

Module Three:

Facilitated Dialogue Experiences for Small Groups

This module includes small-group dialogue experiences for sharing perspectives.

Listening Circles

Listening circles are an excellent way to engage in healthy dialogue. It would be good to use listening circles if there are trained facilitators in your area. If you choose to use listening circles, please contact Sandee Gamet at sgamet@CofChrist.org for help in refreshing facilitator skills and ideas for creating opportunities.

For all other facilitated dialogue groups, the following approach is recommended:

Small-Group Experience

Facilitated small-group dialogue seeks to provide a safe, open environment for people to share life experiences, reflect on how those events have influenced their thinking, explore their thoughts, and deeply listen to the experiences and thoughts of others.

Size and Number of Sessions

For people to fully engage and have time to share and listen, we recommend groups of four to six participants for one-hour sessions, or groups of no more than ten participants for two-hour sessions.

We recommend that small groups engage in six sessions of one to two hours. Why that many sessions? The topic of conditions of membership is personal and complex. Six to eight sessions are needed to provide sufficient opportunity for listening and sharing of perspectives and deep reflection.

Who to Invite?

Diversity-of-life perspectives contribute to a meaningful experience. You may want to seek specific individuals to be part of a small group because of their different perspectives and/or life experiences. This might include a member whose parents were active members, a young adult, a person who attends but has not chosen baptism, a person who attends and declines to be rebaptized, a person rebaptized into Community of Christ, a person baptized with no previous religious connection, a person first baptized as an infant, a person first baptized as a youth or adult and later rebaptized in Community of Christ, or someone baptized into Community of Christ from a non-Christian faith.

Use of Facilitators

To live out the purpose of small groups in a safe environment, engage a facilitator whose sole job is to guide the group's sharing and listening. To explore deeply held perspectives, participants need

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to feel free from judgment. The combination of a process and skilled facilitation can provide that opportunity.

Choosing a Facilitator

The facilitator is important to the success of any group. The following list will help in selecting someone. Sandee Gamet also is available for consultation at (816) 833-1000, 1-800-825-2806 ext. 2353, or sgamet@CofChrist.org. Choose someone who will

- model elements of the process;
- facilitate sharing of perspectives;
- move the sharing of perspectives by posing a question to focus on;
- be attuned to individual and group dynamics;
- be sensitive to the comfort/discomfort of participants and refrain from trying to “fix” disquieting moments;
- hold participants to the guidelines;
- help participants in asking genuine questions;
- provide an impartial presence, i.e., set aside personal opinions so that respect for all participants and their views can be maintained;
- use open-ended questions to deepen the conversation;
- lead balanced participation;
- not be compelled to share in the process or offer personal opinions/experiences;
- be able to maintain confidentiality.

Facilitators will be expected to act solely in that role and not otherwise participate. This will allow them to focus on the group and on the participants' experience without getting sidetracked. Facilitators should not

- share personal perspective;
- act as a resource;

- talk too much as they guide the session.

Guidelines for Group Participation

Guidelines are meant to help create a safe, respectful, and open environment for the conversations.

You may choose to post the guidelines and ask the group if it would like to use them in the sessions. The group may want to develop its own list or add to this one. One very important guideline is confidentiality.

- Uphold confidentiality. Life experiences and perspectives shared in each session belong to the one who shared them. They are the sacred trust of each listener. If you wish to share someone else's story, please ask them for permission.
- Demonstrate respect for each other.
- All perspectives are honored.
- Offer perspectives without attempting to persuade others to your viewpoint.
- One person speaks at a time.

Guidelines for Facilitators

Room Arrangement

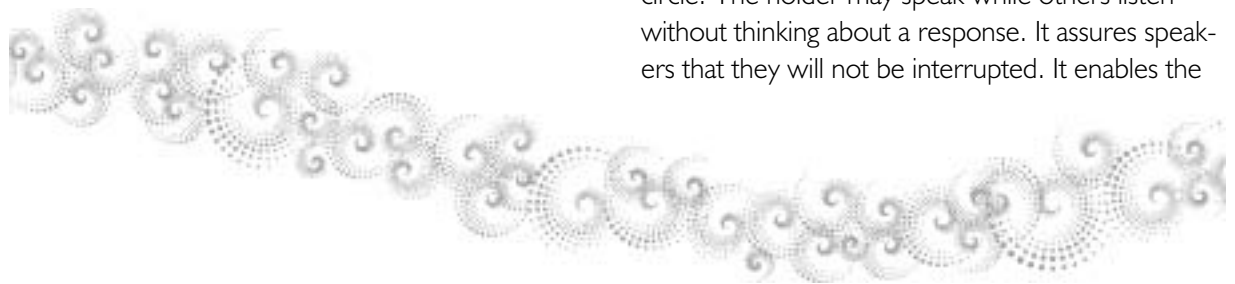
Arrange the chairs in a circle.

Writing Material

As the group develops, members may want to record ideas to send to the First Presidency. Use a white board, flip chart, or chalkboard for public writing.

Talking Piece

You may wish to use a talking piece. It is an object passed from person to person around the circle. The holder may speak while others listen without thinking about a response. It assures speakers that they will not be interrupted. It enables the



contribution of quiet people who otherwise might be unlikely to assert themselves in open dialogue.

You may select a talking piece that has significance to you, the group, the topic, or just something easy to hold.

Relationship Building

Each session has a relationship-building question. The purpose is to learn more about each other. It purposefully does not relate to the topic, making it less threatening as the group develops trust.

Focus Question

Each session also has a focus question. You may want to remind the group to review it in preparation for the next session. Be sure you give enough time for everyone to share. It is important to split the time equitably.

Follow-up Questions

If the sessions are 1 ½ to 2 hours long, you may have time to deepen the dialogue. The group may do so naturally, or you may want to use follow-up questions to help.

Hints for Facilitators

- Prayers: Because there will be diverse opinions about conditions of membership, prayers should not promote a specific perspective.
- After each person initially shares thoughts on the focus question, some may wish to ask a question of someone else in the circle. Make sure the questions are genuine, that the asker truly is curious and wants to hear the speaker's thoughts. If the question appears to have an agenda, it will be important to help the questioner frame a genuine question or note that he is sharing a further thought on the subject.
- It is important not to let the person questioned be put in a difficult position.

Session One: Story of Your Baptism

Relationship-Building Sharing

Though your group may have gone to church together for some time, continue to get better acquainted. Ask everybody to share their favorite time of year and why.

Focus Question

What is the story of your baptism or baptisms? If you're not baptized, what led to that decision?

Follow-up Actions

- Open with a prayer or a well-known hymn or song. You may wish to review *Listen: A Centering Activity*, found at www.CofChrist.org/CofM.
- Introductions benefit circle members who might not be familiar with everyone.
- Explain your role as facilitator.
- Reaffirm with all persons their commitment to participate.
- Share the guidelines for each session or have the group create them. If the group creates its own, it will be important to include a guideline related to confidentiality. It is helpful to have guidelines written down and visible for each session.
- If you use a talking piece, explain its use and significance.
- Ask participants to share their story of baptism. If some participants have not been baptized in any faith, ask them to share their experiences of being in a group of people who have chosen baptism. Or ask them to share the experiences that led to their decision not to be baptized.
- Give the group a silent time to think about responses. You will indicate when it is time to share. Give the group at least 15 seconds of silence.
- When it is time to share, ask who would like to

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start. Give that person the talking piece. When done, the person should pass the talking piece to the next speaker.

- If you don't go in order around the circle, you will need to keep track of who still needs a turn.
- It's important to encourage lengthy speakers to be aware of time so that everyone may participate.
- The facilitator poses a follow-up question to deepen the sharing: How has your experience influenced your perspective on whether persons should be rebaptized to become members of Community of Christ?

Closing

- Ask what insights anyone may have had in the session that day.
- See if there are concerns about how the experience went.
- Close with a prayer or some other short ending. (Ideas for other endings: a short reading, lighting a candle, silence, a song, passing the peace, etc.)

Session Two: Family Influence

Use the same format. Review the guidelines for participation.

Relationship-Building Sharing

Ask group members to share what value or principle guides their lives and who helped plant that value in them.

Focus Question

For a one-hour session. If you did not get to the additional question in Session One, begin there.

How has your experience influenced your perspective on whether it is necessary for persons to be rebaptized to become Community of Christ members?

If you covered the question above, proceed to the next question: **What meaning did baptism have for your family of origin? Or what did your family of origin think of baptism?**

Follow-up Questions

- How did you view baptism as a child?
- What is your view of baptism now?
- If your perspective has changed during your life, what has caused the shift? If not, what has continued to affirm your original perspective?

Sessions Three–Eight

Continue the same format as the previous sessions. If your session is one hour, it may be helpful to refer to the follow-up questions of the previous session or simply use the focus question noted for that session.

Session Three: Baptism in Community of Christ

Relationship-Building Sharing

Ask group members to share a memorable event from their elementary-school years.

Focus Question

How does baptism relate to membership in Community of Christ?



Follow-up Questions

- What relationship do you think baptism has to being a disciple?
- To what extent are the purposes of baptism and membership similar and different?
- When I think about membership, it is evidenced through _____.

Session Four: Priesthood Authority

Relationship-Building Sharing

Share your testimony of why you continue to be part of Community of Christ.

Focus Question

What life experiences have informed your perspective on the relationship between priesthood authority and baptism?

Follow-up Questions

- How would changes in conditions of membership affect how priesthood members express their ministry?
- How do you see the relationship between membership and participation in Communion?
- What fears and hopes does this issue raise for you?

In preparation for session five, have participants review the resolution from the 2007 World Conference found on page 4. Ask them to be prepared to share their thoughts on the resolution in the next session.

Session Five: World Conference Resolution

Relationship-Building Sharing

What is one desire in your life that you haven't fulfilled but still hope to accomplish?

Focus Question

What are your thoughts on the conditions of membership resolution?

Follow-up Questions

- What issues and concerns regarding conditions of membership have not been covered so far? Say why those issues or concerns are important to you.
- What fears and hopes does this issue raise for you? (If you used this question in an earlier session, it might be useful to see if participants have new thoughts.)

Session Six: Scriptural Influence

Relationship-Building Sharing

If you were going to get a tattoo, what would it be and where would you put it?

Focus Question

What has been your life experience in relationship to the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and modern-day revelation found in the Doctrine and Covenants? How does that inform your perspective on the conditions of membership?

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Follow-up Question

- How do we resolve questions if various passages of scripture do not clearly agree?

Session Seven: Contemporary Revelations

Relationship-Building Sharing

When were you first aware of something bigger than yourself identified as God or the Divine?

Focus Question

Read Doctrine and Covenants 161:5; 162:2c–e; and 163:7a–b, d. As you read these passages, what is your sense of their relationship to the question of conditions of membership? What concerns and questions do these passages raise?

Follow-up Question

- How does the baptism of an individual affect the whole body (congregation, worldwide church)?
At the end of this session refer participants to the “Report of the Issues Regarding Conditions for Membership Committee” found in the appendix on page 53. Have them read it before the next session and be prepared to share their thoughts and feelings.

Session Eight: Report on Conditions of Membership

Relationship-Building Sharing

Who has been someone significant in your development as a disciple?

Focus Question

Have group members share statements of feelings and emotions that came when they read the “Report of the Issues Regarding Conditions of Membership Committee.” What are their thoughts?

When I read the report I felt: (encouraged, disappointed, worried, ambivalent, etc). After everyone has participated, ask them to share what they thought when they read the report, how the report relates to discussions in the group, how the report relates to their perspectives, and what insights it provided.

Last-Session Closure

Whatever session is your last, end with an experience that concludes your time together. Options might be a special prayer for continued work on discernment, sharing around the circle what the experience has been like, singing, candle-lighting, or receiving some memento of the time together.

