

## Activity Lesson Plan 1B

### **Title: Part 1: Expressions of God's Radical Love and Hospitality**

#### *Session B: Model of Jesus Life and Ministry*

- *Part 1: Radical Expressions of Welcoming and Hospitality*
- *Part 2: Valuing the Story of Others*

#### **Scripture Focus:**

- Matthew 18:5 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (NSRV)

#### **Group Size:**

- Whole group = 30
- Small groups = 6 tables x 5 people

#### **Activity Materials Per Table:**

- 6-7 children's blocks
- Post it notes (2 colors)
- Crayons

#### **Resources: Model of Jesus Life and Ministry**

In this session we will explore competing and contrasting images of self-worth that define how we hold and value ourselves and in response, how those lenses inform how we see and value others. We will learn that:

- To be intentional about changing the daily narrative of the children entrusted into our care within our Churches and Communities means we must first readjust our focus to see ourselves and the lives of all children through the eyes of Christ.
- We must remind ourselves as Christians we look at the world through a privileged contextual lens of understanding our sacred worth in the eyes of God.
- This knowledge and understanding is something many children and families in our communities and perhaps our Churches do not share, or have never experienced.

Through the Incarnation of Christ, God revealed to the world the radical and loving devotion held for all humanity. The world witnessed this expression of love given through the birth of a child; the most vulnerable of all creation, born in humble, meager surroundings to an unwed teenage mother. A radical example of God's love and hospitality offered to all.

Jesus life and teachings provide us with countless examples of how we are to offer the same love, hospitality, forgiveness, compassion and mercy we have received in our expressions to others. The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 18, Verse 5 reminds us, "*Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*" (NSRV)

Christ welcomed all those he encountered with the same radical expression of love; ignoring outward appearance and inward brokenness. His love welcomes each and all of us in the same

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*Expressions of God's Radical Love and Hospitality for All Children – Workshop 1B*

manner today: the stranger, the outcast, the lonely, the sick, the hopeless, the rich, the poor, and the poor in spirit. As the body of Christ we are charged to greet those we encounter in this same spirit of love.

Every person grows up and develops an image of ourselves shaped by a great number of influences such as: family background, cultural, religious, and ethnic origins, educational, economic, and social status. Yet we are intimately connected together in human community possessing the same spirit of life, uniquely and lovingly breathed into each of us by God.

The difficulty begins in understanding how we welcome and recognize the spirit of God in everyone we encounter? Most of us go through our daily lives trying to avoid looking into the eyes of strangers. Today we will practice looking beyond ourselves and the physical attributes of another to discover the Spirit of God that dwells within each of us.

### **Description of Activity**

#### **Part 1: Readjusting our Focus-Seeing ourselves and others through the eyes of Christ**

- *Exercise #1. Long Loving Look:*

Please find someone in the room you do not know and sit directly facing the other person. Introduce yourselves. Take a couple of moments to relax. Close your eyes and take in a couple of deep breaths. As you breathe in, envision the Spirit of a loving God flowing through your body.

For this exercise, one person will be the giver and the other the receiver. Decide which of you will fulfill each role first. The giver will gaze past the physical presence of the other person and look lovingly into their eyes for 90 seconds. The receiver will graciously receive the loving look provided to them for 90 seconds. Switch roles. Take one minute for each person to talk about the experience, how did it feel to receive from and give love to a stranger?

If time allows, solicit brief feedback from the entire group on the exercise...

#### **Part 2: Valuing the Story of Others – Exposing the Obstacles of Encounter**

The Gospel narratives remind us over and over that Christ took the time to learn and listen to the stories of ordinary people, the “back story of their lives.” Christ walked through the streets of society, welcoming the homeless, hanging out with the ill repute, eating dinner with the poor and forgiving sinners. Christ offered radical hospitality to all he encountered. He recognized and valued the sacred worth of all as beloved of God, and created safe spaces for dialogue by listening with understanding to their journeys of life.

An important reminder as we seek to define Christ’s radical hospitality for children and families in our communities who have never known their sacred worth in the eyes of God. To look upon all children in the same light of Christ, is to remind ourselves that children do not choose the color of their skin or their hair, the family, or the social or economic status they are born into.

When we take the time learn the story of another we enter a sacred space where we begin to value that other person, to see another in the same light that Christ looks upon us. Offering us love, forgiveness and compassion, so we can offer the same to those we meet.

Following the example of Christ we must take the time to move past ourselves and learn to walk in the shoes of those we meet. To do so means that we must understand their story in life, recognize the roadblocks they may have encountered, learn the social systems that hold them hostage. This next exercise will assist us in defining the personal and societal barriers we erect that hold children in helpless and hopeless situations.

- *Exercise #2: Respecting, valuing and learning the story of others*
  - a. As you listen to the words of this song (Black Eyed Peas-Where is the Love Y'all) each person should identify and write down on the post it notes provided at your table at least one of the labels, the systems, the stigmas, and the blind spots we construct personally and as a society that hold children hostage and hopeless.
  - b. When the song is over, as a group construct a tower or wall from the blocks at your table.
  - c. Attach the notes each person created from the song to the colored blocks as a symbolic reminder of the walls we place in front of children who are vulnerable.
  - d. Take 5 minutes as a group to discuss the labels, systems, stigmas and blind spots you have identified.
  - e. Discuss the change in attitudes and behaviors, we as individuals and as faith communities can begin to express that will begin to tear down the walls and rebuild the negative images of self-worth created for these children.

**References:** Gregory C. Ellison II, PhD, Rev. Samuel White & Fearless Dialogues Team. CDF Proctor Institute. July, 2015. [www.fearlessdialogues.com](http://www.fearlessdialogues.com). GE II & Associates 2015. ©All rights reserved.

Facilitator Notes: Please be very sensitive in facilitating discussions for Exercise 2. It is possible that, as presenters or attendees, individuals may have had personal experience in encountering these obstacles. This may bring up uncomfortable, inexpressible emotions or conversations, or it may facilitate more open and truthful dialogue around the subject if individuals are willing to share their personal stories.