

Four Stages of Community

Background for Faithful Disagreement lessons

According to M. Scott Peck, any group of strangers coming together to create a community goes through four distinct and predictable phases:

Pseudocommunity

The essential dynamic of pseudocommunity is conflict avoidance. Members are extremely pleasant with one another and avoid all disagreement. People, wanting to be loving, withhold some of the truth about themselves and their feelings to avoid conflict. Individual differences are minimized, unacknowledged, or ignored. The group may appear to be functioning smoothly but individuality, intimacy, and honesty are crushed. Generalizations and platitudes are characteristic of this stage.

Chaos

Once individual differences surface, the group almost immediately moves into chaos. The chaos centers around well-intentioned but misguided attempts to heal and convert. Individual differences come out in the open and the group attempts to obliterate them. It is a stage of uncreative and unconstructive fighting and struggle. It is no fun. It is common for members to attack not only each other but also their leader, and it is common for one or more members—invariably to propose an “escape into organization”—to attempt to replace the designated leader. However, as long as the goal is true community, organization as an attempted solution to chaos is unworkable.

Emptiness

The way through chaos to true community is through emptiness. It is the hardest and most crucial stage of community development. It means members empty themselves of barriers to communication. The most common barriers are expectations and preconceptions; prejudices; ideology, theology and solutions; the need to heal, fix, convert, or solve; and the need to control. The stage of emptiness is ushered in as members begin to share their own brokenness—their defeats, failures, and fears, rather than acting as if they “have it all together.”

True Community

True community emerges as the group chooses to embrace not only the light but life’s darkness. True community is both joyful and realistic. The transformation of the group from a collection of individuals into true community requires little deaths in many of the individuals. But it is also a time of group death, group dying. Through this emptiness—this sacrifice—comes true community. “In this final stage a soft quietness descends. It is a kind of peace. The room is bathed in peace.” Members begin to speak of their deepest and most vulnerable parts—and others will simply listen. There will be tears of sorrow and tears of joy. An extraordinary amount of healing begins to occur.

*Adapted from M. Scott Peck, MD (A Different Drum), and reprinted with permission from Wellness for Helping Professionals © 1990 Meryn G. Callander

Faithful Disagreement

LESSON 1 | Exploring what it means to be a signal community

Gather

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

Read Galatians 3:27–28 NRSV as a centering scripture.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection on the following question:

What do you value most about this community?

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the rich blessings of community.

Engage and Respond

Invites exploration and interaction and takes the learners from hearing to doing

Explore Blessings of Community from *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd ed. (p. 13).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed best in community life where people become vulnerable to God's grace and each other.

What are the challenges in being vulnerable to God? To each other?

True community upholds the worth of persons while providing a healthy alternative to self-centeredness, isolation, and conformity.

Read the adaptation of Scott Peck's Four Stages of Community (included) along with the above quotations. Share in small groups or with the large group when you have (in this congregation or any community) experienced any of the four stages of community as described by Peck.

- Which stage most accurately describes your congregation? Why?
- Which stage best describes your concept of signal community? How?
- What is comfortable about conformity and being in a pseudocommunity (as described by Peck)?
- How does (personal) authenticity relate to conformity and peace in pseudocommunity?
- What barriers keep your congregation from moving toward true community?

- What emptying needs to take place in order for your congregation to experience true community?
- What ministries would help your congregation move toward true community?
- Read the definition of Faithful Disagreement and principles #1 and #2.
- How do principles #1 and #2 support or challenge your concept of a signal community?
- How can the principles of Faithful Disagreement open new pathways toward true community in your congregation?

Send

Explores how the lesson might be lived out

Read "Inextricably Connected" by Danny Belrose, *Wave Offerings* (Herald Publishing House, 2005) 49.

If we cannot be on the same page,
can we be on different pages in the same book?
If we cannot be in the same book—
can we be on the same shelf or
in the same section
in the same library?

And, if not the same book, same section,
or same library, can we at least celebrate
that we have been penned into creation
by the same Author?

We are inextricably connected,
irrevocably part of the family of God.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection on the following question:

What is one act of emptying or healing you can offer to bless the community?

Bless

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

O God of all, you break down barriers of judgment, fear, and exclusion to provide miracles of healing.

Forgive our indifference and open our minds to the true potential resident in this community.

Help us experience you as we learn from one another, and bless us as we journey forward united through Christ and bound together in love.

Amen.

Faithful Disagreement

LESSON 2 | Celebrating Diversity through Faithful Disagreement

Gather

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

Read Doctrine and Covenants 164:5 as a centering scripture.

It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection on the following questions:

- In what ways is your congregation diverse?
- How does diversity bless your congregation?

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings of diversity.

Engage and Respond

Invites exploration and interaction and takes the learners from hearing to doing

Explore Unity in Diversity from *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd ed. (p. 13).

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

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

We confess that our lack of agreement on certain matters is hurtful to some of God's beloved children and creation.

Make a list of all the ways members of your congregation disagree (such as, on facilities issues, worship styles, or church policy).

- Why do we disagree?
- How is disagreement handled most effectively in your congregation?

Consider a specific disagreement that has been listed.

- What has been helpful about this disagreement?
- What has been hurtful about this disagreement?

Refer to Doctrine and Covenants 164:5 (above) for the following questions. Additional commentary on this scripture may be helpful and can be found at www.CofChrist.org/d&c164/sept2011_veazey.asp.

- How do you interpret the phrase "take on the life and mind of Christ?"
- How does taking on the mind of Christ change your perspective of yourself? Of others?

- How do you interpret "likeness of mind?"
- What level of agreement would this indicate? Why?

Refer to the definition and principles of Faithful Disagreement for the following questions.

- In what ways can disagreement be constructive?
- How is faithful disagreement important to the overall health of a community?
- In what ways does diversity of opinion enrich the life of a congregation? Of Community of Christ?

Consider and discuss the ways faithful disagreement can be used creatively for purposes of reconciliation and healing.

For Congregation Leaders: The following resources provide additional assistance when dealing with conflict.

- Interpersonal Peacebuilding, Listening Ear, Group Facilitation, Consensus Decision Making

The above are available through the Peacebuilding Specialist office at 1-800-825-2806 ext. 2353 or sgamet@CofChrist.org.

- *Church Administrator's Handbook*, www.CofChrist.org/policy (Part III, especially 29 Conflict in the Church and 30 Diversity)
- Pastors and Leaders Field Guide, www.CofChrist.org/leaders

Send

Explores how the lesson might be lived out

Think about it! What more effective witness could there be in a world filled with fear and hate between people than communities of "unity in diversity" and oneness forged through the power of the Spirit of Christ?

—Steve Veazey, April 2012 address

Read Faithful Disagreement principle #10 aloud. Spend a few moments in silent reflection on the following:

Consider a person with whom you are in disagreement.

- What do you celebrate most about this person?
- How is the Holy Spirit leading you to engage with and learn from this person's perspective?

Bless

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

Do not be defined by the things that separate you but by the things that unite you in Jesus Christ.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:5a

Read the following passage, from Belief in Jesus (*Sharing in Community of Christ*, p. 29) as a blessing and sending forth.

We are one; we are many. Somehow, we who are many are one.

We sing differently, pray differently, preach, and live, and see, and think differently.

Yet, *still*, we are one! It is Jesus, the Christ. *He* is our One.

We have faith in *him*. He makes us one.

We sing him. We pray him. We preach, live, see, and think him.

Not *many* of us. Not *one* of us. *All* of us. We are one. He called us. He calls us. He has called you. He calls you. Together.

We lift on high the name: Christ Jesus. We testify of Christ Jesus. We and him.

We are *one*.

Faithful Disagreement

LESSON 3 | How do we treat one another?

Gather

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

Read Doctrine and Covenants 161:3b–c as a centering scripture.

Do not be fearful of one another. Respect each life journey, even in its brokenness and uncertainty, for each person has walked alone at times. Be ready to listen and slow to criticize, lest judgments be unrighteous and unredemptive.

Be patient with one another, for creating sacred community is arduous and even painful. But it is to loving community such as this that each is called. Be courageous and visionary, believing in the power of just a few vibrant witnesses to transform the world. Be assured that love will overcome the voices of fear, division, and deceit.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection on the following:

How have you been blessed by the community or your congregation in a time of brokenness or uncertainty?

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings of community which uphold and affirm the worth of all persons.

Engage and Respond

Invites exploration and interaction and takes the learners from hearing to doing

In addition to the principles suggested below, discussion may be facilitated by reference to *Church Administrator's Handbook* (2005 edition) www.CofChrist.org/policy and *The Priesthood Manual* (2004 edition).

Read Faithful Disagreement principle #3.

- What are examples of ways in which a person's participation as a faithful, committed, and responsible disciple might be lessened by others in the congregation or mission center based on differing viewpoints?
- What are examples of ways in which a person's ability to hold or function in a priesthood office might be impacted by differing viewpoints?

Read aloud Faithful Disagreement principle #5.

Make a list of ways in which a person might be excluded by a congregation or mission center for being in disagreement on a particular subject or policy.

- What is our individual responsibility as a hearer of disagreement?
- How do we listen without trying to change the perspective of the one with whom we disagree?

Consider ways your congregation can benefit from available peacebuilding ministries mentioned in lesson 2.

Read aloud Faithful Disagreement principle #7.

- What challenges you or your congregation in separating agreement on all positions with faithfulness?
- How does separating agreement on all positions with faithfulness promote wholeness in relationships and community?

Send

Explores how the lesson might be lived out

Explore Worth of All Persons from *Sharing in Community of Christ* (p. 13)

God wants all people to experience wholeness of body, mind, spirit, and relationships.

What commitment can you make to change the way you perceive and treat people with whom you disagree. Write your commitment on a piece of paper to keep as a reminder, share in groups of two, or invite those who would like to, to share their commitment with the group.

Bless

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

Read aloud the following passage adapted from Jeremiah 29:7.

But seek the welfare of the person with whom you disagree, and pray to the Lord on their behalf, for in their welfare you will find your welfare.

Think of someone who views issues differently from you. Bring into your mind the face of that person. Ask God to open your heart to him or her. Sit silently and sense God connecting your heart with the heart of this person. Write a statement of gratitude for the person you are connecting with and offer a silent or verbal prayer of blessing. Ask for a peaceful space in your heart and mind that welcomes the person and listens with respect to his or her views. If you feel led, share the statement of gratitude you have written with the person when you next meet.

Faithful Disagreement

LESSON 4 | How do we share appropriately when we disagree?

Gather

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

Read Matthew 18:20 NRSV as a centering scripture.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for God's Spirit of peace at work in the lives of individuals, congregations, and the church, through new pathways for dialogue and faithful disagreement.

Engage and Respond

Invites exploration and interaction and takes the learners from hearing to doing

Refer to Doctrine and Covenants 131:4a–b as you engage in discussion.

The Spirit saith further, that the spirit of distrust and want of confidence in those who are called and ordained to act in the various responsible positions in the priesthood and in authority in the church is unbecoming those professing faith in God, Jesus Christ his Son, and the Holy Spirit of truth, and evinces a serious lack of that charity which Paul, and apostle of Christ declared to be the quality of Christian virtue which thinketh no evil.

Those who go out from the assemblies and solemn conclaves of the church should exercise great care in their ministrations abroad both to the branches where they may officiate and in their preaching the gospel to those outside, to avoid sowing seeds of distrust and suspicion either in public ministrations or in private conversation.

Explore Responsible Choices from *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd ed. (p. 13).

We are called to make responsible choices within the circumstances of our lives that contribute to the purposes of God.

Make a list of choices we make in relationship with others with whom we disagree. Consider how the choices listed impact relationships (both positive and negative).

How does faithful disagreement provide a pathway toward responsible choices that contribute to the purposes of God?

Read Faithful Disagreement principle #4.

- In what settings can individuals promote and engage in healthy dialogue about differing viewpoints?
- How can your congregation promote responsible avenues for dialogue and discussion through the following ministries?
 - Hospitality
 - Generosity
 - Learning communities (Christian education)
 - Small-group sharing
 - Mentor/Spiritual advisor relationships

- Pastoral care
- Functions of specific priesthood offices
- Facilitated listening groups

Read Faithful Disagreement principle #6. Refer to *Church Administrator's Handbook* (2005 edition) www.CofChrist.org/policy, and *The Priesthood Manual* (2004 edition).

- How can your congregation and mission center promote responsible use of public ministry through the following avenues?
 - Worship planning and preparation
 - Priesthood development
 - Youth ministry
 - Christian Education
 - Pastoral Care
- What are the greatest challenges in upholding principle #6?
- What compassionate responses might congregational leaders use if this principle is not upheld in a public ministry setting?

Read Faithful Disagreement principles #8 and #9. (For use with members of priesthood, refer to "Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry" included.)

Consider choices people make when they disagree with church policy. (Example: withholding self or tithing)

How do these choices bring harm to the body and to the mission of Jesus Christ?

Read Faithful Disagreement principle #12. Discuss the current legislative and consent-building processes used by Community of Christ (www.CofChrist.org/USACConf/generational-update060112.asp) which allow people to seek change in policy.

How do these processes challenge the body? And, how do these processes enrich the body?

Send

Explores how the lesson might be lived out

Read Doctrine and Covenants 151:9–10.

You who are my disciples must be found continuing in the forefront of those organizations and movements which are recognizing the worth of persons and are committed to bringing the ministry of my Son to bear on their lives.

Working together to this end will promote unity, resolve conflicts, relieve tensions between individuals, and heal the wounds which have been sapping the strength of the church, spiritually and materially. This you must do in the spirit of love and compassion as revealed in my Son during his journey in your midst.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection on the following questions:

- How have you experienced spiritual or relational

transformation through the process of discernment and common consent?

- What is one action you can take to promote healthy dialogue and a pathway toward peace through faithful disagreement?

Bless

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

Gracious God,

May we be courageous in sharing the peace of Christ with one another, and may our journey through the struggle of disagreement lead to a greater spirit of reconciliation and renewal.

Guide us in generously sharing all we are to your purposes as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Faithful Disagreement

LESSON 5 | Leading of the Holy Spirit

Gather

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:1 as a centering scripture.

“Community of Christ,” your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection on the following question:

What has provided the most significant growth for you as a disciple in Community of Christ?

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s continuing work in our lives, in the church, and in all creation.

Engage and Respond

Invites exploration and interaction and takes the learners from hearing to doing

Explore Continuing Revelation from *Sharing in Community of Christ* (p. 12).

In humility, individually and in community, we prayerfully listen to understand God’s will for our lives, the church, and creation more completely.

- What blessings have you experienced through Continuing Revelation?
- In what ways is Continuing Revelation disruptive?

Consider together and share examples of how God has worked through ordinary people throughout scripture to disrupt and transform the status quo.

Read Faithful Disagreement principles #11 and #12.

- In what ways can the faithful response of individuals, congregations, and the church grow through faithful disagreement?
- How does principle #12 affirm the Worth of All Persons?
- As signal communities, how can we respond to differing viewpoints of committed disciples who feel led by the Holy Spirit?
- How does faithful disagreement affirm differing view-

points and lead to wholeness as individuals and as community?

Explore ways in which your congregation can become more vulnerable to the leading of the Holy Spirit. A variety of helpful practices and resources are available through:

- Disciple Formation Guide, www.CofChrist.org/dfg
- Pastors and Leaders Field Guide, www.CofChrist.org/leaders
- Peacebuilding Ministries, 1-800-825-2806 ext. 2353 or sgamet@CofChrist.org

Send

Explores how the lesson might be lived out

Spend a few moments in personal reflection. Allow time to think about or write about the following questions:

- Think of a time when you held a differing viewpoint on a particular policy, position, or practice of the church.
- Did your viewpoint change? Why or why not?
- How did you find blessing through the community when you were in disagreement?
- What has most impacted you through discussion and learning about faithful disagreement?
- How will faithful disagreement shape your relationships in the future?

Bless

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

Read Ephesians 3:16–21 NRSV as a prayer of blessing and sending forth.

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Faithful Disagreement

LESSON 6 | Leading of the Holy Spirit

Gather

Activates background knowledge, prepares, and motivates for lesson

Read Doctrine and Covenants 163:2 as a centering scripture.

Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God's peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation.

Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community. The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.

Spend a few moments in silent reflection on the following:

How can I generously share invitation and ministry to others by applying the principles of faithful disagreement?

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for all who respond as faithful, generous, committed, and responsible disciples regardless of viewpoints.

Engage and Respond

Invites exploration and interaction and takes the learners from hearing to doing

Allow time for individuals to share how they have grown through study and discussion about Faithful Disagreement.

The principles of Faithful Disagreement can be applied in a variety of settings within and outside of a congregation or mission center.

Divide the group into smaller groups of three to five people. Assign each group one of the following contexts. Make a list of specific ways applying the principles of Faithful Disagreement will help create new pathways toward peace within the given context.

- Family
- Youth group
- Personal relationships
- School or work

Share responses with the larger group.

For Use in a Priesthood Gathering: Consider how priesthood members can enrich the life of the congregation/mission center/church by applying the principles of Faithful Disagreement through their specific priesthood ministries.

- How do deacons apply Faithful Disagreement principles when people have conflict about physical space?

- How do teachers apply Faithful Disagreement principles as ministers of reconciliation and peacemaking?
- How do priests apply Faithful Disagreement principles in family ministry?
- How do elders apply Faithful Disagreement principles in developing disciples to serve?
- How do seventies apply Faithful Disagreement principles when people are unhappy with new people being invited into the congregation?
- How do high priests apply Faithful Disagreement principles to bridge cultural and theological differences in congregations and mission centers?
- How do bishops apply Faithful Disagreement principles in financial disagreements?
- How do evangelists apply Faithful Disagreement principles in forming signal communities as sanctuaries of Christ's peace?
- How do apostles apply Faithful Disagreement principles in global and diverse cultures?

Send

Explores how the lesson might be lived out

Statement of Personal Commitment: Consider a specific context within or outside the congregation in which you can apply the principles of Faithful Disagreement. Complete the following:

As a member of _____, I will generously respond as a disciple of Jesus Christ to uphold the Enduring Principle _____ and allow for faithful disagreement by _____.

Bless

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope

Read Ephesians 4:15–16 NRSV.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Offer a prayer of blessing for the opportunities of growth through the journey together in faithful disagreement.