

Celebrate and Respect God's Diversity

GENESIS 1:1-2:1

1



GOAL

Youth affirm creation's diversity and consider ways to respect and protect those who are excluded.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

God of all, open my eyes to see the beauty in all of your creation and help your children to see the same. Amen.

THIS SESSION

We celebrate God's diversity when we affirm the entire creation that God made and saw as good. The more we learn about this complex, marvelous universe, the more we appreciate God's diversity and intentions. The first story of the first book in the Bible tells about God creating humans in God's image. Male and female they were created, both equally reflecting God. Now that's diversity! But there is more. As we read about all that is created, binary language is used to express two contrasting parts of a whole. There is a much more diverse spectrum of life than we often recognize.

THE BIBLE STORY

In the first creation story in Genesis, God creates the entire universe and sees it as good. Although short, Genesis 1:27 allows for much conversation. Indeed, this verse has been central in debates about gender equality and gender identity, with some using it to discredit the validity of transgender or non-binary identities. However, it is important to note that the verse does not say that God created humans to be male and female only. Rather, the author of the story makes a point to emphasize that God did not create just one kind of human. The passage affirms that all humans are created in the image of God, which should prompt us to celebrate diversity among God's creation and affirm all.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Youth may have been exposed to the idea that differences are bad, that we should try to focus on what makes us the same to promote unity among people. This session challenges the notion that differences are negative and encourages us to celebrate diversity among people.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Honor God's Diversity" (p. 6): Obtain the *Honor God's Diversity* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 1 Set).

Depending on the options you choose:

- "In God's Image" (p. 7): Write the Common English Bible (CEB) version of Genesis 1:27 on newsprint: "God created humanity in God's own image, / in the divine image God created them, / male and female God created them."
- "Ways Your Church Celebrates Diversity" (p. 8): Invite a leader in your church to speak to youth about your church's or denomination's efforts to include people previously excluded, such as women in leadership, persons with disabilities, or LGBTQ+ persons.
- "Celebrating Love" (p. 8): Read the *CNN Health* article and prepare to summarize it for the group.

GETTING STARTED

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- Copies of Resource Page 1
 - Pens

LISTING SPECIES A CT G

Welcome youth as they arrive and give them a copy of Resource Page 1 and a pen. Ask them to follow the instructions on the top of the page and list or draw as many different types of animals as they can before the session begins.

Gather the group and invite a few volunteers to give some examples in various categories of what they wrote or drew. Tell the group that the theme of the next four sessions will be to honor God's diversity. Today's session is about celebrating and respecting diversity.

OPENING PRAYER QC

Lead the group in this prayer or one of your choosing:

God of all, help us to hear you today. Spark our imaginations and transform our hearts as we try to make the world a better place. Give us wisdom and courage to be more like you. God, we give you thanks and praise. Amen.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

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- Honor God's Diversity* infographic poster

HONOR GOD'S DIVERSITY C

Gather around the *Honor God's Diversity* infographic poster and allow youth to look it over and make comments. Ask:

- ➔ How does the poster show some of the variations of land and water?
- ➔ How does it show the gradations of time?
- ➔ What are ways we can celebrate and honor this diversity?

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- Resource Page 1
 - Pens

OUR UNIQUENESS C CT

Have the youth take their copy of Resource Page 1 and think about the human species and all the ways we are unique. Invite them to find room on the front or back of the page and write some of their unique characteristics that are not shared by everyone in the room.

Invite people to choose one unique characteristic they have and say it aloud to the group. Some may mention the same thing. Invite a brief conversation about things they have in common and things that are unique about different members of the group.

Explain that *diversity*, or differences between people, is not a bad thing. In fact, we will discover today that diversity is part of God's plan, and we can learn to celebrate our differences rather than fear them.

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- Beach ball
 - Permanent markers

DIVERSITY IS SPECIAL AM

Have the youth take a minute to think of something about themselves that is shared by few others in this group and in their community.

Tell the group you are going to each write one of their special characteristics on the beach ball to show some of the diversity in God's creation. Have them take a permanent marker and be ready to write their characteristic on the ball when it comes to them.

Begin the game by writing something unique about yourself on the ball and then pass the ball to someone else who is to write their unique quality on the ball before passing the ball on. If someone chooses not to participate, they may pass the ball to the next person they choose. When all have had a chance to write, hold the ball up and say that these things that make us unique are all part of God’s diverse creation. When we affirm and value diversity, we acknowledge that every single person is a special beloved creation of God.

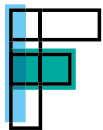
CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEO

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Internet-connected device

Older youth may enjoy watching short videos by the foundational essay writer of this practice. As a way to begin the study, prepare to show the “*Honor God’s Diversity Practice Overview*” video and the “*Honor God’s Diversity Session 1*” video from the Growing Faith YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR).

Tell youth that the writer of the foundational essay that guides this practice is Dr. Justin Reed, a professor of Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In the videos, he explains the focus of the entire practice and the focus of session 1. Show the videos and discuss people’s reactions.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

IT’S ALL GOOD

CT C

Bibles

Paper and pens

Form pairs and give each pair a piece of paper and pen. Each pair should have either a Bible or a Bible app open on their smartphone. Have the groups read Genesis 1:1–2:1 aloud and write down everything created that God saw as good. Compare answers and discuss:

- ➔ Is there anything that exists that was not included in this reading?
- ➔ If humans were created in God’s image, what does God look like, as humans are very diverse?
- ➔ What is humanity’s role in honoring God’s diversity? (Genesis 1:28)



The reading can also be done as a whole group with each participant reading one verse aloud, emphasizing each phrase where the text says that God saw that something was good.

IN GOD’S IMAGE

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Prepared newsprint

Honor God’s Diversity infographic poster



Depending on the maturity, experiences, and diversity in your group, this activity may evoke discussion about names for God besides *Father* and issues of gender. If there are objections to the gender binary language of “male and female,” it may help to point out that the creation story that contains this verse is full of binary language to describe the broad diversity of God’s creation. For example, Genesis says God created day and night, earth and sea, but we know there are many times of day and night and many types of land and water. If you have the *Honor God’s Diversity* infographic poster, it may be very helpful to look at it here.

Display the newsprint with the CEB version of Genesis 1:27, “God created humanity in God’s own image, / in the divine image God created them, / male and female God created them.” Read it in unison. Discuss:

- What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
- If all genders are created in God's image, what gender is God?
- Looking at this verse, how would you describe what God looks like if God looks like every single person?

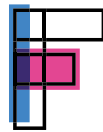
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- Bible
 - Paper
 - Pens

QUALITIES OF GOD AND HUMANS

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Have a volunteer read Genesis 1:27 aloud to the group. If possible, read a few different Bible versions of the same verse, especially the CEB version (see Session Preparation for “In God’s Image” on p. 5). Discuss what it means to be created in God’s image.

Form two groups and give each group a piece of paper and a pen. Have each group first select a volunteer to write down the answers the group names. Tell group 1 they are to come up with as many qualities as they can think of to describe humans, such as height and shoe size. Tell group 2 they are to come up with as many qualities as they can think of to describe God. After a few minutes, have the groups read their lists. Discuss things that God and humans have in common.



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

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- Guest speaker

WAYS YOUR CHURCH CELEBRATES DIVERSITY

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Welcome and introduce your guest speaker and have them talk to the group about ways your church celebrates and honors diversity. The process of including women in leadership, providing access to people with disabilities, and full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons and others has been a struggle for many churches. Invite youth to ask questions of the person and share their opinions about how diversity can best be celebrated in your community.

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- Internet-connected device

HONORING THE IMMIGRANT

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Remind youth that the Bible says many times to welcome strangers and refugees. When a past president severely slowed the abilities of refugees to flee to the United States, many church communities spoke against this. Show the Twitter video at bit.ly/FMBibleRefugees (1:07). Discuss:

- What other marginalized people are honored and affirmed in the Bible but are excluded or oppressed by society?
- In what ways can your church stand up for marginalized people and communities?

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- Internet-connected device

CELEBRATING LOVE

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Summarize the *CNN Health* article “A Group of Christians Attended a Pride Parade to Apologize for How They’ve Treated the LGBT Community,” *CNN Health* (July 2, 2018), bit.ly/FMApologyLGBT.

Show pictures from the article on your device and discuss ways your church celebrates persons who identify as LGBTQ+.

TRANSGENDER IDENTITY

Show the YouTube video “I’m Transgender” (bit.ly/FMImTransgender, 1:52), a video about Felix, a young person who is transgender. Explain that *transgender* refers to a person who does not identify with the sex or gender they were given when they were born. Discuss together:

- What were some of the challenges Felix faced?
- Why were some people mean to Felix?
- How can we relate Felix’s story to our Bible passage?
- How can Christians celebrate and protect others like Felix?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

USING MORE NAMES FOR GOD

Give each person a copy of Resource Page 2 and a pen. Read the first paragraph and go over the instructions. Allow youth to work alone for a few minutes on the page. Invite volunteers to tell any additional words they have heard used for God and also which words they would like to use more often. Discuss how using different names for God helps honor God’s diversity.

CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSITY

Title the newsprint “Honoring Our Diversity.” Under the title, draw a vertical line down the middle of the newsprint; title one side “Celebrate” and the other side “Respect.” Make pens and sticky notes available to the participants.

Tell the group that they are to think of ways your group or your church might both celebrate and respect diversity in the community, both inside and outside the church walls. Discuss briefly the difference between things that celebrate diversity and things that respect or protect diversity among people. Challenge youth to think of people who do not come to your church but might if they felt their diversity was honored and protected. An example might include making the church more accessible.

Invite them to write each idea on a sticky note and post it under one of the titles on the newsprint, depending what sort of action it is. Read all the answers and discuss which ones the group might do. Later, share the newsprint with your church leadership or post it in a visible place so the larger community can see.

SELF-PORTRAITS

Ask youth to think quietly about their strengths, things that they are proud of. Then ask youth to think of things about themselves that they feel need improvement. Invite youth to draw a self-portrait. Encourage them to showcase their strengths and, if they are comfortable doing so, their areas for improvement. As they finish their portraits, invite the youth to hang them in a visible place.

Ask youth to look at one another’s portraits. Discuss how we all have similarities and differences, strengths and weaknesses. No one is perfect. Yet we are all beautifully created in the image of God. Encourage them to always look for the image of God in themselves and in others.

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- Internet-connected device



If the idea of gender existing outside a binary is a new concept for you, you’re not alone! Trans Student Educational Resources has created a great tool, “The Gender Unicorn,” to help people visualize the different aspects of gender. See bit.ly/FMGenderUnicorn.

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- Copies of Resource Page 2
 - Pens

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- Newsprint
 - Marker
 - Sticky notes
 - Pens

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- Paper
 - Colored pens



FOLLOWING JESUS

CLOSING PRAYER



Sit in a circle with the youth. Explain that you will say something to the person on your right and they should repeat the same phrase to the person on their right. Say to the person on your right, “You are created in the image of God.” When the person on your left says the phrase to you, say it back to them and have them say it to the person on their left, going around the circle again.

Lead the group in prayer:

God our Creator, thank you for making us all in your image. We promise to honor your diversity by treating all people with dignity and respect. Amen.

Creation Diversity

List or draw as many different members of the following creations as you can think of. A few examples are given.

Dogs (*poodle, labrador*)

Plants (*rose, redwood tree*)

Fish (*large-mouth bass, shark*)

Cats (*Siamese, lion*)

Birds (*robin, woodpecker*)

Planets and stars (*Sun, Pluto*)

Names for God

There are many names for God in the Bible besides *Father*. A few of them are found in this word cloud.

1. Underline words for God you have heard used in worship. Add others if you have heard other names for God.
2. Circles words you like.
3. Write which words you would like to use when you speak of God.

