



Grace in Action

Goal: To show God's grace by serving others.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Acts 6:1-7

When the number of disciples was increasing in the earliest church, leaders recognized the need for people to take on the task of waiting on tables at the daily distribution of food. This was to meet the concern for providing food for those in need. So seven people were chosen, including Stephen, who became the first Christian martyr (see Acts 7). These seven were forerunners of *deacons* in our churches, a term that means “one who serves.”

Those chosen were called by God and the community to carry out this ministry. While it did not appear to be a spectacular ministry, this simple, humble ministry was done in spectacular fashion. It was necessary. It showed that even the most humble tasks, carried out for the love of Jesus Christ, are important ways to share the grace and hospitality of Jesus Christ.

Surely, those chosen for this work were grateful to serve the church this way. Emphasis was on their service, in gratitude, for the grace given in Jesus Christ, shared through this ministry.

The same is true today. No matter what work we do for Christ in the church and the world, we do it to share the grace of Christ, and we do it all with glad and grateful hearts.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

It's always good to remember that children learn by doing, by being involved. So they learn about God's love by sharing love with others. They learn about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus by helping someone. This story about people who helped as leaders in the early church provides a great way for the children to connect with opportunities for service in their church today. Getting a chance to identify specific things they can do helps them learn that the church needs everyone's help to show God's love in the world.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

A frequent request of young children is, “Can I help?” And parents and caregivers know that, by involving a child in helping them cook, or fix something that is broken, or gardening, the child learns about how to do something and how to be a helper. Older children are growing in confidence with some of their skills and abilities and usually identify some preferences for things they like to do. Inviting children to share some of their gifts and talents with others is a great way the church has to affirm their work as leaders.

*God of love, reassure me of your love as I examine how my words
and actions show your love to the children I lead. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 2, 16, 19

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

floor pillows and
cushions

low table

juice, bread, grapes,
cups or mugs

seven baskets

biblical costumes, dish
towels, pieces of rope or
old ties

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

Responding

Claiming

invited guest

Celebrating

cards cut from card-
stock copies of **GN 2**
and **GN 3**

Offering

smartphone or other
video recording device,
biblical costumes, list
of homebound church
members

Extra

card-stock copies
of **GN 4**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Before the children arrive, post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule.” Cut out and glue the arrow marker on a clothespin. Use the schedule to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Claiming God’s Grace” and “Offering God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing



Play “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”—**MM 13**—as the children arrive.

Greet the children by saying, “Christ is risen!” Prompt the children to respond, “He is risen indeed!” Speak a word of welcome to each child and find out something about their interests.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Invite a volunteer to practice the Scripture reading for today.

Challenge the children to set up the space to look like one of the rooms where people gathered in the early church. Remove the chairs and put throw cushions on the floor around a low table.

Ask the children to create a worship space, using a green cloth, a Bible, and a candle. Note that the green cloth is the church color for Ordinary Time, a time for study and service.

If possible, have a jug of juice, some pottery cups (mugs will do), a loaf of bread, and some grapes on the table. Set the seven empty baskets nearby.

Have dish towels and pieces of rope or old ties to use for head coverings. Provide biblical costumes. Explain that the children are going to experience what life was like in the early church by creating a play. Invite the children to put on the costumes.

Singing

Play “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”—**MM 13**; **SCM 16**. Play it several times and sing along.

T *Transitioning from an activity with movement to a quiet or listening one can be difficult for some children. Alerting them of the change in advance, such as saying, “After this we will be praying,” allows children time to anticipate the change and act accordingly.*

Praying



Turn on the candle, reminding the children that the light represents Jesus the Christ and the light he brings into the world.



Beginning with the person whose last name is last in alphabetical order, ask the children to tell about something good or bad that happened to them last week. Anyone who doesn't want to speak aloud can simply say, "Pass." Pray together:

Dear God, teach us about your grace today. Help us to learn about service and to practice serving one another. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Preparing to Hear the Story C

Display a sheet of newsprint and create two columns on it. Label one column *people* and the other *God*. Ask the children to name the reasons they choose someone for a team. List their responses in the "people" column. Then ask them to think about why God chooses certain people to do things. List these reasons in the "God" column. Wonder who God might call to help other people.

Say that today's story talks about a time when seven people were chosen for a specific job in the church.

Hearing the Story C L

Ask a volunteer to find Acts 6 in the Bible. Have a volunteer read Acts 6:1–7. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible on the worship table.

Gather the children in a circle. Provide paper and crayons. Invite the children to draw a food they like. Tell the story again from **SCM 2** or listen to the story audio. Conclude by having the children "share" their food. One by one, tell others what they drew and hand their food to the person on their right.

Reflecting on God's Grace C M FA

Give copies of **GN 1** to children who can read and assign speaking parts to them for the skit. Have pre-readers and younger children play the roles of disciples in Scene 2. Use the table, food, and baskets as props. If you have more pre-readers than readers, read **SCM 2** as the children pantomime the story.

After the play, put aside the food for "Celebrating God's Grace."

Singing

Sing "With My Hands Open Wide"—**MM 20**; **SCM 19**. Invite the children to come up with movements for this song.

Turn off the candle.



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), pcusastore.com.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.



Remember to send an email telling the guest that he or she will be sharing about how your congregation cares for others.

Claiming God's Grace LG

Before the session, invite a deacon or a member from the church's care ministry to be a guest and tell about this ministry.

Today, as in the early church, God's love and care comes through church members of all ages.

Introduce your guest to the children. Invite the guest to tell ways that your congregation cares for others, especially those to whom the children can show God's love. Wonder together how the children may be involved in the caring ministry of the church. Invite the children to ask questions.

Thank your guest and encourage the children to follow up with one way they can be of service in the church.

Celebrating God's Grace FA M

Gather the food you brought to use in today's biblical play. Before you eat, say grace, thanking God for the gift of food in a world where not everyone has their share. Enjoy the food together.

Remind the children that the disciples chose seven servants for a particular task—to take care of people who were being neglected.

Invite the children to tell how they think people do God's work. They may mention being a minister or going to another country to help people learn about God.

Play a game about ways people do God's work. Invite the children to form two lines. Place the cards cut from **GN 2** and **GN 3** facedown in a pile on a table. Have the first child in line pick up a card and, without looking at it, hold the card on their forehead so it faces out. The child opposite them will try to act out what is on the card. If the child holding the card guesses what is being acted out, the card goes in a new pile. If the child cannot guess, the card goes to the bottom of the original pile. The goal is to work as a group to find ways people can help others.

When all cards have been guessed, encourage the children to talk about why God may have chosen these people to do what they do.

Praying God's Grace LG

Help the children pray for people in their community who serve Jesus. As a group, name people in your church and community who do a good job of serving Jesus, either by telling people about him or by helping other people in Jesus' name. Have the children take turns printing each name on an index card. Assist with writing as needed. Make sure each child has at least one card. Gather around the candle



and turn it on. Explain that each child will read the name on their card at your signal and place it around the candle. Pray:

Dear God, help everyone who serves Jesus. Encourage them and help them know the best things to say and do. Today we pray especially for *(each child reads the name on his or her card)*. Surround them with your love. Amen.

Turn off the candle.

Encourage children to take their cards home and pray during the week for the people named on them.



Offering God's Grace



Make a video recording of the skit the children prepared in “Reflecting on God’s Grace” to share with the congregation and send to homebound members, as possible.

Using a smartphone or other video recording device, record each child saying hello, introducing themselves, saying how old they are, and telling a favorite thing they like to do.

Guide them in announcing the citation for the story (saying “Acts, chapter 6, verses 1 through 7”) before performing the skit.

Record the group as they perform. After the skit, record the children’s comments about what they have learned from the story.

Send the video via smartphone or email to homebound members. Request that the video be shown in worship or as part of an electronic newsletter.

Extra Activity

In a quiet tone, read the following prayer, pausing after each phrase.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours;
yours are the only hands with which he can do his work,
yours are the only feet with which he can go about the world,
yours are the only eyes through which his compassion can
shine forth upon a troubled world.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

—Teresa of Avila

Hand out copies of **GN 4**. Read the prayer again, emphasizing the words that are under the boxes. Invite the children to draw a picture that represents the word. In the last box, tell them to draw a picture of themselves.

If time allows, have the children share their art and ask a volunteer to read the prayer one more time.

Be sure to follow any policies your church may have about sharing photos or videos of the children.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

LG

Invite the children to help clean up the space.

Have the children name what they will remember most from today's story. Ask them to name something they will do for the church this week.

Read the charge below. Tell the children that, when you say, "Let us turn," they may turn in any direction they choose:

Jesus changes people who love him.

When Jesus changes us, he calls us to do God's work.

Let us turn . . . toward kindness.

Let us turn . . . toward generosity.

Let us turn . . . toward helping others.

Let us turn . . . toward prayer.

Let us turn . . . toward Jesus.

And let all God's children say, Amen!

As each child leaves, bless them, saying, "(Name), may the grace of God be with you. Go and serve the Lord."



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

Scene 1: A Difficult Problem

Characters: Narrator, Joanna, Elisha, elderly woman

Setting: Joanna and Elisha are standing together. Joanna's basket has one loaf of bread and some grapes in it. Elisha's basket is empty. An elderly woman is speaking with Joanna.

Narrator: It was the end of the day. Joanna and Elisha had been giving food to the poor people and widows. They were tired and a bit hungry themselves.

Joanna: It's lots of work delivering all this food. *(She hands her loaf of bread and grapes to the older woman.)*

Woman: Thank you, my dear. I wouldn't have eaten today if it weren't for your kindness.

Joanna: Go in peace, friend. *(The woman exits, carrying the food.)*

Elisha: We need more helpers. We have delivered lots of food, but there are still many women we have not visited. We need to give food to all the women who are hungry.

Joanna: Let's ask Peter and Mark to call a meeting. Maybe they will choose some other people to help us.

(Joanna and Elisha exit, talking excitedly about the meeting.)

Scene 2: New Helpers

Characters: Narrator, Peter, Mark, Joanna, Elisha, Stephen, Nicanor, Philip, Prochorus, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolaus, other unnamed disciples

Setting: The disciples are gathered in a room. There is a low table with some food and a few baskets on it. Peter is calling the meeting to order.

Narrator: Joanna and Elisha gathered the disciples together that evening.

Peter: All right, everyone. Joanna and Elisha asked me to call this meeting. They think that all the women should get food, not just a few. We need more helpers.

Mark: Who will help?

Unnamed Disciples: We have too many things to do. Let's invite others so they can help as well.

Joanna: Jesus taught us to give everything we have to the poor! What about you, Stephen?

Stephen: You're right. I think that caring for others is an important job. Joanna and Elisha have done good work. We need more people to help pass out food. We need people who are full of the Holy Spirit, who want to share the love of God. Who wants to share the love of God by distributing food?

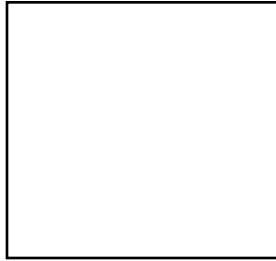
(Stephen, Prochorus, Nicanor, and Philip raise their hands. Then Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus raise their hands too. They say things like "I'll help!" and "Choose me!")

Narrator: So seven people were chosen to help serve the food.





Christ has no



now on earth but yours; yours are the only

body



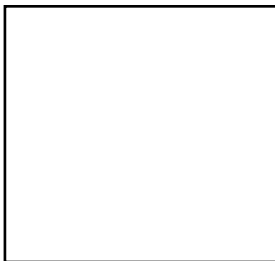
with which he can do his work, yours are the only

hands



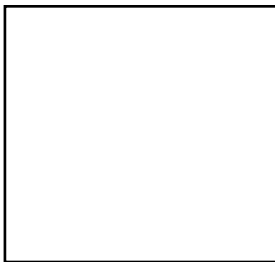
with which he can go about the world, yours are the only

feet

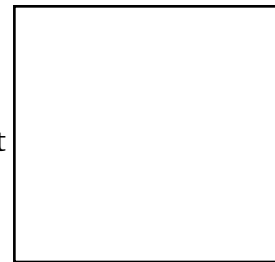


through which his compassion can shine forth upon a troubled

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. Christ has no body now on earth but



world

yours

—Teresa of Avila

