

Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

Ps. 1

1 John 5:9–13

John 17:6–19

God Calls Leaders

Goal for the Session

Children will hear about Matthias, the apostles, and church leaders of today and give thanks for their Christian leadership.

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective,” A. Katherine Grieb

After the resurrection of Jesus, the succession puzzles continue. There seems to have been no expectation that any one disciple or family member should succeed Jesus as Messiah designate. No dynasty seems to have been either intended or suggested, whether by relation, descent, or appointment. Instead, we have Luke’s intriguing account in Acts 1:15–26, of the early church’s pressing concern to replace the apostate disciple Judas with another who would bring their number back up to twelve. Indeed, so urgent is this concern that, along with the ministry of prayer, it dominates the activity of the Jesus community waiting in Jerusalem during the ten days between the ascension of Jesus and Pentecost.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective,” Noel Leo Erskine

The challenge facing the church today is to be careful not to place issues of structure above the mission of the church. “Does that remind us of many elections that take place in our churches? Rather than asking ourselves who can make a better contribution to the mission in an ever-changing world, we seek someone who can continue what has been done previously. . . . The very fact that Matthias is never again mentioned should serve as a warning: do not try to force the Spirit to act according to our own purposes.”

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective,” Jeffrey D. Peterson-Davis

This story of the selection of Matthias pushes us to ask questions about how we discern the will of God and the confidence we place in systems we employ. While casting lots seems primitive and out of step with reason, could we trust that God might reveal the divine will in such a simple and definitive way? To what extent do the methods we employ in discernment get tangled up in our own need to control circumstances and outcomes? How do we see the community of the early followers of Jesus engaging in discernment? How does prayer influence our decision making?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara K. Lundblad

We can be grateful for the witness of those who are so little known. The sermon can be a time to acknowledge and celebrate the ordinary people who have carried the extraordinary gospel from one generation to the next. Who is Justus in your faith journey? There is the Sunday school teacher who taught for over forty years, never eligible for a church board because women were not even allowed to vote. There is a man whose name you cannot remember who told you that Jesus held him through the weeks and months after his wife died. And there is every person sitting in the sanctuary. Thanks be to God!

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
Acts 1:15–17, 21–26

Focus on Your Teaching

When children are very young, they often think of church leaders and pastors as “God” or “Jesus,” especially if they’ve seen them wearing long robes during worship. The children you teach now understand the difference between God and those who stand in front of the congregation at worship, those who teach, and those who lead and serve. Today’s lesson gives opportunity to recognize many leaders in the church—the twelve apostles, the leaders in your own congregation, and also the children themselves. Help children to see that Christian leaders come in many different sizes and ages.

YOU WILL NEED

- small table or large box
- white cloth
- cross
- permanent markers
- plastic cups
- 18" square of plywood or thick corrugated cardboard
- Bible
- Resource Sheet 1
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- red paper or plastic tablecloth
- Color Pack 19, 29

For Responding

- option 1: Color Pack 20, copies of Resource Sheet 2, colorful markers
- option 2: Color Pack 21, scissors, paper towel tube, tape, cups from Gathering
- option 3: Color Pack 22, photos of church leaders, glue stick, index cards, markers, poster board, masking tape

Dear Lord, help me to be one of your faithful leaders and to guide others into the fellowship of your love. Amen.

■ L E A D I N G T H E S E S S I O N

GATHERING

Before the session, invite a person in your church who serves in a leadership position to be the storyteller and give him or her Resource Sheet 1 (Twelve Were Called). Turn a plastic cup upside down, and use a permanent marker to draw a cross and print “Jesus” on the side. Make a worship table by covering a small table or large box with a white cloth and placing a cross on it. If you are using option 3 in Responding, bring photos of leaders in your church cut from a church directory, printed from your church Web site, or digital photos you take.

Welcome children by name. Ask each one to use a permanent marker to write his or her name on the side of a plastic cup. Make a cup for yourself. Ask: “Is it possible to use your cups as a chair?” Invite the children to wonder about the possibility. Have them place the cups upside down on the floor, spacing them evenly within a 18" x 18" space. (If your group has fewer than five children, have each one place a second cup.) Carefully put the square of plywood or thick corrugated cardboard so it covers all the cups. Invite learners to take turns sitting on the square.

Ask the children to gather around the worship table and place their cups on it. Place the “Jesus” cup upside down on the table. Say that during the prayer, each person will pick up one cup, speak the name on it, and stack it on top of the Jesus cup. Pray aloud:

Dear Jesus, help us work together today. Be with us as we learn about building your church. Bless: (Each child reads name on a cup and adds it to the stack.) Amen.

If you are not able to have a church leader as your guest storyteller, prepare to tell the story yourself. Bring information about the many ways people serve as leaders for the committees, groups, and projects in your church.

Option: If children ask about Judas, remind them of how Judas betrayed Jesus (Luke 22:47–48, 54a), but without focusing on his suicide. Emphasize that people sometimes make bad choices. However, no matter what people do, God's love and God's church go on.

**EASY
PREP**

Option: Ask your worship leaders if the children might lead worshipers into the church in this way some Sunday.

EXPLORING

Open your Bible to Acts 1 and say this is where today's Bible story is found. Introduce your guest and have this person tell about the leadership position he or she holds in your church. What kinds of things does he or she do?

Ask your guest to tell the Bible story, using Resource Sheet 1 (Twelve Were Called). Invite your guest to help you teach the "God Calls Leaders" song on the resource sheet. Thank him or her for coming.

Review that the twelve apostles were leaders for the first Christians. Today, we also have people to lead and guide us in church. Discuss:

- ❖ Who are the leaders of our church? (For example: pastor; church musicians; office staff; Sunday school teachers; church committee members; leaders of youth, men's, or women's groups.) Name as many leaders as possible.
- ❖ What do these leaders do?
- ❖ How can we thank these leaders and show them we care about them?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Colorful Church** Children will create artwork that demonstrates how individuals join together as the church. Stand at the other side of your learning space and hold up Color Pack 20. Invite learners to tell what they see. Move very close to the children and ask what they see. Comment on how all the colored dots work together to create the picture. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Our Colorful Church). Have each child choose a marker without looking. Tell learners they will work together to create pictures. Show learners how to make small dots with the tip of the marker. Have each one print his or her name outside the lines of the church and then begin to color in the church with dots. After about thirty seconds, tell learners to switch papers. Have each one print his or her name outside the lines of the church and then begin to color in the church with dots. Repeat the process, continuing in this way until all pictures are finished. Recall the people who lead your church and how God has given each one a skill or talent to use in the church. Ask the children to tell what talents and skills they might use to serve in your church. Encourage learners to use their pictures as a reminder to pray for one another and for your church.
2. **Follow the Leader** Children will take a walk around the church building, taking turns as leader. Have learners help you cut the cross from Color Pack 21 and tape it around a paper towel tube to make a processional cross. Explain that a processional cross is sometimes used to lead people into worship. Stack up the cups from Gathering. The child named on the top cup carries the cross and leads the group around your learning space or the church hallways. Sing or say "God Calls Leaders," learned in Exploring, as you walk. At the end of the song, move the top cup to the bottom of the stack. The

person named on the next cup becomes the new leader. Continue until all children have a chance to lead. Sit together and invite learners to imagine things they would like to do as a church leader.

3. **Leaders Window** As children look at pictures of church leaders past and present, they will be encouraged to see themselves as leaders too. Show Color Pack 22 and explain that this is a stained-glass window that teaches about the twelve apostles. Set out pictures of church leaders from your church directory or Web site or ones you've taken. Say the name of each leader and what he or she does. Invite children to draw pictures of themselves on index cards. On a piece of poster board, use masking tape to create the look of a stained-glass window. Have learners glue the leader's photos and their portraits to the panels. Display the finished poster board next to Color Pack 22. Say a prayer of thanks for every member in your church.

God Is So Good

*God is so good,
 God is so good,
 God is so good,
 God's so good to me.*

*God answers prayers . . .
 God's so good to me.*

*God cares for me . . .
 God's so good to me.*

*God, you're so good . . .
 You're so good to me.*

Save the red tablecloth
 for use in upcoming
 sessions.

CLOSING

Invite learners to sit in a circle on the floor with their cups from Gathering. Have them turn their cups upside down and tap the floor in time with the music as they sing “God Is So Good” (Color Pack 29; track 6 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021).

Spread out a red paper or plastic tablecloth. Invite learners to print their names on the tablecloth with permanent markers. Print yours too. Place this red cloth over the worship table. Comment that each person named on this cloth can help to lead other people in God's ways.

Ask a volunteer to hold up Color Pack 19. Tell learners to say the names of the pictures when you point to them during the prayer. When you point to the balloons, they can say names of people who are church leaders. Pray aloud:

God of surprises,

When you lead us to meet people, guide our (feet).

When you ask us to help others, guide our (hands).

When you show us your creation, guide our (eyes).

When you ask us to tell others about you, guide our (mouths).

When you send us preachers and teachers like Peter, guide our (ears).

Help us surprise these people with your love: (balloons).

Amen!

Say good-bye to each learner by name.

Twelve Were Called (Based on Acts 1:15–17, 21–26)

Forty days after Easter, Jesus ascended to heaven. This means he went back into heaven to live with God forever. Jesus' followers would have to carry on without him. They were still Jesus' followers, but they knew they needed some human leaders to guide their work as disciples.

Jesus' followers gathered to praise God and to pray. One day Peter stood up and talked to them. When Jesus was living on earth, he chose twelve people, called apostles, to learn about living in God's ways, to teach others these things, and to invite people to follow Jesus. Judas was one of these apostles, but he died. The eleven apostles thought someone needed to be chosen to be the twelfth apostle.

Peter prayed with all the people gathered to ask God to help them choose another leader. Who would it be? Two people were ready to serve. Everyone prayed, "Lord, you know our hearts. Show us which one of these two you have chosen." The leader who was chosen was Matthias!



God Calls Leaders

(Tune: Jesus Loves Me)

Peter, Andrew, James, and John,
Philip and Bartholomew,
More to list; we're halfway through.
God calls leaders; God calls you!

Refrain

We can be leaders, following Jesus.
We can be leaders, in our church today.

Thomas, Matthew, James (second one!),
Thaddaeus and Simon; almost done!
Who's number 12? It's Matth-i-as.
God calls leaders, just like us.

Refrain

May 16, 2021
God Calls Leaders

Our Colorful Church

