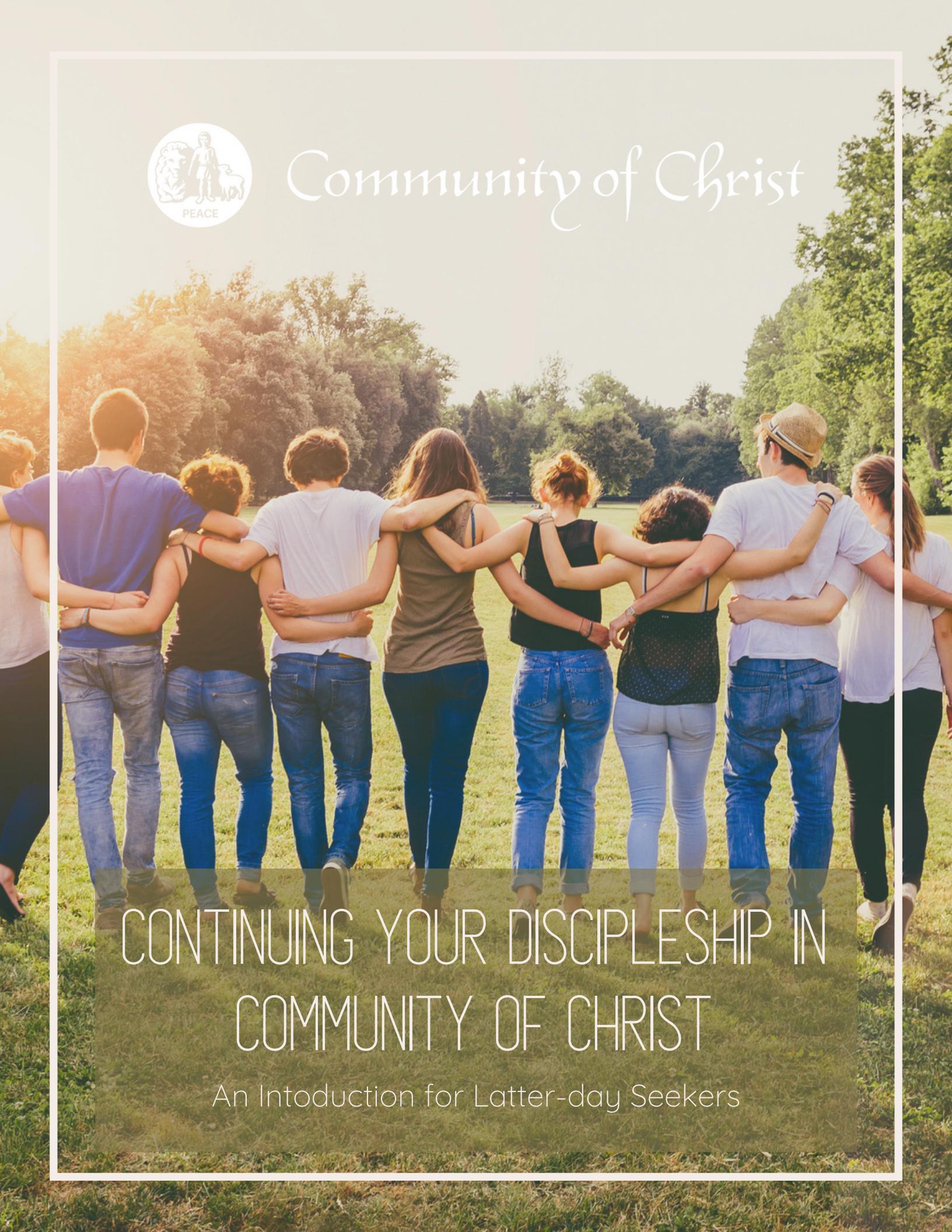




Community of Christ

A photograph showing a group of approximately ten young adults from behind, standing in a line with their arms around each other's shoulders. They are outdoors on a grassy field, with trees and sunlight in the background.

CONTINUING YOUR DISCIPLESHP IN
COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

An Introduction for Latter-day Seekers



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Robin K. Linkhart
Council of Twelve Apostles
Community of Christ
Independence, Missouri, USA

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Acknowledgments

This resource was prepared to introduce Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs to interested persons of the Latter-day Saint tradition. In some instances, we translated Community of Christ terminology into language more familiar to the target audience.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).¹ Community of Christ encourages members to "use the most up-to-date translations of the Bible available." This is because translations such as the NRSV "provide students of the Bible with accurate translations based on the best current knowledge of ancient languages in which the Bible was written" [—from *Walking with Jesus: A Member's Guide in the Community of Christ* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 2004), 33].

¹ October 13, 2021, the NCC Governing Board approved the Updated Edition of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSVue) of the Bible, which is considered the most meticulously researched, rigorously reviewed, and faithfully accurate English-language Bible translation. The process began in 2017 when the NCC commissioned the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) to conduct a review and update of the 1989 New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV). Find NRSVue at <https://friendshippress.org/nrsv-updated-edition/>.

In addition to original material, the following Community of Christ publications were used and at times modified to prepare these lessons, and occasionally significant portions have been included:

- Seekers and Disciples, 2001
- Understanding the Way: Exploring our Christian Faith, 2003
- Walking with Jesus: A Member's Guide in the Community of Christ, 2004
- First Steps, 2003
- Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs, 2010
- Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs, 2018
- A Way of Life, 2019

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Suggestions, comments, and corrections are welcome. Write to Robin K. Linkhart, Council of Twelve Apostles, Community of Christ International Headquarters, 1001 West Walnut Street, Independence, Missouri 64050 USA, or email rlinkhart@CofChrist.org.



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Our Unique History, Message, and Identity

Lesson 1

Our history as a church begins with Joseph Smith Jr. going into a grove of trees to pray as a young boy. But like the early Saints of the Restoration, we lay claim to something much older than the nineteenth century. Central to everything is our testimony of Christ and our identity as His followers. In our experience as a community from Joseph Smith Jr. forward, we have found that we can best realize the mission of Christ through the hope and vision of Zion. As Restoration Christians, the church's mission statement expresses our unique message and identity: "We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace."

This mission statement, and our very name "Community of Christ," reflects Jesus's teaching on the two great commandments: to love God and love our neighbors (Matt. 22:36-40). We encounter and experience the love of God, and express love of our neighbors, through embracing the salvation of Jesus Christ as it touches all dimensions of life. We recognize salvation where peace abides and justice reigns, as Christ redeems and restores peace. The peace of Jesus Christ encompasses all the promises, hopes, and blessings of the gospel as revealed by God through Christ, and affirmed by the Holy Spirit, God's promised presence within our midst. We recognize Christ's peaceable kingdom wherever the Spirit greets us.

As followers of Christ, we are called to proclaim peace and participate in God's redeeming activities. Our congregations are models of the peaceable kingdom, albeit imperfect but ever striving. Within the fellowship of the saints, we seek to realize vibrant community where all can participate. We respect—and employ—the gifts and talents of each person, from oldest to youngest, in celebration of our mission. We share the peace of Jesus Christ by caring for one another, for all people, and for the earth itself—and invite others to come, be transformed, and go forth to serve others.

Zion has been understood as many things: the reign of God, shalom, the peaceable kingdom, the beloved community, and God's kingdom on earth. Whatever you call it, Zion is not always a horizon away, but salvation is to be realized here and now (Rom. 13:11). Rather than wait for celestial kingdoms in the next life, we are called today to set free the oppressed, to proclaim peace, and to overcome injustices and unnecessary suffering in this life. Our divine call is to embody the gospel in Christ-centered communities, through which the physical and spiritual needs of people can be met, and through which harmony, security, and peace can be realized. With God, we take part in an ongoing creation, building a world of peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit—an active, redemptive peace for all.

We recognize the profound need for peace in a world filled with systemic injustice, war, suffering, and all manner of human brokenness. Still, God's love prevails declaring the worth of every life, calling us to be creators of justice and joy, as Jesus taught. As a familiar verse states, "Adam fell that [humanity] might be; and [humans] are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 1:115/LDS 2:25).² Although in Community of Christ we understand the fall of Adam more metaphorically, we recognize that this passage acknowledges that even though our human condition involves suffering, the potential for joy



²The Community of Christ editions of the Book of Mormon follow the original chapters set in 1830. Within the LDS tradition, Orson Pratt revised the chapters and verses long after the two churches had parted ways, resulting in the differences between the two traditions' reference systems. There are two editions published by Community of Christ, the "Authorized Version" which was published in 1908, and the "Revised Authorized Version" published in 1966.

is ever present. Some suffering is a natural part of what it means to live and exist as part of creation. In contrast, unnecessary suffering stems from choices made that are counter to God's plan for creation. When this happens, it not only impacts the capacity to realize the joy that God envisions for all creation, it causes immense suffering for humanity and all life forms including the Earth herself.

Alienation from God and unnecessary suffering among humans traditionally has been called sin. Regardless of what we call it, the self-interest of our human condition means we must look outside ourselves to understand the realities of our world and the hope that is ours. Instead of being punished for our sins, we are punished by our sin and the sins of others—including causes of suffering beyond our doing and control, such as disease, poverty, hatred, bigotry, rape, and war. Jesus's message of the reign of God recalls us to our true humanity. He restores our lives by setting them in the blazing light of divine love and the promise of creation's transformation. In this light we see our need and our potential. In Jesus we see the lengths God has taken to reclaim us for the divine purpose, and we are freed to respond to his invitation to new life. In Christ's outreach to the poor and the broken, we behold the action of God, who refuses to leave any beloved creatures lost or marred.³ Through Jesus Christ's life and ministry, death and resurrection God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace. The cause and hope of Zion is found in the responding to, and sharing of, Christ's salvation with others, setting free those who suffer, and creating pathways for peace for all creation.

Early Christians proclaimed this to be the “good news” (or “gospel”): Christ had overcome death and sin. They rejoiced in Christ's victory which ensures peace in this life and the next; and they called on others to follow and receive Christ by entering into the kingdom of God. Receiving Christ's peace—experiencing salvation, redemption, and restoration—is only possible through God's grace. Where sin once resulted in suffering and death, now through Christ we can find joy in all the dimensions of salvation.

³Anthony Chvala-Smith, *A Way of Life*, p. 78 (need proper format)

Early Saints of the Restoration took the position that the beauty and power of this message of salvation was lost in the creeds and theological arguments put forth in the centuries following Christ's mortal ministry. They embraced what they believed was a restoration of the original "New Testament" church of Christ.⁴ Like others who were interested in restoring Christ's original teachings, the Restoration is part of a larger movement known as Christian Primitivism. In the United States in the 1800s, Christian Primitivists distinguished themselves from the two largest categories of Christianity in America: Protestantism and Catholicism. They also rejected much of the history, experience, creeds, and resulting theology that Christianity developed over centuries of existence.



In the earliest days of our Restoration Story, latter-day disciples of Christ regarded their restored gospel as "new and everlasting" (D&C 20:1a/LDS 22:1). As they reframed and re-imagined Christianity, the old things felt new. This fresh vision restored a crucial element to their expression of the Christian faith—the prophetic

impulse. That separated them even further from traditional Christians. Likewise, the ecstatic nature of new revelation separated them from other Christian Primitivists, who were more rational in their approach and read the New Testament like a rigid blueprint. For Joseph Smith's followers, new revelations reopened the canon and the heavens. They were convinced that they were the one and only true church, and that all other forms of

⁴ Today, Community of Christ would say that this idea of an original church of Christ was more a construct of the nineteenth century than a structure of the first century.

⁵ Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants are sometimes numbered differently from those in the LDS D&C.

Christianity were apostate, void of authoritative priesthood and salvific ordinances (or sacraments). They believed they would build Zion and that Christ would return—in their lifetimes—to their temple yet to be built in Independence, Missouri.⁶

Their exclusive vision—and subsequent failure to realize Zion or witness a Second Coming—is

remarkably similar to the beliefs and experiences of the early Christians after the crucifixion of Jesus. Those first Christians believed he would return in their lifetimes, and how they interpreted Jesus's teachings supported this hope (Matt. 24:34, Mark 13:30, Luke 21:32, 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Eventually, early Christians realized that Jesus was more than just the savior of one generation, one race, or one nation. The boundless love and grace of God revealed through Jesus Christ was for all peoples and all times. This realization enriched their Christian witness and discipleship, giving Christ's gospel new meaning, depth, and hope.



Community of Christ journeyed a similar path. We began to see with new eyes and claimed a deeper understanding of what it means to be a people of the Restoration and followers of Jesus Christ.

⁶ The early Saints also saw themselves as a New Israel, in addition to the Latter-day Church. Restoring the elements of all previous dispensations, especially those from the “Old Testament,” almost consumed Joseph Smith by the time of Nauvoo. The later lesson on Temples will address this more in depth, although it is useful here to note that Community of Christ has tended to reflect Kirtland’s Christian Primitivism more than Nauvoo’s focus on Israel and restoring Old Testament covenants. For further reading, see Jan Shipps’ *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985): 59, 75.

For many years we upheld the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as the one true church. In the 1960's we began to realize the Spirit of God at work beyond our tradition and assumptions. We now learn from—rather than reject—the faith journey of other Christians and other members of the Restoration. In place of exclusivity, we experience increased understanding, awareness, and appreciation for the spiritual journey of others. This new posture liberated us to recognize the validity of others' journeys as potential expressions of salvation, and still uphold the convictions of our own unique calling. Drawing the circle wide helped us see through Jesus's eyes that members of the human family extended far beyond our own membership, and that the neighbors we are called to love and serve are near and far. (Luke 10:25-37).

Discussion Question

In your own words, describe Christian Primitivism. How might this concept inform your understanding of the Restoration Movement?

We affirm God's one true vision for creation. A vision of reconciliation, salvation, wholeness, justice, and peace expressed in the scriptural definition of shalom. Shalom means a fullness or completeness of peace. God yearns to establish a lasting covenant of peace with humankind and with all of creation.⁷

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with
the kid, the calf and the lion and
the fatling together, and a little
child shall lead them...They will
not hurt or destroy on all my
holy mountain; for the earth will
be full of the knowledge of the
Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9 NRSV

⁷ "Sharing in Community of Christ", p. 9-10

No, Jesus did not return in glory to the earth during the lifetimes of the first-generation disciples as they expected; nor did Christ return to a New Jerusalem in Independence during the lifetimes of the first-generation Saints. But the message of hope and peace they embraced still rings loud and true. Their hope and expectations were based on their own particular experience and understanding of Christ. The journey continued. Over time we experienced the profound blessings of community as the Spirit breathed new life and hope through the pages of continuing revelation (Doctrine and Covenants). Timeless truths and enduring principles emerged from the testimonies of the early Saints. We are not bound by any one moment or understanding of those who have gone before. We hold fast to God revealed through Jesus Christ made known to us through the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit. The One who calls us, claims us, and leads us through the liberating truths of the gospel interpreted anew for each time and place—an old, old path made ever new. We do not hold ourselves captive to the particular and contingent understandings of former Christians or Saints, but to the essential truths of the gospel and their meanings for our day and time.



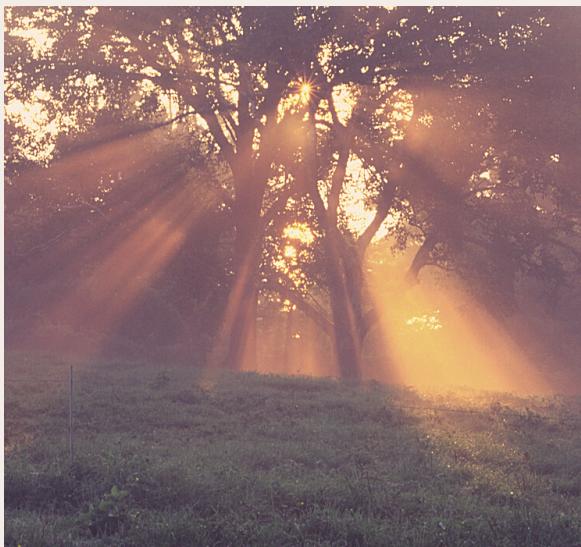
Too often believers lose sight that God's message is for all ages and peoples. Some have canonized a specific group's experience, along with the particulars of their time and culture. But the message of the Restoration is that God conveys essential truths to every generation to meet their unique needs. If we forget this, then what was once alive and vibrant becomes rigid, and the

potential for liberation through Christ is limited. We must never forget that the gospel is both new and everlasting: everlasting in its unchanging message of salvation through Christ, and new as salvation is experienced in new times and places by diverse people—or experienced now in our own hearts in new ways as enduring principles are faithfully applied in an ever-changing world.

As a Restoration people on a journey of faith, Community of Christ continually seeks to distinguish between the transcendent, and the culture and time in which the transcendent is revealed.⁸ While recognizing him as our founding prophet, we are not necessarily bound to Joseph Smith Jr.'s interpretations. We look for guiding principles consistent with the greater whole

Again you are reminded that this community was divinely called into being. The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment of time, but is instead the call to every generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe.

Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e



of the gospel story, to connect in meaningful relevant ways with today's world. All of our leaders—including Joseph Smith—are humans with faults and failings. We believe in the God Joseph pointed to and the prophetic impulse which moved in his life and continues to speak in our day across diverse contexts and cultures. That God defies the limits of

⁸ D&C 163:7 states that scripture “cannot be fully contained in any finite vessel or language. Scripture has been written and shaped by human authors through experiences of revelation and ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the midst of time and culture.”

human comprehension. As tempting as it can be as we humans struggle to see clearly, any attempts to anthropomorphize the divine mystery that is God only serve to limit, warp, or co-opt the true essence of God. Community of Christ leans into the mystery and listens to the Voice.



Listen to the Voice that speaks from beyond the farthest hills, from the infinite heavens above, and the vast seas below. Listen to the Voice that echoes across the eons of time and yet speaks anew in this moment. Listen to the Voice, for it cannot be stilled, and it calls you once again to the great and marvelous work of building the peaceable kingdom, even Zion, on behalf of the One whose name you claim.

Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e

Discussion Questions

What might it look like to be a people of the Restoration in contrast to a people about the Restoration?

Name things you have learned from the larger Christian tradition which are part of your understanding of the gospel and experiences as a follower of Jesus. (Instructor makes list of responses)

- How have these “learnings” informed your experience as a Restoration Christian?
- Discuss
- Option: Ask students to share their responses in pairs of two (this can save time with large groups and still provides for deep sharing and being heard).

The text states: “Timeless truths and enduring principles emerged from the testimonies of the early Saints. We are not bound by any one moment or understanding of those who have gone before. We hold fast to God revealed through Jesus Christ made known to us through the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit. The One who calls us, claims us, and leads us through the liberating truths of the gospel interpreted anew for each time and place—an old, old path made ever new. We do not hold ourselves captive to the particular and contingent understandings of former Christians or Saints, but to the essential truths of the gospel and their meanings for our day and time.”

- What does this mean to you?
- What questions do you have about this approach to living a faithful response to Christ’s call?

All prophetic counsel is part of an ongoing experience, revealing a journey toward greater understanding of our mission, our Christ, and ourselves. Through this process, we ensure that we are a people of the Restoration and not a people about the Restoration. God doesn’t call us to be curators to a museum exhibit. God invites us to take part in the sacred story now, here, today as it unfolds in a breathing, living experience! Joseph Smith interpreted his interactions with the Divine through the lens of his unique reality—with an early 19th Century magical world view, living in the Burned Over District in New York State in the middle of the Second Great Awakening.⁹ So, we too interpret through the lens of our place and location in time. So too, God invites us to embark on the journey of faith seeking understanding “to witness to essential truths” in our own “language and form.” (Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e, see full paragraph quote above)

⁹ To learn more about magical world view, Burned Over District, and Second Great Awakening see Early Mormonism and Magical World View, D. Michael Quinn, Signature Books; 2nd edition (December 15, 1998)

We are children of the Restoration, and our foundation is Jesus, the peaceful One. The life and ministry of Jesus is God with us, providing a window through which we can see God and more deeply understand the divine essence through our own “language and form”—to include what life looks like in today’s world. For Community of Christ that means that part of following God is paying close attention to what Jesus did and said: the being, doing, and saying attributed to Jesus.

No longer wary of the experience of other Christians, appreciative of the Christian Primitivist impulse, we are neither Protestant nor Catholic. An early Primitivist cry “no creed but Christ,” is still useful. We respect the diverse ways people think about God, creed or not. For us the mission of Jesus Christ as expressed in Luke 4:18-19 is what matters most. We seek unity of purpose with all peoples and nations, Christian or not, to realize God’s dream for our world: salvation through peace. Here. Now. “...and there were no poor among them, and all who were hungry ate.”



The soul of Community of Christ is expressed most fully as we embody Jesus Christ, the peaceful one, and his mission. This happens through relational, spiritual, invitational, and globally connected Christ-centered communities actively pursuing justice and peace on and for the earth. The Enduring Principles are a guide for our continual discernment and practice of what is essential for the life, forms, and holistic mission of the church. We are discovering that a posture of simplicity, agility, and flexibility will equip and poise us to faithfully live the heart of our calling in a changing world. We are growing in trust of what it means to be transformed in Christ and engaged in whole-life stewardship as we make decisions and courageously share all the dimensions of Christ's peace in our world.

We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace. All are welcome to travel the way with us.

Discussion Question

How does it feel to move beyond the idea of a one true church?

- What are you giving up by letting go of the idea of one true church?
- What are you gaining by letting go of the idea of one true church?

Resources

Lesson 1

Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, describe Christian Primitivism. How might this concept inform your understanding of the Restoration Movement?
2. What might it look like to be a people of the Restoration in contrast to a people about the Restoration?
3. Name things you have learned from the larger Christian tradition which are part of your understanding of the gospel and experiences as a follower of Jesus. (Instructor makes list of responses)
 - How have these “learnings” informed your experience as a Restoration Christian?
 - Discuss
 - Option: Ask students to share their responses in pairs of two (this can save time with large groups and still provides for deep sharing and being heard).
4. The text states: “Timeless truths and enduring principles emerged from the testimonies of the early Saints. We are not bound by any one moment or understanding of those who have gone before. We hold fast to God revealed through Jesus Christ made known to us through the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit. The One who calls us, claims us, and leads us through the liberating truths of the gospel interpreted anew for each time and place—an old, old path made ever new. We do not hold ourselves captive to the particular and contingent understandings of former Christians or Saints, but to the essential truths of the gospel and their meanings for our day and time.”
 - What does this mean to you?
 - What questions do you have about this approach to living a faithful response to Christ’s call?
5. How does it feel to move beyond the idea of a one true church?
 - What are you giving up by letting go of the idea of one true church?
 - What are you gaining by letting go of the idea of one true church?

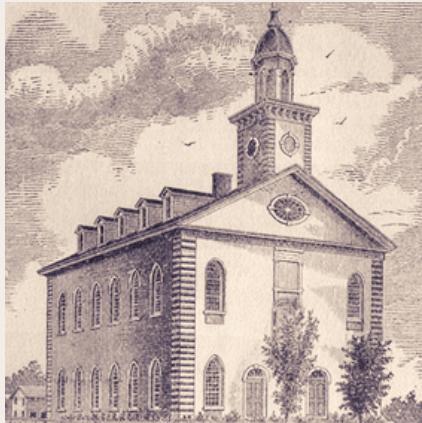
Learn More

1. [Church History Timeline](#)
2. Project Zion Podcast | [The Restoration in the 21st Century](#) | Apostle David Nii
3. Church Historian Richard Howard’s, [“An Analysis of Six Contemporary Accounts Touching Joseph Smith’s First Vision.”](#)

The Church

Lesson 2

“The story of Community of Christ is part of a much larger sacred story that is rooted in Christian history, including the Hebrew tradition from which Christianity emerged. Within this larger history, Community of Christ has a particular story that is inspiring, colorful, and increasingly international...The story of the church is one of unusual faith, vision, and creativity in response to God’s call. We can clearly see God’s Spirit active in every chapter of our faith story. What began with a teenager seeking God in prayer in the early 1800s continues today. God gives each generation insights, experiences, and challenges for divine purposes.”¹⁰



Church History

Like many other faith communities and denominations with roots in Restoration Heritage, Community of Christ has a conflicted relationship with our history, especially the early history of the church. It is an eventful, dynamic, multifaceted story filled with faith adventures, challenges, triumph, tragedy, questions, prophetic vision, controversy, extravagant generosity, radical hospitality, and the occasional scandal. In October 2008 President-Prophet Stephan M. Veazey shared “Perspectives on Church History” with the church. It is an official statement and includes guidance along with nine Church History Principles to help us navigate our explorations and deep dives into Restoration history.

¹⁰ “We Share a Sacred Story,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 10-11.

Perspectives on Church History

1. Continuing exploration of our history is part of identity formation.
2. History informs but does not dictate our faith and beliefs.
3. The church encourages honest, responsible historical scholarship.
4. The study of church history is a continuing journey.
5. Seeing both the faithfulness and human flaws in our history makes it more believable and realistic, not less.
6. The responsible study of church history involves learning, repentance, and transformation.
7. The church has a long-standing tradition that it does not legislate or mandate positions on matters of history.
8. We need to create a respectful culture of dialogue about matters of church history.
9. Our faith is grounded in God's revelation in Jesus Christ and continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹¹

The church began in the early nineteenth century in western New York, during a time of great religious excitement and revival. Many involved were deeply concerned with their salvation, and churches were competing for converts. The family of Joseph Smith Jr. was caught up in the religious fervor of their community but was divided over which church to join. Joseph, then a young teenager, sought God in prayer. Although several different accounts of the event exist, he experienced a transforming encounter with the divine. It would be the seminal moment of an unprecedented faith trajectory that would eventually touch millions. Years later, we would come to know this event as the first vision. However, for many years, Joseph kept this powerful experience private, sharing it with only close friends and family. Several more significant spiritual experiences followed the first vision and

¹¹ "Perspectives on Church History," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*-4th edition (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2018),76-81.

culminated in publishing the Book of Mormon, and the church formally organizing on 6 April 1830 at Fayette, New York. During these years, Joseph also received divinely inspired counsel (later received by the church as revelation and canonized) further confirming his prophetic call.

In the months that followed the April 6th gathering, the new church sent out missionaries and attracted members. Early in 1831, Joseph Smith Jr., his family, and many members moved to Ohio and united with Sidney Rigdon and the community of believers he led at Kirtland, Ohio. Rigdon had been a leader in another Restoration movement but was dissatisfied that the movement didn't include the gifts of the Spirit such as prophecy and ecstatic outpourings like at Pentecost (Acts 2). Joseph Smith's message spoke to Rigdon and his many followers. In Kirtland, Smith built on the communalistic foundations of Rigdon and his congregation, and together worked to create a religious and social community. The early years of the church were marked by a self-understanding that the church had or could get all the answers to the religious questions of the time. The church's leaders were intent on restoring the church to its primitive purity, driven by a vision of Zion and a hope for the Second Coming.

In the following years, the new church expanded into nearby states as well as Canada and Europe. Church members set up a community in 1831 at Independence, Missouri, and the Prophet designated that place as the "center place of Zion." However, tensions flared between newly-arrived church members and the "old settlers." Both groups had different ideas about community, government, slavery, and religion. Differences led to harassment and conflict—from both sides of the divide. While terrible atrocities were inflicted on the Saints, church members were not always innocent and peaceful. Part of embracing honest, responsible historical scholarship is also taking an honest look at ourselves and our multifaceted past. We have much to learn from our past, the good and the bad.

In 1833, church members fled Independence and Jackson County, Missouri, and established new settlements in the lands north of the Missouri River. But, by mid-1838, the church and its members were no longer welcome in the state of Missouri and moved east to Illinois.

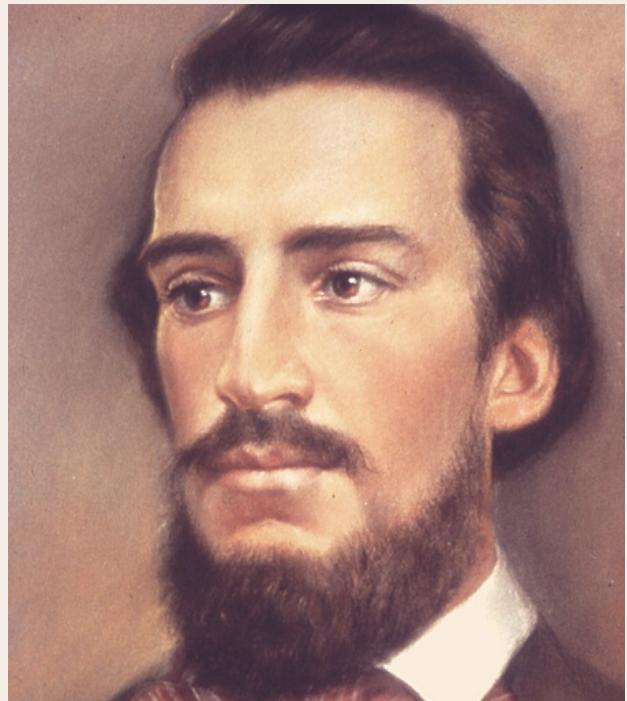
By 1839, the church set up a new church headquarters and city on the banks of the Mississippi River at a place now called Nauvoo, Illinois. Thousands of church members moved to Nauvoo and the surrounding area, eventually overwhelming Nauvoo's old-time settlers. To protect the church from the violence of Missouri repeating in Nauvoo, the Prophet established a very powerful militia, and set up several judicial and political protections afforded by his position and Nauvoo's city charter. He was even running for the President of the United States, to further the Saint's protection and church's goals. When Smith ordered the destruction of the printing press used by dissenters to publish the *Expositor* voicing strong disagreement in response to controversial teaching and practices of the church, the match was lit and the flames of contention leapt.



From the view of outsiders, Joseph Smith Jr. had consolidated religious, judicial, political, economic, and significant military power unto himself (and indeed he had). This was seen as un-American and dangerous by outsiders. Ironically bringing about the very thing Joseph sought to avoid, tensions between Saints and Gentiles grew, and, on 27 June 1844, an angry mob killed Joseph Smith Jr. and his older brother, Hyrum.

There were months and years filled with conflict and division following the death of the man whom church members loved and revered as a prophet. The members and leaders of the church had not been well prepared for this unexpected event and the young denomination became fragmented into many smaller factions. Nauvoo, the city filled with so much hope, became a ghost town. Some church members followed Brigham Young to Utah. Others followed James Strang, a new member of the church who claimed angelic ordination following the founding prophet's death. Still others believed that Sidney Rigdon, or Smith's younger brother William, should lead the church. This confusion lasted several years.

Many members of the church sought the prophetic guidance that had always been critical to the Restoration. After years of searching and testing the claims of different leaders, faithful elders of the church such as Jason W. Briggs and Zenos H. Gurley Senior decided that none of the various contenders for the leadership of the church were chosen of God. Briggs prayed for guidance, and in October 1851 he learned through the Holy Spirit that he and the scattered branches of the church should look to the heirs of their martyred prophet for prophetic leadership.



Joseph Smith III, then only twenty-seven years old, had struggled for several years for confirmation before sensing God's call to leadership. His mother, Emma, did little more than encourage him to seek God's will for himself. He was accepted as the new president and prophet of the church on 6 April 1860 at a conference held at Amboy, Illinois. He spent the rest of his life bringing unity and mission to the independent-spirited members of what became known as the Reorganization. Avoiding the mistakes of earlier

mistakes of earlier Saints, including his father, Joseph III made peace with his neighbors and the church returned to Jackson County, Missouri.¹²

Discussion Question

Consider the events leading to the ordination of Joseph Smith III (marking the beginning of the Reorganization) following the death of his father, Joseph Smith, Jr.

- What stands out to you and why?
- What do you find meaningful?
- What questions do you have?

In 1915, following the death of Joseph Smith III, his son Frederick Madison Smith became the president of the church. He led the church through the years of economic depression in the United States and the Second World War. A younger brother, Israel A. Smith, succeeded Frederick after his death in 1946. In 1958, W. Wallace Smith was the third son of Joseph Smith III to be ordained as president of the church. During his presidency, Community of Christ expanded into Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The church entered a new era in 1976 when President W. Wallace Smith named his son, Wallace B. Smith, to succeed him as prophet and president. In 1978, W. Wallace Smith set a precedent by retiring from church leadership. President Wallace B. Smith presided over a continued expansion of the church into many nations around the world. Although the possibility of women's ordination had long been a topic of dialogue in the church, it was Wallace B. Smith who challenged the membership of the church with prophetic insight ultimately bringing counsel to the church through Continuing Revelation providing for the ordination of women at the 1984 World Conference. That counsel was deliberated and approved for inclusion

¹² Learn more about Joseph Smith III in Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet, by Roger D. Launius, University of Illinois Press; Paper edition (September 1, 1995).

in the Doctrine and Covenants (section 156) during legislative sessions at the 1984 World Conference.

The first women were ordained in 1985. A steady stream of women joining the rank and file of ordained priesthood forever changed the face and nature of Aaronic and Melchizedec ministries. Under the guidance of President Wallace B. Smith, the Temple in Independence was built and dedicated in 1994. At the end of his tenure, President Smith sensed God's call for W. Grant McMurray to succeed him; and in 1996, McMurray was ordained as president and prophet of the church. This marked the first time someone other than a direct descendant of Joseph Smith would serve as prophet-president of Community of Christ.



President McMurray led the church for eight years. During his presidency, the church adopted a new name, reflective of its founding heritage and sense of identity and mission. On 6 April 2001, the church officially became known as Community of Christ. President McMurray resigned in 2004, choosing not to name a successor. Naming the next prophet-president became the important work of the Council of Twelve and Council of

Seventy partnered with the prayerful discernment of the membership. According to the polity of the church, the absence of a prophet-president (by death or resignation) does not dissolve the First Presidency. McMurray's counselors in the First Presidency remained in place as interim leaders until a successor was named and approved according to the by-laws, policy, and scriptures of the church.

The membership of the entire church engaged in several months of prayer and fasting. Finally, the Council of Twelve Apostles announced their unanimous conviction that God was calling Stephen M. Veazey to the office⁶ of prophet and president of the church. Thousands of members and friends of the church affirmed the testimony of the Twelve. Veazey's ordination as the eighth president of Community of Christ, and prophetic successor of Joseph Smith Jr., took place on 3 June 2005. His call was presented at the World Conference and sustained by each of the quorums, orders, councils and the conference assembly which included sustaining action by the legislative body of delegates representing the global church.



In the early years of President Stephen M. Veazey's leadership, he focused on refining and reframing Community of Christ identity, mission, and message. He led the church in articulating its Enduring Principles and Basic Beliefs. Imperative to the present and future of the church, Veazey consistently underscored the core message: the mission of Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead; and God calls whomever God calls.

At the 2007 World Conference, President Veazey presented revelation inviting the church to hear God weep in response to the cries of the poor, to courageously challenge anything contrary to God's restoring purposes, and to be just and wise stewards in caring for the earth. This revelation was later canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants as Section 163. Section 164, added in 2010, made provision for the church to accept other Christian baptisms. It also invited all to rediscover the blessings of the Lord's Supper and recognize that "[t]hrough the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God" (D&C 164:5).

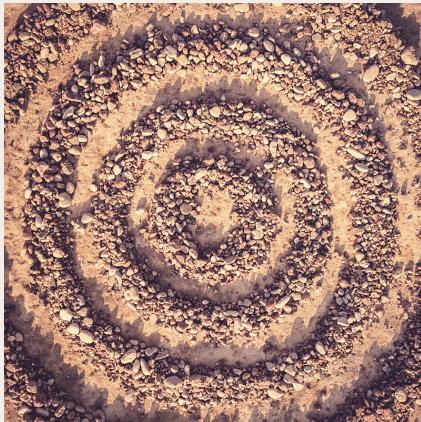
Recognizing numerous pressing issues resident in culturally diverse nations of the church, Section 164 provided for the convening of national conferences. Several nations, including the United States, have convened national conferences taking action to extend the sacraments of marriage and ordination to all persons regardless of sexual orientation according to the established guidelines of the church and in compliance with the laws of the land. The church continues to uphold the principle of monogamy.

These courageous actions laid a solid foundation for the future and served as critical first steps for the hard work of changing from the inside out as we endeavor to learn what it means to be fully inclusive as a people of faith sharing leadership, decision making, teaching and advocacy both inside and outside the walls of our churches.

To learn more about our journey to national conferences, LGBTQIA2S+ inclusion, and programs that support and advocate for LGBTQIA2S+ members and friends visit here: <http://www.latter-dayseekers.org/lgbtqia-inclusion.html>

Discussion Question

What events in the life of Community of Christ, 1844 to the present, would you regard as significant? Why?



Church Organization

The basic unit of the church is the congregation which is led by a pastor who is usually elected yearly by members of the congregation in a business meeting.¹³ Pastors are members of the priesthood, usually holding the office of elder. A pastor has counselors, or shares leadership with

another person as a co-pastor or works with a team of leaders commonly referred to as Pastor Leadership Team or Pastorate. The congregation has freedom to adapt models of leadership that fit the needs of the congregation.

Several congregations join together in what is called a mission center.¹⁴ While mission centers exist to support local congregations, they also provide classes, family and youth camping experiences, workshops, and many other support and training programs.

A mission center president and a mission center financial officer lead each mission center. Sometimes those two functions are provided by one person (single-line). Mission Center officers serve with different configurations of counselors, mission center councils, advisory boards, or other types of advisory groups. The mission center conference governs the mission center through the process of common consent; all the members of a mission center, or delegates elected by each congregation, comprise the conference and are empowered to act in legislative sessions in accordance with the by-laws of the church.

¹³ Congregations and pastors in Community of Christ are similar to wards and bishops in the LDS Church organization. The office of bishop in the early Restoration was a stake-level function that evolved to a congregational and pastoral role many years after Brigham Young and his followers settled in Utah. Pastors and other congregational leaders are typically volunteers, who donate their time after work or in retirement.

¹⁴ Mission centers were formerly called "stakes" in Community of Christ. However, the Community of Christ stake (now mission center) is more like an "area" in the LDS Church, in that they cover a much larger geographical area (covering several states or countries) with a larger number of congregations than typical in an LDS stake (sometimes as many as 30 or 40).

Mission centers receive administrative and ministerial guidance from a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles. Each of the apostles supervises a “field,” which is comprised of several mission centers. The Council of Presidents of Seventy, along with all the Quorums of Seventy, are yoked in mission with the Council of Twelve as especial witnesses to share the peace of Jesus Christ.

The First Presidency (the president of the church and two counselors) provides leadership to the entire church, as presidents over the Melchizedec Priesthood. The First Presidency and other presiding quorums and councils of the church have office space in Community of Christ’s Temple and International Headquarters in Independence, Missouri, out of which the church sponsors conferences, worship, and educational opportunities. Several members of these presiding bodies reside in diverse locations across the globe and frequently travel to provide ministry and support in their fields.



The Presiding Bishopric (the presiding bishop and two counselors) oversees the tangible assets of the church, and manages the funding for the church’s mission, as presidents over the Aaronic Priesthood.

Community of Christ world conferences¹⁵ are held periodically to conduct the affairs of the church. Legislation passed at the 2007 World Conference called for

conferences to be held at three-year intervals. The president-prophet and other world church leaders speak to the church periodically during the interim between world conferences.

¹⁵ In Community of Christ World Conference was referred to as General Conference until April 8, 1960 and the approval of World Conference Resolution 1021.

World Conference typically lasts a full week. Delegates are elected by each mission center to discuss and vote on items of business that are brought before the church; general attendance is open to all. Business items include the budgets and financial reports of the denomination and calls to and releases from the leading quorums of the church. The leading quorums are the First Presidency, Council of Twelve Apostles, Presiding Bishopric, Council of Presidents of Seventy, Standing High Council, High Priests Quorum, Order of Bishops and Order of Evangelists. Other World Conference business includes items of interest or concern brought to the conference from mission centers, quorums, caucuses, and other appointed bodies. The week of world conference includes many worship gatherings held in the mornings, at midday, and in the evenings. Some of the worship gatherings are for the membership at large, and others are focused to meet the needs of various age groups, or culture and language interest groups.

Discussion Question

What questions do you have about the structure and organization of the congregation, mission center, or World Church?



Congregational Life

The path of the disciple is personal, but it is far from private. Being a disciple calls us into community with one another. We are to love God and one another (Matthew 22:36-40). This provides avenues to both give and receive support, and also blend our gifts together to create a fellowship that becomes a blessing to the larger community.

One of the beauties of Community of Christ is that each congregation is unique according to the gifts and personalities of its members. This means the programs offered by each congregation and often their schedules of meetings will be unique as well. Congregations come in all sizes. They can range from a handful of people to dozens of families. While



International Headquarters provides support to congregations through handbooks, curriculum, and guidelines, it is rare to find two congregations that look and act exactly the same. At the same time there exists a strong sense of familiarity and the trademark welcome that is Community of Christ.

Just as every home and house is different, every congregation and church building is different. Each is a work in progress with additions, repairs, growth, and remodeling happening as needed. There is no standard architectural model for congregational meetinghouses. Church members are humans on a journey, seeking to realize God's kingdom on earth. Congregations can be a lot like a family and experience deep bonds of connection with one another. There is also frequent laughter, singing, and joy in every avenue of association as they journey in faith together inside and outside the walls of their church building.

15

At the heart of growing in community is worshiping God together. In the broadest sense, worship involves the recognition and celebration that all of life is an encounter with God. This encounter is the beginning of transformation from the inside out.

Worship services often follow the four-part model found in Isaiah 6:1-8, but regularly incorporate creative expressions inclusive of the resident giftedness of those present in the congregation.

Isaiah Worship Model

1. Praise: We recognize God and come into God's presence with praise. We celebrate the joy of coming together in community.
2. Confession/Repentance: We confess our human failings and ask for forgiveness as individuals and as a community.
3. Proclamation: We receive God's grace (unfailing acceptance and forgiveness) and hear the word of God (sermon, message, talk).
4. Commitment: We (re)commit ourselves to God and to serving others and go back out into the world to share the peace of Jesus Christ.

Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ enriches our lives and creates a deep sense of satisfaction. Having received so much from God, followers of Christ want to share Christ's peace and his mission in the same way that he lived and taught in the stories of the New Testament, responsibly interpreted for application in today's world.



Discussion Question

Share about a Community of Christ worship experience that has been meaningful to you?

- Option: Ask students to share their responses in pairs of two (this can save time with large groups and still provides for deep sharing and being heard).



Spirituality

As a people we have learned a lot about spirituality on our journey of faith. During the 1960's as we began to see with new eyes and struggled to understand what it means to be a Restoration people and followers of Jesus Christ in our generation, we also saw the Spirit of God moving in powerful ways among other denominations, faiths, and cultures. This led to a spiritual awakening which expanded our capacity to listen to God's voice, to our journey as a people, and to the sacred teachings we treasured. Drawn into the spiritual practices of deep listening we discovered our journey with God anew.

In Community of Christ today we teach and learn about the diversity of human spiritual types, share together in a variety of spiritual practices, learn about the diversity of human spiritual types, and live rhythms (individually and corporately) that awaken us to God's presence in the everyday. It is not unusual for a spiritual practice to be included in a Sunday worship service. There are many opportunities for children, youth, and adults to learn about and explore spiritual practices to enrich your relationship with God, self, and others.

Community of Christ Spiritual Formation Ministries offer programs, practices, events, and resources for disciples and seekers to engage the inward/outward journey of being formed in Christ. Whether you are looking for ways to deepen your own spiritual life, the spiritual life of your community, or want to grow in the gifts of spiritual leadership, discernment, and companionship, all are invited into the life-long process of spiritual deepening.

Learn more here: <https://cofchrist.org/go-deeper/>.

You can find additional resources for children and youth here:

<https://www.allthingsarespiritual.org/spiritual-practices-for-children-and-youth.html>.

Listen, O people of the Restoration—you who would become a prophetic people, embodying in your life together the ministries of the Temple. Listen to the Voice that speaks from beyond the farthest hills, from the infinite heavens above, and the vast seas below.

Listen to the Voice that echoes across the eons of time and yet speaks anew in this moment. Listen to the Voice, for it cannot be stilled, and it calls you once again to the great and marvelous work of building the peaceable kingdom, even Zion, on behalf of the One whose name you claim.

Doctrine and Covenants 161: 1a, b

Followers of Jesus Christ generously respond (see insert below) as they are able with their time and money so the lives of others, throughout the world, might also be blessed. In a world where people seek to dominate others, our call to bring peace and justice for everyone is desperately needed.

From the start of his ministry, Jesus highlighted that healing community is central to his message and taught that the life of fellowship was essential to discipleship. Jesus called, prepared, and empowered a group of diverse people—not separate individuals—to be the nucleus of God's renewing grace in and for the world.



When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ's new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be.

Doctrine and Covenants 164: 9b

Tithing in Community of Christ

In Community of Christ, tithing is called A Disciple's Generous Response. We give monetary gifts to both the local church and the world church, in equal proportions. The amount should be according to our true capacity to give, and not a set formula. In April of 2013, President Veazey gave this inspired counsel to the Church:

Free the full capacity of Christ's mission through generosity that imitates God's generosity. Discover deep joy and life's meaning by promoting divine purposes on Earth. Listen to the testimonies of those who are responding and follow your soul's yearning to come home to God's grace and generosity.

Remember, a basic discipleship principle is growing Christ's mission through both local and world mission tithes according to true capacity. Giving to other worthwhile organizations, while an important part of A Disciple's Generous Response, follows world and local mission tithing and should not diminish or replace it. If a law is needed to focus and balance response, then let these tithing principles serve that purpose.

Tithing is a spiritual practice that demonstrates willingness to regularly offer every dimension of one's life to God. hen defined by faith, love, and hopeful planning, including resolving indebtedness, capacity to respond becomes much greater than initially assumed.

As a universal reality, the church of Christ is bigger than any denomination or group, and transcends times, places, and cultures. To recognize and affirm that no single group can claim to be the whole body of Christ is humbling. Community of Christ is only part of the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself once had to remind the disciples that they did not have a monopoly on the kingdom of God (Mark 9.38-41).

In Community of Christ, we live out the mission of Christ through five Mission Initiatives: Invite people to Christ; Abolish Poverty and End Needless Suffering; Pursue Peace on Earth; Develop Disciples to Serve; and Experience Congregations in Christ's Mission. We proclaim the gospel, celebrate the sacraments, and work for a better world. We practice the disciplines of Christian life in the laboratory of community: prayer, fasting, study, service, hospitality, and sharing (see Moroni 6).

Community of Christ believes that its members are called to be a prophetic people. To be a prophetic community means many things to us. It means that we will seek to pay attention to God's ever-new ways of reaching out to our wounded world. Old forms do not restrict the Spirit of the One who came to set captives free. To be prophetic means to watch and listen with the eyes and ears of prophets: demanding justice, pursuing peace (Zion), and responding to the new things God is doing in the world. Speaking truth to power as the prophets of old to set the world in motion turning towards God and calling for actions aligned with God's preferential treatment of the poor and downtrodden of our world, is the vital work of a prophetic people.

Discussion Questions

How have you seen the Community of Christ mission statement reflected in the lives of your Community of Christ friends?

Discuss the Mission Initiatives and how they reflect the mission of Jesus announced in Luke 4:18-19.

What does it mean to be a prophetic people?

Resources

Lesson 2

Discussion Questions

1. Consider the events leading to the ordination of Joseph Smith III (marking the beginning of the Reorganization) following the death of his father, Joseph Smith, Jr.
 - What stands out to you and why?
 - What do you find meaningful?
 - What questions do you have?
2. What events in the life of Community of Christ, 1844 to the present, would you regard as significant? Why?
3. What questions do you have about the structure and organization of the congregation, mission center, or World Church? (discuss)
4. How have you seen the Community of Christ mission statement reflected in the lives of your Community of Christ friends?
5. Share about a Community of Christ worship experience that has been meaningful to you?
 - Option: Ask students to share their responses in pairs of two (this can save time with large groups and still provides for deep sharing and being heard).
6. Discuss the Mission Initiatives and how they reflect the mission of Jesus announced in Luke 4:18-19.
7. What does it mean to be a prophetic people?

Learn More

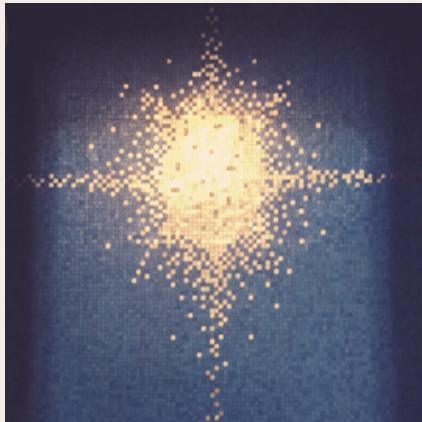
1. Project Zion Podcast | [Doctrine and Covenants 156](#) | Bill Russell
2. Project Zion Podcast | A Journey Toward Ordination | Women in Community of Christ | Becky Savage
 - [Part One](#)
 - [Part Two](#)
3. Project Zion Podcast | [Common Consent](#) | John Wight
4. Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet, by Roger D. Launius, University of Illinois Press; Paper edition (September 1, 1995).
5. The Journey of a People (3 vol. set), Mark A. Scherer, Community of Christ Seminary Press (January 1, 2013).
6. Project Zion Podcast, [Cuppa Joe Series](#)

Speaking of God

Lesson 3

Most Latter-day Saints have not been exposed to the general theological constructs of the Christian Tradition. This section represents Community of Christ's perspective of the Trinitarian Godhead and some of our Basic Beliefs. For some, it sounds and feels very Catholic and/or Protestant. That is a normal feeling and response. In time, things will become more clear and feel less foreign. It is also important to remember that Community of Christ's perspective on scripture does not take a literal inerrant view but is dedicated to a careful scholarly exegetical process committed to the responsible interpretation of scripture. Faith seeking understanding is a lifelong journey and theological undertaking.

God's revelation in Jesus Christ and continuing presence through the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed by scripture, is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message, and beliefs.¹⁶



God

We believe in one living God who meets us in the testimony of Israel, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. We affirm the Triune God—One God in a community of three Persons. All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond understanding and love

beyond imagination. This God alone is worthy of our worship.¹⁷

¹⁶ "We Share Enduring Principles," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*. (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 12.

¹⁷ "We Share Basic Beliefs," in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 14.

One of the most fundamental questions of Christianity and religion overall is how to describe the inexhaustible mystery of God: Who is the God that we proclaim? This is a far more difficult question than most would surmise. God is beyond full human comprehension, which understandably leads to much disagreement on the nature of the Divine. Words, as finite vessels, can never fully capture God's nature or majesty. We only know what God reveals, and that is limited to our own understandings and highly influenced by the lens through which we see and experience our world. We all speak out of a limited understanding of God.

Even with limitations, faith seeks to understand. We seek to understand throughout our lives as we continue to encounter God, experience salvation/healing in Jesus Christ, and experience a living presence with the Holy Spirit.

O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints
for you, as in a dry and weary land
where there is no water...Because your
steadfast love is better than life, my
lips will praise you.

Psalm 63:1,3

For it is the God who said, "Let light
shine out of darkness," who has shone
in our hearts to give the light of the
knowledge of the glory of God in the
face of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6

We believe in the Living God

The church does not base its convictions about God on some kind of clear arguments some assume can be demonstrated irrefutably on a chalkboard. Instead, the church trusts the words of its witnesses and our community experience of God's transforming power in our midst. We did not think or logic our way to God; God reveals God's own person to us, and we respond with "We believe." King David

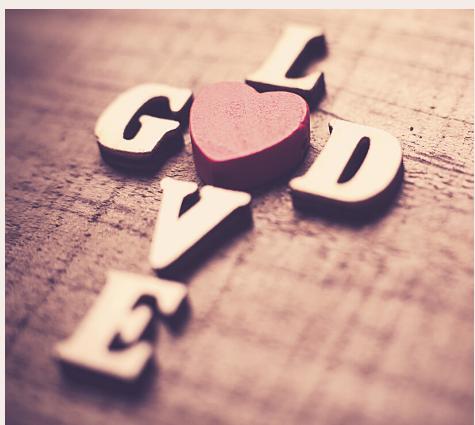
knew a divine presence who quenched life's deepest thirst, whose love was better even than life; the Apostle Paul encountered One whose radiant glory

transfigured his whole life. The church believes in that same God, who demonstrates repeatedly that our trust is not misplaced. We believe in the Living God.

We believe “in.” Believing in is different from believing that. Many people believe “that” there is some power or will behind the universe, some guiding force amid the ebb and flow of life. In other words, they are of the opinion that there is more to existence than can be seen. But to believe in God is not simply to have an opinion. To believe in is to be committed to something that is, that has awakened our yearnings and claims our deepest loyalties. To believe in God is to have trustingly given ourselves to One who exists, who has sought us, whose presence is inviting us to a new way of life.

We believe in the Living God. The Living God is not some nameless, impersonal force, abstract concept, or idea we use in place of a question mark. Ideas cannot love us; nameless forces do not quench the thirst of our souls; concepts are not responsive to our cries. Our faith is that there is One who truly loves, refreshes, and answers us, and that this One is the maker of heaven and earth, and is alone worthy of our trust and worship.

The God whom we have come to know is not remote or unconcerned, but present in the heart of all things, concerned for galaxies, whales, sparrows, and the child next door. God is not indifferent to the evil we do or the injustice we promote, for these things are contrary to God’s nature. Rather, this God has acted to release creation from evil, to forgive sins, to mend our lives and make all things new. When we say in the church that we believe in God, we have in mind only this God.



Believe in God; believe that God is, and that God created all things, both in heaven and in earth. Believe that God has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth.

Mosiah 2:13-14¹⁸

¹⁸ Adapted to reflect gender neutral language

Discussion Question

What does it mean to you to believe in God?

The God of whom scripture testifies is a God of names: God Most High; the Mighty God; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Holy One of Israel; “I am”; and countless more. For the biblical witnesses, a name was the key to one’s identity, and not simply a convenient handle. That the true God could be named, was a sign of mercy. For God’s people the name then becomes a reminder of how God graciously became known. Community of Christ embraces a wide diversity of names for God, many found in scripture and others reflective of the multifaceted ways God makes God’s-self known to us in the natural world in which we live.¹⁹ The names of God in scripture tell God’s story, and in so doing reveal who and what the church means when it says “God.”

For this reason, the New Testament often names God “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Who God is cannot be separated from Jesus Christ’s life and ministry, cross and resurrection, and his life-giving presence among us. In God’s revelation to the world in Jesus Christ, God has entered fully into our misery and suffering. In Christ, God is companion of the lost and foe of the self-righteous. In Christ, God conquers death. In Christ, God reconciles the world to God’s divine purposes. In Christ, we see that the beginning and end of all things is unsurpassed love. The God in whom Christians believe is the God of Jesus Christ.

According to the testimony of scripture and the church, the glory of God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ and becomes known in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. God, Christ, Spirit: God is not a lonely, static, solitary being, but a living, dynamic relationship. One God in Three Persons is not a number puzzle, but the revelation that God is ever (as one ancient Christian thinker put it) the Lover, the Beloved, and the Bond of Love.

¹⁹ See Inclusive Language document in Learn More

We have historically emphasized that God is unchanging. This does not mean that God is a static being, and that human structures in church and society, based on one generation's understanding of God, should be permanent. Instead, what we mean is that our God is always reliable and trustworthy. That God is true to God's own vital nature. That God's loyalty to the creation is unswerving. That God is safe space providing unconditional nurture where we can become rooted and grounded in love as recipients of God's boundless love and grace. In practice, this means that we realize discipleship and church life will be marked by change and growth. Faith in the Living God is never to settle for where we have been or what we have understood, but to be pioneers and pilgrims always on the Way.

Discussion Question

As we consider scripture, what different names are used to reference God? How do these names reveal the nature of God to you? (Can also do as a pair share)



Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, fully human and fully divine. Through Jesus's life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down walls that divide. Christ is our Peace.

²⁰ "We Share Basic Beliefs," in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 2010, 14.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.

Psalm 40:1-3

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty....Whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

John 6:35, 51

Christian faith holds that the glory of God is made known definitively in Jesus Christ— not in human words, but in the eternal Word of God. In the language of scripture, God’s glory is the splendid beauty of God’s own eternal being, the weighty holiness of the creator of all things. The apostles testified that in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection they had beheld nothing less than the glory of God. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory” (John 1:14).

God’s eternal Word became a flesh-and-blood, first-century, Jewish human male named Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth was born in Roman-occupied Palestine during the reign of the emperor Augustus and was crucified under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. The church’s faith is not based on idle speculation, but on events that took place in time and space. The church’s memories of the life of Jesus present a real person, not a myth. The words of the witnesses also tell us there was something more to this otherwise ordinary man. Everything about him confronted his contemporaries and us with an unconditional claim and authority. But only faith could behold in him the glory of God incarnate.

Jesus Christ's words and deeds reveal the glory of God. He freed the oppressed from evil powers and forgave those twisted by sin. He welcomed the unclean and the unfit. He healed the diseased. His words brought judgment to those whose traditions left no room for a living God to surprise them. He called his disciples to a righteousness far more demanding than any legal code. He affirmed the dignity of women and rejected oppressive customs. He even restored the dead. "Go and tell John," Jesus told some of the Baptist's followers, "what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and dead are raised, and the poor have the good news brought to them" (Matthew 11:4-6). In the words and deeds of Jesus, God's reign came near. Indeed, Jesus was the kingdom of God in person, God's peace on earth.



The cross on which Jesus was crucified reveals the glory of God. Jesus was executed by the Roman Empire as a royal pretender. But his death was not simply a tragic miscarriage of justice. The cross was integral to Christ's mission, for he came "to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Virtually every page of the New Testament resounds with the claim that Jesus died for us. In this event God identifies with¹⁵ fallen creatures to the uttermost. The cross lays bare who we are: violent self-serving rebels, defiant and lost, yet beloved of God beyond reason. The cross also makes plain who God is: the One who stoops to save, who refuses to let us stay lost, who does not inflict violence but suffers it. In Jesus Christ's death we see how God reigns: not in coercive power, but in suffering love, showing the futility of violence, and ultimate triumph of love.

And, always remember, the way of suffering love that leads to the cross also leads to resurrection and everlasting life in Christ's eternal community of oneness and peace. Trust in this promise.

Doctrine and Covenants 165:6c

The empty tomb reveals the glory of God. "He has been raised; he is not here" (Mark 16:6). The story of Jesus ends with the wonder of an empty tomb. Jesus Christ is no longer a figure of memory, but, raised into God's own life, he now lives and reigns in power. Easter casts its light backward over the whole career of Jesus and manifests what was

always true about him: that he was and is Christ, that he was and is for all time God's Son. Easter shows the Cross to be God's mercy in action. And it casts its light forward, revealing a glimpse of a glory yet to be: the new creation. If there were no resurrection of Jesus, there would be no good news. Easter is the beating heart of the Christian faith. Easter brings hope and possibility in the face of life's darkest moments.

From Community of Christ origins in the 1830s until today, our watchwords have been the same that the boy prophet first heard: "This is my Beloved Son; hear him" (Mark 9:7). Though the details of our founding history sometimes generate questions, confusion, or doubt, we are willing to live in that uncomfortable space and own the truth of human frailty and failings—and to repent when warranted. At the end of the day, we rest in the recurrent themes we hear throughout our journey. In 1838 our founding prophet Joseph Smith wrote: "The fundamental principle of our religion is the testimony of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ, 'that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended up into heaven,' and all other things are only appendages to these."²¹ Jesus, God with us and God for us, is the center of the faith of Community of Christ.

²¹ Smith, Joseph Jr. Elders Journal 1.3 (Far West, MO: Jy 1838): 44.

Doctrine and Covenants 165:1a-e

Canonized 6 June 2016

1 a. Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ's mission.

b. As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God's vision for the church and creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God's nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ's love and mission.

c. Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.

d. Undertake compassionate and just actions to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth.

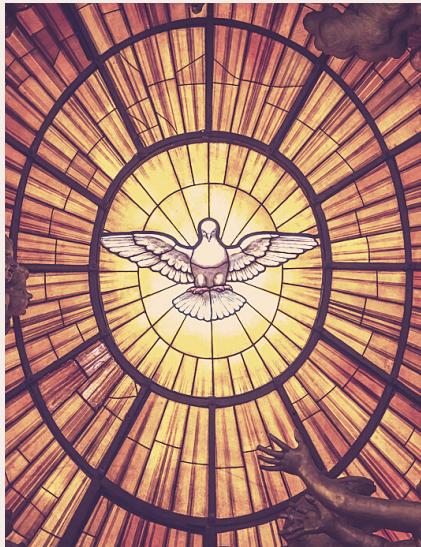
e. Let nothing separate you from this divine mission. It reveals divine intent for personal, societal, and environmental salvation; a fullness of gospel witness for creation's restoration. f. Continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives forward. Additional innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting groups of disciples and seekers are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world.

For an official statement on Christ, see the document: "We Proclaim Jesus Christ."²²

Discussion Question

How have Jesus Christ's words and deeds revealed (disclosed and made known) the glory of God to you?

²² "We Proclaim Jesus Christ," in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 2010, 22-23; also found at www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/christology.asp.



The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, Giver of Life, holy Wisdom, true God. The Spirit moves through and sustains creation; endows the church for mission; frees the world from sin, injustice, and death; and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is working.²³

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life.

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from you presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there....Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day.

Psalm 139:7,12

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Luke 4:18-19

When the Risen Lord commands the apostles to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19), he makes known who God is. Those who follow Christ must be plunged into the being of God, as revealed in the threefold name. By this name the church glorifies the God who is ever the Giver, the Gift, and the Giving: the Divine Community whose essence is love.

The Spirit named over us in baptism is thus not part of God

²³ “We Share Basic Beliefs,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 2010, 14.

but is God: indwelling all creation and drawing us to Christ. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force but is infinitely personal: an “I” (not an “it”) working in and through all things. Whether in the darkest depths or at the brightest heights of our experience, the Spirit of God is the life-giving Presence to Whom we are always connected.

Scripture uses many images to depict the Spirit. Scripture speaks of the Spirit as purifying Fire, Peace that passes understanding, Light, Love, Water, Wind, and life-giving Breath. As the Breath of God, the Spirit swept over the void at the dawn of creation, bringing order out of chaos. The Spirit helped people like Moses, Deborah, and Samuel do impossible tasks. The Spirit guided judges, kings, and sages in Israel. The Spirit inspired the prophets to speak of God’s judgment and promise. The identity of the Spirit is made known supremely in Jesus Christ. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. At his baptism, the Spirit revealed his identity as the Beloved Son. By the Spirit, Jesus healed the sick. He promised his disciples that he would endow them to fulfill his mission through the Spirit. From the⁵tomb in which his crucified body lay, he was raised into the very life of God by the Holy Spirit.

In scripture, the Spirit of God is also the Spirit of Christ. Jesus was not only the recipient of the Spirit, but the giver, as well. “He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22). The Spirit makes known the Son; the Son’s life, death, and resurrection give shape to the Spirit. God gives the Spirit, not apart from Christ, but in, through and by him. Where the Spirit is, there will the Son be; where the Son is, there will the Spirit be.

The Holy Spirit is the Revealer. Only by the power and wisdom of the Spirit can we comprehend the good news of Christ as God’s own self-revelation. The Spirit is like a “translator,” who, transcending history and culture, enables the diverse human family to hear the mystery of redemption in the language of our own hearts and to enter the Way in faith. Thus, it is not only true that we believe in the Spirit, but by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the Restorer. Healing is one dimension of the Spirit's restoring work. The restoring of bodies, hearts, and minds to wholeness is a gift for which the church, in imitation of its Lord, prays.²⁴ But to give this gift belongs to the freedom and wisdom of God. Miracles of healing remind us that an untamable Mystery dwells in our midst. Prophecy is another dimension of the Spirit's restoring work. God's people often wander from the Way and need to be recalled. In Biblical terms, prophecy is how the Spirit reminds God's people of who they are and what they are called to be. The restoring work of the Spirit calls us back not to the frozen forms and culture-bound practices of the past, but to the freedom that is in Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the Renewer. Silently, quietly, and invisibly—as we respond in faith to the sacred story, and to the sacraments—the Spirit transfigures us. The Love poured out at Pentecost actively seeks to renew our lives at their very roots. It was this endowment and Pentecostal experience of the Spirit that the Saints in the Kirtland Temple were after, to clothe them spiritually to take the Gospel to the world, in imitation of the first Pentecost and instructions of Jesus (Luke 24:46-53, and Acts 2). But the



²⁴ The Holy Spirit as Restorer works in and through the church as we become agents of Christ. "There are many ways to be Christ's agents of healing and restoration, to bring good news, to proclaim release, restore sight, and let the oppressed go free. As we receive God's healing love and grace, we begin to embody the life and mind of Christ and become his hands and feet in our world. As we are fed and nourished in the warm embrace of community and experience authentic relationship, we begin to recognize the needs and hunger of others. Then in our everyday lives we begin to reach out, gently touch, and share the peace that flows from the healed scars we bear." (From page 52, read more there.)

renewing work of the Spirit has an even vaster scope than the transformation of individuals and even the church. Already, in the present gift of the Spirit, we have a foretaste of the final liberation of all creation, when Easter will come at last to all things.

We experience the Spirit's revealing, redeeming, restoring, renewing presence in our midst. The Spirit, through Whom the prophets called Israel to walk justly, is calling us to the same path today. The Spirit poured out on Jesus is calling us in his name to make real today

our vision of the world that will be. And so, with all those who across the ages have named Jesus Christ as Lord, we cannot help but respond with these venerable words: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*²⁵

Put thy trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good; yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit.

Doctrine and Covenants 10:6
(LDS 11:12)

Discussion Questions

How have you experienced the Holy Spirit?

How is the concept of the Trinity challenging for you? What does this mean to you?

Read the document “We Proclaim Jesus Christ” (Sharing in Community of Christ, 2018, 58-60) and discuss as a group.

²⁵Gloria Patri, Glory Be prayer, a short doxology belonging to ancient Christian Tradition and shared ecumenically in word and song.

Resources

Lesson 3

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to you to believe in God?
2. As we consider scripture, what different names are used to reference God? How do these names reveal the nature of God to you? (Can also do as a pair share)
3. How have Jesus Christ's words and deeds revealed (disclosed and made known) the glory of God to you?
4. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit?
5. How is the concept of the Trinity challenging for you? What does this mean to you?
6. Read the document "We Proclaim Jesus Christ" (Sharing in Community of Christ, 2018, 58-60) and discuss as a group.

Learn More

1. [Inclusive Language Policy](#)
2. [We Proclaim Jesus Christ](#)
3. Project Zion Podcast | [Percolating on Faith](#) | Trinity
4. [Conceiving God](#)
5. Project Zion Podcast | [Common Grounds](#) | Trinity Sunday: Retired Apostle Susan Oxley shares the difficulty she had accepting the idea of the Trinity.

Woven Together: Creation, Humanity, Sin, Salvation, and Zion

Lesson 4



Sacredness of Creation

One of Community of Christ's nine Enduring Principles

- *In the beginning, God created and called all of it good.*
- *Spirit and material, seen and unseen, are related.*
- *Creation's power to create or destroy reminds us of our vulnerability in this life.*
- *God is still creating to fulfill divine purpose.*
- *We join with God as stewards of care and hope for all creation*²⁶



As an expression of Divine love, God created the heavens and earth and all that is in them and called them "good." Everything belongs to God and should be cherished and used justly according to divine purposes. God sees creation as a whole, woven together without separation between spirit and element. God calls people of every generation to join with God as stewards in the loving care of creation.

²⁶ "We Share Enduring Principles," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 12.

Understanding the basic goodness built into creation impacts how we treat one another and the world. Some Christians give up on this world and think only of the afterlife. Some rejoice when a hurricane or earthquake causes devastation because they think it heralds Christ's return. Community of Christ proclaims something different.

The story of creation in the first chapter of Genesis affirms the good that God placed in all created things. God's Spirit moved over a watery chaos, and by God's Word, the Creator established order and life. Like the chorus to a mighty hymn, the story presents one central theme, "And God saw that it was good."

This is the world God created—the world God redeemed through the love and compassion of Jesus. God continues to yearn toward this world and love it. We are called to help God restore broken, wounded places to their intended fullness and wholeness. We call this bringing forth the cause of Zion, the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed.

Discussion Question

How does an understanding of the creation of humanity and the natural world affect how Christians (should) treat one another and the world?

Every human being is created in the image of God. In Jesus Christ, God took on the limits of human flesh and culture, and also is experienced through those limits. We affirm without exception the worth of every human being. We also affirm that God has blessed humankind with the gift of agency: the ability to choose whom or what we will serve within the circumstances of our lives.



Community of Christ affirms that people are of great worth (Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c/LDS 18:10-11) and are created that they might have joy (2 Nephi 1:115/LDS 2:25). Humanity is endowed with freedom and created to know, love, and serve God. We are created in the image of God and find our true worth and identity in relating to God and one another. We are restless, yet our true selves yearn for responsible, Christ-like relationships. We express our worth by living the life of a disciple, shaped and formed through faith, hope, love, and peace.

Created in God's image, we are called to take part in God's ongoing creation. The mystery that is God actively participates in the creation process from the beginning and each day since to this very moment, whether it be light, vegetation, animals, ad infinitum. We recognize the power of story in the Genesis

What is Shalom?

In Hebrew, it means peace. But it signifies a peace that comes through wholeness, integrity, health, perfection, and security.

In Community of Christ, we lift up Christ as the embodiment of Shalom. Can you think of a word that better represents everything that Jesus is and brings into our lives?

Zion is Shalom embodied in our communities, or Christ among us. The name "Community of Christ" calls us to share Shalom, and live in Shalom.

The root to Shalom is Š-L-M, found in many Arabic words, such as "Jerusalem." When a Muslim says, "Salaam alaykum," and a Jew says, "Shalom aleikhem," they are both saying "Peace unto you" using this same root.

Other cultures might have other words that capture similar ideas to Shalom. Polynesians have such a root, which means compassion, health, mercy, and peace: Aloha (Hawaiian), Aroha (Maori), or Alofa (Samoan). As a community of believers with cultures from all over the world, we embrace all the ways that Christ can be embodied and revealed among us.

Shalom!

creation accounts that point to God as creator. Stories passed down through the generations impart deep meaning which can be missed if the details of story are interpreted without context or understood as literal truths—in contrast to timeless truths. God created humankind in God’s image, with free agency, the agency to choose to receive God’s generous gift of love and grace. As disciples who choose to receive God’s gracious gift of love and grace, we can also choose to fully respond to God’s invitation to become full participants in God’s world. A world set in constant motion through God’s ongoing acts of creation, effecting an overflow of divine love through human choices as disciples become the hands and feet of Jesus.



God created us to be agents of love and goodness. Yet we misuse our agency individually and collectively. Agency is a gift, as is stewardship over creation. Yet, we take these gifts and turn them against God’s purposes with tragic results. Sin is the universal condition of separation and alienation from God and our true selves, from one another and from the earth. Sin causes unnecessary suffering. We need the divine grace that reconciles and



restores us with God, our communities, ourselves, and all of creation.

Doctrine and Covenants Section 163, given in 2007, provides poignant guidance for Community of Christ, and further refines our understanding about God's peace:

Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation. Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community. The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a-b

Discussion Question

Think of someone you know (a community or individual) living in a condition of separation and alienation from God or one another. Consider this scripture: "Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation." (Doctrine and Covenants 163)

- How might this scripture bring a message of healing and hope to that situation?
- How might it speak to the brokenness or woundedness you experience in your life?



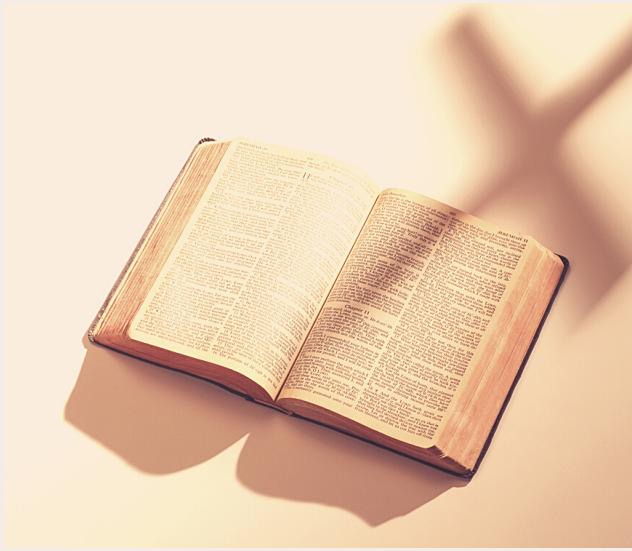
Prophetic counsel from Doctrine and Covenants Sections 161, 162, and 163 clearly teaches that one of the things we are to create is sacred community. By no mistake, in Section 163 the term sacred community is in the same paragraph as the invitation to discover the blessings of all the dimensions of salvation. One might even wonder whether it is possible for us to discover all the dimensions of salvation apart from community.



In sacred community, we learn how to live out the principles of forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation. We learn how to blend our gifts and resources for good. We give ourselves permission to be human, and lovingly hold one another accountable to the call of Christ. In sacred community, our concern is about all life and how all things can be shaped by the values found in the life and ministry of Jesus. The challenge is for our discipleship and our lives to be integrated faithfully in all of our relationships—with other people, all of creation, ourselves, and our Creator.

As a community of faith, we affirm that we belong to God and to one another. The quality of our relationships depends on the exercise of our freedom and ability to choose wisely. Freedom is a gift God gave to us at our creation. We are free to choose responsibly or not. We have liberty, yet our actions on behalf of God's reign matter.

In baptism we enter a way of life that begins the renewal of our humanity. Evoking God's name marks our formal entry into this path. We are baptized in the name of the Living God, the eternal community of Father, Son, and Spirit, in whose image we were created, by whose grace we are called, and by whose love we are being transformed. God achieves this purpose through the church—the communion of those whom Christ has called and who in turn call him Lord. God's very being is communal, and the nature of God's divine



purpose is most deeply experienced and known in community. The church is thus far more than a human society; it is an integral part of God's healing work in the world.²⁷

The scriptures use a special word to describe God's generosity toward us in our brokenness. The word is grace. This term appears more than 150 times in the New Testament, a

clear signal that grace is at the very heart of God's revelation in Christ. In its simplest sense the term describes a gift freely granted to the undeserving. Grace is the word scripture uses to speak of God's limitless hospitality toward us.

The grace of God delivers us into a new way of life—the Way of Jesus Christ. Welcomed to the Lord's Table and called into God's family, there is much for the disciple to do. The tasks of the Christian life do not earn salvation (an impossibility) but rather express the reality of the new way of life we have entered. In the words of Paul, because Christ has made us his own, we now press on to make his saving love our own (Philippians 3:12).

The invitation is to open every corner of our life to the transfiguring light of God. All that was declared at our baptism, can now be made real and visible through the everyday practices of living the path of the disciple as followers of the way of Jesus.



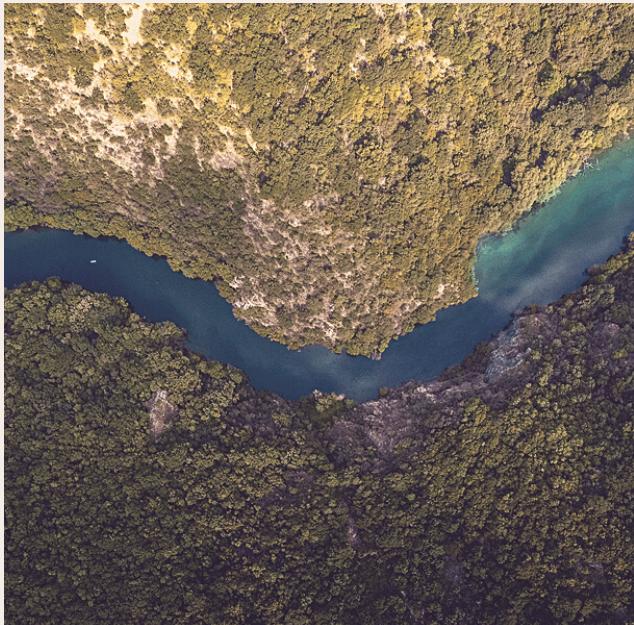
²⁷ A Way of Life, p. 70 (format for proper citation)

We often are tempted to think of salvation as a prize we will receive after death for having the “right answer.” This way of thinking disfigures the gospel of Jesus. It leaves too much of our actual life untouched by grace. Christian faith is not meant to be a collection of ideas one holds, or an insurance policy into which one has paid some premiums. Salvation is itself a new kind of life that is meant not simply to be had, but to be practiced. When Jesus told Zacchaeus that salvation had come to his house, he did not mean that this tax collector would get something called “salvation” at a later date and that otherwise his life would go on as usual (Luke 19:9). He meant that salvation already was visible in Zacchaeus’ changed outlook and actions. Grace calls us to discipleship.

God’s aim in the Christian life is to form the likeness of Christ in us. From our side, nothing is easy about this journey. We often resist the very grace that would free us. Our “yes” to the gospel does not instantly make the reign of God our center or love the source of our deeds. The competing loyalties that plague our divided hearts do not magically leave because we have chosen the path of the disciple. Loveless attitudes, misguided passions, and false images do not exit our lives because Christ has entered. The roots of sin and the patterns of our broken humanity are embedded deeply in the self and in our cultures. To know that we are for all time claimed by mercy is an unfathomable gift. But once this light has dawned, we are given the task of walking in the light. The church is called to “grow into salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).

Growing into salvation is a mystery: it is fully a work of grace, and yet does not occur without our participation. It happens as we follow Jesus into all the twists and turns of life. God has chosen in this way to honor our personhood. The purpose of this





journey is that having been saved by grace, we go on to learn to cooperate with grace. Having entered the river of divine love, we must now learn how to swim with the current. We have been called into a lifelong process of transformation. On this journey the Holy Spirit renews our lives to their core as we continue in the Way of Jesus.²⁸

Finally, through our understanding of grace, we come to know that we are not better, nobler, or more beloved of God than others. That we have heard God’s call is a humbling mystery. Nothing about us merits our being on this path, receiving these gifts, offering this service. The only way to adequately express our awe is by confessing that we are saved by grace.

Discussion Question

What does “God’s grace” mean to you? How has this chapter expanded your understanding of God’s grace?

How do we gain the saving grace of God? Grace, as an aspect of God’s freedom, is not bound in rigid formulas. Anything that draws us toward God is grace. Three important responses mark the beginning of the Christian journey: faith, repentance, and baptism. Faith is reaching out in personal trust to receive the gift God offers. Faith is our simple “yes” to this gift and is an important step on the journey. The decision to be baptized begins with faith in Jesus Christ and a desire to commit one’s self to follow his ways with all of our heart, might, mind, and strength. It is a decision that marks a significant

²⁸ A Way of Life, P.93-94

Covenant People

In Community of Christ we refer to ourselves as a covenant people. To be in covenant is to respond to God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Covenant begins with God extending love and invitation and is complete when we respond with a commitment, a promise to follow and to live in covenant community.

This is the promise and commitment we make when we are baptized. Covenant is made real through our relationships with others in community and with God who blesses our community.

The Enduring Principle, Blessings of Community, is most fully experienced in covenant.

-Of Water and Spirit, p. 38
(2014 Herald Publishing House)

point in recognizing God's initiative in our life, turning toward God, and entering a covenant relationship to the community of disciples and God.²⁹

Repentance has to do with recognizing our brokenness, or incompleteness, without God and turning toward a life aware of and living for God. We call this discipleship. Repentance is a personal private inner action of turning toward God and accepting God's healing balm of love and grace.

Baptism of water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unites the believer with Christ. In baptism, we publicly enter into the death

and resurrection of Jesus, and in so doing we covenant to follow his teachings as best we can. We also commit to be an active part of the community that proclaims and follows Jesus Christ, the peaceful One.

Discussion Question

How does reframing faith, repentance and baptism deepen your understanding of what it means to be a disciple?

²⁹ OWAS p. 49



Baptism of the Spirit (or confirmation) follows baptism. In the sacrament of confirmation, the elders of the church place their hands upon the head of the one being confirmed in accordance with the apostolic pattern seen in Acts 8:17. The companion sacraments of baptism of water and of Spirit recall the Holy Spirit descending like a dove at Jesus's baptism (Luke 3:21-22). Through confirmation, the new disciple is

formally united with the church and upheld in prayer that they might receive strength, courage, and God's guidance for the journey ahead. Confirmation makes plain what has been happening all along: the Holy Spirit as the agent of grace has guided us thus far and will continue to carry each one in God's steadfast love into the future. New life in Christ is always a gift. Grace is the soul of the gospel, the heart of the good news Jesus shares with all who will listen. You are worthy, you are loved, you are accepted, no matter what.

Some people speak about salvation and accepting Christ as Savior like securing a ticket to heaven when they die. In contrast, Doctrine and Covenants Section 163:2a states that God wants all people to "...discover the blessings of all the dimensions of salvation." People need saving from loneliness, fear, and hopelessness right here and now. Humanity needs salvation from disempowered lives and feeling helpless to make the world a better place. The need for salvation from poverty and violence is critical. The path to salvation Jesus shares is focused on conditions in today's world here and now. We rest in the knowledge that God's love is eternal and all will be well, letting go of the need to know complete details. Our hope lies in God and God's love is sufficient. That hope brings peace for the future and draws us into the heart of God's vision of a peaceable kingdom here on the earth.

Community of Christ believes the Risen Lord calls us to pursue peace and establish the cause of Zion. We understand this as the call to share the peace of Jesus Christ in all its personal, interpersonal, community, and worldwide dimensions. In the Bible, Zion is the term for Jerusalem, the holy city. For us this image of the city has become one of our central symbols: A city is a powerful symbol of community. Shaped by these biblical images from the past, our hope for the future is communal.

As Easter restored the broken community of the disciples, so the cause of Zion calls us to promote local and worldwide communities that signal the peaceful reign of God on Earth by working to mend neighborhoods, nations, and nature. This work is difficult, but not futile.

The Bible closes with the image of the new holy city coming to earth (Revelation 21). We take that to be a promise that community is the future of the human race. The age to come is about perfecting life together. God, whose threefold name reveals the divine community, intends human life to reflect the divine reality. That is the end for which we were created. That is the end for which our humanity is being renewed.

In the light of this promise and filled with hope, we embrace the cause of Zion: peace.

The God we serve is a God of justice and mercy, advocate and judge for both living and dead. God cares about how we treat our neighbors and enemies, and the level of care we extend to support the health of our Mother Earth and all creation. How we welcome the poor, the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned and rejected, matters to God.

Together, we press forward in service and love. We place our faith in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and lift our eyes to the future in hopeful longing. As we walk our hearts hear the prayer Jesus taught us to pray: “Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Discussion Question

Resources

Lesson 4

Discussion Questions

1. How does an understanding of the creation of humanity and the natural world affect how Christians (should) treat one another and the world?
2. Think of someone you know (a community or individual) living in a condition of separation and alienation from God or one another. Consider this scripture: “Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God’s shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God’s peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation.” (Doctrine and Covenants 163)
 - How might this scripture bring a message of healing and hope to that situation?
 - How might it speak to the brokenness or woundedness you experience in your life?
3. What does “God’s grace” mean to you? How has this chapter expanded your understanding of God’s grace?
4. How does reframing faith, repentance and baptism deepen your understanding of what it means to be a disciple?
5. The “worth of persons” is an important enduring principle in Community of Christ. How would you describe this principle to a friend?

Learn More

1. Project Zion Podcast | [Percolating on Faith](#) | Human Beings
2. Project Zion Podcast | [President Veazey](#) | Peaceful Humanity
3. Project Zion Podcast | [Percolating on Faith](#) | God’s Good Creation
4. Project Zion Podcast | [Sinner! Sinner!](#) | Matt Frizzell

Onward to Zion

Lesson 5



Blessings of Community

One of Community of Christ's nine Enduring Principles

- *The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God's grace and each other.*
- *True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.*
- *True community upholds the worth of all persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.*
- *Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.³⁰*

The cause of Zion has called to God's people throughout the ages. In the Bible, Zion is the term for Jerusalem, the holy city. For our more recent Restoration ancestors, Zion meant Independence, Missouri, and the concept also called them to gather from the edge of the Great Lakes to the edge of the Great Plains. Cultural and religious differences with neighbors resulted in their being driven from Independence in 1833. When it became clear that their lands would not soon be reclaimed, their understandings of the location of Zion grew to include northern Missouri. By the 1840s, the idea of Zion as a place had expanded to include all of North and South America. Today, we have decentralized Zion, and see its potential in all of creation—which is what God meant when, in the beginning, all of creation was pronounced "good."

³⁰ "We Share Enduring Principles," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 13.

Although their understanding may have been too limited for our understanding today, we give Joseph Smith and his followers credit that Zion was not simply a place. It was the collective transformation of the hearts of the people. As they understood it, this transformation would result in a perfect, just, and peaceful society, similar to the description in Acts 2 about the early Jerusalem church.

Acts 2 begins with the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Peter then proclaims Jesus as the Christ and invites everyone in the crowd to be baptized. The chapter ends with the disciples sharing all that they had with one another. In the early Jerusalem church two thousand years ago, the example set for us portrays a spirit-filled community proclaiming Jesus Christ and living in such a way that the essence of the community they have become is good news to the poor. We call this community Zion:

And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them....

Doctrine and Covenants 36:2h-l (LDS Moses 7:18-19)

Revelation given in 2013 has this to say about Zion:

Beloved Community of Christ, do not just speak and sing of Zion. Live, love, and share as Zion: those who strive to be visibly one in Christ, among whom there are no poor or oppressed.

Doctrine and Covenants 165:6a

As we "live, love, and share as Zion," we are promised the power of the Holy Spirit. Today the mission of Community of Christ is the same as the mission of the early church: We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

This same kind of Zionic community is described in Fourth Nephi of the Book of Mormon. The following story is told about how the people changed after they experienced the ministry of Jesus, which included Jesus teaching the Sermon on the Mount, blessing the children, and praying for the people.

The disciples of Jesus formed a church of Christ in all the lands round about. And as many as came to them and truly repented of their sins were baptized in the name of Jesus; and they also received the Holy Ghost.

Soon all the people were converted to the Lord..and there were no unhealthy conflicts among them, and everyone dealt justly one with another. They had all things common, therefore they were not rich and poor, slave and free, but they were all made free and partakers of the heavenly gift.

And they were married and given in marriage, and were blessed.

And they walked after the commandments that they had received from their Lord and their God, continuing in fasting and prayer, and in meeting together often, both to pray and to hear the word of the Lord.

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land because of the love of God that dwelt in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor prostitution, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of unfaithful sexual desires.

And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. They were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.

4 Nephi 1: 1-4, 12-13, 17-20,
English modernized and condensed
(LDS 1.1-3, 11-12, 15-17)

Zion is community where the worth of all people and the sacredness of all creation are fully lived out. Zion is transforming families, neighborhoods, and nations. As Joseph Smith taught, Zion is wherever righteous people create safe space and nurture for all creation, especially the most vulnerable among us.

Seeking God's will on earth as it is in heaven is to try to make God's kingdom tangible among us, in this life. Zion is a world safe for the endangered and vulnerable, a place where the lamb and the lion shall lie down together without any anger. This is what we mean in our mission statement about promoting communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

We have many terms for Zion, which provide depth and direction: God's kingdom on earth, peaceable kingdom, God's shalom, or the reign of God. The term "signal community" is sometimes used today to mean Zion. Section 163:5a of the Doctrine and Covenants calls for establishing signal communities of justice and peace that reflect the vision of Christ. They are called signal communities because they signal the presence of Christ in the midst of the larger community, and its members exemplify discipleship. Signal communities are gatherings of people committed to Christ's mission. Signal communities provide light in a dark world, and beacons of hope in a world of hurt and despair.

Today, our understanding of Zion has grown from being a "place" physically and only located in Jackson County, Missouri, to being able to be established anywhere in the world where disciples of Christ are gathered into signal communities.

Zion is the dedicated response of disciples to the love of God experienced in Jesus. This response to God's love includes keeping the commandments of Jesus in our lives together. This response to grace will result in our becoming communities of people with one heart and one mind, dwelling in righteousness, with no poor among us. Zion is a big dream of a better world with no more war, no more poverty, and no more abusive family relationships.



Discussion Questions

Brainstorm and record phrases that describe Community of Christ's understanding of Zion.

- Which (if any) are new perspective for you? (identify)
- How do these perspectives connect with your understanding of Zion? (discuss)

What connections do you see between the Community of Christ mission, the early church described in Acts 2, and the Zionic community described in Fourth Nephi?

How are “signal communities” tied to the Community of Christ understanding of Zion?

One way Zion is created in the world is through Outreach International, a humanitarian organization associated with Community of Christ. Outreach International serves as a modern-day example of the principles expressed in building God’s kingdom. Its mission is twofold: (1) to help the poor help themselves by empowering people to overcome the devastating effects of poverty and develop the capacity to create a new future for themselves and their communities; and (2) to provide responsible ways for people with charitable hearts to help the poor to a better life. In villages and communities around the world, Outreach International works with men and women to help them identify and resolve their own problems.

Our approach assists whole communities to develop the capacity to overcome the effects of poverty and create a new future. We believe that when the poor themselves are the initiators in resolving the problems of poverty, the results are sustainable and they have the tools necessary to succeed far into the future.

www.outreach-international.org



We can also bring about the kingdom of God on earth by living generously, and specifically through A Disciple's Generous Response (see Tithing in Community of Christ page 16). Responding generously as a disciple of Jesus Christ allows us to share time, talent, and treasure so together we can assist people worldwide.

Peacemaking is another important part of bringing about the cause of Zion. We each have the ability make choices. God wants us to make responsible choices. We are called to bring peace and justice to our world. Jesus Christ's life shows us how to live God's peace. As disciples, we should seek out resources and affiliate with persons promoting wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. This might mean taking part in activities related to interpersonal conflict resolution, peace and justice studies, spiritual stress relief, ending poverty and hunger, economic and environmental stewardship, or other worthy endeavors. As congregations and individuals, when we work to make the world more peaceful in all these realms of body, mind, spirit, and relationships, we are doing the work of Christ.

The dream of Zion as God's peaceable kingdom on earth has inspired our movement in significant ways through the decades. Even when we fail in living out this dream, God keeps faith and promises so we can begin again. We dare to hope for the day Zion will come over all the earth and bless every family and all people, and renew the earth. We make a start through being wise managers or stewards of our time, gifts, and money, to bless others through consistent service and financial giving.





Our story is one of a people called by Jesus Christ to seek God's peaceable kingdom on earth. At times this journey has required great faith and sacrifice. Yet we view our history honestly and openly, and we confess many mistakes and sins as a people. We see the kingdom is, thankfully, always much greater than our best or worst efforts. Still,

by the grace of God, we sense that our calling is to be part of the coming of Zion—peaceable and just communities everywhere on earth. We have found nothing more meaningful, significant, enduring, or worthwhile.

The idea of Zion began as a holy city and for us this image of the city has become one of our central symbols. Zion is part of our hope for the future. As Easter restored the broken community of the disciples, so the cause of Zion calls us to work for mending neighborhoods, nations, and nature. We interpret that as a promise that community is the future of the human race. The age to come is about perfecting life together. God's threefold name reveals that Zion

exists within the Triune Community of God. All of creation is to reflect that divine reality and harmony. That is the end for which we were created. That is the end for which our humanity is being renewed. Because of this future, we embrace in hope the cause of Zion.



Together we seek to model the community we call Zion, God's peaceable kingdom on earth. We want to be a transformed community that will inspire the world with hope and new possibilities. We begin in our congregations. Our commitment to the local fellowship is important, but we are also part of a larger international church present in more than fifty nations. Our community is local and global. Our commitment is local and global.

Watch and discuss video 4

An excellent test of Christian community is to ask, "How are the children, and how are the elderly?" Any community that is good for the young and old, both of whom are vulnerable, is more likely to be good for everyone. These questions can also be applied to our neighborhoods, villages, towns, cities, and nations. Specifically, "How are the children?" If anything is good for children, we can support and praise it. If anything damages or hurts or threatens children, then we work for change.

We should also be continually asking, "Do we hand a better world on to our children and grandchildren?" This question raises important questions about the environment, and about peace and justice for everyone in the world. By using the welfare of all children as the measuring stick for the health of community, we can ask critical and searching questions of our neighborhoods, schools, our governments, and ourselves. At the same time, we can work together united in our concern for children.

We are inspired by how Jesus loved children and taught that they were the center of the kingdom (Mark 9:33–37, 42–48; 10:1–16). A world good for all children and for future generations is Zion fully come. Indeed, it is good for all generations. The church logo of a lion, lamb, and child reminds us that a little child shall lead us in the ways of peace (see Isaiah 11:6).



We live in a hurting world. Yet we believe that the world was created by a loving God who longs for it to be healed. Following Jesus Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit, we can make a positive, significant difference in the world. We are needed in the task of pursuing peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit. We work through our local congregations and join in common purpose with our siblings in Christ all over the world who are seeking to live out their Christian discipleship. We affirm that serving in the mission of Christ is a great and marvelous work to which we can give ourselves. We give God praise for our opportunity and privilege to serve in the cause of Zion. We invite you to embrace this cause so that all the children of the earth may be blessed and the old, the poor, and the oppressed may not be forgotten.

Blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost...

1 Nephi 3:187
(LDS 13.37)

Discussion Questions

Using the welfare of all children as the measuring stick for the health of your community:

- What critical and searching questions emerge in your mind with regard to yourself, your neighborhood, your schools and your government?
- What critical questions emerge with regard to our world?

List specific ways “worth of all persons” and “sacredness of all creation” might be lived out in Zionic communities. How have you observed these principles lived out in Zionic communities?

Resources

Lesson 5

Discussion Questions

1. Brainstorm and record phrases that describe Community of Christ's understanding of Zion.
 - Which (if any) are new perspective for you? (identify)
 - How do these perspectives connect with your understanding of Zion? (discuss)
2. What connections do you see between the Community of Christ mission, the early church described in Acts 2, and the Zionic community described in Fourth Nephi?
3. How are “signal communities” tied to the Community of Christ understanding of Zion?
4. Video and discussion
 - Show a trailer (short video) from Outreach International (www.outreach-international.org) and discuss how OI expresses principles of “kingdom living.”
 - Now that you know more about Outreach International, how does it connect with the content shared in this lesson?
5. Using the welfare of all children as the measuring stick for the health of your community:
 - What critical and searching questions emerge in your mind with regard to yourself, your neighborhood, your schools and your government?
 - What critical questions emerge with regard to our world?
6. List specific ways “worth of all persons” and “sacredness of all creation” might be lived out in Zionic communities. How have you observed these principles lived out in Zionic communities?

Learn More

1. Signal Communities, [Lessons for All Ages](#)
2. Signal Communities, [Lessons for Children](#)
3. Signal Communities, [Live Out Christ's Mission](#)

The Sacraments of the Church

Lesson 6

Community of Christ throughout the world celebrates the sacraments of the church (in times past we used the term "ordinances" instead of "sacraments"). The word sacrament means "to make sacred." These special rituals use common elements and activities—like water and bread, eating and touch—to connect us in relationship with God and the sacred community. Sacraments make God's life-renewing grace visible. The sacraments embody God's grace and peace, and lead to transformation in lives and communities as they draw us into deeper relationship with God, self, and others. The sacraments help shape our identity and life as followers of Jesus Christ. Sharing sacraments in community brings blessing to the community. We find ourselves spiritually nurtured which empowers us to share the peace of Jesus Christ and³¹ move out in mission on behalf of the world we are called to serve and love.

Sacraments help us see with spiritual eyes and leads us to the discovery that God is ever present in all dimensions of life and all of life is sacred. These sacred encounters illuminate God's loving desire to bring all humanity into peace, wholeness, and right relationships with each other and the Divine.

Discussion Question

What does the term "sacrament" mean? Why might it be applied to more than just the blessing of the bread and wine?

Community of Christ has eight sacraments, each rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus.

³¹ Modified from "We Share Sacraments," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 17.



Baptism

Jesus began his work by asking John to baptize him (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21). A person seeking to be baptized “into Christ” becomes a “new creature” and recognizes God’s personal love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Those baptized make a life-long commitment (promise or covenant) to follow Jesus, the peaceful One. We are immersed in water to symbolize death to sin and are raised out of the water to begin a new life.

Paul, an early convert to Christianity, wrote how baptism symbolizes a complete following of Jesus and a dramatic change of life: “...when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God...” (Colossians 2:12). We celebrate this most important faith commitment in a public worship service.

Baptism in Community of Christ is by immersion. Many church buildings have a baptismal font in the sanctuary (chapel). Baptisms are often planned as part of the Sunday morning worship service but can be done at other times. Community of Christ practices “believer’s baptism.” This means that baptism is for those old enough to decide to be disciples, usually at the age of eight or later in life. We baptize those who have expressed a wish to covenant with Christ to follow him all their lives as best they can. Preparation for baptism is done in the local congregation. The wish to be baptized need only be expressed to the pastor or other congregational leader. The person being baptized chooses an Aaronic priest or an elder to perform this sacrament “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”³²

³²While both the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants use the term “Holy Ghost” in the baptism prayer, Community of Christ tradition recognizes “Holy Spirit” as being interchangeable, and having the same meaning. Accordingly, our priesthood often ends the prayer with “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”



Confirmation

Baptism of the Holy Spirit follows baptism by water. Following the example set by the apostles in the early church (Acts 8:17), elders lay their hands on the head of the new disciple and pray for the Holy Spirit's blessing. For those who would follow as disciples, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, "another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth..." (John 14:16-17). Through confirmation, the new disciple is formally united

with the church and upheld in prayer that they might receive strength, courage, and God's guidance for the journey ahead. Confirmation makes plain what has been happening all along: the Holy Spirit as the agent of grace has guided us thus far and will continue to carry each one in God's steadfast love into the future. This sacrament "confirms" the new disciple as a full member of Community of Christ.

Guidance provided in Doctrine and Covenants 164 in 2010, states that Community of Christ can recognize baptisms that were performed in other denominations. Previously baptized persons may choose to be rebaptized when they join Community of Christ, or they may choose confirmation only, so long as they were baptized by immersion at or after the age of eight.



Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Communion)

Jesus gave his disciples a piece of bread and drink of wine and said to them: "Take, this is my body.... This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:22-24). The Gospel of Luke further says, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Most congregations share the Lord's Supper

on the first Sunday of each month and can share this on other special occasions when appropriate. This could be during World Conference, or perhaps at Easter, or during a retreat or family camp.

This sacrament centers in Christ's gift of life, death, and resurrection for all people. The sacrament prayers call everyone to obedience and reconciliation with one another as they renew their commitment in the body of Christ. Prayers are based on those found in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon.

Community of Christ offers the Lord's Supper to all baptized Christians who choose to take part, following their own faith and practice. Some refer to this as "open communion." Priests or members of the Melchizedec Priesthood bless and serve the bread and "wine" to those gathered. Community of Christ uses grape juice rather than wine, although water may be offered for those with health concerns such as diabetes. Provision for serving the Lord's Supper online invites participants to prepare their own emblems ahead of time.



Ordination

Jesus gave spiritual gifts "to equip the saints [disciples] for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13). All members are called to serve in the church, displaying these spiritual gifts from God. The office of member (D&C 17:18-19; D&C 20:68-70, LDS), is the core of discipleship and essential to the congregation and church. Members can serve the church in nearly all dimensions of church life limited only from sacramental and presiding roles that are the responsibility of specific priesthood offices. Some are called to serve in specific priesthood offices for the good of the congregation and community. When a person accepts a call to priesthood, the congregation considers the call in a business meeting and the call cannot move forward

without approval from the membership. Ordinations take place in a worship service centered on the meaning of the sacrament and celebration of the person's commitment to serve. A prayer of ordination is offered asking God's blessing on the person's ministry. As a community sacrament, it is important for ordination to take place during a public worship service. Depending on the office of priesthood, ordinations may take place during a weekly congregation service, a mission center conference worship, or world conference worship. More information about priesthood is discussed in Lesson 8.



Blessing of Babies or Small Children

Jesus invites all parents to bring their little ones for a special blessing (Mark 10:13-16; 3 Nephi 8:12-13, 23-27; LDS 17:11-12, 21-25). A worship service is planned to celebrate the birth of a new life. Two elders typically perform this sacrament. The child is brought before the congregation by the parents, and placed in the

arms of the elders. Typically, the assisting elder holds the child and the elder offering the prayer of blessing places their hands on the child's head. An older child may sit in a chair and both elders will place their hands on the head of the child and one elder will offer the blessing.

Standing with the family before the congregation, one of the elders acts as voice. The elder blesses the child, asking for God's presence and guidance for the child, the parents, and the larger community of disciples who support them. The congregation shares in the commitment to support the spiritual and physical growth of the child. To paraphrase an old saying, "It takes a community of love to raise a child." At any point after the age of eight, the child may make the decision to be baptized.

Community of Christ freely offers the sacrament of Blessing of Children to all, regardless of church membership, and is available to children from birth through the age of seven years.

Discussion Questions

How do the sacraments shape the identity and symbolize the mission of Community of Christ?

How do sacraments engage congregations in a celebration of unity?



Laying on of Hands for the Sick

The ministry of Jesus included healing. One of the ways Community of Christ follows the New Testament example is by the sacrament of laying on of hands for the sick. When this sacrament is requested, one elder places a drop of consecrated olive oil on the head of the one who is sick or in need of a blessing and offers a short prayer of

anointing. Another elder then confirms that anointing, offering a special prayer on behalf of the person receiving the sacrament (James 5:14-15). This may be done privately or in the presence of family, friends, or the congregation. This sacrament is available for physical, spiritual, and emotional needs, and is available for all, whether the person is a member of Community of Christ or not.



Marriage

Jesus blessed marriage by his teachings and presence (Mark 10:6-9; John 1:1-11). Priests or elders conduct this sacrament in the presence of family and friends. God's love is celebrated as the foundation for the vows made between two people. The gathered community of friends and family show their support for the couple, and their

willingness to be available to them in time of need. In Community of Christ, marriage is much more than a legal arrangement. The couple covenant to live in mutual love that seeks to embody the love and compassion of Christ. Community of Christ freely offers the sacrament of marriage to all, regardless of church membership, and is subject to local laws and customs.

Marriage is often performed in the local congregation chapel (sanctuary), but other settings are appropriate according to the wishes of the couple.

Community of Christ upholds the principle of monogamy.

“Monogamy is the basic principle on which Christian married life is built...” (D&C 150:10a). The phrase “the basic principle” means fundamental or foundational to the church’s understanding, teaching, and practice regarding marriage. For Community of Christ, monogamy is the understood standard of Christian married life.



Evangelist Blessing

Prior to the ordination of women to the priesthood, this sacrament was called a Patriarchal Blessing. Joseph Smith Jr. taught that a patriarch was an evangelist.³³ Because the term “evangelist” has no gender-specific connotation, it better described the priesthood office and sacrament once men and women served side-by-side in this calling.

Evangelist means “one who shares the good news.” Through the sacrament of the Evangelist Blessing, we receive good news, indeed!

In Section 165 of the Doctrine and Covenants evangelists were given additional counsel regarding blessing.

³³ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Joseph F. Smith, ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Desert Book, 1977), 151.

Offer the sacrament of evangelist blessing not only to individuals and congregations, but to families, households, and groups seeking spiritual guidance to more completely give themselves to Christ's mission. Nothing in this instruction should be construed to lessen the importance of the sacrament of evangelist blessing for individuals.

Doctrine and Covenants 165:5b

Jesus Christ's ministry was one of blessing. He counseled and prayed for those seeking to follow him (Luke 22:31-32). At critical times in life, the disciple may seek a blessing. More than one blessing is possible. An evangelist, with his or her special focus and calling, shares with the disciple in preparation, study, counsel, and prayer. The blessing provides counsel and guidance, both for the present and the future. The blessing is recorded and transcribed. One copy is sent to the recipient of the blessing and one copy is retrained in membership records. Sometimes disciples read their blessing at various times throughout their lives to gain inspiration and guidance. The evangelist blessing is freely offered to all, regardless of church membership. In prior years in the life of the church, evangelists often declared a disciple's "lineage," however this practice has largely faded away.

Provision for Online Sacraments

In September 2019, provision was made for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to be shared in online ministries. During the COVID-19 pandemic provision was made to share all sacraments online with the exception of baptism. All sacraments may also be streamed online to allow other persons to attend from remote settings or participate in various hybrid worship experiences. More information is available at this link: <https://cofchrist.org/find-a-ministry/?tab=online>.

Discussion Questions

Share about an experience you had as a participant or witness of one or more of the sacraments. How did that experience draw you deeper into your relationship with God?

Share photos or artistic representations of each sacrament and briefly review each sacrament.

- How are each of these sacraments rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus?
- What questions do you have about the sacraments?

Prior to class (or using phones or computers during class), review the calendar of the mission center and nearby congregations including your own. Share dates of upcoming sacraments and invite class members to attend with you. Plan to discuss the experience afterwards (maybe at the next class).

Resources

Lesson 6

Discussion Questions

1. What does the term "sacrament" mean? Why might it be applied to more than just the blessing of the bread and wine?
2. How do the sacraments shape the identity and symbolize the mission of Community of Christ?
3. How do sacraments engage congregations in a celebration of unity?
4. Share about an experience you had as a participant or witness of one or more of the sacraments. How did that experience draw you deeper into your relationship with God?
5. Share photos or artistic representations of each sacrament and briefly review each sacrament.
 - How are each of these sacraments rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus?
 - What questions do you have about the sacraments?
6. Prior to class (or using phones or computers during class), review the calendar of the mission center and nearby congregations including your own. Share dates of upcoming sacraments and invite class members to attend with you. Plan to discuss the experience afterwards (maybe at the next class).

Learn More

1. [Sacraments in Community of Christ](#)
2. Project Zion Podcast | [Cuppa Joe](#) | Historical Changes of the Sacraments
3. Project Zion Podcast | [Percolating on Faith](#) | The Sacraments Part I
4. Project Zion Podcast | [Percolating on Faith](#) | The Sacraments Part 2

The Temple

Lesson 7



The Temple is the House of the Lord

The Temple is a vibrant symbol of Community of Christ's identity, mission, message, and beliefs and actively functions as a place of prayer, gathering, learning, worship, and spiritual growth. Likewise, in the Jewish and early Christian traditions, the House of the Lord historically held a key role as

the center of worship. Jesus visited the temple often during his life and ministry, and so did the apostles after His death and resurrection.

Community of Christ Temples are open to all. Community of Christ does not practice secret rituals in or out of the Temple, nor are there special ordinances that occur only in our Temple. The early saints of the Reorganization valued transparency, common consent, and had a theology that looked more like the Kirtland era of the church. The Nauvoo endowment and its close relationship to polygamy were practices that did not get carried over into the Reorganization.

Today, Temples remind "us that, above all else, Jesus Christ seeks to restore us to life as we were created to experience it; life as God intends it to be; life characterized by love, generosity, relationships of mutuality, sharing, and peacefulness." Temples call us to gather in, and then send us outward, having been transformed. They "steer us to our true calling to become God's spiritual house, built on the witness and sacrifice of Jesus Christ—a household that unites, heals, restores, and frees people through community to express their best selves no matter who they are...a household in which Jesus would truly feel at home!"³⁴

³⁴ "We Share Temple as Life-Giving Symbol," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 19.



Temples of the Restoration

In ancient times, God's covenant people were called upon to build a house to God's glory. In our day as in times past, through the modern prophet Joseph Smith Jr., a covenant community was again called to build a house to God's glory in Kirtland, Ohio. Community of Christ honors this call from God through the Prophet Joseph Smith to set up a house of prayer, fasting, faith, learning, glory, and order—a House of the Lord.³⁵ The Kirtland temple stands as a monument of faith for all members of the Restoration, as does the Temple in Independence for Community of Christ. Called by a prophet to build this sacred building in Independence, Missouri, we invite all to our Temple “dedicated to the pursuit of peace” and “for reconciliation” and “healing of the spirit” (Doctrine and Covenants 156:5a).

When we exit the Temple, we do so through doors emblazoned with the church seal. The doors lead to an outer court that is a massive map of the world. This embodies the mission of the Temple, to gather us in, and then send us outward to establish peace in the world. The seal of the church, upon the Temple's doors, is inspired by Isaiah's vision that “the wolf...shall live with the lamb,...and a little child shall lead them,” and when humanity “will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:6, 9, emphasis added).



³⁵ Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants 85:36b

Discussion Question

How has your understanding of Temples evolved during your faith transition?

- What have you given up?
- What have you gained?



Our Model: Kirtland Temple

When the Lord called on the saints to build “a house of God”³⁶ or temple, leaders of the Church of Christ (as it was then known) were living in two different locations: Kirtland, Ohio, and Independence, Missouri. While they made ever-evolving plans for a temple complex in Independence, it never came to fruition in their lifetimes; but a temple in Kirtland did.

The Kirtland temple served three roles for the church: it provided sacred space for worship, for education, and for leaders to meet and direct the affairs of the church. The Kirtland Temple’s focus on both worship and education reflected their wish to be a people prepared both spiritually and intellectually.

As a House of the Lord, the temple at Kirtland became a site of spiritual manifestations similar to the day of Pentecost for the primitive church, which took place following Christ’s Ascension (see Acts 2). After having tarried in Jerusalem (see Luke 24:46-53), Christ’s apostles were endowed with the Spirit during Pentecost, and were spiritually equipped to take the gospel to all nations. A similar experience occurred in Kirtland, as latter-day apostles and priesthood were endowed with the Spirit to take the gospel to all nations.

³⁶Ibid



The Temple in Independence

Through a modern-day prophet of God, Community of Christ was called to prepare to build the Temple in Independence, Missouri. President W. Wallace Smith, grandson of Joseph Smith, Jr., gave the following revelation on April 1, 1968:

The time has come for a start to be made toward building my temple in the Center Place. It shall stand on a portion of the plot of ground set apart for this purpose many years ago by my servant Joseph Smith, Jr. The shape and character of the building is to conform to ministries which will be carried out within its walls.

Doctrine and Covenants 149:6a

In 1984, President Wallace B. Smith, great-grandson of Joseph Smith Jr., gave further direction to the church:

The temple shall be dedicated to the pursuit of peace. It shall be for reconciliation and for healing of the spirit. It shall also be for a strengthening of faith and preparation for witness. It shall be the means for providing leadership education for priesthood and member.

Doctrine and Covenants 156:5a-b, d

Ten years later, on April 17, 1994, the temple dedication was presided over by President Wallace B. Smith. The first major event held at the temple prior to its dedication was the International Women's Conference in June 1993.

Like the Kirtland temple before it, the Temple at Independence serves as a center of worship, learning, and church administration.



Worship

Honoring the call of God to set up a house of prayer, a Daily Prayer for Peace is held at the Temple, 365 days a year. Since December 1993, this short worship service holds up the concerns of the world to its Creator. Many other worship services are held in the Temple throughout the year. Participants come from diverse faith communities, cultures, and all walks of life.



Education

The Lord called the nineteenth-century Saints to establish a temple as “a house of learning.” In the same revelation, God also instructed them to “seek...diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning even by study, and also by faith” (Doctrine and Covenants 85:36a/LDS 88:118).

The Temple serves as a center for education and preparation of the priesthood and membership, both at the Temple and through distance education courses.

For Community of Christ priesthood and members throughout the world, “Temple School” provides courses with topics that include doctrine, church history, scripture, and priesthood duties. Connected to the educational roles of the Temple, the Community of Christ³⁷ Seminary invites people of all faiths to develop their knowledge of Christ and ability to promote the peaceable kingdom. Workshops, seminars, lectures, conferences, and other educational gatherings are conducted in the Temple.

³⁷ Education opportunities and classes once housed under Temple School now can be found at <https://www.heraldhouse.org>



Church Administration

As with the Kirtland temple, the Temple in Independence serves as the seat of the presidency of the Church, and as a center for the general officers of the church. On the second floor are offices for the First Presidency, Council of Twelve, Presiding Evangelist (formerly, “Presiding Patriarch”), Presiding Bishopric, President of the Quorum of High Priests³⁸ and the Senior President of Seventy. The Standing High Council³⁹ also meets in the Temple. Additionally, other administrative offices are located in the Temple to help support our mostly volunteer priesthood members throughout the world and to coordinate Community of Christ’s Mission Initiatives.

Discussion Question

How has the importance and function of temple remained the same in Community of Christ tradition since the Kirtland era? How has it changed?

³⁸ See LDS Doctrine and Covenants 124:133-36.

³⁹ In the early days of the church, two presiding high councils existed: the standing high council, and the traveling high council, also known as the Twelve Apostles—See D&C 104:12-16 (LDS D&C 107:33-38; 124:127-132). Originally, the Standing High Council presided at the Center Place over the stakes of Zion, and the Twelve, or Traveling High Council, outside of the stakes of Zion. According to revelation, the standing “high council in Zion forms a quorum equal in authority, in the affairs of the church, in all their decisions, to the councils of the twelve at the stakes of Zion”—D&C 104:15 (LDS D&C 107:37). The Community of Christ has retained this structure with the general church leadership, although the LDS Church has not.

When Mormons arrived in Utah, the Salt Lake Stake fulfilled the function of a Standing High Council until June of 1877. Until 1877, the outlying stakes reported to the various quorum presidencies in the Salt Lake Stake for appointments of their priesthood officers. But, in the final year of his life, Brigham Young reversed this policy, placing all stakes under the supervision of the Twelve. See the June 1877 “Circular of the First Presidency” in Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, James R. Clark, comp. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1965), 2:283-95.



The Symbolism of the Temple

The design of the temple symbolizes the gospel of Jesus Christ, which teaches of the peaceable things of the kingdom. Entering its sacred space is to encounter God's plan of salvation for creation. All temples are theology in stone, models of the universe—and the same holds true for the Temple in Independence. The Temple is Zion, but ever beckons us to go outward to establish Zion everywhere.

The Temple is designed with symbols that draw the mind to higher things, to empower those who enter to embrace more fully the peace of Jesus Christ. It is a place of endowment of the Spirit. Located at the historic center place of our movement, the Temple is our symbolic “mountain of the Lord’s house” which orients us to Jesus Christ and God’s plan of salvation.

Entering the Temple from the east, worshipers move through the Temple’s sacred space, progressing symbolically towards God’s kingdom. The Worshiper’s Path travels upward along an ascending spiral path to the inner sanctuary—the spiral motion continuing infinitely upward, drawing focus up towards the heavens.

The resulting spire atop the sanctuary, the most distinctive feature of the Temple, was inspired by the nautilus—the spiral being a universal shape found throughout nature. The shape can also be found in the curve of a ram’s horn; in the spiral arms of galaxies and in the rotation of tropical storm clouds; in the arrangement of seeds on the head of a sunflower, which moves with and follows the path of the sun across the sky; and in various other instances throughout nature. The spiral is a symbolic fingerprint of the Creator, and reminds us that God is in control of the universe and an ongoing creation. Employing the spiral’s symbolism in the Temple is a way of creating

a centering place that gathers us in, and then sends us out, to extend Zion to the entire world.

Discussion Question

Review photos or a video of the Temple noting important symbols, architecture, design, and other elements. Discuss and list additional questions.



The Temple and the Spirit

Community of Christ is called to be a people of the Temple, a people of the Restoration, a people of Zion. Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore peace to creation. Through the ministries of the Temple, we explore and are led by God in what it means to be a prophetic people sharing the peace of Jesus Christ.

Inspired by the Spirit, Prophet-President Wallace B. Smith presented to the church in 1984 that “there is great need of the spiritual awakening that will be engendered by the ministries experienced within [the Temple’s] walls” (Doctrine and Covenants 156: 3). Part of this reawakening involved the Temple serving as “a place in which the essential meaning of the Restoration as healing and redeeming agent is given new life and understanding, inspired by the life and witness of the Redeemer of the world” (Doctrine and Covenants 156:5e).

In 2000, prophet-president W. Grant McMurray called the church to:

Become a people of the Temple—those who see violence but proclaim peace, who feel conflict yet extend the hand of reconciliation, who encounter broken spirits and find pathways for healing. Fulfill the purposes of the Temple by making its ministries manifest in your hearts...Let it stand as a towering symbol of a people who knew injustice and strife and who now seek the peace of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Doctrine and Covenants 161:2

Community of Christ seeks always to be people of the Temple. It is a journey that asks us to remember, reclaim, embody and share Jesus the peaceful One. The centrality of Christ and our commitment to community rang loud and clear in the 1994 mission statement: We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

“Given as a divine blessing” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:1a) in 2000, and made official in 2001, our new name, Community of Christ, re-energized our ministry and witness. But it was the introduction of the Mission Initiatives in 2011 that poignantly clarified the essential meaning of Restoration as it related to the healing and redeeming work of Jesus announced in Luke 4:18-19.



Becoming a People of the Temple

In April 2011, President-Prophet Stephen Veazey addressed Community of Christ from the Temple sanctuary where thousands gathered, leaning forward, and listening intently as President Veazey shared his vision of Christ’s mission. Broadcast live across the world to an international church, all of us became part of bringing Section 156:5e to life.

As a prophetic people we heard the clarion call to be ambassadors sent by Christ. The Temple “shall be a place in which the essential meaning of the Restoration as healing and redeeming agent is given new life and understanding, inspired by the life and witness of the Redeemer of the world.”

It is interesting to note that the Inspired Version (Joseph Smith Translation) of Luke 4:18 reads “he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,” clearly resonating with the call sounded in Section 156. With increased understanding, step by step we are becoming change agents of healing and redemption in our world as we live into the fullness of what it means to follow the one whose name we bear: Jesus the Living Christ.

As people of the Temple, we are becoming living sanctuaries of peace for those who seek wholeness. We are learning what it means to be a people open and willing to “encounter broken spirits and find pathways for healing” (Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a) together.

Spiritual refugees lost and searching today are experiencing Christ’s presence among a people earnestly seeking to be a people of the Temple. People who encounter broken spirits and find pathways for healing, who do the hard work of becoming a community of joy, hope, love, and peace so they can offer a holy place of welcome and renewing—a sacred space of safety and rest. As wounded healers we have all stood in need of Christ’s redeeming presence.



In scripture we understand that Christ is present with us in fellowship, hospitality, word, and sacrament. In scripture, just like today, those are the everyday practices of what it means to be the church in the world for God. Community of Christ is not talking about inside our buildings, although we do that too. We are talking about all the places of our lives, where we live, and work, and play.

There are many ways to be Christ’s agents of healing and restoration, to bring good news, to proclaim release, restore sight, and let the oppressed go free. As we receive God’s healing love and grace, we begin to embody the life and mind of Christ and become his hands and feet in our world. As we are fed and nourished in the warm embrace of community and experience authentic relationship, we begin to recognize the needs and hunger of others. Then in our everyday lives we begin to reach out, gently touch, and share the peace that flows from the healed scars we bear.

Occasionally the door opens to share the message we carry out in the open, seen and heard by many eyes and ears. But mostly it happens in ways that go unnoticed by all but the recipient. Holding a hand in the hospital waiting room, helping a neighbor with chores, sending an



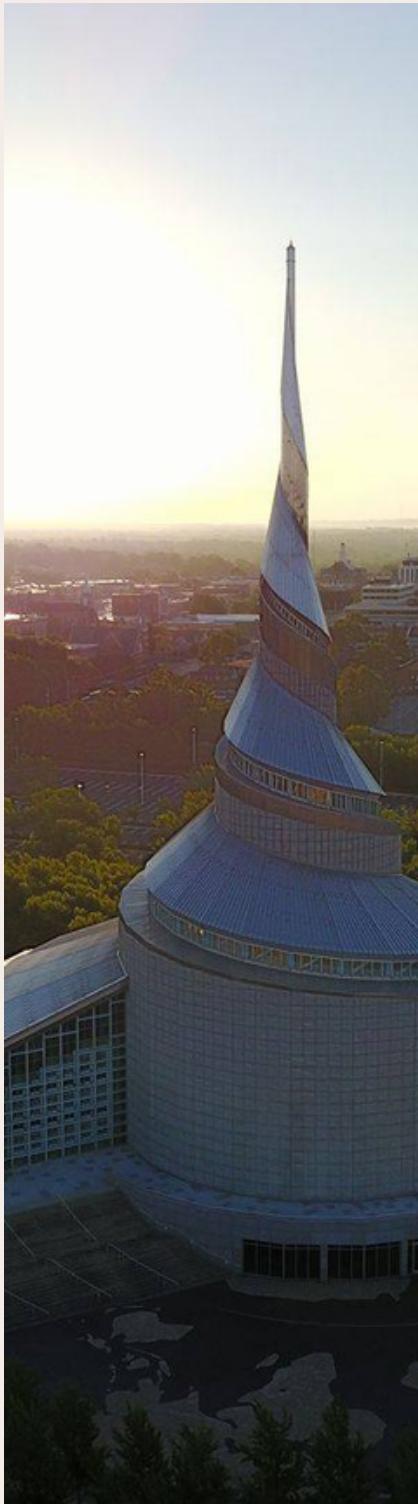
encouraging email, reading to a small child, attending the school play to see a teen's debut, listening attentively to someone's story, inviting the new family down the street to supper, singing hymns to a sick friend, offering forgiveness, telling the truth about who you are, opening your heart to a stranger, taking a class to learn more about poverty, advocating for those who have no voice.

Every time we share, we also receive, and the circle of God's love and grace continues wider and wider drawing us into the body of Christ. Perhaps the ministry of the disciple means being exactly who we already are, doing just what we already do, with one difference: We understand ourselves to be God's prophetic people in and for the world. For when we say "yes" to being God's people in the world, we become a vehicle of God's grace—a sign and symbol that points to the one we follow, Jesus, the Living Christ. We become a people of the Temple.⁴⁰

Discussion Question

How does the Community of Christ Temple in Independence function as an ensign of peace for the world? How might the Temple call the church to become a sanctuary of Christ's peace?

⁴⁰ Linkhart, Robin K., "Restoration as Healing and Redeeming Agent." in *Breathe New Life*, Community of Christ, Herald Publishing House, Independence MO 2018, p. 40-42.



Prophetic Guidance for the Temple

In 2007, prophet-president Stephen M. Veazey gave the following to the church:

The Temple is an instrument of continuing revelation in the life of the church. Its symbolism and ministries call people to reverence in the presence of the Divine Being. Transformative encounters with the Eternal Creator and Reconciler await those who follow its spiritual pathways of healing, reconciliation, peace, strengthening of faith, and knowledge. There are additional sacred ministries that will spring forth from the Temple as rivers of living water to help people soothe and resolve the brokenness and pain in their lives. Let the Temple continue to come to life as a sacred center of worship, education, community building, and discipleship preparation for all ages. Vital to this awakening is the understanding that the Temple calls the entire church to become a sanctuary of Christ's peace, where people from all nations, ethnicities, and life circumstances can be gathered into a spiritual home without dividing walls, as a fulfillment of the vision for which Jesus Christ sacrificed his life.

Doctrine and Covenants 164:8a-c

Resources

Lesson 7

Discussion Questions

1. How has your understanding of Temples evolved during your faith transition?
 - What have you given up?
 - What have you gained?
2. How has the importance and function of temple remained the same in Community of Christ tradition since the Kirtland era? How has it changed?
3. Review photos or a video of the Temple noting important symbols, architecture, design, and other elements. Discuss and list additional questions.
4. How does the Community of Christ Temple in Independence function as an ensign of peace for the world? How might the Temple call the church to become a sanctuary of Christ's peace?

Learn More

1. [Becoming a People of the Temple](#)
2. [Community of Christ: A People on the Move](#)
3. [Temple Tuesday](#)

Priesthood

Lesson 8



All Are Called

One of Community of Christ's nine Enduring Principles

- God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God's purposes.
- Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry.
- Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world.
- We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God's call⁴¹

In Community of Christ, all persons, regardless of sexual orientation⁴², are eligible to hold the priesthood. We believe that priesthood callings come from God, as discerned by the officers of the church. Once a call is discerned, it is presented to the candidate for prayerful consideration. If the candidate accepts the call, the call is then presented to the congregation or mission center conference for approval. After a period of preparation of both mind and spirit which includes specific courses of study, ordination comes through the laying on of hands, and always takes place in a public worship service.

Many individuals do not hold the priesthood but serve the church and their communities in other ways. A vast majority of our priesthood members serve as bi-vocational volunteers. Some ministers apply for church

⁴¹ "We Share Enduring Principles," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 13.

⁴²Not all nations have held National Conference providing for same-sex marriage, and ordination for those in same-sex marriage (or marriage-like relationships). Contact Community of Christ World Church Secretary (snaylor@cofcchrist.org) for the current list of nations that have instituted these provisions.

employment and, if accepted, are employed full-time in service to the mission of the church. Priesthood service does not require professional training for ministry, although some priesthood members have studied in graduate schools of theology, ministry, and religion. Most ministers

employed full-time with the church hold graduate degrees in theology and ministry.

According to our scriptures, "priesthood is a sacred covenant involving the highest form of stewardship of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. The priesthood shall be composed of people of humility and integrity who are willing to extend themselves in service for others and for the well-being of the faith community" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:6a).

Community of Christ recognizes two orders of priesthood, the Melchizedec⁴³ and the Aaronic. Within these two priesthoods, there are several offices, each with specific duties and authority.

Each office of the priesthood is equal in importance, the responsibilities and duties of each office differ. The pastor of each local congregation has the responsibility for discerning calls to the Aaronic priesthood and the office of elder. Priesthood calls originating in a local congregation are reviewed by the Mission Center President. They must also be cleared through the First Presidency's office. Once approved, the call is then presented to the individual. If the individual accepts, the call is presented to a congregational conference for a sustaining vote.

⁴³ There are several alternate spellings for the name Melchizedec. Many readers will be familiar with "Melchizedek." Doctrine and Covenants sections 83 and 104 (LDS 84 and 107) outline the two orders of priesthood.



Calls to the offices of seventy or high priest, as well as calls to serve in the leading quorums of the church, come through Mission Center or World Church officers. Once accepted by the individual, those calls are presented to a Mission Center Conference or World Conference for a sustaining vote. Ordination to any priesthood office takes place only after all necessary approvals and required education are completed.

The Aaronic priesthood offers ministry of presence, modeled on Jesus's ministry as comforter, peacemaker, and friend. The Aaronic priesthood includes the offices of deacon, teacher, and priest.⁴⁴ Priesthood serving in these offices focus on inviting individuals, families, congregations, and communities into deeper relationships with one another and with Jesus Christ. Deacons often take part in the care of the local church building. They are sensitive to the temporal needs of congregational members and teach about stewardship and responding generously in tithes and offerings. Teachers provide the ministry of the peacemaker. They cultivate relationships among families, often visiting in the home. Priests also visit members' homes encouraging them to pray and attend to family duties.



They provide preaching ministry in their congregation and may teach and mentor new members in preparation for baptism and/or confirmation. They officiate in the sacraments of baptism, communion, marriage, and ordinations to the Aaronic priesthood.

The Melchizedec priesthood offers ministry of mission and vision, helping the church focus on what matters most. They also share insight into the ever-deepening

⁴⁴ In Community of Christ, the Aaronic priesthood does not include the office of bishop, although the bishop works closely with the Aaronic priesthood. The office of bishop developed differently in the two traditions. See Doctrine and Covenants 83:5a (LDS 84:29) for an early text placing the office of bishop as an "appendage" of the higher priesthood.

call to discipleship that is resident in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Melchizedec priesthood includes the offices of elder, seventy, high priest, bishop, apostle, president, and prophet. Elders serve in both missionary and administrative roles. Elders teach, preach, expound, and witness. They preside over (“conduct”) meetings and officiate the sacraments. They may visit in homes to bless the sick, teach the gospel, and comfort and strengthen members. Congregational pastors usually hold the office of elder; however, any priesthood member may be “set apart” to preside over the congregation, depending on the needs of a specific congregation and the availability of various ordained priesthood offices.

Some elders may be called and ordained to the office of seventy. Serving in one of the church’s quorums of seventy, they conduct missionary work under the direction of the apostles.

Some priesthood offices provide locally focused ministry in a congregation and some offices serve in World Church focused ministries. High priests may serve in local congregations as pastors, or in various roles outside the congregation including bishop, evangelist, apostle, or church president. Bishops oversee the financial affairs of the church, and the ministries of the Aaronic priesthood. Evangelists attend to the spiritual formation of the priesthood and church. They provide evangelist blessings to anyone wishing to receive inspired guidance and comfort. Apostles are the leading missionary quorum of the church. They help the First Presidency in managing the World Church. The First Presidency is the presiding quorum in the church, comprised of three high priests. The prophet-president and his or her two counselors direct the World Church.



Discussion Question

How does priesthood in Community of Christ feel familiar to you? How does it feel different?

As you consider the role of priesthood in Community of Christ and who is eligible to serve in ordained ministry, what sense of loss do you feel? What sense of gain do you experience? (Naming the process of letting go and embracing is important to all faith journeys and transitions.)



Congregation-focused Priesthood Offices

Deacon

Deacons express their ministry of service and model Jesus as comforter by nurturing and sharing principles of generosity with individuals and families in the congregation and the community. Deacons watch over the church, teach and preach, visit in the homes of members, care

for the physical and social well-being of the church, and are especially called to teach and advise members about the principles of A Disciple's Generous Response (tithes and offerings). Deacons care for the temporal aspects of congregational life, to include building upkeep.

Teacher

Teachers express their ministry of reconciliation and model Jesus as peacemaker by being peacemakers with individuals and families in the congregation and community. Teachers work to strengthen the membership, and ensure the church meets often. They are called to preach and teach and provide bridging ministries toward reconciliation amid conflict. The ministry

of the teacher promotes friendship and recognizes the life problems resident in the congregation, offering a relationship of redemptive love and concern. Teachers are ministers of reconciliation.

Priest

Priests express their ministry of presence and model Jesus as friend by being spiritual friends to families, congregations, and communities. Priests can officiate the sacraments of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and marriage. They may ordain those called to the office of deacon, teacher, or priest. With elders, priests are responsible for preparing people for baptism and confirmation.



Elder

Elders are ministers of mission modeling Jesus as “servant of God’s people” whose concrete acts of ministry are direct, tangible expressions of the spiritual ministry of the gospel. Their ministry expresses the mission of the church. Elders have the authority to ordain people to the Aaronic priesthood and to the office of elder. They may perform all the other sacraments of the church except for the Evangelist (formerly "Patriarchal") Blessing. Elders teach and preach, watch over the church, and visit in the homes of the members.



World Church-focused Priesthood Offices

Community of Christ refers to the entire denomination collectively as "the World Church." Priesthood offices and leaders at the denominational level of church organization are typically assigned to minister widely, in mission centers and apostolic fields, rather than in a single congregation. Members of the priesthood in the

Aaronic offices and the office of elder can and do minister outside of their home congregation, but the specific duties of those offices are most often needed closest to home.

Seventy

Modeling Jesus as ministers of witness and invitation, some elders are called to the office of seventy, whose ministry is specifically focused on inviting and witnessing to people seeking to commit their lives to Christ. The seventies work in close association with the Council of Twelve Apostles to fulfill the missionary task of the church. The seventies are organized into quorums. Each quorum is led by a president. The quorum presidents collectively make up the Council of Presidents of Seventy. One of the presidents is chosen as the "Senior President of Seventy" and also serves on the World Church Leadership Council.

High Priest

Modeling Jesus as ministers of vision, high priests are ministers of vision, servant leaders who focus their ministry on sacrament, service, presiding, teaching, learning, spirituality, leadership, peace, and justice. There are several specialized callings within this office (see below—the offices of Bishop, Evangelist, Apostle, and President). Collectively the high priests comprise the Quorum of High Priests and are led by a quorum presidency.

Bishop

Modeling Jesus as ministers of generosity, bishops are high priests who focus their ministry on guiding the church in teaching and preaching the principles of *A Disciple's Generous Response*. The Presiding Bishopric presides over the Order of Bishops and is the presidency of the Aaronic priesthood. They provide support, training, and advocacy in empowering the Aaronic priesthood to respond to their calls to service. Bishops typically serve as financial officers for mission centers or apostolic fields (geographical areas comprised of several mission centers supervised by a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles).

Evangelist

Modeling Jesus as ministers of blessing, evangelists are high priests who are responsive to the reconciling and redeeming influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people as ministers of blessing. Evangelists also advise the church and confer spiritual blessings. The Presiding Evangelist presides over the Order of Evangelists. Ideally, the high priests called to this office are free of administrative responsibilities. Since 1985 when the first women were ordained to the priesthood, the name "evangelist" has been used to describe those holding this priesthood office. The blessing given is now known as the Evangelist's Blessing, rather than Patriarchal Blessing.

Apostle

Modeling Jesus as ministers of worldwide mission, apostles are high priests, and comprise the Council of Twelve Apostles, which has primary responsibility for the church's missionary outreach. Apostles manage the work of the church in "fields" and oversee the quorums of seventy in missionary work. One of the apostles is set apart as president of the council, and one serves as secretary of the council.

President

Modeling Jesus as ministers of prophetic vision, the leading quorum of the church is the three-member First Presidency. The president of the church and two counselors hold the office of high priest, but are also ordained to the office of president. Only one of these is the President of the Church, who is also president of the quorum of the First Presidency. Each member of the First Presidency is referred to by the title “president.” The First Presidency presides over the entire denomination or World Church.

Administratively, there are many presidents within the church. These include congregational presidents (pastors), presidents of large jurisdictions of the church (mission centers), and presidents of World Church priesthood quorums (Council of Twelve Apostles, Quorum of High Priests, Presiding Bishop, Presiding Evangelist, Quorums of Seventy). However, only members of the First Presidency are ordained to the priesthood office of president.



Also, the President of the Church holds the priesthood office of prophet. The prophet-president bears the responsibility of bringing revelatory instruction to the church. Only the President of the Church is sustained as a prophet, seer, and revelator. The First Presidency is the chief interpreter of Scripture on behalf of the church and has final responsibility for church administration.

Discussion Question

Referencing the “Ministry and Priesthood: Serving Together to Fulfill Christ’s Mission” brochure (see link below), or based on what you read in this lesson, what additional questions do you have about the offices, or the process of call, acceptance, approval, education, and ordination do you have?

Describe the characteristics you would expect to find in a congregation who faithfully lives out the Enduring Principle “All are Called.”



Expectations of Priesthood

Priesthood faithfulness begins with faithful discipleship. Faithful discipleship emerges from ongoing faith and spiritual formation. The constant call is to follow the Living Christ and to abide in increasing measure in God's love and vision for creation. Being comes before doing. The following Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry are expectations that apply to all priesthood members and ordinands and support a life of serving as a faithful priesthood member.

Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry

In response to God's sacred call and priesthood authority granted by Community of Christ, each priesthood member covenants to:

- Engage in ongoing faith and spiritual practices to deepen their relationship with God and others through study and spiritual formation.
- Affirm and promote Christ's mission of invitation, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking; helping prepare others for Christ's mission; and partnering with other priesthood in leading congregations in Christ's mission.
- Provide ministry consistent with the church's identity, mission, message, and beliefs as expressed in Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs and other current official documents.
- Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle.
- Model generosity as a regular contributor to mission tithes (local, mission center, and worldwide ministries), according to my true capacity.
- Protect the safety and well-being of children and youth, including, where applicable, being a Registered Children and Youth Worker.
- Actively participate in congregational life or similar church expressions when congregational life is not available.
- Participate annually in educational or spiritual-formation experiences offered by their congregation, mission center, apostolic mission field, or World Church.
- Develop and implement a plan for ministry that uses my gifts to advance Christ's mission.



Principles

Established core principles inform the essence of priesthood ministry. Mutual understandings of these principles provide clarity about expectations for both supervising administrative officers (pastors, mission center presidents, apostles) and priesthood. These principles and mutual understandings help disciples (members and friends) and priesthood form a deeper awareness of the essential ministry priesthood bring into the life of the church and its mission.

- a. All disciples “are called according to the gifts of God unto them” (Doctrine and Covenants 119:8b). Some are called to priesthood ministry as a focus of their call as disciples.
- b. The priesthood should “be made up of those who have an abiding faith and desire to serve [God] with all their hearts, in humility and with great devotion” (Doctrine and Covenants 156:8a).
- c. “Priesthood is a sacred covenant involving the highest form of stewardship of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. The priesthood shall be composed of people of humility and integrity who are willing to extend themselves in service for others and for the well-being of the faith community” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:6a).
- d. Priesthood members are expected “to continually magnify their callings through spiritual growth, study, exemplary generosity, ethical choices, and fully accountable ministry” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:6c).

- e. God “ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in...Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:6a).
- f. Church policies “provide a clear way for disciples to respond to [priesthood] calling. They also define the difference between a sense of call as potential and the need to align one’s life with principles of moral behavior and relationships that promote the well-being of the church community” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:4b).
- g. All presiding administrative church officers should uphold the “worth and giftedness” of all persons impacted by administrative actions and “protect the most vulnerable” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:6).



Mutual Understandings

- a. Priesthood members agree to serve according to the church’s expectations for Christian and ministerial conduct and to uphold the current version of Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry.
- b. Priesthood members provide affirmative ministry consistent with current versions of the church’s official documents such as the current version of Sharing in Community of Christ. When there is personal disagreement with a position, priesthood members are guided by Faithful Disagreement: Definition and Principles.
- c. A priesthood member can be released from priesthood by presiding administrative church officers for established causes outlined below.
- d. Releasing a priesthood member for cause is an administrative action that does not affect church membership.

e. Administrative policies and procedures should assure that a priesthood member subject to release:

- Is informed of the allegations in writing. Where possible, personal contact by the presiding administrative church officer is encouraged.
- Has reasonable time to consider the allegations.
- Has opportunity to resolve the relevant issues, if possible and appropriate, before administrative action is taken.
- Has opportunity to appeal the decision to release for cause to the next- higher presiding administrative church officer.
- All priesthood status changes will be reported to the World Church secretary through established procedures.



Causes for Release

1. Conviction of a serious crime as defined by applicable laws (of the land).
2. Deliberate disregard of church law as expressed through church bylaws, relevant World Conference Resolutions, First Presidency official rulings, and current World Church policies and established practices.
3. Failure to model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle, or demonstrated complete disregard for the principles of ministerial conduct (for example adultery, abuse of alcohol or drugs).
4. Deliberate disregard of the properly exercised authority, action, or direction of a presiding administrative church officer.
5. False, misleading, or malicious statements meant to harm the church. This includes print, broadcast, and social media (electronic) communications.

6. Deliberate failure to preserve confidential information given with the expectation of ministerial confidentiality, with the understanding that reporting mandated by law or when physical harm of self or others is likely are exceptions.

7. Such other disregard for the principles of ministerial conduct as may result in the loss of power and standing to minister effectively.

An additional cause is priesthood inactive status for at least three years.



Priesthood Status Categories

One of the church's roles is to support and equip priesthood members for meaningful and effective ministry. This support includes priesthood status categories that encourage faithfulness and respond to changing personal circumstances. The categories are as follows.

1. Active

- Active priesthood members engage in ministry and embody the "Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry" (see page 60).

2. Leave

- The leave category supports wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. It is for priesthood members who need rest, renewal, healing, or a concentrated time of education and development. Leave is appropriate when a priesthood member needs a break from priesthood ministry and responsibilities with the clear intent of returning to active ministry.
- Leave also is appropriate when a priesthood member has significant personal burdens or stresses that are best managed by stepping away from priesthood ministry for a time with the clear intent of returning to active ministry.

- Leave is appropriate, but not mandatory, during dissolution of marriage, unless the divorce petition alleges illegal conduct or unchristian behavior that could cause release from priesthood if proven true. If such conduct is alleged, see the suspension category.
- Leave is requested by a priesthood member and approved by the supervising administrative officer for up to one year.
- A priesthood member on leave does not participate in public or sacramental ministry without prior approval by the supervising administrative officer. A priesthood member on leave retains her or his priesthood certificate.
- Leave is not available when there are allegations of illegal conduct or unchristian behavior that could cause release from priesthood if proven true. If such conduct is alleged, see the suspension category.

3. Emeritus

- The emeritus category recognizes and honors long and faithful service curtailed by health or age-related conditions. This category is requested in writing by the priesthood member and approved by the supervising administrative officer. However, the supervising administrative officer may suggest it as a pastoral consideration.
- A priesthood member emeritus does not participate regularly in public or sacramental ministry. A priesthood member emeritus occasionally may participate in public or sacramental ministry with prior approval of the supervising minister.
- The proper title for a priesthood member in this category is the name of the priesthood office plus emeritus. For example: Elder Emeritus or Priest Emeritus.
- A priesthood member emeritus retains his or her priesthood certificate.

4. Suspension

- Suspension removes from active ministry priesthood members who are facing legal charges or accusations of unchristian conduct that may adversely affect ministry or make it unacceptable to a congregation or the World Church.
- Suspension is applied by the supervising administrative officer and lasts up to one year.
- During suspension, a priesthood member does not participate in priesthood ministry. If charges or accusations have not been resolved after one year, suspension may be extended in six-month increments.
- Suspension provides time to address charges or allegations that may or may not be valid. No assumptions are made about guilt or innocence until proceedings officially conclude.
- This category helps protect the suspended priesthood member, congregation, mission center, and World Church from certain risks. As an example, a serious allegation leading to conviction could put the church at risk if a person were allowed to remain in active priesthood ministry during an investigation or trial.
- A priesthood member in the suspension category retains his or her priesthood certificate.
- If a legal proceeding results in a conviction of a serious crime defined by applicable laws, or if other behaviors such as misuse or abuse of priesthood privileges or disregard for the principles of ministerial conduct result in the loss of capacity to minister effectively, the priesthood member should be released for cause. Refer to WCR 1316 and Procedures for Priesthood Release for Cause.
- A decision to place a priesthood member in the suspension category may be appealed according to established procedures.

5. Inactive

- If a priesthood member is not active, the initial and ongoing response should be pastoral ministry to encourage participation. A supervising administrative officer should determine, if possible, the reason for inactivity and provide pastoral ministry. Perhaps a category like leave or emeritus is more appropriate.
- Some situations that cause extended priesthood inactivity are not easily resolved or result from a loss of sense of priesthood calling. In these instances, it is proper to assign the priesthood member to the inactive category.
- A priesthood member may request, in writing, to be placed in the inactive category. Also, a supervising administrative officer may assign a priesthood member to this category. A priesthood member may remain in the inactive category up to three years. After three years in the inactive category, the supervising administrative officer acts to release the priesthood member for inactivity.
- A priesthood member in the **inactive** category does not participate in public and sacramental ministry without the prior approval of the supervising administrative officer.
- The **inactive** category is for:
 - A priesthood member who does not want to continue in active priesthood ministry and has no desire to return to active priesthood ministry in the foreseeable future. This priesthood member also can request **release without cause**.
 - A priesthood member who is not participating in the life of Community of Christ and who has no plans to do so in the foreseeable future.
 - A priesthood member who becomes “unknown” to the church because of a lack of response to communications and opportunities to express continuing commitment.
- An **inactive** priesthood member retains her or his priesthood certificate.
- A priesthood member **may** be returned to active status by personal request and action by the presiding officer.

6. Release

- Release removes priesthood authority, responsibilities, rights, and expectations. This category does not change membership status. Released priesthood members are church members in good standing unless they are excommunicated or expelled through other proceedings.
- A priesthood member is released by action of the supervising administrative officer according to established procedures. There are three kinds of release:
 - Release without Cause: Changing life circumstances or personal conscience may lead a priesthood member to conclude the need to be released from priesthood. Release without cause happens by request of the priesthood member and action by the presiding officer. Presiding officers may suggest the advisability of release as part of a decision-making process. However, someone should not be released without cause if release for cause is required.
 - Release for Cause: A presiding officer may remove a priesthood member's authority to function as an ordained minister for cause. See pages 61 and 62.
 - Release for Inactivity: An additional cause for release is priesthood inactive status for at least three years.
- A person released without cause, released for cause, or released for inactivity from priesthood does not retain a priesthood certificate.
- Release for cause or for inactivity may be appealed according to established procedures.

Return to a Priesthood Office Previously Held

At times and for specific reasons active priesthood members may request to set aside their current office and be reinstated to a priesthood office previously held. This is achieved by personal request and action by the supervising administrative officer. Reinstatement to a priesthood office previously held does not require re-ordination. A new priesthood certificate will be provided when the action is reported.

Reinstatement of a Priesthood Office Set Aside

A priesthood member may be reinstated to a priesthood office that was set aside for the purpose of returning to a previously held priesthood office. This is achieved through personal request and approvals of supervising administrative officers in the administrative line according to established procedures. Reinstatement does not require re-ordination. A new priesthood certificate will be issued when an approved action is reported to the World Church secretary.

Reinstatement of Released Ministers

A person who has been released from the priesthood may be reinstated to any office previously held. Initiation of such requests comes from the released person or from the pastor, after determining the commitment and personal stability of the individual and the acceptability of his or her ministry. The pastor discusses this step with the mission center president and then requests the First Presidency to provide information from the file, including a list of offices previously held. With this information in hand, the pastor meets with the individual to determine if there is a willingness to accept a return to priesthood responsibility and to a specific office.

The released priesthood member and the pastor both write letters requesting reinstatement and enclosing all pertinent information. These are forwarded to the mission center president and transmitted through the administrative line for approval at each level. When the First Presidency takes favorable action, a new license is issued and sent to the mission center president for delivery to the member. The minister is not re-ordained.

If a call to an office never held by the released priesthood member is in prospect, it should be handled exactly the same way that a new call for any other person is processed. Administrative reinstatement is not appropriate in this case.

Discussion Question

What questions or concerns do you have about the principles for priesthood faithfulness, expectations of priesthood conduct, or priesthood status categories?

Resources

Lesson 8

Discussion Questions

1. How does priesthood in Community of Christ feel familiar to you? How does it feel different?
2. As you consider the role of priesthood in Community of Christ and who is eligible to serve in ordained ministry, what sense of loss do you feel? What sense of gain do you experience? (Naming the process of letting go and embracing is important to all faith journeys and transitions.)
3. Referencing the “Ministry and Priesthood: Serving Together to Fulfill Christ’s Mission” brochure (see link below), or based on what you read in this lesson, what additional questions do you have about the offices, or the process of call, acceptance, approval, education, and ordination do you have?
4. Describe the characteristics you would expect to find in a congregation who faithfully lives out the Enduring Principle “All are Called.”
5. What questions or concerns do you have about the principles for priesthood faithfulness, expectations of priesthood conduct, or priesthood status categories?

Learn More

1. [Ministry and Priesthood: Serving Together to Fulfill Christ’s Mission](#)
2. Project Zion Podcast | [Priesthood Authority](#) | John Hamer
3. Project Zion Podcast | [Priesthood in Community of Christ](#) | Janné Grover
4. The nuance of Community of Christ culture and the tradition of how calls to priesthood are discerned and processed. Contact President of Seventy Karin Peter (kpeter@cofchrist.org).
5. Ministry of the Disciple, All Are Called: (link TBD)

Revelation and Scripture

Lesson 9



Continuing Revelation

One of Community of Christ's nine Enduring Principles

- *Scripture is an inspired and indispensable witness of human response to God's revelation of divine nature.*
- *God graciously reveals divine will today as in the past.*
- *The Holy Spirit inspires and provides witness to divine truth.*
- *In humility, individually and in community, we prayerfully listen to understand God's will for our lives, the church, and creation more completely*

Discussion Question

How has modern day revelation been important to your faith journey?

One of the significant teachings of Community of Christ is that the canon of scripture is not closed—that God continues to direct the church through revelation to the prophet. Over the years, Community of Christ has progressed in its understanding of revelation from a plenary or direct ("mouthpiece") experience, to viewing revelation as conceptual, or as an encounter with God, which requires interpretation by the recipient.

⁴⁵ "We Share Enduring Principles," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 12.

One writer noted, “One of the most troublesome complexities is evident when looking at the Doctrine and Covenants.” Although scholars are able to place the revelations within their historical and cultural contexts, in the Doctrine and Covenants one finds an

“...experience of God’s guidance so expressed as to indicate that the guidance is direct and propositional. The first person language, the indications of the prophet being directed to write, the content of the documents (often informational), all give the impression that revelation is an experience in which God gives persons direct answers to specific questions.”⁴⁶

Further complicating an unmediated process of revelation—where a prophet is understood to be prophesying in a vacuum, the words being directly and only from God and never to be changed or rewritten—scholars have discovered numerous changes in the wording of many early revelations brought to the church. This is especially present in the Doctrine and Covenants but also occurs in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith made extensive changes in several revelations, some published before Smith made the edits, which clearly shows the conceptual and sometimes fluid nature of revelation.

Discussion Question

Read the following statements from this chapter. What connection do you see between these two statements?

- Over the years, Community of Christ has progressed in its understanding of revelation from a plenary or direct (mouthpiece) experience, to viewing revelation as conceptual, or as an encounter with God, which requires interpretation by the recipient.
- The Prophet Joseph Smith extensively changed several revelations, some of which were previously published, which shows clearly the conceptual nature of revelation.

⁴⁶ Sharon Welch, “Revelation in the Restoration Movement,” Christian Education Commission, ed. 1985. Restoration: A People Growing. Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 95-96.

Community of Christ members now realize that critical examination of the scriptures in light of the time, context, and culture in which they were written helps us understand the content of the written revelations and interpret them according to current circumstances and contexts. This realization helps us to understand how the Prophet Joseph Smith was able to change the documents:

[Church Historian Emeritus] Richard Howard suggests that because of Joseph's sensitivity to both the events of history and "continued striving of the Spirit of God" he was motivated to reinterpret his understanding of the principles and procedures that were most appropriate for the church. Such modification may indicate that, far from being infallible, the prophet is required to interpret the will of God in light of his own understanding, an understanding that grows and changes. Modification may also be necessary because the revelatory experience is one in which the prophet is challenged to interpret the will of God with the contemporary situation, not for all time.⁴⁷

Discussion Question

Read and discuss the preceding statement.

The prophet-president of Community of Christ presents documents in which the will of God is expressed. Although individuals and local church leaders may receive personal enlightenment to guide them in their daily affairs or administrative work, only the prophet is able to present revelations to and for the entire church. It is important to note that the church follows a specific process of checks and balances to ensure the integrity and divinity of anything added to the Doctrine and Covenants. Personal discernment takes place consistent with a disciple's spiritual practices and is not considered to be revelatory in the same way that the prophet-president receives revelation

⁴⁷ Ibid, 98.

on behalf of the church. Likewise, scripture, church by-laws, polity, policy, priesthood/member/discipleship ethics, tradition, reason, experience, and the common welfare of all concerned are held in balance to guard the safe keeping of the most vulnerable among us.

Before a document is accepted from the prophet-president as God's will and ordered to be included in the scriptural canon, the document is presented to the church by the prophet for the sustaining vote of the membership. This traditionally takes place at World Conference. The practice of letting the membership show their support and witness is in harmony of the principle of "common consent" requiring that "all things shall be done by common consent in the church by much prayer and faith."⁴⁸ This practice has strong historical precedent in the Restoration, having been done in 1835 prior to the publication of the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Both Community of Christ and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have followed this practice subsequently on many occasions.⁴⁹



48 D&C 25:1b (LDS D&C 26:2).

49 At a general conference in Utah in August 1852, Joseph Smith's revelation on polygamy (now LDS Doctrine and Covenants 132) was publicly presented for the first time, voted on, and officially adopted as a revelation. The same procedure was followed in 1880 when the LDS Church made the Pearl of Great Price its fourth book of scripture. Again, in 1890 when polygamy was ended, a vote of the conference was called, followed in 1902 by the presentation and canonization of a revised version of the Pearl of Great Price. The same canonization procedure was followed in 1976 when an 1836 vision of Joseph Smith Jr. and a 1918 vision of Joseph F. Smith canonized by conference vote and added to the Pearl of Great Price, then moved to the Doctrine and Covenants in 1979. The same procedure was followed in 1978 when Spencer W. Kimball's announcement on giving priesthood to "all worthy male members" was presented to the conference of the church and voted on.



Scriptures

Instruction brought to the church in 2007, now canonized as section 163 of the Doctrine and Covenants, underscores scripture's importance, its purposes and its meaning:

- 7 a. Scripture is an indispensable witness to the Eternal Source of light and truth, which cannot be fully contained in any finite vessel or language. Scripture has been written and shaped by human authors through experiences of revelation and ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the midst of time and culture.
- b. Scripture is not to be worshiped or idolized. Only God, the Eternal One of whom scripture testifies, is worthy of worship. God's nature, as revealed in Jesus Christ and affirmed by the Holy Spirit, provides the ultimate standard by which any portion of scripture should be interpreted and applied.
- c. It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings. Much physical and emotional violence has been done to some of God's beloved children through the misuse of scripture. The church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices.
- d. Scripture, prophetic guidance, knowledge, and discernment in the faith community must walk hand in hand to reveal the true will of God. Follow this pathway, which is the way of the Living Christ, and you will discover more than sufficient light for the journey ahead.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:7a-d

Discussion Question

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:7a-d. How does this section connect with your view of scripture? How does it expand your perspective of scripture?



We do not believe in scripture, but in the God to Whom scripture points. There are three books of scripture that have canonical status in Community of Christ. These scriptures are the standard by which doctrine and church government are formulated. Collectively, these three books are called the "Standard Books" (in contrast to the "Standard Works" in the LDS tradition).

Community of Christ traditionally used what is known as the Inspired Version of the Bible, but strongly encourages its members to use the most up-to-date translations produced by trusted biblical scholars. In the United States, many Community of Christ members find the "New Revised Standard Version" of the Bible to be useful.⁵⁰ The Inspired Version is known in the LDS Church as the JST or "Joseph Smith Translation." This edition of the Bible is based on the King James Version, and was edited by Joseph Smith Jr. who claimed to have received divine guidance through the Spirit of revelation and inspiration. He did not publish this book during his lifetime. However, it was published in the late 1860s by his son Joseph Smith III who succeeded him as prophet-president of the church.



⁵⁰ October 13, 2021, the NCC Governing Board approved the Updated Edition of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSVue) of the Bible, which is considered the most meticulously researched, rigorously reviewed, and faithfully accurate English-language Bible translation. The process began in 2017 when the NCC commissioned the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) to conduct a review and update of the 1989 New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV). Find NRSVue at <https://friendshippress.org/nrsv-updated-edition/>.

The Book of Mormon is a "Standard Book" of scripture in Community of Christ. In the official statement "Scripture in Community of Christ,"⁵¹ Affirmation Nine states:

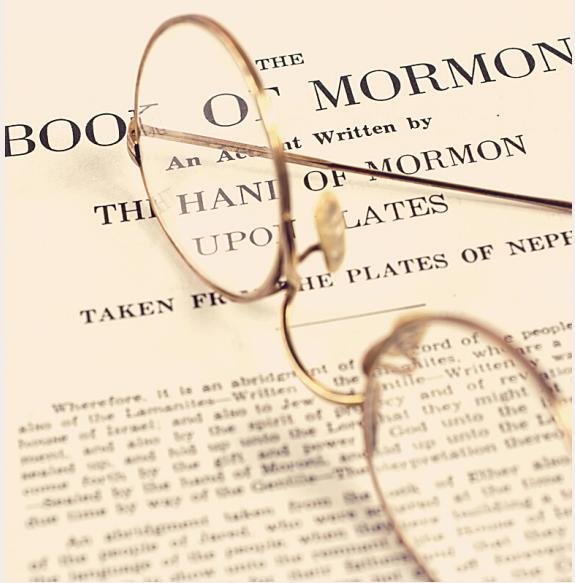
With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We do not use these sacred writings to replace the witness of the Bible or improve upon it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God (Preface of the Book of Mormon; Doctrine and Covenants 76:3g). We have heard Christ speak in all three books of scripture, and bear witness that he is "alive forever and ever" (Revelation 1:18).

Noting that 19th century readers of the Book of Mormon read it in a "literal or 'plain sense' way," Community of Christ President Stephen M. Veazey stated in 2009: "Over time, more historical, scriptural, and scientific evidence became available. New methods and tools for exploring the scriptures were developed. As a result, the Book of Mormon, like the Bible, became the subject of much-closer examination." President Veazey concludes that while "a spectrum of belief" exists "in the church" today "about the Book of Mormon,"

It seems the Book of Mormon defies any simple explanation or theory. The book invites the reader to explore the gospel of Christ with the spiritual eyes of faith in an increasingly skeptical age. The Book of Mormon's witness of Christ is not finally dependent on external confirmation, such as archeological evidence, but on the witness of the Spirit in the faith community. Beliefs about the Book of Mormon are matters of personal conscience and faith. However, it is important to remember that we are not called to believe in a book; we are called to believe in and worship the Living God revealed in Jesus Christ.⁵²

⁵¹ All of "Scripture in Community in Christ" may be read online at www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/scripture.asp.

⁵¹ Stephen M. Veazey, "Facing our Challenges: Questions and Answers (Part Two)," Herald 156:7 (July 2009), 13. **119**



church. The texts of all published editions are generally identical. There are some slight variations due to wording differences present in the three editions of the Book of Mormon published during Joseph Smith Jr.'s lifetime. Community of Christ publishes two editions of the book. The 1908 "authorized version" maintains traditional wording. The second version of the Book of Mormon (known as the Revised Authorized Version, RAV, or 1966 Edition) updated antiquated words and phraseology to reflect more current language usage. It increases the readability of the text, although it is not a paraphrased or condensed version.

As with the Bible, Community of Christ does not believe in the Book of Mormon but in God to Whom it points. We uphold the Book of Mormon in our canon—and regardless of its source, consider its content to be scripture.

Questions often arise about the differences between editions of the Book of Mormon published by Community of Christ and those published by the LDS

church. The texts of all published editions are generally identical. There are some slight variations due to wording differences present in the three

The Book of Moses

The Book of Moses is found in Genesis in the Inspired Version of the Bible, as well as in two sections of the Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants.

The book known as Joseph Smith-History, which relates to the First Vision and organization of the church, can be found in Community of Christ historical records.

Matthew 24 is from the Inspired Version of the Bible. And the Articles of Faith, a brief statement of belief drawn from a letter written by the Prophet Joseph Smith can be found in historical records and publications of Community of Christ.

The Book of Abraham has no place in Community of Christ canon. It is historically problematic and contains teachings which cannot be reconciled with other scriptures.

The main differences between various editions of the Book of Mormon pertain to chapter and verse numbering. Chapter and versification systems developed independently long after the two churches went their separate ways. Community of Christ editions of the book, maintained the chapters as identified in the 1830 first edition and added verse numbers later, which were absent in the first edition.

Discussion Question

Discuss and explore the implications of the following statement:

- “Beliefs about the Book of Mormon are matters of personal conscience and faith. However, it is important to remember that we are not called to believe in a book; we are called to believe in and worship the Living God revealed in Jesus Christ” (President Stephen M. Veazey, Herald 156:7 (July 2009), 13).

How does the following statement connect with your perspective on the Book of Mormon?

- “As with the Bible, Community of Christ does not believe in the Book of Mormon but in the God to whom it points.”

A third book of scripture common to both churches is the Doctrine and Covenants. This volume contains the revelations brought to the church by the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors. Community of Christ, as of 2022, has 165 sections in its Doctrine and Covenants.

Several sections attributed to Joseph Smith Jr. are present in the LDS version, which are not found in Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants. Some are published in the historical records of Community of Christ; others contain disputed doctrinal innovations. A few revelations and other documents from Joseph Smith Jr.’s presidency are present in the Community of Christ edition and not in the LDS edition. Section numbers differ due to the separate development trajectory of the Doctrine and Covenants since 1844.

The Pearl of Great Price was first published as a missionary tract for the LDS church in 1851. The LDS church canonized it as a fourth book of scripture in 1880. Most of the current content of the Pearl of Great Price is present in various Community of Christ canon (Inspired Version of the Bible/JST) or historical records.

Revelation

We affirm the Living God is ever self-revealing. God is revealed to the world in the testimony of Israel, and above all in Jesus Christ. By the Holy Spirit we continue to hear God speaking today. The church is called to listen together for what the Spirit is saying and then faithfully respond.

Scripture

Scripture is writing inspired by God's Spirit and accepted by the church as the normative expression of its identity, message, and mission. We affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants—not to replace the witness of the Bible or improve on it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God. When responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied, scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for our discipleship.

Resources

Lesson 9

Discussion Questions

1. How has modern day revelation been important to your faith journey?
2. Read the following statements from this chapter. What connection do you see between these two statements?
 - Over the years, Community of Christ has progressed in its understanding of revelation from a plenary or direct (mouthpiece) experience, to viewing revelation as conceptual, or as an encounter with God, which requires interpretation by the recipient.
 - The Prophet Joseph Smith extensively changed several revelations, some of which were previously published, which shows clearly the conceptual nature of revelation.
3. Read and discuss the following statement:
 - [Church Historian Emeritus] Richard Howard suggests that because of Joseph's sensitivity to both the events of history and "continued striving of the Spirit of God" he was motivated to reinterpret his understanding of the principles and procedures that were most appropriate for the church. Such modification may indicate that, far from being infallible, the prophet is required to interpret the will of God in light of his own understanding, an understanding that grows and changes. Modification may also be necessary because the revelatory experience is one in which the prophet is challenged to interpret the will of God with the contemporary situation, not for all time.
4. Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:7a-d. How does this section connect with your view of scripture? How does it expand your perspective of scripture?
5. Discuss and explore the implications of the following statement:
 - "Beliefs about the Book of Mormon are matters of personal conscience and faith. However, it is important to remember that we are not called to believe in a book; we are called to believe in and worship the Living God revealed in Jesus Christ" (President Stephen M. Veazey, Herald 156:7 (July 2009), 13).
6. How does the following statement connect with your perspective on the Book of Mormon?
 - "As with the Bible, Community of Christ does not believe in the Book of Mormon but in the God to whom it points."

Learn More

1. [Statement on Scripture](#)
2. Project Zion Podcast | [Percolating on Faith](#) | What is Scripture
3. [The Book of Mormon and Community of Christ's Mission Initiatives](#)
4. The Book of Mormon's Witness to its First Readers, by Dale E. Luffman, Community of Christ Seminary Press (June 20, 2017).
5. Doctrine and Covenants Comparison (Community of Christ and LDS editions): (link TBD)
6. Project Zion Podcast | [Percolating on Faith](#) | Book of Mormon

Discipleship in Community of Christ

Lesson 10



Discipleship

A disciple is one who is disciplined to the teachings of a master. While followers of Jesus have been referred to by many names, in Community of Christ we call each other “disciples,” which is the most basic term given in scripture. To be a disciple means that we are Christians in more than name only. Disciples are people whose lives are transformed as they

continually seek to pattern, in their daily lives, the example and teachings of Jesus Christ.



First Steps

Becoming a disciple in Community of Christ begins with a few simple steps.

- Listen to the still small voice that whispers to you. Each person’s journey is different and finding a spiritual home in Community of Christ doesn’t mean everything is suddenly clear and all doubts disappear. It’s more a sense of connection to the way of life Jesus

walked and taking the journey with a people who proclaim his name and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

- Be involved with a congregation, taking part in activities that help you learn, grow, and serve others.



- Learn more about the church, and how you can follow the teachings of Jesus as you experience its sacraments and engage in the mission of Jesus Christ; spend time in conversation with a church member or member of the priesthood. Pay attention to your questions and doubts, they are important and welcome as we journey together.

- Be baptized and/or confirmed into the fellowship of Community of Christ; experience the blessings of community anew.
- Accept God's unconditional love for you and continue the journey of faith seeking understanding in ways that best nurtures your relationship with the divine. Following baptism and/or confirmation, you are encouraged to more fully explore your participation in the life of the congregation, experiencing worship, education, and fellowship designed to provide ongoing support on your path of discipleship, mission, and making a difference in the world.



Discussion Question

Where do you find yourself at this point on your journey of discipleship?
How has being a disciple transformed your life?



Engaging Further in the Mission of the Church

Discipleship in Community of Christ centers around our mission statement: “We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.”⁵³ Seeking ways to reflect this mission in your daily life will lead you on a journey of spiritual growth and transformation. We invite you to travel the path of discipleship by engaging in the mission of the Church.

Community of Christ has five Mission Initiatives that reflect the whole mission of Christ to redeem the world.

Invite People to Christ

Disciples of Jesus Christ are both invited and called to invite others. The New Testament tells the amazing story of Andrew who was barely a disciple when he invited his brother Simon (who later became Peter) to follow Christ (John 1:38-42).

Mission Initiatives

- Invite People to Christ
 - Christ’s call to share his peace with the world
- Abolish Poverty, End Suffering
 - Christ’s mission of compassion
- Pursue Peace on Earth
 - Christ’s mission of justice and peace
- Develop Disciples to Serve
 - Christ’s mission experienced in your individual life
- Experience Congregations Engaged in Mission
 - Christ’s mission experienced in your congregation

You are invited to commit or recommit your life to following Jesus Christ in the fellowship and mission of Community of Christ. You are also encouraged to invite others to “come and see.” Community of Christ partners with members, friends, and seekers, as well as ecumenical,

⁵³ “We Share a Mission,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 8.

interfaith, non-profit, and civic organizations to build communities of joy, hope, love, and peace and realize the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Abolish Poverty, End Suffering

The Doctrine and Covenants tells us:

And remember in all things, the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple

Doctrine and Covenants 52:9c/LDS 52:40

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ enriches our lives and creates a deep sense of satisfaction. Because we have been given much, we want to share our time, treasure, and talent so we can abolish poverty and end suffering worldwide.

- Listen to the needs of others and learn what resources are available through the church and beyond—as we listen to others, we learn which programs or experiences might be of value in their lives. We also learn how Christ might be able to change their lives for the better and are able to share His peace.
- Prioritize your spending in a way that provides for money that can be given away—when we live in such a way, we honor our deepest values.
- Honor God’s call to tithe through A Disciple’s Generous Response—this is a generous, tangible response to God’s grace and love, which helps meet the needs of an active church, as we work together to bring hope and healing to our world.



Pursue Peace on Earth

We are called to bring peace and justice to our world.

- Seek peace within yourself through spiritual disciplines. Invite the Spirit into your lives during the everyday moments: as you breathe, go for a walk, or when you share a meal with family and friends. Learn to pray always, that God's Spirit might always be with you. When we experience peace within ourselves, we are more able to share peace with others.
- Disciples learn how to bring peace to circumstances where conflict threatens to disrupt communities and relationships. Draw upon the resources of your congregation and the knowledge and experience of its members, especially the Teachers in the Aaronic priesthood, to learn to use conflict-resolution skills and engage in ministries of reconciliation.
- Look for opportunities in your local community to join with like-minded people committed to peace and justice. If these opportunities do not exist, develop new pathways for peace. Be God's voice for good in the world!

Develop Disciples to Serve

A disciple seeks to know God. The scriptures promise that God is always present and available to us. There are several things we can do to invite the Holy Spirit and realize God's presence in our lives.

- Engage in personal worship and pray regularly—disciples seek to be with God in times of quiet reflection.
- Seek inspiration and comfort from the scriptures—reading the scriptures is a way to learn more about God and the guidelines for better living.
- Study all good books—knowledge of God can be found in many places, so reading good books can make us disciples that are more effective.
- Volunteer and serve within your community—by serving others, we serve Christ. Food pantries, outreach to the unhoused, ministry with and for single parents or foster children, and LGBTQIA+ outreach are all ways Community of Christ congregations serve in their community.

Experience Congregations Engaged in Mission

A disciple is a member of a community of disciples. By working and sharing together, we experience a deeper understanding of who God calls us to be.

- Engage in worship regularly with your congregation—disciples help one another come to know God.
- Embrace diversity—no two of us are alike, and we gain strength through our differences as well as through our likenesses with others.
- Share in congregational activities—through sharing together, we come to deeper understandings of our discipleship.
- Volunteer for specific tasks—we learn more about our discipleship as we try new things.
- Share in educational experiences available in your congregation—disciples seek to help one another in their learning.

Discussion Questions

How has your connection to congregational life helped you learn, grow, and serve others (in a Community of Christ congregation or in another denomination)?

In Community of Christ disciples are called to be peacemakers. Think of someone you know who has lived the life of a peacemaker. How were they like Jesus?

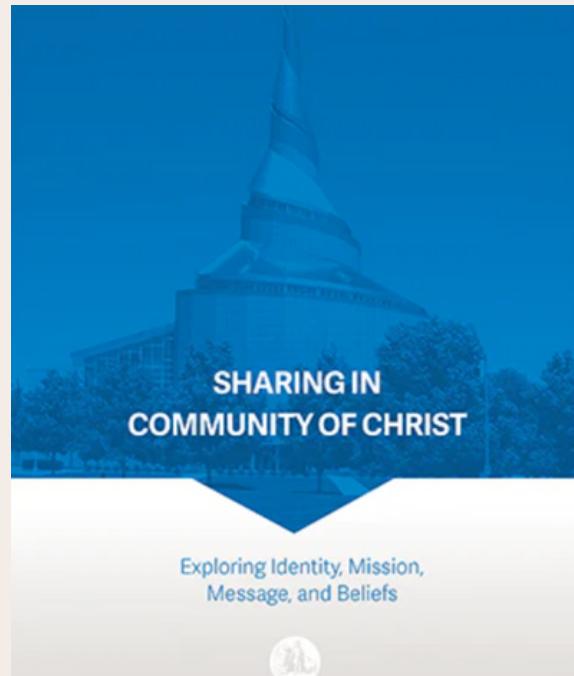
Describe specific ways you have observed faithful disciples sharing their time, talent, treasure, or testimony (tells others about how God is moving in their life in transforming ways).



Learning More about Community of Christ's Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs

In the spirit of the Restoration, Community of Christ faithfully continues the discipline of listening to God and discerning God's call. In recent years, part of that journey has included a focused effort to clarify church identity, mission, and message. In February 2009, the First Presidency introduced a document titled "We Share: Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs." That document was the

result of a collaborative effort among representatives of the worldwide church and church leaders. The contents of that document, with other supporting information, were published in 2010 as *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*. If you are interested in learning even more about Community of Christ, ask a member of the church or priesthood member for a copy of *Sharing in Community of Christ*, now in its fourth edition (as of 2018).



Discussion Questions

What types of activities or practices help you connect with the Holy Spirit?

How might the practice of "embracing diversity" have an impact on congregational life? In the neighborhood and city where you live?

The Word of Wisdom as Enduring Principle

The "Word of Wisdom" is the common name used to refer to Doctrine and Covenants 86 (LDS 89). Members of Community of Christ understand the Word of Wisdom as it was originally given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, and described in its preface, to be a guide for healthy living. The Word of Wisdom is not a commandment, a test of fellowship or faith. In this perspective, the strict practice and observance of guidance found in Doctrine and Covenants 86 is not a precondition to baptism, confirmation, membership in good standing, or fellowship with Community of Christ.

Applicable to the priesthood, but certainly wise counsel to all, Joseph Smith III presented the following inspired counsel in 1887: "Avoid the use of tobacco and be not addicted to strong drink in any form, that your counsel to be temperate may be made effectual by your example" (D&C 119:3d). Being temperate and avoiding addiction in all its forms frees our souls to receive more fully the Spirit.

Rather than impose a strict code of conduct, Community of Christ invites members to live a life modeling responsible choice. Seen as a core value and foundational concept, "Responsible Choices" is one of Community of Christ's nine Enduring Principles and are detailed in Sharing in Community of Christ.



Responsible Choices

One of Community of Christ's nine Enduring Principles

- *God gives humans the ability to make choices about whom or what they will serve.*
- *Some people experience conditions that reduce their ability to make choices.*
- *Human choices contribute to good or evil in our lives and in the world.*
- *Many aspects of creation need redemption because of irresponsible and sinful human choices.*
- *We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God.*

Discussion Questions

What other things would you like to learn about Community of Christ, or being a disciple?

Studying “Sharing in Community of Christ and/or Of Water and Spirit are other avenues of exploration on your journey with Community of Christ (see links below)

Resources

Lesson 10

Discussion Questions

1. Where do you find yourself at this point on your journey of discipleship?
2. How has being a disciple transformed your life?
3. How has your connection to congregational life helped you learn, grow, and serve others (in a Community of Christ congregation or in another denomination)?
4. In Community of Christ disciples are called to be peacemakers. Think of someone you know who has lived the life of a peacemaker. How were they like Jesus?
5. Describe specific ways you have observed faithful disciples sharing their time, talent, treasure, or testimony (tells others about how God is moving in their life in transforming ways).
6. What types of activities or practices help you connect with the Holy Spirit?
7. How might the practice of “embracing diversity” have an impact on congregational life? In the neighborhood and city where you live?
8. What other things would you like to learn about Community of Christ, or being a disciple?
9. Studying “Sharing in Community of Christ and/or Of Water and Spirit are other avenues of exploration on your journey with Community of Christ (see links below)

Learn More

1. [Enduring Principles](#)
2. [Mission Initiatives](#)
3. Ministry of the Disciple, All Are Called (chapter 1): (link TBD)
4. [Ministry of the Disciple](#), Temple School course
5. [Sharing in Community of Christ](#)
6. [Of Water and Spirit](#)

Glossary of Terms

Christian Primitivism - Also known as Restorationism, Christian Primitivism focuses on restoring the Christian church to the early New Testament church as described in the book of Acts. Christian Primitivists believe the first century church practiced the truest form of Christ's teachings and seek to restore Christianity to its pure roots. The influence of Christian Primitivism in the United States can be seen in the First and Second Great Awakening. Early Saints of the Restoration took a similar position teaching that the beauty and power of Christ's message was lost in the creeds and theological arguments put forth in the centuries following Christ's ministry.

Christology - Christology is the study of Christ centered on the question, focuses on restoring the Christian church to the early New Testament church as described in the book of Acts. Christian Primitivists believe the first century church practiced the truest form of Christ's teachings and seek to restore Christianity to its pure roots. The influence of Christian Primitivism in the United States can be seen in the First and Second Great Awakening. Early Saints of the Restoration took a similar position teaching that the beauty and power of Christ's message was lost in the creeds and theological arguments put forth in the centuries following Christ's ministry.

Priesthood - Ordained ministers entrusted with the authority to act on behalf of the church. Ordination is a sacred covenant with God and the church. Priesthood members are ministers dedicated to creating sacred communities that prepare, equip, and send disciples in Christ's mission. They are called to serve in specific ministries and servant-leadership roles. Each role or office represents a different part of Jesus' ministry. Community of Christ priesthood offices include deacon, teacher, priest, elder, seventy, high priest, evangelist, bishop, and apostle. The offices of bishop, evangelist, and

Priesthood, cont'd - apostle are callings within the office of high priest. Sacramental ministry is only part of how priesthood serve in Community of Christ. Faithful priesthood ministers seek to live and model whole-life discipleship in ways that embody and live the concerns and passion of Jesus Christ. It is a way of life in service to others.

Prophet/Prophetic - These terms are often heard in reference to our prophet-president or in the phrase a “prophetic people” or “communities”. The prophet-president is not God’s mouthpiece on earth, rather, they focus on God’s vision for the church worldwide, and remind us to be prophetic ourselves. The term prophetic can refer to our ability as members and friends of the church to discern how we might reflect God’s nature as revealed in Jesus Christ speaking truth to power in order to effect systemic change and pursue peace. Being prophetic means seeking insight and listening together in our church communities both locally and globally, then living as ensigns of peace and advocates for justice across the world. Congregations express “local distinctive fashions while upholding a unity of vision, foundational beliefs, and mission throughout the world” (Doctrine and Covenants 163: 11a).

Reign of God - The vision we share is God’s vision of reconciliation, salvation, wholeness, justice, and peace expressed in the scriptural definition of shalom. Shalom means a fullness or completeness of peace. God yearns to establish a lasting covenant of peace with humankind and with all of creation. God’s vision of peace for creation was clearly revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who proclaimed the coming kingdom or peaceful reign of God on Earth. The gospel or “good news” was then entrusted to the church—the community of disciples called to be the body of Christ. As we strive to live like Jesus, creating radically inclusive, loving, and generous communities, we taste the Kin-dom of God (God’s reign) now, and faithfully journey into the fullness of God’s Kin-dom yet to be.

Repentance - The act of expressing regret and turning from sin. Its linguistic roots point to its theological meaning of a change of mind and life direction as evidence of repentance (Greek: metanoia). As such, repentance can be seen as a return to God and turning from things that distract or take us away. We actively work toward reconciling our relationship with the Divine, to be in harmony with God, self, and others.

Revelation - We affirm the Living God is ever self-revealing. God is revealed to the world in the testimony of Israel, and above all in Jesus Christ. By the Holy Spirit we continue to hear God speaking today. The church is called to listen together for what the Spirit is saying and then faithfully respond.

Sacraments - Sacraments (formerly called ordinances) are special ministries given to the church to convey the grace of Jesus Christ to his followers and all those he yearns to touch with his compassion. Community of Christ sacraments are baptism, confirmation, the Lord's Supper, marriage, blessing of children, laying on of hands for the sick, ordination to the priesthood, and the evangelist blessing. In these ministries, God sanctifies common elements of creation which serve as symbols representing God's living presence among us. The power of sacrament lies in the mystery of God's presence. Not in claims to authority, but through servant ministry joined with community to celebrate the sacraments of the church which bless human life, renew spirits, and prepare the church to pursue the peaceful kingdom of God. Sacraments draw us into an awareness of the Holy Spirit's presence and open space for encounters with God. These sacred events encompass many significant milestones on a spiritual journey. Except for ordination, Community of Christ sacraments are generously shared with all people, both members and friends. For more information about sacraments see *Sharing in Community: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs*.

Saints (Community of Christ) - The term “saints” was present in our name for many generations (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) and a common part of our lexicon. It was understood in the Biblical sense of referring to a holy people. Not particularly in a moral pious sense, but rather as a people specially marked or called out as God’s people. In that way it is related to our understanding of being a peculiar people. In common use it referred to the membership of the church and the close interconnected relationship we enjoyed with one another near and far. It still appears in some of our hymnody but is not used as much since the name change to Community of Christ. Younger generations have not experienced the common use of the word hence it is not part of their lexicon or memory.

Salvation - The gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ: forgiveness of sin, and healing from separation, brokenness, and the power of violence and death. This healing is for individuals, human societies, and all of creation. This new life is the loving gift of God’s grace that becomes ours through faith and repentance. Baptism is how we initially express our commitment to lifelong discipleship. As we yield our lives to Christ in baptism, we enter Christian community (the body of Christ) and have the promise of salvation. We experience salvation through Jesus Christ, but affirm that God’s grace has no bounds, and God’s love is greater than we can know. We are all inherently worthy of God’s love through Jesus Christ. We face the future with hope and join with God here and now to create communities that affirm the worth of all persons and the sacredness of creation. We follow Jesus who said, “Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand!” Which is to say, “Turn towards God and respond through love in action now.” God’s saving grace calls us to focus on this life, as we strive to deliver humanity from suffering, promote peace, and live out the true and full worth of all persons as exemplified in Jesus Christ. Actions in this life join with God to co-create a salvific future for all creation.

Scripture - Scripture is writing inspired by God's Spirit and accepted by the church as the normative expression of its identity, message, and mission. We affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants—not to replace the witness of the Bible or improve on it, but because we confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God. When responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied, scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for our discipleship.

Shalom - Shalom is a Hebrew word that means peace. It signifies a peace that comes through wholeness, integrity, health, perfection, and security. As our understanding and practice of peace has deepened, shalom has become an important and often used word in Community of Christ. You will find it in our hymns, scripture, mission statement, writings, and Enduring Principles. We recognize Jesus as the embodiment of God's Shalom. The cornerstone of Zion is peace. Indeed, it is central to our focus and mission: to restore peace to creation in all its forms.

Sin - God created us to be agents of love and goodness. Yet, with tragic results, we often misuse our agency individually and collectively. Sin separates us from God and from one another. Grace reconciles and heals relationships with God and all creation. Rather than a vice list of sins or turning away from God's purposes, it is a posture of living, a turning toward the God of all life. This can apply to individuals, communities, and institutions.

Spiritual Practices - Spiritual practices are specific activities anyone can do to deepen your relationship with the sacred and the world around you. A variety of practices can help you connect to God (or whatever name you use to describe that "something more" beyond yourself). They enable you to become actively engaged with your inner or "true" self — the depth of your being. They can also expand the breadth of your experiences and

Spiritual Practices, cont'd - understanding of other people and the whole creation. Spiritual practices emerged from ancient human experiences spanning time, culture, and traditions. Spiritual practices also can be understood as a form of prayer or meditation, which can be experienced individually or in a group. Practices can incorporate any combination of the human senses of site, sound, taste, touch, smell. They often include periods of silence, or various physical movements. A few examples include walking a labyrinth, contemplative prayer, Lectio Divina, centering prayer, Visio Divina, and guided meditation.

Zion - In the early days Zion was a specific place we named as the gathering site in Jackson County, Missouri. Over time that understanding of the now and coming Zion (Christ's second coming) has evolved to understanding Zion as a state of being. Much like our understanding of salvation, it is an active striving to eradicate poverty, encourage love, worth, and restore a fullness of peace. As such, Zion is the collective whole of people and creation becoming a faithful reflection of Jesus Christ in word and deed (living and being). "...Zionic conditions are no further away nor any closer than the spiritual condition of my people justifies." (Doctrine and Covenants 140:5c)



Additional documents
and resources can be
found when you
request access to
["Our Ministry Tools"](#).

Appendix

1. Link List.....	<u>142</u>
2. Five Mission Initiatives.....	<u>147</u>
3. Enduring Principles.....	<u>149</u>
4. Scripture in Community of Christ.....	<u>153</u>

Link List

Lesson 1

1. Church History Timeline: <https://cofchrist.org/history/>
2. Project Zion Podcast | The Restoration in the 21st Century | Apostle David Nii
<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-154-the-restoration-in-the-21st-century-with-david-nii/>
3. Church Historian Richard Howard's, "An Analysis of Six Contemporary Accounts Touching Joseph Smith's First Vision."
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/sao3dntaqnrb61w/AAATcXhaR7ijSC8JyAxJ9zm4a?dl=0>

Lesson 2

1. Project Zion Podcast | Doctrine and Covenants 156 | Bill Russell
<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-132-bill-russell-explains-doctrine-and-covenants-156/>
2. Project Zion Podcast | A Journey Toward Ordination | Women in Community of Christ | Becky Savage
 - Part One: <http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-165-a-journey-toward-ordination-women-in-community-of-christ-with-becky-savage/>
 - Part Two: <http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-166-a-journey-toward-ordination-women-in-community-of-christ-with-becky-savage-part-2/>
3. Project Zion Podcast | Common Consent | John Wight
<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-169-common-consent-with-john-wight/>
5. Project Zion Podcast, Cuppa Joe Series:
<https://www.projectzionpodcast.org/series/cuppa-joe/>

Lesson 3

1. Inclusive Language Policy: <http://www.latter-dayseekers.org/uploads/7/9/3/8/79384866/inclusive-language-policy.pdf>
2. We Proclaim Jesus Christ: <https://cofchrist.org/jesus/>
3. Project Zion Podcast | Percolating on Faith | Trinity:
<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-41-percolating-on-faith-the-trinity/>
4. Conceiving God:
<http://www.latter-dayseekers.org/uploads/7/9/3/8/79384866/conceiving-god.pdf>
5. Trinity Sunday: Retired Apostle Susan Oxley shares the difficulty she had accepting the idea of the Trinity.
<https://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-78-trinity-sunday-common-grounds/>

Lesson 4

1. Project Zion Podcast | Percolating on Faith | Human Beings:
<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-208-percolating-on-faith-god-shots-human-beings/>
2. Project Zion Podcast | President Veazey | Peaceful Humanity:
<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/473-coffee-buzz-peaceful-humanity/>
3. Project Zion Podcast | Percolating on Faith | God's Good Creation:
<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-185-percolating-on-faith-god-shots-gods-good-creation/>
4. Project Zion Podcast | Sinner! Sinner! | Matt Frizzell:
<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-229-sinner-sinner-with-matt-frizzell-and-brittany-mangelson/>

Lesson 5

1. Signal Communities, Lessons for All Ages:

https://www.heraldhouse.org/products/signal-communities-live-christs-mission-lessons-for-all-ages-pdf-download?_pos=2&_sid=e818c3a13&_ss=r

2. Signal Communities, Lessons for Children:

https://www.heraldhouse.org/products/signal-communities-live-christs-mission-lessons-for-young-children-pdf-download?_pos=3&_sid=e818c3a13&_ss=r

3. Signal Communities, Live Out Christ's Mission:

https://www.heraldhouse.org/products/signal-communities-live-christs-mission?_pos=1&_sid=a190fcba&_ss=r

Lesson 6

1. Sacraments in Community of Christ:

<https://cofchrist.org/our-beliefs/#csec-our-beliefs-sacraments>

2. Project Zion Podcast | Cuppa Joe | Historical Changes of the Sacraments:

<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/390-cuppa-joe-historical-changes-of-the-sacraments/>

3. Project Zion Podcast | Percolating on Faith | The Sacraments Part I:

<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-112-percolating-on-faith-the-sacraments-part-1/>

4. Project Zion Podcast | Percolating on Faith | The Sacraments Part 2:

<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-120-percolating-on-faith-the-sacraments-part-2/>

Lesson 7

1. Becoming a People of the Temple: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzN56jcrUgk&t=2s>

2. Community of Christ: A People on the Move: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zX4uGmYSUI>

3. Temple Tuesday: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-Tnkv6NgelaLoM_Ls5HSv3lubOns2yy_

Lesson 8

1. Ministry and Priesthood: Serving Together to Fulfill Christ's Mission:

<https://www.heraldhouse.org/products/ministry-and-priesthood-serving-together-to-fulfill-christs-mission>

2. Project Zion Podcast | Priesthood Authority | John Hamer:

<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/301-priesthood-authority-john-hamer/>

3. Project Zion Podcast | Priesthood in Community of Christ | Janné Grover:

<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-162-priesthood-in-community-of-christ-with-janne-grover/>

4. Ministry of the Disciple, All Are Called: (link TBD)

Lesson 9

1. Statement on Scripture: <https://cofchrist.org/scripture>

2. Project Zion Podcast | Percolating on Faith | What is Scripture:

<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/episode-168-percolating-on-faith-god-shots-scripture/>

3. The Book of Mormon and Community of Christ's Mission Initiatives:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y0U2ZTBWYqo>

4. Doctrine and Covenants Comparison (Community of Christ and LDS editions): (link TBD)

5. Project Zion Podcast | Percolating on Faith | Book of Mormon:

<http://www.projectzionpodcast.org/podcast/pzp-e44-percolating-on-faith-book-of-mormon-mp3/>

Lesson 10

1. Enduring Principles: <https://cofchrist.org/about-us/#csec-about-us-enduring-principles>
2. Mission Initiatives: <https://cofchrist.org/about-us/#csec-about-us-mission-initiatives>
3. Ministry of the Disciple, All Are Called (chapter 1): (link TBD)
4. Ministry of the Disciple, Temple School course:
https://www.heraldhouse.org/products/ts-mp301-ministry-of-the-disciple-pdf-download?_pos=2&_sid=c1fad6160&_ss=r
5. Sharing in Community of Christ:
http://monkdev.mnk.26072.s3.amazonaws.com/uploaded/s/0e12798418_1628179385_sharing-in-community-of-christ.pdf
6. Of Water and Spirit:
https://www.heraldhouse.org/products/copy-of-of-water-and-spirit-preparing-for-baptism-and-confirmation-in-community-of-christ?_pos=6&_sid=24bffa7f8&_ss=r

Mission Initiatives

All ministries, personnel, and resources are focused on the whole mission of Jesus Christ through five, life-changing, and world-changing Mission Initiatives.

1. Invite People to Christo

- We are poised to share the peace of Jesus Christ with those who are waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel.
- We fulfill God's ultimate vision as we...
- Baptize/Confirm Many New Members
- Open New Communities
- Launch in New Nations

2. Abolish Poverty, End Suffering

- We are poised to be Christ's hands and feet, reaching out through compassionate ministries that serve the poor and hungry and stop conditions that diminish the worth of persons.
- We fulfill God's ultimate vision as we...
- Help Those Who Hurt
- Feed the Hungry
- Support Compassionate Ministries
- Respond in Times of Crisis

3. Pursue Peace on Earth

- We are poised to restore Christ's covenant of peace, even the Zion of our hopes. The hope of Zion will become reality when we live Christ's peace and generously share his peace with others.
- We fulfill God's ultimate vision as we...
- Establish the Temple as a Centre to Promote Peacemaking throughout the World
- Engage Children in Peacemaking around the World
- Seek Justice, Create Peacemakers around the World
- Unite with Others to Make Peace around the World

4. Develop Disciples to Serve

- We are poised to equip men, women, and children to be true and living expressions of the life, ministry, and continuing presence of Christ in the world.
- We fulfill God's ultimate vision as we...
- Help All Ages Deepen Their Discipleship
- Empower Priesthood for Mission
- Grow Pastors and Leaders for Mission
- Train and Send Ministers for Mission throughout the World

5. Experience Congregations/Communities in Mission

- We are poised to become communities that are the true and living expressions of Jesus Christ, woven together by the Spirit, and sent into the world as evangelistic witnesses, compassionate ministers, and justice and peacemakers.
- We fulfill God's ultimate vision as we...
- Nurture Communities of Christ's Love and Peace
- Experience God's Presence through Community
- Become a People of Peace, Reconciliation, and Healing of the Spirit

Christ's Mission is Our Mission.

Enduring Principles

Our Enduring Principles define the essence, heart, and soul of our faith community. They describe the personality of our community as expressed throughout the world.

God's revelation in Jesus Christ and continuing presence through the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed by scripture, is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

We do our best to uphold these principles (values, concepts, themes) as a faithful response to our heritage and our continuing experience with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Grace and Generosity

- *God's grace, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, is generous and unconditional.*
- *Having received God's generous grace, we respond generously and graciously receive the generosity of others.*
- *We offer all we are and have to God's purposes as revealed in Jesus Christ.*
- *We generously share our witness, resources, ministries, and sacraments according to our true capacity.*

Sacredness of Creation

- *In the beginning, God created and called it all good.*
- *Spirit and material, seen and unseen, are related.*
- *Creation's power to create or destroy reminds us of our vulnerability in this life.*
- *God is still creating to fulfill divine purpose.*
- *We join with God as stewards of care and hope for all creation.*

Continuing Revelation

- *Scripture is an inspired and indispensable witness of human response to God's revelation of divine nature.*
- *God graciously reveals divine will today as in the past.*
- *The Holy Spirit inspires and provides witness to divine truth.*
- *In humility, individually and in community, we prayerfully listen to understand God's will for our lives, the community, and creation more completely.*

Worth of All Persons

- *God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth.*
- *God wants all people to experience wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.*
- *We seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth.*
- *We join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed.*

All Are Called

- *God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and to share in God's purposes.*
- *Jesus Christ invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share his life and ministry.*
- *Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of communities and the world.*
- *We respond faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to our best understanding of God's call.*

Responsible Choices

- God gives humans the ability to make choices about whom or what they will serve. Some people experience conditions that diminish their ability to make choices.
- Human choices contribute to good or evil in our lives and in the world.
- Many aspects of creation need redemption because of irresponsible and sinful human choices.
- We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God.

Pursuit of Peace

- God wants shalom (justice, reconciliation, well-being, wholeness, and peace) for all of creation.
- Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's peace, reveals the meaning of God's peace in all aspects of life.
- The vision of Zion is to promote God's reign on earth, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ, through the leavening influence of just and peaceful communities.
- We courageously and generously share the peace of Jesus Christ with others.
- Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore peace (shalom) to creation.
- We celebrate God's peace wherever it appears or is being pursued by people of good will.

Unity in Diversity

- *Community of Christ is a diverse, international family of disciples, seekers, and communities.*
- *Local and worldwide ministries are interdependent and important to our mission.*
- *We embrace diversity and unity through the power of the Holy Spirit.*
- *We seek agreement or common consent in important matters. If we cannot achieve agreement, we commit to ongoing dialogue and lovingly uphold our common faith in Jesus Christ and his mission.*
- *We confess that our lack of agreement on certain matters is hurtful to some of God's beloved children and creation.*

Blessings of Community

- *The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God's grace and each other.*
- *True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.*
- *True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.*
- *Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.*
- *We value our connections and share a strong sense of trust in and belonging with one another—even if we never have met.*
- *Some disciples are called and ordained to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community and the world.*
- *We are called to create communities of Christ's peace in our families and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation.*

Scripture in Community of Christ

Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ. Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.

Affirmation One

We declare that Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).

Affirmation Two

We find the Living Word in and through scripture. Scripture is the indispensable witness of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church. The church formed the canon of scripture so that it might always have a way to hear the good news, nurture its faith, measure its life, test its experience, and remember its identity.

Affirmation Three

Scripture is a library of books that speaks in many voices. These books were written in diverse times and places, and reflect the languages, cultures, and conditions under which they were written. God's revelation through scripture does not come to us apart from the humanity of the writers, but in and through that humanity. In the earthen vessels of scripture we have been given the treasure of divine love and grace (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Affirmation Four

Scripture's authority is derived from the model of Christ, who came to be a servant (Mark 10:45). Therefore, the authority of scripture is not the authority to oppress, control, or dominate. If Jesus came to serve, how much more should the books that point to him be treated as a servant of the saving purposes of God.

Affirmation Five

Scripture is vital and essential to the church, but not because it is inerrant (in the sense that every detail is historically or scientifically correct). Scripture makes no such claim for itself. Rather, generations of Christians have found scripture simply to be trustworthy in keeping them anchored in revelation, in promoting faith in Christ, and in nurturing the life of discipleship. For these purposes, scripture is unfailingly reliable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Affirmation Six

Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship each have something to contribute to our understanding of scripture. In wrestling to hear and respond to the witness of scripture, the church must value the light that each of these sources may offer.

Affirmation Seven

As the church tries to interpret scripture responsibly, it seeks the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide his disciples into new truth (John 16:12–15). By the Spirit, the ancient words of scripture can become revelatory, allowing us to grasp what may not have been seen or heard before.

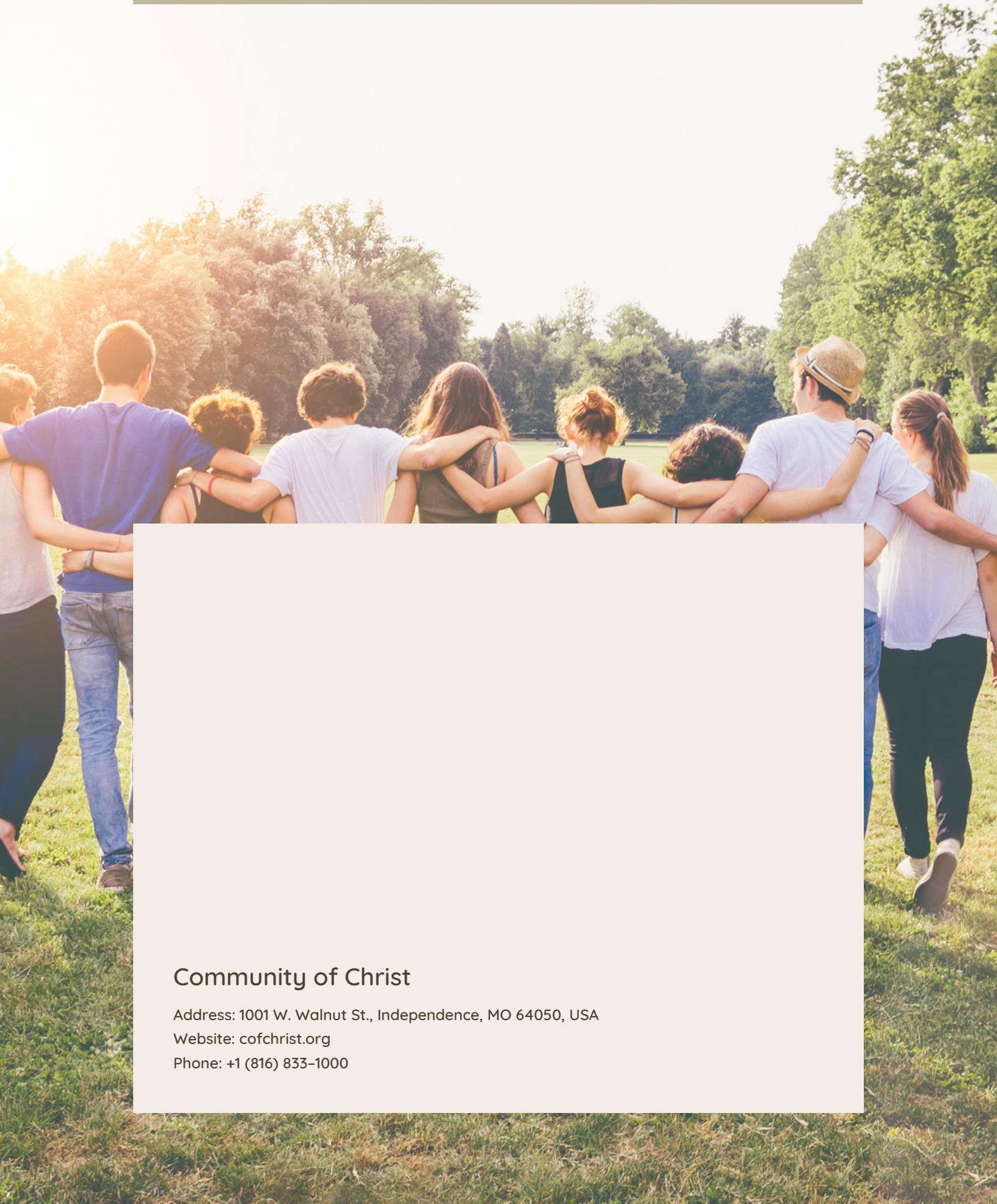
Affirmation Eight

Disciples are called to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures so that they may ever increase in love for God, neighbor, and self (Matthew 22:37–40; Mosiah 1:49), uphold the dignity and worth of all persons (Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c–d), and faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ.

Affirmation Nine

With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We do not use these sacred writings to replace the witness of the Bible or improve upon it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God (Preface of the Book of Mormon; Doctrine and Covenants 76:3g). We have heard Christ speak in all three books of scripture, and bear witness that he is “alive forever and ever” (Revelation 1:18).

For our time we shall seek to live and interpret the witness of scripture by the Spirit, with the community, for the sake of mission, in the name of the Prince of Peace.



Community of Christ

Address: 1001 W. Walnut St., Independence, MO 64050, USA

Website: cofchrist.org

Phone: +1 (816) 833-1000