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INTRODUCTION: INVITATION TO EXPLORE

In April 2019, the World Conference passed World Conference Resolution 1319.

Nonviolence
Adopted April 12, 2019

1319. Whereas, the call of Jesus Christ has led Community of Christ to learn from acts of violence in its early history and to seek to embody the peace of Christ in the world; and

Whereas, any discussion on the ethics of violence in the current political and social context can polarize people and provoke worries, concerns, and strong emotions; and

Whereas, Community of Christ has declared itself to be a peace church in the Restoration tradition, affirming the Worth of All Persons and lifting up the cause of Zion; and

Whereas, Community of Christ independently and ecumenically already is exploring different positions on the use of violence; be it therefore

Resolved, that, over the next three years Community of Christ members and leaders discuss the role nonviolence plays in the pursuit of “peace on and for the Earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:1d) and in the life and mission of the church; be it further

Resolved, that, scriptural, theological, and historical discussion resources on the principles of nonviolence be produced and suggested for members and friends of Community of Christ as part of our continued commitment to peace education and advocacy; and be it further

Resolved, that, the position of Community of Christ on nonviolence be referred to the First Presidency for a report and/or statement to be presented to the next World Conference.
President Stephen M. Veazey began the discussion the church committed to in the first resolved during his closing message to the 2019 World Conference:

“Scripture testifies that all creation waits ‘with eager longing’ (Romans 8:19) for peaceful humanity to appear on the world stage to turn the tide of hate, agony, and destruction. With that in mind, the central question raised by our text looms even larger. Are we moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One? Or are we retreating from Jesus by reverting to our old humanity and its destructive ways of interacting with others and creation?”

Naming Jesus Christ the peaceful One upholds the true nature of who the Gospels tell us Jesus was and who we should be as His disciples. As we learn from the Gospels, many of the Jews were expecting a Messiah that would challenge the authorities with power. Jesus’ focus on ushering in the reign of God resonated but his message of love and inclusion and his nonviolent methods were a surprise. The Gospel story causes us to question what expectations we might have levied on Jesus.

Community of Christ is guided by our identity, mission, message, and beliefs. As we consider the nine Enduring Principles, it becomes clear that Jesus, the peaceful One, first embodied these principles and therefore so must we as his disciples. Similarly, the mission of Jesus focused on inviting people into God’s kingdom on earth, breaking down systems that disadvantaged others, and speaking truth to power using nonviolent methods to pursue peace.

WCR 1319 acknowledges that Community of Christ is committed to “Lifting up the cause of Zion.” The question before the church is what is the relationship between nonviolence and the peaceful reign of God on earth? The question posed by President Veazey has become the church’s guiding question helping us reflect on how we are doing as disciples of Jesus Christ in responding to our calling. On the surface, the guiding question looks simple to answer. It is a yes or no question. Of course we are moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One, right? But wait, are we?

The guiding question leads us to fully explore who Jesus, the peaceful One, was and is. This is an ongoing journey of seeking understanding to know Jesus and to lay down our preconceived notions of who Jesus should be. People’s preconceived notions of who the Messiah should be got in the way of recognizing Jesus when he walked the Earth. Let us learn from this. The guiding question is like a magnifying glass that helps us look at how we need to align our attitude, behavior, and actions to better align with Jesus, the peaceful One, as expressed through the identity, mission, message, and beliefs of Community of Christ.

Our identity, mission, message, and beliefs uphold the foundational nature of God’s peaceful reign on Earth, the peaceable kingdom, or Zion. We all share a vision for a better future. The challenge comes in deciding how to faithfully follow Jesus, the peaceful One, in creating God’s vision of Shalom. In that regard, conversations about nonviolence are imperative as we consider this challenge.

This resource was produced as part of a series of resources developed in response to the first Resolved in WCR 1319. Other multimedia resources have been produced to guide the discussion.

As the church studies this resource, may we open our hearts and minds to fully understand and embody Jesus, the peaceful One. And may the Holy Spirit bless and guide our courageous exploration and respectful conversations about the role of nonviolence in our response in pursuing God’s vision of Shalom.
KEY SCRIPTURES
You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times… But I say to you …
—Matthew 5:21-22
If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.
—1 Corinthians 13

HEBREW SCRIPTURES AND ISRAEL’S STORY
In his book, The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium, Walter Wink recounts ancient creation stories about gods engaged in gruesome cosmic battles. Great systems of domination evolved from these tumultuous origins, beginning with the powerful empires of Mesopotamia from around 3000 BC. In this worldview of domination by imposing one’s rule over others, kingdoms rose and fell based on power.

The Hebrew story contrasts with this context of violent domination. Their creation story told of God creating the universe solely by the power of his word and declaring that it was to be a good place for humankind (Genesis 1). God made a covenant with Abraham that by being God’s people, Abraham’s descendants would be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). It is a story of God upholding that covenant by redeeming them from oppression in Egypt and preserving them as a people. Israel was counterculture in the ancient world because it was defined by a covenant with God. Other kingdoms were defined by their place in the hierarchical web based on who had power over whom.

Israel wavered between wanting to be a power-driven kingdom like its neighbors and being covenant people called to be a blessing to the world. The Hebrew scriptures reflect this struggle. Stories of their warrior God protecting them from their enemies through vengeance and violence exist side-by-side with stories of a loving God who sought the welfare of all.

Sometimes Israel chose to embrace the culture of domination. Then the prophets stepped forward to remind them they were God’s covenant people delivered from captivity. As covenant people they were to take care of one another when they faced difficulties, and to care for foreigners, orphans, and widows (Leviticus 25: 35-38, Deuteronomy 24:17-22).

JESUS AND THE UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM
By Jesus’ time, the people of Israel yearned for a promised Messiah who they assumed would liberate them from Roman occupation. Instead, Jesus connected them with the peaceable God of
their history. Donald Kraybill, in *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, explains how Luke used the Jewish symbolism of 40 days in the desert to tell how Jesus rejected the temptation of using economic power (bread), political power (kingdoms of world), or religious power (temple) to achieve God’s purposes (Luke 4:12). Jesus would not use power to inflict violence on others (Kraybill, page 33).

Instead, in Luke 4:16-30 Jesus affirms the prophet Isaiah’s depiction of a God who cared for people. He declared that he was the sought-for Messiah. Different than anticipated, he was sent to bring good news, proclaim release, recover sight, free the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 61:1-2a). At first the people cheered, until they realized he left out the part about the expected day of vengeance when God would punish the wicked (Isaiah 61:2b). Jesus was telling them he would be a different Messiah—not one who organized vengeance and violence, but who showed them how to live with peace and justice for all people.

Mark describes Jesus’ approach another way. After his baptism Jesus says, “… repent and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:14). Instead of repent, many scholars believe the Greek word for it, *metanoia*, is better understood as reform your thinking. This passage might be rendered as think in a new way and believe this good news. Jesus encouraged his disciples to think in a new way—that in contrast to the power-driven kingdoms around them, relationships and actions in God’s kingdom were based on love. That was the good news.

Paul echoes Jesus’ emphasis in 1 Corinthians 13. He affirms that no matter what we say or know or do — regardless of how eloquent, insightful, or noble we are—without love we are just making meaningless noise. Paul closes with the affirmation that “faith, hope and love abide…but the greatest of these is love.”

At that time people believed that when bad things happened in their lives, it was because someone had sinned (John 9:1-34). But in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), Jesus taught that all parts of life are sacred and blessed—whether painful, sorrowful, joyful, productive, or struggling. Among the many examples, Jesus affirmed that peacemakers were part of God’s family, assuring them that bringing peace into another’s life was a blessed act.

Later in Matthew 5, Jesus explained that he was not trying to replace Jewish traditions or what the prophets said but that he was there to fulfill them—to make them into reality. Over and over he expanded on those traditions, saying, “You have heard that…but I say to you…” Using the lens of love-based relationships, Jesus was again saying, “There is a new way to look at this.”

**LOVE AND SHALOM**

Jesus focused on bringing about God’s kingdom through love. It would be unfaithful to the witness of the New Testament to reduce the love modeled by Jesus to being only about nonviolence. Jesus sought for a bigger peace than simply the absence of violence. His teaching and actions were about how we treat one another if we replace the rules of human cultures with interactions grounded in love, as God loves. He taught how acting in this kind of love would bring shalom—a Hebrew word that captures the ideal of complete well-being in every facet of life, of being in balance with the best of what God wants for each one.
A culture’s rules often indicate that it’s acceptable to care only about people who are like us. In contrast, Jesus offered the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37). Its lesson is that when confronted with the suffering inflicted on those who are other, loving as God loves calls us to go beyond the indifference encouraged by our culture. Jesus tells us to be like the Samaritan who chose instead to respond to suffering with compassion and action.

Jesus’ embodiment of God’s love for all did not mean that he avoided confrontations. He actively pushed back against the political, religious, and economic injustices of that day. He did not hesitate to criticize people in power for willfully not living up to the best of what they knew was taught in their scriptures, traditions, and by God. Through his words and actions, Jesus affirmed God’s love and presence was for everyone, even those who opposed him.

**Jesus and a New Way**

Jesus especially confronted religious leaders who fixated on obeying every detail of the Jewish law while forgetting that their traditions and rituals were supposed to serve the people. He chastised those who used legal loopholes that deliberately abused those they were supposed to protect. He challenged the scribes and Pharisees, the bureaucrats of the day, for rules and policies that exploited the poor and widows (Mark 12: 38-40). He reminded them that religious practices, like the Sabbath, were intended to serve people’s needs, not enslave them to a set of rules (Mark 2:27). Jesus also pushed back against cultural rules by recognizing the “unclean” woman who touched his garment (Mark 5:25-34) and challenging the double standards of those who brought another, the adulterous woman, before him to be judged (John 8: 1-11).

In his interactions with people Jesus refused to take easy shortcuts based on his perceived authority or social power over people. Instead, he listened to others and responded in grace. Mark recounts how a Syrophoenician woman begged Jesus to heal her daughter (Mark 7:24-30). At first Jesus turned her away because his mission was to Israel, saying it was, “… not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” (Dogs being a term used to describe foreigners.) Although the woman absorbed his rebuke, for the sake of her child she claimed only “the children’s crumbs left for the dogs.” Touched by her insight and humility, Jesus blessed her daughter.

Jesus also rejected the assumption that the only choice was between reacting with violence or with complacency. In another “You have heard that it was said …” lesson, Jesus challenged people to resist without responding in kind. In *The Powers That Be*, Walter Wink explains we should not understand Jesus’ teaching to, “turn the other cheek,” “give your cloak also,” and “go the second mile,” as a prescription for passivity (Matthew 5:38-41). Instead, Jesus was providing examples of nonviolent active resistance that were fitting for that culture.

The experience between Jesus and the woman at the well models the shalom in God’s upside-down kingdom (John 4:10-15). It was upside-down because their meeting violated all the rules of Israelite culture and identity. It broke political rules because she was a Samaritan, with whom an upstanding Jew would never associate. It broke religious rules because she was a woman, with whom a Jewish man would never converse. It broke cultural rules because she was a social outcast, with whom nobody (Jew or otherwise) wanted to be seen.

Despite these clear cultural signals that she was not worthy of his attention, Jesus saw her as a person, as one beloved and blessed in God’s kingdom. He offered no condemnation. Instead, he offered her the same “living water” that he offered everyone.

**Applying Scripture to Our Context**

Scripture compels us to ask ourselves what signals in our cultures shout “unworthy!” “unfair!” or “unclean!” Are these signals in our scripture, tradition, culture, or relationships with one another? When do we need to hear Jesus
saying, “But I say to you...think in a new way...”? Instead of simply parroting “turn the other cheek” advice that was specific to that time, Jesus is asking us to do the hard work of finding creative ways to actively resist injustices in our own time and culture.

God continues to work toward the peaceable kingdom and calls us to be part of what is already here and what is yet to come. God invites us to live Christ’s mission by embodying love in our lives and relationships, as did Jesus, the peaceful One.
LESSON 1

SCRIPTURE: INTERPRETED THROUGH JESUS, THE PEACEFUL ONE

LESSON OVERVIEW

Learners will explore how scripture is responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied through the lens of Jesus, the peaceful One.

PREPARATION

Read “Introduction: Invitation to Explore,” page 4, and Article 1—“Scripture: Interpreted through Jesus, the Peaceful One,” page 6.

SUPPLIES

- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Journal books or blank paper and writing utensils (invite participants to bring their own journal)
- Meditative music for time of reflection (optional)

GUIDING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

As you explore issues of nonviolence in a group setting, it is important to engage in meaningful dialogue that welcomes all perspectives and honors the worth of all persons. The following principles will help guide difficult conversations:

- Honor all perspectives and hold safe space for all to share. Vary opportunities for sharing, such as sharing in pairs, writing, drawing responses, or sharing in small groups. Pay attention to perspectives that challenge your own, but remember the purpose is not to debate or change perspectives.
- Practice active listening by paraphrasing what has been stated to ensure each participant’s point is correctly interpreted.
- Encourage participants to speak as “I” instead of “we,” speaking for oneself instead of one’s “side,” and avoid generalizations.
- Approach divisive topics without personal agenda to gain understanding of different perspectives. Stay true to the gospel, and uphold Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs without diminishing the perspectives and life experiences of others.
- Uphold unity in diversity, recognizing oneness in Christ does not mean sameness.
- Recognize the Holy Spirit’s presence and movement through authentic sharing and holy listening.
It is important to ground conversation about scripture in the affirmations of scripture found in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*. Provide copies of, or make sure participants have online access to, “*Scripture in Community of Christ*.”

Read this Preamble of “Scripture in Community of Christ.”

Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ. Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.

Read or sing verses one and three of “*We Limit Not the Truth of God*,” *CCS* 69, as an invitation to open minds, hearts, and dialogue.

Explore how affirmations from “Scripture in Community of Christ” are upheld in the article “*Scripture: Interpreted through Jesus, the Peaceful One*.” You may choose to read each affirmation as a group and share examples from the article, or you may assign small groups or individuals one affirmation to read and find connections in the article. Share and discuss responses.

Why does what we believe about scripture matter, and how does it shape our understanding of Jesus, the peaceful One?

Consider how the article speaks to your context. Use the following questions to guide discussion as a large group or assign a different question to smaller breakout groups. Share responses and insights with the larger group.

- If Jesus were spending his forty wilderness days in your neighborhood, with what economic, political, or religious power temptations would he be confronted?
- What expectations do we have of a modern Messiah? How are these expectations displayed in cultural, political, or religious trends?
- What are some cultural norms that do not align with what Jesus taught about relationships based on loving as God loves?
- In what ways do you see people marginalized by religious, political, or economic policies and systems in your community? Where do you see efforts to address or change these policies or systems?
- What are some creative, nonviolent examples of resistance to injustice in your community?
What are examples of an upside-down-kingdom way of being in sacred community?

Give an example from your experience that illustrates the message of the cartoon on page 7 of the article.

Allow moments of silence at the end of each lesson to reflect on what has been shared, discussed, and experienced. Participants are invited to reflect in silence, write or draw responses in a journal, or share with a partner. If possible, provide meditative music for this time of reflection.

Notice where there is new insight, awareness, and energy. For what are you most grateful through this experience?

Notice where you have questions or feel resistance. Ponder these with holy attention and curiosity. What is the Holy Spirit inviting you to receive? How will you respond, and what will be your next faithful step?

Read or sing these verses as a closing challenge to live as Jesus, the peaceful One, revealed through the living word of scripture.

The living word of scripture provides the guide and source for saints in search of wisdom and light to chart their course.

The strangers and the pilgrims who owned the cause sublime have glimpsed the revelation, and answered in their time.

Our brothers and our sisters, true saints of every age who share with us their story, speak out from every page. That story is not ended, for still God’s voice is heard through all who bear the calling to be the living word.

The opening verses of John’s gospel describe Jesus as “the Word became flesh” (v. 14), or the Living Word. “The Living Word of Scripture,” CCS 65, is a hymn that expresses Community of Christ’s Enduring Principle, Continuing Revelation.
SCRIPTURE IN COMMUNITY OF CHRIST

Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ. Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.

AFFIRMATION ONE
We declare that Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).

AFFIRMATION TWO
We find the Living Word in and through scripture. Scripture is the indispensable witness of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church. The church formed the canon of scripture so that it might always have a way to hear the good news, nurture its faith, measure its life, test its experience, and remember its identity.

AFFIRMATION THREE
Scripture is a library of books that speaks in many voices. These books were written in diverse times and places, and reflect the languages, cultures, and conditions under which they were written. God’s revelation through scripture does not come to us apart from the humanity of the writers, but in and through that humanity. In the earthen vessels of scripture we have been given the treasure of divine love and grace (2 Corinthians 4:7).

AFFIRMATION FOUR
Scripture’s authority is derived from the model of Christ, who came to be a servant (Mark 10:45). Therefore, the authority of scripture is not the authority to oppress, control, or dominate. If Jesus came to serve, how much more should the books that point to him be treated as a servant of the saving purposes of God.

AFFIRMATION FIVE
Scripture is vital and essential to the church, but not because it is inerrant (in the sense that every detail is historically or scientifically correct). Scripture makes no such claim for itself. Rather, generations of Christians have found scripture simply to be trustworthy in keeping them anchored in revelation, in promoting faith in Christ, and in nurturing the life of discipleship. For these purposes, scripture is unfailingly reliable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

AFFIRMATION SIX
Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship each have something to contribute to our understanding of scripture. In wrestling to hear and respond to the witness of scripture, the church must value the light that each of these sources may offer.
AFFIRMATION SEVEN

As the church tries to interpret scripture responsively, it seeks the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide his disciples into new truth (John 16:12–15). By the Spirit, the ancient words of scripture can become revelatory, allowing us to grasp what may not have been seen or heard before.

AFFIRMATION EIGHT

Disciples are called to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures so that they may ever increase in love for God, neighbor, and self (Matthew 22:37–40; Mosiah 1:49), uphold the dignity and worth of all persons (Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c–d), and faithfully follow the way of Jesus Christ.

AFFIRMATION NINE

With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We do not use these sacred writings to replace the witness of the Bible or improve upon it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God (Preface of the Book of Mormon; Doctrine and Covenants 76:3g). We have heard Christ speak in all three books of scripture, and bear witness that he is “alive forever and ever” (Revelation 1:18).

For our time we shall seek to live and interpret the witness of scripture by the Spirit, with the community, for the sake of mission, in the name of the Prince of Peace.
ARTICLE 2

HISTORY: SHARE THE PEACE OF JESUS CHRIST

AUTHOR: SETH BRYANT

KEY SCRIPTURES

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: “Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me …

—Jeremiah 18:1-5

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 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 2:42-47

CHRIST IS PEACE

Peace ought to be Christianity’s fundamental principle. But history shows us that we have not always lived up to our primary calling to share the peace of Jesus Christ.

Peace runs throughout Community of Christ Mission Initiatives and Enduring Principles. Peace is explicit in our Mission Initiative, Pursue Peace on (and for the) Earth and in our Enduring Principle, Pursuit of Peace (Shalom). The case can be made that it is implicit in the other Mission Initiatives and Enduring Principles. They guide us in embodying the peace of Jesus Christ as individuals, in communities, and throughout the Earth.

MISSION IN THE EARLY DAYS

The early Saints had hopes like those we have today. Zion was their mission: a community of Christ with “no poor among them” (Doctrine and Covenants 36:2h-i).

We should recognize that their vision and efforts provide a foundation to our current mission and identity. We must also understand how they were products of their time, and that they framed and lived out their mission in ways that frustrated their own hopes for peace.

If we were to spell out the mission initiatives of the 1830s church, they might look like this:

We will establish Zion by

- Restoring Christianity to the first-century Christian experience
  - Gathering continually at the Temple

...
- Receiving apostolic and revelatory gifts
- Sharing all things in common to overcome poverty, and

- Inviting People to Christ
  - Sharing the one and only true church
- Supporting the Gathering of
  - The Jews to Jerusalem, and
  - The Saints to the New Jerusalem

Although Zion involved personal and communal peace, the Saints were mostly invested in millennial peace. Like many Christians—going back to the first century—the Saints expected Jesus to return soon, and that his Second Coming would renew and restore the Earth to a peaceful paradise.

**CONNECTION TO OTHER CHRISTIAN MOVEMENTS**

The early Saints, while having some peculiarities, were not all that different from many of their neighbors in their views on the millennium, an American New Jerusalem, and the need for restoring the church to purity.

As grandchildren of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation, the Restoration Movement inherited its three traditions: getting back to basics, seeking a new golden age, and daring to challenge dominant Christianity. A century before Joseph Smith Jr., Methodists laid groundwork for the Restoration in claiming that Christianity had become misguided, and that the solution was for the common person to be empowered and filled with God’s holiness to transform communities.

We are probably most indebted to the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement. It is noncreedal and focuses on overcoming sectarianism by restoring first-century Christianity in preparation for Jesus’ return. In 1827, a founding member of the Stone-Campbell Movement explained the Ancient Gospel as “faith, repentance, [noninfant] baptism, remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.”

Latter Day Saints would copy this exact formula, taking in both ideas and members. Sidney Rigdon—a Campbellite itinerant minister who ended up converting to our church—helped bring hundreds from his flocks into our fold. Sheep-stealing caused conflicts, contributing to the tarring and feathering of Joseph Smith Jr. and Sidney Rigdon in 1832.

Later, we also drew ideas from the Social Gospel (1870-1920), a movement that applied Christian principles to social issues. Christians operated orphanages and hospitals, reformed prisons, advocated for abolishing slavery, and germinated women’s rights and suffrage. We adopted many of these reforms in our Zion-building efforts. One “Zionic institution”1 from our history can be found in this inspired counsel from Joseph Smith III:

> It is the will of the Lord that a sanitarium, a place of refuge and help for the sick and afflicted, be established by the church, at Independence, Missouri …

1 Mark A. Scherer’s “Beyond Nauvoo: Discovering the Reorganized Church Story Again for the First Time,” *JWHA Journal* Vol. 31.2 (Fall/Winter 2011), 33.
LEARNING FROM OUR PAST

With this context of our historic mission, we might evaluate how effective the early Saints were at creating peace. Their mission gave them focus. Countless people, who felt without a home in any other church, found the peace of Christ through the Restoration Movement. Their gatherings created sacred community.

In contrast, how they engaged in mission isolated them. Their exceptionalism came across as arrogant. They shunned and ignored other Christians, calling them apostates. The Saints went into great debt building the Kirtland Temple out of a sense of urgency and entitlement. Those that gathered often had limited resources, so poverty and scarcity created problems. Conflicts with neighbors abounded when large numbers of Saints quickly moved into a new area.

As gatherings failed to achieve Zion, the Saints knew firsthand they were not experiencing peace. Instead of honestly assessing why their gatherings failed, early Saints began defining themselves in opposition to others and later began fighting back.

In 1834, Joseph Smith Jr. organized an army called Zion’s Camp to march from Kirtland to Missouri to restore properties lost because of mobs. This group was following instructions in Doctrine and Covenants 95:6-7, but peacekeeping by military force is a paradox. On the banks of Fishing River, when it was clear that engaging the mobs would mean an outright bloodbath and defeat, Joseph received a revelation calling on the church to “Sue for peace” (Doctrine and Covenants 102:11).

Proclaiming peace on the banks of Fishing River was Joseph’s parting-of-the-Red-Sea moment (Doctrine and Covenants 8:1c-2b). With an army bearing down on them, peace was Joseph’s inspired path forward to guide his people to salvation.

This revelatory moment is pivotal for Community of Christ today, but unfortunately Joseph lost sight of it. In the 1840s he turned to a militia for protection. The state of Illinois had formed this militia, but Joseph and others enthusiastically joined to the terror of their neighbors.

Under the leadership of Joseph Smith Jr., peace was always a means to some other end, or an intended byproduct of mission. Because it was never the central purpose of the mission, peace was fleeting. A hoped-for millennial kingdom did not arise with Christ forcing peace on the world. Militarism among the Saints and clashes with neighbors contributed to the killing of Joseph in 1844.

IDENTIFYING THE PEACE GENE

Our second prophet-president, Joseph Smith III, wanted us to become the people in his father’s Fishing River revelation who “lift up an ensign of peace, and make a proclamation for peace unto the ends of the earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 102:11b). Joseph Smith III identified the peace gene² in our movement and made it foundational.

Joseph Smith III removed elements from the Restoration that were not peaceful. He did not mix church with civic government like his father had, and he pushed to remove militarism from the church. He was hesitant about a gathered community in Lamoni, Iowa, because he had lived through the

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struggles of church gathering throughout his formative years.\textsuperscript{3} He urged the Saints to gather differently than in the past. He saw neighbors as a crucial part of Zion and urged the Saints to respect the “feelings of the people under the laws existing in the places where such settlements are to be made” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:5-8).

REWORKING THE CLAY

Joseph Smith III’s revisioning of the movement reminds me of a scripture. In the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet was told to “go down to the potter’s house” to hear God’s message. Jeremiah went, and he saw the potter “working at his wheel.” The clay was not shaping up to what the potter hoped it would be and could be. “He reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him” (Jeremiah 18:1-5).

In the Reorganization the clay was being reworked and is still being reworked now in Community of Christ. With each reshaping, peace becomes more and more defined as our basic, foundational, and essential purpose as the body of Christ. We are learning that peace must be fundamental. It cannot be a byproduct of the mission or a means to some other end. It must be the beginning, middle, and end.

Peace does not mean ignoring or hiding problems. True peace requires justice, and justice is not easy. How could we be pushovers if we are following Jesus, the radical outlaw? Pursing peace may be the hardest calling to accept.

Some may question if it is fitting or accurate to define Community of Christ as a peace church. The history of Community of Christ shows that peace is in our genes, and that we have been refined again and again to focus on peace.

Recent counsel invites us to place peace at the center of who we are: “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). Community of Christ is realizing that identity as our own form of a peace church.

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\textsuperscript{3} Joseph Smith III was born in the church’s first gathering place in Kirtland, Ohio; he moved with his family to a new gathering place in Far West, Missouri, when he was seven; and shortly thereafter he gathered with his family to another gathered church community in Nauvoo, Illinois, where he lived until his thirties.
LESSON 2

HISTORY: SHARE THE PEACE OF JESUS CHRIST

LESSON OVERVIEW

Learners will explore historical foundations of the church as a peace movement.

PREPARATION

Read “Introduction: Invitation to Explore,” page 4, and Article 2—"History: Share the Peace of Jesus Christ,” page 15.


SUPPLIES

- Portions of children’s modeling clay for each participant
- Journal books or blank paper and writing utensils (invite participants to bring their own journal, if they wish)
- Meditative music for time of reflection (optional)
- Community of Christ Sings

GUIDING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

As you explore issues of nonviolence in a group setting, it is important to engage in meaningful dialogue that welcomes all perspectives and honors the worth of all persons. The following principles will help guide difficult conversations:

- Honor all perspectives and hold safe space for all to share. Vary opportunities for sharing, such as sharing in pairs, writing, drawing responses, or sharing in small groups. Pay attention to perspectives that challenge your own, but remember the purpose is not to debate or change perspectives.
- Practice active listening by paraphrasing what has been stated to ensure each participant’s point is correctly interpreted.
- Encourage participants to speak as “I” instead of “we,” speaking for oneself instead of one’s “side,” and avoid generalizations.
- Approach divisive topics without personal agenda to gain understanding of different perspectives. Stay true to the gospel, and uphold Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs without diminishing the perspectives and life experiences of others.
• Uphold unity in diversity, recognizing oneness in Christ does not mean sameness.
• Recognize the Holy Spirit’s presence and movement through authentic sharing and holy listening.

MISSION THEN AND MISSION NOW

On page 15 of the article, “History: Share the Peace of Jesus Christ,” the author describes what the mission initiatives might have looked like in the 1830s church. Using the descriptions of Community of Christ’s Mission Initiatives, compare similarities and differences between mission then and mission now. You may do this as a large group or form smaller groups or pairs to make lists of similarities and differences. Discuss responses. Using a form of common consent, determine as a group what is the most significant difference and the most significant similarity.

Use the following questions to guide discussion as a large group or in smaller breakout groups.

1. The author believes that peace is Christianity’s fundamental principle. Explain why you agree or disagree. What other teachings of Jesus Christ, if any, might be more central?

2. What might be problematic with the early Saints’ expectation that Jesus would return and fix many of the problems facing humanity and the Earth? What do our Basic Beliefs say about the Reign of God and End Time (see pages 33-38)?

3. In the 1860s, Joseph Smith III reflected with the Church on how they should respond to the American Civil War. He said that they considered the matter “with much the same solemnity that doubtless characterized the Puritans, Quakers, Shakers, or other denominations whose tenets forbade the shedding of blood” (Memoirs of Joseph Smith III [Herald House, 1979], page 90). What do we have in common with the peace churches mentioned by Joseph Smith III? How are we different? (Find an overview of the Quaker and Shaker movements at www.nps.gov/articles/history-of-the-shakers.htm.)

REWORKING THE CLAY

The author compares Joseph Smith III’s revisioning of the movement to imagery of the potter reworking clay found in Jeremiah 18:1-5. Provide portions of children’s modeling clay for each participant and invite them to mold something that symbolizes
peace or the “peace gene” in the church’s history. For those who may be new to or unaware of Community of Christ history, invite them to shape something that represents a turning toward peace in their personal history. Share responses in pairs, small breakout groups, or with the larger group as time allows.

Discuss what “reworking the clay” might look like in your context that would make Community of Christ known as a peace church. How would you describe the “peace gene” of this movement to a seeker or friend?

Allow moments of silence at the end of each lesson to reflect on what has been shared, discussed, and experienced. Participants are invited to reflect in silence, write or draw responses in a journal, or share with a partner. If possible, provide meditative music for this time of reflection.

Notice where there is new insight, awareness, and energy. For what are you most grateful through this experience?

Notice where you have questions or feel resistance. Ponder these with holy attention and curiosity. What is the Holy Spirit inviting you to receive? How will you respond, and what will be your next faithful step?

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**Bless**
Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and help
(5% of lesson time)

Read or sing “For Everyone Born,” CCS 285, which describes a welcoming and inclusive sacred community.

Going deeper: Invite individuals or small groups to write their own verse for this hymn that describes the peaceful reign of Christ. Read or sing the new verses.
INVITATION: THE POWER OF NONVIOLENCE IN THE HANDS OF A PROPHETIC PEOPLE

AUTHORS: ELRAY HENRIKSEN, ANDREW BOLTON, KELSEY PAUL SHANTZ

KEY SCRIPTURES

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
—Romans 12:21

Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, you will be children of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

A PROPHETIC PEOPLE: HOW?

The prophetic tradition of the Old Testament proclaimed a coming day when “justice will roll down like waters”\(^4\), when “swords will be beaten into ploughshares” and “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”\(^5\) The prophets looked forward to a Messiah, the Prince of Peace, to bring this day.\(^6\) “Injustice anywhere is the threat to justice everywhere,” cried Martin Luther King Jr. in his Letter from Birmingham Jail. King called white churches to stand up and provide support to the Civil Rights movement. As a minister of the gospel, King advocated for and used nonviolence, a message re-actualized today.

President Stephen M. Veazey in his closing sermon at the 2016 World Conference posed:

God is calling for a massive exodus of people from poverty and related suffering. Who will be the prophets standing before crafty politicians and predatory hoarders of wealth, saying with conviction, “You had better let God’s people go!”? Can you see Community of Christ as that voice in the world?

Like Moses, in a moment of introspection, we might reply: “Who [are we] that [we] should [go and do this]?\(^7\)” Like Moses, our movement has a story of violence of its own. Like Moses, we would rather not go. As described in the previous article, the early history of Community of Christ was troubled. We embraced violence to fight a war in Northern Missouri in 1838 and set up an army of 5,000 men in Nauvoo, Illinois. But we also imagined Zion in our midst, where God’s justice and peace reigned.

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\(^4\) Amos 5:24 (All biblical references are NRSV)
\(^5\) Isaiah 2:4
\(^6\) Isaiah 9:6
\(^7\) Exodus 3:7-10
From 1860 onward Joseph Smith III led the Reorganization down a peace path. The most significant emblem of our movement was the church seal: an image of the lion and the lamb led by a child with “peace” under it. This logo is a prophetic symbol for us as a people. It inspires the Temple’s purpose to stand as an ensign of peace. The church peace seal carries us forward to consider nonviolence. The Isaiah passage that inspired the seal has these words, “They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.”

We ask how we become a prophetic voice in the world. What strategy can we adapt to our context, so our prophetic voice is heard? What power can bring oppressive relationships to an end? How do we make our vision of Zion a reality, locally and globally?

Community of Christ’s pursuit of peace is already defined by our commitment to nonviolent conflict resolution. We have learned about dialogue, facilitation, and mediation. We will continue to use these methods. Unfortunately, these techniques only work when conflicting parties are about equal in power and have agreed to sit at the same table. What do you do when one side threatens the other with violence, and the other side only has unarmed bodies and their voices? Let us explore principled and pragmatic nonviolence as peaceful methods with creative power that can be wielded to complement existing nonviolent techniques.

For more about the power of resisting nonviolently, we turn to Jesus’ experience living under the brutal colonial rule of the Roman Empire. After his baptism, Jesus faced the temptation of creating God’s kingdom on Earth by violence. At the time of John’s arrest, he proclaimed the kingdom of God was near and read his mission statement that began with good news for the poor. His first recruits were not soldiers, but unarmed fishermen: Peter and Andrew, James and John.

Their first lesson on discipleship was the Sermon on the Plain in Luke and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. In Luke and Matthew Jesus taught disciples not to retaliate, to turn the other cheek, to walk the second mile, and to love our enemies for God’s grace is given to good and bad alike. Other New Testament authors also taught this, including Paul. Jesus rebuked James and John for wanting to “command fire to come down” on an inhospitable Samaritan village, and then taught the Good Samaritan parable on loving your enemies to further clarify his message.

Jesus is consistent in his practice of principled nonviolence right to the end. At his arrest he rebukes the disciple who attacked the servant of the high priest with a

8 Isaiah 11:9
10 Mark 1:14-15
12 Mark 1:16-20
14 Romans 12:14-21
15 Luke 9:51-56
sword. Dying on the cross, Jesus forgave those who trespassed against him, so we could learn to do the same. With renewed reassurance of God’s peace and nonretribution after the resurrection the disciples were reborn as followers of the Way.\(^\text{17}\)

Through these examples, Jesus Christ reveals a God who shows mercy to good and bad alike.

**PRAGMATIC NONVIOLENCE**

Jesus’ use of nonviolent strategy as a pragmatic tool is best understood in context. Jesus sent out the first apostles and seventy as lambs among wolves. He told them to be wise as serpents, yet innocent as doves as they navigated the brutalities of the Roman Empire.\(^\text{18}\) By entering Jerusalem riding a donkey and not a cavalry horse, Jesus claimed royal succession with King David in a tense situation where Jewish leaders were in collusion with the Roman occupying power. For those who followed Jesus and acclaimed him as the Messianic leader and as the Son of God, they were in fact rejecting the power of the Emperor, who also claimed to be the Son of God.

Through Jesus’ cleansing of the temple in a protest against the outrageous prices being charged the poor for sacrificial animals, he reclaimed “ownership” of the Temple as a place of prayer for all nations and condemned its misuse as that of a “den of robbers.” After this nonviolent campaign, Jewish leaders plotted to kill him but could not do anything straight away because the crowd protected Jesus.\(^\text{19}\)

The actions of Jesus in this story teach nonviolence as a pragmatic tool.

“It is our contention [...] that political defiance, or nonviolent struggle, is the most powerful means available to those struggling for freedom,” wrote Gene Sharp in 1973 in his groundbreaking study *From Dictatorship to Democracy*. This creative, practical nonviolence has been called “a war by other means.”\(^\text{20}\)

Nonviolent activists wage their own battles. They plan wise strategy and tactics. Pragmatic nonviolence demands courage, discipline, and sacrifice of its nonviolent soldiers.\(^\text{21}\) It is a method that can work for those who do not have military power or the financial means to fight violently.\(^\text{22}\)

Nonviolence is—pragmatically—more successful and more effective in creating durable peace. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan’s examination of 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns from 1900-2006 found that nonviolent resistance was twice as effective as violent resistance, and nonviolent campaigns were also more likely to result in democratic and peaceful societies after a conflict. In contrast, armed rebellions

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\(^{17}\) John 14:27 and John 20:26

\(^{18}\) Matthew 10:16, Luke 10:3

\(^{19}\) Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48


have decreased in their effectiveness, and when they have been victorious have almost never produced democracies, often relapsing into civil war. For further reading on nonviolent approaches, including different historical positions of Christianity to violence, download *Four Approaches to Violence* from Herald House.

**TOWARD THE PEACEFUL ONE**

Since 2007, Community of Christ has found inspiration in the prophetic invitation to “strive to be faithful to Christ’s vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth,” “courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling purposes of God,” and “pursue peace.”

As followers of Jesus, how can we further embody the passion and concerns of Christ? Our discernment should be characterized by what is old and new, representing a faithfulness to the New Testament stories of the path paved by Jesus that inspires our pursuit of peace on and for the Earth.

What new thing are we willing to do, what new stories about ourselves and God are we willing to tell, and not the least, how do we frame our relationships with others and Creation? Moving toward the peaceful One is a struggle for all of us and this should not surprise us. As a prophetic people, we are, individually and collectively, called to be on this journey.

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24 Doctrine and Covenants 163:3b

25 Doctrine and Covenants 164:9c
LESSON 3

INVITATION: THE POWER OF NONVIOLENCE IN THE HANDS OF A PROPHETIC PEOPLE

LESSON OVERVIEW

Learners will explore the prophetic call of a peace movement through principled and pragmatic nonviolence.

PREPARATION


SUPPLIES

• Journal books or blank paper and writing utensils (invite participants to bring their own journal, if they wish)
• Meditative music for time of reflection (optional)
• Community of Christ Sings

GUIDING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

As you explore issues of nonviolence in a group setting, it is important to engage in meaningful dialogue that welcomes all perspectives and honors the worth of all persons. The following principles will help guide difficult conversations:

• Honor all perspectives and hold safe space for all to share. Vary opportunities for sharing, such as sharing in pairs, writing, drawing responses, or sharing in small groups. Pay attention to perspectives that challenge your own, but remember the purpose is not to debate or change perspectives.
• Practice active listening by paraphrasing what has been stated to ensure each participant’s point is correctly interpreted.
• Encourage participants to speak as “I” instead of “we,” speaking for oneself instead of one’s “side,” and avoid generalizations.
• Approach divisive topics without personal agenda to gain understanding of different perspectives. Stay true to the gospel, and uphold Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs without diminishing the perspectives and life experiences of others.
• Uphold unity in diversity, recognizing oneness in Christ does not mean sameness.
• Recognize the Holy Spirit’s presence and movement through authentic sharing and holy listening.
Isaiah 11:1-9 inspired the church seal. When the Messiah comes, The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them...
They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

—Isaiah 11:6,9

Jesus is the Messiah who came to teach peace in his words, life, and ministry. Discuss how the church seal as art, as church logo, as inspirer of the Temple purpose, as “visual theology,” calls us toward nonviolence.

In pairs or small breakout groups, invite participants to share what the church seal means to them. How would they describe the meaning of the church seal to a seeker or friend?

With some online reading, what can you learn from the American Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. and the Farm Workers’ movement led by Cesar Chavez in the 1960s? Both movements combined principled and pragmatic nonviolence in the struggle for the rights of African Americans and migrant farm workers. Discuss what you find out.

What struggles for human rights exist in your context (community, village, city, or nation)?
How are these issues being challenged or addressed?
How might principled and pragmatic nonviolence be used to address these challenges?

“Moving toward the peaceful One is a struggle for all of us.” How is Jesus, the peaceful One, challenging you personally to work for justice and reconciliation in your community?

Allow moments of silence at the end of each lesson to reflect on what has been shared, discussed, and experienced. Participants are invited to reflect in silence, write or draw responses in a journal, or share with a partner. If possible, provide meditative music for this time of reflection.

Notice where there is new insight, awareness, and energy. For what are you most grateful through this experience?

Notice where you have questions or feel resistance. Ponder these with holy attention and curiosity. What is the Holy Spirit inviting you to receive? How will you respond, and what will be your next faithful step?

| Bless |
| Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and help |
| (5% of lesson time) |


Invite participants to complete the following prayer as personal and communal commitment to the pursuit of peace.

God of shalom,

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with…

Amen.

| Send |
| Explores how the lesson might be lived |
| (10% of lesson time) |

KEY SCRIPTURES

Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.

—Psalm 46:10

Listen to the Voice that echoes across the eons of time and yet speaks anew in this moment. Listen to the Voice, for it cannot be stilled, and it calls you once again to the great and marvelous work of building the peaceable kingdom, even Zion, on behalf of the One whose name you claim.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:1b

LISTEN TO GOD

As a global faith community, where do we turn when confronted with complex, challenging, and potentially divisive issues? We are not strangers to hard conversations about topics that matter in our lives and the world. We are still learning how to listen deeply to God and one another as the source of our response. We are also still becoming a community that “trusts in the Lord with all our hearts and does not rely on our own insight.” (Proverbs 3:5, adapted)

The ancient Christian practice of discernment opens possibilities into God’s future. It offers a way of stability and faithfulness that lives with integrity in the ambiguity and uncertainty of the world. As Community of Christ engages the topic of nonviolence, discernment provides ways of listening to God and one another, increasing our understanding and leading to a faithful communal response.

The essence of discernment is seeking God in the circumstances, relationships, and decisions of our lives. We start with seeking God because discernment is first about growing closer to God as disciples of Jesus. It is not about finding the right answer. It is adjusting our way of living to align more consistently with God’s vision of shalom for all creation. Discernment is the way disciples listen for the still-speaking voice of God in our own lives and times.

The topic of nonviolence is complex. As we learn about nonviolence from multiple perspectives, we also discover our own feelings, memories, and experiences that shape how we come to this conversation. This is more than a philosophical debate. Nonviolence is an issue that gets to our most basic human tendencies to protect the ones we love, seek justice, and preserve life. The practice of discernment invites us to incorporate everything we are hearing, learning, remembering, and feeling into conversation with God to seek God’s vision and direction for our lives and communities.

It takes time to expand our awareness to more fully recognize all the intricate ways the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit speaks through everything. There is always something for us to hear.
CONTINUING REVELATION

Continuing Revelation, an Enduring Principle, upholds that God is always present working in us and speaking to us. Trusting God’s continued presence supports the church in times of change, fluidity, and complexity. We remember God is not done with us and works in all relationships, situations, and aspects of our lives. At the same time, Continuing Revelation is inherently disruptive to our tendency to avoid change. Luke Timothy Johnson describes the consistently self-revealing nature of God:

In the response called faith, the human person asserts that God is not only “real,” but that God is what is most real. God is not a vague idea, left over when everything is counted, but is active and alive and intrudes into human existence … Because God intrudes into the comfortable space we cling to for our self-definition and calls us out to a wider truth, divine revelation continues in our world. God acts now. … the Word of God is continually spoken and requires hearing. … There is never a moment before death when faith can say, “Enough, it is finished,” for the Word of God to each individual is not fully spoken until that death. God’s Word unfolds with every breath we breathe.  

Pause and breathe the breath of God’s Word unfolding in you.

Centuries of wisdom tell us that although God is consistently self-revealing, there are natural barriers to hearing, feeling, and seeing the Holy Spirit. We must work at being open. Early and often in discernment it is important to embrace a posture of availability to God called Spiritual Freedom or Holy Indifference. The purpose is to become so fully committed to God’s vision that we are willing to become indifferent to our own limited agendas, views, attachments, and assumptions. This stance of humility makes us more open to receive divine revelation.

Letting go means we must be honest about what is shaping our identity and ways of seeing the world. We need to consider what might obstruct us from recognizing God within and around us, and through people who are different from us. Politics, economics, social-status, gender, sexuality, culture, and much more shape how we see the world.

We do not always realize what is influencing our daily interactions and decisions. Discernment helps us intentionally gaze through the lens of God’s love and vision. This is not to dismiss all other aspects of life as though they do not exist, but to reorder them. We experience transformation as we grow in awareness of what God continues to reveal within and around us.

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26 Luke Timothy Johnson, Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church, 24-25.
President Stephen M. Veazey introduced a practice for discernment: the Six Lenses for Discovering God’s Will. Each lens helps us look through an important facet of our faith to gain a more complete sense of God’s vision. They work interdependently and cannot be separated so we do not miss a crucial insight of God’s call to us.

The Six Lenses are Knowledge and Reason, Scripture, Personal and Community Experience, Continuing Revelation, Tradition, and Common Consent. Looking through each lens provides a vital, life-giving discipline of searching for God in ways that stretch and challenge us. Rather than being driven by our own ideas, agendas, and preferences, we are asked to test what we discover in the wisdom of the larger community and tradition, and to continue to seek a wider truth.

To faithfully discern we must avoid a standpoint of self-assurance, which means relying completely on what one thinks and feels or a standpoint of certitude which means relying on one’s current interpretation that is believed to be “absolute, unchanging, and true.” Discernment invites us into a standpoint of exploration that includes curiosity, mutuality, openness, and humility. As an example, the first three articles in this series use the lenses of scripture, history, and reason to consider nonviolence. They each provide a perspective on this issue we bring into discernment.

Engaging the Six Lenses, we listen to God in different ways so we can hear, see, and feel the Holy Spirit. Often, we get frustrated or feel stuck because we sense there is more but cannot see the way ahead. Using the lenses can be a liberating practice by expanding the ways we look for meaning. We covenant with one another to listen deeply even when we disagree. The Holy Spirit works within the tensions and insights ignited as a creative force to open new ways of thinking and being together.

As you apply the lenses to nonviolence, perhaps you discover your perspective has been most significantly shaped by personal and community experience. By stretching yourself to gain a deeper understanding of scripture or tradition perhaps you find a new way of understanding nonviolence. Or maybe the church’s response on nonviolence seems clear when you think about the statistics of violence in the world, but then you hear stories from other church members that highlight the complexity of nonviolence in other cultures.

Amid the complexity and urgency in our world, discernment is a reliable practice for connecting with divine wisdom and guidance. It is a practice that acknowledges God is at work in every moment, decision,

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27 Patricia O’Connell Killen and John DeBeer, The Art of Theological Reflection, 5-10.
relationship, and all aspects of life. As we continue to engage challenging and important topics together, may we grow in wonder and humility at God who continues to speak even now, in you, and in us.

A PRACTICE: DISCERNING COMMUNITY OF CHRIST’S RESPONSE TO NONVIOLENCE

1. Take a few moments to settle into a time of prayer. Breathe deeply. Take as much time as you need to quiet within and become more open to God’s presence.
2. Frame the question for discernment in prayer: “God, what role does nonviolence play in the pursuit of peace on and for the Earth (Doctrine and Covenants 165:1d) and in the life and mission of the church?”
3. Pray for greater freedom and availability to seek God’s vision. Become aware of what has been shaping your perspective on nonviolence. In humility, ask God to help you release or hold more lightly anything that may be getting in the way of deeper understanding and openness to God and others. Write down what you are invited to release.
4. Search your personal and communal memories for ways the church has responded to this issue, or has been shaped by this issue, in the past. What does God want you to see in this history? When did it feel like the church was moving closer to Jesus, the peaceful One, and when did it feel like the church was moving further away?
5. Consider what sources may help you understand this issue more deeply. Engage the Six Lenses. Invite others to join you in conversation about what they see as they look through each lens.
6. Bring everything you are discovering into a time of prayer. Notice where your attention is drawn. Notice what is emerging as a way forward. If you have any thoughts about your response to the issue of nonviolence at this point, write them down, and continue to hold them lightly in prayer.
7. Seek confirmation from the Holy Spirit about what you sense emerging.
8. Continue in conversation and discernment as you prepare for the next World Conference. Bring your growing sense of a response with you into our global community or find ways to share your story and perspective from a distance. As you sense opportunities to respond that are in alignment with our best understanding of God’s vision for all creation, act!
LESSON 4

DISCERNMENT: DISCOVERING GOD’S VISION IN A COMPLEX WORLD

LESSON OVERVIEW

Learners will consider issues of nonviolence through practices of discernment engaging the Six Lenses for Discovering God’s Will.

PREPARATION


SUPPLIES

• *Community of Christ Sings*
• Journal books or blank paper and writing utensils (invite participants to bring their own journal, if they wish)
• Meditative music for time of reflection (optional)

GUIDING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

As you explore issues of nonviolence in a group setting, it is important to engage in meaningful dialogue that welcomes all perspectives and honors the worth of all persons. The following principles will help guide difficult conversations:

• Honor all perspectives and hold safe space for all to share. Vary opportunities for sharing, such as sharing in pairs, writing, drawing responses, or sharing in small groups. Pay attention to perspectives that challenge your own, but remember the purpose is not to debate or change perspectives.
• Practice active listening by paraphrasing what has been stated to ensure each participant’s point is correctly interpreted.
• Encourage participants to speak as “I” instead of “we,” speaking for oneself instead of one’s “side,” and avoid generalizations.
• Approach divisive topics without personal agenda to gain understanding of different perspectives. Stay true to the gospel, and uphold Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs without diminishing the perspectives and life experiences of others.
• Uphold unity in diversity, recognizing oneness in Christ does not mean sameness.
• Recognize the Holy Spirit’s presence and movement through authentic sharing and holy listening.
Sing or play a recording of “Be Still,” CCS 156, OR “O God We Call,” CCS 195, as a centering prayer.

There is always something for us to hear. Take a few moments now to hold gently and lightly all you have been learning, feeling, and experiencing related to the topic of nonviolence. As you sit with your perspective about nonviolence right now, notice what comes up for you. Is there an image or feeling that surfaces? Spend time simply listening and noticing without drawing any conclusions. Hold it in prayer, asking to see what God wants you to see.

As we grow in the God who is never done speaking a new thing within us, we are transforming. As you reflect on the issue of nonviolence, what “way of seeing” most consistently shapes your perception and understanding right now? Is there anything you are invited to release, or hold more lightly, that is obstructing your ability to genuinely listen to God and others on this issue?

Or maybe the response for the church seems clear to you when you think about the statistics of violence in the world, but then you hear stories from other church members that highlight the complexity of this issue in other cultures. Spend time in prayer and study with each of these lenses. Notice which lenses you naturally gravitate toward and which are more challenging for you. Hold them together as you discern God’s wider vision. As community, use the lenses to talk through the various aspects of our faith that inform our discernment.

*See guide at the end of this lesson, “Engaging the Six Lenses for Discovering God’s Will”
in the past. What does God want you to see in this history? When did it feel like the church was moving closer to Jesus, the peaceful One and when did it feel like the church was moving further away?

Consider what sources may help you understand this issue more deeply. Engage the six lenses. Invite others to join you in conversation about what they see as they look through each lens.

Bring everything you are discovering into a time of prayer. Notice where your attention is drawn. Notice what is emerging as a way forward. If you have any thoughts about your response to the issue of nonviolence at this point, write them down, and continue to hold them lightly in prayer.

Seek confirmation from the Holy Spirit about what you sense emerging.

Continue in conversation and discernment as you prepare for the next World Conference. Bring your growing sense of a response with you into our global community or find ways to share your story and perspective from a distance. As you sense opportunities to respond that are in alignment with our best understanding of God’s vision for all creation, act!

Notice where there is new insight, awareness, and energy. For what are you most grateful through this experience?

Notice where you have questions or feel resistance. Ponder these with holy attention and curiosity. What is the Holy Spirit inviting you to receive? How will you respond, and what will be your next faithful step?

**Bless**

**Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and help**

(5% of lesson time)

Offer a closing prayer of gratitude for this time of personal and communal discernment.

Sing “Alleluia,” *CCS* 116 or 117

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**Send**

**Explores how the lesson might be lived**

(10% of lesson time)

Allow moments of silence at the end of each lesson to reflect on what has been shared, discussed, and experienced. Participants are invited to reflect in silence, write or draw responses in a journal, or share with a partner. If possible, provide meditative music for this time of reflection.
### Knowledge and Reason
"Consideration of available information through reason and study is not the opposite of trusting in the Holy Spirit. Study and thinking are how we love God with our hearts and our minds."

What available information sheds light on this discernment process? What am I thinking about this? What more do we need to know? What might we need to study to deepen our knowledge?

### Continuing Revelation
"Continuing revelation involves ongoing encounter with God and Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It provides added insight or deepens understanding of formative experiences. It 'unveils' dimensions of earlier encounters with God that have been unrecognized or perhaps even misunderstood."

How is the Holy Spirit showing up in surprising ways and places? Are you open to experiencing the new thing God is doing within and around you? What have you not yet thought to ask or imagine?

### Tradition
" Tradition is the body of belief, wisdom, and practices produced over the years by the faith community as it seeks to live the gospel in various times and places."

What aspects of tradition shed light on this discernment process? Was there a time when you or your ancestors faced a similar situation? What rituals, sacraments, scriptures, practices, sacred story, or gifts of wisdom, are present within the tradition to guide you as you seek understanding?

### Personal and Communal Experience
"We bring aspects of our personal experiences, culture, beliefs, feelings, and personalities to our quest to better understand God’s will. The most reliable spiritual discernment occurs in association with others."

What aspects of your own culture and personal experience are helpful to this discernment process? What have you learned that can be applied now? What can you learn from the diversity of other people’s experiences?

### Scripture
"The Living Word is presented and received as good news in the lives of hurting people. It draws people to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. It bears the fruit of love, reconciliation, healing, and hope for all."

What images, words, or phrases from sacred text affirm or confront you on this journey of discernment? If you were to locate yourself in a story or parable, what would speak to where you are now? What might it be saying?

### Common Consent
"Common Consent at its best is a process of education, discussion, prayer, and consideration that requires patience, cooperation, and spiritual sensitivity. It encourages minority or opposing voices that may contribute vital insights or strengthen proposals."

What insights from prayerfully listening to my community shed light on this discernment process? Who will be impacted by this decision? How might it influence your discernment to take time to listen to the voices that make you uncomfortable or to the perspectives you may resist? How are you invited to discern in a way that contributes to the well-being of the whole community?
KEY SCRIPTURES

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

—Colossians 3:14-15

We love because he first loved us. Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

—1 John 4:19-21

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

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:6a

CHRIST’S SPIRIT OF LIGHT AND TRUTH

A powerful personal experience that continues to inspire my view of the church’s purpose occurred at the 2019 World Conference Communion service. As the event unfolded, I sensed Christ’s spirit of light and truth. That feeling intensified as I looked at the assembly representing various languages, cultures, ways of life, and skin tones.

People gathered in response to Christ’s invitation to come to his table of reconciliation and spiritual empowerment for living. Disciples came together to make decisions about the church’s future.

Just then the Graceland University choir began to sing the first verse of Community of Christ Sings #285: “For everyone born, a place at the table.” As the choir sang, the hymn grew into a spiritually penetrating sound of divine nature and vision. It was overwhelming, inspiring, and humbling. I was moved to tears as I experienced spiritual community in Christ and considered the challenges and possibilities before the church.

The experience was not just one of feeling. I became aware of God’s deep appreciation for the responsiveness of congregations and groups in aspiring to be sacred community in Christ in more than name only. I also sensed God’s eternal hope for us to open our minds, hearts, and relationships more fully. God yearns for everyone born to have a place at the table of God’s community of transforming grace and peace.

URGENT CALL TO MAKE SPACE

Prophetic counsel to the church over past decades points to a persistent and increasingly urgent call for the church to respond by making space.
Open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.

—Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a

Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

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

—Doctrine and Covenants 165:6a

The important call for Community of Christ today is to apply this spiritual direction during a time of intensifying polarization, hostility, and violence. Fallen humanity continually creates divisions of fear, discrimination, and inequality. Redeemed humanity creates sacred community locally and globally that offers healing, peace, and hope for the world.

CHRIST-INSPIRED PEACEFUL COMMUNITY

This vision of Christ-inspired, peaceful community is not new. The earliest communities of disciples, formed following Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, were admonished:

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were indeed called in one body.

—Colossians 3:14-15

This vision of Christ-inspired and Christ-shaped spiritual community has motivated disciples in every age. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian who strenuously resisted the cruelty of Nazi Germany and that resistance eventually cost him his life. Bonhoeffer wrote, “The church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ himself who has taken form among people.” On another occasion he stressed that the church is “Christ existing within community.”

This sacred community far exceeds what we normally associate with “community.” It is more than a social or special interest group. According to I John 4:7-21, sacred community is rooted deeply in God’s love, defined in character and action by Jesus Christ, the peaceful One, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. When people experience sacred community, they feel the love of God, encounter the peace of Jesus Christ, and receive the welcoming invitation of the Holy Spirit as never before. Involvement in sacred community changes, heals, and redeems lives.

Community of Christ is evidence of God’s continuing work through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to bring sacred community into existence. From the start of this faith movement, living the principle of the gospel in local and global community has been at the center of our purpose. The cause of Zion is how we strive to live that vision. It is at the heart of who we are even as we grow in our understanding and expression of it.
Growing in sacred community compels us to expand our circles of love, concern, understanding, and action. It motivates us to interact in new ways. This growth is sometimes difficult, but the vision of Zion urges us forward.

**HOW WE DECIDE TOGETHER**

An important aspect of growth in Christ-inspired community is how a group makes important decisions together. If a faith community is growing in the vision, love, and peace of Christ, there will be challenging questions to consider and related decisions to make together. Early in the Restoration movement, we were pointed to the principle of common consent as essential to our life together. Doctrine and Covenants 25:1b emphasizes, “And all things shall be done by common consent in the church, by much prayer and faith.”

Common consent provides opportunity for church members to participate in decision-making. It also allows the body to express support (or not) for church leaders entrusted to fulfill their responsibilities.

For many years, majority rule was the primary way common consent was accomplished in the church. This meant the decision was made based on whatever or whoever got the most votes. Unfortunately, this led to a sense of winners and losers, causing hard feelings and division.

In recent decades, the church has responded to the call to be a prophetic people who discern God’s will together by exploring alternative approaches to common consent. These approaches have strengthened the church’s ability to have difficult conversations about important and sometimes controversial topics. Guided by knowledgeable people, the church has studied, experimented, and gained valuable experience with common consent tools, steps, and approaches. This has helped us discover more productive ways to decide while embodying more productive ways to decide while embodying sacred community.

**AN ALTERNATIVE COMMON CONSENT APPROACH**

An alternative common consent approach begins with spiritual preparation. It is important to listen to God through discernment practices and using the six lenses discussed in the previous article. It includes engaging with one another to understand various perspectives on the topic and why people hold their perspectives. It makes space to hear the insights of minority voices. It values the opportunity of the body to refine possible outcomes. It honors the need for a strong level of support for a certain decision to move forward. Deciding may take longer; however, the way forward is often easier because the body understands and more readily embraces the decision.

As practiced in Community of Christ, the alternative common consent approach seeks a high level of agreement but does not need unanimous agreement. Considering this, the approach includes creating space for those who disagree with a decision while remaining committed to the church’s mission. The Faithful Disagreement Definition and Principles provide guidance to ensure continued inclusion of people who disagree with a decision of the body when they share their views in respectful ways.

Seeking common consent is challenging but also transforming. To be effective it is critical we set aside behaviors that stifle productive group discernment and decision-making. It is equally important that we approach conversations respectfully avoiding combative debate. At the same time, common
consent draws us together in seeking God’s will for the body.

PEOPLE DECIDING PEACEFULLY

Peter Senge, in his preface to David Bohm’s On Dialogue essay, observed that “Our habits are so strong to defend our view, to agree with views that correspond with our own, and to disagree with those who differ, that simply allowing diverse views to stand can be almost impossibly difficult.” Quoting Bohm directly, he stressed, “The thing that mostly gets in the way of dialogue is holding to assumptions and opinions, and defending them.” Senge described this as “…the instinct to judge and defend, embedded in the self-defense mechanism of our biological heritage.” As noted in the previous article, we can overcome our holdover self-defense instincts through spiritual formation practices such as spiritual indifference, shedding personal agendas, and practicing more peaceful ways of engaging one another.

One of our aims for the next World Conference is to have a verbally nonviolent conversation about nonviolence. It is important how we explore our personal and communal perspectives on the meaning of nonviolence and its priority as a faithful way to follow Christ.

May our exploration from beginning to end be characterized by spiritual centeredness. God invites us to listen deeply and carefully to various views and share our personal views by speaking in non-defensive ways. As we remain open to new insights, the Holy Spirit will guide us to a more commonly held understanding of the significant issues involved. Our faithful engagement as a sacred community will help us find a pathway on nonviolence that keeps us following Jesus, the peaceful One.
LESSON 5

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES (ZION): PEOPLE DECIDING PEACEFULLY

LESSON OVERVIEW

Learners will explore ways of being Christ-inspired community and principles for group decision making.

PREPARATION

Read “Introduction: Invitation to Explore,” page 4, and Article 5—"Spiritual Communities (Zion): People Deciding Peacefully,” page 37.

SUPPLIES

- *Community of Christ Sings*
- Chime or singing bowl (optional)
- Journal books or blank paper and writing utensils (invite participants to bring their own journal, if they wish)
- Meditative music for time of reflection (optional)

GUIDING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

As you explore issues of nonviolence in a group setting, it is important to engage in meaningful dialogue that welcomes all perspectives and honors the worth of all persons. The following principles will help guide difficult conversations:

- Honor all perspectives and hold safe space for all to share. Vary opportunities for sharing, such as sharing in pairs, writing, drawing responses, or sharing in small groups. Pay attention to perspectives that challenge your own, but remember the purpose is not to debate or change perspectives.
- Practice active listening by paraphrasing what has been stated to ensure each participant’s point is correctly interpreted.
- Encourage participants to speak as “I” instead of “we,” speaking for oneself instead of one’s “side,” and avoid generalizations.
- Approach divisive topics without personal agenda to gain understanding of different perspectives. Stay true to the gospel, and uphold Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs without diminishing the perspectives and life experiences of others.
- Uphold unity in diversity, recognizing oneness in Christ does not mean sameness.
- Recognize the Holy Spirit’s presence and movement through authentic sharing and holy listening.
Invite participants into a time of guided meditation. As you center in song, scripture, and silence, listen to the Holy Spirit’s invitation for you.

Call to prayer with the sounding of three chimes
Read, sing, or play a recording of “Ososŏ: Come Now, O Prince of Peace,” CCS 225.

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Read, sing, or play a recording of “Ososŏ: Come Now, O Prince of Peace,” CCS 225.

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.” Colossians 3:14-15

Allow one minute of silence followed by three chimes
Read, sing, or play a recording of “Ososŏ: Come Now, O Prince of Peace,” CCS 225.

“We love because he first loved us. Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” 1 John 4:19-21

Allow one minute of silence followed by three chimes
Read, sing, or play a recording of “Ososŏ: Come Now, O Prince of Peace,” CCS 225.

“Beloved Community of Christ, do not just speak and sing of Zion. Live, love, and share as Zion: those who strive to be visibly one in Christ, among whom there are no poor or oppressed.” Doctrine and Covenants 165:6a

Allow one minute of silence followed by three chimes
Read, sing, or play a recording of “Ososŏ: Come Now, O Prince of Peace,” CCS 225.

Engage
Invites exploration and interaction (35% of lesson time)

Use the following questions to guide discussion as a large group or in smaller breakout groups.

1. President Veazey writes about the urgent call for the church to make space, and references Doctrine and Covenants 161:3a, 163:2b, and 165:6a. Form small breakout groups or pairs and assign one of the passages to each. Discuss how each passage invites the church to make space. What might this look like for individuals, groups, or congregations? Share responses with the larger group.

2. Bonhoeffer wrote, “The church is not a religious community of worshippers of Christ but is Christ himself who has taken form among people.” How does this statement affirm or challenge your understanding of being sacred community? List characteristics of a church as a community of worshippers of Christ, and church as Christ himself who has taken form among people. Share examples of each.

3. President Veazey upholds significant developments in how the church makes important decisions together. Discuss how each of the following principles
impacts decision making. In what ways has each blessed the church, and what is challenging about each principle?
• Becoming a prophetic people
• Alternative (expanded) common consent approach
• Faithful Disagreement definition and principles (see page 45)

Respond
Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of lesson time)

Holy listening to God and others is an important practice as the church discerns the role nonviolence plays in the life of the church. As a way of seeing the diversity of perspectives, invite participants to share their level of support (1=little or no support, 3=moderate support, 5=full support) for the following statement:

Nonviolence plays an integral role in the church becoming a true peace movement.

If your setting allows, designate space for a line that represents a spectrum of opinion (from one to five) and invite participants to stand in the line according to their level of support for the statement.

Form breakout groups of four with as much diversity of perspectives as possible. Invite groups to share responses to the following questions. Each group member will have two minutes to share their responses followed by one minute of silence while the group holds that person in prayer. The purpose is not to debate or discuss perspectives, but to practice holy listening to the other.

• Why do you hold your level of support?
• What is most significant in shaping your perspective?

Share reflections about this experience with the larger group.

Send
Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of lesson time)

Allow moments of silence at the end of each lesson to reflect on what has been shared, discussed, and experienced. Participants are invited to reflect in silence, write or draw responses in a journal, or share with a partner. If possible, provide meditative music for this time of reflection.

Notice where there is new insight, awareness, and energy. For what are you most grateful through this experience?

Notice where you have questions or feel resistance. Ponder these with holy attention and curiosity. What is the Holy Spirit inviting you to receive? How will you respond, and what will be your next faithful step?

Bless
Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and help
(5% of lesson time)

Offer a prayer of blessing as we continue to grow in discernment, dialogue, and preparation for deciding peacefully as a spiritual community (Zion).

Sing “We Are One in the Spirit,” CCS 359.
Faithful disagreement principles.
CONCLUSION – THE EXPLORATION CONTINUES

This resource is not the end of the church’s discussion about the role nonviolence plays in the pursuit of “peace on and for the Earth” (Doctrine and Covenants 165:1d) and in the life and mission of the church. Our exploration continues.

The second resolved of WCR 1319 states: Resolved, that, scriptural, theological, and historical discussion resources on the principles of nonviolence be produced and suggested for members and friends of Community of Christ as part of our continued commitment to peace education and advocacy.

World Church teams have been studying and discussing nonviolence through the particular focus of the team such as theology, earth stewardship, and spiritual formation to name a few. Additional material for study and discussion is being produced. Watch for new material on CofChrist.org.

Also, a place for member-created resources on nonviolence has been activated and material is being posted at: www.heraldhouse.org/collections/member-created-nonviolence.

If you have something to add to the conversation, please submit it for review following the instructions posted at: www.heraldhouse.org/pages/member-created.

The third resolved of WCR 1319 states: Resolved, that, the position of Community of Christ on nonviolence be referred to the First Presidency for a report and/or statement to be presented to the next World Conference.

The role of nonviolence in the world is complex and has many cultural, theological, and personal perspectives. As the First Presidency has faithfully engaged in the assignment in the third resolved, it has become clear that adequate time is needed as the church patiently and diligently explores how we faithfully move toward Jesus, the peaceful One, and come to consensus on the role nonviolence plays in fulfilling our calling.

The Presidency anticipates that the next World Conference will be a time to further our discussions and collaborations as the church works toward creating a statement on nonviolence. It is anticipated that the next World Conference will be a critical time of discerning together as we listen to what God would have us hear and understand related to nonviolence. A future World Conference will have the responsibility of acting on a final statement about nonviolence but only after sufficient consensus has been developed on the best way forward.

Your voice is an important part of statement development. If you have suggestions regarding what should be included in a statement on nonviolence, email FP@CofChrist.org. The First Presidency reviews everything received as they discern responses to their task from the 2019 World Conference, providing a report and/or statement on nonviolence.