

3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

# Sharing in Community of Christ:

Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs

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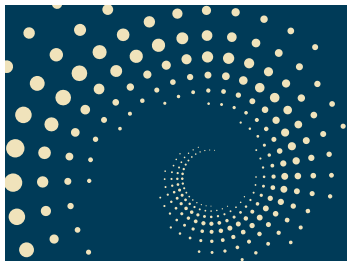
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Cover: This cross hangs in the Temple in Independence, Missouri.  
It is made from more than 100 types of wood from around the world,  
representing the more than 50 nations where the church is established.  
The olive branches at the center take the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



# Introduction

The document *We Share Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* was introduced to the church in 2009 by the following 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.

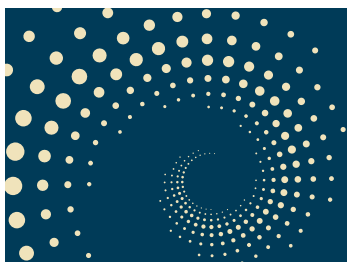
We expect this paper will play a major role in guiding the church in the years ahead. It provides a foundation on which we will build classes, sermons, ministry models, resources, small-group activities, and worship experiences that speak to those we serve. It provides common threads to use to weave unique expressions of the vision and mission of Com-

munity 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, message, and beliefs presented in the document.

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 third 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 atmo-

sphere 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

The vision we share is God's vision of reconciliation, salvation, wholeness, justice, and peace expressed in the scriptural definition of *shalom*. *Shalom* means a fullness or completeness of peace. God yearns to establish a lasting covenant of peace with humankind and with all of creation.

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

—Isaiah 11:6–9 NRSV

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...*

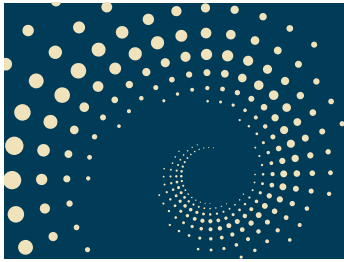
—Ephesians 2:13–14, 17 NRSV

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

*Ulukuta Lwakwa Kristu*  
Bemba

*Gulu la Kristu*  
Chewa

*Gemeenschap van Christus*  
Dutch

*Idung Mbiowo Christ*  
Efik

*Community of Christ*  
English

*Communauté du Christ*  
French

*Gemeinschaft Christi*  
German

*Lingomba ya Kristu*  
Lingala

*Kristi Samfunn*  
Norwegian

*କନ୍ୟାନିତି ଅଫ୍ ଖ୍ରୀଷ୍ଟ*  
Oriya

*Comunidade de Cristo*  
Portuguese

*Содружество Христа*  
Russian

*Comunidad de Cristo*  
Spanish

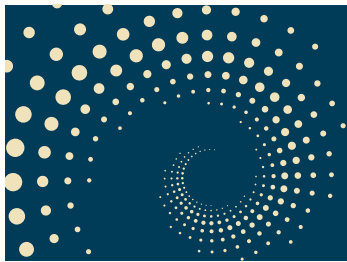
*Jumuia ya Kristo*  
Swahili

*Autahi nō te Metia*  
Tahitian

*Христова Спільнота*  
Ukrainian

## 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 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.

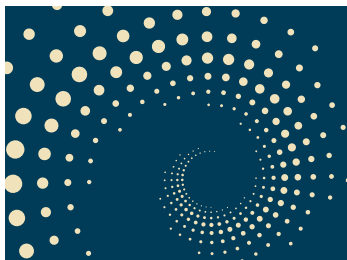
*“Community of Christ,” your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a*

*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?



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 22.)

## 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 commu-

nities 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, 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*
- **Abolish Poverty, End Suffering**—*Christ's mission of compassion*
- **Pursue Peace on Earth**—*Christ's mission of justice and peace*

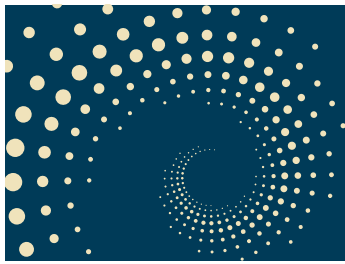
- **Develop Disciples to Serve**—*Equip individuals for Christ's mission*
- **Experience Congregations in Mission**—*Equip congregations for Christ's mission*  
We will be a prophetic people characterized by uncommon devotion to the compassion and peace of God revealed in Jesus Christ!

### 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?



Members from the South Central States Mission Field help the Big Bridge Congregation in Jamaica put a roof on their new building.



# 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 25.

## Reflection:

Spend time with the reflection questions found in the document "Scripture in Community of Christ." (pages 26, 27)

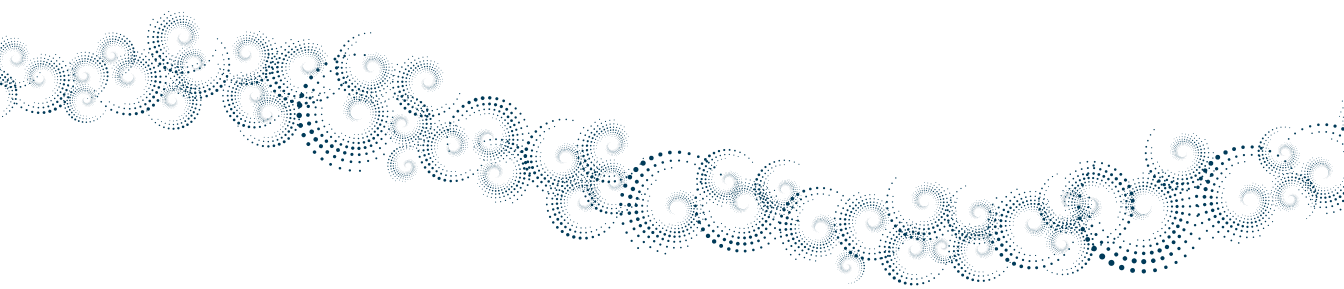
The story of God's transforming work in the world did not end with the testimony of

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 sacred story that is rooted in Christian history, including the Hebrew tradition from which Christianity emerged. Within



this larger history, Community of Christ has a particular story that is inspiring, colorful, and increasingly international. The church began in the early 1800s in upper New York, USA, during a time of Christian revival. So far, the church has established a presence in close to 60 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 30.

## 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 21<sup>st</sup> century? What could you do today to help them better understand what is going on in the church and society?

# 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 will use 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.

## 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 sha-

lom (peace), reveals the meaning of God's peace in all aspects of life.

- The vision of Zion is to promote God's reign on Earth, as proclaimed by Jesus Christ, through the leavening influence of just and peaceful communities.
- We courageously and generously share the peace of Jesus Christ with others.
- Led by the Holy Spirit, we work with God and others to restore peace (shalom) to creation.
- We celebrate God's peace wherever it appears or is being pursued by people of good will.

## Unity in Diversity

- Community of Christ is a diverse, international family of disciples, seekers, and 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 27 and at [www.CofChrist.org/discernment/onemany.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/onemany.asp).

### 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.



## 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 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 22.

### 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 community (the body of Christ) and have the promise of salvation. We experience salvation through Jesus Christ, but affirm that God’s grace has no bounds, and God’s love is greater than we can know.

## The Church

God intends Christian faith to be lived in companionship with Jesus 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 25.

## 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.

## 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 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 church throughout the world celebrates sacraments. These special ministries use common symbols and familiar procedures to draw us into relationship with God, who seeks to establish covenant with us. The sacraments embody God's grace and peace and lead to transformation of our lives and communities. The sacraments shape our identity and community life as followers of Jesus Christ. As we experience the blessings available through sacraments, we are empowered to share the peace of Jesus Christ and to fulfill our mission in the world.



Baptism



Confirmation



Communion (Lord's Supper)



Laying on of Hands for the Sick



Blessing of Children



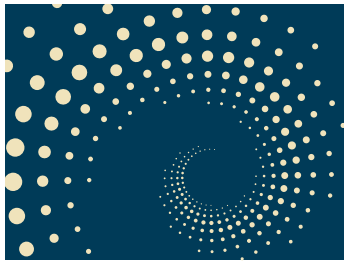
Marriage



Ordination



Evangelist Blessing

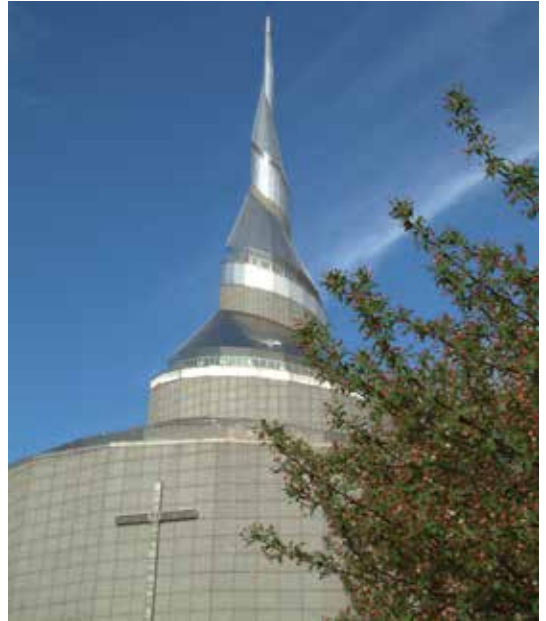


# We Share

## Temple 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.



Independence Temple



Kirtland Temple

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.]

Photo by Val Brinkerhoff

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 essential meaning of the Restoration as healing and redeeming agent is given new life and understanding, inspired by the life and witness of the Redeemer of the world.

—Doctrine and Covenants 156:5

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

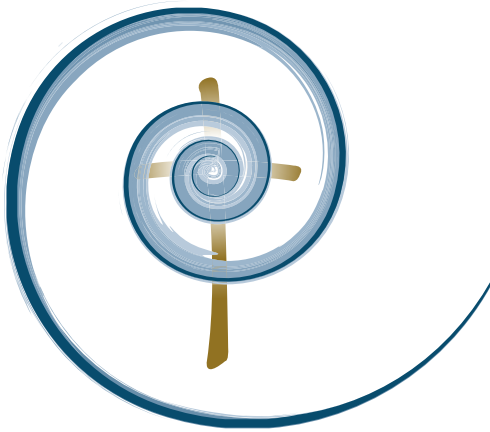


The spiraling, Christ-centered symbolism of the Temple and its defined purposes reveal the essence of God's presence with us. These images and concepts serve to focus the church on its true identity, message, and mission. As we become a people of the Temple, we will be led to embrace what "matters most" 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 become 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



Artist: Giuseppe Rungaldier

## Redeemer of the World

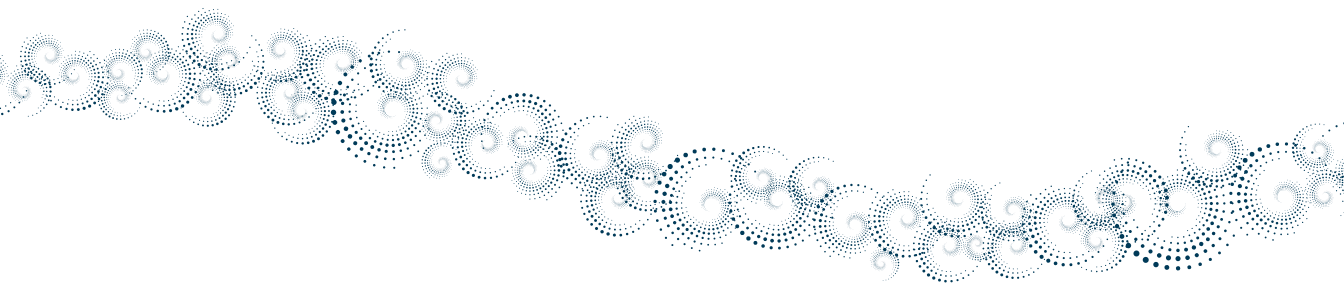
news of the coming reign of God on earth, preaching liberation to the oppressed and repentance to oppressors. He taught his followers to love God, to love their neighbors, and to love their enemies. By eating with sinners, serving the poor, healing the unclean, blessing children, and welcoming women

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 murderers 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, 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 sin, 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.



# 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 the first paragraph, 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 One

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

## Affirmation Two

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

## Affirmation Three

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

## Affirmation Four

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

## Affirmation Five

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

## Affirmation Six

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

## Affirmation Seven

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

## Affirmation Eight

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

## Affirmation Nine

With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book

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

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

## 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 Three)?
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 Three)? What values do you find in both the unity and diversity of the scriptural witness?
7. How have you seen scripture used to oppress, control, and dominate (Affirmation Four)? 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 Five)?
9. How do you use faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship in your reading, understanding, and application of scripture (Affirmation Six)? 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 Seven)? How has scripture been revelatory to you?

11. How has scripture helped you more “faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ” (Affirmation Eight)? 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 Nine)? How has each of these three books of scripture functioned in your life and faith journey?



*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 (also found at [www.CofChrist.org/discernment/onemany.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/discernment/onemany.asp)).*

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 unre-served 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 today'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 aboriginals, 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.

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 culture? 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.

# Perspectives on Church History

By President Stephen M. Veazey  
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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.

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 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 spotlight—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 histo-



Joseph Smith III

rians, 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 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, 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 restoring 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.

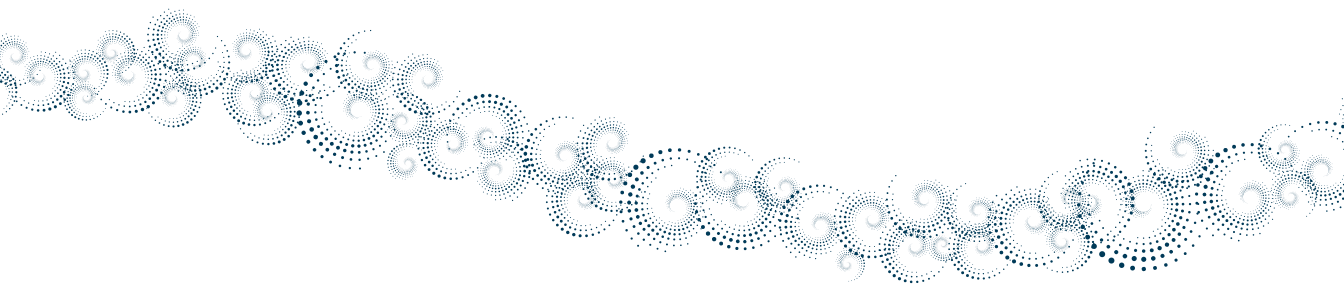
**8. We need to create a respectful culture**

**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.



# We Share

## A Disciple's Generous Response

God gives and loves graciously and generously. We receive. God provides "enough and to spare" (Doctrine and Covenants 101:2f). God shares in abundance "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over" (Luke 6:38 NRSV). Disciples love God. We share with others in gratitude. We strive to be

generous. We acknowledge that all we are and have is a gift from God.

Discipleship is a whole-life commitment we willingly make in response to God's wonderful generosity. Disciples place importance on good management of financial resources and find great joy through living generously.



God calls us as disciples of Jesus Christ to be generous in all relationships and commitments. Being generous disciples is about aligning our priorities with God's priorities, aligning our hearts with God's heart.

*Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint. Break free of the shackles of conventional culture that mainly promote self-serving interests. Give generously according to your true capacity. Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in the grace of generosity that flows from compassionate hearts without thought of return. Could it be otherwise in the domain of God, who eternally gives all for the sake of creation?*

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

One word we use to describe management of financial resources is “stewardship.” Our stewardship defines the extent we can generously share, wisely save, and responsibly spend. The following six principles of *A Disciple's Generous Response* guide us in living out our stewardship of resources. If you apply these principles to your response, you will discover your true capacity. When you truly receive and understand God's generosity in your life, your heart will be touched. You will want to be more generous. You will become more aware of your true capacity to receive and give generously. Repeating this cycle periodically will lead you to even greater levels of awareness.

## Generosity—A Spiritual Discipline

**Principle 1. A disciple practices generosity as a spiritual discipline in response to God's grace and love.**

- Receive first God's boundless grace and unending love.
- Share because of what we have received.
- Share with a sense of gratitude rather than indebtedness.
- Extend our lives in service to others; receive even as we give.
- Generosity becomes our nature.

## Reflection:

- How do you experience God's generosity in your life?
- How do you exercise the spiritual discipline of generosity?
- What is your source of generosity?

## Respond Faithfully

**Principle 2. A disciple is faithful in response to Christ's ministry.**

- The life and ministry of Jesus Christ expressed God's unconditional love for us.
- Respond to the ministry of Jesus Christ by building communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.
- Respond faithfully with steadfast love and commitment to God.
- In response to Christ's ministry, we are accountable to one another, God, and ourselves.

## Reflection:

- What motivates you to be faithful?
- How have you received God's generous love and grace?
- How will you be open daily to the touch of God's generous love and grace?



Photo by Paul Davis

## Respond Financially

**Principle 3. A disciple's financial response, while unique to individual circumstances, expresses love of God, neighbor, creation, and oneself.**

- Jesus taught, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21 NRSV).
- Using our resources to the glory of God aligns our hearts with God's heart.
- Prayerfully set attainable-but-significant financial goals.
- Purposeful financial response keeps us focused on God, Christ, and building God's kingdom.

### Reflection:

- If someone looked at how you use your finances, what would they conclude about where your heart is?
- How can you improve your financial response to express love of God, neighbor, creation, and self?

## Share Generously

**Principle 4. A disciple shares generously through tithing so others may experience God's generosity.**

- Tithing is a gift of thanksgiving to God in response to God's generous gifts to us.
- Tithing is given from our income before we save or spend.
- Our tithing response reflects the call to be in the church and the community.
- Contributions to mission tithes are shared equally between World Church Mission Initiatives and local and mission center ministries.
- Sharing generously through mission tithes enables the church to share the peace of Jesus Christ with others around the world.
- Honor what we have received from God by striving to give 10 percent or more of our income through tithing.

### Reflection:

- What has motivated you to give at the various stages of your life: child, youth, young adult, adult, and mature adult?
- What organizations or causes share the ministry of Christ with people?
- What actions will you and/or your family take to set an annual giving goal and work toward achieving it?

## Save Wisely

**Principle 5. A disciple saves wisely to create a better tomorrow for self, family, the church's mission, and the world.**

- Saving is a way to prepare for the future, both the expected and the unexpected.
- Saving extends our love, through bequests, to friends, family, and the future mission of the church.
- One method for increasing savings is to determine a sustainable standard of living at current income, and then maintain it when income increases.

### Reflection:

- What examples of expected and unexpected circumstances might you save for?
- What methods have you found successful for saving?
- How will you share your love through your savings?

## Spend Responsibly

**Principle 6. A disciple spends responsibly as a commitment to live in health and harmony with God and the world.**

- Living the other five principles motivates us to spend responsibly.
- The teachings of Jesus challenge us to make lifestyle choices that often are countercultural.

- We are called to exercise our power to choose to spend responsibly, focusing on meeting our needs and wants in moderation.
- Learning the importance of living within our means and the appropriate use of debt helps us become disciples who spend responsibly.

## Reflection:

- How do you find the right balance between needs and wants?
- Do you plan and manage your finances with a budget? If so, how has this helped you?
- What does living in health and harmony with God and the world mean to you?

## Scripture Reflection

*a. There are many lives waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel, or to be lifted from hopelessness by the hands of loving servants. But they will be lost to you without the generous re-*

*sponse of disciples who share from their own bounty that others may know the joys of the kingdom.*

*b. Many are fearful and believe their security is to be found in the accumulation of possessions. The answers you seek are not inherent in the things of this world but in a faith that places its trust in the promises given to all who would follow Jesus Christ.*

*c. You have been given the principles of generosity, rightly interpreted for a new time. These principles call every disciple to tithe faithfully in accordance with means and capacity. Those values, deeply rooted in the Restoration faith, affirm that stewardship and discipleship cannot be divided and are dependent upon each other.*

*d. The call to respond is urgent. Look to the needs of your own congregations, but look also beyond your walls to the far-flung places where the church must go. Each disciple needs a spiritual home. You are called to build that home and care for it, but also to share equally in the outreaching ministries of the church. In that way the gospel may be sent to other souls also yearning for a spiritual resting place.*

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:7a–d



In Greenville, Liberia, this young girl shared her gift of happily washing dishes all week for the mission center conference.

Photo by Paul Davis

## Reflection:

- Consider Doctrine and Covenants 162:7a. What is your “bounty”? In what ways can you share from this bounty and bless others?
- In what ways is your practice of stewardship connected to your discipleship? How can you bring these more closely into alignment?
- In what ways do you share equally in congregational ministries and the worldwide ministries of the church? If you are not sharing equally, what steps can you take to make the sharing equal?
- Review and reflect on these questions in light of your understanding of true capacity. When is it appropriate to place a number or percentage on your generous response?

- Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:6 to see how it speaks of the role of spiritual disciplines in gaining an awareness of your true capacity. How does being generous increase this awareness when you consider “exemplary generosity” as a spiritual discipline?

## An Invitation

In reading the six principles of A Disciple’s Generous Response, we hope you begin to consider ways that each principle applies to your life. When you respond faithfully, you will come to know your true capacity. The promise in Doctrine and Covenants 163:9 is clear: “Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in grace and generosity that flows from compassionate hearts without thought of return.” You are invited on this journey of discovery.

# 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.