



Adult
Facilitator's
Guide

Sharing in Community of Christ:

Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs

Note to facilitator:

This adult study resource will explore the text *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, (2010, ISBN 978-0-8309-1488-3) available from Herald House. It will become a valuable reference document guiding and shaping the church in the future. We encourage each participant or family to buy a copy of this text for use during this class and beyond.

Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs is an expansion of the document “We Share Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs” that was released to the church in 2009. That resource is found at www.CofChrist.org/discernment/weshare/default.asp.

The online “We Share” document also contains links to other online texts and official statements from the Church. Those documents have been gathered and published with the expanded “We Share” document in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Class participants will need to have a copy of the text *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*. This text is available from Herald House at www.HeraldHouse.org or 800-767-8181. Order with ISBN 978-0-8309-1488-3. The lessons that follow explore five major topics of sharing:

The lesson plans for *Sharing in Community of Christ* were created by the following Community of Christ ministers and explore five major topics:

Sharing God's Vision for Creation	page 3
—Erica Blevins Nye, Young Adult Ministries	
Sharing the Peace of Jesus Christ	page 9
—Carla Long, Sierra Pacific Mission Center Financial Officer	
Sharing the Sacred Story	page 12
—Art Smith, Mission Center President and Leadership Development, (South America Mission Field)	
Sharing Our Enduring Principles	page 17
—Steven L. Shields, International Field Ministry	
Sharing God's Mission in the World	page 19
—Karin Franklin Peter, Field Missionary Coordinator, Southern USA Field	

The lessons are for large or small groups for 60 to 90-minute class sessions. Some supplies are needed for each day's lesson. And for variety, each day's lesson follows a different format. Students will benefit from bringing a Bible to class with a copy of *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Day 1: Sharing God's Vision for Creation

Teaching Points

1. Shalom means justice, well-being, wholeness, and peace.
2. God wants shalom for all creation.
3. Zion (the peaceable kingdom) is God's reign on earth through just and peaceful communities.
4. Jesus Christ made known the coming of God's peaceful reign.

This lesson references pages 4–5 in the text *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Have music playing as students enter the class space. Consider using the song “Righteousness, Peace, and Joy” by Ron Kenoly from the album *Lift Him Up*. Go to the following site for a preview:

http://www.amazon.com/Righteousness-Peace-And-Joy/dp/B003410F1O/ref=dm_att_trk6

Consider using this song or other hymn at the end of class as a sending forth.

Several optional activities are listed at the end of this lesson. As time and interest permit, select activities appropriate for your group.

Shalom

We Share a Vision of Creation: “The vision we share is God’s vision of reconciliation, salvation, wholeness, justice, and peace expressed in the

scriptural definition of shalom. Shalom means a fullness or completeness of peace.”

The vision that Isaiah shares with us in chapter 11:6, 9 is a vision of shalom.

Isaiah’s Vision of the Kingdom

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. . . . They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. —Isaiah 11:6, 9 NRSV

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together...

The prophet proclaims the natural interactions among humanity and the earth will be transformed. Each animal paired with its natural predator or prey. This harmony in the animal kingdom shows equitable relationships between the powerful and the vulnerable.

...and a little child shall lead them.

In Isaiah’s imagery, a human, the meekest of humanity, cares for the rest of creation in the Peaceable Kingdom.

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah proclaims that no one will bring harm to another. Persecution and injustice will have no place as the welfare of one affects all. And God’s peaceable reign will flow to every corner of the world. All people will know God’s peace. Those who are in relationship with the God of Love will respond by cultivating just and loving relationship with others.

This image of harmony among animals could be a metaphor for relations among people. In the coming Kingdom of God, the powerful will become humble and gentle. All will live side by side in security. God’s grace will make right even those harmful social

dynamics that seem inherently imbedded into our way of being.

What Is Shalom?

Shalom is holistic and embraces all persons and all creation in reconciliation and harmony. When Jesus taught about peace, he was using the word *shalom* in all its richness. Jesus, when teaching the Beatitudes, really said, “Blessed are the *shalom*-makers.” The New Testament was written in Greek and *eirene* was the word used to translate shalom. Perhaps the best English word to translate *shalom* is not “peace” but the word “Zion.” (<http://www.cofchrist.org/peace/>)

Physical/ Material

- The presence of wholeness of body or life. Health or physical security. This is the primary use of shalom in the Old Testament.
- Abundance, success, or fulfillment.
- Victory over one’s enemies or freedom from war.

Relational/ Social

- Right relationship or harmony between two parties or nations. Just government and compassion are present. This state of accord, often established by a covenant, was made between nations or with God.

Moral/ Ethical

- Honesty, integrity, and straightforwardness. A person of shalom is blameless and genuine.

God Wants Shalom and Zion

We Share a Vision of Creation:

God yearns to establish a lasting covenant of peace with humankind and with all of creation. . . . The gospel or “good news” was then entrusted to the church—the community of disciples called to be the body of Christ.

God’s Will Is Shalom

Zion can be described as a condition of God’s shalom when all of creation exists side by side in communities of health and wholeness, tending to the welfare of all. To live in this balance is to exist just as God created us

to live. God’s will is ultimate shalom for all of creation, Zion.

Zion: Communities of Peace

Zion is our vision of ultimate shalom for all of creation. Zion is the peaceable kingdom marked by justice and reconciliation. The vision of Zion unfolds in our interactions today as we seek justice and reconciliation.

Communities of peace are places that intentionally seek to express Zion living today. Andrew Bolton, Council of Twelve Apostles, discusses three elements that can define “signal communities”:

- **Process:** personal repentance, conversion, baptism, covenant making, and continuing lifelong transformation to become like Jesus. There is no possibility of Zion without personal change. Nor is personal change possible without others. We need the help of sisters and brothers in Christ.
- **Condition:** embodying shalom together as the peace of Jesus Christ in all its dimensions: just relationships, harmony with nature, reconciliation, forgiveness, no poverty, and sharing peace, for example.
- **Place:** vitally important. Change has to happen on earth as it is in heaven. The former model of Zion states that the place was Independence, Missouri, USA. The new model of Zion remembers “that God so loved the world...” (John 3:16). We also remember that we are an international fellowship in more than fifty nations. Therefore, “place” is anywhere in the world. All that is needed is that covenanted disciples gather to express the life of Jesus in their relationships and for the sake of their neighbors. “Signal communities” are gatherings of the committed that provide light in a dark world, beacons of hope in a world of hurt and despair. (Andrew Bolton “Signal Communities: Hope of Zion.” *Herald* 155, no. 4 [April 2008]: 14).

We believe that we must work hand-in-hand with God to bring about Zion. Shalom can only be delivered through the grace and generosity of God. When we choose to follow God’s way of grace and generosity in our interactions with one another, the Earth, and our Creator, we partner with God as Kingdom builders. Jesus Christ is our example of living in God’s way.

Shalom results when we are transformed into the likeness of the One who is the Embodiment of Shalom.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which of the three elements of “signal communities” speaks most to you?
2. How does your congregation express one of these elements of “signal communities” in your transformational practices, community interaction, and in your geographical location?
3. Which element is most challenging for your congregation? Why?

Righteous Relationships

*Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.*

—Psalm 85:10 NRSV

God wants a world where people and creation live in harmony. All are created with worth and to live in a balance of relationship with one another. Righteous relationships mutually uphold the welfare of all parties. Shalom is the state of wholeness where creation is lived out as it should be. There can be no shalom when people or creation are not living in that right relationship.

Reflection:

1. How do some people or elements of creation suffer at the hand of another?
2. Where do we see one prosper by the poverty of another?

We are called to repent of those situations where we are not living in right relationship with one another. Adam Wade, East Asia Mission Center president, describes the process of restoring right relationship. “Peace comes through reconciliation of myself with God, with those I’ve hurt, and with those who have hurt me. . . . Peace shines through when we pierce the darkness of oppression, hunger, and injustice.” (Adam Wade “Pursuit of Peace (Shalom).” *Herald* 156, no. 12 [December 2009]: 14). We build shalom by our efforts to repent of and reconcile our unhealthy relationships.

Social Justice

The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

Prophets like Isaiah were primarily concerned with the righteous relationship between the powerful and the powerless: social justice. They had an eye toward the most vulnerable to gauge the health of the nation. Isaiah preached where they saw persons who were oppressed or treated unfairly for others’ gain.

As shalom-builders, we, too, must take action when we see social injustice. Some of today’s most pressing concerns of social justice include marginalization of various groups of people based on issues of class, age, race, ability, gender, religion, economics, and others.

Media: Share a video or news story that exposes an example of social injustice. Look for local examples as well as national and international stories. Discuss the issues that surround this story.

Story Telling: In small groups or together as a class, have volunteers share: In what ways has a form of social injustice impacted you personally?

Shalom for All Creation

These are portentous times. . . . The land is being desecrated by the thoughtless waste of vital resources. You must obey my commandments and be in the forefront of those who would mediate this needless destruction while there is yet day.

—Doctrine and Covenants 150:7

Righteous relationship also refers to the association between humankind and the planet. Shalom for the earth is a crucial element in the kingdom of God. Right relationship with the earth is a mutual balance between maintaining healthy systems in the natural world and our human needs. Humankind has reached the tipping point where our power to create or destroy rivals that of Earth itself, leaving the whole globe vulnerable to our choices. We are charged with stewardship of this planet, and we are divinely tasked to see to its just treatment.

Discussion Questions:

1. What demographics are most vulnerable to social injustice in the world? In your community? Why?

2. How have you or your family taken steps to alleviate social injustice? Your congregation?
3. What barriers do you encounter when trying to overcome social injustice? Why is it difficult for you?

Jesus Proclaimed Shalom

We Share a Vision of Creation: “God’s vision of peace for creation clearly was revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who proclaimed the coming kingdom or peaceful reign of God on earth.”

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

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:2a

Jesus Is Shalom

As the embodiment of shalom, Jesus reveals shalom and the hope of Zion in many ways: through his life (actions and teaching), and through his death and resurrection.

The life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus add to our further understandings of the word shalom. Dimensions that Jesus added include grace, forgiveness, and the blessedness of peacemaking, love of enemies, non retaliation, and overcoming evil with good. (Andrew Bolton “Signal Communities: Hope of Zion,” *Herald* 155, no. 4 [April 2008]: 13.)

In Jesus’ interactions he demonstrated God’s value of all people. He received the weakest, the sinful, and the most despised with healing grace—the isolated sick, the helpless blind, the worthless prostitute, and the wretched tax collector. Jesus’ ministry centered on acts of justice, restoring the lowest in society to their rightful place in the community. Jesus built up right relationships that signal Zion conditions.

God took the humble form of a human. And he lived as a simple carpenter, rather than a person of esteem like a king. In his ministry and death, Jesus demonstrated

the ultimate example of even the most powerful humbling themselves for the welfare of others. If we willingly sacrifice our own privilege, claiming the welfare of the lowest in society as inextricably linked to our own welfare, we too can embody the Kingdom of God.

God’s peace was mediated through Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection proclaimed the coming kingdom by bringing God and humanity back into righteous relationship. And it transformed relationships among people. Mennonite scholar Perry Yoder describes these two elements in this way:

[One] purpose of the work of Jesus was to bring peace between people and God. This peace results from things being made right between them: justification... [The] death of Jesus which set things right was an act of God’s love for helpless enemies. Thus through active enemy love and helping the helpless, God transforms divine-human relationship through Christ. There can be peace between people and God because things have been made right between them. (Perry B. Yoder *Shalom: The Bible’s Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace*. [Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House. 1987] quoted in Temple School course, PS 275 *Ministry of Shalom* [Independence, Missouri: Community of Christ, 2001], 11.)

Discussion Questions:

1. If my welfare resides in the welfare of others, how does this expand my definition of “relationship”?
2. Zion is approached through “justified relationships.” Where do we see unjust relationships in our world?
3. As Jesus Christ’s followers how do we proclaim repentance and reconciliation?

Activities

SHALOM STONES

Supplies:

- Smooth river stones, washed and dried (These can be found at hobby or craft stores.) Check this site to view a sample: <http://www>.

createforless.com/Panacea+River+Rock/plid7946.aspx

- Variety of fine-point permanent markers
- Optional: Clear gloss craft glaze and inexpensive paintbrushes

Directions:

1. Each class member is provided with a smooth river rock and a selection of fine-point permanent markers.
2. Write the word “Shalom” on the stone and let the ink dry. Optional: Paint river rocks with a clear gloss craft glaze to add a shiny finish and protect the ink from wear. Allow to dry during another discussion or activity.
3. Each learner may take their stone and retreat to a quiet place on the grounds or in the room. While alone, consider:
 - Where do I experience shalom in my life? How does it look and feel?
 - What element of shalom do I desire most in my life? Why?
 - How can God bring shalom to me and to the situation?
 - What would shalom look like? Envision it.
 - How would I respond to this shalom?
 - Offer a prayer for peace for your need.
4. What will you do with your Shalom Stone?
 - Leave your shalom stone for another person to possibly find.
 - Pass your shalom stone to another person during the week. Perhaps pray together for your need or offer a prayer for peace.
 - Keep your shalom stone for yourself, as a reminder of your experience.

A GREETING OF SHALOM

The word “shalom” was often used as a greeting or farewell. It was meant to inquire about someone’s well-being and safety: “Are you doing well? Has everything been all right?” Or it could be a blessing of well-being on the one to whom it was spoken: “I wish you abundance and safety. I pray you will have success and wholeness!”

Directions:

This week, greet one another with “Shalom!” It might feel uncomfortable at first, but keep with it!

OUR VISION OF ZION

Supplies:

- One large foam-core board or poster board in any color
- Construction paper in a variety of colors
- Two-sided tape and strong glue
- A variety of permanent and watercolor markers
- Several pairs of scissors
- Miscellaneous craft supplies (glitter, ribbon, buttons, crayons, paints, etc.)

Directions:

1. In advance, set the board up at the front of the room.
2. Instruct participants to consider what Zion looks like to them.
 - What symbols and images come to mind to represent various aspects of Zion or shalom? (a tree, a spiral, a hand, an animal, etc.)
 - Individuals use construction paper and other craft supplies to draw or cut out symbols of their vision of Zion.
3. Ask each person to explain the significance of their symbols. Then they will attach their symbol to the board.
4. When all have shared in this collage of symbols, take time with the whole group to discuss any insights or interesting observations.
5. A variation of this activity is to decorate four boards that depict the four elements of peace. Then follow with the activity “A Corner of Zion” detailed below.
 - Peace for Me: Personal Shalom
 - Peace for us: Relationship Shalom
 - Peace for Everyone: Community/Nation Shalom
 - Peace for the Planet: Earth Shalom

A CORNER OF ZION

Supplies:

- 4 poster boards or foam-core boards with signs reading:
- Peace for Me: Personal Shalom
 - Peace for us: Relationship Shalom
 - Peace for Everyone: Community/Nation Shalom

- Peace for the Planet: Earth Shalom

If the group created one collage, display the “Our Vision of Zion” collage poster at the front.

Directions:

1. In advance, move each of the four posters to a different part of the class space. Set up a small circle of chairs at each station.
2. Ask participants to move to the poster that is their favorite element of shalom. In the small groups share:
 - What speaks to you about this aspect of shalom?
 - Why is this aspect most important to you?
3. Move again in response to this question: In which area of shalom are you least comfortable? Share in small groups:
 - What discomfort or doubt do you have about this area? Why?
 - How can we grow in confidence and make a difference in this area?
 - Why is this aspect of shalom important?
 - What do you see as the greatest needs for righteous relationship in this element?
4. Pray in these small groups for those hopes and concerns raised.

Day 2: Sharing the Peace of Jesus Christ

Teaching Points

1. Jesus' life shows us how to generously live God's peace—how to treat all people including the poor, sick, and those who are oppressed.
2. Christ's peace has many relational dimensions as expressed by the Children's Peace Pavilion motto: "Peace for me, peace for us, peace for everyone, peace for the planet."

This lesson references pages 7–8 in the text *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

This class will look at Ephesians 2:13–14, 17 in a new and different way. We will interact with the text to discover what the writer wanted the first readers to know and how those insights might intersect with our lives. We will be using a Bible study method that takes place in three movements:

Looking at the text

Looking with the text

Walking with the text

Looking At—This is the starting point. Here we try to understand the text in light of its original setting. We seek to answer the questions: Who wrote it? When did they write it? Why did they write it? Who is it written for?

Looking With—In this step, we let the passage question us. We use the text as a lens through which we explore our own lives and discipleship. For example, if this passage were written for us, what would we feel? What would we see?

Walking With—This final step asks the question, "So what now?" This is the part that explores the difference the scripture passage will make in our lives today. In some ways, this is the hardest step, because the passage must not only be understood, but internalized.

There are rules for this type of study; they are included in this lesson. Please make sure that everyone understands the rules. If possible, give a copy of the abbreviated rules to each class member. *These rules are critical to this Bible study. The teacher must make sure that the class understands the rules and agrees to follow them. This will help keep the discussion balanced, with no single student dominating the discussion.*

This lesson plan works best with smaller groups (8 to 10 people). The smaller groups allow everyone a chance to hear and to be heard.

This is a summary of the passage in Ephesians. Please feel free to read this to the class at the end of the class time.

Summary of 2:11–22: The author uses the Old Testament image of a "peace offering" to depict Christ's self-offering on the cross. His death broke the "Berlin Wall" that estranged those on one side (Jews) from those on the other side (Gentiles). Even more, the totality of Jesus' life and mission is here described as about "making peace" between the fractured peoples of the world. This fracture is symbolized in the ancient division between Jew and Gentile. Jesus replaces the Old Testament law by becoming, in his own being, the bridge between us and God, and between us and those we are un-reconciled with. (Chvala-Smith, Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith. "The Letter to the Ephesians: Touched by the Fullness of Grace" [unpublished paper, 2009] 4.)

Note: The facilitator is encouraged to use a good study Bible in preparation for the class. The *Oxford Annotated Bible* (Third Edition) is an excellent choice.

Open the class with prayer or singing.

Supplies:

- Ask students to bring a Bible or provide the passage for reference.

- Provide paper and pen for journal writing.
- Provide copies of the “Guidelines for Listening” sheet.
- Locate a map that depicts the location of the ancient city of Ephesus. This may be found in the maps section of a good study Bible.

Explain the three-step process of the Bible study—Looking At, Looking With, Walking With. Show this on an overhead projector or provide a printed copy for each group.

Establish the “Guidelines for Listening” for this group experience.

Explore Ephesians 2:13–14, 17 together.

- First read the passage out loud to the group.
- See if there are any questions that come to mind after the reading. (There is no need for questions to be answered at this time, just note what the questions are.)

Ephesians 2:13–14, 17 NRSV

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. . . . So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

LOOKING AT

The teacher shares this material as background for the entire class.

Who wrote this passage?

The author was probably an admirer of Paul’s work, and not Paul himself. The writer, however, was familiar with Paul’s letters, as one-third to one-half of the verses in Ephesians have parallels in Colossians (if Paul wrote Colossians). So, it is likely that the author had a copy of the letter to the Colossians in front of him/her when he/she wrote Ephesians.

The author knew Paul and Paul’s writing style intimately, and was clear on Paul’s theology.

Where is Ephesus?

Refer to the map. Locate other cities in the area (Corinth, Philippi, and Jerusalem)

When was the letter to the Ephesians written?

This letter was probably written in the 90s C.E. The author speaks as if everything has been resolved between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, as they are now “one body.” Also, the author says that the apostles and the prophets are the foundations of the church. But in I Corinthians, Paul says that the foundation of the church is Jesus. Thus the author looks back on the early apostolic period as the time in which the church received its foundations from the first missionaries and preachers. Paul, on the other hand, writes in that first period, when it is still too early to say that his generation of leaders helped create the foundation. Thus the letter to the Ephesians was most likely written in the second or third generation after Jesus.

Who was it written for?

The obvious answer to this question is that this letter was written for the people of Ephesus. The answer, however, is not completely true. There is evidence to suggest that this letter was not written only for them, but that it was written to circulate. The earliest manuscripts of this letter lack the designation “to the Ephesians.” This letter doesn’t attend to problems of only one congregation. The overwhelming feeling is that this letter was circulated among many churches throughout Asia Minor.

More information for the class

This text apparently reflects a setting in those Pauline churches where Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians—so often portrayed as enemies in the pages of the New Testament—have become completely reconciled. The author’s retrospective vision sees in the unification of these two separate, distinct peoples a central expression of the meaning of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. The author stands solidly in Paul’s tradition: ethnic separations in the church are *utterly* contrary to the gospel. Within the community formed by Christ’s reconciling death there must never be divisions into “insiders” and “outsiders” (Chvala-Smith. 2009, 5).

The “hostile dividing wall” in 2:14–15 is a reference to the Law of Moses, which the author sees as the basis of the separation of Jew from Gentile. Though the temple in Jerusalem had

been destroyed years, even decades, before this author wrote, he may have in mind the dividing wall that once separated the court of the Gentiles from the court of Israel. An inscription on the wall warned Gentiles that if they crossed into the court of Israel, they would receive the death penalty. The Pauline author maintains that Christ's death has torn down all such walls, and that his body is a new temple in which such divisions have been done away with (Chvala-Smith. 2009, 5).

Divide into smaller groups (8 to 10 people) for the following activities. Select a leader for each group to ask the questions and lead the discussion. Remember to uphold the Guidelines for Listening.

LOOKING WITH

- How has experiencing Christ's message or the Holy Spirit's presence broken down a dividing wall between me and someone else?
- According to the author of Ephesians, the peace of Christ is not passive, because it seeks to bring down walls. How does that differ in the usual way I think of Christ's peace?
- In what way does the kind of peace Ephesians talks about make me uncomfortable?
- In my present experience, I sense Christ trying to break down my wall of...
- Where have I seen Christ breaking through dividing walls in my own life?

WALKING WITH

- What would it take for me to let Jesus begin breaking down one of the dividing walls (that I carry in my head or heart) this week?
- Allow the students to record the answer to this question in a journal: One divide that exists in my circle of relationships is...
- This week, I will pray...

Suggestions for Bible Study Groups

These Guidelines for Listening are designed to help group members listen to each other's perspectives in

a caring manner. To maintain a neighborly atmosphere, the leader may need to remind members of the guidelines. Group members may also share in helping one another be accountable to the guidelines in a kindly manner. Realize that the sharing of personal experiences may include strong emotions. Expressing strong emotions is okay. Remember the goal of this type of Bible study is to hear the wide range of perspectives and experiences of the members in your group. We place importance on letting our understandings expand because of the shared insights discovered in the text. Trying to convert each other to one "right" view will destroy trust and shut down people's willingness to share.

The Guidelines for Listening below include short explanations. A brief list that can be read or displayed is also included.

Guidelines for Listening

- **All answers are acceptable.** There are no right or wrong answers. Each person is sharing a part of themselves as they respond to the question, so...
- **Demonstrate respect** for each other and each other's responses.
- **One person talks** at a time.
- **Uphold confidentiality.** Things shared within the group are shared in trust. Be trustworthy with the things you learn about each other.
- **Offer and accept perspectives without attempting to convince or convert.** The questions should be designed to be answered with statements such as "My reaction...", "I feel...", "For me...", and so on.
- **Share the time**—it is very easy for outgoing or verbal persons to monopolize the class discussion. Remember that the quiet people are just as intelligent and devoted to the gospel as the talkative ones. Find ways that invite participation from all members of the group.
- **Respond to the question**—not to others' answers.
- **Be mindful of your choice of language**—choose words that are not offensive or divisive.

- Respond to the question.
- All answers are acceptable.
- One person talks at a time.
- Do not debate another's answers.

Day 3: Sharing the Sacred Story

Teaching Points:

1. The Community of Christ story is part of a much larger sacred story (Christian history and the Hebrew tradition).
2. God's Spirit is active in Community of Christ's faith story.
3. The Community of Christ statements "Scripture in Community of Christ" and "Perspectives on Church History" guide our exploration of scripture and church history.
4. The Holy Spirit helps us understand God's truth.

This lesson references pages 10–11 and pages 30–32 in the text *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Thoughts for the Teacher and Students

When he first presented "We Share: Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs" to the church, president of the church Stephen M. Veazey pointed out that the phrase "we share" has two important meanings. "We share" means we have something in common. There are commonalities we share as an international faith community. Just as important, the phrase challenges us to share our witness with others.

Scripture is like that, too. Scripture calls us to different behaviors and attitudes. The sacred story challenges us to work on our relationship with God. We hear the prophetic voice calling us back to the commandments of God. Scripture challenges us to share grace with others as it portrays Jesus mercifully attending to those

around him. The apostle Paul writes counsel to the congregations he serves and, in a way, to us at the same time.

We also share in scripture as we see people just like ourselves in the stories told. We can identify with those characters. We have made the mistakes they made. We can identify with their hurts and their joys. The sacred story begins in Hebrew scripture and continues through the life of Jesus and of the first Christians.

We share in the sacred story. We share in receiving the sacred story's challenge to be in right relationship with God.

Scripture Activity

Supplies:

- Several Bibles or copies of Psalm 78
- Flip chart or marking board
- *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs* text

Psalm 78:1–4 NRSV

Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

Explanation

Throughout Judeo-Christian history, the sacred story has been used to call people back to God and to draw people together through shared identity. Psalm 78 is a teaching psalm.

Verse 1 "Give ear, O my people, to my *teaching*..."

Verse 2 "I will open my mouth in a *parable*; I will utter *dark sayings* from of old..."

These first words make the psalmist sound like one of the wisdom teachers. The language is typical of a reading from Proverbs. We learn in verse 4 the lesson will be taught through a review of "the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done." Psalm 78 is a history psalm.

ASSIGNMENT

Invite the students in the class to study Psalm 78. If there are enough students in the class, have students work in groups of three.

- Assign each group a section of the Psalm.
- Ask each group to identify the “glorious deeds of the LORD” found in their assigned reading.
- Each group can make a list of the deeds mentioned in the scripture and to remember the broader stories referenced as much as possible.
- Each group should prepare to share their list of “glorious deeds of the LORD” with the class.

Notice the psalmist is teaching the people by reminding them of stories and not just lifting specific scriptural statements out of context to make a point. This is part of what the Community of Christ scripture statement means when it says, “Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied” (see *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, page 25). The psalmist is offering divine guidance through reminding the people of sacred story.

Give each group a few minutes to work on their lists.

Group Reporting: Make a list on flip chart paper or on a chalk or white board of the “glorious deeds of the Lord” identified by the class. If time is short, do not have each group report individually, just allow for participants to call out examples that they found in their study of Psalm 78.

CONSIDERING CHURCH HISTORY PRINCIPLES

Just as the psalmist chose to teach about God through sharing the sacred story, Community of Christ members have long used storytelling to explain their faith. Historians continue their research and analysis so our understanding of the church’s history keeps changing. Sometimes newer versions of our story have been confusing. If, for many years, we used a particular version of our story to explain a faith principle, then a change in our understanding of history can sometimes challenge our faith.

The First Presidency of Community of Christ has suggested some helpful principles.

REFLECTING ON THE CHURCH HISTORY PRINCIPLES

With the class read over the church history principles and the explanatory paragraphs provided in the document “Perspectives on Church History” found on pages 30–32 of *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*. As time allows consider any of the discussion questions that may be of interest to the class.

If the group is large, divide into smaller groups for discussion or divide the principles among the groups.

PRINCIPLE I—Continuing exploration of our history is part of identity formation.

As a church we seek always to clarify our identity, message, and mission. In our faith story, we see clearly God’s Spirit giving this faith community tools, insights, and experiences for divine purposes. A people with a shared memory of their past, and an informed understanding of its meaning, are better prepared to chart their way into the future.

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.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:5

Discussion:

1. The Bible has many passages that retell the history of the people of Israel. Psalm 78 is a good example. How does history contribute to our sense of identity as a people?
2. How do memories of our past help us to live in the present?
3. Our sacred story comes from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), New Testament, Christian history, and Restoration and Community of Christ history. Is one part of the sacred story more important to you in forming your identity? Have you had opportunity in your life to explore all

of these sources of sacred story and to allow them to contribute to your identity?

PRINCIPLE 2—History informs but does not dictate our faith and beliefs.

The foundation and continuing source for our faith is God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Studying history is not about proving or disproving mystical, spiritual, or revelatory experiences that birth or transform religious movements. Sound history informs faith, and healthy faith leads to insights about history. Theology and faith, guided by the Holy Spirit, must play an important role in discovering the enduring meaning of such events as well as the deeper truths found in them. Our understanding of our history affects our faith and beliefs. However, our past does not limit our faith and beliefs to what they were historically.

Discussion:

1. Why is it important to focus on God’s revelation in Jesus Christ as the foundation and continuing source of our faith?
2. National and cultural history also informs our identity. As Christians in Community of Christ, how do we set the right balance between national or tribal identity and our identity as part of the sacred story?
3. What are some divine principles revealed in Jesus Christ that are illustrated by events in church history?
4. What changes are class members aware of over the years in how we tell the church’s story that have had an impact on their own faith or on the faith of others around them? What historical assumptions about the Community of Christ story would be most difficult for you to see change? Why?

PRINCIPLE 3—The church encourages honest, responsible historical scholarship.

Studying history involves related fields. Historians use academic research to get as many facts as they can; then, they interpret those facts to construct as clear a picture as possible of what was going on in the past. This includes analyzing human culture to see how it affected events. Historians try to understand patterns of meaning to interpret what the past means for our

future. This process should avoid “presentism,” or interpreting the past based on a current worldview and culture instead of the culture of the time.

Discussion:

Think about our church story as a large jigsaw puzzle. There are many facts and impressions—both old and new—that contribute to the picture of Community of Christ. When old facts do not fit, it is because either they are misunderstood or they are not facts at all. Sometimes historians unearth new facts that must find a place in the puzzle. At first, these new facts may appear insignificant when weighed against what is already known, but they have the potential to change the entire picture.

1. What pieces of the church story are familiar to you and that fit easily into the puzzle?
2. Which pieces of the story do not fit easily for you? Which ones need more thought and consideration?
3. When have you uncovered a new fact that changed your perception of “the truth”?

PRINCIPLE 4—The study of church history is a continuing journey.

If we say that a book on history is the only true telling of the story, we risk “canonizing” one version, a tendency we have shown in the past. This blocks further insights from continuing research. Good historical inquiry understands that conclusions are open to correction as new understanding and information comes from continuing study.

...Come before your Eternal Creator with open minds and hearts and discover the blessings of the gospel anew.—Doctrine and Covenants 163:10b

Discussion:

1. Church authorities in Galileo’s time were threatened by scientific breakthroughs that seemed to contradict theological understandings taught by the church. Copernicus similarly upset the church by suggesting the Earth was not the center of the universe. Why should the church remain open to the continuing work of historical scholars, scientists, and academics?
2. Ask students to remember their first day of school. What were the events of that day? What was the

name of the school? What were the names of the other students in class that day? Now see if anyone can talk about their parents' first day of school, or their grandparents' first day. Students may do their best but an old school picture posted on Facebook tomorrow by another former student from that first school year may change or correct a memory. The events of history don't change but our access to it does (because of our memory, or changing access to historical documents, photos).

PRINCIPLE 5—Seeing both the faithfulness and human flaws in our history makes it more believable and realistic, not less.

Our history has stories of great faith and courage that inspire us. Our history also includes human leaders who said and did things that can be shocking to us from our current perspective and culture. Historians try not to judge—instead, they try to understand by learning as much as possible about the context and the meaning of those words and actions at the time. The result is empathy instead of judgment. Our scriptures are consistent in pointing out that God, through grace, uses imperfect people for needed ministry and leadership.

Discussion:

Our sacred story shows instances of God working with flawed human beings to carry out divine purpose. Consider with the class the story of calling David to be king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:1–13). How might the story of David help us to keep things in perspective with God and Christ at the center? How might this story help us in thinking about historical figures in Community of Christ? Can we find God's Spirit active with Community of Christ historical figures despite their flaws and although they may not have always acted as we might have liked? (God chose the most unlikely candidate to be king. David had a colorful reign. Still, Christians felt it important to connect Jesus as a descendent of this great king. Do we expect our more modern Community of Christ leaders to live up to different standards? Is it harder for us to see God working in and through flawed leaders of our present age than through flawed biblical figures?)

PRINCIPLE 6—The responsible study of church history involves learning, repentance, and transformation.

A church with a mission focused on promoting communities of reconciliation, justice, and peace should be self-critical and honest about its history. It is important for us to confess when we have been less than the gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to be. This honesty prompts us to repent, and it strengthens our integrity. Admitting past mistakes helps us avoid repeating them and frees us from the influences of past injustices and violence in our history. We must be humble and willing to repent, individually and as a community, to contribute as fully as possible to restoring God's shalom on earth.

Discussion:

If we place all of our historical leaders on pedestals it may become difficult to repent from past behaviors. It is too much to expect that our leaders from 150 years ago will always think like we do today?

How does it make you feel to learn about church leaders in the nineteenth century understanding darker skin to be a sign of a curse and that lighter colored skin was better? Can we still respect these leaders of the past while repenting or turning away from some of the attitudes they held?

PRINCIPLE 7—The church has a long-standing tradition that it does not legislate or mandate positions on matters of church history.

Historians should be free to draw their own conclusions after thorough consideration of evidence. Through careful study and the Holy Spirit's guidance, the church is learning how to accept and responsibly interpret all of its history. This includes putting new information and changing understandings into proper perspective, while emphasizing the parts of our history that continue to play a role in guiding the church's identity and mission today.

Discussion:

1. Many people call the church historian or ask church leaders for the church's official position on various matters of church history (for example, the origin of polygamy within the restoration movement). Do students in this class agree with the church's position against legislating or mandating positions on matters of church history? Is this hard for some

students to accept? Why might it be tempting for some to want to adopt official positions?

2. Are some people in the class longtime Community of Christ members? Maybe they can share some examples of matters of church history that at one time had seemingly become part of official church position or mandate.

PRINCIPLE 8—We need to create a respectful culture of dialogue about matters of history.

We should not limit our faith story to one perspective. Diverse viewpoints bring richness to our understanding of God’s movement in our sacred story. Of course, historians will come to different conclusions as they study. Therefore, it is important for us to create and maintain a respectful culture that allows different points of view on history. Our conversation about history should be polite and focused on trying to understand others’ views. Most important, we should remain focused on what matters most for the message and mission of the church in this time.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.—Colossians 3:15–16 NRSV

Discussion:

1. Consider with the class whether it seems easier to dialogue respectfully about matters of faith or matters of history. When matters of history are elevated to positions of faith, has that helped or hurt us as we try to create a respectful culture of dialogue on matters of history?
2. Why might different people hold different views on matters of history?

Talk with the class about the difference between “historical events” and “historical accounts” written years later. “Historical events” actually happened on a given day in the past. “Historical accounts” are recorded perhaps years later based on “actual historical events” that had been observed, remembered, recorded, and for which documents were kept and preserved. “Historical accounts” weave together sketchy evidence from the past filling in gaps,

even guessing at motivations. “Historical accounts” need to be tentative for all of these reasons.

Talking about accounts written by historians through the years can be fun. But it is best to avoid becoming too attached to any one account. A new document might turn up tomorrow in somebody’s attic or basement that may require a reevaluation of the whole story.

Principle 9—Our faith is grounded in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We must keep our hearts and minds centered on God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. As God’s Word alive in human history, Jesus Christ was and is the foundation of our faith and the focus of the church’s mission and message.

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.— Doctrine and Covenants 163:7d

Discussion:

Invite members of the class to say a few words about how they have come to know God through Jesus Christ and through the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If there is time...

Return to Psalm 78. Invite students to rewrite the psalm, expanding the portions about the Lord’s glorious deeds to include God’s continuing work in Christian history and throughout the story of Community of Christ. Or, expand the psalm to include telling about God’s glorious deeds in your congregation, church campground, or other gathering place over the years.

Day 4: Sharing Our Enduring Principles

Teaching Points:

1. Enduring Principles are the heart of how we express ourselves in Community of Christ.
2. Enduring Principles are uniquely expressed throughout the church.

This lesson reference pages 12–4 and pages 27–29 in the text *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Acts 4:32–35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:11a

God is calling for a prophetic community to emerge, drawn from the nations of the world, that is characterized by uncommon devotion to the compassion and peace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Through divine grace and wisdom, this faith community has been given abundant gifts, resources, and opportunities to equip it to become such a people. Chief among these is the power of community in Christ expressed locally in distinctive fashions while upholding a unity of vision, foundational beliefs, and mission throughout the world.

Some class members may already have a copy of *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, which includes the two documents. Prepare some extra copies just in case some do not have them.

Have some blank writing paper and pens or pencils available for class members.

ONE (ABOUT 15 MINUTES)

Begin the class by welcoming the group members. Open with prayer, as suitable to your setting. Read Acts 4:32–35 and Doctrine and Covenants 163:11a.

Invite class members to turn to “We Share Enduring Principles” on pages 12–14 of *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Briefly review the nine main headings, and ask the class to note that they are founded in our firm belief in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Next, turn to “We Are One, We Are Many” on pages 27–29 of *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Tell the class that this statement comes from the collective work of 200 leaders of the church from around the world. The group gathered for a few days before the 2004 World Conference in an “international leaders meeting.” This statement was written five years before the “Enduring Principles.”

TWO (ABOUT 20 MINUTES)

Ask class members to form groups of three.

Depending on the number of groups, assign one or more enduring principle to each group.

Ask the groups to compare the assigned enduring principle with the document “We Are One, We Are Many.”

In each group, discuss the key points of the assigned principle or principles, and note in the margin the same or similar points found in “We Are One, We Are Many.”

THREE (ABOUT 10 MINUTES)

Ask each class member, individually, to make two columns on a piece of writing paper, and to write the following:

- In the left hand column, write each of the nine enduring principles in a list.
 1. Grace and Generosity
 2. Sacredness of Creation
 3. Continuing Revelation
 4. Worth of All Persons
 5. All Are Called
 6. Responsible Choices
 7. Pursuit of Peace (Shalom)
 8. Unity in Diversity
 9. Blessings of Community

- In the right hand column, for as many enduring principles as possible, write something practical the class member has done or can do that expresses the enduring principle.

FOUR (ABOUT 15 MINUTES)

Ask the class to come together again, and invite class members to share briefly their testimony or experience with one or several enduring principles. Or, ask class members to share which enduring principle means the most to them and why.

Day 5: Sharing God's Mission in the World

Teaching Points:

1. We tell others about Jesus Christ by generously sharing our witness, resources, and our help.
2. True community includes love and acceptance of those who cannot care for themselves.
3. Taking part in communities (local and worldwide) is the way we live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

This lesson references pages 8–9 in the text *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Sharing God's mission in the world is at the heart of Christian discipleship. We tell others about Jesus Christ by generously sharing our witness, resources, time, energy, and support. We also seek to share the ministry and message of Jesus in ways that bring about healing, justice, and restoration.

In groups of 2 – 3 have class participants tell "Why I share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others." (5 minutes)

Read the following scripture aloud or ask three readers to share this passage with the class. You will need readers for the parts of the narrator, Jesus, and Peter.

John 21:15–17 NRSV

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."

He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you," Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

JOHN 21:15–17 NRSV (FOR THREE READERS)

Narrator: When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Narrator: He said to him,

Peter: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: "Feed my lambs."

Narrator: A second time he said to him,

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Narrator: He said to him,

Peter: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: "Tend my sheep."

Narrator: He said to him the third time,

Jesus: "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Narrator: Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him,

Peter: "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you,"

Narrator: Jesus said to him,

Jesus: "Feed my sheep."

In the gospels we see Peter as quick to speak but often slow to understand. He has all the best intentions and much leadership potential but sometimes his humanness gets the best of him even to the point where on the eve of the crucifixion, Peter would deny even knowing Jesus...three times.

Yet even in his folly and frailties Peter finds opportunity to serve. Here on the shore after eating the breakfast of fish and bread that Jesus had prepared, Jesus again invites Peter into God's mission. "Feed my sheep," Jesus tells him. Not once but three times.

Feed my sheep; be a shepherd: one who tends, cares for, feeds, and protects the flock. This was not an easy task. Sheep wander off; they need constant supervision and protection, especially the most vulnerable, the newborn, the sick and old, and those about to give birth. Shepherds needed to be ready to go wherever necessary to make sure the sheep had food, water, and shelter. The flock could only be entrusted to someone who would care for it as if it were their own, someone who understood what it was to be lost, alone, afraid.

Perhaps the challenges of the assignment led to Jesus repeating it three times. He was making sure Peter heard him clearly...“Feed my sheep.”

We Share in God’s Mission

Disciples recognize that first the mission is God’s mission. To share God’s mission in the world is to be sent by God, for God’s purposes. This means we set aside our own agendas and spend time discerning where and how God is calling us into communities locally and worldwide.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How have you noticed God calling to you to “Feed my sheep”?
2. In what ways have you responded to this calling?
3. In what ways have your own agenda items hindered you from responding to your fullest potential?

Allow a couple of minutes for silent reflection.

Ask one or two participants to share briefly their responses.

Have a class participant ready in advance to offer a prayer of confession and repentance for the class.

We Share in God’s World

Luke 4:18–19 NRSV

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

To share God’s mission as understood and proclaimed by Jesus means we must be intentional in spending time discerning together our calling and mission. We listen for direction about the “where” and “to whom” of this call, even if this means we will face discomfort, resistance, and unforeseen challenges.

Citing Luke 4:18–19 in his teaching on “Wholistic Evangelism” president of the church Stephen M. Veazey explores how Jesus understood mission:

- The gospel is preached to the “poor.”
- Brokenhearted people find relief and comfort.
- Blinded people have new vision and hope.
- Captives are released and liberated.
- Restoration of “Shalom” is experienced in community.

We share the gospel in ways that bless and transform people’s whole lives—the physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and relational. We seek to be faithful to God’s vision of shalom through

- speaking and living the gospel in community life;
- caring ministry and humble service to the poor and suffering;
- peacemaking and justice so all will be free to fulfill their potential.” (*Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, 8.)

Discussion or Reflection:

How do these understandings of mission agree or differ with your current understanding?

Derrick Williams, co-chair of the Diversity Team for Community of Christ, wrote:

When Jesus states that “the Spirit of the Lord is on me...to bring the good news to the poor...” Jesus was calling for a change in the thinking and the design of what people had been doing in that period. His trained disciples would now go out after being equipped to take their new teachings of the gospel to the people, not just wait in the synagogues for people to come to them like the custom of the day. He is very intentional in describing who were to be the focused recipients. We must change our thinking to include the belief and practice that every one (of any nation, race,

culture, age and lifestyle) is entitled to in live in harmony as Christians. (Williams, Derrick. 2009. "Crossing Borders in Community of Christ," unpublished paper, used with permission.)

Divide the class into three groups. Assign a recorder (supply paper and pen or pencil) and timekeeper for each group.

Allow 10-15 minutes for groups to discuss and to prepare and record responses.

Group 1— Given financial and full-time staff constraints, how might your mission center best support congregations and disciples to *speak* and *live* the gospel in community life in ways that express the mission of Jesus?

Group 2— God calls us to give caring ministry and offer humble service to the poor and suffering. How might this inform or "reform" the plans and focus of congregational ministry, worship, and fellowship to more fully represent the mission of Jesus?

Group 3— We change as we engage in mission. What ways can you become more aligned with how Jesus understood mission? How does this influence personal behaviors, habits, and practices?

Have each group reporter share responses with the larger group.

We Share a Mission

Doctrine and Covenants 162:7a, d

There are many lives waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel, or to be lifted from hopelessness by the hands of loving servants. But they will be lost to you without the generous response of disciples who share from their own bounty that others may know the joys of the kingdom...Each disciple needs a spiritual home. You are called to build that home and care for it, but also to share equally in the outreaching ministries of the church. In that way the gospel may be sent to other souls also yearning for a spiritual resting place.

Sharing God's mission in the world is to care for others out of the deep, abiding love that each disciple has received and generously offers to others.

Whose life might change as you share in God's mission in the world?

- Spend one minute in silent reflection.
- How will you respond to the call, "Feed my Sheep?"

Consider asking students to share their response and commitment with another person or to write that commitment down and make their continued response a matter of prayer.

Invite someone to offer a prayer for courage for the group to live out the commitment they made.

Close with the class reading the Community of Christ mission statement aloud:

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

Ask class members to reflect individually on what this statement means for them, for their congregation and mission center, and for the entire Community of Christ.

Day 6: Sharing As a Generous Disciple

Small-group Discussion:

1. Watch the DVD or read online President Veazey's Statement on World Ministries Budget Projections, then discuss your individual response to this message.

At the April 2010 World Conference, President Veazey spoke to the long-term decline in contributions to World Ministries Mission Tithes:

If tithing does not increase, we will have no choice but to further reduce the World Ministries budget, which will impact the number of ministerial field staff and resources for mission all over the world. The current level of response does not reflect the magnitude of the blessings we have received through God's grace individually and as a church.

(See www.CofChrist.org/wc2010/VeazeyBudgetProjections.asp to read his full statement.)

Are you responding to God's generosity by giving to your full capacity to both World and Local Ministries? Our shared mission depends on a **sustained increase** in tithing beginning **right now**.

2. Priesthood response:

In a letter sent to priesthood members, President Veazey upheld a set of affirmations about priesthood ministry <http://www.cofchrist.org/priesthood/letter-new.asp#questions>. The following relates to the topic of generosity:

God's grace and generosity revealed in Jesus Christ is at the heart of the gospel. We respond to God's generosity by generously giving our time, talents, and finances to support the local and worldwide ministries of the church. Members of the church expect all priesthood to model generosity in many ways, including giving according to one's true capacity to local and world ministries mission tithes.

How does your giving show your commitment to local and worldwide ministries?

3. As time allows, work through the discussion questions found at the end of each chapter in *Becoming a Generous Disciple: Six Principles to Live By*.

Teaching Points:

1. A disciple practices generosity as a spiritual discipline in response to God's grace and love.
2. A disciple is faithful in response to Christ's ministry.
3. A disciple's financial response, while unique to individual circumstances, expresses love of God, neighbor, creation, and oneself.
4. A disciple shares generously through tithing so that others may experience God's generosity.
5. A disciple saves wisely in order to create a better tomorrow for self, family, the church's mission, and the world.
6. A disciple spends responsibly as a commitment to live in health and harmony with God and the world.

This lesson references page 12 in the text *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*.

Discussion Supplies:

Becoming a Generous Disciple: Six Principles to Live By (Herald House, 2004, ISBN 0830911200)

President Stephen Veazey's "Statement on World Ministries Budget Projections," found at www.CofChrist.org/wc2010/VeazeyBudgetProjections.asp and on *We Share 2010 World Conference DVD* (available to pastors and mission center leaders).

Online generosity materials and scriptures references for adults and kids are found at: <http://www.cofchrist.org/Generosity/>