

Semicontinuous
Jer. 2:4–13
Ps. 81:1, 10–16
 Complementary
Sir. 10:12–18 or
Prov. 25:6–7
Ps. 112
Heb. 13:1–8, 15–16
Luke 14:1, 7–14

An Invitation

Goal for the Session

Children will celebrate that God invites everyone, even unexpected guests, to the banquet.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 14:1, 7–14

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Rodney S. Sadler Jr.

Verses 12–14 also continue this counterintuitive message, telling us that our own tables should be surrounded by strangers, who are the “poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind,” in essence. We should populate our tables with those who are at the greatest social disadvantage. Although this instruction is patently this-worldly in its orientation, it says something about the nature of God’s reign as well; it lets the hearer know that the attributes ascribing favor in this world are not the same as those that do so at the coming feast. Those viewed as lower are to be treated with greater respect, to receive greater favor, and to enjoy places of honor in our own lives!

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Emilie M. Townes

The realm of God is also about how God offers an invitation in our lives to receive a genuine blessing when we learn that it is crassly unfaithful to store up spiritual points to note our goodness and then make it worse by ostentatious displays of that goodness. Receiving a blessing that invites us to grow into a deeper relationship with God is not something we can work our way into through acts designed to display our worth. No. God asks us to live into our createdness through our everyday acts toward each other and in and through our relationship with God and creation. Jesus wants us to understand that our all-too-human drive to seek the best seat in the house or at the party will not mark genuine participation in God’s mercy or love.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Charles E. Raynal

Luke gives beautiful testimony to this barrier-breaking hospitality in the account of the journey of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where she gives birth and lays Jesus in a manger “because there was no place for them in the inn” (2:1–7). The birth of Jesus thus breaches the blockade of welcome for the babe at the inn and embodies royal David’s line in an unexpected way. The hospitality of the manger becomes a paradigm for Luke’s particular emphasis on the welcome of the stranger and the communion at table that breaks down the barriers at the borders to human community and overcomes the constrictive exclusions of fear and loathing in the world.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Ronald P. Byars

Jesus’ challenge reaches across boundaries of place and time, calling us to be more aware of those from whom we are inclined to avert our eyes, and to follow him rather than those who baptize common prejudices as virtues. We who “have been baptized into Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:3) are called to conform to him and to his ways. To live into our baptism is to be ever mindful of those who are typically left out. (“Do not be conformed to this world” [Rom. 12:2].)

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 14: 1, 7–14

Focus on Your Teaching

Third- and fourth-graders are excited when an invitation to a birthday party arrives, but they also know what it feels like to be left out. The most popular children are invited to party after party while others may never receive an invitation at all. The party in today's focus scripture includes some of those people who were usually left out. Children, whether they are always included or long to be included, can never hear too often that God's love includes them.

God of grace, may your love fill even those dark corners of my soul so that I may overflow with the joy that comes from knowing your love. Amen.

■ LEADING THE SESSION

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ green cloth
- ☐ Christ candle
- ☐ lighter
- ☐ offering basket
- ☐ Bible
- ☐ Color Pack 1, 2, 29, 33
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast
- ☐ mural paper
- ☐ pencils or dark crayon

For Responding

- ☐ Option 1: *Singing the Feast*, bit.ly/SingingTheFeast
- ☐ Option 2: construction paper (light colors), markers, newsprint
- ☐ Option 3: copier paper, markers
- ☐ Option 4: Resource Sheet 2

GATHERING

Before the session, print the opening litany on newsprint. Prepare the mural paper for Exploring. For Responding, option 2, fold construction paper in half crosswise and write the prayer opening on newsprint. For Responding, option 3, gather information about a local food pantry and how the children and their families can participate.

Greet learners by name as they arrive. Invite several children to set up the worship table with the green cloth, candle, offering basket, and Bible, opened to Luke.

When everything is ready, gather at the worship table. Point to the green cloth. Explain that today is the Seventeenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Tell about this season, using the information on Color Pack 1. During Ordinary Time, the church focuses on growing in faith and following Jesus.

Invite a child to lead the group in the liturgy and another to light the candle.

One: Lord, prepare our hearts,

All: As we open our ears to your word.

One: Open our eyes,

All: As we look with love on your people.

One: Hold our hands,

All: As we walk with you to do your will. Amen.

Play “Do Lord, O Do Lord” (Color Pack 29, [Singing the Feast](http://bit.ly/SingingTheFeast)). Invite children to sing along. Receive the offering. Then extinguish the candle.

Display Color Pack 2. Ask:

- ✠ What title would you give this photograph?
- ✠ Who do you think is invited to this party?
- ✠ Do you think you would like to go to this party? Why or why not?

Recalling biblical stories they know helps children recognize how much they know from the Bible.

Do Lord, O Do Lord

Do Lord, O do Lord,
O do remember me.
Do Lord, O do Lord,
O do remember me.
Do Lord, O do Lord,
O do remember me,
Way beyond the blue.

Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
I know I need to pray.
Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
I know I need to pray.
Yes, Lord, O yes, Lord,
I know I need to pray,
Way beyond the blue.

Do Lord, O do Lord,
O do help me to pray.
Do Lord, O do Lord,
O do help me to pray.
Do Lord, O do Lord,
O do help me to pray,
Way beyond the blue.

EASY
PREP

Explain that today's Bible story is about a special party and the people who are invited to it.

EXPLORING

Invite a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship table and tell the group the book to which it is open. Tell children there are many stories they may have heard from Luke, including the stories of the good neighbor, Jesus' visit to Mary and Martha, the Lord's Prayer, the farmer and his barns, and the healing of the bent-over woman. Then ask another child to find chapter 14.

Explain that people often invited Jesus to eat in their homes. There were no restaurants to eat in when people traveled. It was the custom to seat special guests, as Jesus would be, near the host, the person who was having the dinner. This was a place of honor. Tell the story from Resource Sheet 1 (A Surprising Guest List).

Ask:

- ✂ In Jesus' time, how were people seated at special dinners?
- ✂ Why did Jesus tell people to seat themselves far away from the host?
- ✂ Who did Jesus tell the host who gave the dinner to invite?

Tell the group that they are going to create a dinner party with the guests that Jesus told the host to invite. Form pairs. Give each pair a length of mural paper as long as a child's height and a pencil or dark crayon. One child lies down on the paper and the other child draws around the child, creating an outline. Each pair, with markers, adds facial features and clothing to the paper figure. Assign each one a different type of person (one who is poor, blind, lame, and any other category they can draw). Tape the figures to chairs arranged around a table. Ask each pair to introduce their paper figure to the group, giving the figure a name. Have the children stand behind their figures as you read Luke 14:12–14. Ask:

- ✂ Who do you think Jesus would tell us to invite to the dinner today?

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children.

1. **Music and Meditation** Children will reflect on including those who are often excluded in their prayers. Ask the children who they usually pray for. Then ask them to think about who else Jesus would want them to pray for, based on the story he told the host of the dinner. Possible responses are, besides those Jesus named, people who are sick or suffering, people who are lonely, people who are homeless, people who have left their homes because of war. Explain that you are going to play some soothing music. They are to sit comfortably with their feet on the floor and close their eyes. Play "Harp Music" ([*Singing the Feast*](#)). While the music plays, ask children to pray for the people they have just named. Urge children to continue to pray for these people during the week.

2. **Table Prayers** Children will make prayer tents for the dinner table they created in Exploring. Have children gather with their partners when they made the paper figures in Exploring. Give each pair a sheet of construction paper, folded in half crosswise, and markers. Explain that they are to write a prayer for people who are like the figure they created. Help them begin by providing this prayer opening on newsprint: *Dear God, we pray for people who. . . .* If possible, help the group take their dinner guests and prayers to set around a table where the congregation will see it.
3. **Food Pantry** Jesus' words to the host make an easy connection for Christians today to care for people who are hungry. Participating in an outreach ministry around hunger is a natural for children of all ages. Tell children about a food pantry supported by your congregation. Talk about how they and their families can be part of this ministry. Food pantries often run out of food in the summer. Perhaps the children can publicize the need for donations through posters or leaflets they make and distribute. They might make prayer tents (see above) for their family dinner tables as a reminder to pray for people who are hungry.
4. **Including the Excluded** Children may have opportunities with the start of the school year to include new students. Read the story on Resource Sheet 2 (Not Left Out). Discuss the questions there. Talk together about what they can do to welcome new students at school or church.

I Have Decided to Follow Jesus

I have decided to follow
Jesus;
I have decided to follow
Jesus;
I have decided to follow
Jesus;
No turning back, no
turning back.

Though none go with me,
still I will follow;
Though none go with me,
still I will follow;
Though none go with me,
still I will follow;
No turning back, no
turning back.

My family with me will
follow Jesus;
My family with me will
follow Jesus;
My family with me will
follow Jesus;
No turning back, no
turning back.

Another way to introduce this conversation is to read *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig and illustrated by Patrice Barton to the group. It tells the story of a boy who is ignored by everyone and how it took just one child noticing him to change his world.

CLOSING

Gather at the worship table. Light the candle.

Remind children that Jesus told the host of the dinner to care about people who suffer—people who are lame, blind, crippled, or poor. Included in that group could be people who are lonely or left out. Ask:

✠ Who will you pay special attention to this week? To whom will you show God's love?

Sing "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" (Color Pack 33, [Singing the Feast](#)).

Pray:

Loving God, we want to show your love to people all around us, especially those who are often forgotten. Amen.

Extinguish the candle.

A Surprising Guest List

based on Luke 14:1, 7–14

In Jesus' time, travelers depended on people welcoming them to their homes for meals and to sleep. When this story begins, Jesus is at the home of a leader of the Pharisees, men who studied God's word and especially God's laws.

Jesus watched the other guests come into the room. Some quickly chose the best seats, those close to the owner of the house. These seats were saved for special guests, and people didn't take them unless they were asked to sit there.

When everyone was seated, Jesus told this story:

"When you are invited to a special dinner, don't think that you are better than the other guests and sit in the best seats. Someone who has a special invitation may come, and the host, the one who is giving the dinner, will say to you, 'Please give this person your seat.' You will feel embarrassed as you get up to find a new seat. Instead, when you are invited to a special dinner, find a seat that is not special at all. Then, the host may come over to you and say, 'Come, sit closer to me!' In this way, you will be honored rather than embarrassed. Remember the people who try to make themselves important will be taken down, and the ones who do not think highly of themselves will be raised up."

Then Jesus spoke to the man who had invited him to the dinner: "When you give a special dinner, don't just invite the people you know will invite you to their special dinners. Instead, invite people who are poor, people who cannot walk, and people who cannot see to your dinner. These people can't invite you to dinners, but God will repay you when God's kingdom comes on earth."



What a different kind of dinner party Jesus described to the people!

Not Left Out

Have you ever moved to a new town where you didn't know a single person? Have you ever moved to a country where no one spoke English? What would it be like to move thousands of miles to a place where you didn't know anyone and you couldn't understand what people were saying?

Every year many children travel with their families to live in a new land. Everyone around them is a stranger. What's worse, when people talk to them, they don't understand what they are saying.

When those children are supposed to go to school, they are surrounded by people who talk to them in a strange language. It must be frightening not to understand the words, or the rules, or the way things are done in this new land. How do you think you would feel?

What would you want the children in your class to do? How could they help you?

