Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Enduring Principles Series
Facilitator Notes

_Sacred Space: A Small-group Resource—Enduring Principle Series_ is primarily for people who come together in an informal Community of Christ setting to share a conversation and build relationships. The outline is meant to serve as a guide as people enter conversation, share their stories, ask questions, and express joys and concerns.

Small-group ministry also introduces Community of Christ to people and invites all who seek to follow Christ to be shaped and formed in his image.

Readings or scriptures are provided for specific elements of the gathering: Prayer for Peace, Sharing Around the Table, and Generosity Statement. These readings appear in the body of each outline. They also appear separately so an individual reading or scripture can be shared easily with persons responsible for a particular part of the gathering. For example, as people gather, invite someone to share the Prayer for Peace. Hand the person a hard copy for that specific portion of the gathering. Part of the facilitator’s role in an informal setting is to cue participants as the gathering unfolds. Only the facilitator will need the complete outline.

The handout section for each gathering outline also includes optional additions for Communion and Thoughts for Children, which can be integrated into the gathering as needed.

Each session begins with a Prayer for Peace and closes with a Generosity Statement, an invitation, a hymn, and a prayer. The main portion of each session is Sharing Around the Table, where we eat, study a scripture, and share. This sharing also can take place in a simple circle of chairs without food. In this way new relationships emerge, old relationships become stronger, and community forms. Bible references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Doctrine and Covenants scriptures are from Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants.

Using the Sacred Space—Enduring Principle Series Materials

_Sacred Space—Enduring Principle Series_ follows the Christian calendar and over the course of the year introduces participants to Community of Christ through the lens of the Enduring Principles. A variety of themes and scriptures are explored to deepen understanding of Jesus Christ and invite people into a life of being shaped and formed in his image. Each week explores tangible ways people can live Christ’s mission in the context of their everyday lives.

Forty-eight outlines—four per month—bring a focus theme and related weekly topics. The outlines for Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas can be adjusted according to where each holiday or season falls on the yearly calendar.

Four additional outlines cover months with a fifth meeting day. The additional outlines provide an alternative small-group experience.

Outline Helps
Gathering

Invite everyone to have a seat. Welcome guests and introduce folks to one another. A short time of sharing joys and concerns sometimes helps people to know each other.

Prayer for Peace

A bell or chime is rung three times to begin the Prayer for Peace. This allows group members to focus their thoughts on Christ’s peace.
The candle is lit to symbolize the peace of Christ illuminating the world. Community of Christ services often include candles to symbolize the Christ made real in our lives.

*Note:* When first-time visitors are present, it is helpful for the facilitator to share the above statements before the chime is rung, candle lit, and prayer read. This provides important context that allows visitors to engage fully in the shared experience.

### Sharing Around the Table

Studying the scripture and questions is a time to learn more about scripture, discipleship, and Community of Christ in an informal setting. Sharing food around a table helps people build relationships, develop trust and the courage to share their authentic selves, and experience safe space to question and explore.

Make arrangements for snacks or a meal before the meeting date. If one person or family is hosting the weekly meeting, ask others to coordinate the snack or meal.

Remind participants that sharing is sacred, safe space. Information or experiences shared in these meetings is to be held in confidence.

*Note:* Sharing Around the Table also can be facilitated in a circle without food, depending on the context and needs of the group.

### Generosity Statement and Invitation

Place a basket for financial contributions where people can see it. Sharing the Generosity Statement reminds people of the opportunity to contribute to ministries of Community of Christ. Have information cards available with instructions for eTithing. Growing numbers of people prefer to handle finances electronically. Participants may wish to have their contributions recorded and receipted. Check with your mission center financial officer for instructions.

### Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

Serving Communion is an option if appropriate Community of Christ priesthood members are available to serve. Traditionally Communion is served on the first Sunday of the month, but it can be adjusted depending on the needs of the group and the availability of Community of Christ priesthood members. (For example, if a group meets on the second and fourth Sundays of the month, Communion can be shared on the second Sunday. If Community of Christ priesthood members are available only once a month or less frequently, Communion can be shared whatever day they are present.)

### Invitation to Next Meeting

Always state the date, time, and location for the next meeting. Provide handouts with full information, including directions.

Encourage participants to invite others who are seeking safe space to process their spiritual journey. It can help to create a secret Facebook group to share changes in schedule and location. This also helps people stay connected between meetings.

To learn more about secret Facebook groups and how to create one, read Facebook 101. Visit [www.CofChrist.org/resources](http://www.CofChrist.org/resources) and search for “Facebook” in the Keyword Search on the page. If you have questions about Facebook, email Communications at Communications@CofChrist.org.
Prepare for Children

As facilitator, it is helpful to prepare for children. A blanket or quilt spread on the floor gives children a sense of place. Prepare activity bags with coloring pages, crayons, a small bottle of water, or other parent-approved snack. Quiet toys for infants also help.

The handout section of each gathering outline includes Thoughts for Children. This element easily can be added to the gathering when children are present. A list of materials appears at the top of the Thoughts for Children handout. Have these materials ready in a bag with the handout.

Materials

- Peace candle (see note) and lighter (Many facilities allow only flameless candles; check with your meeting place.)
- Chime or bell
- NRSV Bible
- Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants
- Basket for people to offer financial contributions
- Information cards for eTitheing
- Community of Christ Sings hymnals
- Hymnal recordings (on smart phone or computer with flash drive)
- Speaker
- Session outline
- Handouts for readings and scriptures (Prayer for Peace, Spiritual Practice, Sharing Around the Table, Generosity Statement)
- Snacks (It is helpful to ask people to take turns bringing snacks for each session.)

For Children

- Activity bags

Communion

- Communion prayer card
- Communion statement
- Communion trays, cups
- Bread, grape juice, water

Notes

At small-group gatherings it is helpful to have Community of Christ resources for first-time participants or those who would like more information about the church. Resources are available thorough Herald House (www.HeraldHouse.org).

Contact your mission center invitation support minister, mission center president, or your area’s president of seventy for more information about resources. Keep these resources on hand to give to seekers:

- Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs, 3rd edition
- Community of Christ: an Illustrated History
- Doctrine and Covenants
- Promise Cards
- Business cards with your contact information
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

March

Focus: Justice

Topic: Justice

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace
Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle.

Today in our prayers we remember the people of Zimbabwe (author Tanoh Assoi).

Loving Creator, God of peace: Your love for us is great. Thank you for your plan of peace and happiness for each one of us. May your name be blessed! May your name be glorified! May your name be exalted! May you give justice for those who face injustice in any situation.

And hope for the hopeless Lord, you are the source of peace. Let your peace reign in our lives! Let your peace reign in our homes. Let your peace reign in our country. Let your peace reign in our world.

Let us rejoice in your peace today and forever. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table

“With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?”

—Micah 6:6–8 NRSV

All was not going well for the people of Israel, and many blamed God. Through the Prophet Micah they are told to remember that God has always been with them. They are to remember God bringing them out of captivity and caring for them on their wilderness journey.

The people then begin to ask what they can do to receive God’s favor again. All their ideas centered on temple worship and temple sacrifice. Micah reminds the people that rather than ritual, God is most interested in how people live their lives. What does God require? That we exercise justice, kindness, and humility in our relationships with others and with God.

Questions
1. What does “do justice” look like in your life? Who are the recipients of injustice? How can you participate in restoring justice?
2. Kindness and humility are counter-cultural in many aspects of today’s society. What does it mean to live counter to your culture?

Sending
Generosity Statement
“Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f).
We receive God’s grace and generosity. The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.
This month’s offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Generous God, Be with each of us as we manage our time, talent, treasure, and testimony. May we use all our resources in ways that express our desire to bring blessings of healing and peace into the world. May we focus our giving on your purposes, and may our hearts be aligned with your heart. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
CCS 287, “Come and Bring Light”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending the Group
- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Communion Statement

We share in the Lord’s Supper “as a visible witness of loving Christian fellowship and shared remembrance of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:4a). All committed followers of Christ are invited to partake, but no one should feel pressured to receive the emblems.

Our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing Community of Christ Sings 530, “Eat This Bread and Never Hunger.”
Thoughts for Children

In today’s reading, the people ask Micah how much is enough. If one basket of barley is good, would bringing two be better? Micah tells the people what God has said. He says God doesn’t want any grain, sheep, bulls, or anything like that. After all, God owns the whole world. God doesn’t need anything.

The people are confused. What does God want from them? Micah gives the people God’s word. First, God wants them to be just; to act justly.

Does anyone know what being just means? (Accept all answers.)

Being just means being fair to everyone; using the same rules for everyone. At one time in the USA, there were places where some grown-ups only had to sign their names, and then they could vote for new leaders. But people whose skin was a different color had to read a lot of pages and take a test before they could vote. That was not just. They were using different rules for different people.

How would you feel if you went to a friend’s house to play a game, but your friend made a rule that he would win if he got 10 points, but you couldn’t win unless you got 100 points? (Accept all answers.)

You would be angry because something deep inside you is telling you that it’s not fair. It is not just.

The first thing God wants from us is to treat every person fairly. Is that a good demand from God? I think so, too.

The second thing God wants from us is for us to “love mercy.” Who can tell me what mercy is? (Thank the children for their answers.)

When was a time you were merciful to someone? How about when someone was merciful to you? (Accept their answers.)

God wants us always to look for the kind thing we can do—not just when someone is watching us, but always. God wants us to love doing kind things.

The third thing is to stay close to God. Remember every morning, God is with you, loving you.

(adapted from www.sermonwriter.com/childrens-sermons/what-god-wants-from-us)
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

March

Focus: Justice

Topic: Responsible Choices

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle.

Today in our prayers we remember the people of Guinea-Bissau.

Almighty One, we give praise and honor to you for a world you have made for us to live in and with more than enough to go around.

Your world is orderly; the seasons go by as we live and grow up and grow old. Yet in the world there is much suffering from war, greed, and indifference.

Please instill in our hearts the desire for peace right where we live and help us do our best right at our home.

Give us wisdom to teach our children to love, to respect, and to be kind to each other so they can grow up with peace in mind.

Let us share all good things that you provide to us on this Earth.

You are the One who does not hesitate to respond to our call, and you are the cornerstone of peace.

Amen.
Sharing Around the Table

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

—Luke 19:1–10 NRSV

Zacchaeus, the tax collector, is ostracized because he has been in league with the Romans, contributing to the financial oppression and suffering of the people and making a tidy profit for himself.

When Jesus extends relationship and grace, Zacchaeus and his entire household, experience repentance, and restoration to community.

The story challenges the social mindset that having money is what makes one happy or is a sign of success. It is about God’s grace and acceptance, which make it possible for all people to discover their fullest potential in Christ.

When we live from this growing awareness, our generosity is released, and we join in the mission Jesus lived for us. When all people discover who they are in Christ, then salvation in all of its dimensions—present and future, social and spiritual—has the potential to become real (www.CofChrist.org/worship-resources-30-october-2016).

Questions

1. How has your encounter with God’s grace released in you a radical generosity that you have extended to others?
2. The salvation Zacchaeus experienced restored broken relationships with God and with the community. How have you experienced this kind of restorative salvation?

Sending

Generosity Statement

“Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f). We receive God’s grace and generosity. The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.

This month’s offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Generous God, Be with each of us as we manage our time, talent, treasure, and testimony. May we use all our resources in ways that express our desire to bring blessings of healing and peace into the world. May we focus our giving on your purposes, and may our hearts be aligned with your heart. Amen.
Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
   CCS 14, “God Who Cares for All Creation”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group
   • Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
   • Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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testimony. May we use all our resources in ways that express our desire to bring
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purposes, and may our hearts be aligned with your heart. Amen.
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Our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing Community of Christ Sings 530, “Eat This Bread and Never Hunger.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: coloring page, crayons

Zacchaeus, was not well-liked by people in his community. He was a tax collector who took money from the people for their taxes and kept some money for himself. Zacchaeus had money and riches, but he felt lonely and unhappy. He was curious about Jesus and wanted desperately to meet and talk with him. However, there was one small problem: He was small. He could not see over the crowd, so he decided to climb into a tree to watch for Jesus.

Imagine how surprised Zacchaeus must have felt when Jesus noticed him.

Form a circle. Have children silently think of ways they might get Jesus’ attention. Examples might include whistling loudly, shouting a chant, waving arms, jumping, or singing loudly. Encourage the children to be creative and ridiculous.

Ask the children how they felt when they were trying to get Jesus’ attention. Did they feel self-conscious or nervous? Were they worried about looking foolish?

Jesus invited Zacchaeus to follow him. Zacchaeus was so moved by Jesus’ grace and generosity that he made Jesus a promise. He would give half of his possessions (items he owned) to the poor and pay back the people he had cheated what he owed them plus four times more.

When Zacchaeus became friends with Jesus, his entire life became different. He was so thankful for Jesus’ friendship and forgiveness that he began to live in a more fair and just way. He helped the poor and worked for justice and peace.

Brainstorm some ideas of how the children, like Zacchaeus, can make Responsible Choices to work for justice and peace at home, at school, in their neighborhoods, or at church. Sample ideas might include befriending someone who is lonely, sharing school supplies with a classmate, apologizing if you hurt someone, being fair when you play with others.

Thank the children for participating.

Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

March

Focus: Justice

Topic: Abolish Poverty

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*
*Light the peace candle.*

Today in our prayers we remember the people of the United Kingdom (anonymous).

Gracious and loving God who knows us each by name,

We pause now to lift our collective voices and hearts in a daily prayer for peace.

God, we live in a world that often lacks peace.

We live in a world where people fight with one another, oppress one another, and struggle for earthly power and control.

We live in a world where people destroy the Earth out of ignorance and laziness and without fully understanding the impacts of their actions.

We live in a world where people die of disease, hunger, natural disasters, and random unfortunate accidents.

Amid this turmoil, Oh God, it often is difficult to imagine your peace.

We pray for inspiration that we might be able to capture a glimpse of your vision of shalom.

We pray for transformation that we might better know how to shape our words and deeds to be peacemakers where we live and serve.

We pray for wisdom that we might more deeply understand the complexities of peace and justice and how to create new systems that uphold the worth of all people and the beauty of all creation.
We pray for the courage to be your instruments of peace as we come face-to-face with injustice.

But mostly, God of peace, we pray for love. For we realize that your generous sharing of love through the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, makes peace possible.

Shape and form us as generous disciples as we receive your love today and always. Let us multiply your love through our words and actions.

God, who knows and loves us all by name, send us into the world as your hands and feet and bless us to act in peace with your love.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table

God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God’s will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

In the preface to Section 163, Stephen M. Veazey, president of the church, writes:

“Every day since being ordained as prophet-president, I have carried the needs of the church on my heart. Sometimes the weight of concern has seemed almost unbearable. Perhaps this is as it should be, because the heaviness of responsibility has pressed me to seek the mind and will of God as never before. Striving to be open to the guidance of the Spirit, while attempting to lay aside my own preconceived notions, has been a challenging but necessary learning experience. And, as I have sought to perceive God’s will for the church through prayer, study, and listening for the Creator’s voice in the voices of the faith community, I have been blessed by the Spirit in various, sometimes surprising ways.

“The words and images that follow have been birthed through much struggle, not because of any lack of inspiration, but because of the limitations of the human vessel entrusted with responsibility for articulating divine encounter. Attempting to communicate in words what is ultimately beyond words always leaves one with a sense of incompleteness. Added to this is the challenge of creating phrases that can be translated into the languages of the international church without loss of essential meanings. Fortunately, we have the promise that one of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness of divine truth beyond the confines of language and culture.

“Therefore, it is in deep humility and with heartfelt gratitude to God that I offer the following counsel as a witness of God’s eternal purpose and continuing activity in the life of the church. In so doing, I place these words in the church’s hand, trusting that the
Spirit will enable the faith community to hear the call of God today with increasing clarity.”

Questions
1. President Veazey writes that these words reflect God’s eternal purposes for the church. What does it mean for us to be concerned for, and seek to abolish, unnecessary suffering?
2. How is the welfare of others connected to your welfare? What does this say about how God works in community?

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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
CCS 304, “Sometimes We Wait, Expecting God”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group
- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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—Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

In the preface to Section 163, Stephen M. Veazey, president of the church, writes:

“Every day since being ordained as prophet-president, I have carried the needs of the church on my heart. Sometimes the weight of concern has seemed almost unbearable. Perhaps this is as it should be, because the heaviness of responsibility has pressed me to seek the mind and will of God as never before. Striving to be open to the guidance of the Spirit, while attempting to lay aside my own preconceived notions, has been a challenging but necessary learning experience. And, as I have sought to perceive God’s will for the church through prayer, study, and listening for the Creator’s voice in the voices of the faith community, I have been blessed by the Spirit in various, sometimes surprising ways.

“The words and images that follow have been birthed through much struggle, not because of any lack of inspiration, but because of the limitations of the human vessel entrusted with responsibility for articulating divine encounter. Attempting to communicate in words what is ultimately beyond words always leaves one with a sense of incompleteness. Added to this is the challenge of creating phrases that can be translated into the languages of the international church without loss of essential meanings. Fortunately, we have the promise that one of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness of divine truth beyond the confines of language and culture.

“Therefore, it is in deep humility and with heartfelt gratitude to God that I offer the following counsel as a witness of God’s eternal purpose and continuing activity in the life of the church. In so doing, I place these words in the church’s hand, trusting that the Spirit will enable the faith community to hear the call of God today with increasing clarity.”

Questions
1. President Veazey writes that these words reflect God’s eternal purposes for the church. What does it mean for us to be concerned for, and seek to abolish, unnecessary suffering?
2. How is the welfare of others connected to your welfare? What does this say about how God works in community?
Generosity Statement

“Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f). We receive God’s grace and generosity. The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.

This month’s offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Generous God, Be with each of us as we manage our time, talent, treasure, and testimony. May we use all our resources in ways that express our desire to bring blessings of healing and peace into the world. May we focus our giving on your purposes, and may our hearts be aligned with your heart. Amen.
Communion Statement

We share in the Lord’s Supper “as a visible witness of loving Christian fellowship and shared remembrance of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection” ( Doctrine and Covenants 164:4a).

All committed followers of Christ are invited to partake, but no one should feel pressured to receive the emblems.

Our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing Community of Christ Sings 530, “Eat This Bread and Never Hunger.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: basket, healthy snacks (Goldfish crackers, grapes, raisins, fruit)
Ask everyone to stand up.
Say: Many people, families, and children around the world live in poverty. Nearly half the world lives on less than $2.50 a day. (Have half the people sit down.) But 80 percent of the world lives on less than $10 a day. (Have 30 percent more, for a total of 80 percent of the group, sit down.) Imagine that! Though life is less expensive in many countries, $10 a day is a very small amount.”
(Give the basket of healthy treats to the group members left standing and make sure there is enough for everybody.)
Say: Now think about these children who are standing. They don’t live in poverty. In fact, they have 80 percent of the world’s riches, food, and resources. Have the standing children give 20 percent of the treats to the other children. (Don’t allow them to eat the treats yet.)
Ask: Does this seem fair to you? What do you think they should do? (Everyone will respond with a statement like, “Share equally with everyone.”
Ask the children with the basket to share so all have equal amounts.
This is how the world should be. It is difficult to change the world to end poverty, but we are called by God, who created a beautiful rich Earth, and by Jesus, who cared for others, to try. Let’s find ways we can Abolish Poverty, End Suffering.

Chalice Prayer

We’ve learned how many people suffer because of poverty.
Let’s pray for those who need God and Jesus to be with them right now.
Model how children can form their hands into a bowl shape. Invite them to imagine holding those who are poor in their hands.
As you pray, lift your hands and invite the children to follow your actions.
Allow children to add their individual prayers to yours.
Close with “Amen.”

Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

March

Focus: Justice

Topic: Peacemaking

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*

*Light the peace candle*

Today in our prayers we remember the people of Albania.

God of all nations;

Your divine Son, in his sermon on the mount, has promised, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.” We would seek to be worthy of such kinship by our continuing efforts to promote peace in the world on every level.

Teach us how to live peacefully, even when doing so may cost us national and religious pride. Help us find joy in brotherhood and sisterhood with all races and creeds. We must do no less if we are to be worthy of being your children.

May our desire for a peaceful world be passed on to our children, and may they build that peaceful world on the foundation which we shall lay.

Help us to be peacemakers and peacekeepers, we pray in the name of the Prince of Peace.

Amen.

Sharing Around the Table

You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.

Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ’s vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a–b
Shalom is a Hebrew term meaning a fullness or completeness of peace—personal and societal well-being. Shalom is God’s intent for humankind and the whole creation.

From its beginning Community of Christ has understood this vision as an evolving idea of Zion. Zion is the term used to describe God’s peaceable kingdom and building communities of joy, hope, love, and peace. Zion encompasses all facets of life relating to the whole person and is realized in what we call signal communities.

Questions
1. In Community of Christ Basic Beliefs, peace is defined: “Peace is God’s shalom: justice, righteousness, wholeness, and the well-being of the entire creation (www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Sharing-in-Community-of-Christ-3rd-edition.pdf). How is this similar or different to your understanding of peace?
2. What does it mean to you to challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to God’s will for shalom?
3. Section 140:5c reads: “…Zionic conditions are no further away nor any closer than the spiritual condition of my people justifies.” What does this say to you about the call to create pathways of peace?

Sending
Generosity Statement
“Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f). We receive God’s grace and generosity. The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.
This month’s offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Generous God, Be with each of us as we manage our time, talent, treasure, and testimony. May we use all our resources in ways that express our desire to bring blessings of healing and peace into the world. May we focus our giving on your purposes, and may our hearts be aligned with your heart. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
CCS 364, “Lord, Make Us Instruments”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group
- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Light the peace candle

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God of all nations:

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May our desire for a peaceful world be passed on to our children, and may they build that peaceful world on the foundation which we shall lay.

Help us to be peacemakers and peacekeepers, we pray in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.
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Our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing *Community of Christ Sings* 530, “Eat This Bread and Never Hunger.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: copies of peace seal coloring page, crayons
Community of Christ’s seal or logo is a picture of a lion lying down with a lamb, being led by a child. This is a vision of a truly peaceful world, which we also call Zion, the peaceable kingdom, the commonwealth of God, and Community of Christ.
Although the vision is something that may never be fully possible, we nevertheless work to make our world more like Zion by pursuing peace and justice everywhere (John Hamer, Community of Christ Coloring Book, 2016).
Invite children to color the peace seal.
PEACE

see Isaiah 11
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

April

Focus: Community

Topic: Easter

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*
*Light the peace candle.*

Today in our prayers we remember the people of the Republic of Georgia (author Peter Judd).

Lord God, Creator of all, Giver of all gifts, Lover of all:

We pray to you on behalf of our troubled world, fraught with conflict, injustice, and misunderstanding.

The peace we seek often seems so unreachable, so far from possibility.

We yearn for things to be different than they are—for the old world to become new.

We acknowledge our own participation in the difficulties of your times, and so we pledge our intent and resources to the cause of peace.

May we accept your presence in our lives that calls us to be peacemakers.

May we unite with others to make our world a better place to live.

We pray in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were
running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord”; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

—John 20:1–18 NRSV

In John’s account of Easter morning, different people came to faith in Christ along different paths.

The beloved disciple looked into the empty tomb and believed instantly. What did he understand when he saw the empty tomb? What did he believe? John gives us no answer; he merely says faith was the result.

Peter saw the empty tomb and empty shroud where the body had been. But, unlike the beloved disciple, Peter returned home without faith or understanding.

Mary Magdalene saw the empty tomb but understood only that the body was gone. Stolen? Moved elsewhere? The empty tomb did not prompt her to believe in the resurrection. She saw two messengers of God within the tomb, but that didn’t lead to faith. She encountered the Risen Christ, but mistook him for the gardener. Her eyes were opened only when he spoke her name, recalling a familiar relationship of love and caring.

“My sheep hear my voice. I know them…” (John 10:27 NRSV). The Living Word and the one word, her name, brought Mary to faith and rejoicing (www.CofChrist.org/worship-resources-16-april-2017).

Questions
1. When Mary arrived at the tomb, her experience was one of grief, darkness, and despair, but she discovered the hope and assurance of the resurrected Christ. How have you been surprised by hope amid darkness and despair?
2. How have you experienced God calling you by your name? How has it transformed your relationship to God? To others?
Sending

Generosity Statement
“Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f).
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to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.
This month’s offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God of rejoicing, We share our gifts joyfully and with thanksgiving in response to the
generous gifts you have given us. May the offerings we share bring joy, hope, love, and
peace into the lives of others that they might experience your mercy and grace. Amen

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 478, “Woman, Weeping in the Garden”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

• Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
• Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

_Ring a bell or chime three times slowly._
_Light the peace candle._

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In preparation let’s sing *Community of Christ Sings 522,* “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: pictures of a caterpillar and a butterfly

Mary Magdalene, a follower of Christ, showed extraordinary love, courage, and witness when she found the tomb of her Lord empty (John 20:1–18). She learned Jesus was not dead or taken away, but had transformed into the Risen Christ. Mary saw, believed, and shared this transformation with the disciples.

What does transformation mean: It’s a change to something so new it barely is recognized from what it used to be.

Imagine a caterpillar with its big eyes and strange body. It moves slowly and sluggishly. Yet, a caterpillar turns into a new creature, a butterfly, light and fast, fluttering on the wind. It now has wide colorful wings and no longer is restricted to crawling along a twig or the ground. (If you have a caterpillar/butterfly puppet, or a photo, show the transformation from one to the other.)

Mary Magdalene saw Jesus in his last few days and hours; she saw and believed Jesus when he appeared to her after death. And she shared the story and message of Jesus with others.

As spring, and Earth Day approach, when flowers and trees become new, think about what Mary Magdalene experienced: She saw, she believed, and she shared. Who will you share the story of Jesus with?

(Adapted from www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Focus-moments.pdf)
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

April

Focus: Community

Topic: The Church

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle.

Today in our prayers we remember the people of Jamaica.

Compassionate and eternal God,

We call upon you this day, as do many others of different faith communities, in a spirit of united prayer for peace. We marvel at the diversity of your human creations—the different expressions of faith that have emerged in various cultures around the planet. We know it is in such diversity that we find distinctive and unparalleled beauty.

We reflect on the experience of the children of Israel, who so many centuries ago found themselves in captivity by the waters of Babylon. There, as they sat and wept, they wondered how they could worship their God in a strange land. It was then that a marvelous revelation came to light. They realized that you, O God, were more than just their national God, but that you were the one God to whom all humankind must give humble and joyous worship.

So we join millions today who pray to you through their own times and places—and their rich cultural and religious communities—for peace in the world. Bring, O God, peace to each of us and to all men, women, and children. Send among us teachers who will guide us, just as Jesus and others like him taught generations past.

We offer this prayer with humble anticipation. Amen.
Sharing Around the Table

Beloved Community of Christ, do not just speak and sing of Zion. Live, love, and share as Zion: those who strive to be visibly one in Christ, among whom there are no poor or oppressed.

As Christ’s body, lovingly and patiently bear the weight of criticism from those who hesitate to respond to the divine vision of human worth and equality in Christ. This burden and blessing is yours for divine purposes.

And, always remember, the way of suffering love that leads to the cross also leads to resurrection and everlasting life in Christ’s eternal community of oneness and peace. Trust in this promise.

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:6a–c

In Community of Christ, the church is lived when we strive to create Christ-centered communities of justice and peace. These communities vary by context, but all focus on the same mission: “to live, love and share as Zion,” “to be visibly one in Christ among whom there are no poor or oppressed.” We recognize that we are not in this alone. We serve side by side with other Christian communities and other people of faith.

God intends Christian faith to be lived in companionship with Jesus Christ and with other disciples in service to the world. The church of Jesus Christ is made of all those who respond to Jesus’ call. Community of Christ is part of the whole body of Christ. We are called to be a prophetic people, proclaiming the peace of Jesus Christ and creating communities where all will be welcomed and brought into renewed relationship with God, and where there will be no poor.


Questions
1. What does it mean to bear the criticism of those who do not see the divine vision of human worth?
2. What does this vision of Zion say to you?

Sending

Generosity Statement

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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
   \textit{CCS 224, "O May Your Church Build Bridges"}

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group
   \begin{itemize}
   \item Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
   \item Thoughts for Children
   \end{itemize}
Prayer for Peace

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Our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing Community of Christ Sings 522, “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: Post-it notes, poster board with the words *Invitational, Christ-centered communities of justice and peace*

Ask: What do you think when you hear the word *church*?
Say: People sometimes use the word *church* to refer to a type of building…like when we say: “Let’s go to the church.” Other times people use the word to mean the kind of meeting that takes place inside the building: “Let’s start church now.” Church also can mean the people who make up the congregation or community: “We are the church.”

This last meaning—the community of people—is much more important than the type of building or meeting.

In Community of Christ, we all become the church when we gather in community to build meaningful relationships and to live our shared mission. We call these expressions of the church “signal communities.” In a signal community, each person brings giftedness, skills, and talents to share.

Hand Post-it notes to each person. Have people (grown-ups help children) write what skills, talents, giftedness they bring to share in signal community (riding a bike, drawing, laughter, singing, love, friendship, building).

Invite everyone to stick their Post-it notes on the poster board. Read the gifts/talents/skills aloud. Then offer a prayer of thanksgiving for all the gifts of this signal community.

Thank the children for participating.

*(adapted from Hamer, John, Community of Christ Coloring Pages, 2015)*
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

April

Focus: Community

Topic: Blessings of Community

Gathering

Welcome

Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle.

Today in our prayers we remember the people of Chad (author Jeanne Davis).

Loving God,

Breathe in us today.

Sweep away any fear, worry or pride that distracts us from sensing your presence of peace.

We want to be your people, to be community.

Bless us with your compassion that overflows and carries your Spirit’s graceful touch to all who are in need.

In the name of Jesus, who is our peace. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table

You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.

Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ’s vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a–b
Community of Christ faith and practice is defined by our Enduring Principles. They define the essence, heart, and soul of church identity, mission, and message. They describe the church’s personality as expressed through its participants, congregations, and affiliate organizations throughout the world. One of these nine Enduring Principles is Blessings of Community.

**Blessings of Community**

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


**Questions**

1. What does it mean for you to “challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God”?
2. In your own experience, what are some challenges of community? What blessings of community have you experienced?
3. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be part of a community that pursues the peace of Christ. How has this been expressed in your life?

**Sending**

**Generosity Statement**

“Sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f). We receive God’s grace and generosity. The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.

This month’s offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God of rejoicing, We share our gifts joyfully and with thanksgiving, in response to the generous gifts you have given us. May the offerings we share bring joy, hope, love, and peace into the lives of others that they might experience your mercy and grace. Amen.

**Invitation to Next Meeting**
Closing Hymn


Closing Prayer

Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Communion Statement

We share in the Lord’s Supper “as a visible witness of loving Christian fellowship and shared remembrance of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection” (Doctrine and Covenants 164:4a).

All committed followers of Christ are invited to partake, but no one should feel pressured to receive the emblems.

Our experience of being together as we share in Communion is an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community.

In preparation let’s sing *Community of Christ Sings 522*, “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: paper hearts with “I am with you” written on one side, crayons or pencils
Say: Usually, we can care for ourselves. But sometimes, we need help.

- What do you need help with at times?
- Whom do you ask for help?
- How do you ask for help?

Beforehand, prepare paper hearts with “I am with you” written on one side. Give one to each person. Invite everyone to print his or her name on the blank side of the heart.

Hold up your own paper heart. Explain that when you need God, God is right there. When you call, God is right there with you. When you look for God, you don’t even have to move. God is with you, all around you, never away from you.

One way we know God is with us is when we are with friends and family in community. One blessing of community is that with parental permission we can ask friends or family for help, and often we can help others.

Have everyone hold up their heart.

The heart helps you remember that God loves you and is with you.

When you give God’s love to another person, you are sharing a blessing of community. Encourage children to give their hearts to others. Encourage others to give their hearts to the children. Be extra watchful to make sure each child receives a heart from someone else.

Thank the children for participating.

(adapted from www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Focus-moments.pdf)
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

April

Focus: Community

Topic: Zion, the Reign of God

Gathering

Welcome

Prayer for Peace

Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.
Light the peace candle

Today in our prayers we remember the people of Indonesia (author Kris Liddle).

Most gracious and loving Creator,

May we find peace in the knowledge that you surround us through your Holy Spirit always. You, who are the maker and giver of all that is good, are our source of peace. May we find peace in the eyes of every child, in the eyes of every weathered face, in the eyes of those who are longing to know you, and those who are oppressed. May we find peace in the empty places and bring peace to bear your light to others in the dark, lonely parts of the world longing for your light to shine.

In your Son’s most holy name we pray. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table

Beloved children of the Restoration, your continuing faith adventure with God has been divinely led, eventful, challenging, and sometimes surprising to you. By the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God’s ultimate vision for the church.

When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ’s new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your whole-hearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God’s covenant of peace in Jesus Christ.

This covenant entails sacramental living that respects and reveals God’s presence and reconciling activity in creation. It requires whole-life stewardship dedicated to
expanding the church’s restoring ministries, especially those devoted to asserting the worth of persons, protecting the sacredness of creation, and relieving physical and spiritual suffering.

—Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a–c

In early Restoration history Community of Christ considered Zion to be a location in Independence, Missouri. Saints understood their participation in Zion as gathering together there and caring for one another. Through the decades of discipleship and under the impress of the Holy Spirit, the prophets of the church have given voice to God’s call for the church to see Zion as more than a place. It is a spiritual condition, a way of living one’s discipleship in relationship with others.

Community of Christ’s Basic Beliefs describe Zion, the reign of God, this way:

The Reign of God is the coming triumph of love, justice, mercy, and peace that one day will embrace all of creation. Jesus’ life and ministry were the living expression of this promise. He taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom’s full coming and sent them out into the world to be living emblems of that new creation. “Zion” expresses our commitment to herald God’s peaceable kingdom on Earth by forming Christ-centered communities in families, congregations, neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world.


Questions
1. How does defining Zion as the “peaceful reign of Christ” make the idea of Zion more beautiful, confusing, and challenging than your previous understanding? What must you do to respond to the call wholeheartedly?
2. What kind of restoring ministries should the church address? How do you serve in restorative ways?

Sending

Generosity Statement

“If sharing for the common good is the spirit of Zion,” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:2f). We receive God’s grace and generosity. The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response. This month’s offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 387, “Bring Forth the Kingdom”

Closing Prayer

APRIL—Focus: Community; Topic: Zion, the Reign of God
Optional Additions Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
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In preparation let’s sing *Community of Christ Sings 522*, “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ.”
Thoughts for Children

Ask: Does anyone know what a community is? (A group of people who live near each other or gather together; people who care about each other).

A signal community is one that follows Christ's way of living and is an example to others. It is an important part of God's shalom. A community like this can also be called Zion. It is defined in scripture as a city on a hill, a sign of peace. Zion is where we can find our inner peace, but also where we live with others in loving relationships [that] are just and fair, where we can forgive and work out problems with others, where there is no poverty, and where we live in harmony with nature. It can be a real place, a place that we can help to create.


Jesus teaches us how to live in signal communities. We learn to treat others with kindness, to care about everyone, and to ask forgiveness if we hurt someone. Zion is a place many people have dreamed of as the perfect signal community, but Zion also is about how we live in community with others.

When we are together in worship and sharing, we are living in signal community. What do you think is the best thing about a signal community? (peace, love, singing, snacks).

Together we will build signal communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.

Thank the children for participating.