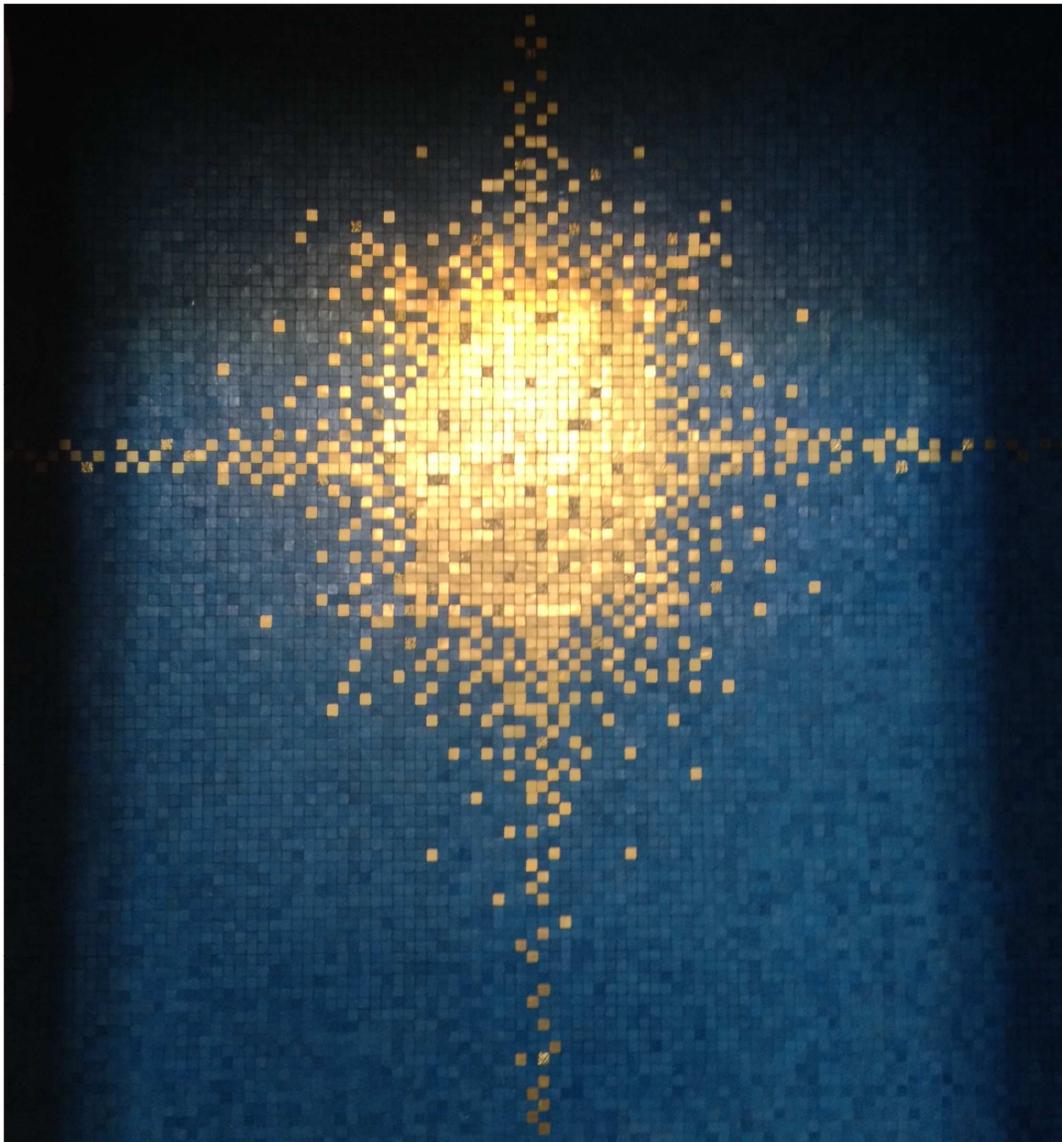


# Continuing Your Discipleship in Community of Christ

An Introduction for Latter-day Seekers



*Community of Christ*

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### Acknowledgments

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

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

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

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

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## 1. OUR UNIQUE HISTORY, MESSAGE, AND IDENTITY

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

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

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

Zion has been understood as many things: the reign of God, shalom, the peaceable kingdom, the beloved community, and God's kingdom on earth. Whatever you call it, Zion is not always a horizon away, but salvation is to be realized here and now (Rom. 13:11). Rather than wait for celestial kingdoms in the next life, we are called today to set free the oppressed, to proclaim peace, and to overcome injustices and unnecessary suffering in this life. Our divine call is to embody the gospel in covenant communities, through which the physical and spiritual needs of

people can be met, and through which harmony, security, and peace can be realized. With God, we take part in an ongoing creation, building a world of peace, reconciliation, and healing of the spirit—an active, redemptive peace for all.

We recognize the need for peace because of the brokenness all around us. God calls us to help everyone realize the plan of happiness. A familiar verse states that “Adam fell that [humanity] might be; and [men and women] are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 1:115/LDS 2:25).<sup>1</sup> While perhaps understanding this fall of Adam more metaphorically, our human condition involves suffering but has the potential for joy. Some suffering results from the very nature of our existence, but unnecessary suffering stems from choices that are made counter to God’s plan. When this happens, Zion is fled, and we cannot realize the joy that God envisions for us.

Alienation from God and unnecessary suffering among humans has been traditionally called sin, and it is something that we cannot fully overcome on our own. Lasting peace is difficult on our own, if not impossible, within the realities of human existence—for, as the apostle Paul reminds, all are sinners and have come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But, instead of being punished for our sins, we are punished by our sin and the sins of others—some (and perhaps many) causes of suffering being beyond our doing and control, such as disease, poverty, hatred, bigotry, rape, and war. Through Jesus Christ’s life and ministry, death and resurrection, God reconciles the world and breaks down the walls that divide. Christ is our peace. The cause and hope of Zion is found in the responding to and sharing of Christ’s salvation with others, setting free those who suffer and setting up pathways for peace throughout creation.

Early Christians proclaimed this “good news” (or “gospel”) that Christ had overcome death and sin. They rejoiced in Christ’s victory which ensures peace in this life and the next; and they called on others to follow and receive Christ by entering into the kingdom of God. Receiving Christ’s peace—or experiencing salvation, redemption, and restoration—is only possible through God’s grace, so where sin once resulted in suffering and death, through Christ we might find joy and eternal life (see Romans 5).

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<sup>1</sup> The Community of Christ editions of the Book of Mormon follow the original chapters set in 1830. Within the LDS tradition, Orson Pratt revised the chapters and verses long after the two churches had parted ways, resulting in the differences between the two traditions’ reference systems. There are two editions published by Community of Christ, the “Authorized Version” which was published in 1908, and the “Revised Authorized Version” published in 1966.

Early Saints of the Restoration felt that the beauty and power of this message of salvation, however, had been lost within the creeds and theological arguments that had followed in the centuries following Christ’s mortal ministry. They embraced what they believed was a restoration of the original “New Testament” church of Christ.<sup>2</sup> Like others who were interested in restoring Christ’s original teachings, the Restoration is part of a larger movement known as Christian Primitivism. In the United States in the 1800s, Christian Primitivists distinguished themselves from the largest two categories of Christianity in America, Protestantism and Catholicism. They rejected much of the history and experience, and the creeds and resulting theology that Christianity had developed for centuries.

For these *latter-day* disciples of Christ, their restored gospel was “new and everlasting” (D&C 20:1a/LDS 22:1).<sup>3</sup> Seeing a transcendent message with new eyes, old things became new again as they reconsidered and re-imagined Christianity. This fresh vision restored a crucial element to their Christianity—the prophetic impulse—that separated them even further from traditional Christians. The ecstatic nature of new revelation separated them as well from other Primitivists, who were more rational in how they sought to restore the church by reading the New Testament like a rigid blueprint. For Joseph Smith's followers, new revelations reopened the canon as well as the heavens. They were convinced that they were the one and only true church, and that all other forms of Christianity were apostate and without authoritative priesthood or salvific ordinances (or sacraments). They believed that Zion would be built and Christ would return in their lifetimes, to their planned temple in Independence, Missouri.<sup>4</sup>

Their exclusive vision—and the failure of realizing Zion, and lack of a Second Coming in their lifetimes—is not unlike the beliefs of the early Christians following the crucifixion of our Savior. Early Christians believed that Christ would return in their lifetimes, their interpretation of

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<sup>2</sup> Today, Community of Christ would say that this idea of an original church of Christ was more a construct of the nineteenth century than a structure of the first century.

<sup>3</sup> Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants are sometimes numbered differently in the LDS D&C from those of the Community of Christ D&C, due to the fluid nature of the book of scripture at the time of Joseph Smith’s death. Verses in the Community of Christ D&C use numbers to represent paragraphs in the original revelation, and letters of the alphabet for each line; and sections are generally printed in chronological order.

<sup>4</sup> The early Saints also saw themselves as a New Israel, in addition to the Latter-day Church. Restoring the elements of all previous dispensations, especially those from the “Old Testament,” almost consumed Joseph Smith by the time of Nauvoo. The later lesson on Temples will address this more in depth, although is useful here to note that Community of Christ has tended to reflect Kirtland’s Christian Primitivism more than Nauvoo’s focus on Israel and restoring Old Testament covenants. For further reading, see Jan Shipps’ *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985): 59, 75.

the Savior's teaching supporting this hope (Matt. 24:34, Mark 13:30, Luke 21:32, 1 Thess. 4:13-18). Eventually, Christians came to realize that Jesus was more than just the savior of one generation, one race, or one nation—but the Savior of all peoples and all times. This realization led to a maturation of the Christian witness and discipleship, and gave Christ's gospel new meaning, depth, and hope.

Community of Christ has undertaken a similar maturation, and has entered into a new understanding of what it means to be a people of the Restoration and followers of Christ. That is, while we once upheld the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as the one true church, we have come to see the Spirit of God at work beyond our tradition and assumptions. As such, we rejoice in rather than reject the faith journey of other Christians and other members of the Restoration. In place of exclusivity, we are experiencing increased understanding, awareness, and appreciation for the spiritual journey of others. Such includes recognizing the validity of those journeys as potential expressions of salvation, while still upholding our unique calling. Broadening our boundaries for Christ's church has led us to reconsider our brothers and sisters as more than those on our membership rolls, and our neighbors more than those in close proximity (Luke 10:25-37).

We affirm there is one true church, but it defies containment within the walls of any one building, or the creeds or articles of faith of any one earthly institution. In our journey as a prophetic people in search of Zion, we seek to *be* a true church, or members of Christ's universal kingdom for all of creation.

No, Jesus did not return in glory to the earth during the lifetimes of the first-generation disciples as they expected; nor did Christ return to a New Jerusalem in Independence during the lifetimes of the first-generation Saints. But the message of hope and peace they embraced is no less true or real. A return within their lifetimes was their hope, based on their limited experience and understanding of the eternal Christ. We have matured in that hope, and further explored what was timeless within their testimonies. We do not hold ourselves as bound to the particular and contingent understandings of former Christians or Saints, but to the timeless truths of the gospel and their meanings for our day.

Too often believers lose sight that God’s message is for all ages and peoples. Some have canonized one group, and their time and culture. But the message of the Restoration is that God conveys eternal truths to every generation to meet their unique needs. If we forget this, then what was once alive and vibrant becomes rigid, and the potential for liberation through Christ is limited. We must never forget that the gospel is both new and everlasting: everlasting in its unchanging message of salvation through Christ, and new as salvation is experienced in new times and places by new peoples, or experienced again in our hearts in new ways. Capturing this need to rediscover the gospel anew, Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e states: “Again you are reminded that this community was divinely called into being. The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment of time, but is instead the call to every generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe.”

As a Restoration people on a journey of faith, Community of Christ has continually sought to distinguish between the transcendent, and the culture and time in which the transcendent is revealed.<sup>5</sup> While honoring the founding prophet, we are not necessarily bound to Joseph Smith Junior’s interpretations, but seek the transcendent within his revelations that is still applicable today. Like all of our prophet-presidents, he was human and had his failings; but we believe in the power of his message that God speaks in our day across the diverse cultures of church members.

All prophetic counsel is part of an ongoing experience, revealing a journey of greater understanding of our mission, our Christ, and ourselves. Through this process, we ensure that we are a people *of* the Restoration and not a people *about* the Restoration. God doesn’t call us to be curators to a museum exhibit, but invites us to take part in the sacred story even today as it unfolds in a breathing, living experience! Accordingly, we see Joseph Smith’s calling as an invitation to an ongoing journey, not a foundation to be continually replicated.

While we frame our experience through the Restoration, our foundation is Christ. No longer wary of the experience of other Christians, still we still honor our Christian Primitivism, being neither Protestant nor Catholic. An early Primitivist cry was "no creed but Christ," and this is still useful. We respect diversity in how people think about God (including creedally), but we think

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<sup>5</sup> D&C 163:7 states that scripture “cannot be fully contained in any finite vessel or language. Scripture has been written and shaped by human authors through experiences of revelation and ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the midst of time and culture.”

about God foremost in terms of Jesus Christ's mission of salvation, and seek unity with other Christians in that mission.

As Restoration Christians, we have a unique and special message and ministry to the world—one that has brought peace and purpose to countless individuals. We invite you to join with us, to rejoice in continuing revelation, unity in diversity, the worth of all persons, and the blessings of community. Join with us and proclaim Jesus Christ, as Living, Breathing Word: Creator, Redeemer, and Restorer of all of creation. And with all Christians everywhere, let us stand to give thanks, for God be praised for the matchless gift of the Son!

## Discussion Questions for Lesson 1: *Our Unique History, Message, and Identity*

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

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

3. Name things you have learned from the larger Christian tradition which are part of your understanding of the gospel and experiences as a follower of Jesus.

*(Instructor makes list)*

How have these “learnings” informed your experience as a Restoration Christian?

*DISCUSS (Could also do this as a “pair share” in a larger group)*

4. The text states: “We affirm there is one true church, but it defies containment within the walls of any one building, or the creeds or articles of faith of any one institution. In our journey as a prophetic people in search of Zion, we seek to be *a* true church, or members of Christ’s universal kingdom for all of creation.” What does this mean to you? What questions do you have about this approach to living a faithful response to Christ’s call?

## 2. THE CHURCH

*“The story of Community of Christ is part of a much larger sacred story that is rooted in Christian history, including the Hebrew tradition from which Christianity emerged. Within this larger history, Community of Christ has a particular story that is inspiring, colorful, and increasingly international...The story of the church is one of unusual faith, vision, and creativity in response to God’s call. We can clearly see God’s Spirit active in every chapter of our faith story. What began with a teenager seeking God in prayer in the early 1800s continues today. God gives each generation insights, experiences, and challenges for divine purposes.”<sup>6</sup>*

### *Church History*

The church began in the early nineteenth century in western New York, during a time of great religious excitement and revival. Many involved were deeply concerned with their salvation, and churches were competing for converts. The family of Joseph Smith Junior was caught up in the religious fervor of their community, but was divided over which church to join. Joseph, then a young teenager, sought God in prayer. Years later, we would come to know this event as the *first vision*. However, for many years, Joseph kept this powerful experience private, sharing it with only close friends and family. Several more significant spiritual experiences followed the *first vision* and culminated in publishing the Book of Mormon, and the church formally organizing on 6 April 1830 at Fayette, New York. During these years, Joseph also received revelations further evidencing his prophetic call.

In the months that followed that founding April 6th gathering, the new church sent out missionaries and attracted members. Early in 1831, Joseph Smith Junior, his family, and many members moved to Ohio and united with Sidney Rigdon and the community of believers he led at Kirtland, Ohio. Rigdon had been a leader in another Restoration movement, but was dissatisfied that the movement didn't include the gifts of the Spirit such as prophecy and ecstatic outpourings like at Pentecost (Acts 2). Joseph Smith's message spoke to Rigdon and his many followers. In Kirtland, Smith built on the communalistic foundations of Rigdon and his congregation, and

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<sup>6</sup> “We Share a Sacred Story,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 10-11.

together worked to create a religious and social community. The early years of the church were marked by a self-understanding that the church had or could get all the answers to the religious questions of the time. The church's leaders were intent on restoring the church to its primitive purity, driven by a vision of Zion and a hope for the Second Coming.

In the following years, the new church expanded into nearby states and into Canada and Europe. Church members set up a community in 1831 at Independence, Missouri, and the Prophet designated that place as the "center place of Zion." However, tensions flared between newly-arrived church members and the "old settlers." Both groups had different ideas about community, government, slavery, and religion. Differences led to harassment and conflict—from both sides of the divide. While terrible atrocities were carried out on the Saints, church members were not always innocent and peaceful. In 1833, church members fled Independence and Jackson County, Missouri, and established new settlements in the lands north of the Missouri River. But, by mid-1838, the church and its members were no longer welcome in the state of Missouri, and moved east to Illinois.

By 1839, the church set up a new church headquarters and city on the banks of the Mississippi River at a place now called Nauvoo, Illinois. Thousands of church members moved to Nauvoo and the surrounding area, eventually overwhelming Nauvoo's old-time settlers. To protect the church from the violence of Missouri repeating in Nauvoo, the Prophet established a very powerful militia, and set up several judicial and political protections afforded by his position and Nauvoo's city charter. He was even running for the President of the United States, to further the Saint's protection and church's goals. From the view of outsiders, Joseph Smith Junior had consolidated religious, judicial, political, economic, and great military power unto himself (and indeed he had). This was seen as un-American and dangerous by outsiders. Ironically bringing about the very thing Joseph sought to avoid, tensions between Saints and Gentiles grew, and, on 27 June 1844, an angry mob killed Joseph Smith Junior and his older brother, Hyrum.

There were months and years filled with conflict and division following the death of the man whom church members loved and revered as a prophet. The members and leaders of the church had not been well prepared for this unexpected event and the young denomination became fragmented into many smaller factions. Nauvoo, the city filled with so much hope, became a

ghost town. Some church members followed Brigham Young to Utah. Others followed James Strang, a new member of the church who claimed angelic ordination following the founding prophet's death. Still others believed that Sidney Rigdon, or Smith's younger brother William, should lead the church. This confusion lasted several years.

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

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

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

The church entered a new era in 1976 when President W. Wallace Smith named his son, Wallace B. Smith, to succeed him as prophet and president. In 1978, W. Wallace Smith set a precedent by retiring from church leadership. President Wallace B. Smith presided over continued expansion of the church into many nations around the world. He challenged the membership of the church with the prophetic insight that allowed ordaining women to priesthood offices in 1985. Under his guidance, the Temple in Independence was built and dedicated in 1994. At the end of

his tenure, President Smith sensed God's call for W. Grant McMurray to succeed him; and in 1996, McMurray was ordained as president and prophet of the church. This was the first time that someone other than a Joseph Smith descendant served as church president.

President McMurray led the church for eight years. During his presidency, the church adopted a new name, reflective of its founding heritage and sense of identity and mission. On 6 April 2001, the church officially became known as Community of Christ. President McMurray resigned in 2004, and chose not to name a successor, but to leave that important task to the church as a community of faith. In Community of Christ practice, the absence of a church president (by death or resignation) does not dissolve the First Presidency. McMurray's counselors in the First Presidency remained in place as interim leaders.

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

During President Stephen M. Veazey's leadership, he has focused on redefining and restating the identity, message, and mission of Community of Christ. He has led the church in defining its Enduring Principles and Basic Beliefs. He repeatedly reminds us that the mission of Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead; and that God calls whomever God calls.

At the 2007 World Conference, President Veazey presented a revelation guiding the church to hear God weeping over the cries of the poor, to courageously challenge anything contrary to God's restoring purposes, and to be just and wise stewards in caring for the earth. This new revelation was later canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants as Section 163. The canon of scripture was further expanded in 2010 with the addition of Section 164, guiding the church to accept other Christian baptisms, rediscover the blessings of the Lord's Supper, and to recognize

that "[t]hrough the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God" (D&C 164:5).

Responding to the prophet's inspired call for tolerance and love, several national conferences of the church, including the United States, have extended marriage to all persons regardless of sexual orientation. In these jurisdictions, all those living in monogamous (and married relationships, where recognized legally) may be called to the priesthood.

### *Church Organization*

The basic unit of the church is the congregation which is led by a pastor who is usually elected yearly by members of the congregation in a business meeting.<sup>7</sup> Pastors are members of the priesthood, usually holding the office of elder. A pastor has counselors, or shares leadership with another person as a co-pastor. The congregation has freedom to adapt models of leadership that fit the needs of the congregation.

Several congregations join together in what is known as a mission center.<sup>8</sup> While mission centers exist to support local congregations, they also provide classes, family and youth camping experiences, workshops, and many other support and training programs.

A mission center president and a mission center financial officer lead each mission center. Usually, the president and financial officer each have two counselors. The mission center conference governs the mission center; all the members of a mission center, or delegates elected by each congregation, comprise the conference.

Mission centers receive administrative and ministerial guidance from a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles. Each of the apostles supervises a "field," which is comprised of several

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<sup>7</sup> Congregations and pastors in Community of Christ are similar to wards and bishops in the LDS Church organization. The office of bishop in the early Restoration was a stake-level function that evolved to a congregational and pastoral role many years after Brigham Young and his followers settled in Utah. Pastors and other congregational leaders are typically volunteers, who donate their time after work or in retirement.

<sup>8</sup> Mission centers were formerly called "stakes" in Community of Christ. However, the Community of Christ stake (now mission center) is more like an "area" in the LDS Church, in that they cover a much larger geographical area (covering several states or countries) with a larger number of congregations than typical in an LDS stake (sometimes as many as 30 or 40).

mission centers. The Quorums of Seventy help the Twelve Apostles in their leadership of the missionary work of the church.

The First Presidency (the president of the church and two counselors) provides leadership to the entire church, as presidents over the Melchisedec Priesthood. The First Presidency oversees the church from Community of Christ's Temple and International Headquarters in Independence, Missouri, out of which the church sponsors conferences, worship, and educational opportunities.

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

World Conferences of the entire denomination are held periodically to conduct the affairs of the church. Legislation passed at the 2007 World Conference called for conferences to be held at three-year intervals (although the president of the church speaks to the church every April 6th).

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

## *Congregational Life*

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

One of the beauties of Community of Christ is that each congregation is unique according to the gifts and personalities of its members. This means the programs offered by each congregation and often their schedules of meetings will be unique as well. Congregations come in all sizes, but can be as small as a handful of people, to dozens of families. While International Headquarters provides support to congregations through handbooks, curriculum, and guidelines, it is rare to find two congregations that look and act the same!

Just as every home and house is different, every congregation and church building is different. Each is a work in progress with additions, repairs, growth, and remodeling happening. There is no standard architectural model for congregational meetinghouses. Church members are people on a journey, seeking God's kingdom. They are much like a family. These people are often at their best while associating together as a group of disciples connected in the community of the church.

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

Worship services often follow the ancient, four-part model found in Isaiah 6.1-8:

1. Praise: we recognize God and come into God's presence with praise.
2. Confession/Repentance: We confess our unworthiness and ask for forgiveness.
3. Proclamation: We receive God's forgiveness and hear the word of God (sermon).
4. Commitment: We (re)commit ourselves to God and to serving others.

Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ enriches our lives and creates a deep sense of satisfaction. Having received so much from God, followers of Christ want to share the “good news” of the gospel. They generously respond (see right insert) with their time and money so the lives of others, throughout the world, might also be blessed. In a world where people seek to dominate others, our call to bring peace and justice for everyone is desperately needed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Community of Christ believes that its members are called to be a prophetic people. To be a prophetic community means many things to us. It means that we will seek to pay attention to God's ever-new ways of reaching out to our wounded world. Old forms do not restrict the Spirit of the One who came to set captives free. To be prophetic means to watch and listen with the eyes and ears of prophets: demanding justice, seeking Zion, and responding to the new things God is doing in the world.

## Discussion Questions for Lesson 2: *The Church*

1. Beginning with the death of Joseph Smith Junior in 1844, in your own words tell the story of the events leading to the ordination of Joseph Smith III marking the beginning of the Reorganization.
2. What events in the life of Community of Christ since 1844 would you regard as significant? Why?
3. What questions do you have in regards to the structure and organization of the congregation, mission center, or world church? (*discuss*)
4. How have you seen the Community of Christ mission statement reflected in the lives of your Community of Christ friends?
5. Share about a Community of Christ worship experience that has been meaningful to you?  
(*in large group or pair share*)
6. Discuss the fivefold mission of the church (the Mission Initiatives), and how it reflects the total mission of Christ.
7. What does it mean to be a prophetic people?

### 3. SPEAKING OF GOD

**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.<sup>9</sup>**

*God*

*We believe in one living God who meets us in the testimony of Israel, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. We affirm the Triune God—One God in a community of three Persons. All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination. This God alone is worthy of our worship.<sup>10</sup>*

One of the most fundamental questions of Christianity and religion overall is how to describe the inexhaustible mystery of God: Who is the God that we proclaim? This is a far more difficult a question than most would surmise. God is beyond full comprehension by humans, leading to much disagreement over the nature of the Divine. Words, as finite vessels, can never fully capture God’s nature or majesty. We only know what God reveals, and even that within our limited understandings. Thus, to speak of the reality of God is to endeavor to speak out of our quite limited understanding of God.

Even with its limitations, faith seeks to understand. We seek to understand because of our encounter with God, as we experience salvation in Jesus Christ, and experience a living communion with the Holy Spirit.

***We believe in the Living God.***

Psalm 63:1, 3

*O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no*

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<sup>9</sup> “We Share Enduring Principles,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*. (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 12.

<sup>10</sup> “We Share Basic Beliefs,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 14.

*water...Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.*

2 Corinthians 4:6

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

The church does not base its convictions about God with the kind of clear arguments that can be demonstrated irrefutably on a chalkboard. Instead, the church trusts the words of its witnesses and its experience of God's transforming power in its midst. We did not think our way to God; God reveals God's own person to us, and we respond with "We believe." King David knew a Presence who quenched life's deepest thirst, whose love was better even than life; the Apostle Paul knew One whose radiant glory had transfigured his own life. The church believes in that same God, who has shown us repeatedly that our trust is not misplaced. We believe in the Living God.

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

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

The God whom we have come to know is not remote or unconcerned, but present in the heart of all things, concerned for galaxies, whales, sparrows, and the child next door. God is not

indifferent to the evil we do or the injustice we promote, for these things are contrary to God's nature. Rather, this God has acted to release creation from evil, to forgive sins, to mend our lives and make all things new. When we say in the church that we believe in God, we have in mind only *this* God.

Mosiah 2:13-14

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

The God of whom scripture testifies is a God of names: God Most High; the Mighty God; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Holy One of Israel; "I am"; and countless more. For the biblical witnesses, a name was the key to one's identity, and not simply a convenient handle. That the true God could be named was a sign of mercy. For God's people the name then becomes a reminder of how God graciously became known. The names of God in scripture tell God's story, and in so doing reveal who and what the church means when it says "God."

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

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

We have historically emphasized that God is unchanging. This does not mean that God is a

static being, and that human structures in church and society, based on one generation's understanding of God, should be permanent. Instead, what we mean is that our God is *always* reliable and trustworthy, that God is true to God's own vital nature, that *God's loyalty to the creation is unswerving*. In practice, this means that we realize discipleship and church life will be marked by change and growth. Faith in the Living God is never to settle for where we have been or what we have understood, but to be pioneers and pilgrims always on the Way.

### *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 walls that divide. Christ is our Peace.*<sup>11</sup>

### ***We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.***

Psalm 40:1-3

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

John 6:35, 51

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

Christian faith holds that the glory of God is made known definitively in Jesus Christ— not in human words, but in the eternal Word of God. In the language of scripture, God's glory is the splendid beauty of God's own eternal being, the weighty holiness of the creator of all things. The

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<sup>11</sup> "We Share Basic Beliefs," in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 2010, 14.

apostles testified that in Christ's life, death, and resurrection they had beheld nothing less than the glory of God. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory" (John 1:14).

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

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

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

The empty tomb reveals the glory of God. “He has been raised; he is not here” (Mark 16:6). The story of Jesus ends with the wonder of an empty tomb. Jesus Christ is no longer a figure of memory, but, raised into God’s own life, he now lives and reigns in power. Easter casts its light backward over the whole career of Jesus and manifests what was always true about him: that he was and is Christ, that he was and is for all time God’s Son. Easter shows the Cross to be God’s mercy in action. And it casts its light forward, revealing a glimpse of a glory yet to be: the new creation. If there were no resurrection of Jesus, there would be no good news. Easter is the beating heart of the Christian faith.

From Community of Christ origins in the 1830s until today, our watchwords have been the same that the boy prophet first heard: “This is my Beloved Son; hear him” (Mark 9:7). Were we to sum up what we are about, we could do no better than quote the prophet Joseph Smith. In 1838, he wrote: “The fundamental principle of our religion is the testimony of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ, ‘that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended up into heaven;’ and all other things are only appendages to these.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus, God with us and God for us, is the center of the faith of Community of Christ.

Doctrine and Covenants 76:3g (LDS 72:22-23)

*And, now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him, that he lives; for we saw him, even on the right hand of God.*

For an official statement on Christ, see the document: “We Proclaim Jesus Christ.”<sup>13</sup>

### *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*

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, Joseph Junior. *Elders Journal* 1.3 (Far West, MO: July 1838): 44.

<sup>13</sup> “We Proclaim Jesus Christ,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 2010, 22-23; also found at [www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/christology.asp](http://www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/christology.asp).

*death; and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is working.<sup>14</sup>*

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

Psalm 139:7, 12

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

Luke 4:18-19

*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.*

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

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

Scripture uses many images to depict the Spirit. Scripture speaks of the Spirit as purifying Fire, Peace that passes understanding, Light, Love, Water, Wind, and life-giving Breath. As the Breath of God, the Spirit swept over the void at the dawn of creation, bringing order out of chaos.

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<sup>14</sup> “We Share Basic Beliefs,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 2010, 14.

The Spirit helped people like Moses, Deborah, and Samuel do impossible tasks. The Spirit guided judges, kings, and sages in Israel. The Spirit inspired the prophets to speak of God's judgment and promise. The identity of the Spirit is made known supremely in Jesus Christ. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. At his baptism, the Spirit revealed his identity as the Beloved Son. By the Spirit, Jesus healed the sick. He promised his disciples that he would endow them to fulfill his mission through the Spirit. From the tomb in which his crucified body lay, he was raised into the very life of God by the Holy Spirit.

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

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

The Holy Spirit is the *Redeemer*. Redemption is release from slavery. Redemption is to be freed from anything that hinders in us the love of God and our neighbor. Both in his life and in death, the Lord Jesus set free from captivity all who put their trust in him. As the Risen One, his liberating power is present in the Holy Spirit, who is ever seeking to deliver us from the evils that bind and distort life.

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

The Holy Spirit is the *Renewer*. Silently, quietly, and invisibly—as we respond in faith to the sacred story, and to the sacraments—the Spirit is transfiguring us. The Love poured out at Pentecost actively seeks to renew our lives at their very roots. It was this endowment and pentecostal experience of the Spirit that the Saints in the Kirtland Temple were after, to clothe them spiritually to take the Gospel to the world, in imitation of the first Pentecost and instructions of Jesus (Luke 24:46-53, and Acts 2). But the renewing work of the Spirit has an even vaster scope than the transformation of individuals and even the church: already in the present gift of the Spirit we have a foretaste of the final liberation of *all creation*, when Easter will come at last to all things.

We experience the Spirit’s revealing, redeeming, restoring, renewing presence in our midst. The Spirit, through Whom the prophets called Israel to walk justly, is calling us to the same path today. The Spirit poured out on Jesus is calling us in his name to make real today our vision of the world that will be. And so with all those who across the ages have named Jesus Christ as Lord, we cannot help but respond with these venerable words: *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

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

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

### Discussion Questions for Lesson 3: *Speaking of God*

1. How is *believing in* different from *believing that*?

2. As we consider scripture, what different “names” are used to reference God?

*(Instructor list)*

How do these names reveal the nature of God to you?

*DISCUSS (Can also do as a “pair share”)*

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

4. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit as Redeemer? Restorer? Revealer? Renewer?

5. How would you describe the concept “God, Christ, Spirit” to a friend?

6. Read the document “We Proclaim Jesus Christ” (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 2010, 22-23; also found at [www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/christology.asp](http://www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/christology.asp)) and discuss as a group.

#### 4. WOVEN TOGETHER: CREATION, HUMANITY, SIN, SALVATION, AND ZION

##### *Sacredness of Creation*

- **In the beginning, God created and called all of it good.**
- **Spirit and material, seen and unseen, are related.**
- **Creation’s power to create or destroy reminds us of our vulnerability in this life.**
- **God is still creating to fulfill divine purpose.**
- **We join with God as stewards of care and hope for all creation.**<sup>15</sup>

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

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

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

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

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<sup>15</sup> “We Share Enduring Principles,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 12.

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 those limits. 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.

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

Created in God's image, we are called to take part in God's ongoing creation. Whether it is light, vegetation, or animals, God is busy creating, throughout the first two chapters of Genesis, and to this very moment. There can be no doubt, then, that if humans are made in God's image, it must be God's intent that we are to create. The specifics of what we might create are diverse.

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

Doctrine and Covenants Section 163, given in 2007, includes profound guidance to Community of Christ refining our common understanding about God's peace:

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

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a-b

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

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

### **What is Shalom?**

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

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

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

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

Other cultures might have other words that capture similar ideas to Shalom. Polynesians have such a root, which means compassion, health, mercy, and peace: Aloha (Hawaiian), Aroha (Maori), or Alofa (Samoan).

As a community of believers with cultures from all over the world, we embrace all the ways that Christ can be embodied and revealed among us.

**Shalom!**

As a community of faith we affirm that we belong to God and to one another. The quality of our relationships depends on the exercise of our freedom and ability to choose wisely. Freedom is a gift God gave to us at our creation. We are free to choose responsibly or not. We have liberty, yet God holds us accountable for how we use it in all aspects of life.

Saving humanity from its failings, 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.

The scriptures use a special word to describe God's generosity toward us in our brokenness. The word is grace. This term appears more than 150 times in the New Testament, a clear signal that grace is at the very heart of God's revelation in Christ. In its simplest sense the term describes a gift freely granted to the undeserving. Grace is the word scripture uses to speak of God's limitless hospitality toward us.

Grace is the greatest gift ever given, and it is given freely, as much as we are willing to receive—for even with grace God honors our agency. It is only through grace that we are saved, as affirmed in the Bible and Book of Mormon. Consider these words from Jacob:

*Cheer up your hearts, and remember that ye are free to act for yourselves; to choose the way of everlasting death, or the way of eternal life. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember after ye are reconciled unto God, that **it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved.***

—2 Nephi 7:40-42, emphasis added (LDS 10:23-24)

Two chapters later, the conversation on grace deepens, this time in the words of Nephi: “*For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do*” (2 Nephi 11:44/LDS 25:23). Through both of these passages, we understand that God honors our agency, and gives us the choice of whether we will choose to receive the gift of grace. But, even if we receive it, still it is a

gift that we could never earn on our own. When we choose to be reconciled to God, we allow Christ to transform our lives, receiving and experiencing the matchless gift of grace.

While we experience salvation through Jesus Christ, we also affirm that God's grace has no bounds, and God's love is greater than we can know. Salvation comes from God through the person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. God's love revealed in Jesus Christ confronts human evil to save us from our sin. God's grace does not leave us alone, even in our separation from God. Remarkably, through grace, God's love so embraces us that, by the power of the Holy Spirit and our faith, we experience our lives transformed into new life in Christ. By God's grace we are turned from rebellion, healed from sin, renewed by the Holy Spirit, and called to discipleship.

The term "grace" further suggests a deep truth about God's way of healing creation. God has reached out in Christ to reconcile the world and to welcome us to God's table despite what we are. Christ acted for us independently of our goodness or badness, freely entering the hell of our alienation from God for our sakes. "While we still were sinners," Paul writes, "Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God did not wait for human beings to make the first step before redeeming the world in Christ; rather, any steps human beings take toward God happen only because God has first embraced us in compassion.

Grace also has to do with power. Grace is not a lifeless substance, but God's love in action. As saving, life-renewing power God's grace justifies or "rights" the sinner (Romans 3:24). It "brings" salvation and "trains" us to live a new kind of life (Titus 2:11–12). The power of grace was on all the disciples of the early church, energizing their life together as a community (Acts 4:33–37). Stephen did miracles because he was "full of grace and power" (Acts 6:8). Grace strengthens the hearts of believers so they may live in the freedom of the gospel (Hebrews 13:9). When we look back over our lives and wonder how it was that we got to this point in our pilgrimage with God, we often say, in the words of the old hymn (*Amazing Grace*, by John Newton), "'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Grace is another way to say, "for God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

When we say that we have been "saved by grace," what do we mean? We mean first that our status as children of God is grounded in God's mercy. We do not find acceptance by doing all the

right things. Nor do we choose discipleship because we are so smart or so good. What brings us to God starts with God. All that is asked is that become vulnerable to the power of grace to reconcile and heal us.

Second, we mean the healing of our humanity is not a do-it-yourself project. The changes needed are far too radical for that. Only the Living God, triumphant over sin and death, can mend us, and so we believe that we can be saved only by grace.

Third, we mean that apart from all we can do or achieve, we ever remain fallible, broken creatures serving in an imperfect vessel called the church. Our journeys bring daily proof of how fragile our lives are and how deep the roots of sin lie buried in our hearts. In Christ, we who are always sinners are at the same time always his people.

We mean, finally, that we are not better, nobler, or more beloved of God than others. That we have heard God's call is a humbling mystery. Nothing about us merits our being in this path, receiving these gifts, offering this service. We can adequately express our awe only by confessing that we are saved by grace.

How do we gain the saving grace of God? Grace, as an aspect of God's freedom, cannot be bound in rigid formulas. Anything that draws one toward God is grace. Once that truth is affirmed, that God is at work in our lives, Community of Christ believes that three important responses mark the beginning of the Christian journey: faith, repentance, and baptism.

Faith is reaching out in personal trust to receive the gift God offers: a new identity as a beloved child—called, accepted, and forgiven. Faith is our simple “yes” to this gift.

Repentance is about changing the course of our lives: not to earn grace, but because grace has already claimed us. To repent is to turn from “dead works,” or anything that keeps us from life in God's love.

Baptism of water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit unites the believer with Christ. In baptism, we publicly enter into the death and resurrection of Jesus, and we covenant to walk as part of the community that calls him Lord.

Baptism of the Spirit (or confirmation) follows, as elders of the church lay on hands in imitation of the apostolic pattern (Acts 8:17). The companion sacraments of baptism of water and of Spirit recall the Holy Spirit descending like a dove at Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21-22). Through confirmation, the new disciple is formally united with the church and given strength for the journey ahead. Confirmation makes plain what has been happening all along: the Holy Spirit as the agent of grace has guided us to this point and will always carry us in God's steadfast love. New life in Christ is in every sense a sheer gift. The church can never remind itself of this fact too often. Grace is nothing less than the soul of the gospel.

When some people talk about salvation, they focus on accepting Christ as Savior so they can go to heaven when they die. Doctrine and Covenants Section 163:2a, however, states that God wants all people to "...discover the blessings of all the dimensions of salvation." People need saving from loneliness, fear, and hopelessness right here and now. We need salvation from disempowered lives in which we feel helpless to make the world a better place. Also, the need for salvation from poverty and violence is acute. The salvation that we are to discover has as much to do with conditions here and now as it does with the condition of our soul after we die. Believing in life after death is important, and that hope brings peace, but our concern for salvation is broader than that, and is shaped by the vision of Zion, God's peaceable kingdom here on the earth.

Zion—the peaceable kingdom, or kingdom of God—is the coming triumph of love, justice, mercy and peace that one day will embrace all of creation. Jesus Christ's 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. As a people of Zion, we express our commitment to herald God's peaceable kingdom on earth by forming Christ-centered communities in families, congregations, neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world.

Thus, Zion is our earthly reflection of the kingdom of God in the next life. By faith we share in eternal life even now, with a firm hope in the next life. In Christ, God's love finally will overcome all that degrades creation, even death itself. Christ's resurrection 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.

So, although we have a firm hope in the next life, our focus as a church tends less towards the next life, and more towards this life. Thus, the traditional language of the Restoration about different kingdoms of glory as the reward in the next life doesn't speak to us any longer, with our current focus and understanding of God's glory and salvation. Still, the historical conception holds this truth: all receive and experience God's glory and salvation to varying degrees. Today, we uphold this concept: all receive God's glory, as much as they are willing to receive, in this life and the next.

With salvation possible here and now, life is not a lost cause to be endured. But 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. This is the very definition of Zion!

Another historical teaching of the Restoration is that death does not limit God's mercy. Community of Christ has confidence in a loving and merciful God who doesn't limit salvation or give up on us, ever! The Apostle Peter wrote that Christ "went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison" and thereby "the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does" (1 Peter 3:19; 4:6). The Book of Mormon shares a similar message, but gives us further insight regarding the state of those who die without baptism, and on the purity of children. Moroni wrote:

*For behold, all little children are alive in Christ, **and also all they that are without the law.** For the power of redemption comes on all that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned...cannot repent; and to such baptism avails nothing*  
—Moroni 8:25-26, emphasis added (LDS 8:22)

The Prophet Joseph Smith recorded a wonderful vision he received in the temple at Kirtland on 21 January 1836. In his vision of the celestial kingdom he saw his brother Alvin, who had died before the church was organized and had not been baptized. The Prophet

*...marveled how it was that [Alvin] had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom...Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a*

*knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom...*

—*Community of Christ History* 2:16 (LDS D&C 137:6-8)

The living God whom we serve is a God of justice and mercy, advocate and judge for the both the living and the dead. 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 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."

**Discussion Questions for Lesson 4: *Woven Together: Creation, Humanity, Sin, Salvation & Zion***

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

6. Consider this passage from the chapter: *“With salvation possible here and now, life is not a lost cause to be endured. But 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.”*

a. How does this passage connect with your understanding of Zion and the nature of God? (See D&C 36:2h-i / Moses 7:18, LDS)

b. How does this passage connect with your understanding of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christian church (Acts 2:42-47)?

7. What topics in this chapter do you have a desire to learn more about? *(Instructor list and lead discussion on how more in depth study could be explored and supported.)*

## 5. ONWARD TO ZION

### *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 all persons* while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.**
- **Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people, especially those who cannot fully care for themselves.<sup>16</sup>**

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

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

Acts 2 begins by the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost. Peter then proclaims Jesus as the Christ, and invites everyone in the crowd to be baptized. The chapter ends

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<sup>16</sup> “We Share Enduring Principles,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 13.

with the disciples sharing all that they had with one another. In the early Jerusalem church two thousand years ago, we have an example set for us in which Jesus is being proclaimed and a Spirit-filled community is being created that is good news to the poor. This community we call Zion:

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

—Doctrine and Covenants 36:2h–i (LDS Moses 7:18-19)

Our most recent revelation has this to say about Zion:

*Beloved Community of Christ, do not just speak and sing of Zion. Live, love, and share as Zion: those who strive to be visibly one in Christ, among whom there are no poor or oppressed.*<sup>17</sup>

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

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

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

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

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<sup>17</sup> This inspired counsel was delivered to the World Conference by Stephen M. Veazey, Prophet-President of Community of Christ, in April of 2013. It may very well be canonized in the future as Section 165 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Read the entire Words of Counsel at [www.cofchrist.org/presidency/041413WordsofCounsel](http://www.cofchrist.org/presidency/041413WordsofCounsel) .

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

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

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

*And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God. They were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God.*  
—4 Nephi 1: 1-4, 12-13, 17-20, English modernized and condensed (LDS 1.1-3, 11-12, 15-17)

Zion is community where the worth of all people and the sacredness of all creation are fully lived out. Zion is transforming families, neighborhoods, and nations. As Joseph Smith taught, Zion is wherever righteous people build up a place of safety for their children.

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

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

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

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

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

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

—[www.outreach-international.org](http://www.outreach-international.org)

We can also bring about the kingdom of God on earth by living generously, and specifically through *A Disciple's Generous Response* (see page 15). Responding generously as a disciple of Jesus Christ allows us to share wealth so we can assist people worldwide.

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

when we work to make the world more peaceful in all these realms of body, mind, spirit, and relationships, we are doing the work of Christ.

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

Our story is one of a people called by Jesus Christ to seek God's peaceable kingdom on earth. At times this journey has required great faith and sacrifice. Yet we view our history honestly and openly, and we confess many mistakes and sins as a people. We see the kingdom is, thankfully, always much greater than our best or worst efforts. Still, by the grace of God, we sense that our calling is to be part of the coming of Zion—peaceable and just communities everywhere on earth. We have found nothing more meaningful, significant, enduring, or worthwhile.

The idea of Zion began as a holy city and for us this image of the city has become one of our central symbols. Zion is part of our hope for the future. As Easter restored the broken community of the disciples, so the cause of Zion calls us to work for mending neighborhoods, nations, and nature. This work is difficult, but not futile. The Bible closes with the image of the new holy city coming down to earth (Revelation 21). We take that to be a promise that community is the future of the human race. The age to come is about perfecting life together. God's threefold name reveals that Zion exists within the Triune Community of God. All of creation is to reflect that divine reality and harmony. That is the end for which we were created. That is the end for which our humanity is being renewed. Because of this future, we embrace in hope the cause of Zion.

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

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

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

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



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

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

—1 Nephi 3:187(LDS 13.37)

## Discussion Questions for Lesson 5: *Onward to Zion*

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

a. Which (if any) are new perspective for you? (identify)

b. How do these perspectives connect with your understanding of Zion?  
(discuss)

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

3. List specific ways “worth of all persons” and “sacredness of all creation” are lived out in Zionite communities.

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

5. *Note to Instructor:* Show a trailer (short video) from Outreach International ([www.outreach-international.org](http://www.outreach-international.org)) and discuss how OI expresses principles of “kingdom living.”

6. Using the welfare of all children as the measuring stick for the health of your community, what critical and searching questions emerge in your mind with regard to yourself, your neighborhood, your schools and your government? What critical questions emerge with regard to our world?

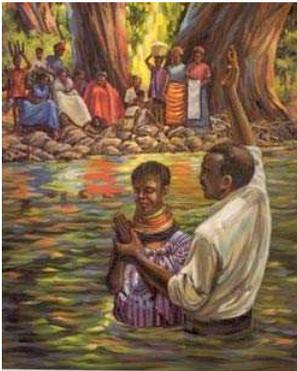
## 6. THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Community of Christ throughout the world celebrates the sacraments of the church (we formally used the term "ordinances" instead of "sacraments"). The word sacrament means "to make sacred." These special rituals use common activities and elements—like water and bread, eating and touch—to connect us in relationship with God and the sacred community. Through sacraments, we enter into covenants with God. 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.<sup>18</sup>

Through the sacraments, one discovers the presence of God everywhere and understands that all life is sacred. These encounters point to God's loving desire to bring all humans into peace, wholeness, and right relationships with each other and the Divine.

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

### *Baptism*



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

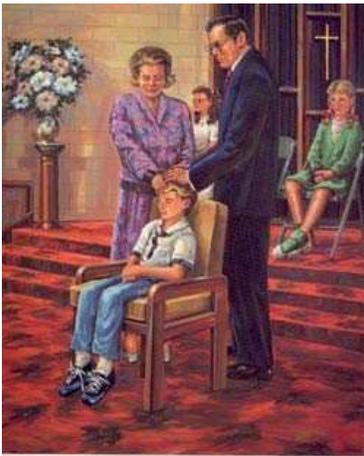
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<sup>18</sup> Modified from "We Share Sacraments," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 17.

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

Baptism in Community of Christ is by immersion. Many church buildings have a baptismal font in the chapel (sanctuary). Baptisms are often done during the normal Sunday morning worship service, but can be done at other times. Community of Christ practices "believer's baptism." This means that baptism is for those old enough to decide to be disciples, usually at the age of eight or later in life. We baptize those who have expressed a wish to covenant with Christ to follow him all their lives. Preparation for baptism is done in the local congregation. The wish to be baptized need only be expressed to the pastor or other congregational leader. The person being baptized chooses an Aaronic priest or an elder to perform this sacrament "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."<sup>19</sup>

### *Confirmation*



Baptism of the Holy Spirit follows baptism by water. Following the example set by the apostles in the early church (Acts 8:17), elders lay their hands on the head of the new disciple and

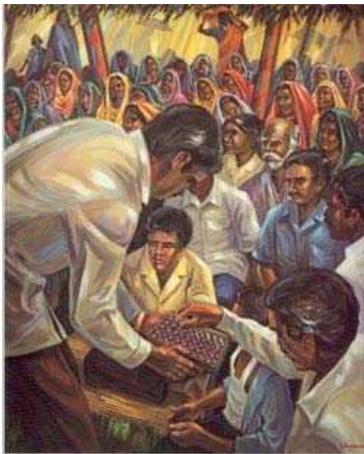
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<sup>19</sup> While both the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants use the term "Holy Ghost" in the baptism prayer, Community of Christ tradition recognizes "Holy Spirit" as being interchangeable, and having the same meaning. Accordingly, our priesthood often ends the prayer with "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

pray for the Holy Spirit's blessing. For those who would follow as disciples, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, "another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth..." (John 14:16-17). Through confirmation, the disciple receives the guidance and blessing of God's Spirit for strength to keep the baptismal covenant to follow Jesus. This sacrament "confirms" the new disciple as a full member of Community of Christ.

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

### *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Communion)*



Jesus gave his disciples a piece of bread and drink of wine and said to them: "Take, this is my body....This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 12:22-24). The Gospel of Luke further says, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Most congregations share the Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of each month, and can share this on other special occasions when appropriate. This could be during World Conference, or perhaps at Easter, or during a retreat or family camp.

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

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

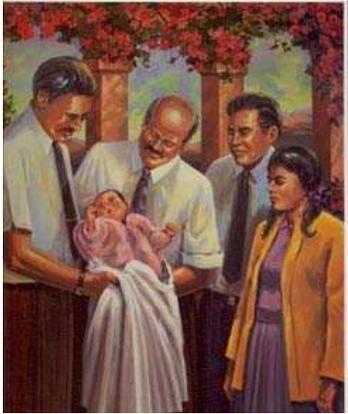
### *Ordination*



Jesus gave spiritual gifts "to equip the saints [disciples] for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-13). All members are called to serve in the church, displaying these spiritual gifts from God. Some discredit the office of a baptized and confirmed member (D&C 17:18-19; D&C 20:68-70, LDS), but it is essential to the congregation and church, limited only from sacramental and presiding roles that are the responsibility of specific priesthood offices.

But some are called to serve in specific priesthood offices for the good of the congregation and community. When a person accepts a call to priesthood, the congregation supports that calling through a worship service celebrating the person's commitment to serve. A prayer of ordination is offered asking God's blessing on the person's ministry. Transparently, ordination is done during a public worship service, and often takes place during a regularly scheduled weekly service in the congregation. The ordained person then becomes one of those who minister to the congregation in sacramental or presiding roles, or both. More on priesthood is discussed in Lesson 8.

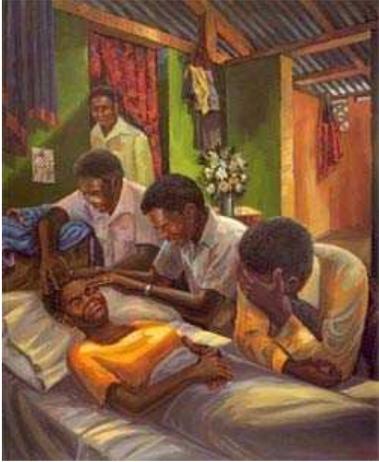
## *Blessing of Babies or Small Children*



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

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

### *Laying on of Hands for the Sick*



The ministry of Jesus included healing. One of the ways Community of Christ follows the New Testament example is by the laying on of hands. When requested, one elder places a drop of olive oil on the head of the one who is sick and offers a short prayer of anointing. Another elder then confirms that anointing, offering a special prayer behalf of the sick person (James 5:14-15). This may be done privately or in the presence of family, friends, or the congregation. This sacrament is available for physical, spiritual, and emotional needs, and is available for all, whether the person is a member of Community of Christ or not.

### *Marriage*



Jesus blessed marriage by his teachings and presence (Mark 10:6-9; John 1:1-11). Priests or elders conduct this sacrament in the presence of family and friends. God's love is celebrated as

the foundation for the vows made between husband and wife. The gathered community of friends and family show their support for the couple, and their willingness to be available to them in time of need. In Community of Christ, marriage is much more than a legal arrangement. The couple covenant to live in mutual love that seeks to embody the love and compassion of Christ. Community of Christ freely offers the sacrament of marriage to all, regardless of church membership, and under local laws and customs.

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

### *Evangelist Blessing*



Prior to the ordination of women to the priesthood, this sacrament was called a Patriarchal Blessing. Joseph Smith Junior taught that a patriarch was an evangelist.<sup>20</sup> Because the term "evangelist" has no gender-specific connotation, it better described the priesthood office and sacrament once men and women served side-by-side in this calling. Evangelist means "one who shares the good news." Through the sacrament of the Evangelist Blessing, we receive good news, indeed!

Jesus Christ's ministry was one of blessing. He counseled and prayed for those seeking to follow (Luke 22:31-32). At critical times in life, the disciple may seek a blessing. More than one blessing is possible. An evangelist, with his or her special focus and calling, shares with the disciple in

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<sup>20</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Joseph F. Smith, ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Desert Book, 1977), 151.

preparation, study, counsel, and prayer. The blessing provides counsel and guidance, both for the present and the future. The blessing can be recorded and transcribed, if the person receiving the blessing so wishes. Sometimes disciples may re-read their blessing at various times throughout their lives to gain inspiration and guidance. The evangelist blessing is freely offered to all, regardless of church membership. In earlier years, evangelists would often declare a disciple's "lineage," but this practice has largely faded away.

## Discussion Questions for Lesson 6: *The Sacraments of the Church*

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

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

3. How do sacraments engage congregations in a celebration of unity?

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

5. *Instructor:* show photos or artistic representations of each sacrament and briefly review each sacrament.

a. How are each of these sacraments rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus?

b. Engage class in Q & A

6. *Instructor:* Prior to class, review the calendar of the mission center and nearby congregations including your own. Share dates of upcoming sacraments and invite class members to attend with you. Discuss the experience afterwards.

## 7. THE TEMPLE

### **The Temple is the House of the Lord**

The Temple is the heart of Community of Christ's identity, mission, message, and beliefs. Likewise, in the Jewish and early Christian traditions, the House of the Lord historically held a key role as the center of worship. Jesus visited the temple often during his life and ministry, and so did the apostles after His death and resurrection.

Temples remind "us that, above all else, Jesus Christ seeks to restore us to life as we were created to experience it; life as God intends it to be; life characterized by love, generosity, relationships of mutuality, sharing, and peacefulness." Temples call us to gather in, and then send us outward, having been transformed. They "steer us to our true calling to become God's spiritual house, built on the witness and sacrifice of Jesus Christ—a household that unites, heals, restores, and frees people through community to express their best selves no matter who they are...a household in which Jesus would truly feel at home!"<sup>21</sup>

### **Temples of the Restoration**

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

When we exit the Temple, we do so through doors emblazoned with the church seal. The doors lead to an outer court that is a massive map of the world. This embodies the mission of the Temple, to gather us in, and then send us outward to establish peace in the world. The seal of the church, upon the Temple's doors, is inspired by Isaiah's vision of when "the wolf...shall live with

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<sup>21</sup> "We Share Temple as Life-Giving Symbol," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 19.

the lamb,...and a little child shall lead them,” and when humanity “*will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*” (Isaiah 11:6, 9, emphasis added).

## **Our Model: Kirtland Temple**

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

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

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

## **The Temple in Independence**

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

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

—Doctrine and Covenants 149:6a

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

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

— Doctrine and Covenants 156:5a-b, d

Ten years later, on April 17, 1994, the temple dedication was presided over by President Wallace B. Smith.

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

### *Worship*

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

### *Education*

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

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

For Community of Christ priesthood and members throughout the world, “Temple School” provides courses with topics that include doctrine, church history, scripture, and priesthood duties.<sup>22</sup> Connected to the educational roles of the Temple, the Community of Christ Seminary

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<sup>22</sup> More information about Temple School can be found at [www.cofchrist.org/temple-school](http://www.cofchrist.org/temple-school).

invites people of all faiths to develop their knowledge of Christ and ability to promote the peaceable kingdom. Workshops, seminars, lectures, conferences and other educational gatherings are conducted in the Temple.

### *Church Administration*

As with the Kirtland temple, the Temple in Independence serves as the seat of the presidency of the Church, and as a center for the general officers of the church. On the second floor are offices for the First Presidency, Council of Twelve, Presiding Evangelist (formerly, “Presiding Patriarch”), Presiding Bishopric, President of the Quorum of High Priests,<sup>23</sup> and the Senior President of Seventy. The Standing High Council<sup>24</sup> also meets in the Temple.

To help our mostly volunteer priesthood members throughout the world, other administrative offices are also located at the Temple, to coordinate Community of Christ's Mission Initiatives.

### **The Symbolism of the Temple**

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

The Temple is designed with symbols that draw the mind to higher things, to empower those who enter to embrace more fully the peace of Jesus Christ. It is a place of endowment of the

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<sup>23</sup> See LDS Doctrine and Covenants 124:133-36.

<sup>24</sup> In the early days of the church, two presiding high councils existed: the standing high council, and the traveling high council, also known as the Twelve Apostles—See D&C 104:12-16 (LDS D&C 107:33-38; 124:127-132). Originally, the Standing High Council presided at the Center Place over the stakes of Zion, and the Twelve, or Traveling High Council, outside of the stakes of Zion. According to revelation, the standing “high council in Zion forms a quorum equal in authority, in the affairs of the church, in all their decisions, to the councils of the twelve at the stakes of Zion”—D&C 104:15 (LDS D&C 107:37). The Community of Christ has retained this structure with the general church leadership, although the LDS Church has not.

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

Spirit. Located at the historic center place of our movement, the Temple is our symbolic “mountain of the Lord’s house” which orients us to Jesus Christ and God's plan of salvation.

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

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

### **The Temple and the Spirit**

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

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

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

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

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:2.

In becoming a people of the temple, God provides an endowment of the Holy Spirit, giving the church power from on high to take Christ’s message of peace to all nations. While respectful of and open-minded about the worship of God experienced in other temples of the Restoration, we know of no other endowment than that of the Holy Spirit. In that our attention is focused more on salvation in this life, our conception of endowment, too, focuses on this life. That said, we hold fast in our faith that the God is extending salvation to the living and the dead. We share that Christ’s mission secures salvation for each of us individually, for our families, and for all of creation. The temple symbolizes this marvelous work and is a center for the church’s preparation and participation in God's work.

We are respectful of the beliefs of other members of the Restoration about the need for baptisms for the dead, ritualized endowments, and marriage sealings. But our understanding of salvation through Christ—as working to restore and redeem all forms of creation, which includes individuals and families—does not require the answers that these ordinances intend to provide. Nor are we bound to practice them simply because they made sense during the Nauvoo period of church history.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> As leaders of the Reorganization first began imagining the purposes the temple in Independence would serve, some held onto beliefs that baptisms for the dead and other sacramental practices would be involved, while others were adamantly opposed. In any event, by April 9, 1886, the church declared: “we know of no temple building, except as edifices wherein to worship God, and no endowment except the endowment of the Holy Spirit of the kind experienced by the early saints on Pentecost Day”; and “that ‘baptism for the dead’ belongs to those local questions of which the body has said by resolution: ‘That the commandments of a local character, given to the first organization of the church, are binding on the Reorganization only so far as they are either reiterated or referred to as binding by commandments to this church.’ And that principle [of baptism for the dead] has neither been reiterated nor referred to as a commandment” as ratified by a general church assembly either before or after the death of Joseph Smith Junior (Conference Resolution 308, Paragraphs 2 and 3).

In and through the Temple we are reawakened as a people of the Restoration, of the Temple, and of Zion—and, most importantly, as disciples of Jesus Christ. In and through the Temple, we are led by God to take the gospel to all nations, the Holy Spirit going before us to prepare the way, and giving us power to fulfill the call. The temple becomes a model of salvation that we are to enact throughout the world.

### **Prophetic Guidance on the Temple**

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

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

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:8a-c

## Discussion Questions for Lesson 7: *The Temple*

1. How have temples been important to your faith journey?
  
2. Consider this passage of the chapter: *Temples remind "us that, above all else, Jesus Christ seeks to restore us to life as we were created to experience it; life as God intends it to be; life characterized by love, generosity, relationships of mutuality, sharing, and peacefulness." Temples call us to gather in, and then send us outward, having been transformed. They "steer us to our true calling to become God's spiritual house, built on the witness and sacrifice of Jesus Christ—a household that unites, heals, restores, and frees people through community to express their best selves no matter who they are...a household in which Jesus would truly feel at home!"*
  - a. How is this understanding of temple similar to the function of temple in the early Christian church?
  - b. How is this understanding of temple important to the Restoration tradition?
  - c. How does this passage help you understand the importance and function of temples today in Community of Christ?
  
3. How has the importance and function of temple remained the same in Community of Christ tradition since the Kirtland era? How has it changed?
  
4. (Instructor: show pictures or video of the Temple and point out important symbols, architecture, design, etc.) Discuss.
  
5. How does the Community of Christ Temple in Independence function as an ensign of peace for the world? How might the Temple call the church to become a sanctuary of Christ's peace?

## 8. PRIESTHOOD

### *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.<sup>26</sup>**

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

Many men and women do not hold the priesthood, but serve the church and their communities in other ways. Almost all of our priesthood holders serve as volunteers, however some ministers apply for church employment and, if accepted, work for the church full-time. Priesthood service does not require professional training for ministry, although some priesthood holders have studied in graduate schools of theology, ministry, and religion. Most ministers employed full-time with the church hold graduate degrees in theology and ministry.

According to our scriptures, "priesthood is a sacred covenant involving the highest form of stewardship of body, mind, spirit, and relationships. The priesthood shall be composed of people

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<sup>26</sup> "We Share Enduring Principles," in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 13.

of humility and integrity who are willing to extend themselves in service for others and for the well-being of the faith community" (Doctrine and Covenants 163:6a).

Community of Christ recognizes two orders of priesthood, the Melchisedec<sup>27</sup> and the Aaronic. Within these two priesthoods, there are several offices, each with specific duties and authority.

We consider each office of the priesthood as equal in importance, although responsibilities and duties differ. The pastor of each local congregation is typically the one who discerns a person's call to the Aaronic priesthood or to the office of elder. Priesthood calls originating in a local congregation are reviewed by the Mission Center President (formerly a "Stake President"). Once approved, the call is then presented to the individual. If the individual accepts, the call is presented to a congregational conference for a sustaining vote.

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

The Aaronic priesthood offers ministry of presence, modeled on the Savior's ministry as comforter, peacemaker, and friend. The Aaronic priesthood includes the offices of deacon, teacher, and priest.<sup>28</sup> Priesthood holders in these offices focus on inviting individuals, families, congregations, and communities into deeper relationships with one another and with Jesus Christ. Deacons often take part in the care of the local church building. They are sensitive to the temporal needs of congregational members, and teach about stewardship and responding generously in tithes and offerings. Teachers are to be peacemakers. They cultivate relationships among families, which ministry may take place in homes. Priests also visit members' homes encouraging them to pray and attend to family duties. They are to preach, and may teach new members their responsibilities during the period between baptism and confirmation. They also

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<sup>27</sup> There are several alternate spellings for the name Melchisedec. Many readers will be familiar with "Melchizedek." Doctrine and Covenants sections 83 and 104 (LDS 84 and 107) outline the two orders of priesthood.

<sup>28</sup> In Community of Christ, the Aaronic priesthood does not include the office of bishop, although the bishop works closely with the Aaronic priesthood. The office of bishop developed differently in the two traditions. See Doctrine and Covenants 83:5a (LDS 84:29) for an early text placing the office of bishop as an "appendage" of the higher priesthood.

may baptize, administer communion, perform marriages, and ordain other people to the Aaronic priesthood.

The Melchisedec priesthood offers ministry of mission and vision, helping the church focus on what matters most. They also share insight into the ever-deepening call to discipleship that is resident in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Melchisedec priesthood includes the offices of elder, seventy, high priest, bishop, apostle, president, and prophet. Elders serve in both missionary and administrative roles. Elders teach, preach, expound, and witness. They preside over (“conduct”) meetings and administer sacraments. They may visit in homes to bless the sick, teach the gospel, and comfort and strengthen members. Congregational pastors usually hold the office of elder; however, any priesthood holder may be "set apart" to preside over the congregation, depending on the needs of a specific congregation.

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

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

## *Congregation-focused Priesthood Offices*

### Deacon

Deacons express their ministry of service and model Jesus as comforter by nurturing and sharing principles of generosity with individuals and families in the congregation and the community. Deacons watch over the church, teach and preach, visit in the homes of members, care for the physical and social well-being of the church, and are especially called to teach and advise members about the principles of *A Disciple's Generous Response* (tithes and offerings). Deacons care for the temporal aspects of congregational life, to include building upkeep.

### Teacher

Teachers express their ministry of reconciliation and model Jesus as peacemaker by being peacemakers with individuals and families in the congregation and community. Teachers work to strengthen the membership, and ensure the church meets often. They are called to preach and teach, and provide bridging ministries toward reconciliation amid conflict. The ministry of the teacher promotes friendship and recognizes the life problems resident in the congregation, offering a relationship of redemptive love and concern. Teachers are ministers of reconciliation.

### Priest

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

## Elder

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

### *World Church-focused Priesthood Offices*

Community of Christ refers to the entire denomination collectively as "the World Church." Priesthood offices and leaders at the denominational level of church organization are typically assigned to minister widely, in mission centers and apostolic fields, rather than in a single congregation. Members of the priesthood in the Aaronic offices and the office of elder can and do minister outside of their home congregation, but the specific duties of those offices are most often needed closest to home.

## Seventy

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

## High Priest

Modeling Jesus as ministers of vision, high priests are ministers of vision, servant leaders who focus their ministry on sacrament, service, presiding, teaching and learning, spirituality,

leadership, and peace and justice. There are several specialized callings within this office (see below—the offices of Bishop, Evangelist, Apostle and President). Collectively the high priests comprise the Quorum of High Priests, and are led by a quorum presidency.

### Bishop

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

### Evangelist

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

### Apostle

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

### President

Modeling Jesus as ministers of prophetic vision, the leading quorum of the church is the

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

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

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

### **Discussion Questions for Lesson 8: *Priesthood***

1. If you were describing priesthood in Community of Christ to a friend or family member, what points of information would you want to include?
2. How do the offices in the Aaronic Priesthood function in the congregation?
3. Describe the role and ministry of the office of elder.
4. How are the ministries of seventy, high priest, bishop, evangelist, apostle, and president expressed in the life of the church?
5. Describe the process that would take place prior to a pastor presenting a member's call to the priesthood.
6. Describe the characteristics you would expect to find in a congregation who faithfully lived out the Enduring Principle "All are Called."

## 9. REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE

### *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.<sup>29</sup>**

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

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

“...experience of God’s guidance so expressed as to indicate that the guidance is direct and propositional. The first person language, the indications of the prophet being directed to write, the content of the documents (often informational), all give the impression that revelation is an experience in which God gives persons direct answers to specific questions.”<sup>30</sup>

Further complicating an unmediated process of revelation—where a prophet is understood to be prophesying in a vacuum, the words being directly and only from God and never to be changed or rewritten—scholars have found there have been many changes in the wording of

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<sup>29</sup> We Share Enduring Principles,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 12.

<sup>30</sup> Sharon Welch, “Revelation in the Restoration Movement,” Christian Education Commission, ed. 1985. *Restoration: A People Growing*. Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 95-96.

many of the early revelations brought to the church, especially the Doctrine and Covenants but also the Book of Mormon. The Prophet Joseph Smith extensively changed several revelations, some of which were previously published, which shows clearly the conceptual and sometimes fluid nature of revelation.

Community of Christ members have come to realize that critical examination of the scriptures helps us understand the content of the written revelations and how to better interpret them according to current circumstances and contexts. This realization helps us to understand how the Prophet Joseph Smith was able to change the documents:

[Church Historian Emeritus] Richard Howard suggests that because of Joseph's sensitivity to both the events of history and "continued striving of the Spirit of God" he was motivated to reinterpret his understanding of the principles and procedures that were most appropriate for the church. Such modification may indicate that, far from being infallible, the prophet is required to interpret the will of God in light of his own understanding, an understanding that grows and changes. Modification may also be necessary because the revelatory experience is one in which the prophet is challenged to interpret the will of God with the contemporary situation, not for all time.<sup>31</sup>

The prophet-president of Community of Christ presents documents in which the will of God is expressed. Although individuals and local church leaders may receive personal enlightenment to guide them in their daily affairs or administrative work, only the prophet is able to present revelations to and for the entire church.

Before a document is accepted as God's will and ordered to be included in the scriptural canon, the document is presented to the church by the prophet for the sustaining vote of the membership. This traditionally takes place at World Conference. The practice of letting the membership show their support and witness is in harmony of the principle of "common consent"

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 98.

requiring that “all things shall be done by common consent in the church by much prayer and faith.”<sup>32</sup> This practice has strong historical precedent in the Restoration, having been done in 1835 prior to the publication of the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Both Community of Christ and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have followed this practice subsequently on many occasions.<sup>33</sup>

### *Scriptures*

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

*7 a. Scripture is an indispensable witness to the Eternal Source of light and truth, which cannot be fully contained in any finite vessel or language. Scripture has been written and shaped by human authors through experiences of revelation and ongoing inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the midst of time and culture.*

*b. Scripture is not to be worshiped or idolized. Only God, the Eternal One of whom scripture testifies, is worthy of worship. God’s nature, as revealed in Jesus Christ and affirmed by the Holy Spirit, provides the ultimate standard by which any portion of scripture should be interpreted and applied.*

*c. It is not pleasing to God when any passage of scripture is used to diminish or oppress races, genders, or classes of human beings. Much physical and emotional violence has been done to some of God’s beloved children through the misuse of scripture. The church is called to confess and repent of such attitudes and practices.*

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<sup>32</sup> D&C 25:1b (LDS D&C 26:2).

<sup>33</sup> At a general conference in Utah in August 1852, Joseph Smith’s revelation on polygamy (now LDS Doctrine and Covenants 132) was publicly presented for the first time, voted on, and officially adopted as a revelation. The same procedure was followed in 1880 when the LDS Church made the *Pearl of Great Price* its fourth book of scripture. Again, in 1890 when polygamy was ended, a vote of the conference was called, followed in 1902 by the presentation and canonization of a revised version of the *Pearl of Great Price*. The same canonization procedure was followed in 1976 when an 1836 vision of Joseph Smith Jr. and a 1918 vision of Joseph F. Smith canonized by conference vote and added to the *Pearl of Great Price*, then moved to the *Doctrine and Covenants* in 1979. The same procedure was followed in 1978 when Spencer W. Kimball’s announcement on giving priesthood to “all worthy male members” was presented to the conference of the church and voted on.

*d. Scripture, prophetic guidance, knowledge, and discernment in the faith community must walk hand in hand to reveal the true will of God. Follow this pathway, which is the way of the Living Christ, and you will discover more than sufficient light for the journey ahead.*

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

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

The Book of Mormon is a "Standard Book" of scripture in Community of Christ. We have a statement called "Scripture in Community of Christ."<sup>34</sup> Affirmation Nine states:

*With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, the 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; D&C 76: 3g [LDS 76:22]). We have heard Christ speak in all three books of scripture, and bear witness that he is "alive forever and ever" (Revelation 1:18).*

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<sup>34</sup> All of "Scripture in Community in Christ" may be read online at [www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/scripture.asp](http://www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/scripture.asp) .

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

*It seems the Book of Mormon defies any simple explanation or theory. The book invites the reader to explore the gospel of Christ with the spiritual eyes of faith in an increasingly skeptical age. The Book of Mormon’s witness of Christ is not finally dependent on external confirmation, such as archeological evidence, but on the witness of the Spirit in the faith community. Beliefs about the Book of Mormon are matters of personal conscience and faith. However, it is important to remember that we are not called to believe in a book; we are called to believe in and worship the Living God revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup>*

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

Many have wondered about differences between the editions published by Community of Christ and the LDS Church. The texts of both books are generally identical. There are some slight variations in wording because there were wording differences in the three editions of the Book of Mormon published during Joseph Smith Junior’s lifetime. Community of Christ publishes two editions of the book. The 1908 “authorized version” keeps the traditional wording. There is a second version of the Book of Mormon (known as the Revised Authorized Version, RAV, or 1966 Edition) in which antiquated words and phraseology were updated to bring it more into line with current language usage. It is not a paraphrased or condensed version.

The main differences between the editions of the Book of Mormon have to do with chapter and verse numbering. This is because chapter and versification developed independently long

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen M. Veazey, “Facing our Challenges: Questions and Answers (Part Two),” *Herald* 156:7 (July 2009), 13.

after the churches had gone their separate ways. The Community of Christ editions of the book, however, keep the chapters as in the first edition of 1830. Originally, there were no verse numbers.

A third book of scripture common to both churches is the Doctrine and Covenants. This volume contains the revelations brought to the church by the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors. Community of Christ, as of 2014, has 164 sections in its Doctrine and Covenants.

There are several sections in the LDS edition attributed to Joseph Smith Junior, which are not found in editions of the Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants. Some of these are published in the historical records of Community of Christ; others contain doctrinal innovations that are disputed. And, there are a few revelations and other documents from Joseph Smith Junior's presidency, which are in the Community of Christ edition and not the LDS edition. Section numbers differ because the current organization of the books was completed after the two churches were separated.

The *Pearl of Great Price* was first published as a tract by missionaries of the LDS Church in 1851, after the break-up of the original church. The LDS Church made it a fourth book of scripture in 1880. Most of the current content of the *Pearl of Great Price* can be found within the Community of Christ canon or history. The *Book of Moses* is found in Genesis in the *Inspired Version* of the Bible, as well as in two sections of the Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants. The book known as *Joseph Smith-History*, which relates to the First Vision and organization of the church, can be found in Community of Christ historical records. Matthew 24 is from the *Inspired Version* of the Bible. And the Articles of Faith, a brief statement of belief drawn from a letter written by the Prophet Joseph Smith can be found in historical records and publications of Community of Christ. The *Book of Abraham* has no place in Community of Christ canon. Besides many historical problems, the teachings found in the document cannot be reconciled with other scriptures.

From our statement of Basic Beliefs,<sup>36</sup> Community of Christ understands revelation and scripture as follows:

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<sup>36</sup> Online at [www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/faith-beliefs.asp](http://www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/faith-beliefs.asp) .

***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.

## Discussion Questions for Lesson 9: *Revelation and Scripture*

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

2. How do the following statements from this chapter connect?

*a. Over the years, Community of Christ has progressed in its understanding of revelation from a plenary or direct ("mouthpiece") experience, to viewing revelation as conceptual, or as an encounter with God, which requires interpretation by the recipient.*

*b. The Prophet Joseph Smith extensively changed several revelations, some of which were previously published, which shows clearly the conceptual nature of revelation.*

3. Read and discuss the following statement:

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

4. Describe the process in Community of Christ which leads to a document being included in the Doctrine and Covenants.

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

6. Discuss and explore the implications of the following statement:

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

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

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

## 10. DISCIPLESHIP IN COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

### *Discipleship*

#### Being a Disciple

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

#### First Steps

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

- (Re) discover how God is calling you to follow Christ. Seek the guidance of the Spirit to discern if God is calling you to become a member of Community of Christ.
- Be involved with a congregation, taking part in activities that help you learn, grow, and serve others.
- Learn more about the church, and how you can follow Christ through its sacraments and mission, by talking with a church member or member of the priesthood.
- Be baptized or confirmed into the fellowship of the body of Christ.
- Accept God’s incredible love for you, and learn to trust and depend on God.

Following baptism or confirmation, you are invited to continue sharing fully in the life of your congregation, experiencing worship, education, and fellowship designed to move you forward in your discipleship.

## Engaging Further in the Mission of the Church

Discipleship in Community of Christ centers around our mission statement: “We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.”<sup>37</sup> Seeking ways to reflect this mission in your daily life will lead you on a journey of spiritual growth and transformation. We invite you to travel the path of discipleship by engaging in the mission of the Church.

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

### **1. Invite People to Christ**

*Christ's call to share the gospel with the world*

### **2. Abolish Poverty, End Suffering**

*Christ's mission of compassion*

### **3. Pursue Peace on Earth**

*Christ's mission of justice and peace*

### **4. Develop Disciples to Serve**

*Christ's mission experienced in your individual life*

### **5. Experience Congregations Engaged in Mission**

*Christ's mission experienced in your congregation*

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<sup>37</sup> “We Share a Mission,” in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2010), 8.

## 1. Invite People to Christ

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

You are invited to commit or recommit your life to following Jesus Christ in the fellowship and mission of Community of Christ. You are also invited to invite others to “come and see.”

## 2. Abolish Poverty, End Suffering

The Doctrine and Covenants tells us:

*And remember in all things, the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted, for he that doeth not these things, the same is not my disciple (D&C 52:9c/LDS 52:40).*

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

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

### 3. Pursue Peace on Earth

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

- Seek peace within yourself through spiritual disciplines. Invite the Spirit into your lives during the everyday moments: as you breathe, go for a walk, or when you share a meal with family and friends. Learn to pray always, that God's Spirit might always be with you. When we experience peace within ourselves, we are more able to share peace with others.

- Disciples learn how to bring peace to circumstances where conflict threatens to disrupt communities and relationships. Draw upon the resources of your congregation and the knowledge and experience of its members, especially the Teachers in the Aaronic priesthood, to learn to use conflict-resolution skills and engage in ministries of reconciliation.

- Look for opportunities in your local community to join with like-minded people committed to peace and justice. If these opportunities do not exist, develop new pathways for peace. Be God's voice for good in the world!

### 4. Develop Disciples to Serve

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

- Engage in personal worship and pray regularly—disciples seek to be with God in times of quiet reflection.

- Seek inspiration and comfort from the scriptures—reading the scriptures is a way to learn more about God and the guidelines for better living.

- Study all good books—knowledge of God can be found in many places, so reading good books can make us disciples that are more effective.

- Volunteer and serve within your community—by serving others, we serve Christ.

## 5. Experience Congregations Engaged in Mission

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

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

### **Learning More about Community of Christ’s Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs**

In the spirit of the Restoration, Community of Christ faithfully continues the discipline of listening to God and discerning God’s call. In recent years, part of that journey has included a focused effort to clarify church identity, mission, and message. In February 2009, the First Presidency introduced a document titled “We Share: Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs.” That document was the result of a collaborative effort among representatives of the worldwide church and church leaders. The contents of that document, with other supporting information, were published in 2010 as *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*. If you are interested in learning even more about Community of Christ, ask a member of the church or priesthood member for a copy of *Sharing in Community of Christ*, now in its third edition (as of 2014).

NOTE:

*We offer the following information about the “Word of Wisdom.”*

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

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

Rather than impose a strict code of conduct Community of Christ invites members to live a life modeling responsible choices. Seen as a core value and foundational concept, “Responsible Choices” is one of Community of Christ’s nine *Enduring Principles*, which principles are detailed in *Sharing in Community of Christ*. We have provided an overview of “Responsible Choices” below:

***Responsible Choices***

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

## **Discussion Questions for Lesson 10: *Discipleship in Community of Christ***

1. Where do you find yourself at this point on your journey of discipleship?
2. How has being a disciple transformed your life?
3. How has your connection to congregational life helped you learn, grow, and serve others?  
(In a Community of Christ congregation or other denomination)
4. In Community of Christ, disciples are called to be peacemakers. Think of someone you know who has lived the life of a peacemaker. How were they like Jesus?
5. Describe specific ways you have observed faithful disciples sharing their witness, time, talent, or treasure.
6. What types of activities or practices help you connect with the Holy Spirit?
7. How might the practice of “embracing diversity” have an impact on congregational life?
8. What do you sense is the “next step” for you?
9. Would you like to learn more about being a disciple in the Community of Christ?  
Studying “We Share” is another avenue of exploration on your journey with Community of Christ—available at [www.cofchrist.org/discernment/weshare/weshare.pdf](http://www.cofchrist.org/discernment/weshare/weshare.pdf)