

# Module Two:

## Prayer and Reflection for Small Groups

### Discerning in Community

This section offers materials for six group sessions. These sessions invite participants to focus on the discernment question through group spiritual practices. Study, discussion, information gathering, and thinking are critical parts of discernment. These approaches will be used in prayer and reflection groups. At times, the group will be asked to put thinking on hold and engage in interior reflection or create spaces of silence through which the Spirit may speak or move. Through practices involving body, mind, and spirit, a different way of “knowing” will be pursued.

This different way of knowing includes, but moves beyond, our ordinary approach to problem-solving by thinking. This doesn't mean we turn off our brains. It means within us are regions of intuition, emotion, sensation, insight, metaphor, symbol, and creative “knowledge” that are difficult to connect with when the thinking brain is fully in charge.

One purpose of spiritual practice is to offer God all of our capacities and allow God to move through them to shape us. Spiritual practices are patterns of praying, meditating, journaling, and reflecting designed to place us before God in an open space we humbly enter to be transformed by God.

Spiritual formation can happen alone, in a large or small group, or anywhere we pay attention to

God. Engaging in spiritual practice in a small group has several advantages:

- We are called to increased accountability and vulnerability in community.
- We are called to leave our self-focus, to listen, and to give attention to others.
- We learn from and are blessed by the experiences and views of others.
- We are touched by the Spirit through shared testimonies and stories.
- We experience support and community as we engage in spiritual practice.
- We grow in our capacity for trust, acceptance, and compassion.

Prayer and discernment in small groups connect to our individual spiritual life. Group members are encouraged to spend time in personal prayer and reflection outside the group.

### Setting Up Prayer and Reflection Groups

- Congregational and/or mission center leaders should identify group facilitators. Identify persons who are gifted listeners, spiritually sensitive, and open to diverse views.
- When possible, select trained Covenant Discipleship Group facilitators. Alternatives are trained spiritual directors or persons who have other training in group process.

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- Limit each group to six to eight persons to allow for equal sharing.
- Ask groups to remain consistent in membership and attendance. The same people should be present for all sessions. Shifting group attendance and membership would interfere with group process and trust.
- Provide a copy of this guide for the facilitator for prayerful preparation.
- Designate a recorder to summarize key ideas and insights. Send the summary to the First Presidency via Andrew Shields, World Church secretary, at 1001 W. Walnut, Independence, MO 64050 or [presidencyresponse@CofChrist.org](mailto:presidencyresponse@CofChrist.org).

### Roles and Responsibilities of Group Facilitator

- Facilitate group sharing that promotes a positive, open, and spiritually sensitive atmosphere.
- Use the suggested activities. Avoid altering the script significantly but remain free to paraphrase materials and use your “own words.”
- Bring a nonjudgmental mindset. Serve as an open-minded guide who avoids influencing the group with personal opinions or insights.
- Listen to the group and help members listen to each other and God.
- Foster an attitude of open exploration of conditions of membership.
- Provide relevant information and resources to help in discernment.
- Help the group create and honor a group covenant (see guidelines on page 17).

- Assign a group recorder and send a summary of insights to the First Presidency soon after the last meeting.

### Setting and Time Frame for Group Meetings

#### Setting

An appropriately prepared setting is important for creating community and good group dynamics. Consider the following:

- Choose a space that is private, quiet, and comfortable. This can be in a room at the church, in a home, or another mutually agreeable location.
- Arrange chairs in a circle.
- Create a simple meditation or worship center if desired.

#### Time Frame

Potential group members need to understand the time commitment. Share the following:

- It is important for members to attend all six small-group sessions. The group can choose dates and times that work for all participants. The facilitator should create a simple schedule and remind participants of upcoming sessions.
- Each session will last at least 1 ½ hours to a maximum of two hours.
- Try to avoid meeting during the Christian-education or Sunday-school hour. If this seems to be the only option, increase the number of sessions to complete the exercises.

#### Facilitator Preparation

A well-prepared facilitator will impact the spirit and quality of meetings positively. Facilitators are encouraged to:



- Read and reflect on guidelines for all group sessions before the first meeting. This will provide a sense of the discernment process, plan, and purpose for each session.
- Before each session, read the outline, prayerfully plan how to facilitate the group, and gather materials.
- Pray for group members between sessions. Pray for help in providing leadership and remaining open to God’s direction.

## Choosing a Group Recorder

Before the first session identify someone willing to serve as recorder. Select a good listener who can capture comments concisely and accurately. The recorder is a fully participating member. Share the following responsibilities with the recorder:

- Observe and listen to interactions. Note themes, ideas, and important statements. Listen for the “meat” or heart of comments. Record them clearly and concisely.
- Take notes during the reflection and sharing periods that follow exercises.
- Give notes to the facilitator at the end of each session or the beginning of the next session if you need time to make corrections.
- Participate fully in activities and include your own comments.

## Discerning with Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason

Traditionally, Christians have engaged in discernment through open-hearted reflection on God’s word (scripture), exploration of historical faith and practice (tradition), personal encounters with God’s Spirit expressed in spiritual stories, testimonies, and insights (experience), and use of inspired thinking (reason).

This guide incorporates the critical areas of scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. Please

familiarize yourself with all exercises before beginning.

## Session One: Introduction to Prayer and Reflection Process Facilitator Preparation and Supplies

- Prepare the meeting space and session plan.
- Bring pens and copies of the handouts on Discernment Principles (page 61), Exploring Views of Scripture (page 62) and Reflecting with Scripture (pages 63, 64).

## Greetings and Centering

Welcome the group and engage in:

- Sharing names and greetings.
- Briefly offering thanks and asking for God’s guidance.
- Guiding the following group prayer:
  - You may wish to review *Listen: A Centering Activity*, found at [www.CofChrist.org/CofM](http://www.CofChrist.org/CofM).
  - Silently greet God and then be still and listen for God’s presence and response.
  - Listen for God in the quiet peace of this place.
  - Listen for God in your own breathing and heartbeat.
  - Listen for God in the still, small voice of Spirit that promises to be with us.
- Allowing two minutes for silent listening prayer.
- Closing with a short statement of gratitude to God and blessing on the group.

## Creating a Group Covenant

Guide the group in agreeing when, where, and how often to meet. Also agree on group-communication principles. Consider the following as part of a simple group covenant:

- Location (this can rotate or remain the same).
- Attendance covenant with meeting dates agreeable to all participants.

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- Communication agreement based on the
  - worth of all;
  - value of diversity: respectful listening to views of all;
  - sensitive sharing of time by avoiding dominance by any individual;
  - avoidance of negative styles of communication such as judgment, criticism, debate, or argument.

### Exploring Discernment: Group Purpose and Process

Listening is at the heart of effective discernment. Discernment involves attentive listening to each other, to God, and to our thoughts and feelings. The reflective listening we will do together will be a central aspect of discerning God's guidance about the policy of rebaptism. Perceiving this guidance is our purpose, but we also will find ourselves being blessed by a deepening relationship with God and a deeper sense of community.

### Introductory Discussion of Discernment

Choose several of the following questions for group discussion:

- When we say discernment is a major goal, what does the word discernment mean?
- How does a person or group discern? What important principles are involved?
- When have you engaged in discernment? What happened?

### Reflecting on Discernment Principles

Provide copies of the "Discernment Principles" handout (page 61) to participants and ask them to read as much as they can in five minutes. Choose

one or two of the following questions to help the group process the handout:

- What did you learn about discernment that you didn't already know?
- What questions do you have on the principles in the handout?
- What outcomes do you wish for the group?  
Summarize by adding any particularly important principles the group has not named.

### Discerning with Scripture Facilitator Input

(Read or paraphrase)

Scripture reflection is essential to discernment. Faith and practice are grounded in scripture. People hold diverse views of what scripture is, says, and how it is to be used. Our diverse views come from different understandings of God. Each view has particular value in shaping our beliefs and practices. A wide spectrum of understandings about scripture exists in the church and in most faith communities. One journaling activity for this session invites us to prayer and reflection with our personal views of scripture.

### Facilitator Note

Give participants the upcoming handout and allow ten minutes for journaling, then follow with discussion questions provided.

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### Exploring Views of Scripture

*(Facilitators: The following section also appears on page 62 in the back of this resource as a handout that may be copied for your group members.)*

Read the following list of "approaches to scripture." Write journal responses to one or more questions.

## Some Approaches to Scripture

**Literal:** Scriptures are accurate historically and literally true.

**Legalist:** Scriptures are laws for living and are consulted as guides for moral and behavioral conduct.

**Historical-critical (contextual):** Scriptures develop in cultural and historical human contexts that affect their content and interpretation.

**Metaphorical:** Scriptural interpretation focuses on metaphorical or symbolic meanings more than emphasizing correct historical and literal meanings.

**Devotional:** Scriptures are to be encountered as reflective meditations for spiritual growth aside from literal, metaphorical, or historical interpretations.

**Literary:** Scripture has authority and relevance as a classic work of literature.

- Which approach best describes your way of understanding scripture? Do you use more than one approach?
- How comfortable and consistent is your approach? Does it change depending on which scripture you are working with?
- Which approaches seem most common in Community of Christ? Is there one true way of reading and using scripture in the church?
- An open canon of scripture based on continuing revelation is an Enduring Principle in Community of Christ. What is your understanding of how revelation takes place between God and people?

## Processing the Handout on Exploring Views of Scripture

- Invite the group to share insights and experiences from journaling.
- Invite additional discussion related to affirmation five from the church's official statement on scripture, [www.CofChrist.org/OurFaith/scripture.asp](http://www.CofChrist.org/OurFaith/scripture.asp):

*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.*

## Group Question

How have you found scripture to be “trustworthy” and “unfailingly reliable” in your life?

## A Reflective Approach to Scripture

### Facilitator Input

In discernment it helps to approach scripture in a reflective, receptive way. We are asked to hear the word addressed in an inward way that leads to personal application and transformation. The example sometimes used is taking the text in, chewing on it, digesting it, and allowing it to nourish us. This means praying with the text, hearing it several times, and allowing it to affect us on many levels. In this way, scripture provides an open space for encountering the Divine through new insights, feelings, or images.



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### Facilitator Instructions

Our second journaling activity, called “Reflecting on Scripture,” invites us to engage in reflective listening with familiar scriptures.

- Spend more time than usual with these scriptures and read them as though you never had heard them.
- Pause often to offer silent prayer or breathe in God’s presence in the words and silence.
- Take ten to fifteen minutes to read and respond to the texts on the “Reflecting on Scripture” journaling handout found on pages 63, 64.

### Facilitator Note

Introduce the upcoming “Reflecting on Scripture” journaling activity. Allow ten to fifteen minutes for journaling and ten minutes for group sharing.

### Group Sharing after Journaling

After participants have completed journaling, use several of these questions to guide the sharing:

- What experience or insight would you like to share from the journaling exercise? (Remember the covenant and be brief.)
- What did you notice about listening to scripture in a reflective way that is different from your usual way of reading or understanding scripture?
- Did you experience any shifts or changes in your attitudes toward scripture?

### Closing the Group

- Ask participants to stand in a circle, hands held.
- Invite each person to share a sentence or phrase from a favorite scripture. Those who do not wish

to share may squeeze the hand of the person next to them or say, “Pass.”

- Offer a short prayer of gratitude for scripture and its guiding inspiration.

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### Reflecting on Scripture

*(Facilitators: This section also appears on pages 63, 64 in the back of this resource as a handout that may be copied for your group members.)*

Choose one or two of the following scripture texts to read in a reflective, receptive way. Read slowly and prayerfully, pausing to listen, take in, and “digest” the text at the mind, heart, and spirit levels. Choose several journaling questions at the end and write responses.

#### Psalm 119:102–106 NRSV

*I do not turn away from your ordinances, for you have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and have confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances.*

#### Doctrine and Covenants 147:7

*I am further permitted to say by the Spirit: Instruction which has been given in former years is applicable in principle to the needs of today and should be so regarded by those who are seeking ways to accomplish the will of their heavenly Father. But the demands of a growing church require that these principles shall be evaluated and subjected to further interpretation. This requisite has always been present. In meeting it under the guidance of my spirit, my servants have learned the intent of these principles more truly.*



## Doctrine and Covenants 161:5

*Be respectful of tradition. Do not fail to listen attentively to the telling of the sacred story, for the story of scripture and of faith empowers and illuminates. But neither be captive to time-bound formulas and procedures. Remember that instruction given in former years is applicable in principle and must be measured against the needs of a growing church, in accordance with the prayerful direction of the spiritual authorities and the consent of the people.*

## II Timothy 3:16–17 NRSV

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.*

## Doctrine and Covenants 162:2c–e

*As a prophetic people you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve. You live in a world with new challenges, and that world will require new forms of ministry...*

*You have already been told to look to the sacraments to enrich the spiritual life of the body. It is not the form of the sacrament that dispenses grace but it is the divine presence that gives life. Be respectful of tradition and sensitive to one another, but do not be unduly bound by interpretations and procedures that no longer fit the needs of a worldwide church. In such matters direction will come from those called to lead.*

*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 each generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe.*

## Hebrews 4:12 NRSV

*Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it*

*divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

## Doctrine and Covenants 163:7a–d

*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.*

*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.*

*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.*

*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.*

- What feelings and thoughts did you have while reading these scriptures?
- Which scripture did you find most challenging or even somewhat disturbing?
- Which scripture had the most meaning for you?
- What is the heart of the message in the scripture you chose, and why does it speak most powerfully to you?
- What do these scripture texts say to you about Christian and Community of Christ understandings of scripture?

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### Session Two: Prayer, Reflection with Baptism Scriptures

#### Facilitator Preparation and Supplies

Choose scripture text to be used for “praying with scripture” (*lectio divina*) meditation (see options).

- Bring pens and copies of the “Reflecting on Jesus’ Baptism” handout found on page 65.

#### Welcome the Group

- How is everyone? Share in one sentence a memory from the last group session.
- Sing an easy chorus or hymn.
- Invite someone to offer a short prayer.

### Scripture Meditations on Baptism

#### Facilitator Input

This session will continue to emphasize discerning with scripture. We will use two forms of meditation from the long history of Christian spiritual practice. The first was developed by Ignatius of Loyola and invites us to enter a scripture story and allow it to come alive in new ways. The second practice, *lectio divina*, means “holy or sacred reading” and invites us to move deeper into a scripture as we hear it several times from different perspectives.

#### Instructions for Meditating with a Scripture Story

Close your eyes and become prayerful as you listen to the story of Jesus’ baptism. You will hear the

scripture twice. During the first reading, get a sense of the story and begin to imagine the scene.

#### The Reading

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”—Matthew 3:13–17 NIV*

#### Facilitator Note (First Reading)

- Allow one to two minutes of silence after the reading.
- Continue with your eyes closed and hear the story read slowly a second time. Visualize the scene in as much detail as possible. Use your senses. What do you see, feel, hear, or smell as you listen? Become a person in the story. Who do you become (John, Jesus, a member of the crowd, a casual observer)?
- If you have trouble imaging the story, try to sense, feel, or imagine what happens in the story in other ways.

#### Facilitator Note (Second Reading)

- Allow three to four minutes of silence after the reading.
- End your meditation by offering a silent word of thanks, opening your eyes, and rejoining the group.
- Use the journaling handout on page 65, “Reflecting on Jesus’ Baptism,” and share your experience by writing a response to several questions provided.



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## Reflecting on Jesus' Baptism

(Facilitators: This section also appears on page 65 in the back of this resource as a handout that may be copied for your group members.)

- Who in the story did you become or identify with most?
  - What did you experience as you imagined Jesus interacting with John, going into the water, and being baptized? How did it feel to enter this moment in Jesus' life?
  - What images and feelings did you have when the dove descended on Jesus and he was told he is God's beloved son? Have you had a profound experience of God's love?
  - What did you learn about Jesus and his baptism that you never had realized?
  - What new feelings or understandings do you have about the sacrament of baptism for Christians after meditating with this scripture?
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## Group Processing

- Allow five to ten minutes time for group members to share insights and experiences from journaling questions on Jesus' baptism. Remember the group covenant to share time equally and to listen openly and respectfully.
- Ask recorder to note the important thoughts expressed.

## Facilitator Preparation for Praying with Scripture (*Lectio Divina*)

### Facilitator Note

You may wish to review *Listen: A Centering Activity*, found at [www.CofChrist.org/CofM](http://www.CofChrist.org/CofM).

Prayerfully review the scriptures on baptism below and select the text that helps most for *lectio divina* at this time.

- Doctrine and Covenants 17:7
- Galatians 3:27–29
- Mosiah 9:39–41

*Lectio divina* can be done with as many scriptures as time allows (thirty minutes minimum for each scripture). Additional *lectio divina* sessions can be scheduled if consensus identifies this as the group's need and wish.

## Introducing Praying with Scripture (*Lectio Divina*)

### Facilitator Input

- *Lectio divina* (sacred or holy reading) is another reflective way to hear and respond to scripture. We will meditate with one of many scriptures on baptism.
- Please get into groups of three or four persons.
- You will hear the scripture read four times.
- After each reading, you will receive several minutes of silence to pray and reflect on a meditation question given by the facilitator.
- After the silence you will be asked to share briefly your response with your group. If you do not wish to respond, say, "Pass" and go to the next person.
- On the last reading, pay special attention to the response of the person on your right.
- After all have shared, you will be asked to offer a short prayer for the person on your right.

## *Lectio Divina* Meditation

### Facilitator Note

Use a scripture you have chosen with the following instructions to the group:

### Reading One

Close your eyes and listen to get a sense of what the scripture says.

### Silence

(one to two minutes)

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### Reading Two

Listen to the scripture again with the following reflection question:

- What word or phrase captures your attention; touches or speaks to you in a specific way?

### Silence

(one to two minutes)

### Group Sharing

Share only the phrase that drew your attention without making additional comments.

### Reading Three

Listen to the text again with the following reflection question:

- How does the word or phrase seem to speak to you? How or why is it touching you?

### Silence

(one to two minutes)

### Group Sharing

Share how or why the word or phrase is speaking to you, touching you.

### Reading Four

Listen to the scripture again with the following reflection question:

- What is the invitation offered to you through this scripture? In what way are you being invited to respond?
- During sharing, pay attention to the sense of invitation stated by the person on your right.

### Silence

(one to two minutes)

### Group Sharing

Share your sense of invitation from the scripture text. How are you being asked to respond? As everyone speaks, pay special attention to the sense of invitation shared by the person on your right.

### Group Prayers

Offer a brief prayer of blessing for the person on your right, focusing especially on the invitation the person felt from the scripture.

### Facilitator Note

Prayers for others at times can become lengthy. A gentle oral reminder to draw prayers to a close or keep them brief may be needed.

### Group Processing of *Lectio Divina*

Choose some of the following questions to help participants discuss their reactions:

- What was helpful about the exercise? What was difficult?
- How is listening to scripture in this way different from some ways we usually read or listen to scripture?
- What insights or awarenesses from the experience might help our understandings of baptism?

Ask the recorder to summarize the group's important insights.

## Session Three: Prayer, Reflection on the Tradition of Baptism

### Facilitator Preparation

- Review the session outline. Choose which exercises to use based on the time frame and needs of the group.



- If you use the “baptisms in films” option, find DVD, computer, or video equipment and cue the film clips to the desired baptismal scenes.
- Bring a candle and matches or a lighter. Bring pens and copies of journaling handouts on page 66. Bring blank paper for additional journaling.

### Welcome the Group

- Greet everyone and invite participants to share in one sentence a favorite spiritual or religious tradition in their life.
- Light a candle and invite the group into one to two minutes of silent prayer.
- Offer a short oral prayer of thanks for the gift of spiritual traditions.

### Facilitator Input

During discernment we gather background information to help us understand the context of our “work” and questions. In addition to scripture, it is important to examine our traditions. In this section we prayerfully will reflect on Christian baptismal traditions.

## History of Christian Baptismal Traditions

### Facilitator Introduction

In this session we will explore the history of baptism and how different traditions developed in Christianity. In the next session we will look specifically at Community of Christ traditions. As we hear the story of Christian baptism, we occasionally will pause to reflect and journal. Write thoughts, feelings, or questions that come up while listening.

### Facilitator Note

Read or paraphrase the following history. Stop to observe the pauses so participants can reflect and journal.

## Overview of Christian Baptism

Baptism as a purification or initiation rite was practiced in Judaism and in the mystery religions of Greece and Rome. John the Baptist initiated baptism for repentance and cleansing of sin as he called people to expect the coming reign of God. The history of Christian baptism begins when Jesus chose to be baptized by John in the River Jordan as he announced his ministry.

The word baptism may have different meanings ranging from immersion to ritual cleansing as in certain Jewish purity practices. Greek meanings include to immerse, dip, plunge, and to perform ritual washings.

Christians disagree as to whether Jesus was baptized by immersion or by standing in the river and having water poured on his head. Many believe that immersion is indicated by John baptizing in a place with a lot of water. Later scriptures speak of the symbolism of death and rebirth, which again implies submersion of the body in water as in a grave.

In first-century Christianity “living water” in the form of a flowing river or stream was preferred. Other bodies of water also were acceptable. One of the earliest Christian documents describing baptism is the Didache of 100 AD. It states that if a body of water is not available, then any water can be used and should be poured over the head three times while repeating the Trinitarian formula of baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This instruction may have been necessary for situations where sufficient water was not available for immersion or persons were baptized in prison or other unusual circumstances.

### **(Two-minute pause for prayer, reflection, or journaling)**

While immersion seems to have been a preferred form of baptism, structural and artistic evidence indicates that other forms also were practiced in the early church. Early art and baptismal

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fonts in the catacombs show baptism as the person stands in a river or font while water is poured over the head and body from a cup or seashell. Pools or fonts—some large enough for immersion of adults—have been found in the catacombs. Many are not large enough for immersion. This leads some to believe that baptism by pouring became relatively common in the first few centuries of the church. Others say immersion remained the standard, with pouring serving as an alternative when necessary.

Whether the candidate was immersed or baptized by affusion (pouring), the act was repeated three times, along with the statement of baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to determine when or how often pouring or other modes of baptism initially were used. Gradually they became more and more common. By the eighth century, immersion no longer was practiced, and pouring had become the church's standard. Sprinkling (aspersion) also emerged, particularly as infant baptism became the norm.

Structures designed to surround baptismal fonts or basins began to be built by 440 AD. Baptisteries were round, octagonal, or square buildings with an interior font chamber and a narthex where candidates received instructions in the faith and made their final confession before baptism. By this time, the baptismal experience incorporated chrismation, which is anointing the body as a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Made of olive oil and sweet balsam, chrism was consecrated and applied to the head, hands, feet, chest, or sometimes the entire body. Candidates entered the baptistery and were baptized nude to emphasize their death and rebirth. They then were anointed with holy oil, dressed in

white, and escorted into the church for their first Communion.

### **(Two-minute pause for prayer, reflection, or journaling)**

Some early baptisms seemed to follow conversion quickly with minimal instruction to faithful Jews or devout Gentiles. Instruction followed baptism in these cases. As Christianity spread and persecution increased, more-extensive education became the expectation. Baptism was risky, and understanding the biblical story and ethical teachings of Christ became primary. Candidates underwent three years of instruction (catechism) and were examined to ensure their commitment and comprehension. They also were sponsored by baptized Christians and were observed for patterns of transformed living.

Easter was a prime time frame for baptisms, ending the three-year preparation with an additional week of fasting, purifications, and examinations. This led to the Easter Vigil, honoring Christ's death on Good Friday and his time in the tomb. The vigil ended Easter morning at dawn as candidates were led to baptism.

With Constantine's Edict of Milan (313 AD) penalties associated with professing Christianity were lifted. Constantine became the first Christian Roman emperor, and Christianity became the state religion. A large influx of persons desiring baptism followed, which perhaps led to construction of baptisteries. Teaching became less intense as risks lessened and numbers grew. Catechism for adult converts was shortened and became associated with the pre-Easter season of Lent.

Entire families sometimes were baptized together in the very early church. As the demands and meanings of the commitment shifted, adult baptism became a primary focus. Emphasis was placed on interior and lifestyle changes accompanying the decision to follow Christ. The apostle Paul



developed a theology of baptism. In it believers, being baptized, come to union with Christ, share in his death and resurrection, are cleansed of their sins, and incorporated into the body of Christ. The believer's sins metaphorically are washed away in the rite. The water is the visible sign of God's grace. (Source: [www.answers.com/topic/baptism](http://www.answers.com/topic/baptism))

**(Two-minute pause for prayer, reflection, or journaling)**

Particularly since the time of Augustine, many Christians have believed baptism is necessary for salvation. Participation became more necessary than belief or interior change to ensure salvation from original sin and consignment to hell. For some, this stance was a sign of sacramentalism, or a belief that a sacrament or elements of a sacrament in and of themselves have magical or spiritual powers to produce salvation. Such shifts and the accompanying fear for loved ones, particularly unbaptized children, appear to have been the impulse behind infant baptisms.

Baptism came to be viewed as a decision made by parents for their children and was to take place as soon as possible following birth. Baptism was expected by church and state, and every baptized person was part of the tax base. Not being baptized began to become unacceptable in the eyes of the church, state, and society.

During the Protestant Reformation both Martin Luther and John Calvin held to the practice of infant baptism and the necessity of baptism for salvation. However, both Luther and Calvin sought a restoration of baptism to centrality rather than allowing it to remain the perfunctory act they believed it had become in medieval Catholicism. The saving power of Christ was at work, along with the faith of parents and the seeds of faith resident in the child. All of these were seen as working throughout the life of the individual to produce discipleship and salvation, but baptism was a necessary first act.

Anabaptists believed that even more radical re-

form was necessary. They saw baptism as an inner decision by a person old enough to understand and profess belief in Christ. Their refusal to baptize infants and their practice of rebaptizing themselves as adult believers created conflict and intense persecution. Quakers went even further. They continue to view baptism as unnecessary because the essential choice as a disciple is internal spiritual transformation that cannot be assured by an outward act.

**(Two-minute pause for prayer, reflection, or journaling)**

Several western Christian denominations currently practice infant baptism by pouring or sprinkling. These churches view baptism as a first step in a child's life of discipleship and a welcome to the Christian walk. Personal commitment often is expressed through confirmation at a later age.

Community of Christ joins Anabaptists, Baptists, Pentecostal movements, and other Restoration churches in the practice of believer's baptism. Eastern Orthodox Christianity continues to baptize by immersion and anointing with chrism.

Efforts to bring Christians together on baptismal policies have been made. A 1982 ecumenical conference in Lima, Peru, produced a joint statement on "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry." The document calls for overcoming conflicts surrounding baptism and Christian unity by respecting—rather than being divided by—diverse practices. Some Christians accept the baptism of other denominations, others do not.

**(Three-minute pause for prayer, reflection, or journaling over the entire history)**

### Facilitator Note

Invite the group into a period of sharing with the following:

- In a few sentences describe feelings, insights, or questions from your reflections as you listened to the historical overview of Christian baptism.

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- How are discipleship and baptism related? Do you view baptism as necessary for discipleship, or can persons become disciples in other ways? Explain or give examples.
- What do you think is essential for baptism to have spiritual validity and transformative power? What needs to happen or be included in the process?
- Which elements are most important or essential to baptism?
  - The use of water
  - The way the water is used (whether it is sprinkled, poured, partly or completely covering the body)
  - The words—the use of the Trinitarian statement of baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost)
  - The spirit of the sacrament and the baptismal service
  - The person's spiritual attitude or commitment to Christ
  - The priesthood authority of the person doing the baptizing
  - Confirmation of membership and the Holy Spirit with laying on of hands
  - Other thoughts

Ask the recorder to note key ideas.

### Meditation Option One: Entering an Early Christian Baptismal Experience

#### Facilitator Instructions

(Read or paraphrase)

Christians have been baptized in various ways over the centuries. Think of the different modes described in the historical overview and the unique aspects of Community of Christ baptism shared above. Each of us has the memory of our own baptism (or baptisms) as a point of reference. It may be helpful to reflect on baptismal traditions different

from our own. In the following meditation you will be asked to choose a baptism tradition to meditate on. You may choose to meditate on a baptism very similar or very different from your own.

- Close your eyes and become prayerful and receptive.
- Ask God for help and guidance as you meditate.
- Choose a baptism experience from below as the scene for your meditation:
  - Early Christian baptism in a river with three immersions.
  - Early Christian baptism in a font in the catacombs with three immersions.
  - Baptism in a baptistery structure—baptism by immersion three times followed by chrismation (anointing of body with holy balsam and olive oil).
  - Baptism standing in waters of a baptistery basin (shallow font) with water poured over head and shoulders three times, followed by anointing with chrism.
  - Baptism with a small amount of water poured or sprinkled over your forehead.
  - Baptism in a river or font with one immersion, followed by prayer of confirmation.

After you have chosen the baptism for your meditation, imagine the whole process as the scene unfolds. Include as many details as possible in your scene: historical setting, location, time of day, weather, other people, buildings or structures, clothing, fragrances, sensations of hot or cold, touch, sounds and words, other insights.

Allow the baptism to become real to you as you enter it over the next four to five minutes. Imagine experiencing this baptism and observe your responses.

#### Facilitator Note

Allow five minutes of silence while people meditate on a baptismal experience. Then quietly invite the group to end its meditation by offering a short prayer of thanks.

## Group Processing

(Choose several questions to discuss.)

- What was it like to imagine a baptism different from your own?
- What felt unfamiliar, improper, or incomplete?
- What felt comfortable, interesting, or positive?
- What surprised you most?
- How would this mode of baptism change the meaning of the experience for you?
- What shifts (if any) did this activity cause in your ideas about baptism?
- Offer a short prayer for continued blessings for the group.

## Meditation Option Two: Reflecting on Baptism Images from Movies and Media

### Facilitator Note

For this activity, choose YouTube video clips or scenes from movies to help the group reflect on diverse Christian baptismal practices. Select and prepare one of the activities listed below. Before viewing the scenes, ask participants to be prayerful, respectful, and open to learning about the traditions of others. Invite them to enter each scene and imagine what it would be like to be baptized in this manner. After viewing the scenes, lead the group into reflection and sharing, using the questions provided.

### YouTube Baptisms

Diverse baptismal practices are available for viewing on YouTube's Web site, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

If choosing the YouTube option, the group will need access to a laptop or personal computer with seating arranged for adequate viewing. If possible obtain additional technology to view the baptisms on a larger screen (using an LCD projector) or a television.

You may search the YouTube, [www.youtube.com/baptism](http://www.youtube.com/baptism) site, for additional baptismal scenes, but the following selection includes a diverse range from Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions:

- *Faith's Baptism* (two infants by "anointing" the head with water; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkqeaQhcUMA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkqeaQhcUMA))
- *A Greek Orthodox Baptism* (immersion and anointing/chrismation of infant; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpP8KSMI\\_-c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpP8KSMI_-c))
- *Baptism of Anastastios* (detail of Orthodox infant immersion/chrismation; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUnN77Aϕjjw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUnN77Aϕjjw))
- *Christening at Russian Orthodox Church* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p4sjcFFTS0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5p4sjcFFTS0))
- *Daughter's Roman Catholic Baptism* (school-age child baptized by pouring; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=orAsfA3dc3s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orAsfA3dc3s))
- *Easter Vigil—Baptism* (adult Catholic baptism by pouring; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifkIDaBAxLM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifkIDaBAxLM))
- *This is Your Time Baptism* (multiple baptisms in pool with fountain; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNQ69NwM33Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNQ69NwM33Q))
- *Caysee's Baptism* (immersion of school-age child in round font; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRNvk0A1QLM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRNvk0A1QLM))
- *Call of the Spirit: Baptism in Jesus' Name* (immersion in tank, baptism in name of Jesus; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTb-934CrG0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTb-934CrG0))

### Baptisms in Movies

Baptism scenes in films also may be used for meditation and discussion. The movies listed may



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be obtained from your local rental or Internet downloading service for a modest fee.

- *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*: Cue to the scene (chapter 10) in which Toula's fiancé, Ian, decides to be baptized into the Greek Orthodox Church. The humorous and touching scene shows elements of Greek Orthodox baptismal rites, including chrismation (anointing with chrism—a sacred balsam-scented oil).
- *The Apostle*: Cue to the scene (chapter 13 and 14) where Sonny is praying in a small tent and hearing others pray for him. When he wakes up he baptizes himself and asks God to make him an apostle. Sonny is a dedicated but sometimes-dysfunctional preacher who accidentally has just killed his wife's boyfriend.

### Group Processing of YouTube or Movie Baptismal Scenes

#### Facilitator Note

After viewing the selected scenes, invite the group into silent reflection or journaling. Use several of the questions below to process insights and reactions.

- After watching these baptismal scenes, spend three to five minutes in quiet reflection about what you observed. Journal if you would like.
- Share with others in the group what you saw, felt, or noticed during the scenes. What are the main differences between these baptismal scenes and your own baptism? Was anything similar to your own baptism?

- Was there a sense of sacrament in what you saw during the baptisms? Why or why not?
- What insights about the tradition of baptism did you gain from these baptismal scenes? Ask the recorder to write down key comments from the discussion.

### Closing the Group

Offer a prayer of thanks for the tradition of baptism in Christianity and Community of Christ.

## Session Four: Reflecting on Community of Christ Baptismal Traditions

### Facilitator Preparation and Supplies

- Prepare prayerfully for this session, particularly for wisdom to help the group with strong emotions and opinions about church traditions that may come up.
- Bring a lighter and a medium- to large-sized candle for use as the peace candle.
- Bring pens and small pieces of paper (strips or squares large enough for several sentences) for people to write on. Bring one regular sheet for all.
- Bring a bowl, basket, or other container to put the pieces of paper in.

### Welcome the Group

Share the following thoughts and activities:

- Christianity and Community of Christ have many meaningful traditions.
- A Community of Christ tradition that has grown in recent years is the Daily Prayer for Peace.



Every day in the Independence and Kirtland temples a candle is lit, and a prayer for peace is offered. Congregations also participate.

- Invite a group member to light the peace candle and ask participants to offer a silent, one-minute prayer for peace.
- Offer a Prayer for Peace that you have written or taken from the World Church Web site: [www.CofChrist.org](http://www.CofChrist.org).

## Reflecting on Tradition

### Facilitator Input

(Read or paraphrase)

All people, cultures, and religions have traditions. They develop from a mixture of personal, family, cultural, geographical, historical, and spiritual factors. Religious movements usually begin with a profound encounter with the Holy. Spiritual traditions then develop and evolve to help us understand and preserve the original light and truth of that experience with God. The difficult balance is to honor traditions without letting them replace the original experience of truth they were created to express and protect. It is just as important not to let go of so many traditions that we forget the essential truths of our initial identity and call. We will explore these and other tensions in this session.

## Community of Christ Menu

### Facilitator Instructions

- Give each participant six to ten small pieces or strips of paper and a pen.
- Note that our traditions help form our sense of identity and communicate to others who we are. Church traditions function the same way.
- Imagine you are creating a menu of important Community of Christ traditions. If people read this menu, they would know what traditional items are available at this restaurant. What beliefs

and practices identify this tradition of Community of Christ?

- Write one important traditional belief or practice on each piece of paper.  
Examples of traditional beliefs and practices: open canon of scripture, priesthood structure, baptism at age eight, centrality of Christ, zionist community...
- Gather all pieces of paper in a container, mix them, and ask group members to take turns drawing a piece of paper and reading it.
- Create piles with similar thoughts.
- Ask the recorder to list all the traditional beliefs and practices and how many times they are named.
- Now ask the group to examine all of the traditional beliefs and practices and begin to prioritize them.
- Invite all persons to create their own lists of prioritized traditional beliefs and practices on a separate piece of paper. Arrange the traditions in ascending order from number one (most important) to ten or higher (least important).
- When finished, invite the group to discuss this activity and the outcomes. How did it feel to do this? What traditional beliefs and practices are high priorities for most of us?
- What similarities and differences were in our lists?
- How were baptismal traditions prioritized? What seemed most important to us about baptism in our tradition? Were there diverse views?
- Close this activity with a prayer of gratitude for the traditions that shape us.

## Reflecting on Revelation and Tradition

Community of Christ emerged as one of the Restoration movements of the early 1800s in the United States. Restoring Christianity to New Testa-

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ment form was a central focus. Joseph Smith Jr.'s spiritual encounters initially led him to a profound sense of forgiveness and divine presence. As he and others made sense of his continued experiences, the church was organized, scriptures were written, and traditional practices and beliefs began to emerge.

### Group Discussion

Which of the following views best matches your concept of the tradition of revelation?

- Revelation and spiritual experience are valid but limited by the filters of the human recipient (ego, age, maturity, gender, historical context, cultural factors).
- God can do anything and therefore can overcome our limitations and speak direct truths to us in unfiltered ways.
- We can prepare to receive wisdom and spiritual truth that can be trusted by letting go of our agendas and egos. Revelation always will be less than God's truth.
- Questioning or reinterpreting revelations damages the truth God provides and undermines our trust in God's word.
- Revelation and spiritual experience are dynamic processes that depend primarily on the growing capacity of human beings to perceive the mind and will of God.
- Do you have another view of revelation and spiritual experience not described?

### Exploring Community of Christ Baptism Traditions

As traditions, beliefs, and practices continued to take shape in early Community of Christ history, a sense of identity and mission also was being shaped. Baptismal traditions were influenced strongly by the belief that the church established by Joseph Smith Jr. in 1830 was the one true expression of Christ's

church on earth at that time. Baptism practices also were affected by our association with other Christian movements practicing "believer's baptism" rather than infant baptism.

Section 20 of Doctrine and Covenants expresses Joseph Smith Jr.'s conviction to make definitive breaks with the baptismal covenants and practices of other Christians.

### Group Reflections on Doctrine and Covenants 20

- Become quiet and prayerful as you read Section 20 (see page 5) to yourself. Then listen to it read out loud.
- Listen to the following questions and spend two to three minutes meditating on or journaling your responses.
- What speaks to you most powerfully from this scripture?
- What in this scripture does not speak to you or brings up questions?
- What connections do you see between this scripture and the sense of identity and mission developing in the early Restoration church?
- How does this scripture fit or conflict with your understandings of the baptismal covenants of Community of Christ members and other Christians?
- Invite each participant to make a one- or two-sentence response to the scripture reflection.
- Ask other group members to hear the responses without comment or discussion.
- Thank the group for its reflections and listening.

### Baptism Traditions: To Change or Not to Change?

#### Facilitator Input

Tony Chvala-Smith, World Church theology and scripture specialist, notes that Community of Christ baptismal tradition includes the following elements:

- Rebaptism commanded: All other baptismal covenants invalidated by the advent of the Restoration: Doctrine and Covenants 20.
- The Form—"Believer Baptism": Doctrine and Covenants 17:7.
- The Mode—"Immersion" (numerous references).
- The Authority—Only by Restoration priesthood members: Doctrine and Covenants 83:3.
- The Formula—Part of the standard Christian baptismal formula retained: "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

These elements have been our tradition since the church was established. But, over the years, questions about changing these traditions have surfaced.

Such questions bring us to the dilemma of whether traditions need to be preserved or open to transformation. We cannot answer that question without looking at other questions of church identity and mission that impact our baptismal beliefs and practices. In our early history we saw ourselves as the "one true church" with the only valid priesthood authority to perform baptisms and other sacraments. These were and still are foundational beliefs for many in the church. But where are we now?

### Group Discussion

Have the group return to the lists members made to identify "the menu" of priority Community of Christ traditions (see page 31). Ask them to reflect prayerfully on their lists again and then discuss:

- What came up as the most important traditions defining Community of Christ?

- How frequently was identity as the "one true church" prioritized?
- How frequently was priesthood authority prioritized?
- How often was baptism by Community of Christ priesthood prioritized?
- If the above issues frequently were prioritized, what does this say about the importance of identity as the one true church with unique priesthood authority?
- If the above issues were not prioritized frequently, what does this say about our connection with identity as the one true church with priesthood authority?
- How do participants feel about the outcomes related to one true church and priesthood authority? Reminder: Be supportive and respectful of diverse views.
- Does either prioritizing or not prioritizing one true church identity or priesthood authority mean we are holding too tightly to tradition or letting go of too much tradition?
- How can we hold these views together as we move forward with God?

## Reflecting on Conditions of Membership Reports and Statements

### Prayer of Blessing

Begin by asking a group member to offer a prayer of blessing for compassion, wisdom, and openness in considering our traditions.

### Facilitator Input

Invite the group to listen carefully and prayerfully to the following information. Ask participants to pay attention to their physical, emotional, and spiritual reactions.



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Extensive study and review of baptism and rebaptism doctrine and practice was done by the Committee on Issues Regarding Conditions for Membership and reported at the 1994 World Conference. The report indicates some shifts of church identity we have discussed.

*At the core of our practice: the belief that the RLDS church was the “one true church restored to its primitive, pristine form by divine action; that our ministers alone had the authority to perform legitimate baptisms, that our baptismal rite was the proper one, being the original [or at least divinely sanctioned] form established by Christ, and that only it effected salvation to celestial glory [assuming the baptized endured faithfully to the end].*

—From Report of the Committee on Issues Regarding Conditions for Membership, 1994 World Conference, with some modifications. (See appendix for full report.)

Tony Chvala-Smith says the report indicates *a major shift in baptismal theology. The root of this shift is the loss or rejection of the core belief behind our practice: the belief that ours is the one, true, restored church with exclusive authority to perform the sacrament of baptism. Behind the loss or rejection of this core belief is a series of complex social and theological forces, but at the heart of it is the recognition that authentic Christian discipleship may be found beyond the boundaries of the RLDS church...*

—From Report of the Committee on Issues Regarding Conditions for Membership, 1994 World Conference. (See appendix for full report.)

### Group Discussion

Choose some of these questions for group discussion:

- What are your reactions to the statements from the committee on conditions of membership and Chvala-Smith’s comments?

- What is helpful or positive about these statements?
- What is disturbing or challenging?
- What physical, emotional, or other responses did you have?
- How do you feel about a shift in our sense of identity as the “one true church”?
- Does this represent growth or a loss of important understandings and beliefs?
- As you consider all of our discussions today, what do you feel would be lost by changing our tradition of requiring rebaptism for church membership (required question)?
- What would be gained by changing our tradition and not requiring rebaptism (required question)?

### Closing the Group

Stand in a circle and offer prayers of blessing on all of the views and needs expressed by the group.

## Session Five: Praying and Reflecting on the Experience of Baptism

### Facilitator Preparation and Supplies

- Bring a small- to medium-sized bowl (or fountain) of clean water.
- Bring a bowl or basket of smooth stones (one for each person).
- Bring pens, paper, and the journaling handout found on page 67.

### Facilitator Introduction to Discerning with Experience

Scripture, tradition, and reason are crucial to discernment. But without a personal sense of rightness or spiritual confirmation, we still may find

ourselves lacking wisdom to discern clearly. Experience is a broad category. It may mean our personal spiritual insight or encounter. Or it may mean what we experience at the emotional, intuitive, or body level that provides a deeper sense of awareness. In discernment it is important to incorporate experiences that engage the whole self to the impress of God's movement. It also is important to share and hear stories of what we are experiencing with God through our human memories and capacities. Our opening reflections will center on our experience with water and baptism.

## Centering Ritual with Water

### Facilitator Note

Place the bowl or fountain of clean water in the center of the group along with the bowl or basket of stones.

### Facilitator Input

Read or paraphrase the following:

Water is used in baptism as a physical and spiritual symbol of transformation. This meditation honors the transformative power of water.

- Please choose a stone from the basket and hold it in your hands.
- Close your eyes and breathe quietly as you meditate with the following thoughts:
- Water is a powerful, life-giving substance. As we reflect on water, begin to imagine the sight, sound, and feel of this amazing liquid. What comes to your mind and senses as you gratefully

ponder water? (brief pause)

- We live in a womb of water for the first nine months of our lives.
- Both the human body and the planet are 70 percent or more water.
- Without water we cannot live more than a few days.
- Water flows constantly in our lives without us noticing. We drink it, wash in it, cook and clean with it, use it to make thousands of things, and play in and on it.
- Water is abundant for some, scarce and difficult to find for others.
- Water cools us and quenches our thirst when we are hot and dry.
- The sound of water can be calming, healing, or majestic as it flows over rocks, tumbles over cliffs, or washes up on the seashore.
- Water is home for trout and salmon, whales and dolphins, millions of unique sea creatures and freshwater amphibians.
- Water moves, flows, drips, splashes, and carves as it caresses and shapes the earth.
- Water reflects light as deep cobalt blue, clear turquoise, and every shade of blue, gray, and green in between.
- Remember times when water was refreshing, healing, or transforming.
- Water gives us images, sounds, sensations.
- One minute of silence.
- Offer a silent prayer of gratitude for water.
- Water symbolizes spiritual cleansing, healing, new life, and transformation.
- Remember what the water felt like during your baptism.
- Christian mystics say God is like the sea in whom we live, move, and have being.
- Offer a prayer to renew your promise to live in God in the same way Jesus did.



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- After praying, place the stone you are holding in the bowl or fountain of water.
- The facilitator will close the meditation with a prayer of blessing for continued gratitude and transformation as we renew our covenant to live in and for God.

## Sharing My Baptismal Story

### Facilitator Input

Remembering your baptism can be a powerful way of connecting with the meaning of this sacrament. In this exercise we will share our baptism stories. No matter what your experience may be, we want to hear it. Whether you have been baptized in Community of Christ, in another faith tradition, in several ways, or not at all, your experience is important to understanding and discerning the meaning and practice of baptism.

You will be given a handout (page 68) titled “The Story of My Baptism” to help you reflect and write. You do not need to answer all questions or include them in your story. Read them to get an idea of what you want to say, and then write your story in the space provided. You will have opportunity to share your story later.

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### The Story of My Baptism

Write the story of your baptism including as many details as you can remember. Below are questions you may want to think about. You may choose to answer some of the questions in your story or describe your baptism in whatever way you wish.

- Where and when were you baptized? How old were you?
- How did you decide and prepare to be baptized?
- Who baptized you? Did you choose the person who baptized you, and if so, why?
- What was baptism like? How did it feel to enter the water and be immersed? If you were baptized by a method other than immersion (sprinkling or pouring, for example), what was that experience like?
- What are your memories of confirmation or baptism of the spirit? Confirmation is connected to water baptism in Community of Christ but may be practiced differently in other traditions. Share how you felt about your confirmation.
- If you were baptized in another Christian denomination before Community of Christ, reflect on the meaning of both (or all) of your baptismal experiences.
- If you were baptized in another denomination, now attend Community of Christ but have not chosen to be baptized again, share your reasons and feelings.
- If you were a member of another world religion before becoming a Christian, share what it meant for you to be baptized as a Christian.
- Why were you baptized (in Community of Christ or any Christian denomination)?
- What difference did it make in your journey of discipleship? How does it continue to inform and shape you as a disciple?  
After thinking about the questions for a few minutes, write the story of your baptism.

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### Group Storytelling and Listening on “The Story of My Baptism”

#### Facilitator Instructions to Group

- Share one or two of the most important things you remember about your baptism.



- Try to tell your story in about two minutes so everyone will have time to share.
- Listen intently to each person's story without commenting or interrupting.
- Note: After baptism stories have been shared, invite additional sharing.
- We've heard each other's stories. Now what would you like to say to each other? What did you learn? What story particularly spoke to you or blessed you?
- How did hearing these stories affirm or expand your understanding of baptism?

## Considering the Experiences and Stories of Others

### Facilitator Input

The Christian family holds many baptismal stories. Hearing as many experiences as possible will help our discernment. In this exercise we will expand our storytelling to what we have seen, heard, or felt when in contact with the baptism stories of others. We have a list of baptism stories and situations to consider.

After each story is described, anyone who has personal experience with a similar story is invited to share briefly about the situation without personal opinions. If no one in the group has personal experience with that story, the group will acknowledge that it has heard and respects this story or perspective. After each story is heard or acknowledged, reflect briefly on the concerns and lessons raised.

### Some Baptism Stories to Consider

- A friend of the church chooses not to become a member because it would dishonor the powerful spiritual experience of his original baptism.
- A convert from another denomination chooses

to be rebaptized by immersion and has a positive experience that transforms his understanding of the sacrament.

- A Hindu woman chooses to be baptized in Community of Christ but finds herself rejected and criticized by her Hindu family and friends.
- A church member believes strongly in the truth and spiritual authority of Community of Christ baptism and fears losing our identity if we stop rebaptism.
- A person attending church does not understand the need for rebaptism because they accepted Christ through their baptism as a Christian in another denomination.
- A baptized Christian chooses to be rebaptized into the church to honor the new sense of covenant he has found in Community of Christ.

### Closing the Group

Ask two group members to pray for wisdom regarding the complex issue of rebaptism.

## Session Six: Praying and Reflecting with Reason

### Facilitator Preparation and Supplies

Before this session, review past group sessions on scripture, tradition, and experience and look over the recorder's notes. Create a concise summary to remind members of their shared experiences and insights. Bring this summary to the group session. Provide copies of reflection and journaling questions: "Personal Reflections: Listening with God" (page 69) and "Where Do I Stand?" (page 70).

### Welcoming the Group

- Welcome the group to the closing prayer and reflection session.

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- Invite participants to share one idea, experience, or person from the prayer and reflection sessions for which they are grateful.
- Invite a participant to offer a prayer for the group.

## Introducing Discernment with Reason

### Facilitator Input

(Read or paraphrase)

Reason helps us bring the pieces of our work together and prayerfully examine them. Reason is not simply stating our opinions or discussing our thoughts. Our best thinking is engaged, but it is put into the service of the wisdom that comes from spiritual intelligence and humility. Human faculties of reason yield to the mind and will of God in our search for greater clarity and truth. In this session we will use reason to reflect on:

- Our work with scripture, tradition, and experience;
  - What views we now hold, our reasons for those views, and what shifts may have taken place in our thinking since the group began;
  - The positive and negative implications of changing or not changing baptismal practices in Community of Christ.
- Silently greet God in whatever way feels comfortable to you.
  - Focus on exhaling as you continue to breathe in and out.
  - Take a breath. Silently pray these words of scripture as you breathe out: "I am in You."
  - Repeat this prayer phrase with each exhalation as a sign of gratitude that you are in fact in God at all times.
  - During one minute of silent prayer, breathe out the words: "I am in you."
  - Now shift your attention to inhaling.
  - Each time you breathe in; silently pray these words of scripture: "You are in me." Repeat this phrase with each "in-breath" as you realize that God is in you and always is as close to you as your own breathing.
  - During one minute of silent prayer, breathe in the words: "You are in me."
  - Now pay attention to the rhythm of your breathing and pray the whole scripture phrase with each breath cycle. Breathing out: "I am in you." Breathing in: "You are in me."
  - Continue this silent breath prayer for one or two minutes.
  - The facilitator will close the breath prayer by saying, "Amen."

### Scripture Breath Prayer

Let's begin with a prayer using scripture (John 17) and meditative breathing.

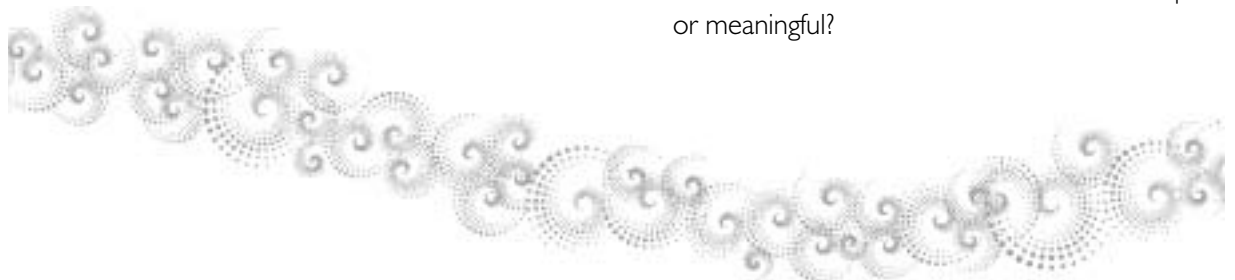
- Close your eyes and become aware of your breath.
- As your breath moves in and out, meditate prayerfully on it as a sign of God's Spirit.

## Remembering and Reviewing

### Group Review

Invite the group to remember what has happened in previous gatherings. Have a short discussion, using some of the following questions:

- What stood out to you from the sessions on scripture, tradition, and experience?
- Which element of discernment was most helpful or meaningful?



- How do you feel about your experience so far?
- What scriptures were particularly powerful or helpful?
- What experiences or stories offered new perspectives?
- What baptismal traditions (if any) influenced your thinking?

### Facilitator Review

After the group review and discussion, share the highlights from your summary of the previous sessions. Allow time for the group to respond briefly.

### Personal Reflections

#### Facilitator Input

The next two exercises will allow you to meditate on your experiences in the group and move closer to discerning where you now stand on rebaptism. Several questions will be posed. You do not need to answer all. They are offered for you to take into a period of personal silence and listening. This session's primary goal is for you to spend personal time with God and your questions, thoughts, and feelings. Use the reflection question handout (page 69) in whatever way is helpful. You may wish to journal or simply sit prayerfully with the thoughts and images that come.

each one slowly and pause to reflect on it before moving to the next question. Listen for divine nudges in your thoughts and feelings. After you have read the questions, write one paragraph that includes any important thoughts or emotions that came to you while listening to the questions.

- What spiritual promptings or insights related to rebaptism in Community of Christ have come to me during our meetings?
- Have I noticed any shifts in attitude or understanding either way?
- What are my primary reasons for accepting or not accepting the baptisms of other Christians?
- What concerns me most about possible changes in Community of Christ baptismal practices? What questions and anxieties do I have?
- What brings me the greatest sense of hope or peace about possible changes in baptismal practices?
- If the requirement for rebaptism changes, what would I see as a meaningful preparation and commitment process for joining Community of Christ?

My Paragraph: What are my thoughts and feelings after reflecting on these questions?

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### Personal Reflections: Listening with God

*(Facilitators: This section also appears on page 69 in the back of this resource as a handout that may be copied for your group members.)*

Get comfortable and become aware of God's presence. Ask for help in listening deeply to divine wisdom and grace. Sit with an open heart and mind as you meditate with the following questions. Read

### Where Do I Stand?

#### Facilitator Input

The previous activity was designed to help clarify our feelings about the conditions of membership at this point. This section will ask you to complete two more activities. The first is to place yourself on a spectrum of opinions about rebaptism. The second is to list the positive and negative results of changing practices.

The body as an instrument of spirit often helps us understand our true feelings. As you complete

## Module Two

these two activities pay attention to insights from your mental, emotional, and physical responses.

- Do you experience mental clarity and openness or confusion and distress?
- Do you feel sadness, fear, excitement, anxiety, peace, anger?
- Are there physical changes in breathing, heart rate, intestines (butterflies or churning), or muscle tone (tightening or relaxing)?

**Note:** Lead the following body prayer before starting the activities.

Stand quietly and take a few calming breaths.

- Ask God for the blessing of your mind, heart, and body.

- Place your hands over your eyes and silently ask God to bless you with spiritual insight and clarity (thirty to sixty seconds of silence).
- Place your hands on your head and ask God to help you put on the mind of Christ and think deeply and truly (thirty to sixty seconds of silence).
- Place your hands over your ears and ask for the blessing of inner hearing and spiritual listening (thirty to sixty seconds of silence).
- Place your hands over your heart and ask for it to be made compassionate and open to God's will (thirty to sixty seconds of silence).
- Place your palms together in prayer; make a small bow to God and say, "Amen."

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## Where Do I Stand?

*(Facilitators: The handout for Activity One and the Optional Activity are on page 70., The handout for Activity Two is on pages 71. They may be copied for your group members.)*

### Activity One

At this time, where would you place yourself on a spectrum of possible viewpoints regarding conditions of membership? If none of the statements describes your perspective, insert your own words. Then mark your position on the spectrum.

**(See optional activity for an approach that may be preferred for your group.)**

1. I would keep current understandings and practices of baptism in the church.

2. I am comfortable with the church's current practices, but I want to hear more about other viewpoints.

3. I am uncertain about the church's current practices, and I need to hear more about other possible approaches.

4. I would allow persons who have been baptized by immersion in other Christian churches to have the choice of being rebaptized in Community of Christ. Then, whether they are rebaptized or not, confirm them members of the church.

5. I would accept the baptisms of those who have been baptized by immersion in other Christian churches and confirm them members of the church.

6. I would accept any type of Christian baptism (immersion, pouring, and sprinkling), except infant baptism, and confirm people members of the church.

7. I would accept any type of previous Christian commitment (believer's baptism, infant baptism) and confirm people members of the church after a time of preparation.

8. I would accept any previous Christian commitment and receive people as members of the church who want to join.

9. I would not have any conditions for membership other than desire to join.

### Activity One

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1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9

### Optional Activity

At this time, state as clearly and briefly as possible your viewpoint on conditions of membership. Place yourselves in relation to each other on the following spectrum with “1” being “no change” and “9” being “no requirements for church membership other than a desire to join.”

### Optional Activity

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1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9

### Activity Two

Use the space below to make a positives and negatives list. In one column list the positive results of no longer requiring rebaptism as a condition of church membership. In another column list the negative results.

**What consequences will there be if the church stops requiring rebaptism?**

**Positive Results/Consequences**

**Negative Results/Consequences**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Take a moment to sit with your list and check physical, emotional, and mental responses. Do you feel you have expressed your true feelings and understandings? Do you sense you have been as open to God’s guidance as possible? Offer God what you have written and ask for continued openness and blessing.

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## Module Two

### Sharing with a Partner

Invite participants to work with a partner and share their experiences with the activities. Give the following instructions:

- Share only what you feel comfortable sharing.
- If you wish, share your position on the scale and your list of consequences.
- Or talk about the feelings you had in completing these tasks.

### Sharing with the Whole Group

With their partner's permission, ask participants to summarize or paraphrase what their partner shared about the activities.

With the permission of the whole group, ask the recorder to note the main points without attaching names to responses.

- Remind the group that diverse viewpoints and experiences are accepted.
- Help participants notice shifts in attitude or perception. The shifts can be in any direction and should be noted without judgment.

### Integrating Input from Reason

Thank the group for the work it has done and the spirit in which it has met. Choose some of the following questions to guide a closing discussion.

- What was helpful about using “reason” as a discernment tool?
- What was difficult or unhelpful?
- What happened between you and God as you listened for divine guidance?
- In all sessions what factors have been most persuasive in affirming or changing your views?
- How would you evaluate the level of community and respect present among group members?
- What would you most like to communicate to the First Presidency about requiring rebaptism as a condition of membership in the church (required question)?

The recorder should note all viewpoints expressed.

### Closing the Group

Ask the group to stand in a circle, join hands, and offer sentence prayers of blessing for leaders and members of the church in discerning God's guidance about baptismal practices. The facilitator then may close by offering a prayer of gratitude for the group.

### Important Follow-up for Facilitator and Recorder

Review the notes from all six group sessions and create a one- to two-page summary of the most important insights and outcomes. Send this document to Andrew Shields, World Church secretary, at the address listed in the introduction.

