



Ministry
and
Priesthood
in Community of Christ

PART I: Theological Foundations

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Introduction

This material provides the conceptual theological and organizational foundation for the support ministries, administrative processes, and educational resources to be developed related to ministry and priesthood. Educational courses, administrative policies and procedures, motivational events, and all communications related to ministry and priesthood should be aligned with its contents.

The information is presented in two parts. Part I focuses on theological foundations. Part II focuses on support ministries, including administrative structure and processes.

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PART I: Theological Foundations

Theological Foundation: God’s Nature and Redemptive Activity

Understanding ministry and priesthood in Community of Christ begins with exploring God’s nature and redemptive activity in creation.

We start by humbly recognizing that fully comprehending God’s nature is beyond our ability to grasp completely. However, it is important to establish a basic understanding of God’s nature on which more particular beliefs and faithful actions can be built. Our Basic Beliefs statement on God provides such a foundation:

We believe in one living God who meets us in the testimony of Israel, is revealed in Jesus Christ, and moves through all creation as the Holy Spirit. We affirm the Trinity—God who is a community of three persons. All things that exist owe their being to God: mystery beyond understanding and love beyond imagination. This God alone is worthy of our worship.

—Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs, 3rd. ed.

Many books have been written on the background and meaning of the concepts in this paragraph. In this material we will focus on the meaning of the sentence: “We affirm the Trinity—God who is a community of three persons.”

The “three persons” referred to—using classical theological language—are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are one God. The “three persons” have distinct “identities” that exist in inseparable relationship. The meaning of “persons” is not what commonly is used to refer to individual humans. When we use “persons” to describe the Trinity, we mean that God is personal, and we experience God’s personal character through God’s triune nature.

One way to illustrate God’s nature comes from Christian teachings originated by Gregory of Nyssa (335–396 CE). Think and then speak a loving thought. The “thought” is like God, the source of all that is. The spoken word is like Jesus Christ, the word made

29 tangible. The breath that carries the word into the world is like the Holy Spirit. However,
30 we must not stop here. We also must understand that the source, the word, and the
31 breath are one God.

32 Of course, any analogy ultimately falls short of the truth. Despite our best efforts to
33 explain it, God’s nature is a mystery. If we think we have completely comprehended
34 God, then what we have comprehended is not God.

35 Nevertheless, affirming God’s triune nature is important to our exploration of
36 ministry and priesthood. Belief in God’s triune nature stresses that God is relational and
37 that God is divine community. Daniel L. Migliore puts it well:

38 **In all eternity God lives and loves as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In God’s own eternal
39 being there is movement, life, personal relationship, and giving and receiving of love.**

40 *—Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, pg. 77*

41 The word *community* means “with unity” or “in oneness.” God, a “community of
42 three persons,” means that God “in three persons” lives eternally in mutual love,
43 purpose, devotion, and communion. Community also means God’s nature has room for
44 distinct “identities” that are united in boundless love and are fully inclusive. This insight
45 has clear implications for how we understand ministry and congregational life.

46 So, it is not only appropriate, but important, to profess that God’s nature has been
47 revealed as divine community—God/Jesus Christ/Holy Spirit. Of course, we are not
48 talking about the imperfect communities populated by human beings. We are
49 highlighting our belief that God’s nature embodies the blessings of love, relationships,
50 Unity in Diversity, and true community.

51 God’s relationship to humanity involves calling for expressions of divine nature in
52 creation. Relationships of receiving and giving love, devotion, Unity in Diversity, and
53 shared vision are the foundation of sacred community.

54 True community bears witness to God’s nature and ultimate purpose for creation.
55 The purpose of creation is to share in God’s love, generosity, and inclusiveness of
56 differences. God is present and acts in human history to reconcile the whole creation to
57 God’s purposes through loving relationships in sacred communities that reflect God’s
58 true nature.

59 Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection reveal God’s nature and purposes. Jesus
60 Christ is God in the flesh through suffering and sacrificial love to reconcile and redeem
61 creation. Jesus’ acts of compassion, forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, sacrifice, and
62 promoting true community reveal God’s way of bringing salvation and peace to the
63 whole creation.

64 Our understanding of God as triune has major implications for our beliefs about
65 ministry and priesthood. God lives in the divine triune community. God acts to redeem
66 creation from destruction and death through suffering love, as seen in the crucifixion of
67 Jesus, and the birth of human communities that reveal to the greatest degree possible

68 God’s nature and will. Community of Christ understandings of ministry and priesthood
69 arise from the fundamental “in community” and “for community” nature of God
70 revealed in Jesus Christ and confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

71 As we experience and respond to God’s nature and redemptive activity, especially as
72 revealed in Jesus Christ, we become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ in community with
73 others. We understand the importance of coming to faithful discipleship through
74 community in Christ or Christian community.

75 As we continue our journey of discipleship—in and through Christian community—
76 we become more and more aware of our giftedness and growing capacity to respond to
77 God’s generosity. We hear more clearly God’s call for us to contribute to the fulfillment
78 of divine purposes. This growing sense of call is often experienced as a desire or even
79 urgency to engage more fully in ministries of witness, compassion, reconciliation, justice,
80 peacemaking, and community-building that reflect God’s nature and will.

81 **Abiding in God’s Love**

82 **God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.**

83

—1 John 4:16

84 Perspectives on ministry and priesthood often emphasize what we should be
85 “doing.” We tend to equate doing and achievement with faithfulness. Actually, ministry
86 and priesthood should initially and then, continually, be grounded in “being.” Being is
87 about who we are and who we are becoming in relationship with others and God.

88 **From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we**
89 **once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if**
90 **anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see,**
91 **everything has become new.**

92

—2 Corinthians 5:16–17

93 True discipleship and faithful ministry are neither sustainable nor fruitful unless they
94 flow from “abiding in God’s love” and immersion in the “living waters” of God’s
95 revelation in Jesus Christ as confirmed by the Holy Spirit and expressed through the
96 church community. Consistently living or dwelling in God’s holy and just love, which is
97 much more than any human love, frees disciples to share divine love in the world more
98 faithfully and fully.

99 Before Jesus began his public ministry he was shaped by the scripture, teaching,
100 sacred rituals, and spiritual practices of his faith community. This spiritual formation
101 occurred in his home, synagogue, at the temple, and in nature. It included prayer, fasting,
102 study, solitude, conversation, and genuine community life.

103 When Jesus was baptized he experienced himself from God’s perspective as the
104 “beloved son” and received the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit. These encounters

105 with God’s presence, holy love, and calling were not isolated events. They were aspects
106 of ongoing spiritual formation over several years. Even the rigors of desert solitude and
107 wrestling with temptations of human ego and willfulness were essential to his emergence
108 as God’s Messiah.

109 When Jesus publicly announced his identifying mission (Luke 4:18–19), what he said
110 he would do came from his awareness that “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has
111 anointed me...” His ministry was not motivated by human ego or good intentions. Jesus’
112 call to mission emerged from abiding in God’s love, Spirit, and vision for creation.

113 Those who engage in Christ’s mission are to spend ample time abiding in the life and
114 love of God. The following scripture expresses this principle especially well:

115 **I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be**
116 **strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may**
117 **dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray**
118 **that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth**
119 **and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ surpasses knowledge,**
120 **so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

121 **—Ephesians 3:16–19**

122 Being rooted and grounded in God’s love is essential to faithful discipleship and
123 ministry. We do this by having our inner beings strengthened through the power of the
124 Holy Spirit, and having Christ increasingly dwell in our hearts. Intentionally abiding in
125 divine love results in the “doing” of effective ministry aligned with Christ’s mission.

126 The church offers resources for seekers, disciples, and priesthood members to help
127 them grow spiritually and dwell deeply in the life of God. Find helpful resources at:

- 128 • www.CofChrist.org/spiritualformation/practices.asp
- 129 • www.CofChrist.org/spiritualformation/resoures.asp
- 130 • www.CofChrist.org/dfg

131 **Jesus Christ’s Mission**

132 God’s nature is relational. The mission and ministry of Jesus Christ are relational.
133 Mission and ministry focus on reconciling people to God and one another through
134 loving, just, and peaceable relationships. Reconciling and redeeming people,
135 relationships, social systems, cultures, and the whole creation is Jesus Christ’s mission.

136 We look to Jesus Christ to show us how to engage in relationships that express
137 God’s nature and purposes. We need to understand Jesus’ vision of mission to
138 understand ministry and priesthood.

139 While many scripture passages could be cited, the most comprehensive statement of
140 Jesus Christ’s vision of mission is found in the Gospel of Luke:

141 **When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue**
142 **on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the**

143 prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it
144 was written:

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

148 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all
149 in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this
150 scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

151 —Luke 4:16–21

152 Faithful ministry and priesthood are rooted in the mission of Jesus Christ, which is
153 none other than God’s vision for the world. The phrases in Jesus’ mission statement
154 define the types of ministry to which we are called as disciples and priesthood members.
155 If we truly experience our “belovedness” through the Spirit’s witness and sense God’s
156 call, then we will find ourselves increasingly engaged in Christ’s mission.

157 **Community of Christ’s Mission**

158 We do not engage in mission alone, but in community with others. Community of
159 Christ’s mission is based on Jesus’ mission (Luke 4:16–21) and how he conducted his
160 mission. This is highlighted in our worldwide mission statement: *We proclaim Jesus Christ*
161 *and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.*

162 Our mission statement calls us to initiate and nurture relationships that witness of
163 Jesus Christ through word and action. This is coupled closely with the call to promote
164 communities of Christ’s peace that demonstrate all aspects of the gospel in real life.

165 Our mission can be summed up in an even shorter phrase: “Share the peace of Jesus
166 Christ.” This phrase is used with the understanding that the “peace of Jesus Christ”
167 includes personal, interpersonal, and global dimensions of the gospel.

168 Our statement of mission incorporates all aspects of Jesus Christ’s mission. Our
169 mission is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to promote Christ-centered
170 communities where those who are poor, captive, and in despair can experience joy, hope,
171 love, justice, and peace. When we pursue the whole mission of Jesus Christ we are being
172 faithful to the nature and will of God.

173 To help us understand how to implement mission, we have taken key phrases in
174 Jesus’ mission statement (Luke 4:16–19) and expressed them as Mission Initiatives that
175 can be understood in many languages throughout the church.

- 176 1. Invite People to Christ
- 177 2. Abolish Poverty, End Suffering
- 178 3. Pursue Peace on Earth

179 To accomplish these Mission Initiatives we:

- 180 4. Develop Disciples to Serve
- 181 5. Experience Congregations in Mission

182 The Living Christ calls Community of Christ to pursue his whole mission by
183 focusing on these five Mission Initiatives. Focusing our mission through the five Mission
184 Initiatives in all aspects of the church's life is very important! Inspired counsel to the
185 church stresses that "The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey
186 ahead" (Doctrine and Covenants 164:9f).

187 The five Mission Initiatives are long-term, church-wide initiatives. They clearly define
188 what the focus of our efforts should be if we desire to be fully faithful to Christ's
189 mission. Just as Christ incarnated or embodied the nature and will of God, we are called
190 to incarnate or embody the mission of Christ in our lives.

191 **Membership, Discipleship, and Mission**

192 Jesus Christ invites people to be disciples who share in his life and mission. The
193 primary call of Christ is to faithful discipleship in community with other disciples. The
194 call of this faithful community of disciples is to express to the greatest degree possible
195 the nature and love of God. All other callings, including priesthood calls, come from the
196 eternal call of Jesus Christ to "follow me" in mission.

197 People respond to Christ's call through baptism and, in Community of Christ,
198 confirmation. The prayer of confirmation bears "witness to the ministry of the Holy
199 Spirit" (Doctrine and Covenants 164:2e) and confers membership in the church.
200 Through baptism and confirmation the call to discipleship in community with other
201 disciples is recognized and publicly expressed. People offer their lives in loving ministry
202 patterned after Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit's promise that as Christ lives in us we
203 find ourselves living in Christ. Again, it is important to emphasize that we come to
204 genuine discipleship in and through the church community! Baptism includes a basic
205 commitment to live the life of Christ in community with other followers. Discipleship is
206 never just an individual or private pursuit.

207 True discipleship involves growing in Christ-like character, love, concern, generosity,
208 and mission. It includes discovering and generously sharing one's giftedness through the
209 faith community to support Christ's mission. As stated in Doctrine and Covenants
210 119:8b:

211 **All are called according to the gifts of God unto them; and to the intent that all may**
212 **labor together...**

213 Discipleship is an inward journey of development, formation, and becoming. It is
214 also an outward journey where disciples are sent into the world to be Jesus' hands, feet,
215 and voice.

216 Disciples pursue Christ’s mission through ministries that are focused on inviting
217 others to Christ, abolishing poverty and ending needless suffering, pursuing peace on
218 Earth, developing others to serve, and responding with others in the church community
219 in mission.

220 In summary, here is a key principle: God calls people into a way of life where one
221 covenants with God and the faith community to follow the message and ministry of
222 Jesus Christ. This is discipleship!

223 **Disciple Ministry, Mission, and Priesthood**

224 Some disciples are called by God and ordained through the church to particular
225 priesthood responsibilities. Priesthood offices and callings are gifts from God to the
226 church for the sake of the church’s life and mission. These gifts are given to provide for
227 consistent and effective proclamation of the gospel and for equipping the whole
228 community of disciples (church) for ministries that support Christ’s mission.

229 Ordination to priesthood involves a covenant relationship with God and the church
230 community. It involves committing one’s life to bring blessing to others. Bringing
231 blessing to others occurs through the sacraments and through leading an exemplary life
232 of discipleship, including aspects of inward and outward formation.

233 Some may ask, “Why priesthood?” Throughout scripture we encounter stories of
234 God’s movement in the lives of individuals, calling them to positions of ministry and
235 leadership. In Hebrew scriptures the call often came in the form of a covenant. In New
236 Testament scriptures Jesus called 12 individuals to provide leadership and ministry to the
237 church as a broader expression of God’s movement in the world. As the Christian
238 movement evolved many others were called to responsibilities of servant leadership
239 and ministry.

240 Community of Christ rests on this rich foundation of particular calling and response.
241 All are called to express their gifts as disciples for the enrichment of the faith community
242 and world. Priesthood members covenant to provide specific forms of ministry and
243 servant leadership necessary to sustain and lead the community as an expression of
244 God’s mission in the world. Those called to priesthood responsibility stand with—not
245 apart from—those seeking to live out the gospel in community. By committing to a life
246 of servant leadership, priesthood members create pathways of hope and opportunity for
247 others to respond to the call to ministry.

248 Priesthood calling is misunderstood if it is seen as a private matter or a personal right
249 apart from the church’s life in Jesus Christ. The meaning of priesthood is inseparably
250 linked to the life of the church and its mission, which is Christ’s mission. Doctrine and
251 Covenants 163:6a states:

252 **The priesthood shall be composed of people of humility and integrity who are willing to**
253 **extend themselves in service for others and for the well-being of the faith community.**

254 Priesthood is not about elevating oneself above others, be they seekers, members, or
255 other priesthood members. It is a call to humbly serve others and to equip them for
256 Christ's mission.

257 It is important to emphasize that no one priesthood member can fully represent
258 Jesus Christ adequately. It takes all disciples and priesthood members to begin to
259 represent Jesus Christ in the world. Priesthood members are called as a team of servants
260 to make Christ real and believable in the world.

261 Paul's brilliant theology of the church as the "body" is especially relevant to
262 this point.

263 **For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body,**
264 **though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all**
265 **baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink**
266 **of one Spirit.**

267 **Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say,**
268 **"Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any**
269 **less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not**
270 **belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole**
271 **body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where**
272 **would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each**
273 **one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?**

274 **Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed**
275 **in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then**
276 **gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are**
277 **all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess**
278 **gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater**
279 **gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.**

280 **—1 Corinthians 12:12–19, 27–31**

281 What do we learn about Christian community, discipleship, and priesthood ministries
282 from this passage?

- 283 • Disciples of Jesus Christ come from many backgrounds. We come from many
284 cultures. We come as poor or rich. We come as male and female. All are invited.
285 None is excluded.
- 286 • We become one through baptism in the one Spirit of Christ. We become Christ's
287 one body. Old divisions are done away in a new humanity, a new community.
- 288 • In the one body disciples are like different organs: arms, legs, eyes, noses. We are the
289 hands, feet, and eyes of Jesus. There is diversity and specialization in the body, but
290 no superiority or inferiority. All organs (members) are dignified, useful, and needed.
291 There is no room for jealousy or rivalry.

292 • Some disciples are called to particular responsibilities according to giftedness. There
293 is a God-appointed order, but equal respect is accorded to all members of the body.

294 The passage ends with these words: “And I will show you a still more excellent way”
295 (1 Corinthians 12:31). What is the more excellent way?

296 What follows is Paul’s “hymn to love” that begins with these verses:

297 **If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy**
298 **gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all**
299 **mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do**
300 **not have love, I am nothing.**

—1 Corinthians 13:1–2

302 At the heart of ministry is *agape love*, a love that is patient and kind—not envious,
303 boastful, or arrogant. A love that is not irritable or resentful, that does not rejoice in
304 wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. A love that bears all things, believes all things,
305 hopes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4–7). Love, expressed in different
306 ways and through different gifts and roles, is the heart of all priesthood callings.

307 The different priesthood offices also have this purpose according to the writer of
308 Ephesians:

309 **The gifts [Christ] gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some**
310 **evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for**
311 **building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the**
312 **knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.**

—Ephesians 4:11–13

314 Our task as ministers is therefore to equip members to serve, to build up the church,
315 and to bring all to unity of faith and knowledge of Christ. The task of ministry is to
316 enable all of us, together, to become more like Jesus.

317 *One-person* ministry is not faithful to the New Testament. *One-team* ministry is
318 faithful, especially when each office expresses an aspect of Christ’s love for all.
319 Partnerships in ministry are necessary, or the body suffers and is diminished.

320 If Trinity is the beginning of Christian community, revealing God’s nature and will,
321 then becoming the body of Christ is its end and fruit.

322 **Priesthood: Gift and Response**

323 **God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so**
324 **that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved**
325 **us...**

—1 John 4:9–10

327 *God is love* (1 John 4:8). God loves us before we love God. All loving begins and ends
328 with God through an eternal cycle of receiving, giving, and receiving.

329 Divine love reveals itself in many ways seen and unseen. However, the clearest
330 revelation of God’s love is Jesus Christ. Christ is God’s never-ending gift to the world
331 that brings hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, and fullness of life to all who graciously
332 receive and generously respond.

333 Provision for priesthood offices and callings is a divine gift given to and through the
334 church. They are continuing expressions of God’s grace and eternal purposes in creation.
335 God, who loves us beyond understanding, whose love was dramatically revealed in Jesus
336 Christ, continues to love us by providing for grace-filled sacraments, compassionate
337 ministries, and sacred communities that draw us close to God and others so the church
338 can fulfill its calling in the world.

339 Priesthood is a divine gift graciously given to and through the church to empower
340 the whole community of disciples to engage in Christ’s mission. Therefore, priesthood
341 does not belong to an individual. Priesthood belongs to Jesus Christ, who desires to
342 share every good gift of God with the church and creation.

343 God acts to call people to priesthood through the discernment and approval of the
344 church community. In no sense does ordination to priesthood make a person
345 independent of the church because it is through the church and for its mission that
346 individuals are called.

347 God not only calls people to priesthood in general, God calls people according to
348 the particular gifts and potential God graciously has given them. The phrase, “*all are called*
349 *according to their gifts*,” is not an affirmation of human merit, but of God’s grace that is
350 expressed in this truth: God does not call people to ministry and priesthood unless God
351 already has placed in their lives the capacity to respond. Priesthood ministry is first and
352 foremost a stewardship of response to the grace of God, the giver of all good gifts.

353 **Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift**
354 **each of you has received.**

—1 Peter 4:10

356 **Priesthood Ordination**

357 Priesthood is conferred on an individual—after necessary approvals—in the
358 sacrament of ordination through the laying on of hands. The sacrament of ordination is
359 not the end, but the beginning of the journey of priesthood ministry. Priesthood may or
360 may not be a lifetime calling. Sometimes a priesthood member’s calling is for a period of
361 time to meet a particular need.

362 Essentially, ordination means that one commits oneself—the totality of one’s life—
363 in response to God’s call issued through the church, to faithful servant ministry for the
364 benefit of the church and its mission. Priesthood calling is not something just in effect
365 when a person is functioning in a formal priesthood role. Priesthood calling is expressed

366 through all aspects of one’s life on a daily basis. Opportunities for priesthood ministry
367 abound when one sees each day as an opportunity to serve the needs of others in the
368 Spirit of the Living Christ.

369 Priesthood calling and ordination involve God’s grace-filled initiative in human life
370 and humble human response. Therefore, ordination is a sacred act of covenant-making
371 that includes God’s promise to faithfully bless priesthood members and the church
372 community as priesthood members faithfully serve in their roles.

373 Since the process leading to calling and ordination involves the discernment and
374 affirmation of the church, and the purpose of priesthood is ministry to and through the
375 church, another dimension of covenant-making occurs. Through ordination, priesthood
376 members covenant with the church to function according to the roles and expectations
377 for priesthood ministry established by the church.

378 Because priesthood members are authorized by the church to represent it publically
379 and privately, they become official representatives of the church. Therefore, priesthood
380 members are accountable for communicating and upholding the church’s *public faith* as
381 expressed in its official documents and statements.

382 In preaching, worship, and celebration of sacraments, priesthood members are
383 responsible for seeing the gospel of Jesus Christ is responsibly, consistently, and
384 affirmatively shared. This does not mean private opinions or disagreements have no
385 place in the church; rather, it means personal opinions and disagreements have no place
386 in the public proclamation and sacramental sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ.

387 **Priesthood Authority**

388 People often talk about authority when discussing priesthood structure, offices,
389 ordination, and ministries. When speaking of authority we should keep first things first,
390 or our perception of authority can too easily become ego-centered and self-serving.

391 Priesthood authority originates with God, especially through God present with us in
392 Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the great “high priest” whose ministry is permanent. Christ is
393 the author and sustainer of a “better covenant” that does not end (Hebrews 7:22–24).

394 **Consequently, he [Jesus Christ] is able for all time to save those who approach God**
395 **through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.**

—Hebrews 7:25

397 The foundation of priesthood authority is humility and ministerial competency
398 through which Jesus Christ is re-presented to people time and time again. The primary
399 purpose of such ministry is to bless people’s lives and to reconcile the world with God’s
400 purposes and vision for the future.

401 Priesthood authority is the opposite of how authority generally is understood.
402 Instead of authority based on power and position, genuine priesthood authority is based

403 on the example of Jesus Christ, who humbly knelt before his disciples and lovingly
404 washed their feet before blessing all creation through his sacrifice on the cross.

405 **Truly authoritative priesthood ministry emerges from a growing capacity to bring**
406 **blessing to others.**

407 **—Doctrine and Covenants 163:6b**

408 **It is my will that my priesthood be made up of those who have abiding faith and desire**
409 **to serve me with all their hearts, in humility and with great devotion.**

410 **—Doctrine and Covenants 156:8a**

411 Another aspect of priesthood authority is sacramental authority. Ordination to
412 priesthood designates people who are authorized by the church to administer the
413 sacraments. Some sacraments have legal, as well as spiritual, implications. The authority
414 to represent Christ and the church through sacramental ministry is a sacred trust that
415 demands a high level of integrity and faithfulness to the policies and procedures of
416 the church.

417 One dimension of priesthood authority we must not overlook is moral authority.
418 This is the authority that comes from the alignment of one’s private and public life with
419 the church’s mission, Enduring Principles, beliefs, and ethics. A lack of such alignment
420 diminishes the credibility and effectiveness of the church’s witness of Jesus Christ. It
421 reduces one’s spiritual standing in the eyes of members and friends to truly represent
422 Christ in the world.

423 Stressing the importance of moral authority does not mean priesthood members
424 must be perfect, which is not possible anyway. Nor does it mean priesthood members
425 must avoid mistakes. We all disappoint ourselves and others at times when we fall short
426 of our potential and aspirations. A central theme of the good news of the gospel is
427 forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ in the present. This is as true for
428 priesthood members as it is for others.

429 Moral authority is about the overall direction of our lives. How are we growing in
430 Christ-like character and grace? Are we embodying the church’s Enduring Principles and
431 ethics so that our priesthood ministry has integrity in the eyes of others? How do we
432 show that Christ’s mission matters most, including resisting behaviors that do not
433 contribute to moral life and relationships in Christ?

434 **Priesthood Faithfulness**

435 **Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries.**
436 **Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.**

437 **—1 Corinthians 4:1–2**

438 Most priesthood members are trustworthy and faithful to their responsibilities. As a
439 result, people, families, congregations, and communities are blessed through sensitive,

440 competent, creative ministries of priesthood members who faithfully serve. The church
441 is deeply grateful for such ministry because it magnifies the impact of our mission in
442 the world.

443 Faithful priesthood ministry also blesses priesthood members. Nothing is more
444 meaningful than growing in Christ-like service as we develop our giftedness and capacity
445 to be living vessels for God's grace to bless others. Through such response we find our
446 truest selves created by God to participate in the fulfillment of divine purposes. As a
447 result joy, hope, love, and peace become enduring qualities in the lives of faithful
448 priesthood members.

449 *Priesthood faithfulness* is about trustworthy, accountable, and competent ministry. The
450 church provides support and resources to help priesthood members find a fullness of
451 joy, meaning, and effectiveness in their callings. Since God calls priesthood members
452 through the church for the sake of the church's mission, the church is called to nurture,
453 equip, and support priesthood members for effective and faithful ministry.

454 Equipping and supporting priesthood members for faithful ministry takes
455 many forms:

- 456 • Preparing and distributing resources for spiritual formation and growth in
457 discipleship.
- 458 • Educating about ministry and priesthood calling in church life.
- 459 • Providing clear processes for pastors discerning and approving priesthood calls.
- 460 • Clarifying and upholding priesthood member expectations and accountabilities.
- 461 • Providing discernment, spiritual formation, mentoring, and educational opportunities
462 prior to ordination.
- 463 • Offering spiritual, pastoral, educational, and mentoring support after ordination.
- 464 • Managing priesthood statuses to respond to changing life circumstances.
- 465 • Offering meaningful opportunities to reaffirm and deepen covenant commitments to
466 priesthood ministry.

467 All priesthood ministries, processes, and opportunities have as their primary goal the
468 effective functioning of priesthood members.

469 **Foundations for Covenant Principles**

470 All aspects of the church's support for priesthood faithfulness are built on a
471 foundation of **Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry**. The
472 foundational principles listed below arise from our best understanding of what
473 contributes to faithful priesthood ministry. Consistent application of these principles
474 creates the maximum opportunity to experience fulfilling, effective, and joyous
475 priesthood ministry throughout one's life.

476

477 **Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry**
478 *for all priesthood members and ordinands*

Priesthood faithfulness begins with faithful discipleship. Faithful discipleship emerges from ongoing faith and spiritual formation. The constant call is to follow the Living Christ and to abide in increasing measure in God's love and vision for creation. Being comes before doing.

The following expectations will help me serve as a faithful priesthood member. In response to God's sacred call and priesthood authority granted by Community of Christ, I covenant to:

- Engage in ongoing faith and spiritual practices to deepen my relationship with God and others through study and spiritual formation.
- Affirm and promote Christ's mission of invitation, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking; help prepare others for Christ's mission; and partner with other priesthood in leading congregations in Christ's mission.
- Provide ministry consistent with the church's identity, mission, message, and beliefs as expressed in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, 3rd ed. (www.CofChrist.org/ourfaith/SharingCofChrist-ed.pdf) and other current official documents.
- Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle.
- Model generosity as a regular contributor to mission tithes (local, mission center, and worldwide ministries) according to my true capacity.
- Protect the safety and well-being of children and youth, including, where applicable, being a Registered Children and Youth Worker.
- Participate in congregational life or similar church expressions when congregational life is not available.
- Participate annually in educational or spiritual-formation experiences offered by my congregation, mission center, apostolic mission field, or World Church.
- Develop and implement a plan for ministry that uses my gifts to advance Christ's mission.

479

480 **Serving Together to Fulfill Christ’s Mission**

481 Each day disciples choose to make Christ’s mission theirs as they engage in making
482 the five Mission Initiatives a reality in their communities, congregations, and the world.
483 All disciples are called to serve together to fulfill Christ’s mission.

484 Disciples and priesthood members holistically strive to achieve Christ’s mission.
485 Each office has particular responsibilities and shared ministries with the other offices of
486 disciple and priesthood. “Serving Together to Fulfill Christ’s Mission” illustrates how
487 disciples and priesthood members serve together in seven essential, mission-focused
488 areas. (See the *Ministry and Priesthood* flyer for detailed information.)

- 489 • Represent Christ primarily as ministers...
- 490 • Especially proclaim and promote...
- 491 • Particularly minister with...
- 492 • Support sacramental ministries by...
- 493 • Promote community by...
- 494 • Promote justice and peacemaking by...
- 495 • Create ministry partnerships with...