and seek deep relationships. For all youth, emotions are very real, and the ability to make good choices is still forming. Some youth may face difficult relationships at home and with peers that affect their faith formation. Adults modeling and showing love and patience is priceless.

NOTE ABOUT SUPPLIES

Basic supplies used throughout this curriculum are Bibles, newsprint, markers, paper, and pens. Other supplies occasionally used include: card stock, sticky notes, glue sticks, scissors, and tape. These supplies are listed next to the activity where they are used.

Internet-connected devices are used throughout this curriculum to access music, videos, art, and websites.

EXPLANATION OF SYMBOLS

- A** **Art:** invites creativity in hands-on arts and crafts.
- AM** **Active/Movement:** allows time for youth to move their bodies.
- AT** **Abstract Thinking:** allows youth to reflect on concepts, such as grace, faith, and hope. Younger youth may find this challenging while older youth are able to think about objects, principles, and ideas not physically present.
- C** **Conversation:** allows time to talk and share thoughts, feelings, and questions.
- CT** **Concrete Thinking:** focuses on the physical world and objects we can see. Generally, younger youth are more drawn to concrete thinking as their brains have not developed to grasp abstract concepts.
- D** **Drama:** uses skits and role-play to engage with the story/practice.
- G** **Game:** allows for cooperative play.
- M** **Music:** engages youth with music and rhythm.
- QC** **Quiet/Contemplative:** provides space and time for thought and reflection.
- S** **Service:** provides opportunities for youth to help others.
- T** **Technology:** uses an internet-connected device.
- X** **Extra Prep:** requires additional time or materials.

Welcome All Overview

WHAT DOES “WELCOME ALL” MEAN?

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes, “Hospitality creates a safe, open place where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another.”¹ For Christians, showing hospitality means showing love, kindness, and grace to all people. While it may be easier to welcome individuals with whom we share similarities, the joy and challenge of Christian hospitality involves welcoming and celebrating those who are different than ourselves. It is important to understand that difference is not the antithesis of unity; rather, the issue arises when we use differences to oppress certain people or groups instead of celebrating the beautiful diversity of God’s family. Thus, Christian hospitality challenges *othering* and advocates for the most marginalized in our society so that all are truly welcomed.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Throughout the Scriptures, the mandate for hospitality is clear. In the Old Testament, God commands God’s people to extend hospitality to strangers, protect the vulnerable, and seek justice for the oppressed. There are grave consequences when people fail to welcome others (for example, the children of Israel being exiled or the destruction of Sodom). Alternatively, the Bible teaches that hospitality is richly rewarded (reference the story of Elijah and the widow later in this unit). Hospitality is the hallmark of Christian life, as Jesus’ entire ministry prioritized extending a wider welcome to all. The Christian imperative for welcoming others is probably best expressed by Jesus in John 13:34–35: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples.”

HOW WILL YOUTH CONNECT?

As part of their identity development, youth often struggle with trying to fit in. They identify individuals with whom they are similar and may assimilate with groups where they feel comfortable. Unfortunately, this may lead them (intentionally or unintentionally) to engage in *othering*. This unit will encourage them to step out of their comfort zones, to stand up for justice, and to demonstrate hospitality to all.

The joy and challenge of Christian hospitality involves welcoming and celebrating those who are different than ourselves.

1. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 161.

Welcome Others

GENESIS 18:1-10

1



GOAL

Youth will discover what the Bible teaches about welcoming others and identify ways to become more hospitable.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Welcoming God, guide me as I guide your children to be more like you. Amen.

WHAT IS THIS SESSION ABOUT?

During this session, we will explore a prime example of hospitality in the Scriptures. We will learn that we should welcome others because God has welcomed us, and because we never know when we might find ourselves in a situation where we are outsiders. Finally, we will discover that, when we give a warm welcome to others, we often receive unexpected blessings in return.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE STORY?

This lesson recalls the story of Abraham and Sarah entertaining strangers in Genesis 18. In the previous chapter, God told Abraham that he and his elderly wife would have a child. This child's lineage would be plentiful and forever blessed. In Genesis 18, Abraham encounters three strangers and invites them to his home. His household provides a space for the men to rest and offers them a hearty meal. After this, the strangers reaffirm the promise God made in the previous chapter, that Sarah would give birth.

This story teaches the importance of hospitality. Abraham did not hold back in extending the warmest welcome possible. So, too, should we be exuberant in our hospitality to others. Similarly, we learn of the reward that comes with showing hospitality. By giving such a warm welcome to their guests, Abraham and Sarah received an immense blessing in return.

HOW WILL YOUTH CONNECT?

While youth may be familiar with welcoming others in the context of church, they may not as readily connect God's mandate for hospitality to other areas of life. This lesson will demonstrate how to do so.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE THE SESSION?

- Gather Bibles, newsprint, marker, paper, and pens.

Depending on the choices you make:

- In "Serve a Meal to Others" on page 69, food is required. Please consider any dietary restrictions and food allergies. Make the necessary adjustments by substituting or adding alternative foods.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME OTHERS

C AM

As participants arrive, help them form groups of two or three. Invite them to either greet one another in a standard greeting of hello or handshake or encourage them to invent a kind greeting that they can use when welcoming others. It may be a spoken greeting or some sort of creative handshake or gesture. After they have greeted the members of their group, tell them to learn one thing about each person that most people don't know. They will need to remember this information, because they will introduce each other when the session begins.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

INTRODUCE A FRIEND

C

Ask for volunteers to share what they learned about the others in their group from the previous activity. Invite them to begin with the prompt "I'd like you to meet _____. One thing I learned about them is _____."

LEARN TO WELCOME IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

C T

☐ Internet-connected device

Watch the YouTube video "Learn to Say Welcome in 15 languages" (bit.ly/FMWelcome15, 0:44) to learn how to say "welcome" in different languages. The first time you play the video, have youth close their eyes and count in their heads how many languages they can identify. When the video is completed, ask youth how many languages they were able to recognize. Play the video again and invite them to learn one greeting they had never heard before. You may need to play it through several times. Encourage them to use their newfound skills as they meet new people who may speak different languages.

PRAY TOGETHER

QC

Lead the youth in prayer by inviting them to repeat each line after you:

Dear God, /
open our ears to hear you, /
open our eyes to see the humanity of others, /
and open our hearts to receive others /
as you have received us. /
Amen. /



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

☐ Bible

READ AND DISCUSS THE BIBLE STORY

C

Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 18:1–10. Invite youth to ask questions or share what the story brings up for them. Consider one or more of these questions for discussion:

- ➔ How did Abraham and Sarah provide hospitality to their guests?
- ➔ Why do you think Abraham went out of his way to be hospitable to these strangers?
- ➔ Although Abraham and Sarah were generous to their guests, what did the guests give them in return? What does this tell us about hospitality?

☐ Bible

REENACT THE BIBLE STORY

D AM

Invite volunteers to reenact the Bible story. The cast will include Abraham, Sarah, and the three strangers.



If you have a limited number of youth, one person can play the role of all three strangers. If you have more youth, consider having someone act as the narrator of the story by reading the story from the Bible while other participants act out the story.

Encourage actors to have fun and improvise while maintaining the general structure of the Bible story. They do not need to read the text while acting.

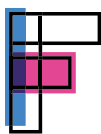
☐ Copies of Resource Page 1

COMPLETE A WORD SEARCH

QC CT

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1 (on p. 70) and encourage youth to find the words and solve the puzzle. Words may be vertical, horizontal, or diagonal. In the spaces below, write the remaining letters in order to find one thing Abraham says in the Scripture passage.

Solution: “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant.”



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

☐ Internet-connected device

WATCH A VIDEO ABOUT IMMIGRATION

T C AT

Watch the YouTube video “It Wasn’t Easy Growing Up as an Immigrant” (bit.ly/FMImmigrant, 3:46). Have a discussion about the video. Consider one or more of the following questions for discussion:

- ➔ Why did people treat Corrie like an outsider? How did this treatment make her feel?
- ➔ What were some instances where people welcomed Corrie?
- ➔ When was a time you felt like an outsider?
- ➔ What can we learn from this story?

REVIEW THE “WELCOME TIMELINE”

C CT

☐ Copies of Resource Page 2

Hand out copies of Resource Page 2 (on p. 71). Review the Welcome Timeline of notable events over the past few centuries of Christian history where a warmer and wider welcome was extended to groups of people who were previously excluded. Note that some of the events were quite recent. Ask youth which of these events they knew about. Wonder together how they feel about the information presented in the timeline.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

MAKE A T-CHART

C CT

☐ Newsprint, marker

Have the youth evaluate how your church shows hospitality. On newsprint, create a T-chart by drawing a line down the middle of the paper. Label the top of one column “what we do well” and the other column “how we can improve.” Together, list ways the church shows hospitality well. Then, brainstorm ways the church can be more hospitable. Think about who is welcome and who is not. After you have finished brainstorming, collectively draft a short welcome statement on behalf of the group. You may wish to post this statement somewhere in your meeting space. Consider presenting this to your church leaders with the youth for a conversation.



Make this an individual activity by having youth create their own T-charts on a piece of paper.

ANSWER A PROMPT

QC AT A

☐ Paper, colored pens

Have youth fold a piece of paper in half. On one half, have them write, “I feel most welcome when. . .” On the other half, have them write, “I welcome others by . . .” Invite the youth to respond to both prompts using words and/or pictures. Encourage volunteers to share their responses.

SERVE A MEAL TO OTHERS

AM X

☐ Bread or crackers
☐ Juice and/or water

Set up a simple meal of bread or crackers and juice. Have participants serve one another. While eating together, discuss how it felt to serve others and to be served by someone else. Wonder together how we might implement this type of hospitality in our everyday lives.

Check on any food allergies or dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternatives as needed.



FOLLOWING JESUS

Read Hebrews 13:2:

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Encourage youth to look for ways to welcome others in the coming days. Invite a volunteer to close with this prayer:

Welcoming God, thank you for loving us and welcoming us into your family. Help us to be more compassionate. Give us the courage to be bold in welcoming others. Amen.

Word Search

ABRAHAM

ATE (not part of "wATer")

BREAD

CALF

FEET

GENESIS

HOSPITALITY

LISTENING

LORD

MAKE

MAMRE

MILK

OAKS

PROMISE

REFRESH

REST

SARAH

STRANGER

TENT

TREES

WATER

WELCOME

WIFE

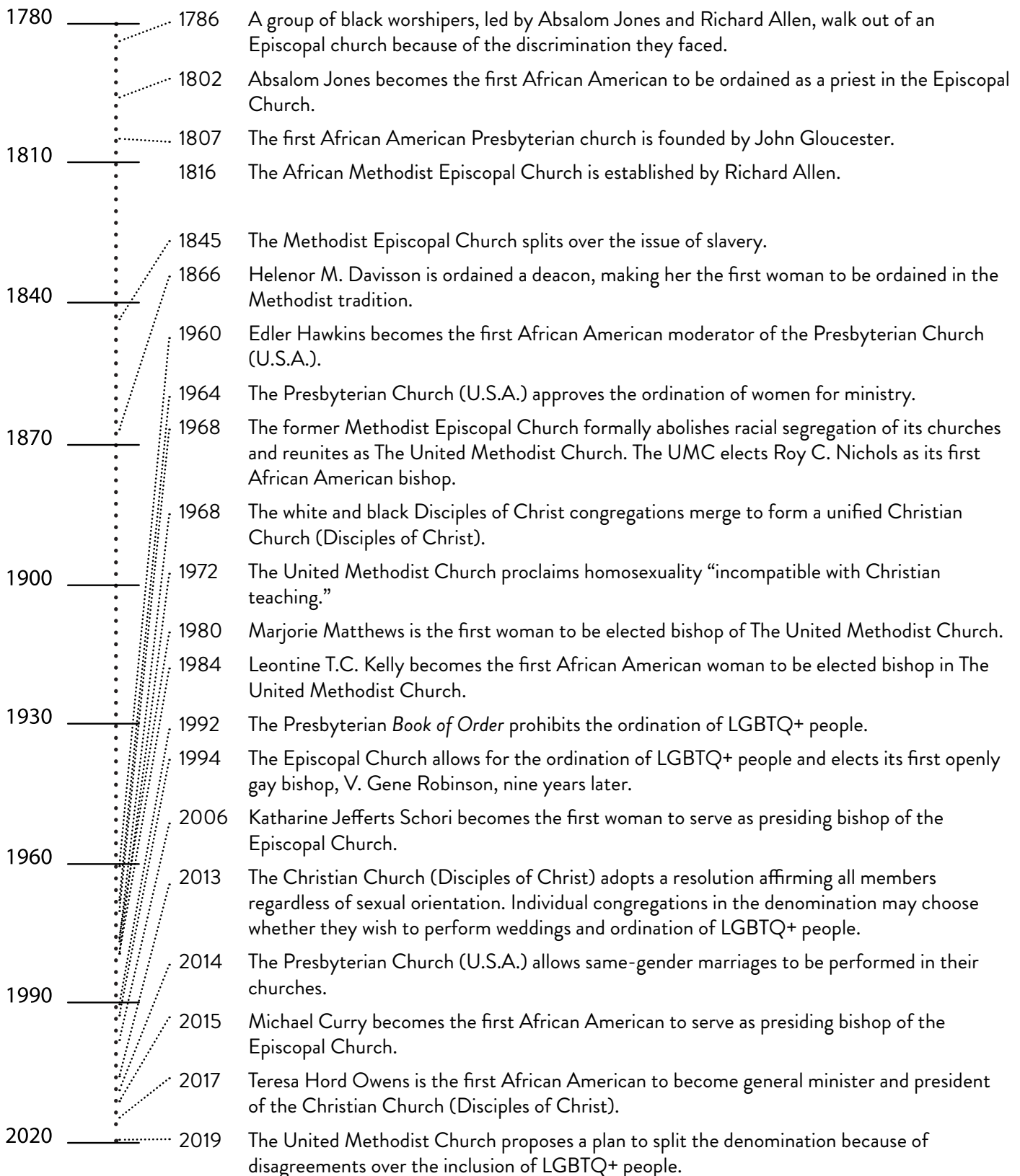
M A B R A H A M Y L O W H
R C D I P F I M A K E I O
F A L W S R F T I M N F S
D L O A A F O E R A R E P
S F R T R G W M E E V E I
O T D E A R E W I T E I T
T H R R H Y L N O S U S A
D R E A O N C O E T E P L
B E F A N S O S O S B Y I
R S R Y O G M U A R I S T
E T E A T E E E K R V S Y
A A S T E N T R S M I L K
D N H L I S T E N I N G T

_____, _____
_____, _____

_____.

Welcome Timeline

This timeline displays a few snapshots of Christian denominations wrestling with extending a wider welcome to all of God's children.



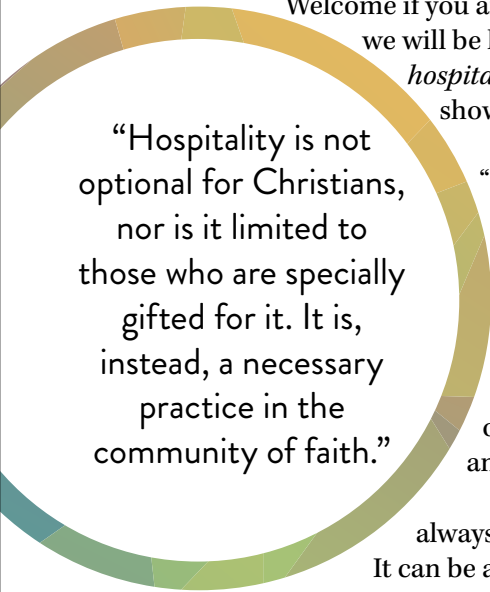


SAMPLE SESSION



Welcome All

UNIT OVERVIEW



“Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is, instead, a necessary practice in the community of faith.”

Welcome all! Welcome if this is your first dive into the *Follow Me* curriculum. Welcome if you are returning to learn about a new Christian practice. In this unit, we will be learning about . . . well . . . welcome. Welcome is also known as *hospitality*, not the hospitality industry, but the Christian practice of showing hospitality to others.

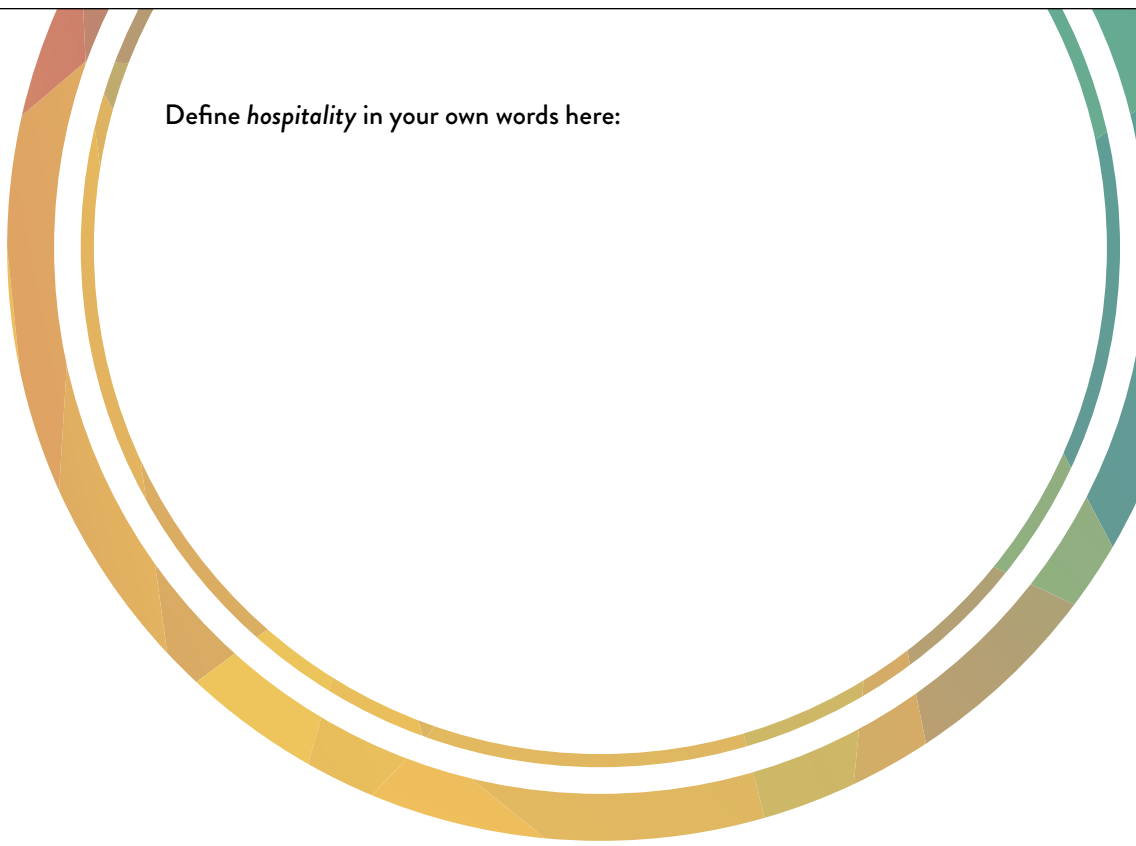
Professor Emeritus of Christian Ethics Christine Pohl states, “Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is, instead, a necessary practice in the community of faith.”¹

As we prepare to learn more about the meaning of hospitality in the context of Christian faith, it is helpful to have a common definition in mind. The “Foundational Essay,” found on pages 10–18, offers this one: “Hospitality creates a safe, open place where a friend or stranger can enter and experience the welcoming spirit of Christ in another.”

Welcoming others is certainly core to the Christian life. It is not always so easy to practice, however, even with those we love the most. It can be a joy, but it can also be a challenge to create that open, safe space, especially when people impinge on our own comfort levels or are different from us or feared. This *Adult Reflection Guide* invites you to reflect on various dimensions of welcoming as we strive to follow Christ and practice welcoming others the way Jesus did.

The practice of hospitality figures prominently in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. There is an expectation from the God who covenants with ancient Israel in the Old Testament, that the Israelites will welcome others—especially the vulnerable—the same way God has welcomed the Israelites. Jesus had a lot to say about hospitality as he had learned about it in the Hebrew Scriptures, and it was a central practice in his life and teachings. He was often dependent on the hospitality of others, and biblical accounts of his visits show how hospitality is sometimes more complex than a host inviting someone in for dinner. In fact, sometimes the host turns out to be the guest!

1. Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 31.



Define *hospitality* in your own words here:

The following pages explore four core aspects of Christian hospitality based on the “Foundational Essay” found on pages 10–18. They are:

- **Welcome others as God welcomes you**
- **See Christ in every person you meet**
- **Know your gifts of hospitality**
- **Challenge *othering***

Each section has a common flow. The aspect is introduced; a biblical text or two show where it appears in Scripture. We then see how Christians have practiced this aspect in the past and present. Finally, some ways to deepen your own practice are suggested.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Follow Me Adult Reflection Guides are designed in a flexible way for users. Based on your interest and learning preferences, make this work for you. The goal is to deepen your knowledge and engagement of the practice and its connection to the Bible and the Christian life. There are several ways to use this guide, depending on your time and interest. You can read the “Foundational Essay,” which takes a deep, scholarly dive into the practice, and then dabble in the four sessions of this guide, selecting parts you wish to explore. If you choose not to read the “Foundational Essay,” spend time working through the four sessions here. If you study in a group, be guided by the Adult Leader's Guide. Whatever approach you choose, make notes in this guide that you can return to over time.

Note: [bit.ly](#) addresses are case-sensitive.



ONE

WELCOME OTHERS AS GOD WELCOMES YOU

GENESIS 1:1–2:4A;
GENESIS 2:4B–25

In his life and teachings, welcoming all, or *hospitality*, was central to Jesus and his Jewish faith. As a Jew, he was informed by the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) and frequently lifted up their imperative to welcome strangers. Hospitality is central to the history of ancient Israel and found throughout the Bible.

The first aspect to consider in this practice of hospitality is to always remember that we can welcome others only because we have first been welcomed by God. So, perhaps the place to begin is the beginning. The two biblical accounts of creation (Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–25) emphasize different aspects of God's actions. The first story describes how God created everything (living and nonliving) and saw that it was good. God affirms everything and everyone. In the second account, God places the two humans, Adam and Eve, in a garden and tells them to take care of everything.

In both creation stories, humans and all other living things are created and welcomed by God. A relationship is established. So a fundamental truth about hospitality is that we can welcome others only because we have first been welcomed and had a place prepared for us by God.

We belong here. We all do. Every. Living. Thing. This attitude is essential when we find ourselves in the position of host. We avoid any feelings of superiority over our guests because, at heart, we know them to be fellow creatures who have been created by God and are loved by God as we are. We treat them as we want to be treated when we are vulnerable guests.

GETTING STARTED

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

HOSPITALITY DEFINED

Consider the following definitions of hospitality by two theologians:

“Hospitality is the practice of God’s welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God’s actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis.”²

—Letty M. Russell

“A life of hospitality begins in worship, with a recognition of God’s grace and generosity. Hospitality is not first a duty and responsibility; it is first a response of love and gratitude for God’s love and welcome to us.”³

—Christine Pohl

To ponder:

- How have you felt welcomed by God?

- Reflect on a moment in your life when you witnessed hospitality as expressed in one of the definitions above. Write any words or phrases that come to mind here:

GOD WELCOMES ALL

Meditate for a few moments on the words to this song. You may want to sing it or say the words out loud:

“God Welcomes All” in *Glory to God* hymnal, #399, or bit.ly/FMWelcomesAll

God welcomes all,
strangers and friends;
God’s love is strong
and it never ends.⁴

2. Letty M. Russell, *Just Hospitality: God’s Welcome in a World of Difference* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 19.

3. Pohl, *Making Room*, 172–73.

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FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

GOD WELCOMES US IN CREATION

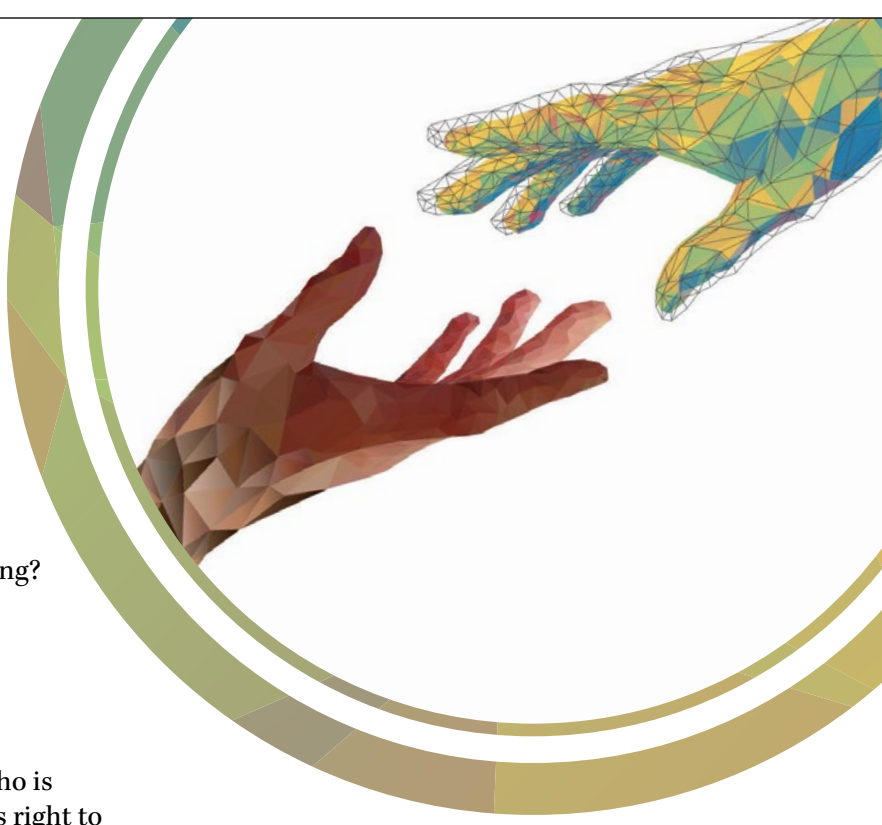
Creation stories are a common feature in religious communities from all different cultures and time periods. They are found in monotheistic and polytheistic religions. The purpose of creation stories within communities of faith is not to provide a scientific account of the beginning of the world, but rather to express humanity's relationship with the God(s) they worship and what their place in the world is.

The creation stories of the Christian faith are found in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. They, like many other religious creation stories, speak of a God/higher power who created a beautiful world and invited humanity into it. We welcome others because God first welcomed us.

A word about the creation stories in Genesis: Yes, there are actually two separate accounts of the creation of the world in Genesis. There is widespread agreement in the field of biblical scholarship that the book of Genesis was drawn from at least three sources. Each of the creation stories comes from a different source. To read more about this, see: bit.ly/FMSourceTexts.

Read Genesis 1:1–2:4a and respond to these questions:

- In what ways are God's actions in the story welcoming? How does this story make you feel welcomed by God?
- Are there limits placed on who is welcomed? Do you think it is right to place limits on whom you welcome? Why or why not?
- Are there any boundaries placed on the hospitality God offers? Is it good to have boundaries when you practice hospitality?



Now read the second account of creation found in Genesis 2:4b–25 and respond:

- In what ways are God's actions in the story welcoming? How does this story make you feel welcomed by God?
- Are there limits placed on who is welcomed? Do you think it is right to place limits on whom you welcome? Why or why not?
- Are there any boundaries placed on the hospitality God offers? Is it good to have boundaries when you practice hospitality?

Think about both stories.

- How does having both stories deepen our understanding of God's hospitality? What would we lose if we had only one of them?

Why are we looking at the creation stories to understand Christian hospitality? Because one could argue that creating the world and inviting humans to be a part of it was the greatest act of hospitality ever done. God chose to share the world that God created with humanity.

FINDING GENESIS 2:4B–25

Much of the Hebrew Testament (what many Christians call the Old Testament) was handed down orally from generation to generation. When it was finally written down, no chapters or verses were assigned. They were added centuries later. Sometimes a verse contains the end of one sentence and the beginning of another. So, when it says the text is Genesis 2:4b–25, it means chapter 2 of Genesis, from the second part of verse 4 through verse 25.

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Welcoming others as God has welcomed us has always been a core practice of Christian faith communities. When we gather in worship, we give thanks to a welcoming God and extend welcome to all. Let's focus on two ways churches show hospitality: through clear welcome statements and through offering sanctuary to support people who especially need hospitality.

CHURCH WELCOME STATEMENTS

Mission statements or other statements of welcome are often printed in worship bulletins and other printed materials about the church. Words that are spoken in worship also reflect the kind of welcome a church seeks to extend to others. Consider the following welcome statements from two churches.

"United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all."

www.firstcongucc.com/ucc

"This church welcomes all to our services of worship and into the full life, leadership and ministry of this church. We are an inclusive community that embraces all people regardless of race, ethnic background, age, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, social or economic situation, marital or family status, biblical interpretation or political persuasion. We welcome all in love as Jesus Christ welcomes all of us. We celebrate that we are all God's beloved children with gifts to share for the just and peaceable reign that God intends. We believe in living out our faith and ministry by loving, learning, giving and serving each other and the world, and by being a place for everyone to meet God, no matter who we are or where we are on life's journey."

bit.ly/FMCorydonPres

- How do these welcome statements make you feel about the church?
- What does each statement tell you about that church's understanding of who God is?

Write a welcome statement for a church you would like to be part of:



SANCTUARY OFFERS WELCOME

Church ministries of hospitality vary widely, depending on the gifts of members and needs of all, from providing a meal to homeless people to opening their building as a sanctuary to immigrants facing deportation.



*What other examples of practicing hospitality have you seen or experienced in your community?
In our country? In the world?*

The following link, bit.ly/FMPCUSASanctuary, introduces you to some of the history of the sanctuary movement in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and includes some short videos about a woman who sought sanctuary and one Presbyterian congregation that chose to become a sanctuary church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America voted in August 2019 to become a Sanctuary Denomination. Read more at bit.ly/ELCASanctuary.

Many Christians participate in non-church-related organizations that provide hospitality to immigrants. Grannies Respond/Abuelas Responden is a grassroots movement formed in 2018 in response to the separation of families seeking asylum at the southern border of the United States. The organization practices hospitality by doing things like meeting asylum seekers at bus stations with snacks and hygiene kits and toys for children. Learn more about Grannies Respond at bit.ly/FMGranniesRespond.

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

You certainly already practice welcome to others in your life. This is a moment to reflect on that practice and consider how to deepen it. Our approach in this unit will not be one of practicing a different kind of hospitality with each lesson, but rather improving our readiness for welcoming others. We begin this first session by doing some self-reflection on gifts needed to practice welcome and learning about our implicit biases. Future sessions will focus on learning about “the other,” building skills, and, finally, practicing hospitality with others who are different from you.

HOSPITALITY SELF-EXAM

Spend a few minutes reflecting on gifts that are necessary to practice welcome. Use the space below to record your responses.

1. List various behaviors, skills, and traits that are beneficial for practicing hospitality, such as being a good listener, flexibility, or cultural sensitivity.
2. Go through the list and put a check mark by those you think are your strengths.
3. Circle those you think you need to work on. (Remember, not everyone who practices hospitality has to be an extrovert or comfortable meeting new people. There are different ways to practice hospitality; doing this exercise may help you stretch outside your comfort zone and also identify what types of hospitality you prefer to engage in.)



KNOW YOUR IMPLICIT BIASES

Sometimes, we may not know something is a barrier for us, either because of our own lack of exposure to certain cultures or because of biases we may hold unconsciously.

What is your comfort zone when it comes to socioeconomic class issues? Take this “Hidden Rules” quiz developed by Dr. Ruby Payne and find out: bit.ly/FMPayneQuiz.



What implicit biases do you hold? If you are interested in exploring this topic, online tests can identify some of these. If you take one of these tests, you may or may not agree with the results, but, hopefully, it will challenge you to reflect on the biases you hold without even realizing it. One example of these tests is Project Implicit from Harvard University (bit.ly/ProjectImplicit).

Questions to ponder:

- What did you learn about yourself by taking these quizzes?
- Did the results surprise you? Why or why not?
- After exploring this introduction to the Christian practice of hospitality and doing some self-reflection, what are ways you might improve your practice of hospitality to others near and far?

FOLLOWING JESUS

SUMMARY

In this session, we spent time reflecting on a fundamental aspect of “Welcome All,” or hospitality. We can welcome others only because God first welcomes us. Because of God’s wildly inclusive love, we are able to practice that sort of divine love with others. We saw how God first created and welcomed humans and all creatures to this world. We looked at how churches show welcome to others. We thought about the gifts needed to practice welcome and some challenges we all face, called implicit bias.

Before we look at the second aspect of “Welcome All”—“See Christ in Everyone”—take a few moments to think about everything you have learned in this lesson and how it informs what hospitality means to you. Then watch the YouTube video “Carrie Newcomer-Room at the Table” (bit.ly/FMNewcomerTable, 3:57).

Write or speak a prayer, asking God to help you
make room in your life to welcome others.



SAMPLE SESSION



Welcome All Overview

SUMMARY OF THE PRACTICE

Hospitality is about creating an open, safe space of welcome. It is an ancient practice, central to most cultures and religions. We practice hospitality at home, at church, at work, at school, and everywhere we go. Participants will easily resonate with the theme as it is so central to our faith. Yet some people have rigid understandings of how one should show hospitality and feel uncomfortable when others don't live up to their expectations. This time of reflection will show many ways to offer hospitality.

The Christian practice of hospitality emerges from an understanding that we are all welcomed to this world by God. Every living thing. Jesus showed hospitality to saints as well as sinners, to the chosen twelve, to multitudes on a mountainside, to outcasts, orphans, widows, and those considered enemies of the people, like tax collectors. By his words and actions, Jesus affirmed the value of each person he encountered and counted them among God's beloved children. Similarly, Jesus welcomes us while bidding us to recognize and welcome the spirit of Christ in one another.

SUMMARY OF THE FOUR SESSIONS

The practice of hospitality is displayed across the breadth of Scripture. It is found in the ways God initiates relationship with humans from the earliest stories in Genesis through the closing imagery in Revelation. Hospitality is witnessed in the interactions between God and people and among people; it is codified in various laws and proverbial sayings. Jesus modeled hospitality and celebrated it in his Last Supper with his friends. The apostle Paul opened his letters with words of hospitality and encouraged early Christians to welcome one another in the name of Christ.

In this four-week study, we limit our focus to a few select texts from the Hebrew and New Testaments that help highlight four aspects of hospitality mentioned in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

One: Welcome Others as God Welcomes You

In Genesis 1 and 2, God's abundant welcome is offered in the creation stories.

Two: See Christ in Every Person You Meet: Friends, Stranger, and Enemy

In Matthew 25, Jesus claims that we do unto him as we do for those who are poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned, or estranged.

Three: Know Your Gifts of Hospitality and Encourage Others' Gifts

We consider people's differing gifts for offering hospitality as shown in the actions of Mary and Martha in Luke 10.

Four: Challenge Othering

Finally, we consider how to make space to welcome those who might otherwise be excluded from our hospitality.



Thank you for leading this group! Your role is to help participants reflect on what they learn and wish to discuss in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. The skills needed are love, ability to listen and include everyone, encourage all, and keep the conversation going. You do not need to have the answers. Rather, encourage questions and further investigation by those who raise them.

INFOGRAPHIC POSTER

First-century hospitality is the theme of the infographic poster for the *Welcome All* unit. It explores Jewish and Roman/Greek customs of welcome, such as the expectations of hosts and guests, common greetings, and table hospitality. Infographic posters provide additional information to engage learners of all ages. Posters (18" x 24") are available for purchase—as a twelve-poster set (one of each practice each year) in print or download; or as individual posters, download only—at www.pcusastore.com/FollowMeCurriculum.

The following supplies need to be available in each session. Specific supplies are listed next to activities where they are used.

- ☐ copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* for each participant, Bibles, pens, newsprint, and markers

Welcome Others as God Welcomes You

GENESIS 1:1–2:4a; GENESIS 2:4b–25

GOAL

Participants will:

- Consider hospitality as a response to God's abundant welcome of us
- Explore biblical foundations of hospitality
- Identify concrete acts of welcome and hospitality

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.

PRAYER

God of abundant grace,
prepare my heart to
welcome your beloved.
Let me welcome ideas,
experiences, and
perspectives that may
differ from my own.
Ground me in your
wisdom, patience, and
grace that I may practice
the hospitality that I seek
to explore with this group.
Amen.

The "Foundational Essay" is included in each practice's leader's guides (for all age levels) and the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

WHAT IS THIS SESSION ABOUT?

To discover the foundational truth about hospitality, we start at the beginning: we welcome others because we have first been welcomed and have a place prepared for us by God. We belong in God's good creation. We all do. From this place of belonging, we show welcome and practice hospitality with both stranger and friend.

In this first aspect of practicing hospitality, we revisit the early stories of creation with an eye toward ways God showed welcome to the first humans. We consider the biblical call to practice hospitality with not only friends but also strangers. We reflect on our comfort levels in offering hospitality in unfamiliar situations and imagine different ways to practice hospitality and offer welcome. This first aspect grounds our understanding in who we are and whose we are. It will stretch us to think about how we welcome God's beloved.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE STORY?

Biblical scholars affirm that the purpose of the two creation stories (Genesis 1:1–2:4a; Genesis 2:4b–25) is to teach us about who God is and about God's relationship with humanity and the world. One could argue that creating the world and inviting humans to be part of it was the greatest act of hospitality ever shown. As part of God's good creation, humans are created in the image of God. This generous gift further affirms the abundant welcome God extends to humans as God's beloved.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE THE SESSION?

- Distribute copies of the *Adult Reflection Guide* to participants and have them read through the first session. You cannot assume they have read it; some may be seeing this for the first time when you meet.
- If possible, read the "Foundational Essay" (on pp. 10–19).
- Read through this session and determine which options you will use. Consider how much time you have and what activities best meet the needs of your group. You may wish to combine some options or adjust them.
- Pray for all who will be part of this study, including yourself. Have fun leading it.
- If using Option 3 on page 91, prepare at least two volunteers to read about the hospitality offered by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) sanctuary movement, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America sanctuary movement, and Grannies Respond/Abuelas Responden found in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have volunteers prepare to give a summary to the group.

GETTING STARTED

In this opening session for the practice of hospitality and welcome, make a special effort to present a space of inclusion and welcome to participants. Invite introductions and have each participant tell what they do to show welcome to others.

Lead or have a volunteer lead the group in singing “God Welcomes All” by John Bell. This song can be found in the *Glory to God* hymnal, #399. You can hear the tune at bit.ly/FMWelcomesAll or watch the YouTube video “God welcomes all” (bit.ly/FMWelcomesAllVideo, 1:15). The lyrics are printed below and in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, page 7 (p. 77 of this sampler).

God welcomes all,
strangers and friends;
God’s love is strong
and it never ends.

☐ *Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device (optional)

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

DEFINE HOSPITALITY

Review the definitions of hospitality found in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, page 7 (p. 77 of this sampler). Have participants discuss the parts of these definitions that stretch their understanding of hospitality. Develop a group definition of hospitality based on your discussion.

☐ *Adult Reflection Guide*

PLAN AN EVENT

Invite the group to imagine they are planning an event for a special occasion. Create a list together of what needs to be considered in making your plans. Discuss the following:

- ➔ Depending on the occasion, what are some preparations that need to happen before the event to make guests feel honored or special (special foods or music, parting gifts, and so forth)?
- ➔ How do you as hosts need to prepare to ensure that guests feel welcome at the event?
- ➔ Why is it important to create a welcoming environment?

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

COMPARE CREATION ACCOUNTS

Have participants take a minute to review and discuss the first two paragraphs on page 8 (p. 78 of this sampler) in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Ask:

- ➔ How do you understand the fact that there are two accounts of creation in the same Bible?
- ➔ How do you react to the author’s statement that the purpose of creation stories in ancient texts was to explain humanity’s relationship to God and our place in the world rather than to provide a scientific explanation of the world?

Form two groups. Assign one of the creation stories to each group (Genesis 1:1–2:4a; Genesis 2:4b–25). After the text has been read silently or aloud, invite a volunteer from each group to summarize the creation account they just read without looking at the text. After they finish, invite one or two others to add anything not mentioned. Discuss the following as a whole group:

☐ *Adult Reflection Guide*



If everyone has a Bible or Bible app, you can form two groups, and everyone can read silently and focus on their text. A group discussion can immediately happen. If not, form two groups and allow time for each group to read aloud the assigned text.

- Can you identify any significant differences in the two texts?
- How are humans created in both texts?
- How is God's welcome shown in both texts?

In the first creation account, male and female are created at the same time. While the second account appears to suggest that women are made from men and has been used throughout time to justify patriarchy, a careful word study makes it less clear. In Hebrew, "Adam" is translated "human." The human does not become identified as male until the female is created. How does that influence your understanding of the reading?

-
- ☐ Paper, markers and/or colored pencils

ILLUSTRATE HOSPITALITY IN CREATION

Distribute paper and drawing supplies. Invite participants to read one of the two creation accounts and then illustrate their image of God's hospitality shown in creation through words or drawing. Invite volunteers to show their work.

-
- ☐ *Adult Reflection Guide*

DISCUSS THE ADULT REFLECTION GUIDE

If participants have already read the two Genesis stories and reflected during the week, spend time discussing how they answered the questions on pages 8 and 9 of the *Adult Reflection Guide* (pp. 78–79 of this sampler).

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

-
- ☐ *Adult Reflection Guide*
 - ☐ Copy of your worshiping community's welcome statement

EXAMINE WELCOME STATEMENTS

Discuss the church's welcome statement found in the *Adult Reflection Guide* on page 10 (p. 80 of this sampler). Show your worshiping community's welcome statement if you have one and compare it with the one in the guide. If participants have already written an idea for a welcome statement in their *Adult Reflection Guide*, invite them to read their ideas. If appropriate, have your group try to come up with a brief welcome statement they would like their worshiping community to have.

-
- ☐ *Welcome All infographic*

LIST EXPECTATIONS OF GUESTS AND HOSTS

Work together to create two lists of current expectations: for guests and for hosts.

Review the lists and consider how these expectations are communicated today. What are the rewards or consequences when the expectations are met or not met?

Display the Infographic Poster (see p. 39 of this sampler) of hospitality practices in the first century. Invite participants to compare the expectations of hosts and guests in the first century with the two lists they created. Reflect together:

- What first-century hospitality expectations would you find easiest to fulfill? What would be more difficult?
- Would you prefer to be a first-century host or guest? Why?
- What lessons about hospitality can we gain from first-century customs?

REVIEW ORGANIZATIONS THAT WELCOME

Have the volunteers report on the two groups' efforts to provide hospitality found in the *Adult Reflection Guide* on page 11 (p. 81 of this sampler). Discuss the following:

- ➔ How do these organizations exhibit hospitality?
- ➔ What faith foundations undergird these organizations' hospitality practices?
- ➔ How does the work they do reflect the message of hospitality offered in Genesis 2:4b–25?

☐ *Adult Reflection Guide*

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

CONSIDER ACTS OF HOSPITALITY

Encourage participants to engage in self-reflection as they prepare to practice hospitality and welcome. Provide time for individuals to respond to the questions on pages 12–13 (pp. 82–83 of this sampler) in their *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite conversation about insights gained from their responses, being aware that some people may not be comfortable disclosing their personal insights with a group. Ask:

- ➔ How does an awareness of your comfort level affect the way you practice hospitality?
- ➔ What acts of hospitality and welcome are you comfortable offering?
- ➔ How might you make room in your life to welcome others as God welcomes us?

☐ *Adult Reflection Guide*

BRAINSTORM WELCOME

Watch the YouTube video “Carrie Newcomer-Room at the Table” (bit.ly/FMNewcomerTable, 3:57). Have participants identify different acts of hospitality portrayed in the video. Brainstorm ways that people with disabilities might have been included in the video. Invite suggestions of concrete acts of hospitality that each person can practice in the coming week.

☐ Internet-connected device

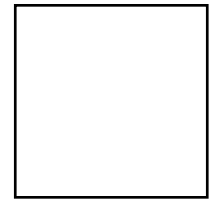
FOLLOWING JESUS

Have each person name an act of hospitality that they will practice this week. Sing or watch the song, “God Welcomes All,” used at the beginning of this session.

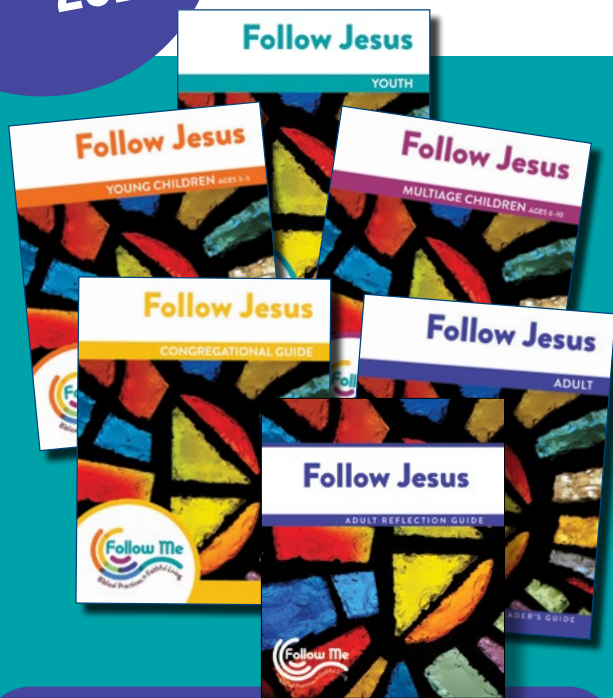
God welcomes all,
strangers and friends;
God's love is strong
and it never ends.

☐ *Glory to God* hymnal or internet-connected device

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Coming
Fall
2021



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Follow Me: Biblical Practices for Faithful Living is our newest curriculum for children, youth, and adults coming summer 2021. This thirty-six-unit curriculum is based on practices Jesus did and taught us to do in the Bible. Each unit studies a practice for four sessions (except for Lent, which has six sessions,) focusing on a different aspect of the practice in each session. The *Congregational Guide* includes everything from a café discussion guide to weekly children's bulletins to worship liturgy to an intergenerational session that allows the whole church to immerse themselves in the unit and to practice the practice together.

Components:

- Leader's guides for young children (ages 3–5), multiage children (ages 6–10), youth (ages 11–18), and adults
- *Adult Reflection Guide* that can be used independently or in a group
- *Congregational Guide* with resources for all ages and an intergenerational session for each unit
- Infographic posters

www.pcusastore.com/FollowMeCurriculum