



All One Church

Goal: To practice ways to welcome and include all people.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Acts 15:1-18

A very important council or meeting was held in Jerusalem. The question was whether Gentiles (non-Jews) who came to accept Jesus as the Messiah should have to be circumcised and accept the law of Moses, as Jews who became Christians did. This would be a two-step process: Gentiles would, in effect, “become Jews” before they “became Christians.”

But the council decided that, as Peter said, “We will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (v. 11). Salvation comes by the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, without any requirements that humans have to “do”—including circumcision or keeping the law of Moses.

This important decision by the Jerusalem council opened the Christian church to all people. God saves us by the grace of the Lord Jesus, which we receive gratefully, without any conditions. We extend grace to others in the church through graciousness, through loving and grace-filled actions to welcome them into the one family of God. Grace received leads to grace given as an expression of the loving grace that binds the church together in Christ Jesus. Churches can find ways to include all others into the church family of Jesus.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

It doesn't take long for children to learn who's in and who's out, who's cool and who's not. If you are in the “in” group of children at school, it's easy to have friends to sit with at lunch and to have playdates after school. If you are a kid who doesn't have a lot of friends, it's sometimes hard to find your place. Practices of inclusion and exclusion begin early in life, and children learn from adults how to treat others.

The church stands as a countercultural witness to practices of exclusion, and it proclaims in words and practices that all are welcome. God's grace is visible when children grow up knowing that God's love embraces all.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

What have you noticed about the ways they relate to one another, including or excluding? Your children may have encountered racism in its various forms or messages that people from other countries or other ethnic backgrounds are not “as good as” others. They may have learned to fear or avoid people who are different because of disability or other kinds of differences. Their peer group or friends may have been singled out as a group that is “in” or “out” because of class or ethnicity. They may have heard messages about “those people” who are to be avoided or disliked or they may have heard those messages directed against themselves. Think about how you might help them connect with this story of the early church as they remember how they are to treat one another as all part of God's family.

O God, grant me a vision of your purpose and the courage to love your children according to that vision. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 5, 5a, 15, 22, 26

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

bowl of water

snack

Responding

Claiming

SCM 5b, 23

Celebrating

All the Colors We Are: The Story of How We Get Our Skin Color by Katie Kissinger (Redleaf Press, 2014), *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz (Square Fish, 2002), or internet-connected device; multicultural crayons and/or markers

Praying

SCM 5c, 5d, 5e, and 5f
taped together

Extra

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

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual 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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” requires more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **F** **FA**

Greet the children by name and with the words “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

As you welcome children, gather them into two groups: those who have blue eyes and those who do not have blue eyes. Explain that you are instituting a new value system to the group, one in which non-blue-eyed people are more valuable than those who have blue eyes.

Have only the blue-eyed children help prepare the worship space. Ask them to include a Bible, a candle, a bowl of water, and a green cloth.

While the blue-eyed children set up the worship space, invite the non-blue-eyed children to sit together at the table. Offer the non-blue-eyed children a snack, such as a cookie. Do not offer anything to the blue-eyed group.

Ask some non-blue-eyed children to be leaders today and help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Today’s passage is lengthy. Decide if you will have children read from the Bible or use **SCM 5**. Invite several non-blue-eyed volunteers to practice the reading for today.

Children will start commenting on the inequity of the situation. Try to keep the simulation going while understanding children’s feelings.

Singing

F

Invite the non-blue-eyed children to name people, places, and things for which they thank and praise God. If blue-eyed children offer suggestions, tell them they have to wait till everyone non-blue-eyed has had a turn.

Play “Praise God, Praise God”—**MM 7**; **SCM 15**. Suggest that the non-blue-eyed children sing the song with gratitude to God. Do not include the other children in singing. Replay the song, this time encouraging the blue-eyed children to sing too.

Praying

F

Invite a non-blue-eyed person to turn on the candle, reminding the children that the light represents Jesus the Christ and the light he brings into the world. Invite the children to repeat after you as you pray:



O God, /
Help us hear what you have to say to us. /
In Jesus' name, we pray. /
Amen. /

F *Notice and listen carefully to children's concerns about inclusion and exclusion. Discuss different aspects of fair and unfair situations, helping children to form strong ideas of fairness.*

Visit janeelliott.com and learn more about her blue eyes/brown eyes experiment.

A value system is a set of values and measures adopted by a person, organization, or society as a standard to guide the way they prefer to behave in dealing with different situations.

Preparing to Hear the Story

F FA

Ask the children how it feels to be valued in different ways according to eye color. Wonder aloud whether a blue-eyed person could ever receive a treat in the system you created. Ask:

- ▼ How would you feel if you knew the eye-color system applied everywhere?
- ▼ How is the eye-color exercise similar to the ways we treat people with different backgrounds, different shades of skin, and different foods they eat?
- ▼ What do you think is a gracious and loving response to people who are treated differently because of what they look like? How can you treat all people graciously and lovingly?

Tell the children that today's story is about a time long ago when people in the church thought some people were able to be a part of God's family while others were not. Comment that you are glad that you know that all people are welcome in God's family, and no one is excluded or treated as less than another person in your group. Offer the snack to the blue-eyed children so that they may enjoy the goodness of fellowship together.

Hearing the Story

C TD

Invite one of the children to find Acts 15 in the Bible. Invite volunteers to read Acts 15:1-18 or **SCM 5**. Conclude the reading 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.

Read the story again using **SCM 5** or listen to the story audio. When you read James's words, "We are all God's children, and we all belong to God's family," pause and touch the water and invite all the children to touch the water.

Reflecting on God's Grace

Show **SCM 5a**. Ask a child to read the text on **SCM 5a** aloud. Wonder how there can be no differences between the people mentioned on **SCM 5a**. Invite the children to imagine how baptism makes us all one in Christ. Wonder what that means when we talk about our differences. Ask the children how we can help other people to know that God loves all of us.





Singing

Sing “God’s Love for Us Is Truly Amazing (El amor de Dios es maravilloso)”—**MM 29; SCM 26**—and celebrate how Jesus’ grace calls us to love one another.

Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.

Claiming God’s Grace



Creating a new stanza for a song will reinforce how children are part of God’s family and how God invites them to include other people.

Show **SCM 5b** and ask children to imagine that three other children are standing courtside near the tree stump. Ask the group to think of different things that the basketball players might do or say in this situation. Wonder how knowing today’s story about including different people might guide their actions.

Sing “Love”—**MM 24; SCM 23**. Wonder how it feels to know we are part of God’s family. Work together to write a new stanza about welcoming and including others in God’s family. For example:

Love, love, love, love:
welcome others, this we do.
Love your neighbor as yourself;
God loves us too.



Celebrating God’s Grace



Read a book about skin color, such as *All the Colors We Are: The Story of How We Get Our Skin Color* by Katie Kissinger or *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz. *All the Colors We Are* is bilingual (English and Spanish) and offers a scientific and simple explanation of how we get our skin color. *The Colors of Us* is a colorful identification of different skin tones by a child. Another option would be to watch one of the YouTube videos “Read Aloud—All the Colors We Are by Katie Kissinger” (bit.ly/AllTheColorsWeAre, 3:19) or “The Colors of Us” (bit.ly/TheColorsOfUsVideo, 4:15).

Provide paints and painting supplies, multicultural crayons, and/or multicultural markers. Invite children to draw pictures of God’s diverse world with all God’s people.

Note: bit.ly web addresses are case sensitive.



Praying God's Grace

VI C

Display the poster of the world using **SCM 5c, 5d, 5e, and 5f**. Ask the children to find Jerusalem. Explain that today's story took place in Jerusalem. Slowly, Jesus' followers spread word of God's love for everyone. Invite the children to walk their fingers from Jerusalem in all directions. Ask children to name countries or cities that they have visited or heard about. Print their responses on the places they name. Eventually the good news spread to the ends of the earth, including (*name of your community*). Ask:

- ▾ How might you carry the good news of Jesus to others?
- ▾ Whom might you tell?

Ask the children to stand around the map, facing out. Have them cup their hands over their mouths and whisper, "God's love is for everyone," into their hands. On the count of three, everyone names a country, city, or person and everyone responds, "Thank you, God."

C *Simply put, some children are introverts. For them, it isn't a matter of being shy, not understanding something, or being afraid; they are uncomfortable. Making your group a safe place will help these children find their voice. Encourage other children to be patient.*

Offering God's Grace

LG

Invite children to decorate bags to be used to welcome newcomers or visitors. Some children may decorate bags with words, drawings, and stickers. Others may create cards for everyone to sign. Children can write welcoming messages on the bags and cards. Brainstorm illustrations and messages that might be included on the bags and cards. Write down suggestions on a sheet of newsprint and display it so all can see it. As you work, plan other things the children could do to help newcomers feel welcome. Arrange to give the bags to the person or group in your church with the responsibility to welcome visitors.

GN 1 Solution:

bars on window, belt, bricks, face, flame, hat/hair, mouse, sandal, scroll, walking staff

Extra Activity

Hand out copies of **GN 1**. Remind the children that they have talked about accepting differences in people. Ask if they can find the ten things different in the two pictures.



Consider the feelings of children who have not yet been baptized. Remind them that God loves them very much.



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).

LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Read **SCM 5a**.

Touch the bowl of water and remind the children to be thankful for their baptisms. Invite the children, one at a time, to dip their hands in the bowl of water. Say to each child:

(Name), you are a child of God and God loves you dearly.

Celebrate together by singing “Sing Thanks to God”—**MM 23**; **SCM 22**.

Bless each child as they leave, saying, “*(Name)*, go out and find someone new to welcome and to share the love and grace of Jesus.”



