YOUTH ACTIVITIES

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ACTIVITY ONE
HELPING HANDS

Supplies: *pencils, paper, tape, scissors, and pipe cleaners*

Overview: *Connecting with ourselves and others to understand what is needed to achieve a common goal is crucial for serving and supporting local and global communities. In this activity, youth will focus on honing essential skills, recognizing others' needs, and exploring collaborative ways to achieve a goal.*

PART ONE: WONDER

Gather the youth in an open space, ask them to spread out, and have them find a spot in the room to begin a time of meditative reflection. At this time, the youth can sit or lie down. Begin with these prompts:

- Close your eyes and still your breath. Try to find a rhythm in your breathing. Once you find that rhythm, see if you can change it.
- How long can you hold your breath? How fast can you release it?
- Breathe in for three seconds, hold your breath for three seconds, and release your breath for three seconds.
- Where do you feel your breath? How does it move?
- Breathe in for five seconds, hold your breath for five seconds, and release your breath for five seconds.
- As you focus more on breathing, what do you notice? Does it feel the same as usual?
- Breathe in for eight seconds, hold your breath for eight seconds, and release your breath for eight seconds.

At this time, invite the youth to open their eyes and stand up. Have the youth mix around the room, then silently choose a breath pattern to emulate (Three, Five, or Eight Seconds). Then have the youth begin breathing in the way they chose. While maintaining their breath patterns, ask the youth to work to have everyone in the room breathe the same pattern together. However, to do this, they can't speak, use hand gestures, or make any noises as they attempt this. Once all the youth are breathing in the same time pattern, they are successful.

PART TWO: ACT

Gather youth around tables and divide them into groups of four. This game will be held in two rounds. For the first round, provide each group with three pieces of paper, one pair of scissors, a roll of tape, and ten pipe cleaners.

Once all groups have the necessary materials, number each group member 1-4. Number ones may only touch the paper, number twos may only touch the scissors, number threes may only touch the roll of tape, and number fours may only touch the pipe cleaners. When all the youth are clear on their assigned item, ask them to work as a group to build a house. Each house must have a doorway, walls, and a roof. Other than that, allow the groups to get creative with the materials provided to them. Each group will have five minutes to work together to build their house.

Once the time is up, give each group three new pieces of paper and ten more pipe cleaners. For the second round, each group must build an identical house to their first one in two minutes, while speaking only one word at a time. Once a group member has spoken, they cannot speak again until someone else in the group speaks. At the two-minute mark, invite each group to share their two houses and the challenges they faced in creating them.

PART THREE: DISCUSS

Together read Mark 2:1-5

> *"When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door, and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Child, your sins are forgiven."*

Ask the youth:

- What essential skills were necessary in getting the man who was paralyzed to meet Jesus?
- How do you think the four people figured out how to carry the man, remove the roof, dig through the roof, and land the man at Jesus?

- What faith is Jesus recognizing in the four people, and how was their faith revealed in their actions?

Next, invite the youth to ponder on parts one and two of the activity:

- What did you recognize about yourself and how you breathe in the wondering meditation?
- How did you communicate with others to replicate the breath pattern without direct communication?
- In the game, how did working in groups of four make the task more or less difficult?
- Did the lack of time and your ability to communicate in the last round change your group's dynamic?

Provide each youth with a piece of paper and a pencil and invite them to write their answers to the following questions:

- What solution do you think you or your group would have come up with if you were the ones with the man who was paralyzed?
- What solutions can we work to find in our communities? Who is in need of aid that we can provide?
- Who can we work with to ensure we are doing all we can to help others?

Finally, ask the youth to read their answers silently and identify a common theme, skill, or trait in their responses. Once they have it, have them write it down at the top of their paper and circle it. Invite the youth to return to these responses when they need inspiration for how they can help others.

CLOSING PRAYER

God/Creator, give us the clarity to recognize how we best connect with our communities. Allow us the courage to use our skills and energy to serve those in need and work with others to build new solutions to problems facing our world. May the faith of the four friends in our scripture embolden us to enact our faith in new ways that make a lasting positive change. Amen.

ACTIVITY TWO
REFRAMING/ REWORDING

Supplies: *paper, and pens*

Overview: *The language we use to address ourselves and others matters. It is the difference between acceptance versus prejudice, tolerance versus hatred, and undertraining versus ignorance. This activity will cover how new ways of approaching justice work focus on educated inclusion and reflexive conversation around one's positionality.*

PART ONE: WONDER

Gather the youth and invite one to read Mark 2: 1-5 aloud for the group:

> *"When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door, and he was speaking the word to them. Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Child, your sins are forgiven."*

Once the scripture has been read, invite the youth to silently wonder on the following questions:

- Why do you think the man who was paralyzed is unnamed in the scripture?
- How does the scripture referring to the man as the "paralytic" suggest society viewed him and his worth?
- What "sin" (of the man who was paralyzed) was Jesus forgiving at the end of the scripture?

Give the youth two minutes once all the questions have been read to sit and wonder. Then open for a time (10-15 minutes) of discussion, reading through the questions again. Allow them to question, argue, or even debate what the answers to these questions could be. As the youth raise possible answers, ask them how these answers, if taken to be true, would affect the story's message. (e.g., If the man is unnamed because, as the story was passed down, people simply forgot his name, what does that convey about the importance of those passing on the story. If it wasn't his name, what was it?)

Once the discussion time has ended, divide the youth into groups of three. Provide each group with a paper and a pen and have them reword the scripture as they wish. They can add names, change the language, or expand on what Jesus said. Allow them to get creative in their interpretation of the text. Once all groups have finished, invite them to each take turns sharing their version of scripture with the rest of the youth.

PART TWO: ACT

Gather the youth in an open space where they can run. This game will be a version of the popular game Trainwreck/Fruit Basket. The youth will form a large circle standing arm's length apart. One youth will start in the center and state a prompt to get people to move so they can take a place in the circle. However, in this version, they must prompt their fellow youth with trait-first language (e.g., brunette people, blue-shirt-wearing people, or cat-owning people). Everyone who has the named trait must then run to a new spot in the circle (they cannot go to a spot directly next to them). Once all the spots are taken, one youth will be left in the middle each time. After ten rounds of playing the game with trait-first language, have the youth switch their language to be person-first (e.g., people with brunette hair, people wearing blue shirts, or people who own cats). After ten rounds, the game ends.

Have the youth stay in the circle, including the remaining youth from the middle, and invite them to sit down. Ask the youth to share and reflect on the game with the following questions:

- Which way of speaking came most naturally to you (trait-first or person-first)?
- How did it feel to be referred to by a trait?
- Did you feel any different when the switch to person-first language was made?
- How did the switch in language affect your gameplay and emotions?

PART THREE: DISCUSS

Together read Mark 2:1-5

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Ask the youth to ponder on parts one and two of the activity:

- What did you notice about language in scripture that you haven't noticed before?
- How does language affect the way people see themselves in society and in scripture?
- In what new ways can scripture be reframed to speak equally, justly, or person-first?
- What did the Act game reveal about what language you are used to using?

Then, have the youth discuss the following questions in small groups for ten minutes:

- How can language structure be harmful or helpful?
- What communities do you see in your local or global community that are affected by poor societal language/terminology?
- If you haven't noticed the power of language before, is there a reason why? Are there people/communities that face these harms more frequently than others?

Provide the youth with paper and a pen. Invite them to create a chart listing people, communities, social groups, and/or issues affected by harmful language in our society. After two minutes, ask them to think of creative ways to reframe common harmful language and envision new ways society could address these groups. Who could they talk to in order to better understand what that community needs, wants, and feels? What changes could this make for the people involved in these communities, and how could this impact the way they are perceived by their global community?

CLOSING PRAYER

God/Creator, open our minds to new voices, new ideas, and new language. Allow us to set aside our pride as we aim to better understand one another's histories and hurts, and continue to push us to seek thoughtful opinions, even if they challenge the way we have always done something. Amen.

ACTIVITY THREE

ON BUSINESS

Supplies: *Candy*

Overview: *How do we show our commitment or become committed? In this activity, we will explore how commitment adds depth to our work, goals, and dreams. As we strive to be helpful local and global citizens, it is vital to assess how our commitment levels will impact our approach to service.*

PART ONE: WONDER

Invite the youth to gather in an open space and stand in the center of the room. The youth will be asked a series of questions about commitment, to which they can choose "commit" or "quit." Based on their response to the prompt, they must move to either the left side of the room for "commit" or the right side for "quit." Once the youth are clear on their directions, begin reading the following prompts:

- You promised to hang out with your friend after school, but you are feeling tired after class. Commit or quit?
- It's 8pm, you have a test in the morning, but you haven't studied yet. Commit or quit?
- You've been in a relationship for a few months, and now you're moving away to a new state. Commit or quit?
- Three weeks ago, you agreed to volunteer at an animal shelter, but your favorite artist just announced a concert on the same day. Commit or quit?

Once completed, ask the youth to sit down and discuss why they chose "commit" or "quit" to each prompt. Would their answers have changed depending on the context of each situation?

Next, divide the youth into groups of three. Have each group come up with its own "commit or quit" question for the group. One at a time, invite each group to go up and host a round by presenting their prompt to all the youth. When all the groups have finished, have the youth discuss the following questions:

- Were any of the groups' prompts similar? If so, why do you think you chose similar topics?
- Were you surprised by any of your own answers?
- How did the context of the prompt determine your decision?
- Are there some things you will always quit or commit to, no matter the context?

PART TWO: ACT

Gather the youth and have them stand in a large circle, with one youth starting in the center. The goal of this game is for the youth in the center of the circle to make their peers laugh, while the rest of the youth attempt to hold in their laughter. The first person to laugh must trade places with the youth in the center of the circle. The youth in the center may be as creative as they like, so long as all jokes are appropriate and they do not physically touch another person.

Play this through for ten rounds. Once completed, present the youth with a candy incentive. This time, each youth will take a turn in the center, trying to make everyone laugh. For each person who laughs, the youth in the center gets a piece of candy. If no one laughs, then everyone else in the circle gets a piece of candy. Play until each person has a turn in the center.

At the end, have the youth sit down in the circle and discuss what changed between the rounds.

- Did you approach both rounds the same way, or was one more intense?
- If one round was more serious/intense for you, why? What changed?
- How did the candy change the game? Did you change how you played to get candy?

PART THREE: DISCUSS

Together read Mark 2:1-5

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Invite the youth to wonder about commitment questions:

- What commit or quit prompts could you make based on this scripture?
- What do you think the response of the people you helped the man would be to those prompts?
- How much commitment do you think went into helping the man who was paralyzed see Jesus? How many steps can you name from the scripture?
- Would you have committed to all those steps to help? Why or why not?

Next, have the youth discuss the Act game:

- What was the function of commitment as you tried to not laugh or tried to make others laugh?
- Did the introduction of the candy make you more committed? If so, why?
- Do you think incentives help you or others be more committed?

Finally, ask the youth:

- What would make you or others more committed to different activities?
- Are there things in your community that you are committed to? (School, dance, sports, volunteer work, church, etc.)
- How does your level of commitment to these activities affect your experience in them?
- How could you get others committed to something you believe in?

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator/God, as we read scripture, we are inspired to be deeply committed to work, service, relationships, and faith. Help us find causes we can be committed to helping, growing, and sustaining. Above all, let us continue to find new ways to stay committed to loving and respecting ourselves and all those around us. Amen.