



# Challenging Empire

## A CALL TO COMMUNITY

The United Church of Canada • L'Église Unie du Canada

The 2007–2008 Mission Theme for The United Church of Canada is “Challenging Empire: A Call to Community.” When playing “Journey from Empire” with the children in your group or family, share stories of what the United Church is doing to help fulfill this year’s mission. For examples of these stories and other related resources, see *Mandate*, Special Edition, May 2007, and the new resource *Challenging Empire: Justice Seeking in Your Faith Community*, both available from UCRD. Also check the United Church website to read the report “Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire.”

## Journey from Empire

### A Board Game for Children 8 to 12 Years

#### Background

It is very difficult for us to understand the teachings of Jesus without understanding what he means when he talks about the “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of Heaven.” These phrases, set alongside the reality of the kingdoms of the times, were integral to Jesus’ message. It was Jesus’ resistance to the forces of the Roman Empire that in part led to his crucifixion.

The Hebrew Bible or Old Testament also speaks negatively about human kingdoms and in large part is about the response of the Hebrew people to two oppressive empires—Egypt (think Moses and the Exodus) and Babylon (think Exile).

Jesus talked about the “kingdom of God” as a political and religious metaphor. He intentionally used this term to get people’s attention and to make statements

against the realities of life under Roman rule. He turned the values of the empire on its head when he spoke about the kingdom of God.

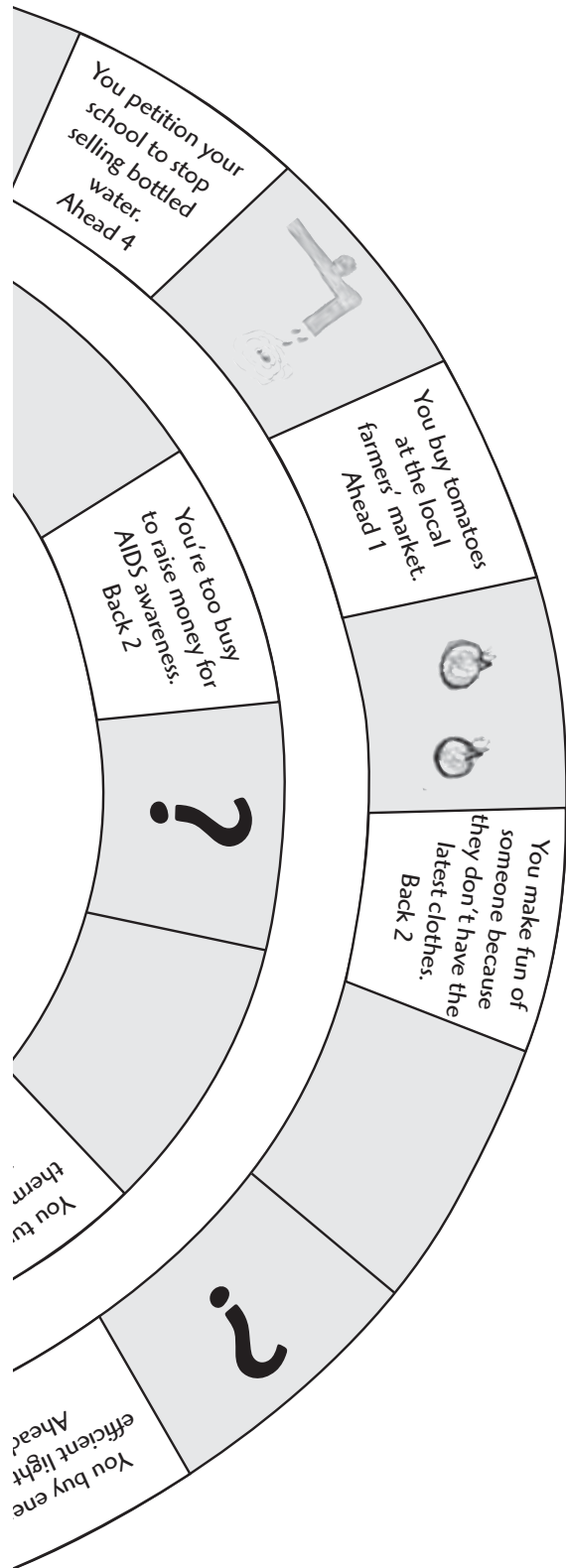
Today, we still live according to the oppressive values of empire. These values teach that “might makes right,” and wealth and power are to be prized over all else. Not only are these values harmful to the earth and to the least powerful of the earth, they are also harmful to those who hold them and rarely bring the satisfaction for which we humans search.

The Journey from Empire board game will help familiarize children ages 8 to 12 years with what is meant by empire and how Christian teachings help us to look more carefully at the empire values that are so much a part of our current reality.



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## Object

The object of the game is to move from the centre of the spiral, where players are confronted by the empty values of empire, to the outer edge of the kingdom of God, where the love of God and neighbour are experienced and enacted. You'll notice that there are some empire values on the outer edge of the spiral to remind us that even when we want to move forward, sometimes we slip up and embrace empire. There is also the possibility, even close to the centre of the spiral, to choose practices that move us nearer to the kingdom of God, symbolizing that there is hope and we can move forward even when surrounded by empire. As statements are read, you'll see that some problems of empire relate to large, systemic issues such as energy waste, privatization of water, or unfair trade practices, while some deal with more personal choices and actions. This reminds us that even as we make individual choices to live peacefully with others, we must also work with others to do what we can to bring justice to the larger world issues.

## How to Play

To play the game, each player (individuals, pairs, or teams) should have a playing piece (differently coloured paper clips or playing pieces borrowed from another board game). Players take turns rolling a dice or spinning a spinner to progress from the centre to the outside of the spiral. Along the way, players will land on squares that instruct the players either to move forward or back. Other squares invite them to pick up a "question card." (See page iv for question card texts. Use page iv to make the cards ahead of time.) The question cards provide opportunities for cooperative learning and discussion. There is not necessarily one correct answer, although there is a response that gives clues to correct answers or actions. Players who land on the "question spaces" may take a card and read the question to the group. Others can offer their own responses and then the response on the card may be read, again emphasizing that many different answers could be correct. The cards also offer a Bible verse that relates to the situation and may be read along with the "answer." Everyone can learn something from the question cards.

## End

As players exit the game board and enter God's kingdom, they can be invited to read what the Bible tells us about the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven:

Matthew 5:1–12	Mark 10:13–16
Matthew 6:9–13	Mark 10:17–27
Matthew 13:3–9	Luke 6:20–23
Matthew 13:31–33	Luke 14:12–24
Matthew 13:44–45	Luke 17:20–21
Matthew 13:47–48	Romans 14:17

## “Empire Says...” Question Cards

Before you begin to play the board game “Journey from Empire,” photocopy or write out these questions and answers and create a set of question cards. If possible use discarded paper or the backs of greeting cards.

**Q= Question A= Answer R=Read**

**Q. Empire says we must always be busy; we're only valuable if we're producing something. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Go to a quiet place where you can just “be.” Daydream or pray if you like. One way to care for our bodies that God has given us is to take time for rest and renewal.

R. Genesis 2:1–3

**Q. Empire says we must buy things or our economy will fail. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Do some research on “Buy Nothing Christmas” or “One Hundred Dollar Christmas.” Suggest to members of your family and church that you would like to spend less money on gifts and more time with each other.

R. Matthew 6:28–30

**Q. Empire says that everything is for sale, including the earth's resources. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Make a commitment to drink less water sold in bottles and encourage friends and family to do the same.

R. Leviticus 19:9–10

**Q. Empire says humans have the right to live according to their means, no matter what happens to creation. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Do some research about your “Ecological Footprint” and try to live more simply by riding a bike, walking, or at minimum carpooling at least one extra time per week.

R. Psalm 24:1–2

**Q. Empire says that the lives of some people are worth more than the lives of others. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Try to get acquainted with one new person with whom you might not usually have contact, e.g. an older person, someone of a different religious, ethnic, or racial group, or someone who is differently-abled from you.

R. Romans 12:13

**Q. Empire says we should be able to buy what we want when we want it. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Buy only local produce rather than those strawberries shipped from South America in the middle of winter. The cost to the environment for the fuel used for shipping is enormous.

R. Genesis 1:11–12

**Q. Empire says we should be able to buy what we want at very low prices. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Buy items that are fairly traded or that you know are from companies in which the workers are fairly treated. Sometimes lower prices mean low wages for workers.

R. Leviticus 25:17

**Q. Empire says people with more power have the right to buy or take the resources of those with less power. Can you name one way to counter this value?**

A. Write letters or protest in other ways the invasion of powerful nations into areas of the world in which they want to have control of oil, water, other resources, or the political system.

R. Isaiah 2:4

**Q. Empire says that strong and rich countries must be doing something right and so they should be able to invade struggling or violent regions to teach them the right way. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Learn about complex political situations and relationships such as those in the Middle East so that you understand why one form of government or one set of cultural values might not necessarily be better than others.

Luke 10:30–37

**Q. Empire says that bigger is better. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. If your family is buying a new house, appliances, electronics, or car, do some research about how to make “green” or “sustainable” decisions and talk this over with your parents.

R. Matthew 6:25–27

**Q. Empire says that one way to show someone you love them is to buy extravagant gifts. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Consider giving someone a service gift (a massage, taking on an extra household chore, spending time doing something they enjoy) or making something special rather than buying more stuff. Remember that paper wrapping and cards are hard on the environment!

R. 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

**Q. Empire says that it's important to spend money on looking young and beautiful. Can you name one way to counter that empire value?**

A. Think of one thing that you really like about yourself that has nothing to do with the way you look or dress. Tell yourself that you like you. Do the same thing for a friend or family member.

R. Philippians 4:8