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 eTithing
- *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 through 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

November

Focus: Gratitude

Topic: Grace and Generosity

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 Spain.
Lord of life, our Creator,
We praise you with thanksgiving; you are peace. Your peace is all about us, present in all of your creation.
We look at the fluttering butterfly amid the flowers, and we see peace.
We listen to the song of the meadowlark, and we hear peace.
We cup a fragrant rose in our hands, and we smell peace.
We bite into a vine-ripened tomato, and we taste peace.
We hold a baby in our arms, lay our cheek on that soft, sweet cheek, and we feel peace.
All of our senses experience peace, and they tell us that you are peace.
We would know your peace, O Lord, not only with our senses but with our minds and our hearts and our souls. With this knowing may we express your peace, promote your peace, embody your peace, be your peace in our world, which needs your peace so desperately.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.
Sharing Around the Table

Many are fearful and believe their security is to be found in the accumulation of possessions. The answers you seek are not inherent in the things of this world but in a faith that places its trust in the promises given to all who would follow Jesus Christ.

You have been given the principles of generosity, rightly interpreted for a new time. These principles call every disciple to tithe faithfully in accordance with means and capacity. Those values, deeply rooted in the Restoration faith, affirm that stewardship and discipleship cannot be divided and are dependent upon each other.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:7 b–c

Many of us live in cultures where over-consumption and accumulation of belongings are hallmarks of success. This scripture shares a different perspective. We are reminded that in the promises of Christ, the life of discipleship, true joy is found. This includes carefully managing our resources, being responsible stewards of what we spend and save, and sharing what we have with others.

Responsible choices [stewardship] is about agency—our ability to choose how we will respond when we have choices within the circumstances of our lives. Human choices contribute to good or evil in our lives and in the world. ...We are called to do our best and to give as a spiritual discipline.


Questions
1. What does it mean to you that “stewardship and discipleship cannot be divided?”
2. How do you balance cultural expectations of accumulating wealth with the discipleship practice of generosity?
3. What meaningful experience for you expressed God’s grace and generosity?

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:

Covenant God, As we navigate our world of debt and consumerism, help us to save wisely. In this way may we better prepare for the future and create a better tomorrow for our families, friends, the mission of Christ, and the world. Amen.

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
CCS 608, “Take My Life and Let It Be”

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 524, “For Bread before Us Broken.”
Thoughts for Children

• Materials: Small pictures or objects, clock or watch, toy musical instrument or music notes, crayons, happy face, praying hands, plant or flower, toothbrush, heart

God is generous to us. We respond by giving generously to others.

Song: “God Loves a Cheerful Giver” (sung to tune of “This is the Way We Wash Our Clothes”)

This is the way we give our time
Give our time, Give our time.
This is the way we give our time
God loves a cheerful giver.

2. Share our toys...
3. Sing a song...
4. Draw for Jesus...
5. Smile at you...
6. Pray for others...
7. Love our friends

In a small basket, place small items or pictures that represent ways the children can give: clock (time), toy (share), musical note (song), crayons (art), happy face (smile), praying hands (prayer), flower (care of planet), toothbrush (care of self), and heart (love).

Have children sit in a circle. Tell them God loves cheerful givers (2 Corinthians 9:7), and there are many gifts to give. Sing the first verse of the song, “God Loves a Cheerful Giver” while the basket is passed from child to child. When the verse stops, have the child holding the basket reach in and get an item. Ask the children what it is and how they can give that thing to Jesus. Have everyone repeat the scripture verse “God loves a cheerful giver” and then continue until the basket is empty. For each round of singing, change the verse to match the item pulled from the basket.

Challenge: Encourage the children to be cheerful givers every day.
Thank the children for participating.

Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

November

Focus: Gratitude

Topic: Women

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 Central African Republic (author Bill Russell).

God of love, of peace, and of justice:

We live in a violent world, Lord. Wars between nations and tribes exist all over the world, and it must trouble you deeply. We pray for a cessation of hostilities, that differences might be settled through negotiations, through getting to know and empathize with “the other”—whom we all too often demonize.

We have treated as less than human the people of other religions, races, ethnic groups, gender identities, tribes. Women still are treated as property in much of the world, including—far too often—in this country.

We are inspired by the model of Jesus, who saw all persons as persons of worth, and by Joseph Smith, who echoed this message.

May we remember—from the teachings of Jesus, Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela—that returning hatred for hatred, violence for violence only escalates hatred and violence. Let us respond to hate with love, to violence with nonviolence. Help us work to create the peaceable kingdom, Lord.

We ask this in the name of the humble Carpenter from Nazareth, whose life and courageous facing of death helped us see what kind of people you would have us be. Amen.
**Sharing Around the Table**

I have heard the prayers of many, including my servant the prophet, as they have sought to know my will in regard to the question of who shall be called to share the burdens and responsibilities of priesthood in my church.

I say to you now, as I have said in the past, that all are called according to the gifts which have been given them. This applies to priesthood as well as to any other aspects of the work.

Therefore, do not wonder that some women of the church are being called to priesthood responsibilities. This is in harmony with my will and where these calls are made known to my servants, they may be processed according to administrative procedures and provisions of the law.

Nevertheless, in the ordaining of women to priesthood, let this be done with all deliberateness. Before the actual laying on of hands takes place, let specific guidelines and instructions be provided by the spiritual authorities, that all may be done in order.

—Doctrine and Covenants 156:9

The journey to the ordination of women became a reality when President-Prophet Wallace B. Smith offered prayerful guidance to the church in the form of a revelation April 3, 1984, and it was accepted by the conference delegates. This journey was not without its challenges.

[The] ordination of women...had a major impact on the church. To start ordaining women would upset the patriarchal views that prevailed in many church homes. So it was not surprising that many resisted the calling of women.

...[O]rdination of women initiated bitter controversy. The actual ordinations, beginning November 1985, were the “last straw” for many traditional members. An estimated twenty-five to thirty thousand or more eventually left active participation in the church...The quest for greater justice for women in the church, and seeking to be faithful to God’s voice today, has been at great cost.

—*In Pursuit of Peace: Community of Christ’s Journey*

Herald Publishing House, 2016, pp. 109–110

Within a quarter of a century, women were serving at every level of church leadership. Today, an entire generation has grown up in our church, knowing only the full inclusion of women in church service.

—*Community of Christ: an Illustrated History*

Herald Publishing House, 2010, p. 64

**Questions**

1. When have you felt compelled to act for justice and equality, even at great personal cost?
2. What does “all are called” mean to you? Are all persons called to serve in ordained ministry?
Sending

Generosity Statement

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

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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 603, “A Prophet-Woman Broke a Jar”

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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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* 524, “For Bread before Us Broken.”
Thoughts for Children

Men and women share in discipleship and leadership in Community of Christ. We learn from scripture that women shared giftedness in all areas of discipleship and leadership. Women like Mary and Elizabeth were poets and scholars. Women like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Martha, and Lydia shared financial resources. Women like Tabitha cared for the poor. Women like Priscilla, Lois, and Eunice were leaders in the church.

Ask: Who are some women leaders you know? (Help by sharing names of women in the group who participate.)

What giftedness will you share as a disciple of Jesus? (examples: sharing resources, loving others, helping someone, passing out hymnals, cleaning up, praying)

Women and men, girls and boys are all called as disciples of Jesus. Pray for the giftedness of the girls and boys.

Thank the children for participating.

(adapted from http://sundayschoollessons.com/women.htm)
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

November

Focus: Gratitude

Topic: Thanksgiving

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 Equatorial Guinea (author Everett Graffeo).

Lord, we are filled with wonder and bursting with joy at your invitation.
    We feel awe in your presence
    and sense that this moment
    has some eternal significance.
Our pilgrimage wends its way to this holy place.
    We hear your words,
    “Welcome home!”

Seasons and faces pass in review.
People act as if the world and history
have slipped out of your hands.
They act violently with hysterical reactions.
    They risk everything
    to hold on to their brittle world.
    They know no peace
    They have no home.

But with uplifted voice, we cry out
    Hope! Peace! Life! Love!
We live in a grace-filled community
where the winds of love and peace blow
as a gentle whisper in our hearts.
We see many that are responding. 
The evidence is before our eyes. 
We rejoice in your triumph.

There are many who stand in the breach, 
Brave souls who live in the tension 
of hope and unfulfilled longing. 
We see eternity unfolding around us; 
The enemies of light have failed, 
Hope blossoms in the midst of the Earth. 
Justice is the breaking light on the eastern horizon. 
The reign of peace is the promise of the new day.

You do dry the tears in the eyes of the oppressed. 
Death does disappear in your presence. 
Persons are restored to new life. 
Endings do become beginnings. 
Persons do smile again. 
Your peace does reign. 
Hope is justified. 
Love does have the final word.

Teach us the words 
that will give voice to the hope that is in us.
From the thousand openings of our wounded bodies, 
Release the notes of your triumphant song. 
Attune our ears to hear 
the alleluia chorus of future generations. 
Make our world 
the world of your kingdom of peace! 
Amen!

Sharing Around the Table

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. 
—Acts 2:43–47 NRSV

This passage encapsulates what it is to be the church: sharing compassionate ministry, food, resources, worship, and study in community.
Following the powerful interactions with God’s Spirit, thousands of people began to gather in praise, fellowship, and thanksgiving. Marvelous things were taking place. One of the most important was learning to live together in sacred community.

Through the ages, one of the most profound ways to build community is to eat together. There is a sense of vulnerability in preparing food to share with others. There is also a sense of anticipation as we gather around a table. Whether it is a meal with friends or the table of the Lord’s Supper, we gather, give thanks, and share in the Blessings of Community.

Questions
1. How does community inform and contribute to your spiritual formation?
2. When have you felt most vulnerable to God’s Spirit?
3. For what characteristics of sacred community are you most thankful?

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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 132, “For the Fruit of 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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Our pilgrimage wends its way to this holy place.

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where the winds of love and peace blow
as a gentle whisper in our hearts.

We see many that are responding.

The evidence is before our eyes.

We rejoice in your triumph.

There are many who stand in the breach,

Brave souls who live in the tension
of hope and unfulfilled longing.

We see eternity unfolding around us;

The enemies of light have failed,

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Justice is the breaking light on the eastern horizon.

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—Acts 2:43–47 NRSV

This passage encapsulates what it is to be the church: sharing compassionate ministry, food, resources, worship, and study in community.

Following the powerful interactions with God’s Spirit, thousands of people began to gather in praise, fellowship, and thanksgiving. Marvelous things were taking place. One of the most important was learning to live together in sacred community.

Through the ages, one of the most profound ways to build community is to eat together. There is a sense of vulnerability in preparing food to share with others. There is also a sense of anticipation as we gather around a table. Whether it is a meal with friends or the table of the Lord’s Supper, we gather, give thanks, and share in the Blessings of Community.

Questions
1. How does community inform and contribute to your spiritual formation?
2. When have you felt most vulnerable to God’s Spirit?
3. For what characteristics of sacred community are you most thankful?
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:

Covenant God, As we navigate our world of debt and consumerism, help us to save wisely. In this way may we better prepare for the future and create a better tomorrow for our families, friends, the mission of Christ, and the world. 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* 524, “For Bread before Us Broken.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: plain, white paper plates; crayons or pencils
Ask: What things do we know about Thanksgiving? Wait for all to share responses.
Say: Many nations and cultures have a time of Thanksgiving. It is a way to show
grateful to God for a fine harvest, for plenty to eat, for all the blessings we have received in the
past year.
We are grateful for the blessings God has provided for us, so today we are going to make
a gratitude plate.
Give each child a paper plate and crayons or a pencil. Ask them to call out some things
they are most thankful for: parents, favorite food, a special friend, a pet.
Have the children write their names on the plates and then draw a picture of something
they are thankful for.
Plan a time later in the gathering for children to share what they have drawn.
Thank the children for participating.
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

November

Focus: Gratitude

Topic: All Saints’ Day

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 Poland (author Laura Herdman).

Almighty God, we see your power in the design of the galaxies, the oceans, the sands; and we behold your gentleness in the butterfly, the firefly, the violet. How can we not stand in awe before the grandeur displayed on Earth. Help us now to reflect on the times when peace entered our souls as we stood still, listened, and beheld the beauty that surrounded us. And so we do at this moment.

We thank you for expressions of peace that others tell us through their insight of your splendor: the artists, the musicians, architects, poets. And we, too, witness of the good feeling we have each time we create or work at making something a little better than it was. We feel a kinship with you, and peace enters our soul.

Help us to create opportunities to take the touch of Jesus to others, so they may sense his peace. We ask forgiveness of moments when we have not acted on his behalf. Forgive our reluctance, our apathy, our daily busyness that hinders our sensitivity to the needs of others. You give us opportunities to be peacemakers, but we do not always see, hear, or do.

Today we pledge anew our efforts. We pledge to take the peace from the beauty that surrounds us in the arts and nature and give it human expression in our relationships. Somehow, we feel that as we do so, we carry out the purpose for our being. Give us your blessing this day, and receive our petition simply because our Master urges us to pray. Amen.
Sharing Around the Table

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
   for yours is the kingdom of God.
“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
   for you will be filled.
“Blessed are you who weep now,
   for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and
defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely
your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich,
   for you have received your consolation.
“But woe to you who are full now,
   for you will be hungry.
“But woe to you who are laughing now,
   for you will mourn and weep.

“But woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false
prophets.

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless
those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek,
offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even
your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods,
do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”


All Saints’ Day is observed in the greater Christian community as a day to remember
friends, family, congregants, community members, (the community of saints) who have died
during the year. In this way we honor those who have gone before us and reaffirm our belief in
eternal life.

In this passage we read Luke’s version of the beatitudes. They often are referred to as
blessings and woes. Jesus offers blessings upon those in need, the poor, the hungry, those who
grieve, and those who are reviled and excluded. These are the people of God’s compassion and
care. But the rich, those with comfort and plenty, their fortunes will be reversed. Those who are
without today will become the saints of God’s reign. Jesus goes on to share the qualities
expected of God’s people—love in the face of hate, blessing in response to violence, generosity,
and treating people as we wish to be treated.

After her husband was killed and the majority of Saints left on their westward journey,
Emma Smith found herself impoverished and alone. Though life often was difficult, she spent
the rest of it in Nauvoo with her second husband and her children. There, she cared for the poor
and housed those in need. Emma was supportive when her son, Joseph Smith III, became the

NOVEMBER—Focus: Gratitude; Topic: All Saints’ Day
leader of the reorganized church. Her influence significantly affected what later would become Community of Christ. Emma Smith is a “saint” of the Restoration, a faithful disciple we honor on All Saints’ Day.

Questions
1. Jesus set high expectations for disciples. How challenging is it to live in ways of blessing and compassion in the face of exclusion and hate?
2. Who are the departed saints (everyday people or great lives from history) who have touched your life or influenced your spiritual journey?

Sending
Generosity Statement
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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
CCS 331, “For All the Saints”

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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Almighty God, we see your power in the design of the galaxies, the oceans, the sands; and we behold your gentleness in the butterfly, the firefly, the violet. How can we not stand in awe before the grandeur displayed on Earth. Help us now to reflect on the times when peace entered our souls as we stood still, listened, and beheld the beauty that surrounded us. And so we do at this moment.

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In preparation let’s sing Community of Christ Sings 524, “For Bread before Us Broken.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: paper, crayons
Today we celebrate All Saints’ Day. All Saints’ Day comes right after Halloween. On All Saints’ Sunday we think about people in the past who were followers of Jesus.
Ask children to think of people who have been good followers of Jesus. Who did you think about? Is it someone from your family, a friend, someone from the Bible, or someone from history?

Give each child a paper and crayons. Ask each person to draw the person named. Invite each child to tell why his or her person is a follower of Jesus.
Offer a prayer of thankfulness for those who have followed Jesus throughout the ages and for those present today.

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

December

Focus: Peace

Topic: Advent

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 Thailand.

I pray a prayer for peace, Dear Lord;

Peace for the fearful,
Peace for the troubled,
Peace for the downtrodden,
Peace for the war torn,
Peace for the wounded.

I pray a prayer for peace, O Lord;

Peace for the forgotten,
Peace for the abandoned,
Peace for the homeless,
Peace for the hungry,
Peace for the unwanted.

I pray a prayer for peace, O Lord;

Peace for the hopeless,
Peace for the ignored,
Peace for the abused,
Peace for the sad,
Peace for the ill.

I pray a prayer for peace, O Lord;
Peace for the powerful,
Peace for the successful,
Peace for the careful,
Peace for the happy,
Peace for the loved.

I pray a prayer for peace, O Lord;
Peace for the children,
Peace for the world.

I pray a prayer for peace, O Lord.

In the name of the One for whom we wait and celebrate, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

**Sharing Around the Table**

[D]uring the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”

—Luke 3:2–6 NRSV

John the Baptist quotes the prophets of old to remind the people that Israel must be prepared for God to be present in their midst. Originally the “way of the Lord” was the path those who had been in exile followed to journey home. In Luke’s Gospel the “way of the Lord” is preparation through repentance, reconciliation, and covenant.

As we prepare for Christ to arrive, we make ourselves ready in ways that remove stumbling blocks that we or others may trip over. We peer into every valley and crevice to ensure we harbor no ill will, we make low the mountains of self-centeredness, arrogance, and power, and we seek to heal rifts that hinder healthy relationships. We prepare the way of the Lord.

Advent is a season of waiting in expectation for the coming of light into a darkened world in the form of the infant Jesus. Advent is spent anticipating and spiritually preparing for the arrival of the Christ-child. Scriptures, symbols, and hymns help make Advent a time of expectation for Christ’s birth, rather than a frenzy of holiday tasks.

The Advent season begins four Sundays before Christmas and is observed each Sunday until Christmas Day. An Advent wreath with four candles and one Christ candle in the center
often is used to observe the weeks of Advent. One candle is lit each week until all are burning brightly on Christmas Day.

**Questions**
1. How might observance of Advent affect your holiday activities, consumption, and spending?
2. How might repentance, reconciliation, and covenant be a path home from exile?
3. How will you spiritually prepare during Advent?

**Sending**

**Generosity Statement**

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**Invitation to Next Meeting**

**Closing Hymn**

*CCS 404, “Canticle of the Turning”*

**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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Questions
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2. How might repentance, reconciliation, and covenant be a path home from exile?
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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* 523, “As We Gather at Your Table.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: Advent wreath, three dark-blue candles, one pink candle, one white candle

Today begins the season of Advent (Advent means “coming”). Advent is a time of preparing ourselves to receive the gift of Jesus Christ.

The Advent wreath is symbolic of that preparation time. Traditionally, the circle of evergreen reminds us of God’s never-ending love. The candles represent the coming of Christ’s light into the world.

A candle focuses us each week on peace, hope, love, or joy as we prepare for Christmas. There are four weekly candles; one is pink, three are purple or blue. The center white candle, called the Christ candle, is lighted on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Light the first purple or blue Advent candle.

During this season of preparation and expectation, move with peace, create peaceful spaces around you, and hold others in your prayer for peace.

Offer a prayer for peace this Advent season.

Ask the children to say, “May there be peace on Earth. Amen.”

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

December

Focus: Peace

Topic: Pursue Peace

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 Egypt (author Marilyn Davis).

Nurturing God,
Profound silence!
Even nature becomes silent.
Nothing stirs—not the wind, not the leaves.
Yet things move: Birds fly—silently,
Breath continues in each, silence broken by voice; footfall.
Peace reigns for a moment in time.
May we find the source that withholds peace. May we change this source to a peace-giving presence of love and forgiveness. May we find the strength to smile and open our arms in welcome and comfort. May we use profound silence as strength. growing, then moving into giving to others your peace that truly passes all understanding and barriers. This in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”
Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see
the return of the Lord to Zion.
Break forth together into singing,  
you ruins of Jerusalem;  
for the Lord has comforted his people,  
he has redeemed Jerusalem.  
The Lord has bared his holy arm  
before the eyes of all the nations;  
and all the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.

—Isaiah 52:7–10 NRSV

It is wonderful to receive good news after a time of difficulty. We welcome the messenger with relief and joy. So it is for the people of Israel as they receive a message of hope, redemption, and peace that comes to the prophet Isaiah in a vision. The people were in exile. In their fear and despair they felt far from God’s presence. Isaiah’s vision reminds them that all will be well. The time of exile will end, and God will reign in Zion.

Community of Christ, as a religious movement, began inspired by a vision of the peaceable kingdom of God on earth. Early members called this vision Zion.

...In Zion, everything is right. There is social and economic justice. Poverty is abolished. The people of Zion have learned how to be at peace with one another, to be a people of one heart and one mind. Zion is a holistic place, peace with justice and healing. Zion is God’s full peace on earth, an everything-is-right peace. The English word “peace” is too weak to describe the full peace of Zion. Peace in all its dimensions is better translated by the Hebrew word *shalom* or the Aramaic word used by Jesus: *shlama*.

Peace on earth is the consuming passion of God from the beginning of creation. And Jesus Christ, as God in human form, shows us in an individual life what it means to live and die for God’s kingdom of peace, Zion.

...The cause of Zion—the pursuit of peace on earth—has been the vision of hope for Community of Christ from its beginning in 1830...We confess we have not always been faithful to this vision...We live in hope for the full realization of God’s *shalom* on earth, where all creation lives in true peace.

—*In Pursuit of Peace: Community of Christ’s Journey*  
Herald Publishing House, 2016, pp.2–3

**Questions**

1. When have you experienced comfort in a time of darkness and despair?
2. What is the meaning of peace to you?
3. With the definition of peace/shalom in mind (More than the absence of conflict, shalom is a fullness and well-being in society and for individuals that is possible only through God’s generosity.) what actions can we take to pursue peace?
Sending

Generosity Statement

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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 308, “Come, Join in Mary’s Prophet Song”

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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1. When have you experienced comfort in a time of darkness and despair?
2. What is the meaning of peace to you?
3. With the definition of peace/shalom in mind (More than the absence of conflict, shalom is a fullness and well-being in society and for individuals that is possible only through God’s generosity.) what actions can we take to pursue peace?
Generosity Statement

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Reconciling God, Be present with us as we plan our spending. May we use our resources in ways that build healthy, happy relationships with you, with others, and with the Earth. May we remember the teachings of Jesus that challenge us to make lifestyle choices that are counter to our culture of accumulation and excess. Amen.
Communion Statement

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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 from Community of Christ Sings 523, “As We Gather at Your Table.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: a basket with small, smooth rocks with the word PEACE written on them in permanent marker (Sharpies work well.); Outreach International brochure (http://outreach-international.org)

Ask: What do you think when you hear the word peace? (Encourage children to share. Possible answers are peace and quiet, a stop to fighting, a peace sign).

Say: As disciples we share the peace of Jesus Christ. When Jesus taught about peace he was talking about some of these same things, but he meant more than quiet or a stop to fighting. Jesus was talking about peace that included forgiving, healing, ending hunger, caring for those who suffer, feeling welcome in community.

Working for peace in our world is a big job that seems to far outweigh anything any of us can do alone. But if we work together, each small pebble of peacemaking can make a difference.

Ask children for ideas that help bring peace, healing, and welcoming to others. Possible answers: We can pray for peace each day. We can make friends with new kids at school, we can forgive someone who hurt our feelings, and we can help the Community of Christ affiliate, Outreach International (http://outreach-international.org/).

Say: We each can work to share Christ’s peace in the world. Let’s each take a pebble of peace from the basket to help us remember to work for peace.

Ask children to share the pebbles with everyone in the group.

Thank the children for participating.

(adapted from www.buildfaith.org/pebbles-of-peace/)
Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

December

Focus: Peace

Topic: Christmas

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 Gambia.

Dear Maker of all life, Source of all goodness and healing,

We have called you many names, and even by those words we cannot capture your mystery; Spirit, Source, Forgive, Creator, Sustainer, Almighty, Lord God, Abba, Father, Mother. We seek your name because you have named us your own, and in that we have our life and being.

We thank you with humility for calling us, by placing in us a longing to be at one with your love, so that in each moment our restlessness summons us home. Grant us the peace in our hearts that creates the space to allow us to step into the active moments of service, not as people who are healed, but as the wounded healers who trust in your grace.

Give us wisdom and discernment to see the “God-radiance” in all persons, to recognize it readily and to reflect it to them, lest they wait alone having forgotten who they really are. May this Advent season be one in which the longing you placed in our hearts for oneness draws us closer to the One you sent to be with us, Emmanuel. Amen.

Sharing Around the Table

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to
whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

—Luke 2:1–20 NRSV

Jesus was born in a stable to poor, unmarried parents in an overcrowded village far from home. The angelic proclamation of Jesus’ birth was not to the rich and powerful, but to shepherds, lowly field hands. Certainly not the obvious choice for such an important message. Yet Luke tells how the shepherds rejoice and share this good news with others.

God surprises us by choosing humble people and circumstances to deliver the Messiah to the world. Through the ministry and message of Jesus, it is made clear that God cares for the poor, the immigrant, the outcast, and the marginalized. The Christmas story reminds us that God acts in unexpected ways.

Questions
1. How does the Christmas story speak hope to the outcast and marginalized of our world?
2. How has God acted unexpectedly in your life?

Sending

Generosity Statement

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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn
   CCS 415, “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”

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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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* 523, “As We Gather at Your Table.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: Advent wreath, three dark-blue candles, one pink candle, one white candle (center of wreath), small candy canes

Instructions: Light the four Advent candles.
Say: On the night Jesus was born angels appeared to shepherds. who were on a hillside. The angels told the shepherds they had good news! Joyful news! Has anyone ever told you good news?

The good news was that God was present in the world through Jesus, who that night had been born in a manger. The shepherds were excited! They went to see the baby Jesus, who was in a manger in Bethlehem.

Hold up a candy cane so it looks like a “J.”
Say: Today we will share the joyful news of Jesus with others.

Give each child several candy canes. Have the children share with the group. When everyone has a candy cane, light the white Christ candle in the center of the Advent wreath. 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

December

Focus: Peace

Topic: Peace of Christ

Gathering
Welcome

Prayer for Peace

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

Today we pray for world peace.

God of all nations,
We pray for all the peoples of the Earth,
For those who are consumed in mutual hatred and bitterness,
For those who make bloody war upon their neighbors,
For those who tyrannously oppress,
For those who groan under cruelty and subjection.
We pray for all those who bear rule and responsibility,
For outcast tribes, the backward and downtrodden,
For the ignorant, wretched, and the enslaved,
We implore, teach humankind to live together in peace,
No one exploiting the weak, no one hating the strong.
Each nation working out its own destiny,
Unfettered, self-respecting, and fearless.
Teach us to be worthy of freedom,
Free from social wrong, free from individual oppression and contempt,
Pure of heart and hand, despising none, defrauding none,
Giving to all people in all the dealings of life
The honor we owe to those who are your children,
Wherever and however they are to be found.
May we find Jesus and his Spirit of peace among all of your Peoples, in all nations, and may we be counted among those Who proclaim not only his birth, but his life, his message, his way.
Amen.
Sharing Around the Table

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.

—Doctrine and Covenants 164:9b

Sharing the peace of Jesus Christ involves generously and compassionately offering witness, ministry, sacraments, and community life that reconciles and restores people to right or righteous relationships with God, themselves, others, and creation. This holistic approach to proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel is faithful to our best understanding of God’s will. This approach is the fullest meaning of restoration.

...When we effectively proclaim Jesus Christ by sharing our witness, ministries, and sacraments, and promote Christ-centered communities of justice and peacefulness, we are sharing the peace of Jesus Christ.


Questions

1. How have you experienced spiritual or relational transformation?
2. What does it mean to compassionately offer community life that restores people to right relationships?
3. How do you proclaim and demonstrate the peace of Christ?

Sending

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Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 149, “My Peace”

Closing Prayer
Optional Additions Depending on Group

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

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Today we pray for world peace.

God of all nations,
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For those who are consumed in mutual hatred and bitterness,
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In preparation let’s sing from Community of Christ Sings 523, “As We Gather at Your Table.”
**Thoughts for Children**

Materials: building blocks  
Ask two children to build a structure with the blocks. Have another child knock down the structure.  
Ask: Was knocking down the structure a peaceful thing to do? (No).  
Was it fair or kind? (No).  
God’s vision for creation is shalom. Shalom is a peace that includes justice (fairness, people having what they need).  
Where have you felt or seen that kind of peace? (Wait for responses.)  
How do people act when they’re trying to live peace or “shalom”?  
How can we help bring about shalom?  
If we ever wonder how to act, we just need to look to Jesus Christ and follow his example.  
What could we do about the blocks to bring peace? (Help rebuild the structure, help pick things up, say we are sorry.).  
Jesus said that following him is not always easy. But we know God will be with us as we help create shalom wherever we are.  
Thank the children for participating.

(Adapted from www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/Focus-moments.pdf)