

3

Calling the Helpers!

ACTS 6:1-7



GOAL

By hearing stories of Jesus' followers helping others in Acts, children imagine how they can contribute to the service done by the church.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Dear God, open my heart to your word and to these children so that I may be of service to you as we nurture your beloved community. Amen.

THIS SESSION

This session lifts up the practice of caring for those in need in our communities. Communities are places to share joy and fellowship and also bear one another's burdens. Christian community is not insular when it follows the way of Jesus Christ. It reaches beyond itself to aid those in need.

THE BIBLE STORY

The Bible story comes from early in the book of Acts when, as the new churches were in their infancy, it became clear that there was a need to care for the most vulnerable among their numbers, in this case, the widows. In the spirit of our first session, this story shows a way to name particular gifts of individuals and use those gifts for the betterment of the community.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

This session frames service as not just being nice, but as an important part of the life of a Christian and a duty of the church. Children may have experienced having a friend stay with them in an emergency, bringing a casserole to a congregation member just out of the hospital, or another experience on which to draw as we consider caring for others in the community. The children will also hear from members of their own church community who are engaged in meaningful acts of service.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Singing Together" (p. 26): Obtain hymnals with the song "O Look and Wonder" or use the prepared newsprint with the lyrics of the song from session 1. If using the newsprint with the lyrics of the song, keep it for session 4.
- "Putting the Puzzle Together" (p. 26): Cut apart the puzzle pieces from card-stock copies of Resource Pages 1 and 2. If you have more than twelve children, use two copies of the Resource Pages.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Caring Connection" (p. 27): Invite one or more guests from your congregation to share how they are involved in caring for people in need in your community. Encourage your guest(s) to bring photos or items that show volunteering in action. If applicable, visit the area of the church where the ministry takes place.
- "How Can I Help?" (p. 28): Gather several internet-connected devices and adult helpers to use in small-group work.
- "Prayer in the Papers" (p. 29): Gather several internet-connected devices and adult helpers to use in small-group work.



GETTING STARTED

- Name tags
- Markers

FAVORITES

As the children arrive, invite them to make a name tag with their first name and a picture of something they like. It could be an activity, a favorite food or color, a pet, and so forth. If you have an invited guest in “Caring Connection” (p. 27), this will help that person engage with the group and with individual participants by name. If you don’t have visitors, or if you have anyone new to the group, have the children share what they put on their name tags.

- Hymnals with the song “O Look and Wonder” or prepared newsprint with the lyrics of the song from session 1
- Internet-connected device (optional)

SINGING TOGETHER



Use hymnals or display newsprint with the lyrics to the song “O Look and Wonder.” Talk through the words to the song, then listen to the tune. If the whole song seems too ambitious, just sing the refrain, and perhaps the first verse in this session. Repeat it several times, especially the refrain.

To hear the tune, go to bit.ly/FMOLookTune (0:21). To sing along in Spanish (words not provided on the video), show the YouTube video “*Miren que Bueno* (O Look and Wonder)” (bit.ly/FMMiren, 1:52). Try to sing the refrain in English and Spanish.



If using the newsprint with the lyrics, keep it for session 4.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Prepared puzzle piece sets from card-stock copies of Resource Pages 1 and 2




PUTTING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER



Every community has people who need help, and people in it who could help others. One challenge is to connect helpers with people in need. This activity imagines making these connections.

Invite the children to think of a time that the congregation gathers: perhaps coffee hour, a church picnic, or another event. Randomly hand out puzzle pieces, making sure that you distribute both pieces of a set. Involve adult helpers if you need to complete a pair. Tell the children to read the description of the person on their puzzle piece. Assist with reading as needed. Explain that they need to find another person whose card connects with theirs; it may be someone that they can help, or someone who can help them. Once in pairs, tell them to create a skit about the help offered, with one person playing the person with the need and the other playing the person with the resource. Invite each pair to present their skit to the group.

Use the following questions for conversation:

-  What things does our church do that would be a match for you or your partner?
-  What organizations can you think of in our community that offer this kind of help?
-  What new ideas for how our church could help our community came to mind?

Set aside puzzle piece pairs for use in “Caring Is a Two-Way Street” (p. 28).



If you have more than twelve children, use a second set of puzzle pieces, but make sure you are still creating paired sets.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

ELENA'S STORY

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Tell the children that the story for this session comes from the book of Acts, which is a book in the New Testament that focuses on the very early days of the new church that came into being after Jesus died. Invite a child to read the adapted Bible story from Acts 6:1–7 on Resource Page 3. You may also ask another child to read Acts 6:1–7 from the Bible.

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- Resource Page 3
 - Bible (optional)
 - Paper, pencils (optional)

Brainstorm together words to describe how Elena may have felt. If children have trouble, provide pencils and paper and read the stories again so they can jot down words that come to mind.

Discuss the following questions:

- Can you think of a time when you felt like Elena did in the story? If so, share it with the group.
- In our first session about living in community, we talked about being like a body, where everyone has a part, and we are all necessary to the whole body. What connections do you hear in this story in Acts with being like a body?
- What were Stephen and the others offering the community?
- How does our church care for others in our community?



The *Common English Bible* is a good choice for children, but use what you have available.



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

CARING CONNECTION

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Introduce the children to your guest(s) who will share ways that they are offering care to the community on behalf of the church. Invite your guest(s) to share the type of care that is provided and any photos or items that may help the children learn more about the particular ministry. Be sure that children have the opportunity to ask the guest(s) questions. If needed, to get the ball rolling, you may choose to use some of these:

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- Invited guest(s)

- Why did this ministry appeal to you?
- Were you asked to join this ministry, or did you seek it out?
- How long have you been a part of this ministry?
- What kinds of connections have you made, with both the people you are helping and the people you work alongside?
- What have you gained through your volunteering?
- What might be some ways that children can be involved in this ministry?

Thank your guest(s) for their time and involvement in their particular ministry.

- Puzzle piece sets from “Putting the Puzzle Together” (p. 26)

CARING IS A TWO-WAY STREET



Give the children who were in pairs in “Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together” (p. 26) their puzzle pieces. Invite them to create a skit for a second story imagining one way that the *helper* received something from the person who had been helped. Invite pairs to present this new skit dramatically to the rest of the group.

After the skits, discuss the following questions:

- ✦ Volunteers often say that they feel like they gain more than they give from volunteering. What are some things that you imagine they might gain?
- ✦ When was a story about a time when you helped someone else, and how did it feel to be the helper?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Sticky notes in three colors
- Colored pencils, pens, or markers
- Adult helpers
- Internet-connected devices

HOW CAN I HELP?



Give each child a supply of sticky notes in each of the three colors. Have them write their ideas on the appropriate color of sticky note as you describe them. Assist with writing as needed.

- On [*first color*] sticky notes: ways *you* have been able to help in our community (for example, bringing canned goods for a food pantry)
- On [*second color*] sticky notes: ways that you know how *others* help in our community (for example, visiting sick people in the hospital)
- On [*third color*] sticky notes: ways that you think *the congregation* should start helping in our community (something that currently is not happening; for example, hosting a clothing storehouse that distributes donated clothing)

Designate a blank wall or other visible area for children to post their sticky notes, organized by color. Encourage and help the children to point out recurring themes or connections, such as a lot of people would like to see us offer after-school tutoring; or Manuel and Charlotte both know that our church has a food pantry; Alex, it looks like you’ve helped there, can you tell us about it, and so forth.

Form the children into groups, with an adult helper in each group, and provide an internet-connected device for each group. Have each group choose a sticky note from the first two colors you designated above (ways the children may have helped and ways they know others have helped). Tell them to search for local organizations that offer this service. Regroup to share learnings, guiding conversation using these questions:

- ✦ What did you learn about helping organizations in our community?
- ✦ What opportunities for partnership between our church and community organizations did you notice?
- ✦ How many of the services that you found were associated with a faith-based group? Did you expect it to be more? Less?

PRAYER IN THE PAPERS



Prayers often move us to action. Form small groups and provide newspapers (or internet news sites) and have the children search for situations in your community to use as prayer prompts. Adult helpers may be useful for reading and guidance. Have each group identify a situation for each person in their group. Invite the children to choose a piece of construction paper, trace their hand on it, cut it out, and write a simple prayer for that situation on the handprint. Assist with tracing, cutting, and writing as needed. When the group is ready, ask them to spend three minutes alone in prayer for this situation. Encourage them, as they pray, to consider actions they can take and how they could best be a helper in this situation. Some ideas may include prayer, providing supplies, writing letters, raising awareness by sharing the story with others, and so forth. Keep the handprints for “Helping Hands, Praying Hands” (below).

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- Recent local newspapers or internet-connected devices
 - Adult helpers
 - Construction paper
 - Scissors
 - Markers, pens, pencils



FOLLOWING JESUS

HELPING HANDS, PRAYING HANDS

Gather in a central location for a closing time of prayer. If you have the handprint prayers, distribute them to the children. If not, the children will use their own hands for the prayer.

Remind the children that the Bible story today talked about the church recognizing the need to pray, teach, and share the good news of Jesus, and also the need for people in the church to help others. Suggest that one way to remember this idea is with the words “Hands for helping, hands for praying.”

Reinforce to the children the ways that the group has learned about ways to be helpers in the community, including spending time in prayer for our community.

Close the session with prayer. If you are using the handprints, invite each child to take turns saying, “Hands for helping, hands for praying,” while placing their handprint in the center of the group and offering a sentence prayer about it.

If you are using the children’s hands, invite them to put one hand out in front of them, palm up, and say, “Hands for helping,” and then ask God to be with them in one way that they help others. For example, someone may say, “God, be with me when I help my brother with his reading”; another may say, “God, be with me when I pick up trash in the park.” Then have them put their other hand on top of the first hand, clasping it, and say, “Hands for praying.”

Once all have contributed, close with “Amen.”

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- Handprint prayers from “Prayer in the Papers” above (optional)

“I am older and have a lot of medical appointments but no longer drive myself places.”

“I have a reliable minivan, and extra time in the day since I work nights.”

“My family is often hungry, especially near the end of the month when money is tight.”

“I am a volunteer at the food pantry at my church.”

“Since my spouse died, I am alone on holidays.”

“I am the best cook in my whole family, and I love to entertain—we usually have two dozen guests for Thanksgiving dinner.”

“We had a house fire last month, and now we need to start over in furnishing the kitchen in our small apartment and getting clothes for our kids.”

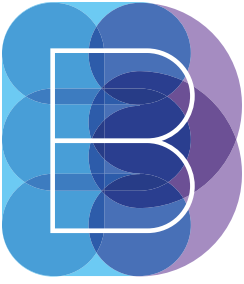
“Now that my youngest child is at college, we need to do a big cleanout of all the things we don’t need anymore.”

“I have two children and a dog, and every afternoon I need to take a work call for a half hour.”

“I am a teenager, and someday I’d like to be a teacher or a veterinarian.”

“I am a grandparent, but my grandchildren live far away from me. I miss being around young people.”

“I am a child, and I love stories and games. I wish someone would read books and play games with me.”



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON ACTS 6:1-7

Elena had been so excited to be a part of this new community! She had heard about Jesus; she had even been there to hear Peter preach at that amazing Pentecost gathering! This was the community that her family needed; her mother and grandmother were raising her all alone, and although they did their best, Elena's family needed the community now more than ever.

As Jews, they knew that it was their tradition and their law to care for those in need. What joy it would be to be a part of this community who cared for one another. Elena was relieved for the burden this might lift from her mother and grandmother.

Early one morning, they set out for the food line, to join this community who were one in Christ! As she waited, Elena felt a tiny rumble in her belly, but knew that soon she would have some food for the day. She was surprised, then, when the people giving out food walked past her family, and a few of the other Greeks in the line. They were speaking a different language (and, unlike on that day of Pentecost, she couldn't understand them), so Elena and her mother and grandmother simply left, a little hungry, and a lot confused.

It turns out that Elena was not the only one who noticed that the community wasn't taking care of everyone equally. The leaders gathered together to talk about the problem of people being left out. Although they had important work to do to teach and preach and pray, the leaders of this new church knew that a community has to care for people—for ALL people. So the gathered church came together and decided that there needed to be people whose job was to care for the neediest among them. They chose a good man named Stephen, that Elena's family knew, to be the leader, and invited a half dozen others to join him in this special job of caring for the community.

Not only were Elena and her family helped by these newly assigned leaders, but soon, there were even more people who were a part of the community!