

Love Is a Verb

Power, name, love. These words weave through this week's texts, and their interrelationship presents a rich depiction of the saving work of the divine amongst us. The name of Jesus Christ holds power. The power of Jesus resides in love. The love of God through Jesus exerts influence in us and over us. Our call is to love, to exercise our power in acts of love towards one another. The web continues to interweave and strengthen.

Focus scripture: John 10:11–18

John 10:11–18 is a passage whose familiar, comforting message exists in some tension with its context. Echoing Peter's experience in Acts 3 — 4, John 9 — 10 recounts Jesus' healing of a blind man followed by a contentious discussion with religious leaders in which Jesus employs metaphors of sheep and sheep-tending to attempt to reveal himself to the entrenched leaders.

A good shepherd's love for the sheep bears the same qualities as those described in the 1 John 3: it is sacrificial, bold, power-filled. Furthermore, this shepherd is not the shepherd only of these sheep. One flock, one shepherd (v. 16): other sheep, ultimately all sheep, belong to this shepherd.

The opening four verses of the chapter set the scene for Acts 4:5–12 in which "the prisoners," Peter and John, have been arrested and held in custody by temple officials as a result of their teaching and preaching about the Resurrection while in the temple. This much-annoying sermon (v. 2) was recounted, in part, in last week's Acts 3 lectionary text.

In the face of questioning, Peter responds at first with an implicit censure of his interrogators: how is it that a good deed has become bad? In their fixation on a perceived challenge to the established authority and doctrine, these religious leaders are unable to see the miracle that has taken place in their midst.

Continuing his response, Peter reasserts the claim that has landed him in this interrogation — that the source of his power is the name of the resurrected Jesus Christ of Nazareth (see last week Acts 3:16). To know, to call upon, to believe "the name" is a recurring theme in this week's texts: here in Acts 4, in Psalm 23:3, and in 1 John 3:23. Power to speak, power to act, power to be bold, power to follow, power to love: all

are connected to a belief in the saving power of the name of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

The "rejected cornerstone" quotation in verse 11 is from Psalm 118:22. Jesus also quotes the verse self-referentially in each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17); an ancient metaphor, with a new interpretation in a new context.

Psalm 23 is much-loved and undoubtedly one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. On this Good Shepherd Sunday, the image of God as shepherd inspires trust and confidence but does not deny the multiple, sustained threats to that security. Thus, we should take care that our familiarity with this psalm does not give way to sentimentality in reading it.

In the psalm's culminating verse, the writer is daily pursued ("follow" in the New Revised Standard Version), no longer by enemies, but by God's goodness and steadfast, faithful love (mercy in the NRSV).

The command of 1 John 3:16–24 is clear: love one another. Love sacrifices. Love attends to the economic realities of our siblings. Love moves boldly. Love shows obedience to God's way. This multi-layered love for one another has God's love as its source and its model. Its essence, however, is to be expressed outwardly in word, in deed, in action. Love is a verb.

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Contrary to the power exerted by human structures, the power of the resurrected Jesus Christ resides in his saving love for humanity. The power of this love emboldens our acts of love in a world full of people who have been disempowered and ill-loved. How can we, individually and communally, enact our love in service to those who have been systematically excluded and oppressed?



Focus Scripture

John 10:11–18

Additional scriptures

Acts 4:5–2

Psalm 23

1 John 3:16–24

God of Love, we turn ourselves this day to the Good Shepherd as our inspiration and model for the sacrificial love for one another to which you have called us. Fill us with the power of your name and embolden us in our acts of love. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Younger children in this age group are usually spontaneously caring and nurturing – with siblings, with pets, with friends and family. Most children this age have a keen interest in and spontaneous affection for animals of all kinds. When introducing children to the metaphor of Jesus as a shepherd, they will be invited to think about their own experiences in caring for animals. Be aware that the younger members of your group are still literal thinkers and might have a harder time relating to the shepherd image as a metaphor.

Older children often want very much to be recognized and affirmed. Whether it

is being picked for a sports team, chosen as a partner in a game, or invited to a birthday party, being welcomed and included is a sign of being loved. As they consider the metaphor of shepherd-like care and love, they may be able to relate by thinking about those voices they associate with the feeling of being loved and cared for.

In this week's session we move backwards in time, from the stories of Jesus' appearance after his resurrection to a teaching from Jesus earlier in his life. The stories for the rest of the season will help children explore what it means to follow Jesus. Pray that children will see in Jesus a model of God's deep love and care.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, John 10:11–18, and [biblical background material](#) (p. 71).
- ❑ Prepare a worship space with a gold or yellow cloth, white pillar candle, gold spiral and tealights (see resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)," p. 111).
- ❑ Bring matches, taper, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark placed in this week's focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring copies of the resource sheet "[Easter Season Resources](#)" (p. 111); save copies for following Sundays.
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "Alleluia, Praise to God" (p. 5 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "[A Good Shepherd](#)."
- ❑ **Research group:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Shepherds in Jesus' Time](#)"

- ❑ **Poem group:** information about "[Couplet poems](#)" from the bottom of p. 75

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- ❑ **Game zone:** recording of music (such as "*Somlandela/We Will Follow*," #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7, or available for purchase as MP3 download)
- ❑ **Craft zone:** copies of resource sheet "[Sheep Messages](#)," poster board, raw wool or fuzzy yarn, construction paper
- ❑ **Art zone:** poster board, denominational mission magazines
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** folded card stock, art supplies, list of ministries in the church
- ❑ **Music zone:** song "Comfort Me" (pp. 12–13 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #14 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)
- ❑ **Easter zone:** question box from previous weeks, slips of paper

Bless

- ❑ Bring the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or the song "*Somlandela/We Will Follow*," (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



Love Is a Verb

Scripture

John 10:11–18

FOCUS To learn about God’s deep love and care from the metaphor of Jesus as a good shepherd

Gather

Welcome the children and introduce newcomers.

Opening ritual

Call to gather Invite children to gather in the worship space and explain that we are in the Season of Easter. Lead the children in the traditional Easter greeting used each Sunday of this season by followers of Jesus around the world:

Leader: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Children: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

Easter ritual Invite a child to read the “Gathering prayer” on the resource sheet “[Easter Season Resources](#)” (p. 111), with the rest of the group responding with “Alleluia!” after each line. Invite another child to light the Christ candle and use a taper to light the first three tealights in the spiral.

Sing, if possible, the song “Alleluia, Praise to God” (p. 5 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #20 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Receive the offering and extinguish the candles to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Invite children to talk about pets that they have had or have, or what kind of pet they might like to have.

- What are some things we do to take care of a pet?
- How does your pet let you know what it needs?
- What do you think are the important qualities a person needs to look after animals?

Explain that in today’s reading from the Bible, Jesus uses the example of a shepherd as someone who cares.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open to the focus passage in the gospel of John. Explain that today’s Bible reading is a story that Jesus told his friends long before he died and then was alive in a new way. The followers of Jesus continued to remember all that Jesus did and taught them. When they gathered in one another’s homes, they told stories of Jesus over and over.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet “[A Good Shepherd](#)” to tell a story based on **John 10:11–18**, inviting children to do the actions.

- What does Jesus say about being a good shepherd?

- What do you think Jesus is saying about how we care for one another?

Exploring the story further

(To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.)

Research group The children in this group will have an opportunity to learn more about shepherds in Jesus’ time. Provide copies of the resource sheet “[Shepherds in Jesus’ Time](#)” and read together. To find out more about what the Bible says about shepherds, form two groups, with one group looking up **Ezekiel 34:31** and the other looking up **Isaiah 40:11**. Share information with the whole group.

Poetry group The children in this group will have an opportunity to consider how they might follow Jesus' example to share care and love in the world. Provide information from the section "[Couplet poems](#)" (from the bottom of p. 75) and invite children to form pairs to write poems about following in Jesus' way.

Reporting Invite the research group to share information about shepherds, and the poetry group to share some of their poems.

The Bible story and us

Jesus taught his followers about God's love in the words that he spoke and in the way that he lived. Jesus was like a shepherd, watching over people, healing them, comforting them, and caring for them.

■ What are some ways that Jesus shared God's love with others?

As part of a Christian community we also follow Jesus and try to live the way Jesus lived.

■ What are some ways that we can show God's love to our family? To our friends? At school?

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

❑ **Game zone: Follow the leader**

Jesus, the good shepherd, invites us to follow him and learn from him. Invite children to play a follow the leader type of game. Play the recording of the song "*Somlandela*" (#22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) or another piece of music and have children take turns leading the group around the room. When the music stops, the "leader" mimes a loving action while the rest of the group guesses what it is. Then another person will take a turn being the leader.



❑ **Craft zone: Sheep messages**

When we follow Jesus, we learn how to love and care for one another. Provide copies of the resource sheet "[Sheep Messages](#)" and supplies. Invite children to follow the instructions to make woolly sheep messages to share with others. Help younger children cut out and print messages as necessary.

❑ **Art zone: Collage**

The first Christians followed the example of Jesus, the good shepherd, as they cared for one another. Provide mission magazines and poster board and invite children to find images of church workers offering "shepherd love and care" today, and collage these images onto poster board. They might add their own drawings of ways they can show care in their daily lives.

❑ **Outreach zone: Thank you cards**

There are many good shepherds who volunteer in churches all around the world. Invite children to help list such people in your congregation (for example, pastoral care visitors, those who serve during the fellowship time on Sunday, church school leaders). Distribute materials and invite children to make thank you cards, with messages such as, "Thank you for being like a good shepherd when you..." Plan a way for the notes to be mailed or delivered.

❑ **Music zone: Comfort song**

Those who follow Jesus, the good shepherd, offer comfort to others. The chorus of the song "Comfort Me" (pp. 12–13 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #14 on the *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7) speaks of comforting love. The children may recall learning this song from the session during Lent on March 15. Sing the chorus over and over, repeating it to get the comfort of the rhythm, the words, and the music. Talk together about when people might find this song comforting.

❑ **Easter zone: Question box**

If a "Question box" was made on April 11, encourage children to add more questions.

Bless

Gather around the worship table and invite a child to light the candles.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Thank you, God,
that Jesus loves and cares for us,
as a good shepherd loves and cares for the sheep.
Help us to trust that love. Amen.

Sing the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 110) or "*Somlandela/We Will Follow*," (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Blessing Send each child out saying, "(Name), may God's peace go with you."

Reflect

In what ways do you see yourself following the "good shepherd"? In what ways do the children demonstrate an understanding of Jesus' shepherd care and love? How can you be a model of shepherd care for the children in your group?

Couplet poems

Couplets are two line poems, where each line is the same length and each line rhymes. For example,

"One, two, buckle my shoe.
Three, four, shut the door."





A GOOD Shepherd

(based on John 10:11–18)

Encouraging children to use
their imaginations will help
them enter into
the story.

In Israel, where Jesus and his friends lived, there were many sheep. People used the wool from the sheep to make clothes, and they used the meat from the sheep for food. Sometimes, when Jesus was trying to explain things to his friends, he talked to them about sheep and shepherds. In Israel some of the shepherds were women and some were men.

“Here’s a way you can think about me,” said Jesus. “I am like a good shepherd – a person who takes care of the sheep.

“A good shepherd makes sure the sheep don’t get hurt. If one sheep is lost, a good shepherd will go looking for it. A good shepherd loves every one of the sheep in the whole flock.
(Invite children to shield eyes as if looking for a lost sheep.)

“Suppose a big wolf wants to catch a sheep and eat it. A good shepherd will chase that wolf away!

“Now suppose somebody else is looking after the sheep. Someone who doesn’t really care

what happens to the sheep. When the wolf comes, that person will run away and hide.
(Invite children to pat their hands on their knees as if running away.) The wolf might catch a sheep and eat it.

“Let me tell you something else about a good shepherd,” said Jesus. “A good shepherd knows the sheep. And the sheep know the shepherd. When he walks somewhere looking for grass for the sheep to eat, they follow. All the shepherd has to do is call and they come.
(Invite children to put hands around mouth as if calling.)

“A good shepherd cares so much about the flock of sheep that she would do anything – even die – to take care of the sheep. No one makes the shepherd do this. The shepherd does this because she loves the sheep.

“So I want you to think of me as your shepherd,” said Jesus. “I love you and I will take care of you.

“But here is something important. Most shepherds only look after one flock of sheep. I have many flocks of sheep in many different places. I care for all of them, and I hope that some day they will all come together to be one flock.”

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Shepherds in Jesus' Time

I am a shepherd and I have lots of sheep. You might think that sheep all look alike. Well, they don't. Actually there are many kinds of sheep, but even those of the same kind don't look alike. Each sheep is different. I have known each sheep in my flock since it was a baby lamb. I get to know each one in a special way.

If you think it is easy to keep track of a flock of sheep, you are wrong. Being a good shepherd is a lot of hard work. Sheep get cuts and scratches, and I have to clean the wound and put oil on it so it will heal. If it is a bad cut, I may have to bandage it. Being out in the open means that there are insects that bite the sheep. I must go over their bodies, and all that wool, to get rid of ticks.

Sometimes the sheep wander off as they look for grass to eat. They just seem to forget where they are going. Then I have to go looking for them. Sometimes they get caught in thorny bushes and can't get out. That wool is really thick, you know. When a sheep is missing, I worry until I find it. A sheep caught in a bush is in danger of being eaten by a wild animal. Wild animals watch for sheep that have strayed away from the flock.

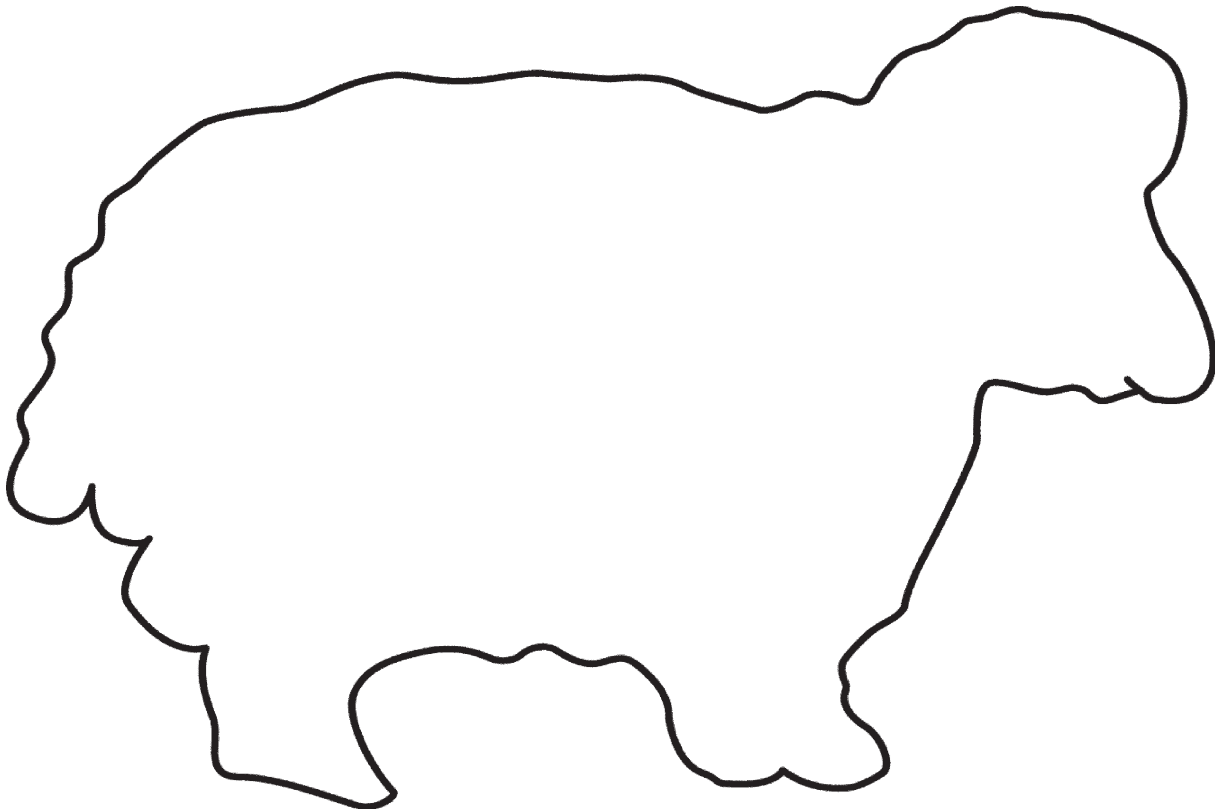


I also have to see that my flock has food to eat and clean water to drink. Do you know that sheep will not drink from a stream that is running? They want water that is still. That is why I often take them to a well and get water from it for them to drink. Sometimes other shepherds and their flocks are at the well too. But when I call my sheep, they know my voice and come right away. I have been talking and singing to them since they were baby lambs.

Some nights when we are far from home I stay awake and watch over my sheep all night. When I can, I put my sheep in a pen made of stones. There is no gate on the pen, so I lie down there to keep the sheep in and the wild animals out.

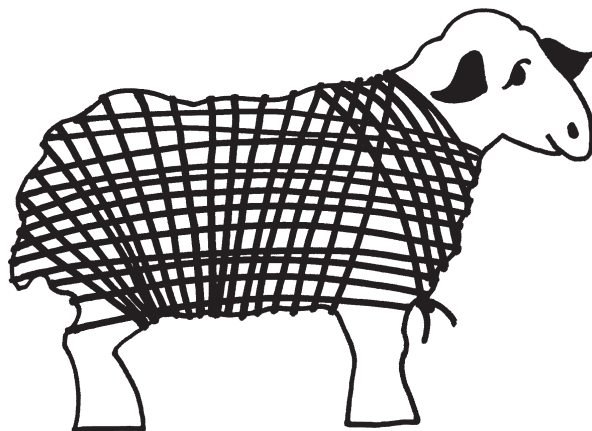


Sheep Messages



Instructions:

1. Cut out the sheep pattern and trace onto a piece of poster board.
2. Cut out the poster board sheep.
3. Use a permanent marker to draw in facial features and ears.
4. Wrap wool or yarn around the body until it is fat and fluffy; begin at the neck and wrap around the chest, middle, and back of the body, leaving the legs and tail; tie off the ends of the wool.
5. Write the message "God loves you" on a piece of construction paper; punch a hole in one corner, and tie the message around your sheep's neck with a piece of wool or yarn.



Rituals for Lent

Lenten rainbow pathway

Create a pathway of “stepping stones” using large circles cut from coloured construction paper: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Cut several circles of each colour to make the pathway connect from the doorway of your meeting space to the worship area. During Lent the children will follow this rainbow path of stepping stones to gather in the worship space during the opening ritual each week.

Gathering prayers

Choose two volunteers to read the opening prayer each week: one will light the candle and the other will place an object (symbolizing the focus scripture theme) beside the candle. These symbols can remain in the worship space with all five displayed on the fifth Sunday. There are only five prayers included on this page because there will be a special all-ages gathering on Palm/Passion Sunday.

Gathering song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**

Every day. **Every day.**

God will always love us. **God will always love us.**

Thank you, God. **Thank you, God.**

Blessing song

(tune: “Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping”)

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

May God bless you. **May God bless you.**

Keep you safe. **Keep you safe.**

May God’s love surround you.

May God’s love surround you.

Go in peace. **Go in peace.**

Lent 1

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this first Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for the rainbow which is a sign of God’s love.
(*Place a rainbow-coloured object beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 2

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this second Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for all the stars in the sky that remind us of God’s love. (*Place a star beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 3

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this third Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”

for all the wonderful things in creation. (*Place an object from nature beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 4

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this fourth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for giving us hope when times are hard. (*Place a stone beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.

Lent 5

One: Lent is a special time of praying. (*Light the purple candle.*)

Two: On this fifth Sunday of Lent we say “Thank you, God”
for your love that is deep in our hearts. (*Place a heart beside the candle.*)

One: Lent is a special time for thinking about God.

Two: God has promised to be with us always.

All: Thank you, God. Amen.



Easter Season Resources

Prepare an Easter worship space...

1. Cover a small table with a gold or yellow cloth and place a white pillar candle in the middle.
2. Create a spiral shape leading out from the central candle by sprinkling a pathway of gold confetti or sequins.
3. Place six tealights at intervals along the spiral, with the last one at the end.
4. Each week the central candle will be lit first and a taper will then be used to light additional tealights, until all are lit by the seventh Sunday of Easter (May 20). These tealights will symbolize the growing light as the good news about the risen Christ spread out among the disciples and into the community.

Gathering prayer

Reader: Loving God, we celebrate this Season of Easter, a time of new life and joy.

All: Alleluia!

Reader: We are called to be witnesses to the new life in Christ. (*Light the central Christ candle.*)

All: Alleluia!

Reader: We are called to spread the light of this good news. (*Light one or more tealights, adding one each week.*)

All: Alleluia!

Somlandela

Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,
Somlandela, yonke indawo.
Somlandela, sonlandelu Jesu,
Lapho eyakhona somlandela.

We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
We will follow, we will follow him.
We will follow, we will follow Jesus.
Wherever he will lead us we will follow.

Traditional Zulu song

Prayer lines (May 20)

I thank God for your gift of music in our church community.

I thank God for your leadership in our church community.

I thank God for the way you care for our church building.

I thank God for the ways you help lead worship.

I thank God for your visits to people who are sick or can't get to church.

Thank you hand cards (May 20)

Fold construction paper in half and trace a hand outline.
(See illustration #1.)

Cut out the shape, leaving the folded side intact to make a card.

Choose a prayer line, cut it out, and glue it inside the card.
(See illustration #2.)

Write your name below the message.

On the outside of the card, print the name of the person chosen to receive the card.



Illustration #1



Illustration #2

