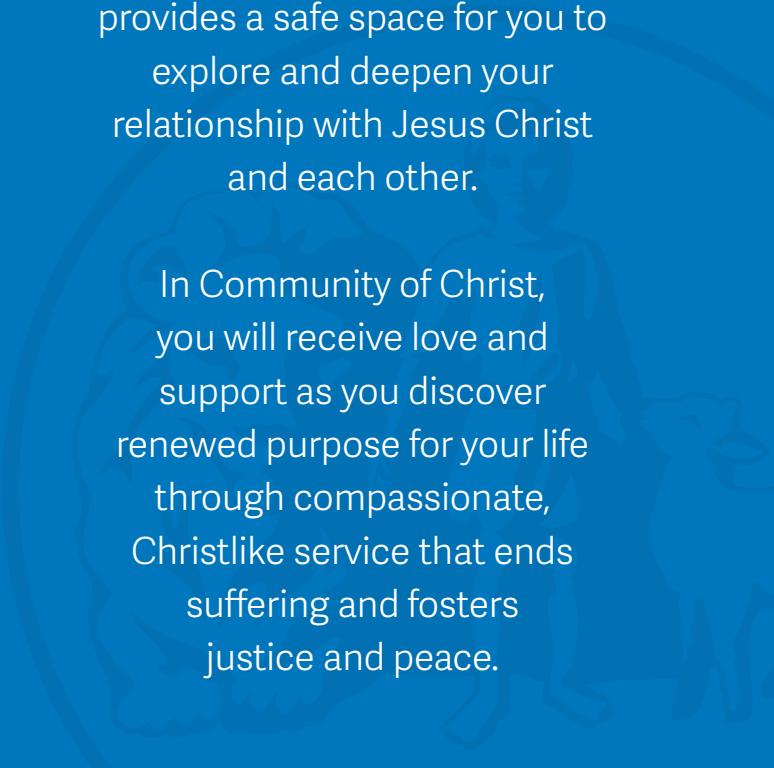


SHARING IN COMMUNITY OF CHRIST:

Exploring Identity, Mission,
Message, and Beliefs



Community of Christ



To those seeking a spiritual home,
Community of Christ is a welcoming,
loving, worldwide faith community
that values the worth of every
person as a child of God and
provides a safe space for you to
explore and deepen your
relationship with Jesus Christ
and each other.

In Community of Christ,
you will receive love and
support as you discover
renewed purpose for your life
through compassionate,
Christlike service that ends
suffering and fosters
justice and peace.



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Cross (above): This cross hangs in the Temple in Independence, Missouri. It is made from more than 100 types of wood from around the world, representing the more than 50 nations where the church is established. The olive branches at the center take the form of a descending dove, symbolizing peace. Artist: David Martin.

Sharing in Community of Christ book design by Jeff Piedimonte.

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INTRODUCTION

The document *We Share Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* was introduced to the church in 2009 by this statement:

This document is the result of a collaborative effort among representatives of the worldwide church and church leaders. The Expanded World Church Leadership Council, various World Church leaders, teams, and many other individuals have contributed to its contents.

We expect this paper will play a major role in guiding the church in the years ahead. It provides a foundation on which we will build classes, sermons, ministry models, resources, small-group



activities, and worship experiences that speak to those we serve. It provides common threads to use to weave unique expressions of the vision and mission of Community of Christ throughout the world.

Please reflect on this material prayerfully, take time to incorporate or "enflesh" it in your life as a disciple and leader more and more. Then, using your giftedness and experience, create ways to help seekers, disciples, and congregations find meaning and hope through the vision, mission, mes-

sage, and beliefs presented here.

This document is not a new program to roll out with great fanfare! It is salt and leaven to use to enrich our mission and witness as we continue our faith journey into the future.

The fourth edition of *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* includes five life-changing, church-changing, and world-changing Mission Initiatives. Use it for reference, study, and reflection as you grow in discipleship and live Christ's mission.



INVITATION

In this document, we offer a compilation of writings that describe and explain who we are as a church growing in our mission to proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace. As you read and explore the various aspects of “who we are” and “who we are becoming,” approach your study with openness and prayerful anticipation.

As you learn, share with others in an atmosphere of seeking new and evolving awareness of God’s Spirit working in your life and in the lives of other faithful disciples. Study the recommended scriptures, engage in the reflection questions, and ponder how these writings inform your life and discipleship. Carefully consider how to enhance your life and ministry in response to God’s promptings and the examples of Jesus’ life and ministry.



WE SHARE

The phrase we share is used in headings throughout this document. This phrase has two important meanings:

1. What we share with one another, as members and participants in Community of Christ shapes identity, mission, message, and beliefs as a worldwide faith community.

2. Just as important, the phrase we share emphasizes our call and commitment to share our witness, ministries, sacraments, resources, and message with the world.

So, the phrase we share defines both what we generally hold in common and what we generously offer to the world.



WE SHARE...

a Vision for Creation

We share 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.

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling*

WE SHARE...A VISION FOR CREATION

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

God's vision of peace for creation clearly was 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. The purpose of the church is to form disciples who faithfully share the gospel of peace in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near...

—Ephesians 2:13–14, 17 NRSV

The Christian cross and the church seal symbolize and emphasize our commitment to God's vision of justice and peace for the entire creation. This vision was proclaimed consistently by the prophets and decisively revealed in Jesus Christ, who calls disciples in every age to share his peace throughout the world.



REFLECTION

- What are the things in this world that you find to be the most beautiful or that give you joy?
- What are the things in this world that you love but that are broken, corrupt, or in need of healing? How did this brokenness, corruption, or injury happen? What can you do to help? What can the church do to help?
- How would you share the meaning of the cross and the church seal with someone who hadn't seen them before? How and why are these symbols important to you?



WE SHARE...

a Name

We are Community of Christ! We share a common name throughout the world that is translated into many languages. Our name is faithful to our heritage and true to our identity and calling today.

"Community of Christ," your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:1



REFLECTION

- Think about your name or the names you have gone by throughout your life. How has your sense of identity been shaped because of your name?
- How would you respond if someone said "Community of Christ?" "I haven't heard about it."

WE SHARE...A NAME



Communauté du Christ
French



Community of Christ
English



Gemeenschap van Christus
Dutch



Kristi Samfunn
Norwegian



Ulkukuta Lwakwa Klistu
Bemba



Kominote di Kris
Creole



Odung Mbiowo Christ
Efik



Resztoránus Egysület
Hungarian



Comunidad de Cristo
Spanish



Comunidade de Cristo
Portuguese



Gemeinschaft Christi
German



Соаружество Христа
Russian



Gulu la Khristu
Chewa



Христова Спільнота
Ukrainian



Autahiti no te Metia
Tahitian



ქრისტეს თანამეგობრობა
Georgian





WE SHARE...

a Future

We also are continuing to become "Community of Christ!" Our future is full of possibility, necessary challenges, and hope as we continue to respond to the guidance of God, who has led the church from its beginning.

"Community of Christ," your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full

meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:1

REFLECTION

How should the challenge to be "Community of Christ" change those who accept it?



WE SHARE...

the Peace of Jesus Christ

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.

Early in its history, the church, often referred to as the Restoration

movement, perceived the call to share the fullness of the gospel throughout the world (Doctrine and Covenants 1:4) and to "seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion" (Doctrine and Covenants 6:3). Today, we understand this as the call to share the peace of Jesus Christ in all of its personal, interpersonal, community, and worldwide dimensions.

Sharing the peace of Jesus Christ involves generously and compassionately offering witness, ministry, sacraments, and community life that reconciles and restores people to right or righteous relationships with God, themselves, others, and creation. This holistic approach to proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel is faithful to our best understanding of God's will. This approach is the fullest meaning of restoration.

For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed, but my

steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

—Isaiah 54:10 NRSV

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

—John 14:27 NRSV

And whoso shall publish peace, even, tidings of great joy, how beautiful upon the mountains shall they be.

—1 Nephi 3:189

For he [Jesus Christ] is our peace, in his flesh he made both groups into one, and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility...So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near...

—Ephesians 2:14,17 NRSV

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 163:2

REFLECTION

- In what ways have you experienced Christ's peace (wholeness, well-being, justice) in your life?
- In what ways can you share the peace of Jesus Christ with someone else?

This holistic approach to proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel is faithful to our best understanding of God's will.



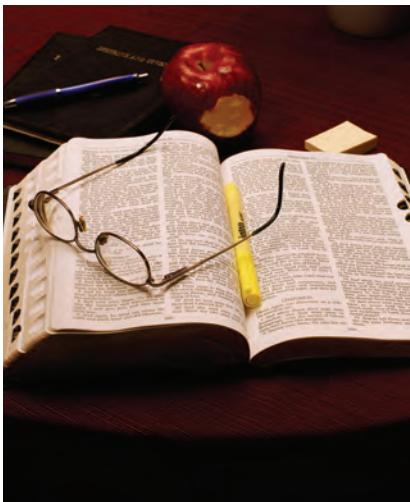


WE SHARE...

a Sacred Story

The sacred story is the unfolding drama of God's reconciling work in the world. This story reveals God as the One who calls humanity into relationship, and who seeks the well-being of all creation. This revelation, first made known in the books of the Hebrew Bible, continues in the New Testament with the coming of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. This library of books called the Bible roots the church in the sacred story and nurtures and informs the Community of Christ's faith, identity, and mission to the world.

For more information about how we interpret the sacred story found in scripture, see the statement titled "Scripture in Community of Christ" found on page 63 and online at: www.CofChrist.org/scripture-in-community-of-Christ.



REFLECTION

Spend time with the reflection questions found in "Scripture in Community of Christ."

The story of God's transforming work in the world did not end with the testimony of the biblical writers. It continued in the life and witness of the whole Christian church, as well as in other places. The sacred story is the all-encompassing saga of God's redeeming action in the world. Generations of Christian followers have written new chapters to this continuing story. The sacred story, as found in scripture and in the larger Christian tradition, anchors and nurtures our understanding of ourselves and our

call. Our unique identity includes claiming our place within the wide circle of those who in every time and place have called on the Lord Jesus Christ. With them, we continue to write new chapters to the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

Do not fail to listen attentively to the telling of the sacred story, for the story of scripture and faith empowers and illuminates.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:5

The story of Community of Christ is part of a much larger sa-



cred 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 church began in the early 1800s in upper New York state, USA, during a time of Christian revival. So far, the church has established a presence in close to

50 nations.

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.



The Presidency has provided a set of church history principles to help guide the church's continued exploration of its history. These principles have been taken from the insights of past and present World Church leaders, church historians, theologians, and others. For the complete text of "Perspectives on Church History" see page 76 or go to www.CofChrist.org/church-history-principles.

The history of Community of Christ is part of a much larger sacred history that has its roots in Christian history.



REFLECTION

After exploring "Perspectives on Church History," respond to the following:

- What is the difference between seeing history as "what happened" and "someone's perspective on what happened"? Can there be such a thing as "official history"?
- Pick one individual, group, or era in the church's history. How have your understandings changed as you have gained additional perspectives or information? Why is this process often so difficult to deal with?
- How do you think future church members will look back on Community of Christ in the early years of the 21st century? What could you do today to help them better understand what is going on in the church and society?



WE SHARE...

a Mission

How do we share the peace of Jesus Christ in all of its personal, interpersonal, community, and worldwide dimensions? The church's mission statement points the way:

We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

We Proclaim Jesus Christ!

We proclaim Jesus Christ through local and worldwide evangelism, including ministries of invitation, witness, inclusive fellowship, worship, caring, and lifelong disciple formation. (See Community of Christ's statement on Christology, "We Proclaim Jesus Christ," on page 58 or at www.CofChrist.org/we-proclaim-jesus-christ.)

We Promote Communities!

We promote local and worldwide communities that signal (represent, reveal) the peaceful reign of God on Earth. Some call this the cause (hope) of Zion.

When we effectively proclaim Jesus Christ by sharing our witness, ministries, and sacraments



and promote Christ-centered communities of justice and peacefulness, we are sharing the peace of Jesus Christ.

Christ's Mission Is Our Mission

The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead.

—Doctrine and Covenants 164:9f

In Luke 4:18–19 NRSV, Jesus proclaimed his mission when he read from the writings of Isaiah:

"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."

Jesus is anointed for a divine mission:

- Evangelism—sent to proclaim good news and invite others to join him in mission
- Compassionate ministries—reaching the brokenhearted, the suffering, and those who need hope and Christ's peace
- Justice and peacemaking—release those held captive by unjust systems and the circumstances of life that devalue the worth of any person

The kingdom was present in Jesus' ministry as described in the Gospels and his disciples' actions as described in Acts. Those first believers continued Christ's mission by proclaiming the Living Christ, inviting all people into community, valuing the worth



of each person, generously and compassionately meeting their needs, and pursuing justice and peace for everyone.

Five Mission Initiatives— They're All Essential!

Our call is to reclaim that same vision and passion for the whole mission of Jesus Christ today through five life-changing, church-changing, and world-changing Mission Initiatives:



**Invite People to Christ***—Christ's mission
of evangelism*

We are poised to share the peace of Jesus Christ with those who are waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel.

**Abolish Poverty,
End Suffering***—Christ's mission of
compassion*

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.

**Pursue Peace on Earth***—Christ's mission of
justice and peace*

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.

**Develop Disciples to Serve***—Equip individuals for
Christ's mission*

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.

**Experience Congregations
in Mission***—Equip congregations
for Christ's mission*

We are poised to become congregations that are true and living expressions of Jesus Christ, woven together by the Holy Spirit, and sent into the world as evangelistic witnesses, compassionate ministers, and justice and peacemakers.

We will be a prophetic people characterized by uncommon devotion to the compassion and peace of God revealed in Jesus Christ!

Mission Prayer

God, where will your Spirit lead today?

Help me be fully awake and
ready to respond.

Grant me courage to risk something
new and become a blessing of
your love and peace.

Amen.

REFLECTION

- How will you respond to God's call to put your life into the divine mission of invitation, compassionate ministry, and justice and peacemaking?

- We tell others about Jesus Christ by generously sharing our witness, resources, and help. In what ways do your congregation, mission center, and personal ministry tell others about Jesus Christ?

- Think of one person whose life would be dramatically changed by the message of Christ's gospel. In what ways can you share that message?



When we proclaim Jesus Christ by sharing our testimonies, our ministries, our sacraments, and promoting communities of justice and Christ-centered peace, we share the peace of Jesus Christ.



Enduring Principles and Basic Beliefs

What is the relationship between Enduring Principles and Basic Beliefs? When people try to understand the church's identity, mission, and message, they bring different ways of perceiving reality, which leads to different questions.

What is the church like? Enduring Principles are the underlying truths and affirmations that shape the personality of the church. Enduring Principles guide how we live in our communities, families, workplaces, congregations, and cultures. They describe how we experience and share the gospel and the church with others.

What does the church believe? Basic Beliefs are the more comprehensive, rational explanations of what the church holds to be true, arranged in categories that are part of the broader Christian tradition. Basic Beliefs represent a deepening level of inquiry about the gospel and the church.

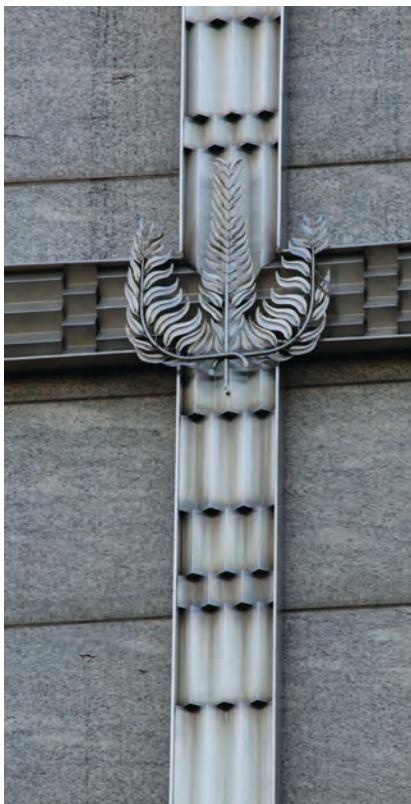
We need both ways of expressing the identity, mission, and message of the church, along with the others described in this document, to ensure that people can explore and experience the gospel in ways that are the most informing and transforming for them.





WE SHARE...

Enduring Principles



The Foundation: God, Christ, Holy Spirit

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.

In faithful response to our heritage and continuing experience with God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, we endeavor to uphold the following Enduring Principles (values, concepts, themes) as essential components of church identity and mission.

Enduring Principles define the essence, heart, or soul of church identity, mission, and message. They describe the personality of the church as expressed through its participants, congregations, and affiliate organizations throughout the world.



Some call Enduring Principles core values. Others call them foundational concepts. Use whatever terms make the most sense in the setting where you are writing, sharing, teaching, or preaching. For general official purposes, the World Church uses the term Enduring Principles.

Enduring Principles

Each principle follows with statements that help explain its meaning. Each set of statements ends with “we” statements that emphasize calling and desired response. The statements following each principle are not meant to be limiting or comprehensive. They are provided as helps. Use phrases, illustrations, stories, testimonies, scripture passages, and additional points to provide clarity and understanding for those with whom you are sharing.



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 church, 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 the community, the congregation, 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.



- 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.



Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)

- God wants shalom (justice, reconciliation, well-being, wholeness, and peace) for all of creation.

- Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom (peace), reveals the meaning of God's peace in all aspects of life.



Unity in Diversity

- Community of Christ is a diverse, international family of disciples, seekers, and congregations.
- Local and worldwide ministries are interdependent and important to the church's mission.
- The church embraces 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 the mission of the church.

- 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, the congregation, and the world.

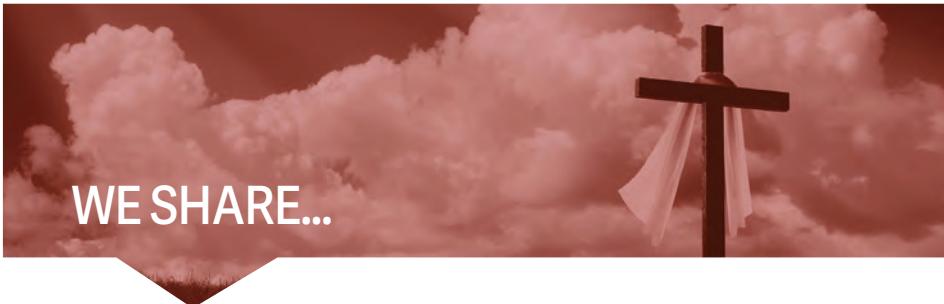
- We are called to create communities of Christ's peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation.

To see how church members throughout the world express the Enduring Principles of the church, see the statement: "We Are One, We Are Many" on page 68.

REFLECTION

- Select one or more Enduring Principle that speaks to you. Read through the "We Are One, We Are Many" document and look for ways the principle is expressed.
- Write, reflect, or discuss with someone how you have seen this principle expressed in your life, ministry, or congregation.





WE SHARE...

Basic Beliefs of Community of Christ



Preface

The good news of Jesus Christ is at the center of the faith and beliefs of Community of Christ. We are a worldwide community and are committed to follow Jesus, bring forth the kingdom of God, and seek together the revealing, renewing presence of the Holy Spirit. We offer here our Basic Beliefs, not as the last word, but as an open invitation to all to embark on the adventure of discipleship. As we seek God's continuing guidance, we encourage all people to study the scriptures and think about their experiences as they engage in the life of the church.

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 Trinity—God who is a community

WE SHARE BASIC BELIEFS

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.

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' life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace. See the Christology statement "We Proclaim Jesus Christ" on page 58 and at www.CofChrist.org/we-proclaim-jesus-christ.

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.

Creation

As an expression of divine love, God created the heavens and the 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 without separation of spirit and element. God calls people of every generation to join with God as stewards in the loving care of creation.

Humanity

Every human being is created in the image of God. In Jesus Christ, God took on the limits of human flesh and culture, and is known through them. We therefore 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.

Sin

God created us to be agents of love and goodness. Yet we misuse our agency individually and collectively. We take the gifts of creation and of self and turn them against God's purposes with tragic results. Sin is the universal condition of separation and alienation from God and one another. We are in need of divine grace that alone reconciles us with God and one another.

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 com-

munity (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.

The Church

God intends Christian faith to be lived in companionship with Je-



WE SHARE BASIC BELIEFS

sus Christ and with other disciples in service to the world. The church of Jesus Christ is made of all those who respond to Jesus' call. Community of Christ is part of the whole body of Christ. We are called to be a prophetic people, proclaiming the peace of Jesus Christ and creating communities where all will be welcomed and brought into renewed relationship with God, and where there will be no poor.

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. See the statement "Scripture in Community of Christ" on page 63 and at www.CofChrist.org/scripture-in-community-of-christ.



Sacraments

Sacraments 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. 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 to bless human life and to renew and form the church to seek the peaceful kingdom of God.

See www.CofChrist.org/sacraments.

Discipleship

Being a Christian is more than holding a list of right ideas; it is



about radical obedience to Jesus in every part of life. God's boundless love sets us free for lives of responsible stewardship in which we generously offer our lives in service to God's reign. Discipleship is both an inward and outward journey. Jesus calls us to follow him and to invite others to experience the transforming power of his grace.

Ministry

Ministry is humble service offered according to the model of Jesus, who calls every disciple to share in ministry for the world. Some disciples are called by God and ordained to priesthood offices to serve the mission of the church in specialized ways. The Holy Spirit gives complementary gifts and abilities to all disciples to equip the body of Christ for its witness in the world.

The Reign of God

The Reign of God is the coming triumph of love, justice, mercy, and peace that one day will embrace all of creation. Jesus' life and ministry were the living expression of this promise. He taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom's full coming and sent them out into the world to be living emblems of that new creation. "Zion" expresses our commitment to herald God's peaceable kingdom on Earth by forming Christ-centered communities in

families, congregations, neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world.

Peace

Peace is God's shalom: justice, righteousness, wholeness, and the well-being of the entire creation. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, came to preach the kingdom and to be our peace through the cross. The Holy Spirit empowers us for the costly pursuit of peace and justice for all people.

Resurrection and Eternal Life

Christ is risen! Thus we believe that God is God of life, not of death. By faith we share in eternal life even now. In Christ, God's love finally will overcome all that demeans and degrades the creation, even death itself. Easter also gives us hope that the tragic suffering and death of victims, throughout history, is not the last word. We believe the Holy Spirit will transform all creation to share in the glory of God.

Judgment

The living God whom we serve is a God of justice and mercy. God cares about how we treat our neighbors and enemies and how we make use of creation's gifts. It matters supremely to God how we welcome the poor, the stranger, the sick, the imprisoned, and

the rejected. We affirm in scripture's light that Jesus Christ is advocate and judge of the living and the dead.

End Time

We press forward together in service to God, knowing that our labor is not in vain. The future of the creation belongs to the Prince of Peace, not to those who oppress, dominate, or destroy. As we anticipate that future, we devote ourselves to seek Christ's peace and pursue it. We do not know the day or hour of Christ's coming but know only that God is faithful. With faith in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, we face the future in hopeful longing, and with the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray: "Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

REFLECTION

- Consider how your understanding about the Basic Beliefs is similar to or different than what is stated here.
- Consider how you would explain these beliefs to someone exploring understanding about Community of Christ beliefs.



WE SHARE...

Whole-life Stewardship

Stewardship is
the response of my
people to the ministry
of my Son and is
required alike of all
those who seek to
build the kingdom.

—Doctrine and Covenants 147:5a

Living Life Generously

All that we are and all that we have are gifts from God.

We seek to share generously what we have received as an act of faith and thanksgiving for all that God has provided. With Jesus Christ as our model, we are called to use all our gifts—time, talent, treasure, and testimony—in service to God and others.

To be generous for the sake of others, we must grow in our capacity to share our gifts from God. As God's generosity transforms us, we want to use our life to serve others.

We serve through tithing of our time, talent, treasure, and testimony. We describe this as whole-life stewardship. Being good stewards of our lives is our ultimate calling as generous disciples.

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

—Luke 12:48 NRSV

What is Tithing?

Tithing is a spiritual practice that demonstrates willingness to offer every dimension of one's life to God.

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:2d

As these words find expression in the church, the following affirmations guide us:

Stewardship is whole-life response to God's grace and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

One way stewardship is expressed is through the spiritual practice of tithing.

Although tithing literally means a tenth, giving generously to one's true capacity is the spirit of tithing.

Tithing of time, talent, treasure, and testimony supports local and worldwide church ministries in pursuit of Jesus Christ's mission.

All disciples are called to live as faithful stewards who tithe.

—WCR 1314

A Disciple's Generous Response

The six principles of A Disciple's Generous Response guide us in managing and sharing our resources for the sake of God's purposes. If we apply these principles to our lives, we will learn to align our priorities with God's priorities, and our hearts with God's heart.



Receive God's Gifts

Principle 1. God gifts each person with boundless grace and unending love. God's gifts for each of us are expressed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION

How do you experience God's generosity in your life?

Respond Faithfully

Principle 2. When we faithfully respond to the ministry of Jesus Christ we become accountable to one another, God, and ourselves. Our response to God's gifts of love and grace is to serve others and let generosity become part of our nature.

REFLECTION

What motivates you to be faithful?

Align Heart and Money

Principle 3. Managing the money we have, no matter the amount, expresses our desire to love and help God, neighbors, ourselves, and the world. When we focus our giving on God's purposes, our hearts become more aligned with God's heart.

REFLECTION

If someone looked at how you use your finances, what would they conclude about where your heart is?

Share Generously

Principle 4. Tithing is a spiritual practice. It is a gift of thanksgiving to God in response to God's generous gifts to us. When we share our tithes, the church can spread joy, hope, love, and peace around the world so others can experience God's generosity, too.

REFLECTION

What has motivated you to give at the various stages of your life: child, youth, young adult, adult, and mature adult?

Save Wisely

Principle 5. Saving is a way to prepare for the future. It gives us the chance to extend our love and create a better tomorrow for our families, friends, the church's mission, and the world.

REFLECTION

What examples of expected and unexpected circumstances might you save for?

Spend Responsibly

Principle 6. Responsible spending is a commitment to live a healthy, happy life together with God and others. The teachings of Jesus challenge us to make lifestyle choices that are often counter-cultural.

REFLECTION

How do you find the right balance between needs and wants?

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts...Give generously according to your true capacity.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

Free the full capacity of Christ's mission through generosity that imitates God's generosity.

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:2a

REFLECTION

How do you imitate God's generosity, individually and as a community?



Touched by God's Generosity: An Invitation

When our lives are touched deeply by God, we want to be more Christ-like in our living. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we acknowledge God's grace and love in our lives.

Accepting God's gifts means offering our whole life to Christ as a faithful disciple.

You are invited to a journey of whole-life stewardship in response to God's amazing generosity in your life as we seek to build communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

Free the full capacity of Christ's mission through generosity that imitates God's generosity.

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:2a





WE SHARE...

Sacraments

Look especially to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body.

—Doctrine and Covenants 158:11c

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.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

The Sacraments

We encounter God through the sacraments of the church, which touch lives at important times and places. Sacraments bring God's grace, the influence of the Holy Spirit, and the example of the life of Jesus Christ together with one's personal commitment of faith. Through the sacraments, we discover the presence of God everywhere and realize that all life is sacred. These encounters point to God's loving desire to bring all people to peace, wholeness, and right relationships with one another and the Divine, which is the

meaning of salvation. The sacraments refresh, renew, and challenge us to continue on Christ's mission, our mission, for the sake of all creation.

Community of Christ has eight sacraments, most of which are celebrated in worship experiences at appropriate times.

Baptism

Jesus began his work by asking to be baptized (Matthew 3:13–17). Baptism is a public act announcing you are choosing to follow Jesus Christ with all of your heart, might, mind, and strength. It is a decision that marks a significant point in recognizing God's initiative in your life, turning toward God, and entering a covenant relationship to the community of disciples and God.

In baptism, we are immersed in water to symbolize death to sin and raised from 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 NRSV).

People old enough to make their own decision may be baptized in Community of Christ. This is considered the age of 8 and older. Baptism represents a first step toward membership in Community of Christ.

Confirmation

As Jesus came out of the water (Matthew 3:13–17), the Holy Spirit, represented as a dove, descended on him. As followers of Jesus, we are baptized of water and the Holy Spirit. Following baptism of

water, new disciples take part in the sacrament of confirmation. It "confirms" membership in Community of Christ, and affirms the Holy Spirit's continued blessing for each disciple.

In the sacrament of confirmation, elders place their hands on the head of the new disciple, and one elder offers a special prayer. The prayer of confirmation seeks God's blessing to help new members grow in their covenant and generously share their giftedness in support of the church's mission. The commitment made through baptism and confirmation is active "discipleship expressed through covenant with God and others in sacred community" (Doctrine and Covenants 164:2d). Confirmation

BAPTISM



CONFIRMATION



helps weave people into the fabric of community—both congregation and worldwide church—so they can grow in discipleship.

The Lord's Supper (Communion)

Jesus gave his disciples a piece of bread and a 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 NRSV). The Gospel of Luke further says, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19 NRSV). The Communion meal is shared the first Sunday of

each month in the congregation and on special occasions.

All who believe in Christ, which usually is expressed in water baptism, whether members of Community of Christ or not, are welcome to share the Lord's Supper. This is an opportunity to celebrate again our baptism and confirmation covenants, reconcile relationships, and mutually recommit to the church's mission. It plays an important role in healing and strengthening the congregational community. Preparation should include reconciling with others, confessing our faults, and asking for and offering forgiveness. We

THE LORD'S SUPPER (COMMUNION)

We encounter God through the sacraments of the Church, which touch lives in important times and places.



cannot be reconciled with God if we are not reconciled with others (Matthew 5:23–24).

Ordination

Jesus called people to follow him, be his disciples, and use their gifts for others (Luke 6:12–13). Some are called by God to be ordained ministers because their gifts help them serve the covenant community in specific ways.

Ordination recognizes the divine initiative to call certain disciples to particular priesthood responsibilities and ministries for the sake of the community, the congregation, and the world. This

sacrament often is performed in a worship service. Officiating ministers, usually two, lay their hands on the person's head. One minister offers a prayer, naming a specific priesthood office to which the person is being ordained, and may include added guidance and blessing. The congregation, representing the entire church, commits to receive the ministry that will come from the newly ordained priesthood member.

Ordination confers authority on priesthood members according to the responsibilities of their particular priesthood offices. Priesthood members act within the guidelines

ORDINATION



and setting of the church community, upholding high standards of ministerial ethics and serving with integrity and trustworthiness.

Blessing of Children

When Jesus was a young child, Mary and Joseph took him to the temple “to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:21–35). During Jesus’ adult ministry, parents brought their children to him to be blessed (Mark 10:14). When families bring their babies to be blessed by the elders, they are responding to God’s grace by choosing to raise their child in God’s loving community and promising to provide guidance and nurture throughout the child’s lifetime. The congregation also commits to being a loving community in which the child can thrive and grow as a disciple

of Jesus Christ.

Two elders administer the blessing of children, usually during a worship service in the presence of the child’s family and the congregation. The elders hold, support, or place their hands on the child, and one elder offers a prayer of blessing. Children from newborn through age 7 may be blessed. This sacrament is available to any child regardless of the family’s membership in Community of Christ.

Laying on of Hands for the Sick

Jesus blessed those who were hurting in many ways. The disciples anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them (Mark 6:13). We find many stories of blessing the sick in the New Testament, reflecting God’s desire for wholeness

BLESSING OF CHILDREN



LAYING ON OF HANDS FOR THE SICK



and shalom for all creation.

During times of physical, mental, or emotional distress, people may seek this sacrament from ministers. This sacrament opens a way for healing in whatever form it comes.

Usually two elders administer this sacrament together. They visit with the person to find out more about the person's need. One elder places a drop of consecrated oil on the forehead of the person, places hands on the person's head, and offers a statement of purpose and blessing. The second elder then places hands on the person's head and offers a prayer for wholeness and well-being. This may be done privately or in the presence of family, friends, and the congregation. This sacrament is available to all seeking wholeness in body, mind, and spirit.

Marriage

Jesus Christ taught that the bond between two people who love and commit to each other in a formalized covenant is sacred (Matthew 19:4–6). He blessed marriage with his presence (John 2:1–11). Christian marriage is a sacred covenant between two people for lifelong, healthy, loving companionship. Marriage is also a legal agreement. The sacrament of marriage highlights God's desire to strengthen and enrich the marriage.

A Community of Christ marriage ceremony includes a statement of mutual covenant, "You both mutually agree to be each other's companion..." (Doctrine and Covenants 111:2b), and a pronouncement prayer, "May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from hence-

MARRIAGE



forth and forever. Amen" (Doctrine and Covenants 111:2d). The couple's agreement establishes a lifelong bond, a covenant to share Christlike love with each other, with others, and with God.

Community of Christ priests and elders may perform this sacrament, regardless of the couple's membership in Community of Christ, as long as local laws governing marriage are followed.

Evangelist Blessing

Jesus prayed a special prayer for his disciples to guide them in their journey (John 17, Luke 22:31–32). Today, an evangelist blessing

can be requested by individuals, couples, families, households, groups, and congregations who want to feel God's loving grace and guidance. Time is spent in preparation through prayer, spiritual practices, study, and discernment. An evangelist or team of evangelists will guide the preparation. Once adequate preparation is completed, the evangelist(s) offers a prayer.

This sacrament expresses the universal love of God for the recipient(s) and brings assurance, clarifies choices, and provides light for a lifetime of faithful discipleship in response to God.

EVANGELIST BLESSING





WE SHARE...

Temples as Life-giving Symbol



As a faith community, we have been given ample gifts, scriptural resources, sacraments, spiritual insights, and symbols that orient our lives toward Christ so that we may deepen our faith relationship. Among these gifts are the temples in Kirtland [Ohio, USA] and Independence [Missouri, USA]. Both temples, through their breathtaking architecture, call us to reverence and awe in the face of beauty that awakens our souls to the need to worship God as the creator and sustainer of all that is. We simply cannot be self-absorbed and self-important when we are in the temples.

Both temples—in Kirtland and Independence—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.



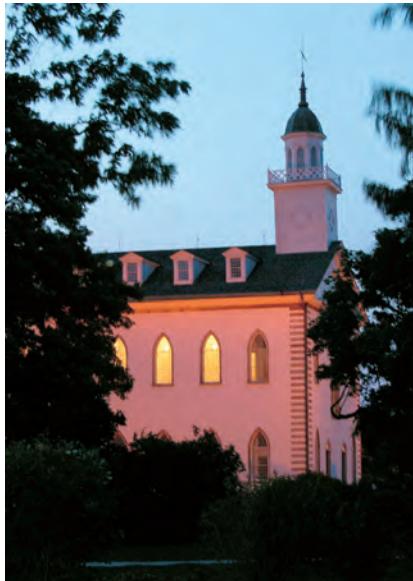
The temples, places of beauty, worship, education, and church guidance, are compasses and lighthouses for our faith journey. They serve as constant reminders that we are called to live counter to the cultures of isolation, individualism, greediness, and suspicion that surround us. They constantly point beyond themselves to 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! [Excerpted from the Sermon shared by Steve Veazey June 10, 2007 during a worship service celebrating the dedication of the Kirtland

Temple Visitor and Spiritual Formation Center.]

Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing, and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God; that your incomings may be in the name of the Lord; that your outgoings may be in the name of the Lord...

—Doctrine and Covenants 85:36b–c

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. By its ministries an attitude of wholeness of body, mind, and spirit as a desirable end toward which to strive will be fostered. It shall be the means for providing leadership education for priesthood and member. And, it shall be a place in which the es-



Temples, places of beauty, worship, education, and church guidance, are compasses and lighthouses for our faith journey.

sentential 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 156:5

Let [the Temple] stand as a towering symbol of a people who knew injustice and strife on the frontier and who now seek the peace of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:2b

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.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:2a

...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

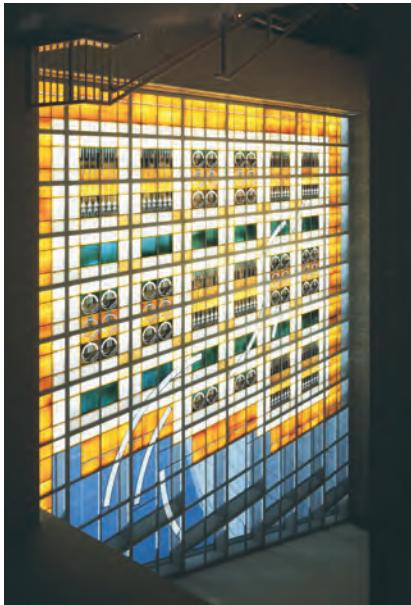
walls, as a fulfillment of the vision for which Jesus Christ sacrificed his life.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:8c

In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

—Ephesians 2:21–22 NRSV

The spiraling, Christ-centered symbolism of the Temple and its defined purposes reveal the essence of God's presence with us. These images and concepts serve to focus the church on its true identity, message, and mission. As we become a people of the Temple, we will be led to embrace what "matters most" in the life of the church. In fact, without the ongoing influence of the Temple, we would not be as focused as we are on:



- The need to approach the Divine in awe and wonder in an increasingly skeptical age.
- God's vision of peace for creation.
- The interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual dimensions of the universe.
- Peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit as the essence of Jesus Christ's ministry.
- Wholeness of body, mind, and spirit as a desirable condition for all.
- The essential meaning of the restoration as healing and redeeming agent.
- The disciple's lifelong inner and outer journey as depicted by the Temple's symbolism.
- The church's call to "pursue

peace" and be "a sanctuary of Christ's peace" throughout the world.

- The call to engage in ecumenical and interfaith relationships because the Temple is a house of prayer for all faiths.

The Temple Strategy Team has defined the focus of the Temple as:

Restoring God's Shalom: Individual and Community Journey of Transformation

The idea and language of shalom best capture a holistic and scripturally sound basis for ministries consistent with the symbol and stated purposes of the Temple.

The Christian journey is a pilgrimage toward shalom; a movement toward wholeness revealed

to us in the way of Christ. Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection take us into the intimate center of God and impel us outward into mission; to embody wholeness and grace in a suffering world.

Jesus is "the Way." Jesus is the Christian journey itself, a pilgrimage that culminates in the wayfarer's arrival in God. The Temple symbolizes God's summons to pilgrimage. The journey matters. We are a people on a pilgrimage into God and out into God's world. That is the daily rhythm of discipleship into which we are invited.

As we journey, we covenant to become a "dwelling place for God" (Ephesians 2:22). We seek to be-

come personally "a sanctuary of Christ's peace" for the sake of family, friends, congregation, community, denomination, the world, and God's reign.

We uphold the purpose of restoring God's shalom by integrating the disciplines of worship, formation, and praxis to bring about transformation.

Worship

For you shall...be led back in peace...

—Isaiah 55:12

Let the Temple continue to come to life as a sacred center of worship, education, community building, and discipleship preparation for all ages.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:8b



Formation

...guide our feet into the way of peace.
—Luke 1:79

God is calling for a prophetic community to emerge, drawn from the nations of the world, that is characterized by uncommon devotion to the compassion and peace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:11a

Praxis

(A recurring process of transformative action and reflection.)

Seek peace and pursue it.
—Psalm 34:14

Transformative encounters with the Eternal Creator and Reconciler await those who follow its [the Temple's] spiritual pathways of healing, reconciliation, peace, strengthening of faith, and knowledge.

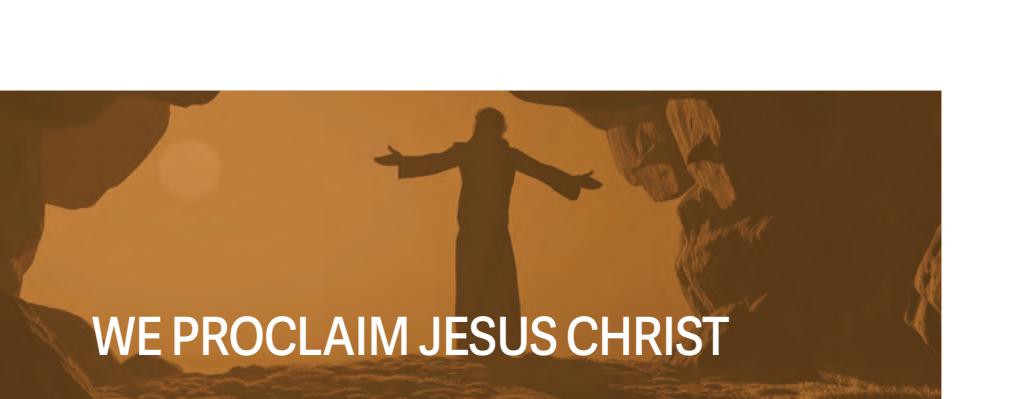
—Doctrine and Covenants 163:8a

REFLECTION

- If you have visited the Temple in Independence or Kirtland, how has your experience with the Temple affected your response to God's call in your life? If you have not visited a Temple, what impact has reading about them, and hearing stories about those who have visited them, had on your life?
- What does the Temple symbolize for you? How is this connected to your discipleship?
- Section 163:8c states that "the Temple calls the entire church to become a sanctuary of Christ's peace." Consider how you and your congregation function as a sanctuary of Christ's peace. What is required of you as a disciple to become a living sanctuary of peace?







WE PROCLAIM JESUS CHRIST

Preamble

Throughout history, Christians have sought to describe their faith in Jesus Christ. Traditionally, churches have used statements of belief and confessions of faith to articulate their understanding of Jesus Christ's person and work. Such statements provide important foundations for educating disciples and for addressing theological questions that arise from time to time.

While words are never ultimately adequate, the statement that follows describes what is at the core of our beliefs as the Community of Christ. We do not expect that there will be universal assent to this statement and reject any prescriptive use of it. Yet it is our prayer that the church will find this to be a compelling summary of our faith, and that it will be helpful to the mission of the church as it proclaims Jesus Christ and promotes communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

1. As members of Community of Christ, we are bound together with Christians in every place and in every time by our confession of Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, author of our salvation, and head of the church.
2. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh, both fully human and fully divine. In him we see ourselves and we see God, whom he tenderly called Abba, the compassionate One, who gave birth to all of creation and declared it to be "very good." Together with the Holy Spirit, they are one.
3. By the mystery of the incarnation, Jesus, born of Mary, came into the world to live and dwell among us to reveal God's nature and will. He prophetically condemned injustice in the temple and proclaimed the good news of the coming reign of God on Earth, preaching liberation to the oppressed and repentance

to oppressors. He taught his followers to love God, to love their neighbors, and to love their enemies. By eating with sinners, serving the poor, healing the unclean, blessing children, and welcoming women and men as equals among his disciples, Jesus declared that all persons are of worth in the sight of God.

4. Jesus was betrayed by his own friends, accused of blasphemy and treason, and sentenced by Pontius Pilate to die on a cross between two common criminals. By forgiving his murderer and choosing to take on the sin, pain, and suffering of the whole world, he reconciled all of humanity to God.

5. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead, vindicating his life and ministry, and triumphing over all injustice, even death itself. He ascended into heaven, having entrusted his followers with authority to minister in his name to the ends of the earth. He sent the Holy Spirit to be with them in their witness of the good news of the Resurrection.
6. Christ is our peace, breaking down the dividing walls of hostility between us. He promises us the redemption and healing of our relationships with God, one another, and all of creation.
7. The church, the body of Christ,



WE PROCLAIM JESUS CHRIST

is called to proclaim the gospel until Christ comes again. It is he who forgives us in baptism, and feeds us at his table. As disciples of Christ, we are all called to conform our lives to his by living in loving community with others, seeing Jesus in the faces of the least of God's children, and serving those whom the world has forgotten. It is to Christ and to his gospel that we declare our loyalty and by which we will be judged.

8. The promises of God in Jesus Christ are sure—that by the Holy Spirit we will be given grace to do the things we have

been asked: courage in the struggle for justice, passion for peace in the midst of violence, forgiveness of our sins, stewardship in place of materialism, healing of body and spirit where there is hurt, and eternal life in the face of death.

9. We live and serve in hope that God's kingdom of justice and peace will indeed come, bringing healing to the whole, groaning creation. Putting our trust in the Risen Christ, present among us by the Holy Spirit, we press on together, giving blessing, honor, and glory to God, now and forevermore. Amen.

A replica tomb depicts Jesus' grave.



Questions for Individual and Group Reflection and Discussion

1. Prayerfully read the statement in its entirety. What is your overall reaction to what you have read? Which parts seem to resonate particularly well with you?
2. Carefully read the preamble. What is said here about the role of the statement on Jesus Christ—in the lives of the individual member, in congregations, and in the church as a whole?
3. In paragraph 1, what does it mean to be "bound together... by our confession of Jesus Christ"? What connections do you feel to other Christians, both within Community of Christ and in other denominations? What does each phrase—"Son of the Living God, author of our salvation, and head of the church"—mean for your personal life and that of your congregation?
4. Read John 1:1–14 in the New Revised Standard Version or another good, recent translation. How do you see paragraph 2 reflecting what the author of this scripture is saying? What are the differences? How can Jesus be both "fully human and fully divine," without one diminishing the other? What is your understanding of the Trinity (God, Christ, and Holy Spirit)? To what extent is your own belief in the Trinity adequately expressed in this paragraph?
5. What does Jesus reveal about "God's nature and will" (paragraph 3)? Which of the ministries of Jesus described in this paragraph do you find to be most significant in terms of your understanding of God?
6. What is your understanding of Jesus' role in reconciling "all of humanity to God" (paragraph 4)? What are examples of how you and other people betray Jesus today? Why is forgiveness so important to reconciliation?
7. What is the place of the affirmation "God raised Jesus from the dead" (paragraph 5) in your faith and in your beliefs? How was Jesus' resurrection a vindication of his life and ministry? In what ways do you feel authorized to minister in Jesus' name? How does the Holy Spirit help you in your witness and ministry?

8. In what sense is Christ “our peace” (paragraph 6)? How does Christ bring peace into your life? What relationships in your life need to be healed?
9. What does it mean to understand the church as “the body of Christ” (paragraph 7)? Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 to see the Apostle Paul’s views on this. What does it mean for you to “conform” your life to Christ’s? What will this require you to give up?
10. Which of the “promises of God in Jesus Christ” (paragraph 8) do you find most meaningful? What other promises would you add to this list? In what sense are God’s promises for our individual benefit on the one hand or for people in community on the other?
11. What does it mean for you personally to “live and serve in hope [of] God’s kingdom” (paragraph 9)? How do you exercise “trust in the Risen Christ”? How might your life better give “blessing, honor, and glory to God”?
12. Reread the entire statement on Jesus Christ. How has your reflection on this expression of the life and ministry of Jesus helped prepare you for more effective discipleship as a member of Community of Christ? How can you use this statement in your witness of Jesus Christ to others?





SCRIPTURE IN COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

Preamble

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 1

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 2

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 3

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 giv-

en the treasure of divine love and grace (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Affirmation 4

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 5

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 6

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 7

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 8

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 9

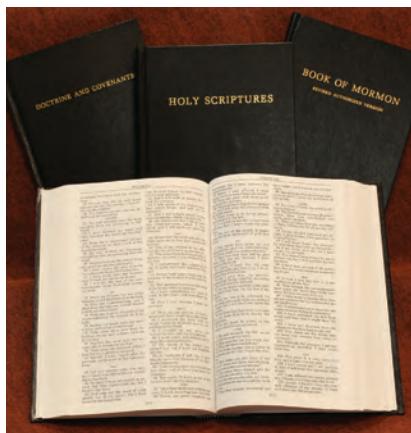
With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We do not use these sacred writings to replace the witness of the Bible or improve upon it, but because they confirm 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.

Questions for Individual and Group Reflection and Discussion

1. Prayerfully read the affirmations in their entirety. What is your overall reaction to what you have read?
2. Consider the preamble. How do you define the phrases "responsibly interpreted" and "faithfully applied"? How can your approach to scripture become more in keeping with these two criteria?
3. How do the first and second affirmations help distinguish between the Living Word (Christ) and the written word (scripture)? How do these two tend to become confused in the life of the church? What problems does such confusion create?
4. How have you discovered Christ "in and through scripture" (Affirmation Two)? How have you found God's "saving, transforming message" in the witness of the scriptures?
5. How has an understanding of scripture's cultural and historical context helped you responsibly interpret and faithfully apply specific texts to your life (Affirmation 3)?
6. How does recognition of the role of the human writer affect how you view scripture in your own life and in the life of the church (Affirmation 3)? What values do you find in both the unity and diversity of the scriptural witness?

The scriptures provide an inspiring direction and an understanding of life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied.



7. How have you seen scripture used to oppress, control, and dominate (Affirmation 4)? How can you better use and understand scripture as servant, after the model of Jesus? How would this require you to change the way you use scripture?
8. How is it possible to believe that scripture is “true,” yet not inerrant? What does it mean for you to affirm that scripture is “trustworthy” and “unfailingly reliable” (Affirmation 5)?
9. How do you use faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship in your reading, understanding, and application of scripture (Affirmation 6)? Which do you tend to emphasize more than the others? Which might you benefit from giving more attention to?
10. How has the Holy Spirit blessed you in your understanding of scripture? How has the Spirit led you to new truth (Affirmation 7)? How has scripture been revelatory to you?
11. How has scripture helped you more “faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ” (Affirmation 8)? How has it helped you “increase in love for God, neighbor, and self”?
12. How do you understand the Bible to be foundational? What, then, is the role of the other two books of scripture (Affirmation 9)? How has each of these three books of scripture functioned in your life and faith journey?





WE ARE ONE, WE ARE MANY

This document was created during the 2004 International Leader's Meeting. It was read by a group at the 2004 World Conference as a reflection of the unity and diversity found within Community of Christ. This document continues to offer a comprehensive view of the various expressions of the church throughout the world.

We are Community of Christ and we are walking the path together. We sing "joy" in thousands of congregations. We say "hope" in scores of languages. We proclaim peace in almost 60 nations. We are one and we are many. We are diverse, yet we are community, for we belong to Christ.

We live in a world where the face of Jesus is torn. Humans hurt each other, rending the body of Christ. Systems and institutions



crush the spirit and imprison the mind. Christ mourns where bullets, barricades of burning tires, barbed-wire fences, cultural prohibitions, violence, and mine fields separate humanity. Christ shares the burdens of poverty, AIDS, orphans, imperialism, wealth, and conflict. Christ is persecuted with those who suffer in his name, and forsaken when his servants forget indigenous communities.

The church also tears the face of Jesus. We show the world the lamb and the lion and the child but we fail to resolve conflicts in our own families and congregations. We are sometimes so focused on our own relationships that we risk

losing our relationship with Jesus, who is also found in the stranger and the enemy. We are hostile to culture in some nations and taken hostage by culture in others. We risk division on the tense topics of human sexuality, rebaptism, and membership. We struggle to represent leadership from around the world as we decide important matters in the life of the church.

We, too, have torn the face of Jesus. Yet God chooses us.

We are many, but we are one.

Community

We are one in community. We yearn to be together and feel connected by an unbreakable bond, to



find a true home in the church.

Just as the first-century church was often pushed into an ever-expanding circle of cultures and identities, we are often called into struggle, constantly challenged to move into new understandings of the Creator's steadfast and unreserved love.

We acknowledge that Community of Christ is a culture in and of itself. At the same time, each of us is grounded in our own cultural identity; each of our congregations is steeped in the local culture. We are not called to abandon those identities.

We also know that we are not alone as Christians. We work together with all those who proclaim the values of Christ. We join ecumenical efforts and strive for community with all people of faith.

We feel pain when members of the body of Christ are persecuted, restricted, or oppressed in expression of their witness. We are moved with compassion for those in places where laws restrict baptism. We weep with brothers and sisters whose churches and homes and lives are threatened because of their beliefs.

We struggle with issues of diversity. When does our diversity threaten our unity? How do we address issues that are critical in some areas but taboo in others? What issues can be decided locally without harming our worldwide fellowship?

We do not have all the answers. Our shared community

compels us to seek answers by listening until we understand. We choose to move forward guided by love and compassion instead of dogma

Worth of Persons

We are one in our belief in the worth of every person and the value of every soul in God's sight. All are called to develop their gifts for service to Christ and to others.

We value the cultures and languages of others, but we fight barriers that divide us along lines of caste, class, gender, race, nation, and age. We see all members of Community of Christ as brothers and sisters. Our names are known by God. We greet each other as family even if we have never been introduced.

We are free to think for ourselves, to strive for tolerance and acceptance of those who are different from us. We are included. We are not just another drop in the ocean of humanity, not just another face in the crowd. God has called us into unique relationships.

Worship and Sacraments

We are one in our belief in the power of the sacraments and our encounter with God through worship.

We are many in our practices. In some places, shoes are left at the doors and we worship with bare feet. In other places we wear polished loafers and high-

heeled sandals. Men and women sometimes sit apart, sometimes together. Some sing their theology while others recite, read, and preach the gospel. Some pray in silence, some pray with partners, and others pray in a cacophony of voices that unify in praise and petition. We meet for exactly an hour, or until the Spirit tells us we are finished. The blood of Christ is grape juice, coconut milk, caramelized water, or orange soda. The body of Christ is wheat, rye, corn, and rice, but we all take upon ourselves the name of Christ and remember him, that we may have his Spirit to be with us.

Scriptures

We are one in our belief that the scriptures are vital to our discipleship as individuals and congregations.

We are many in how we use the scriptures. Some of us use the Bible exclusively. Others have powerful testimonies of the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants in witness and worship. We do our honest best as we use and interpret the scriptures.

Mission, Peace, and Justice

We are one in knowing that we must do, and not only think. We like the way our church is going—addressing humanitarian concerns and connecting peace with justice in this unjust world. Life in the church is real and practical, offering guidance in to-





We send our people
around the world
to serve in Christ's
mission. We receive
people from around
the world as we
would receive Christ.

day's context as well as preparing for life after death.

We have many ways of going. We go to the prisons, to the hospitals, to the hungry, to the homeless. We go to the edge to change the world, to risk; we talk about things difficult to talk about. We go to people difficult to go to. We go to build Zion, to build community. We go to aborigines, to immigrants, to bankers, to alcoholics, to low caste, to high caste. We go to supporters



of the government, to social and political critics. We send our people around the world to serve in Christian mission. We receive people from around the world as we would receive Christ.

Sharing

We are one in generosity. We have many ways of giving. We dance our giving and we sit quietly while a plate is passed. We give tithes as the Spirit moves and by monthly automatic bank transfer.

We give our firstfruits and we give our leftovers. We give black pearls and we give live poultry.

We are one, called to tell others about the gospel.

We are many in our method. We preach on street corners; we pitch our tents in neighboring villages. We go door to door, use a megaphone, share in private, broadcast on the radio, sing in choirs, and win the chief to convert the tribe. We offer convincing arguments, and we avoid debates for fear that in winning the argument we will lose our friends. We teach "Each One, Reach One," we teach "Each One, Reach One Each Month."

Belief in Jesus

We are one; we are many. Somehow, we who are many are one.

We sing differently, pray differently, preach, and live, and see, and think differently.

Yet still, we are one! It is Jesus, the Christ. He is our One. We have faith in him. He makes us one.

We sing him. We pray him. We preach, live, see, and think him.

He is the Jesus of history, fully human. It is his example that is important to us. Crucified, dead, buried, risen. He lived, and is living, for us and in us.

Savior. My savior. Your savior, our savior. Savior of the lost; lost individuals, lost villages, lost peoples. We were lost, but we are found. Unloved. Loved.

WE ARE ONE, WE ARE MANY

We are one.

God, Christ, Holy Spirit. Father, Son, Holy Ghost. Trinity. Three in one unified. Unity. Community.

We are one.

He judges us, forgives us, loves us, weeps over us and with us. He is coming again. He is with us.

Not many of us. Not one of us. All of us. We are one. He called us. He calls us. He has called you. He calls you. Together.

We lift on high the name: Christ Jesus. We testify of Christ Jesus. We and him.

We are one.



FURTHER REFLECTIONS

- What is your experience and awareness of the church throughout the world?
- What, if anything, in this statement surprises you?
- What does this say to us about discernment and mission?
- How do you respond to the idea that we are grounded in our own cultures and also part of Community of Christ cul-
- ture? How do those cultures interact in your setting?
- The statement asks the following questions: When does our diversity threaten our unity? What issues can be decided locally without harming our worldwide fellowship? Think about how you would answer those questions out of your own church background.



Not many of us.
Not one of us.
All of us.
We are one.
He called us.
He calls us.
He has called you.
He calls you.
Together.



PERSPECTIVES ON CHURCH HISTORY

By President
Stephen M. Veazey
October 1, 2008

The gavel Joseph Smith III used to preside over conferences of the Reorganization sits atop a credenza in my office at the Temple. I do not own it; it belongs to the church.

The foundation
and continuing
source for our faith
is God's revelation
in Jesus Christ.
Sound history informs
faith, and healthy
faith leads to
insights about
history.

Occasionally, while mulling over thorny church issues, I walk over and pick up the gavel, respectfully examining its slightly cracked ivory head and beautifully carved wood handle. Cradling it in my hands, I feel that I have some tangible connection to the past. Thus engaged, my mind wanders back through time to ponder the personalities, events, and circumstances that shaped today's church. Although I have read many church history books, I always want to know more about my religious ancestors and the historical contexts



An artist's rendition of Nauvoo, Illinois, former headquarters of the church.

in which they expressed their faith.

While I was much more than casually aware of church history previously, since becoming president of the church I have engaged in an extensive study of our story. I have explored books and articles from a wide spectrum of scholars, authors, and publishers, ranging from the faithful to the skeptical and in between. Truth has nothing to fear from scrutiny.

During recent decades there has been a mounting wave of added information as religious historians have gained access to more source material and have written with increasing frankness about various topics. Also, in the past few years, the media spot-

light—including several high-profile television series and political campaigns—has been turned on to Latter Day Saint history.

Because of my exploration of various credible works, and probing discussions with historians, some of my previously held notions have been challenged and adjusted in the face of additional knowledge. The “apologetic” approach to church history—presenting our story in as favorable a light as possible—is not sufficient for the journey ahead. That approach does not evidence the integrity that must be fundamental to our witness and ministry.

While I have adjusted some personal perspectives, I have mainly

found a deeper understanding of the many complex, interrelated factors that shaped the church over the years. I have come to see more clearly how God's Spirit worked in the lives of imperfect, but highly dedicated people to shape a faith movement that continues to play a vital role in God's unfolding purposes today. As a result, I have gained even greater confidence that the same Spirit that saw the church through seemingly insurmountable challenges in the past will continue to sustain and guide us in the future.

As the First Presidency has joined with others in exploring issues emerging from the ongoing study of Restoration history, we decided it would be timely to provide a set of "Church History Principles" to help guide the church's reflections and discussions. These principles have been distilled from the insights of past and present World Church leaders, church historians, theologians, and others. We hope the statements will prove useful as the church continues to explore the personalities, events, and meanings of our church's colorful, inspiring story.

Church History Principles

1. Continuing exploration of our history is part of identity formation.

As a church we seek always to clarify our identity, message, and mission. In our faith story, we see clearly God's Spirit giving this faith

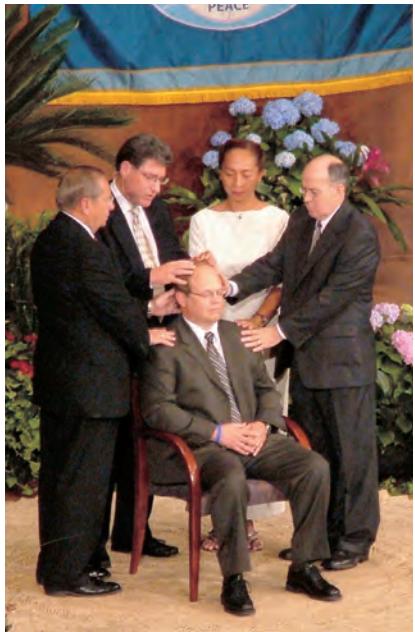


Joseph Smith III, church president 1860–1914

community tools, insights, and experiences for divine purposes. A people with a shared memory of their past, and an informed understanding of its meaning, are better prepared to chart their way into the future.

2. History informs but does not dictate our faith and beliefs.

The foundation and continuing source for our faith is God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Studying history is not about proving or disproving mystical, spiritual, or revelatory experiences that birth or transform religious movements. Sound history informs faith, and healthy faith leads to insights about history. Theology and faith,



The ordination of President Veazey in 2005

guided by the Holy Spirit, must play important roles in discovering the enduring meaning of such events as well as the deeper truths found in them. Our understanding of our history affects our faith and beliefs. However, our past does not limit our faith and beliefs to what they were historically.

3. The church encourages honest, responsible historical scholarship.

Studying history involves related fields. Historians use academic research to get as many facts as they can; then they interpret those facts to construct as clear a picture as possible of what was going on in the past. This includes

analyzing human culture to see how it affected events. Historians try to understand patterns of meaning to interpret what the past means for our future. This process should avoid “presentism,” or interpreting the past based on a current worldview and culture instead of the culture of the time.

4. The study of church history is a continuing journey.

If we say that a book on history is the only true telling of the story, we risk “canonizing” one version, a tendency we have shown in the past. This blocks further insights from continuing research. Good historical inquiry understands that conclusions are open to correction as new understanding and information comes from ongoing study.

5. Seeing both the faithfulness and human flaws in our history makes it more believable and realistic, not less.

Our history has stories of great faith and courage that inspire us. Our history also includes human leaders who said and did things that can be shocking to us from our current perspective and culture. Historians try not to judge—instead, they try to understand by learning as much as possible about the context and the meaning of those words and actions at the time. The result is empathy instead of judgment. Our scriptures are consistent in pointing out that God, through grace, uses imperfect people for

needed ministry and leadership.

6. The responsible study of church history involves learning, repentance, and transformation.

A church with a mission focused on promoting communities of reconciliation, justice, and peace should be self-critical and honest about its history. It is important for us to confess when we have been less than what the

gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to be. This honesty prompts us to repent, and it strengthens our integrity. Admitting past mistakes helps us avoid repeating them and frees us from the influences of past injustices and violence in our history. We must be humble and willing to repent, individually and as a community, to contribute as fully as possible to resto-



ring God's shalom on earth.

7. The church has a long-standing tradition that it does not legislate or mandate positions on matters of church history.

Historians should be free to draw their own conclusions after thorough consideration of evidence. Through careful study and the Holy Spirit's guidance, the

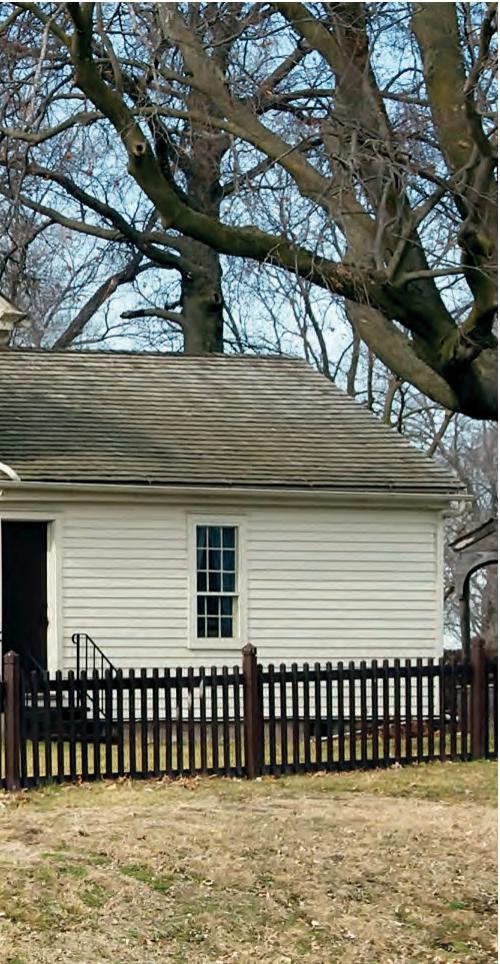
church is learning how to accept and responsibly interpret all of its history. This includes putting new information and changing understandings into proper perspective, while emphasizing the parts of our history that continue to play a role in guiding the church's identity and mission today.

8. We need to create a respectful culture of dialogue about matters of history.

We should not limit our faith story to one perspective. Diverse viewpoints bring richness to our understanding of God's movement in our sacred story. Of course, historians will come to different conclusions as they study. Therefore, it is important for us to create and maintain a respectful culture that allows different points of view on history. Our conversation about history should be polite and focused on trying to understand others' views. Most important, we should remain focused on what matters most for the message and mission of the church in this time.

9. Our faith is grounded in God's revelation in Jesus Christ and the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We must keep our hearts and minds centered on God's revelation in Jesus Christ. As God's Word alive in human history, Jesus Christ was and is the foundation of our faith and the focus of the church's mission and message.



The Smith family homestead in Nauvoo, Illinois

SUMMARY

We hope you have experienced God's Spirit moving and influencing you as you have studied *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*. Periodically and prayerfully review this resource.

Reflect again on those questions that challenge you. Reconnect to these expressions of our evolving mission, message, and beliefs. Continue to open yourself to the work of God's Spirit in your life and ministry.



