Session 1
Ecuador—building a strong foundation

Strong, healthy relationships are important for people of all ages. Infants and toddlers learn trust and security when we meet their basic physical needs with love and care. As children grow older, they continue to need trusted adults to care for them, giving them unconditional love and acceptance. Children who experience these kind of relationships will thrive and most likely have the skills to build solid relationships with other children and adults throughout life.

Christians all over the world form communities we call churches, where we build relationships in response to God’s love for us, and are called to love people all over the world. The Christian church is built on the foundation of Jesus, who showed us how to love God and one another. Children can take an active role in building the church community as they participate in their own congregations and learn to respect the faith traditions of others.

BIBLE TEXT
Matthew 7:24-27

FAITH CHALLENGE
We help build the church community.

ADVANCE PREPARATION
- Read through the entire session and decide what you will do.
- Set up the room/space for the various activities.
- Gather props and set them up for the story (Story tip, p. 22): Bible, rocks, sand, craft sticks to make two simple houses (Kids Cluster, p. 22), bucket of water, two plastic garbage bags, two baking sheets with raised edges.
- Find volunteers to present the story: a Bible reader and two volunteers to mime the actions. It’s best to practice ahead of time.
- Gather supplies for the activities you choose to do.
- Prepare a snack (p. 12).
Kids Cluster

1. **Plan an activity for the early arrivals.** Check page 6 for ideas.
2. **Have children create two simple houses from craft sticks** to use in the Bible story time.
3. **Welcome the children and gather for a time of singing** (p. 9). Be sure to include action songs, familiar songs, favorite songs, and new songs.

Kids Explore

1. **Begin with the theme song.** “God’s Family” (p. 8). Pray a simple prayer.
2. **Introduce the theme of the day:** We help build the church community.
3. **Map activity.** Build a yarn or thread bridge from your hometown to Ecuador. Use pushpins to hold the yarn in place. Tell interesting tidbits about this country, such as its proximity to the equator, the language the people speak, and the continent where it is located. Tell about the people and activities of Quito Mennonite Church (p. 25). Find Quito, Ecuador’s capital city, on the map.
4. **Tell the Bible story.** Open the Bible to Matthew 7:24, to show where today’s story is found. Have one volunteer read the story as two others pour water on the props at the appropriate times.
5. **Talk about building bridges with relationships.** Bridges need solid foundations to hold the traffic that uses them. So, too, relationships need strong foundations for friendships to survive.
   - What surprised you about this story Jesus told?
   - What questions do you have about the story?
   - How would you describe a wise person?
   - How would you describe a foolish person?
   - Can you think of a time you acted wisely? Foolishly?
   - How is the church like the wise person?
   - What does it mean that Jesus is the foundation of the church? (Refer to Bible memory verse.)*
   - How are the church people in Ecuador building strong relationships?
   - What are the church people in our hometown doing to build strong relationships based on God’s love?
   - How can you help build the church?
   - How can learning about other faiths help us be global kids?

* The Christian church is built on the life, death, resurrection, and teachings of Jesus Christ. The church is a family of people who love and follow Jesus and love one another.

**Story tip**
Place plastic bags on baking sheets on the floor or table. On one bag, make a pile of rocks and set one house sturdily on top. On the other bag, make a pile of sand and set the second house on top. During the story, helpers will pour water on the rocks and the sand. The idea is that the house on the rock will stay solid, while the house on the sand will sink or topple.

**Tip**
Use the relationship questions/ideas as conversation points during the craft time. It is not necessary to sit quietly and reflect on these points, but do include them during other activities.
**Kids Create**

**DESIGN A CHURCH**
(INDIVIDUAL)
What kind of church building will be welcoming for all God’s people?

**Materials:** Lego™ building bricks, paper, rulers, pencils, scissors

- Younger children may build a church after discussing what would be important parts of this building.
- Draw or cut out essential parts of a church building that would have a strong foundation and be a place for God’s children to gather.
- Take time for children to talk about their designs and buildings.

**TIPS**
Show actual blueprints of a church building and talk about the work and planning needed before any building begins.

Talk about the nonmaterial elements that are needed for building a strong foundation for a church that is built of people.

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**FAMILY FAITH BLOCKS**
(INDIVIDUAL)
Children will make a faith block to take home as a reminder that they are part of God’s community of faith.

**Materials:** block template (p. 26), crayons, markers, photos, glue, tape

- Copy the template onto white or colored paper and cut it out.
- Decorate the squares with pictures and the Bible memory verse.
- Assemble the block. Cut along the solid lines; fold on the dotted lines. Use the tabs to glue or tape the faith block together.

**TIP**
At home, take turns tossing the block with family members and responding to the question on the top square. (Have extra copies on hand in case children want to make more blocks at home.)

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**BRIDGE EXPERIMENT**
(GROUP)

**Materials:** 4 sturdy bricks or books, 2 sheets card stock or heavy paper, about 20 pennies

- Stack two bricks on a table. Place a second stack of two bricks about 6 in. / 15 cm from the first stack.
- Place one sheet of card stock across the top of the bricks to form a bridge.
- Gently place pennies on the center of the bridge until it collapses. Count the pennies you used.
- For the second part of the experiment, remove the bridge and pennies. Start with the stacked bricks as before. This time, place one sheet of card stock beneath the two stacks of bricks and form a rounded arch to the level of the top brick. (You may need to move the books closer together.)
- Place the second sheet of card stock on top of the bricks, as before, to create a bridge. Add pennies as before. How many pennies can the bridge support now?

Talk about the purpose of a strong foundation. What supports do we need to be strong followers of Jesus?

**TIP**
To make this activity more interactive, bring more supplies and have children work in pairs.
**CAT AND MOUSE**  
**(GROUP)**

This is a game that children in Ecuador like to play.

- Everyone sits in a large circle.
- Give a stuffed animal (preferably a cat and a mouse) to two different players seated in the circle.
- On “Go,” players pass the stuffed animals quickly to the right, around the circle.
- The idea is that the cat is trying to catch the mouse, so players try to avoid getting caught with both the cat and mouse in their hands. A player caught holding both animals is out of the game.
- The game starts again, with one player eliminated in each round.

**SWING AND SEEK**  
**(GROUP)**

This game from Ecuador requires a swing set and places to hide.

- Form two groups, depending on the number of swings you have. One group is the swingers; the rest of the players are pushers and runners.
- The pushers push the swingers until they are high in the air. Then the pushers and runners run away to hide all in one place as the swing slows down and stops (without help from the swinger).
- The swingers then go together to hunt for the pushers and runners. When they find them, the swingers chase the other players and try to tag them before they can get back and sit on the swings.

*Option:* Play the game with just one swinger. Runners may hide in separate spots. The swinger announces when s/he is off the swing. Anyone who gets to the swing before being caught is safe. To catch a runner, the swinger must return to the swing and say, “One, two, three for (name).” The last player caught becomes the swinger for the next game.

**WHICH ONE?**  
**(GROUP)**

This game (a play on wise and foolish) helps children make decisions and think about themselves in the abstract.

- You will need a large running space with two ends. Children begin in the middle of the space.
- The leader asks, “Do you like ___ or ___?” and points to the two separate ends of the space. No one moves until both choices are given.
- Players show their preference by running to one end or the other. (This is not a race, just an active running game.)
- Suggestions for choices: a lion or a lamb, cats or dogs, winter or summer, day or night, competing or cooperating, thinking or asking, work or play, hot dogs or hamburgers, adventures or safety, hot or cold, a movie or a museum, fancy or plain, trees or flowers, rocks or sand, indoors or outdoors, a bike or a skateboard, the mountains or the mall, loud or quiet, books or television.
THE STORY OF QUITO MENNONITE CHURCH IN ECUADOR

In 2000, the Cesar Moya and Patricia Uruena family arrived in Ecuador to teach leaders about God and the Anabaptist way of believing in Jesus. Soon they were meeting every month with families who wanted to be together to worship God. Cesar and Patricia began to teach Bible stories in people’s homes. Soon there were enough people to meet together and become a church. They met in a small office space in El Inca.

This little church now has more than forty people who come together to worship God. They were strangers, but now they are friends in Jesus Christ, who helped them develop a strong foundation of love, faith, and acceptance.

This congregation does much more than worship every Sunday. They teach Sunday school classes for children and teens. They run monthly programs for children in one neighborhood that has a lot of drugs, alcohol, and gangs. The church wants to help children know that God’s way is a way of peace and love and getting along with each other.

The Quito Mennonite Church also works with refugees who come from Colombia—people who needed to leave their own country to be safe. The church gives them a place to feel safe and loved. The church people help them find new homes and jobs, and other help they may need. They do this out of their love for God and their wish to live like Jesus lived, caring for and helping people in need. One woman, Liliana, serves God by tutoring children who are refugees.

The church in Quito is the people, not a building. When they talk of building the church, they mean that they want to invite more people to be part of God’s community. Sure, they would like a building for their worship and programs, but more importantly, they want to build strong relationships that are based on God’s love and acceptance.

Facts about Ecuador

- The Galapagos Islands, volcanic islands west of Ecuador, are popular because of their unique reptiles, birds, and plants. They bring many tourists to the area.

- The coastal plain of Ecuador grows enough bananas to make the country the world’s largest exporter of this fruit.

- The eastern part of Ecuador, the Orient, has Amazon rainforests and jungles.
Pray for children and their families who are building God’s church in Ecuador.

Tell or read one story about Jesus, who is the strong foundation of the church.

Make up a question for someone else to answer about building strong relationships with other people.

If you had to leave your home and become a refugee in Ecuador, what is one thing you would take with you?

If you were helping a refugee who came to your home or church, what is one thing you would do?

What can your family do to build God’s church in your community?