



# Community of Christ

Twelve lessons based on

## **Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs**

Produced by the British Isles Mission Centre

2024



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Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs'**

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This series of lessons uses 'Sharing in Community of Christ', Fourth Edition (Herald Publishing House, 2018) to study some of the church's basic beliefs. Classes take an aspect of the booklet produced by World Church. They then explore the topic through a combination of scripts for the leader, questions, discussion and activity.

Each lesson has been put together by a member of the church in the British Isles. The challenge was to make this study material as flexible and as accessible as possible. By asking different people to write the classes, an eclectic series of study materials has been produced which will create a foundation for discussion and study for different learning styles. The materials are an introduction to the topics. Lessons may pose challenging questions but there is not time for too many in depth theological debates.

There are twelve unique lessons based on the 'Sharing in Community of Christ' booklet. It is advised that groups use them at least monthly. Eleven of the lessons cover various topics. The other lesson provides an opportunity to go back to a topic or have a more general conversation. These classes can be used for priesthood study, congregational study (which may replace worship or be part of Sunday School), ladies or fellowship groups, youth groups or at retreats etc. They could also be used for a seekers group. Each lesson can be led by the same person or different people can be used. The lessons are flexible enough not to need an experienced teacher to guide them. However, leaders should not be afraid to edit or customize the material to meet the needs of their group. The classes have plenty of material. If the leaders feel it appropriate, lessons could be split into more than one session, again, flexibility is essential, catering for the needs of each group. The important thing is that there is opportunity to learn.

Guidance timings are provided for each section of a class but timings will depend on factors like the experience of the group and the number attending. As previously mentioned, the classes are not intended to be an in-depth study, merely *an introduction*. Further resources may be available at a later date. For some this will be re-visiting the familiar, for others only certain aspects may be familiar, for others it may all be completely new.

The lessons were written with in-person classes in mind, however it would be possible to work through the classes on line. Adaptations such as breakout groups or completing

activities individually may need to be made. It is important to remember whole group discussion will take longer than smaller groups or partner work.

Thank you. We hope you enjoy this experience.

If you have questions or need advice please contact  
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Thank you to the team of writers who have helped to create this set of lessons:

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## **Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs**

### **Lesson 1 - God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit**

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 13, 14, 33, 34, 58 and 59

#### Guide Times

- God – 20 minutes
- Jesus – 40 minutes
- Holy Spirit – 20 minutes

#### **Script**

Welcome everyone! This class explores the church's basic beliefs about God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

We believe in one living God who is revealed in Jesus Christ and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. (page 33)

God's continuing presence through the Holy Spirit is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message and beliefs. (page 27)

#### **God**

##### **Activity 1** (5 minutes)

You will need Post-it notes, pens and a larger sheet of paper with the title God on it. Ask everyone to write a word or short phrase which, for them, describes God. Give the opportunity to share ideas and then stick them onto the larger piece of paper.

##### **Demonstration** (5 minutes)

You will need a teacup and saucer, a teapot, a deepish waterproof tray and some water or green tea.

Read the script and demonstrate. Alternatively, ask someone to help you.

#### **Script**

There is a story about a university professor who came to a Zen master to ask him about Zen.

The Zen master served him tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept pouring. The professor watched the overflow until he could no longer restrain himself. "It is over-full, no more will go in!"

The Zen Master said, “Like this cup you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I teach you Zen unless you first empty your cup?”  
(101 Zen Stories, a 1919 compilation of Zen koans from the Meiji era, Japan)

In thinking about the questions ‘What is God like?’ or ‘How would you describe God?’ Henri Nouwen, author, priest and spiritual guide, said,  
“God is greater than our minds and cannot be caught or contained within the boundaries of our finite concepts.  
God cannot be caught or comprehended in any specific idea, concept, opinion or conviction.  
God cannot be defined by any specific emotion or spiritual sensation.  
God cannot be identified with good feelings, right intentions, spiritual fervour, generosity of spirit or unconditional love.  
God is greater than our minds and greater than our hearts.”

**Q. What are your thoughts on the statement ‘God cannot be contained?’**

On page 34 of ‘Sharing in Community of Christ’ we read these profound words which echo those of Nouwen’s, **“God, Mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination.”**

**Activity** (5 minutes) - Together repeat these words about God several times and then reflect on them in silence for a short while. Discuss this statement.

What you believe about God makes a difference to the way you respond to God.  
Is this true? (5 minutes)

**Script**

Like the professor in the story of the Zen master, to seek this incomprehensible God, we must empty ourselves of our preconceptions and be open enough to allow the Trinity to teach us and to reveal themselves to us in deeper and meaningful ways.

Stand and sing ‘Humble yourself before the Lord, He will lift you up.’

**Jesus**

**Script**

Throughout history, Christians have sought to describe their faith in Jesus Christ. Traditionally, churches have used statements of belief and confessions of faith to articulate their understanding of Jesus Christ’s person and work, so begins the preamble to the chapter ‘We proclaim Jesus Christ’ (page 58).

**Activity** (20 minutes) You will need copies of ‘Sharing in Community of Christ’ and the Nicene Creed (see end of these lesson notes).

Compare statements 1-9 on pages 58-60 of 'Sharing in Community of Christ' with the Nicene creed.

Make a list of similarities and differences between the two statements of belief. (This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups)

**Q. What do you notice about Statement 3 compared with the Nicene creed?**

(The Nicene creed does not include any reference to the life and important work of Jesus in the middle part of his life, statement 3 does.)

**Q. Is there a particular statement or phrase that speaks to you at this moment in time?**

**Script**

We proclaim Jesus Christ through local and world -wide evangelism including ministries of invitation, witness, inclusive fellowship, worship, caring and life-long disciple formation. (page20)

**Time of sharing** (15 minutes)

Is anyone part of the church because of a personal invitation or through someone's personal testimony?

Has anyone been drawn in by inclusive fellowship or worship?

Does anyone have a testimony about being cared for or 'loved' into the church fellowship?

How has someone shared the 'Good News' of Jesus' message to you?

**Script**

We Share the peace of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. I do not give to you as the world gives' John 14 v27 NRSV

**Share** with your neighbour the things that bring you peace. What is the world's idea of peace? (5 minutes)

**Script**

Paul's letter to the church at Philippi was written whilst he was in prison. It is known as his 'Joy' letter. The reason for this joy is grounded in his relationship with Christ.

In Philippians 4 v 6-7 we read "Don't worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all that he has done. If you do this

you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

**Q. Can anyone testify to the truth of this scripture?**

**Homework** - Reflect on this scripture, live it out and see what happens.

**The Holy Spirit**

**Activity (5 minutes)** Ask the group to share, orally or pictorially, symbols that represent the Holy Spirit.

**Q. What do these symbols tell us about the Holy Spirit?**

**Script**

We believe in the Holy Spirit, giver of life, Holy Wisdom, true God. The Spirit endows the church for mission, frees the world from sin, injustice and death and transforms disciples. Wherever we find love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control, there the Holy Spirit is Working, (page34)

**Discuss: Can the mission of the church succeed without the endowment of the Holy Spirit? (5minutes)**

The Holy Spirit and the task of the church work together hand in hand.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to enable those who follow Jesus to take the good news of the gospel into the world. Equally the work of the church cannot succeed without the Spirit. The spirit enables God's people to BE God's people.

**Sharing (10minutes)**

**Q. How does the Holy Spirit enable? How does it transform?**

**Have you ever been enabled or felt transformed by the Holy Spirit?**

**Script** - We can think of the Holy Spirit as the personal presence of God.

**Q. What does this mean for us as disciples?**

**How can we tell if the Holy Spirit is present and working with in us?**

**Script**

As we recognise God's enabling and transforming presence in our own hearts we can learn to recognise the divine presence in the hearts of others.

Community is primarily a quality of the heart. God excludes no one.

The mission of the church, enabled and transformed by the Holy Spirit, is to draw the circle wide and invite all to come to Christ and experience his peace, true shalom.

**Sing** 'Draw the Circle Wide' (273 in 'Community of Christ Sings')

### **Nicene Creed**

I believe.....in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only-begotten Son of God,  
Begotten of his Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God,  
Begotten, not made,  
Begotten of one substance with the Father,  
By whom all things were made:  
Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven,  
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,  
And was made man.  
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;  
He suffered and was buried,  
And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,  
And ascended into heaven,  
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father,  
And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead:  
Whose kingdom shall have no end.



Community of Christ

**Sharing in Community of Christ:  
Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs**

**Lesson 2 - Our Sacred Journey**

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 27-32, 76-81, 11-12 and 35-36.

Guide Times

- Overview of the Enduring Principles – 30 minutes
- Our sacred journey – 15 minutes
- We share a name – 15 minutes
- The church- 20 minutes

**Part 1 – Overview of the Enduring Principles (30 minutes)**

1. Display the images of the logos without the labels. Do you know which Principle each logo represents? (5 minutes)

Images for printing or display on screen can be found here or as an attachment at the end of the lesson: <https://www.communityofchrist.ca/media.html>

One without labels can be found here:

[https://www.facebook.com/CofChrist/photos/a.10151353257237977/10156337046112977/?type=3&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/CofChrist/photos/a.10151353257237977/10156337046112977/?type=3&_rdr)

2. The Enduring Principles are listed below as a brief outline for the activity.

The Foundation: God, Christ, Holy Spirit (from page 27)

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

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



### **Grace and Generosity**

*God's grace, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, is generous and unconditional*

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



### **Sacredness of Creation**

*In the beginning, God created and called it all good*

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



### **Continuing Revelation**

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



### **Worth of All Persons**

- *God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth*
- *God wants all people to experience wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships*

- *We seek to uphold and restore the worth of all people individually and in community, challenging unjust systems that diminish human worth*
- *We join with Jesus Christ in bringing good news to the poor, sick, captive, and oppressed*



### **All Are Called**

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



### **Responsible Choices**

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



### **Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)**

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



### **Unity in Diversity**

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

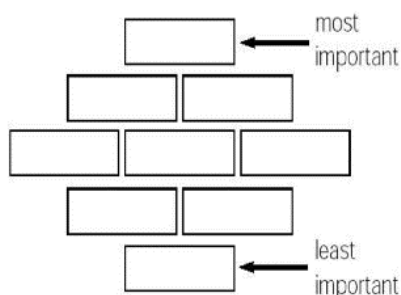


### **Blessings of Community**

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

### **Activity**

- In small groups, discuss which one is the most important/relevant to the church in the British Isles today? (10 minutes)
- Create a 'diamond 9' to express your groups choices.
- Share with the class the one you find most challenging or consider to be least important. (10 minutes for feedback to the whole class)



**Part 2 - Our sacred journey** (pages. 16-19 76- 81) (15 minutes)

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

*-Doctrine and Covenants 161:5*

Script:

As Community of Christ, we share a sacred story of God’s unfolding and revealing presence in the world and closer to home, in the British Isles. Our story, although beginning in scripture with sacred Christian history, doesn’t end with the Bible; it is continued through the witness, testimony, events and people within and around our congregational communities. Along with the whole Christian church, Community of Christ continues to write new chapters of the story of Jesus’ love, responding to God’s call and promptings of the Spirit.

The Presidency has provided a set of church history principles (listed below) to help guide the church’s continued exploration of its history. For the complete text of “Perspectives on Church History” see page 76 or go to [www.CofChrist.org/church-history-principles](http://www.CofChrist.org/church-history-principles)

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

Discussion questions\_– can be either small group or whole class.

- What would the current chapter of our story in the British Isles be called? (As an added/alternative activity, you could design a book cover)
- How do the Enduring Principles appear as part of our story?
- What is the difference between seeing history as “what happened” and “someone’s perspective on what happened”?
- Can there be such a thing as “official history”?

**Part 3 - We share a name** (pages 11-12) (15 minutes)

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

*-Doctrine and Covenants 163:1*

**Activity** - Invite each person to write their name on a flip chart paper to display. Use any colours or designs they wish. After all names are on the paper, invite the class to pause and consider what it might look like in other cultures, nationalities and countries. How are our names part of our identity?

Script – We are Community of Christ! We share a common name throughout the world that is translated into many languages. Our name is faithful to our heritage and true to our identity and calling today. Display page 12 (Community of Christ in other languages) alongside the flip chart of your names as a visual.

**Part 4 - The church** (pages 35-36) (20 minutes)

As part of our Basic Beliefs, we believe in ‘The Church’. What does this mean to you? (5 minutes discussion.)

**Activity** (15 minutes) Think, pair, share

Using everything you have learned about the Enduring Principles, our Sacred Journey and our name, how would you respond if someone said “Community of Christ? I haven’t heard about it.”

Consider your personal answer, discuss in pairs, share in 4s then bring a spokesperson to the class to share ideas.

Can you now write your personal statement of what you would say?

# the enduring principles



grace & generosity



sacredness of creation



continuing revelation



worth of all persons



all are called



responsible choices



pursuit of peace (shalom)



unity in diversity



blessings of community



Community of Christ

learn more at <http://www.cofchrist.org/enduring-principles>



## Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

### Lesson 3 – Our Vision

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 9-15, 28-30, 34, 36 and 71.

#### Guide Times

- Introduction – 5 minutes
- Vision 1: A Future – 15 minutes
- Vision 2: Pursuit of Peace (Shalom) – 15 minutes
- Vision 3: A Vision of Creation – 15 minutes
- Vision 4: Revelation and Continuing Revelation – 15 minutes
- Drawing it all together – 5 minutes

Select a reader for the whole session to partner with you as you lead this class. You will need scriptures (in italics) from page 14 written onto separate pieces of paper and distributed amongst the group for reading.

This lesson contains a lot of questions. Depending on the size of the group, the leader will need to give the opportunity for just a few people to answer questions - there may not be time for everyone to contribute.

Ask a member of the group to offer a prayer at the end of the class (see context in the lesson).

#### **Introduction** (5 minutes)

To start let's ask ourselves what are the various meanings of 'vision'? (no discussion)

Answers:

- a) the act of seeing with the eyes. *Sight.*
- b) the act of anticipating that which will or may come to be. *Prophetic vision or the vision of an entrepreneur.*
- c) An experience in which a personage, thing or event appears vividly or credibly to the mind although not actually present. *A heavenly messenger appearing in a vision.*
- d) A scene, person etc. of extraordinary beauty. *The northern lights.*

Question: As a young person, did you have a vision for how you would see your life?

As a young person do you have a vision for your future?

Question: What is 'Our vision' – that of Community of Christ and its members and how it calls us to journey? (If the group don't seem to know, then defer discussion as answers will become more obvious during the lesson. This question is revisited at end of lesson.)

**Vision 1: A Future** (page13) (15 minutes)

**Reader:** *Lift up your eyes and fix them on the place beyond the horizon to which you are sent. Journey in trust, assured that the great and marvellous work is for this time and for all time. (Doctrine & Covenants 161:1a)*

Discuss what you understand by the idea of fixing your eyes beyond the horizon?  
Is this a call to journey to that future?

This challenge was written in the year 2000. Name some aspects of the journey we have experienced since that time.

How have we had to journey in trust?

How radical do you expect our future journey to be?

**Reader:** *'Community of Christ,' your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go. (Doctrine & Covenants 163:1)*

Question: What do you think the above scripture means when it says that 'Community of Christ is your identity and calling' ?

Suggested Answer: It is who you are, yet who you are called be.

Question: How does the call to become Community of Christ challenge you personally and the church as a body?

**Vision2: Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)** (pages13-15, 30 & 71) (15 minutes)

From the very early visionary days of the church, we perceived the call to 'seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion' (Doctrine and Covenants Section 6:3).

Today, we understand this as the call to 'share the peace of Jesus Christ' (Doctrine and Covenants 163:2). This finds expression in the church's Enduring Principle 'Pursuit of Peace (Shalom).' This principle is our vision for God's Peace (Shalom) in our time.

**Reader:** 6 bullet points on Pursuit of Peace (Shalom) from page 30.

Follow together the text regarding this Enduring Principle and what it means.

Discuss how the use of the Hebrew word 'Shalom' brings to it a richer and more visionary meaning. *(In English the word 'peace' simply means the absence of war. Shalom means peace but also justice, reconciliation, well-being, wholeness for the whole of creation.)*

Meditation and question for self-reflection: In what ways have you experienced Christ's peace (wholeness, well-being, justice in your life)?

As a group meditate on this question and have the scriptures from page 14 read, pausing between each one, guided by the leader of the lesson.

**Vision 3: A Vision for Creation** (pages 9-11, 34 & 28-29) (15 minutes)

Question: What are the things in the world in which we live that you find most beautiful or that give you the most joy?

Question: What are the things in this world that you love but are broken, corrupt or in need of healing?

How did this brokenness, corruption or injury happen?

What can you do to help?

What can the church do to help?

The church uses symbols that identify who we are and what our vision is. These include the church seal and the Christian cross. Show them to the group.

Question: How would you share the meaning of the cross and the church seal with someone who had not seen them before. How and why are these symbols important to us?

Our vision for creation finds expression in the church's Enduring Principle 'Sacredness of Creation'.

**Reader:** 5 bullet points on Sacredness of Creation from pages 28 and 29.

Question: How are you challenged to be called 'a steward of care and hope for all creation'?

**Vision 4: Revelation and Continuing Revelation** (page 29 & 36) (15 minutes)

Sing/read the words of Community of Christ Sings 180 "We Thank You, O God, for Our Prophets."

**Reader:** The section on 'revelation' from page 36.

In recent times we have been encouraged to embrace the term 'prophetic people'.

Question: What does this mean to you? Can anyone have a revelation or be prophetic? (Answer: There may be no clear answers to these questions. Discussion around this subject is important, as the concept may be new to members of the group)

Our Doctrine and Covenants is full of revelation.

Question: How much do these historic revelations impact our lives today?

(Bring out the contextualisation of scripture)

How does scripture influence our vision for the future?

**Reader:** 4 bullet points on Continuing Revelation from page 29.

**Drawing the lesson to a close** (5 minutes)

Return to the question posed at the start of lesson.

Question: What is 'Our vision' – that of the Community of Christ and its members and how it calls us to journey? Are the group any clearer in their answer to this question than they were at the start of the class?

Question: Out of the four aspects of vision we have explored – Revelation, Shalom, Creation, the Future - which appeals to you the most?

Ask a member of the group to draw the class to an close with a prayer challenging everyone to not only be more visionary, looking beyond the horizon, but to also act on those visions.



## **Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs**

### **Lesson 4 - Our Community**

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 34, 29 and 31.

#### Guide Times

- Introductions – 15 minutes
- Worth of All Persons – 40 minutes
- All Are Called – 15 minutes
- Unity in Diversity - 10 minutes

#### **Introduction** (5 minutes)

#### **Script**

Today we are going to consider some of the Enduring Principles which form part of the core principles and foundational concepts on which the church is built.

Enduring Principles can be described as the essence of and the heart and soul of the church. They form the identity, mission and message of Community of Christ. These underlying truths and affirmations shape the personality of Community of Christ as expressed in our congregations and affiliate organisations.

The activities and discussion for our study today are taken from Enduring Principles of Community of Christ and can be found in the booklet "Sharing In community of Christ Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Belief".

#### They include:

- Worth of All Persons (page 29)
- All are Called (pages 29,30)
- Unity in Diversity (page 31)
- Blessings of Community (pages31,32)
- Humanity (Basic Beliefs page 34)

Welcome to each one of you. Your presence and contributions are greatly valued as we seek to better understand, together, what it means to be part of Community of Christ.

**Activity 1 - Introductions (10minutes)**

Sit in a circle. (Have this set up prior to starting to save time. If there is a large group, more than 10, you may need to have more than one circle.)

Ask each participant to turn to the person on their right, smile and say,

“Hello, my name is ----- and I like -----,”then do the same to the person

on their left so that everyone has spoken to the person on either side of them.

Now go round the circle asking each person to introduce the person on either side of them saying, “This is ----- and they like ----- and this is ----- and they like -----.”

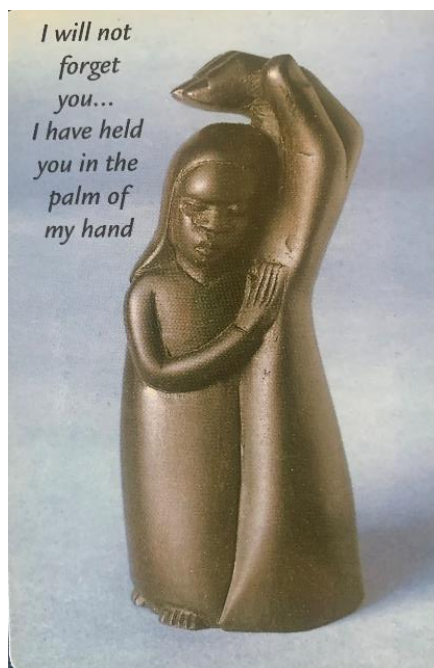
Ask one or two people to share what it felt like to say and hear their name being spoken.

**Script** - Our name is important. It forms part of our identity. It is who we are, and it matters.

**Activity 2 (10 minutes)**

**Script** - God views all people as having inestimable and equal worth (page 29).

Take 30 seconds to look at and reflect on this image based on Isaiah 49 v15,16.



Ask participants to share their thoughts with the group.

**What does it say to them personally?**

**How does it feel to be held in a loving embrace?**

**What does it tell us about God's love?**

Allow a few minutes for one or two to share about a time when they felt held in God's loving embrace.

**Activity 3** - 20 minutes (in preparation for this activity collect pictures of a variety of well-known people and some unknown ones too, for example: royalty, celebrity, sports person, musician, politician, nurse, firefighter, homeless person, refugee, criminal, a child, etc.)

Ask the group to discuss and decide on how to order them **vertically** according to how society may view them in importance. (most important at the top, least at the bottom).

**What does this tell us about our society and how we view people?**

Now ask them to rearrange the pictures based on the church's enduring principle 'The Worth of All Persons'.

**How does it look now?** (The pictures should be arranged horizontally and in any order)

Ask the group to name unjust systems that diminish human worth, (some may be global, some may be systems witnessed in their own communities)

**How can we challenge these systems individually and as a body?**

**Has anyone ever challenged an unjust system? What was it and what did they do or say?**

Stand and sing the first verse of hymn 636 in Community of Christ Sings "I have called you by your name, you are mine."

## **All Are Called**

### **Script**

God graciously gives people gifts and opportunities to do good and share in God's purposes.

Jesus Christ graciously invites people to follow him by becoming disciples who share His life and ministry. (pages 29, 30)

The scriptures tell us that Jesus went about doing good, for God was with Him (Acts 10).

In Ephesians 4 v,32 we are encouraged to 'Be kind'

**Activity 4** (15 minutes) For this you will need copies of the grids 'Have you Ever?' and 'My Gifts' along with a short piece of quiet music to play.

Ask the group to complete the grids by ticking the boxes that apply to them.

### **Script**

We share in Jesus' life and ministry by doing good in the places we are, with the opportunities we are given and the gifts we have been blessed with.

Whilst the music is playing, take time to reflect on:

- **The opportunities you have had to do good.**
- **The times someone has done good to you (give thanks).**
- **The gifts with which you have been blessed and can use for God's purposes.**

Say or read the Mission Prayer.

## **Unity in Diversity** (10 minutes)

### **Script**

The church embraces diversity and unity through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We seek agreement or common consent in important matters. If we cannot achieve agreement we commit to ongoing dialogue and lovingly uphold our common faith in Jesus Christ and the mission of the church. (page 31)

Effective relationships are key to understanding each other and working together for the good of the congregation and wider church body.

Research has shown that there are three fundamental skills to making effective relationships. These are: **respect, empathy and genuineness.**

Good relationships enable people to work together more productively and harmoniously and they make an important contribution towards the development of a positive organisational ethos.

Let us consider these three important skills in turn.

**Respect:** These are behaviours which convey to others that they are worthwhile, unique and valuable.

**Empathy:** these are behaviours which show that you understand the other person's world as they are experiencing it – you see it from their perspective, background, experiences, expectations and values.

**Genuineness:** These behaviours convey to others that you are real, sincere and trustworthy – being open about yourself in an appropriate manner.

We can add to these qualities **an accepting attitude of mind** which enables us to avoid prejudging people and situations so that we do not make assumptions about them and their needs.

**Personal reflection** Ask the participants to consider the following question.

As individuals and as congregations do we show each other a good measure of **respect, empathy, genuineness and acceptance** or do we have more work to do in these areas?

**Blessings of Community** (pages 31, 32) (10 minutes)

### **Script**

A teacher asked his students, “How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and day begins?”

**Ask the group for suggestions of what the answer might be.**

The teacher explained to his students, “It is when you can look into the face of another human being and you have enough light in you to recognise your brother or your sister. Until then it is night and darkness is still with us. Let us pray for the light.”

Henri Nouwen (Finding My Way Home).

Our Enduring Principles state:

- True community includes compassion for and solidarity with the poor, marginalised and oppressed.
- True community upholds the worth of persons.
- Sacred community provides nurture and growth opportunities for all people.
- We are called to create communities of Christ's peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations and throughout creation.
- Let us walk in the light of God's love and seek the peace of Christ in our hearts.

**Conclusion - Humanity** (taken from Basic Beliefs page 34) (2 minutes)

**Script**

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

We therefore affirm, without exception, the worth of every human being.

We also affirm that God has blessed humankind with agency: the ability to choose whom or what we will serve within the circumstances of our lives.

All are called to serve. YOU are called to serve.

Whom or what do you choose?

Go in peace, knowing that you are held in God's everlasting love.

Please note resources for this class are on the following pages.

*I will not  
forget  
you...  
I have held  
you in the  
palm of  
my hand*



HAVE YOU EVER?	Tick
Smiled at or offered help to a stranger	
Performed a random act of kindness	
Cooked a meal or made a cake for a neighbour	
Prayed for someone	
Helped a homeless person	
Shopped for someone who is housebound	
Visited someone who is sad, lonely or grieving	
Mowed a neighbour's lawn	
Made someone a drink at work	
Given someone a lift to where they needed to go	
Sent a card to show someone you care	

Add something you have done recently.

<b>MY GIFTS</b>	Tick
Good listening skills	
Praying for others	
Welcoming people warmly with a smile	
Encouraging others	
Faithfulness	
Reliability	
Gentleness	
Kindness	
Patience	
Optimism	
Offering hospitality	

Add your own thoughts and ideas.



Community of Christ

## Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

### Lesson 5 - Our Mission

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 20-25, 30 and 37.

#### Guide Times

- Mission – 30 minutes
- Responsible Choices – 15 minutes
- Discipleship and Ministry – 15 minutes

#### **You will need:**

Copies of the Mission Prayer for everyone

Luke 4 18-19 copied onto a piece of paper and handed to a reader before the class.

Individual strips of folded paper with the mission initiatives written on – optional blutac.

A bowl or basket to put them in.

A very large piece of paper; preferably one everyone can gather round. If this is not possible then have pieces that half the group can gather around. You may want to write across the paper something like, 'We give thanks for our giftedness' or 'We share our gifts in mission.'

As many varied mark making tools as you have, e.g. felt pens, (thick and thin), wax crayons, paints, pencil crayons, chalk.

#### **Part 1 - Mission**

##### **Script** (full section 15 minutes to activity)

Welcome to lesson 5, today we will look at both the church's corporate mission and ours individually.

It seems like all organizations have a mission statement. A mission statement's value only benefits the organization if it is constantly referred to and the group itself is familiar with both the statement and its purpose.

**Question:** Does anyone know the church's mission statement?

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

In recent years we have adopted a mission prayer to support that mission statement and allow it to work in our lives, not just be a statement 'on the books'. Please read the mission prayer to yourself or recite it to yourself if you know it off by heart!

Let's break our Mission statement down a little.

1. We proclaim Jesus Christ.

We looked at the message of Jesus Christ in a previous class. We identified Jesus as our inspiration for witness and as a peacemaker. Our mission to proclaim Jesus Christ is anticipated at both local and worldwide levels.

2. We promote communities.

As our name reflects, we try to live in communities ( although not necessarily physically) that reflect the peaceful reign of God on earth, some call this the cause of Zion. Within and without these communities we share witness of the peace of Jesus.

3. Another common phrase we hear, based on Doctrine and Covenants 164: 9f is

Christ's mission is our mission.

This is also reflected in scripture, Luke 4:18 to 19 (have someone read this.)

**Question:** Do you think this is our mission too? Is it meant to be taken literally?

**Question:** How might this mission be translated into a ministry for today?

### **Mission Initiatives**

The church suggests that there are 5 mission initiatives that direct us towards our mission.

### **Activity (15 minutes)**

Have the 5 Mission Initiatives written on separate pieces of paper. Place them in a bowl and ask people to pick out one at a time. (You may want to blutac them on a board or wall). As you do so, ask the group for one example where they think their group or congregation follows each initiative.

- Invite People to Christ
- Abolish Poverty End Suffering
- Pursue Peace on Earth
- Develop Disciples to Serve
- Experience Congregations in Mission.

Now ask the group to reflect on each initiative again, this time thinking about how they respond to that call. Read each Mission Initiative and then leave a couple of minutes for thought before moving onto the next.

## **PART 2 - Responsible Choices** (15 minutes)

One of the Enduring Principles (refer to previous class) is concerned with making responsible choices.

*Quick fire questions and answers- move through this section at a quick pace.*

Just in a couple of sentences, share with the person next to you

**Question:** What was the hardest choice you have had to make?

**Question:** What was the easiest choice you have ever made?

**Discuss all together:** Through the day how many choices do you make, from the mundane to life informing? (No right answer but must be dozens!)

**Script:** Choices you make impact you and that is one consideration, but how much more must our choices be responsible if they affect others?

Allow for a few people to describe a time when they were a child and someone made a choice that impacted them.

We may weigh up the impact on those closest to us when making some choices but how much do we really consider our local community, our country, our world when we make other choices? (Pause for a minute)

**Question:** Can you think of a time when you consciously thought of the international implications resulting from a choice you made?

**Question:** What poor choices has humankind made that impact on you, despite you not having made that choice? And how does that make you feel?

**Script:** God gives humans the ability to make choices about whom and what they will serve. Some people experience conditions that diminish their ability to make choices. We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God.

*If your group are stuck, here are some ideas for choices that might be discussed:*

To have breakfast? What to have?

To drop litter on the street?

To eat red meat?

To donate to charity shops?

To vote?

To join a protest walk?

To buy goods/food exported from across the world?

How to manage my children's behaviour?

Deforestation?

To buy a lottery ticket?

To buy or rent?

To report a safeguarding issue?

To mow my lawn?

Abortion?

To walk or ride?

To fast before communion?

### **PART 3 – Discipleship and Ministry (15 minutes)**

**Script:** On page 37 of the booklet, it describes what part discipleship and ministry have in sharing our mission. The following excerpts are paraphrased from that text.

Being a Christian is more than holding a list of right ideas; it's about radical obedience to Jesus in every part of life..... Discipleship is both an inward and outward journey..... (where) Jesus calls us to follow him.

Is humble service offered according to the model of Jesus?..... Some disciples are called by God and ordained to priesthood officers to serve the mission of the church in specialised ways. The Holy Spirit gives complimentary gifts and abilities to ALL disciples.

It is very clear that from the enduring principles that the church believes in the worth of all persons. All are called to discipleship according to their giftedness.

#### **Activity**

Have the group gather around the large piece of paper. The aim is to COVER it with the names of gifts that are held within individuals, your group and the international church. Use different mark making tools to encourage a feeling of a collage. The more words you can write the more effective it will be. Encourage the group to use different colours, fonts and sizes when they write. Overlap the words if needed. Be bold. Display the poster in the church building.

If this class is being taken online, members of the group can do their own collage.

Come together at the end of the class for a circle prayer. As time allows, invite each person to prayer for mission or have one person do this.



## Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

### Lesson 6 - Christian Life

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 34, 35, 37 and 38.

#### Guide Times

- Basic Beliefs – 10 minutes
- Sin – 15 minutes
- Salvation – 10 minutes
- Shaped By Our Beliefs- 20 minutes
- Conclusion – 5 minutes

#### **Basic Beliefs** (10 minutes)

In previous lessons, we have looked at some of the Basic Beliefs of Community of Christ. In this lesson we will consider basic beliefs on **Sin, Salvation, the Reign of God, Resurrection and Eternal Life, Judgment and End Time** and how they might shape our Christian life. Before we do that, let's look again at some of the introductory comments about Basic Beliefs (page33).

*We offer here our basic beliefs, not as the last word, but as an open invitation to all to embark on the adventure of discipleship.*

- What does it mean to you for our basic beliefs to be an invitation into the adventure of discipleship?

*As we seek God's continuing guidance, we encourage all people to study the scriptures and think about their experiences as they engage in the life of the church.*

- How might we use our Basic Beliefs, our study of the scriptures and our personal experiences to help us understand more clearly God's guiding hand?
- Do belief, scripture and experience carry equal weight in your life or is one more important than the others?

#### **Sin** (15 minutes)

*God created us to be agents of love and goodness. Yet we misuse our agency\* individually and collectively. We take the gifts of creation and of self and turn them against God's purposes with tragic results. Sin is the universal condition of separation and alienation from God and one another. We are in need of divine grace that alone reconciles us with God and one another. (page34)*

\*In this context 'agency' means the [ability](#) to take [action](#) or to [choose](#) what [action](#) to take.

## Testimony & Challenge

- As you feel able, share of a time when you felt separated or alienated from God or from someone else. If you are no longer in that situation, what was it that enabled reconciliation to take place?
- *God created us to be agents of love and goodness* - Think of someone that you would consider to be an agent of love and goodness. What is it about them that causes you to think of them in that way?
- Are there things you could do in your life to enable you to more fully live into the challenge to be an agent of love and goodness?

## Salvation (10 minutes)

*The gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ: forgiveness of sin, and healing from separation, brokenness, and the power of violence and death. This healing is for individuals, human societies, and all of creation. This new life is the loving gift of God's grace that becomes ours through faith and repentance. Baptism is how we initially express our commitment to lifelong discipleship. As we yield our lives to Christ in baptism we enter Christian community (the body of Christ) and have the promise of salvation. We experience salvation through Jesus Christ, but affirm that God's grace has no bounds, and God's love is greater than we can know.*

## Dwelling in the Word

Read the Basic Belief statement on Salvation several times and then consider the questions below.

- What word or phrase stands out for you in this text?
- In what ways do these words align with an invitation to embark on an adventure of discipleship?

## Shaped by Our Beliefs (20 minutes)

Beliefs play an important role in shaping our identity, sense of community and well-being. Our beliefs as Christians shape our thoughts, emotions, and actions, providing us with a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

The Reign of God, Resurrection and Eternal Life, Judgment and End Time might all appear to be beliefs about future times but a close reading of the basic belief statements on these topics make it clear that they are beliefs that could, and should, shape our Christian lives here and now.

## Discussion

Read and reflect on these four extracts from the belief statements:

*By faith we share in eternal life even now.* (Resurrection and Eternal Life page 38)

*We devote ourselves to seek Christ's peace and pursue it.* (End Time page38)

*“Zion” expresses our commitment to herald God's peaceable kingdom on earth by forming Christ-centred communities in families, congregations, neighbourhoods, cities, and throughout the world. (Reign of God page 37)*

*God cares about how we treat our neighbours 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. (Judgment page 37)*

- In small groups, list some aspects of a Christian life shaped by these statements.
- Share your list with the other groups.
- Discuss which of those things on your list you believe you, or your community, do well and which you find to be more challenging.

If time allows, read through the statements on Reign of God, Resurrection and Eternal Life, Judgment and End Time and consider how your beliefs on these topics are similar or different to what is stated.

**Conclusion** (5 minutes)

The final sentence of the Basic Belief statements is “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.”

Together, say the Lord's Prayer.



## Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

### Lesson 7 - Sacraments (part one)

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 44-50.

#### Guide Times

- Introduction to Sacraments – 30 minutes
- Communion – 10 minutes
- Ordination – 10 minutes
- Marriage - 10 minutes

*Look especially to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. Seek for greater understanding of my purposes in these sacred rights and prepare to receive a renewed confirmation of the presence of my spirit in your experiences of worship.*

Doctrine and Covenants 158:11c

*The sacraments all acts of the assembled body that symbolise God's presence with the church and with each disciple they are not separate from what the church is and what it does rather they are at the core of its ministries.*

First Presidency, Community of Christ 2005

#### **Activity 1 - Introduction: Word Clues** (5 minutes)

Have 8 slips of paper, each with a sacrament written on them. Have members of the group pick one out in turn and then use first 3 words that come to mind describing the sacrament. 8 in all. Encourage no shouting out until all 3 words have been shared. Expect the words to include labels for people, places, and symbols. As sacraments are shared, give a brief description of each, 2 lines at most. Have a very short discussion about who may have seen each sacrament or who might have been part of it.

When all have been shared start to break it down into components of sacraments as follows.

#### **Activity 2 - Symbols** (5 minutes)

Are there any symbols that are precious to you in your family? sporting? events? religious?  
Draw it and share with the group.

**Script** (5 minutes)

What is a symbol? Symbols are actions or objects used to represent something else by association, resemblance or convention. Some symbols of faith that represent a divine presence are

- Things e.g. bread, water, olive oil
- Actions e.g. laying on of hands- after a couple of these, you may try asking for examples to the rest of symbols.
- Events e.g. a communion service.
- People e.g. ministers or fellow disciples.
- Communities e.g. congregation.
- Language e.g. covenant, bless.

In faith terms symbols are sometimes referred to as a worldly reality that connects us to the divine. That allows us, as humans, to appreciate the holy. When we are unable to understand or express the infinite reality of God, then symbols become the means by which we bridge our humanness to the spiritual. In the ordinariness of our lives, they become the avenues for interacting with the divine.

All Sacraments involve symbols. The symbols as objects etc in themselves are of base importance it is what they can represent that helps us connect with the holy.

**Sharing** (5minutes)

Before the class ask a person to briefly share their experience of an infant blessing. (either doing or having done to!) and what relationships they developed in that event. Summing up this experience, draw on the relationship between the person and the minister. Also be sure to draw on the relationship of the congregation, in this case especially the congregation's responsibility to nurture and support the infant.

The corporate act of a sacrament connects us to one another, affirms God's love for all, and binds us to the recipient in the privilege of the experience. The sacraments also shape our identity and community life as followers of Jesus Christ. As we experience the blessings available through the sacraments, we are empowered to share the peace of Jesus and fulfil our mission in the world

Sacraments should be INCLUSIVE; they are accessible to anyone who is a disciple of Jesus Christ.

**Discuss** (10minutes)

1. How can the celebration of the sacraments be more than just a habit or repetitive act?
2. Why is the congregation's participation vital in the celebration of sacraments?
3. Do we find experiencing the sacraments memorable and meaningful? If so why?

## **Looking at sacraments in more detail** ( Approximately 10 minutes each)

### **Communion**

#### **Discuss**

Have someone read Luke 22: 14-20 NRSV

What are some other names we use for this sacrament? Lord's Supper, Sacrament, Lord's Table, Eucharist.

What is it? Accept a couple of responses.

This sacrament is the act of partaking of bread and wine in symbolic remembrance of the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Typically, although not restricted to, celebrated in a congregation on the first Sunday of the month.

What are the symbols used?

Bread (or such) and wine (or such). This is an example where the symbols can take a different form for the individual situation or for the individual – an example of inclusion.

Prayers – There are several versions that may be used.

Where do these prayers come from? (Doctrine and Covenants 17)

#### **Activity 3**

Have prayers prepared and, in the style of Lectio Divina, have someone read the modern combined prayer. Pause, ask the group to listen again, and pick out a word or phrase that stands out to them. Pause, read again, asking the group to consider what this prayer has come to mean to them.

#### **Discuss**

1. What is the core meaning of this sacrament?
2. What does it mean that we offer communion to all committed Christians?
3. Referring to the purpose of a symbol we discussed earlier, what are the symbols here representing and what is their purpose?
4. How different might communion look on another continent/culture to ours?
5. Have you ever experienced communion outside of the usual once a month model? Have a couple of people share briefly where and when and what that meant to them.

### **Ordination**

Have someone read Acts 13:1-3

#### **Script**

Priesthood is a rather complicated issue and discussion about calling, what kinds of priesthood there are and perimeters of priesthood responsibilities are for another time.

However, in the process of calling to the priesthood, the sacrament of ordination is central.

In the light of what we learnt earlier, what people are involved in ordination?  
What symbol(s) is used?

### **Discuss**

1. If you were writing a prayer of ordination, what kinds of things would you include? (thanksgiving, counsel, and blessing)
2. Two ministers lay their hands on the ordinand's head. What is the role of the second person? (To uphold the minister offering the prayer and the ordinand in silent prayer.)
3. Why is important for this sacrament to take place in a corporate worship experience?

### **Marriage**

#### **Script**

This sacrament is not the place to re-iterate the pre-marital practical discussions that have already taken place. The sacrament should emphasise the sacred nature of the covenant between two people in the eyes of God. The structure and formality of the wedding service will alter according to culture and custom.

What are the elements of this sacrament? (look for the following answers)

- Christian marriage typically takes place in church (although various cultures may permit specific places of a sacred nature to the couple).
- It is held in public.
- It is in the context of a worship service, with witnesses.
- The couple make vows or promises to love one another.
- In most cultures, it is a legal ceremony but some may require a corresponding civil ceremony to be conducted.
- The ministers offers a charge and if affirmed, pronounces the couple married.
- The minister offers a blessing on the couple.

### **Discuss**

Which part(s) of this service are sacramental? (The vows and blessing?)

### **Conclusion**

Have someone read Doctrine and covenants 163:2b

*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.*



## Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

### Lesson 8 - Sacraments (part two)

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 44-50.

#### Guide Times

- Blessing of Children – 10 minutes
- Universals and Particulars – 20 minutes
- Baptism/Confirmation/Evangelist's Blessing – 15 minutes
- Laying on of Hands for the Sick - 15 minutes

#### Recap from Lesson 6 - Blessing Of Children (10 minutes)

Prepare beforehand 5 slips of paper each with a core aspect of this sacrament as below.

Read together Mark 10:13-16. Name two observations you have from this scripture.

Have you ever been to an Infant Blessing in Community of Christ?

What did you experience? How did it compare to a baptism or christening in any other denomination?

The core aspects of blessing children are:

- A prayer of blessing offered by two members of priesthood in the context of worship.
- Priesthood standing in for and replicating the actions of Jesus when blessing the children of his day.
- Acknowledging and celebrating the gift of the child.
- Stewardship of love and support from the congregation, family and friends over the child
- Congregational covenant to seek to create a world that blesses all children, is peaceful and just, and surrounds children with love.

Take turns to take a slip of paper out of an envelope/box which will have written on it one of the above. Discuss its meaning and how it personally impacts you.

How do you think infant blessing can be used as a missionary tool? How might you do that?

Have you ever considered having a board displaying information and pictures about infant blessing in your entrance hall?

### **Universals and Particulars** (20minutes)

**Script** - The concept of universals and particulars is not unique to sacraments but is a useful framework and context for discussion.

**Universals** refers to the whole of a subject or a category.

In the context of a sacrament, they are the unchangeable characteristics. The core of the act, everlasting, never changing core aspects.

**Particulars** are the distinctives, those things that are particular to the individual sacraments that may change according to situation, culture and context.

Sacramental universals include:

- Connection to God and God's creation
- Interaction between humanity and God
- Connection to past, present and future generations
- Recognition of God's grace and saving activity among us
- Acknowledgement of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the ordinary
- Covenant between humans and the Divine and the Divine with humans.

Sacramental Particulars include:

- A prescribed ritual or procedure to be followed (kneeling for communion prayers, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, immersion in water)
- Physical objects or emblems to be used in the ritual (oil, water, bread, juice)
- Prescribed words or prayers

### **Example**

A lady who converted to Community of Christ as an adult was overjoyed to celebrate communion as we practice it. She attended the Denton congregation. However, one day she raised with me the fact that during communion ministers were always served first. To her this seemed contrary to the idea of priesthood as servant ministry. Having discussed this further the congregation changed their practice and that, in turn, influenced practice at mission centre events and throughout the British Isles. This particular had come from traditional practice and as such was open to sympathetic change.

### **Discuss**

What sacramental particulars do you experience in your congregation? (think of a sacrament and break it down if that helps)

What cultural changes might be made, in the light of the above to someone, in Africa, Australia or your congregation? e.g. bread and wine, serving style, presentation of emblems.

Do you think we expect other cultures to conform to western ideas of sacramental practice?

How did lockdown influence our view of this? e.g. remote worship, using our own 'bread and wine', not being in same room to share.

If a congregation decided to celebrate communion every week, would that change universals or particulars? (particulars)

When else might you share in communion other than Sunday worship? (Anytime Community of Christ Christians meet together in the presence of a priesthood member.)

How do you decide which prayer option to use in communion?

### **Baptism/Confirmation/Evangelist's Blessing** (15 minutes)

(Sharing in Community of Christ pages 44-50)

Have the group divide into 3 groups/pairs. Each group will discuss a sacrament. Provide the corresponding list of questions to each group.

#### **Group 1. Baptism**

(Take it in turns to read this script)

Read John 3: 3-5. In this scripture Jesus tells Nicodemus that in order to enter the Kingdom of God they must be born of water and spirit.

This phrase is often referred to as being born again. We leave our country or tribe of birth behind and become citizens of the Kingdom of God.

'Baptism requires personal faith in Jesus. It is a response to God's love expressed through Jesus Christ..... Those who seek to follow Jesus through the waters of baptism must know and live the principles shared in the Sermon on the Mount..... building our life on the rock of Christ teachings. Baptism is publicly testifying that you are choosing to follow Jesus with all of your heart mind and strength. This is a decision that marks a significant point in the process of repentance from all that is selfish, violent and unjust..... It is a step requiring personal and informed decisions. No one can decide for us.' (The Sacraments: Symbol, Meaning and Discipleship. Bolton and Gardner).

#### **Discuss**

Why do you think Community of Christ practices baptism by full immersion? (Jesus' example; symbolic of washing away sin)

Thinking back to the previous lesson, what symbols are involved and what do they represent?

## **Activity**

Typically, the participant is asked if they are willing to take upon them the name of Jesus Christ prior to immersion. Pause and think for a while, or write down, what other questions you think might be asked?

## **Group 2. Confirmation**

### **Script**

In the sacrament of confirmation, elders placed their hands on the head of the new disciple and one offers a special prayer. The prayer of confirmation seeks God's blessing to help the new member grow in their covenant and generously share their giftedness in support of the churches mission. Confirmation supports the individual become a disciple and member as part of a congregation and worldwide community. Elders acknowledge the presence of God through the Holy Spirit and may call upon on the gift of the Holy Spirit in order to continue to support the individual through their life.

### **Discuss**

In a religious community, is it important to have a position of 'membership? If so, why? Confirmation usually takes place as a part of a worship experience. Is that necessary? What are the advantages? Is there a time when this might not occur? What are the universals and particulars of confirmation?

## **Group 3. Evangelists blessing**

### **Discuss**

What do you know about Evangelists blessings?  
Have any of the group had an evangelist blessing? If so, would they be willing to share? (You may ask someone prior to the class to be ready to share. At what age? Why? Who? What are their feelings about it, through their life and now? )  
Do you think evangelists blessings are 'shrouded in secrecy'? If so, why might that be?

### **Script**

An evangelist blessing is a prayer of blessing offered by an Evangelist within the priesthood of Community of Christ. (Historically it was known as a 'patriarchal blessing'. Primarily this was because the priesthood member was called patriarch evangelist. In more recent years the term evangelist has been used.)  
Evangelist blessings can be offered for an individual, family or congregation. Individual blessings are typically not held in the context of worship, however there should always a witness to the blessing, typically someone who is recording the words. The evangelist will place his or her hands on the head of the candidate and offers words of thanksgiving, affirmation, council and blessing. Usually, the evangelist and candidate would meet prior to the blessing as many times as thought appropriate. Prayerful preparation would be expected from both the evangelist and participant(s)  
It would be a similar process for the blessing of families or congregations. In the case of the latter the prayer would be offered in the context of worship.

## **Discuss**

Has your congregation had an evangelist blessing? Did you witness it?

When was the last time you heard it read or referred to?

Should every congregation have an evangelist blessing?

Can you have more than one blessing? (yes)

After 15 minutes rejoin the main group.

## **Laying on of Hands for the Sick (15 minutes)**

### **Script**

Also known as 'administration', this sacrament, as with others, mimics the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus blessed those who were hurting in many ways. Today the priesthood lay their hands on the participant's head. Initially one of them anoints the participant's head with consecrated oil, after which the second minister offers a prayer for healing.

The oil, usually olive oil, has no magical healing qualities but will have been consecrated by prayer. Only a drop or two of the oil is used in the anointing, usually on the participant's forehead.

Historically the laying on of hands for the sick was conducted in a private space. This may still be the case when offering this prayer in hospital or a home, however, recently we have come to understand the benefits of offering this prayer in the context of worship or surrounded by those the participant wants. In this way the prayer becomes one that others support.

### **Discuss**

What constitutes 'sick' in this context?

How does our more modern understanding of seeking wholeness in body, mind and spirit influence this sacrament?

Who can ask for administration? (Anyone)

How would you define 'healing' in this context? Is there ever a time when healing means something other than being made better? (Yes, sometimes end of life can be considered healing. Also, medical treatment should be pursued alongside spiritual blessing.)

What impact does this have on the 'readiness' of ministers to lead sacraments?

Once again be sure to give opportunity for testimony regarding laying on of hands for the sick.

If you wish to extend the discussion on sacraments with the group you may like to consider the following topics:

- Sacraments as opportunities for witness and sharing.
- Sacraments as tools for reconciliation.
- The ministry of hospitality shared through the sacraments.



Community of Christ

## Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

### Lesson 9 - Scripture in Community of Christ

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 63-67.

#### Guide Times

- Introduction to Scripture – 20 minutes
- Living Word/Library of Books – 15 minutes
- Reading and Using Scripture – 20 minutes
- The Bible, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants - 15 minutes

Have a selection of Bibles available and also some copies of the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Mormon.

#### **Favourite Scriptures** (10 minutes)

Invite those in the class to share a scripture verse or Bible story that is particularly meaningful to them and to briefly explain why.

#### **Scripture in Community of Christ – Introduction** (10 minutes)

The English word scripture comes from the Latin word *scriptura*, which means “something written.” Scriptures are writings that, over time, are given authority by or become sacred to a particular group.

In Community of Christ, we affirm the *Bible* as the foundational scripture. The word *Bible* comes from the ancient Greek word *biblia*, which means “books” or a collection of “little books.” It is important to remember that the Bible is a library of books written by many authors, not a single book written by one author.

The set of affirmations found on pages 63 to 65 were first presented to the church in 2003 to provide the context for the church’s continuing quest to become more knowledgeable about our three books of scripture. The focus is on how we understand scripture and its role in the life of the church.

Not all of the affirmations will be discussed in this class. This is because of time available rather than any implication that some affirmations are more important than others. Class members should be encouraged to read and reflect on all of the affirmations in their own time.

*Preamble - Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ.*

*Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.*

- What do you understand by the phrases “responsibly interpreted” and “faithfully applied”? How can our approach to scripture be more in keeping with these criteria?

**Living Word** (5 minutes)

**Affirmations 1 and 2** - *We declare that Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).*

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

These affirmations distinguish between the Living Word (Christ) and the written word (scripture).

- What do you understand to be the difference between the Living Word and the written word? How do these two tend to become confused in the life of the church and what problems can this cause?

**A Library of Books** (10 minutes)

**Affirmation 3** - *Scripture is a library of books that speaks in many voices. These books were written in diverse times and places, and reflect the languages, cultures, and conditions under which they were written. God’s revelation through scripture does not come to us apart from the humanity of the writers, but in and through that humanity. In the earthen vessels of scripture we have been given the treasure of divine love and grace (2 Corinthians 4:7).*

The library of writings we call scripture comes to us from many times, many authors, and many circumstances different from our own. How a passage was written tells us much about how we should read and understand it.

- What are the dangers of treating the Bible as if it is one book written by one author?
- What do we benefit from viewing the Bible as a library of books?
- How does recognition of the role of the human writer affect how you view scripture?

### **True but Not Inerrant** (5 minutes)

**Affirmation 5** - *Scripture is vital and essential to the church, but not because it is inerrant (in the sense that every detail is historically or scientifically correct). Scripture makes no such claim for itself. Rather, generations of Christians have found scripture simply to be trustworthy in keeping them anchored in revelation, in promoting faith in Christ, and in nurturing the life of discipleship. For these purposes, scripture is unfailingly reliable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).*

- How is it possible to believe that scripture is “true” yet not inerrant? Would you agree that scripture is “trustworthy” and “unfailingly reliable”? Explain why or why not.

### **Faith, Experience, Tradition and Scholarship** (5 minutes)

**Affirmation 6** - *Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship each have something to contribute to our understanding of scripture. In wrestling to hear and respond to the witness of scripture, the church must value the light that each of these sources may offer. Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship. What do you understand by these terms?*

- Which of these lenses or methods do you find easiest or most natural to turn to when trying to understand scripture?

### **Discipleship and Scripture** (10 minutes)

**Affirmation 8** suggests that disciples should grow in their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures so that they may:

- Increase in love for God, neighbour and self,
  - Uphold the dignity and worth of all persons
  - Faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ
- Share of a time when scripture has helped you to do one of these things.
  - Can you suggest other reasons for reading and seeking to understand scripture?

### **Bible, Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants** (10 minutes)

**Affirmation 9** states that, with other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church.

- Do you agree with that statement?
- What do you think it means for the Bible to be foundational?

**Which Bible?** - Many Bible translations are available and Community of Christ acknowledges that consulting various translations can be helpful. An article on the Community of Christ website provides information on why use of the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition is recommended.

*Community of Christ uses the most responsible biblical scholarship available in the public use and interpretation of scripture. Earlier translations like the King James Version (KJV, published in 1611) were valuable in their time but had limited Greek and Hebrew manuscripts to reference. The Inspired Version (IV, published in 1867) is not a translation from the original languages. It is the KJV with about 5 percent changed or added by Joseph Smith, representing his insights and experiences. While the IV helps us better understand Smith's developing theology, it does not get us closer to the original texts of the Bible, and it has many limitations of the KJV on which it is based.*

*The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV, published in 1989) has been used by Community of Christ as the most reliable version of the Bible available in English because it was based on thousands of manuscripts discovered since the 17th century as well as improved knowledge of the original languages. As of September 2024, Community of Christ has moved to the Updated Edition of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSVue) as the main reference for English resources.*

*Consulting various translations can be helpful in Bible study and sermon preparation. However, for public ministry it is important to work with a translation consistent with Community of Christ's understanding of what scripture is and how it should be used. (Extracts from <https://cofchrist.org/use-of-the-new-revised-standard-version-updated-edition/>)*

**Affirmation 9** continues *“In addition [to the Bible], 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.”*

- When has scripture found in the Doctrine and Covenants or the Book of Mormon has be particularly meaningful to you?

### **Conclusion – An Indispensable Witness (5 minutes)**

We will finish by listening to divine counsel presented to the church by President Stephen M. Veazey in 2007 and canonised as Section 163 of Doctrine and Covenants

*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, 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. (D&C 163: 7a,d)*

\* For a more in depth study of scripture and how it might be used responsibly in the life of the church you are recommended to take the Temple School course “Introduction to Scripture”.



## Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

### Lesson 10 - Whole Life Stewardship

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 39-43 and 28.

#### Guide Times

- Grace and Generosity – 25 minutes
- Our Finances – 25 minutes
- Whole-Life Stewardship – 20 minutes
- What Do We Achieve Through Our Generosity? - 20 minutes

#### **Grace and Generosity** (25 minutes)

Aim – to explore and gain a better understanding of what grace and generosity can achieve and how to work to be better stewards of our whole life.

Focus point – Mission Initiative Abolish Poverty, End Suffering.

#### Volunteer(s) to read

*Mission Prayer – God, where will your Spirit lead today?  
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.  
Grant me courage to risk something new  
and become a blessing of your love and power.  
Amen.*

*Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts, not by commandment or constraint. .... Give generously according to your true capacity. D&C 163:9*

#### Small group discussions

1. What do you have to share?
2. Give examples of when
  - sharing or giving has made you feel good or positive.
  - sharing or giving has not gone well and left you feeling negative.

Share discussion points with the whole group.

#### Volunteer to read

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

### **Our Finances** (25 minutes)

Group discussion

1. Sharing our finances – How do we decide how much and where to give?
2. What barriers are there to sharing more?
3. How much does faith influence your giving?

Share discussion points with the whole group.

Handout copies of Disciples Generous Response. Giving Opportunities -What Funds Can I Give To?" and briefly discuss.

### **Whole Life Stewardship** (20 minutes)

Group Discussions

1. What do you understand by the word 'Stewardship'? What are the responsibilities of a steward?
2. What is the significance of using 'whole-life' alongside the word 'stewardship'?
3. Can we become whole-life stewards? Or can we really only aim to become better stewards?

Share discussion points with whole group.

### **What can we achieve through our generosity?** (20 minutes)

Group discussion

It's important to recognise what we achieve through our stewardship.

What might we achieve through our generosity

1. Locally / in our congregation?
2. Nationally?
3. Globally?

Share discussion points with the whole group.

Whatever we achieve we should aim to do so with humility.

Volunteer to read

*So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. (Matthew 6: 2-3)*

*Whole Life Stewardship and Grace and Generosity are how we work to achieve our Mission Initiatives. We will need to have faith and courage at all times.*

Any question?

Close with the Mission Prayer – Grant me courage...



Community of Christ

## **Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs**

### **Lesson 11 – Catch Up and Review**

You will now have completed 10 lessons. Before moving to the final lesson, we would suggest that you put aside time to:

1. Look in more detail at one (or more) of the topics already considered that participants would like to discuss further,  
  
or
2. Look, in general, at those things that have already been discussed throughout the course giving opportunity for participants to ask questions or share any ideas that may have emerged.



Community of Christ

## Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message and Beliefs

### Lesson 12 - We are One, We are Many

This lesson is based on 'Sharing in Community of Christ' pages 68-75.

#### Guide Times

- Introductory Section – 10 minutes
- Community – 20 minutes
- Worth of Persons/Worship and Sacraments – 15 minutes
- Scriptures - 5 minutes
- Mission, Peace and Justice – 10 minutes
- Sharing – 10 minutes
- We Are One, We Are Many – 10 minutes

*This is the last of the 12 classes (unless you have not done your catch up class yet) It is slightly different in that it focuses on a document created during an International Leaders' Meeting in 2004 as a reflection of the unity and diversity found within the church. Each class member will need paper and something to write with. The lesson takes several topics and draws out the nature of these in a diverse church. You may not have time to cover all of these topics, so consider what is most valuable for your group and just mention other topics.*

*If there is someone in your group who has travelled internationally for the church, give them a chance to share their experiences. You could consider inviting someone in to take this class who has had such an experience.*

#### **Introduction** (10 minutes)

Read the first section of the document aloud. Maybe have four readers take a paragraph each.

#### Discuss:

- What do you think the authors meant by the phrase 'the face of Jesus is torn'?
- Do you agree with the phrase 'The church tears the face of Jesus'?
- Why do you think we may have become insular as individuals, as a society, as a church? Or do you feel we have not?

### **Community** (20 minutes)

Draw the expanding circles of your life. Place yourself in the middle and then the communities of which you are part in circles moving out from the centre.

Share these and then discuss:

- Have you chosen the circles of society you are part of?
- Do you feel tension between any of these circles?

The document talks about feeling pain when members of the body of Christ are persecuted or lack freedoms we take for granted.

#### **Discuss:**

- Can we truly empathize with other people's situations, especially those in lands we have never personally visited?
- How much does the media help or hinder our understanding of those who live beyond our life experience?
- Can we feel unified with others whose lives are very diverse from our own? (both at home and abroad)
- List some of the practical ways your congregation/group could truly share community with those 'beyond our borders'. Again, think about at home and abroad. Commit to talking and praying more about this, making your ideas come alive.

### **Worth of Persons** (5-10 minutes)

Read the paragraphs on Worth of Persons

Discuss:

- Is there one phrase that stands out to you? Share with the group why. (little/no conversation)

### **Worship and Sacraments** (5-10 minutes)

These paragraphs talk about the many and varied styles of worship we enjoy in Community of Christ across the world. Take one of the examples and ask the class how they would feel in that situation. Aim to draw out that there is no 'one way' to worship.

Conversely, are there elements of worship that should be common in any situation? (Do not get into too deep a discussion about the purpose or nature of worship but allow some comments).

Discuss:

- What is your favourite style of worship?
- What draws you into God's presence?

### **Scriptures** (5 minutes)

Make sure all the group understand Community of Christ beliefs in scripture (Lesson 9)

Discuss:

- Do you think scripture promotes community or encourages divisions within the church?
- Does it matter that we may have different interpretations of scripture? (Think of examples such as LGBTQ+ issues, creation story, gender roles)

### **Mission, Peace and Justice** (5-10 minutes)

Read together the paragraph starting 'We have many ways of going.'

Discuss:

- Where do you go?
- Where are you the proudest that the church goes? Why?

### **Sharing** (10 minutes)

#### **A. Generosity**

Discuss:

- Where do your offerings go? Do you know?
- Do you agree with the distribution of international financial gifts?

#### **B. The 'gospel'**

Discuss:

- Do you feel it's your responsibility to share your faith?
- Ask the group to relate times when they did share their Christian belief, preferably in the last week, but otherwise a memorable time.
- How do you share the gospel as a congregation? Can you think of one more modern, new way to do so? Are you willing to try it?

### **We Are One, We Are Many** (10 minutes)

Whatever topics you choose from the above, be sure to leave time to reflect together on the last section.

Have the group read silently to themselves. Then take turns to read a paragraph each, pausing after each paragraph. At each pause ask group to reflect individually and silently what one word stands out in that reading. As they do so, ask them to write the word in one of the circles they drew earlier.

Encourage the group to take home their paper, stick it somewhere they will see it and reflect on the class over the next week.

We are one, we are many; what a privilege and gift that is to us as church. Let us be grateful.

For copies of 'Sharing in Community of Christ', Fourth Edition and 'Disciples Generous Response: Giving Opportunities', which is referenced in Chapter 10, contact Andrew Fox ([afox@cofchrist.org](mailto:afox@cofchrist.org)).