Jesus teaches us to love one another, as he has loved us.
- At the Last Supper, Jesus commands his disciples to love one another.
- Young children, like adults, mean many different emotions and actions when they use the word love. We accept children's definitions, but hold up the self-giving example of Jesus as our model, for adults and children both.
- In today’s core session, we continue to celebrate the season of Easter and explore with children Jesus’ new commandment.

Question of the Week
If you could give your friends one last message, what would you say?
**Getting Started** (5-10 minutes)

Gather the children in a circle. Remind children:

- **Easter day** is over, but not the season of Easter. The Church is still celebrating.
- Today is the 5th Sunday of Easter.
- In Easter, we celebrate that Jesus, who died, is alive, now and always.
- We can say a special Easter greeting every week between now and Pentecost.

Help children practice the special Easter greeting learned in the previous three sessions. Each child who wants to can take a turn saying the opening line of the Easter greeting to the group. The group answers with the response.

Use these words for the greeting:

*Greeting:* Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
*Response:* The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

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**Gospel Story** (5-10 minutes)

**Jesus’ New Rule**

*Story Focus: Use the simple actions set in italics to tell today’s story together with the children.*

Jesus and his friends sit down to eat.  
(Sit in a circle with the children.)

“First,” says Jesus, “I’ll wash your feet.”  
“If I can wash your feet for you, then you can wash each other’s feet too.”  
(Children pretend to wash one another’s feet.)

Jesus takes wine, Jesus takes bread.  
“Eat these with me,” Jesus said.  
(Children lift right hands, then left, then pretend to sip and eat.)

“Here’s a new rule: Love one another.  
I love you, my sisters and brothers.  
(Children hug one another.)

“People will know we are sisters and brothers, when we do just this:  
Love one another.”

(Join in a circle by putting arms on each other’s shoulders.)

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**Stuffed Animal Skits** (5-15 minutes)

Use several stuffed animals to invite children to act out Jesus’ rule, *love one another*, in a variety of situations:

- one takes care of the other, who is sick
- one feeds the other, who is hungry
- one plays with another, who wants someone to play with

Encourage the children’s imaginative play by using one stuffed animal to present the situation, then waiting for the children to act out responses. For example, animals could say:

- Oh, I don’t feel good.
- My tummy hurts and I’m hungry.

Then invite the children to use other stuffed animals to act out ways to help: offering food, medicine or doctor visits. Let children also invent situations to which the other children can respond.

After several skits, you can ask:

- **Who loves us?**
- **What good things do they do for us?**

**Note:** Many children’s book illustrators rely on animal characters to make their stories universal. This is a good tactic to use. Few faith-formation rooms have the resources to provide a truly multicultural collection of realistic human dolls, but gathering together a few huggable stuffed animals is easy to do. Young children invest these beloved play figures with human emotions and characters, making them natural stand-ins for the children themselves.

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**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Stand together in a circle.

Ask children to pass a hug around the circle, together with the words:

- **Love one another!**

**Note:** If you use *At Home with the Good News*, either distribute this week’s papers to the children before they leave or e-mail the papers to their families.
Discover the Good News (5-20 minutes)
On page 1 of today's Discover the Good News you'll find an illustrated version of today's gospel story.

On page 2, you'll find an unfinished letter children can use with their families. You can adapt this activity to use in today's session. For each child, ask the group, “What do we really like about (child's name)?” Fill in one letter for each child.

Page 2 also offers a To Parents article to use at home.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)
From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Love as Jesus Loves” (songbook p. 16)
◆ “God’s Love Is Forever” (songbook p. 45, also available as an MP3)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Spring-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

You may also want to play for children “Child of God.” You'll find suggested movements for this song in the Singing Together activities of the first three sessions of Lent. (Open your Spring-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Companion Music for options on obtaining this music.)

Washing Feet (5-15 minutes)
In the session for the 5th Sunday of Lent, we suggested you invite children to wash one another’s feet. In today’s session, we suggest you reenact this ritual to help children understand the context of today’s gospel.

Explain:
◆ Jesus asked us to stay close to him and live the way he lived.
◆ Jesus showed how to love other people in many different ways.
◆ Once Jesus even washed the feet of each one of his friends.

Invite children to take turns washing and drying each other’s feet. Let the children wash your feet, too! If possible, do the foot-washing next to a sink so that you can fill and empty a dish pan for each person. If foot-washing is done on Maundy Thursday in your congregation, invite children to remember foot-washing they may have seen done in worship.

The Mass (5-15 minutes)
This week, we begin a series of activities designed to encourage preschoolers and kindergartners to explore the Last Supper and the Mass. This week’s focus is:
◆ Jesus’ friends gather together.

Place the Last Supper poster, attached to this document, where children can see and touch it.

Encourage children to explore the poster:
◆ What is happening in each picture?
◆ Have you been to meals like these?
◆ What do you remember about these meals?

Explain:
◆ Jesus shared a special meal with his friends called the Last Supper.
◆ Today Jesus’ friends still gather together for a special meal called the Mass.
◆ What do you remember about getting ready for and beginning Sunday worship?
  — How do we get ready for church on Sunday mornings?
  — Who brings us to church?
  — Who do we like to see at church?

Help children play a game of gathering together. Children scatter around the room, until you call out, “Time for the Last Supper!” or “Time for church!” or “Time for Mass!” Then children gather together around a designated table. Invite volunteers to take turns leading the game.
Young Children and the Gospel

Today’s gospel is taken from Jesus’ teaching to his disciples at the Last Supper. We expand today’s story to include the event that immediately preceded Jesus’ teaching—Jesus takes on the role of servant as he washes his friends’ feet.

Jesus tells his disciples to “Love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus’ love was generous, healing, sacrificial and, above all, authentic. All Christians, adult and children, can look to Jesus for a model of love, but each of us will learn to follow Jesus’ leading by a unique path.

The normal behavior of young children is egocentric. We cannot expect, much less demand, “self-giving” from children who do not yet understand what it means to develop an authentic self. This does not mean that children cannot astonish us with their ability to love; only that such love must stem from the children’s own initiatives to be authentic.

Love and Children’s Families

In today’s session, children talk about love by thinking about the people they love and the people who love them.

As you talk with the children be sensitive to the possibility that some of them may live in unhappy families. Children this young often believe that even abusive parents “love” them, which gives them a confused understanding of what genuine love means. Some children live with parents who, while not abusive, may not be mature enough as parents to offer their children consistent, unconditional love.

There is no easy solution for these children’s problems, but we can help by accepting the children’s own understanding of love when we invite examples. For example, instead of telling children that Mom or Dad loves them, we can ask, “Who loves you?” and accept the children’s answers, which may range from a beloved aunt to a pet cat.

Where You’ll Find Everything Else

◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  — Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
  — An optional activity that includes a snack titled Candy Hearts.
  — A handout of today’s Gospel Story, to distribute or e-mail to children and families.
  — This week’s At Home with the Good News to distribute to children or e-mail to their families.
  — The Last Supper poster, to be used in the activity The Mass.

◆ Open your Spring-C Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  — Information on Spring-C’s Models of the Faith.
  — An article for catechists titled The Book of Revelation.
  — An article for catechists titled The Gospel of John.
  — An article for catechists titled Keeping Easter in Your Household.
  — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings picture the love and encouragement to be found in Christian community. In Acts, Paul and Barnabas encourage new believers to persevere in the faith despite persecution. Revelation describes how God, in tenderness, descends to live among God’s people, removing sorrow and pain. In the gospel, Jesus gives us a new command—love one another; by obeying Jesus, we show our discipleship.

Acts 14:21-27
Paul and Barnabas courageously revisit the churches in Iconium, Lystra and Antioch of Pisidia, cities from which they had been violently expelled on their first missionary journey. Their concern to encourage these newly planted churches outweighs the concern for personal safety.

“The faith” was a commonly used term for the Christian beliefs that provided the bond of unity (Latin, fides) for the new community.

Paul and Barnabas encourage and reassure the new disciples by revealing that opposition and trials are to be expected if they are to follow Christ's way and carry on his mission in the world.

Revelation 21:1-5a
Once the first creation has disappeared and the wicked have been driven off to punishment, all that remains is to wonder at God’s eternal magnificence, reflected in the new creation. Because of its association with brutal storms, raging waters and myths of primeval chaos, the sea no longer exists. Such violence is not compatible with the peace of the world to come.

God then provides a new Jerusalem—a holy city because God dwells in it—that suggests the intimate union of God with the chosen people. “The home of God among mortals” fulfills God’s promise to “be with us” (Exodus 3:12) and Jesus’ assurance that “I will be with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

John 13:31-33a, 34-35
The gospel readings for this and the next two Sundays of Easter are taken from Jesus’ Farewell Discourse at the Last Supper (13:31–17:26), in which he explains the significance and implications of his glorification.

For John, “glory” means a visible revelation of God’s presence and holiness. Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection manifests God’s glory in the fullest sense. The cross is not a humiliation but a glorification and the revelation of God’s plan for salvation.

The love commandment is new, not as a commandment, but in that Jesus’ love becomes the model for all love and the basic obligation of the new covenant. God’s unconditional love has been revealed in a new way in Jesus. He is more than the standard for Christian love; he is its source. His love is both affective and effective, bonding the Christian community and bringing salvation.
Reflection

In today’s gospel Jesus takes the tone of one who must break bad news to children: tender, yet honest and respectful. The mature parent finally learns not to protect their offspring from all life’s hardships. First, it’s impossible to do. More importantly, it is in struggling through those hardships, which increase in difficulty throughout life, that people learn and grow.

Jesus begins as if he’ll tell a “bad news, good news” joke. The bad news is, I’m leaving. The good news is, I’ll be with you more potently and completely than I could be within a human body limited to a specific time and space. For John, the ultimate meaning of faith is a mystical union with Jesus, incarnation of divine love. He portrays that union now as achieved through other human beings, as in one letter he asks, “how can we love the God we can’t see if we don’t love the people we can see? (1 John 4:20)”

The night before Jesus died, he encouraged us to imagine and build a world where love replaces violence. He asked us to care for each other as he cared for us. He assured us of a final victory: good news over bad, hello over goodbye.

The Scriptures and the Catechism

Today we note the “apostolic” character of the Church (CCC, #857–65). From their vital union with Christ, all Christians, both clergy and laity, share in the mission of the Church to evangelize and bring salvation to the world. Every Christian, by his or her baptism, is entrusted to carry on the teaching and healing ministry of Jesus (CCC, #897–913). Although there are a variety of forms that this apostolic action takes, love is the foundation of all.

The World of the Bible

A New Heaven and a New Earth

Jesus’ resurrection prompted the early Christians to await eagerly God’s total triumph over evil and the resulting foundation of a new order—a new creation (heaven and earth, that is, the visible universe)—which would be free from oppression, injustice, violence and suffering.

They believed that God’s final transformation of our disordered world into a rightly ordered one was just around the corner. This belief also inspired the author of the Book of Revelation, who wanted to imagine for his audience just what this transformation would be like.

Contrary to what is often commonly thought about the Book of Revelation, it is not about the end of our world by a divinely-induced catastrophe but rather the end of the world as we know it—dominated by evil and destructive empires—by God’s judgment.

Once this current world is ended and evil has been removed, the new world will be the world that God originally intended from the beginning of creation.

The clue to this is that the book’s ending describes a new world in which God’s heavenly presence and throne now dwell in our midst and the results of evil (suffering and death) are no longer found.