



Spiritual Formation Guide

Preparing for World Conference 2016

Introduction

I pray these words will serve as a pathway for those who sincerely seek to discover God's will through their own experience as we continue our faith adventure together.

—Stephen M. Veazey,
2013 words of counsel

These words of counsel, given to the church for spiritual guidance, were put into our hands for careful discernment. We take seriously the responsibility of being part of a group of disciples that is *engaged* so deeply in the heart of God's vision for creation.

Across cultures, we tease out the meanings and discover new ones each time we return to the poetic phrases and holy confrontations in this text. We test these words by living them where we are called to serve. We consider this guidance prayerfully, with reverence toward the sacred task of claiming words as holy, inspired.

President Veazey's words of introduction evoke expectation. We are part of a faith adventure! As a prophetic people, the work belongs to all. All are included in opening wide our imaginations to seek God's direction for God's people. Do you sense the significance? Take a moment to breathe it in. God is alive in you, in us, in the world, and a divine vision has been set before us. You are invited to gaze into the horizon of what can be. You are part of something that matters for the whole creation. You are called to share in God's movement in the world!

The invitation is to approach these words with curiosity and wonder. Seek God's direction for your life, your congregation, and the church. Allow questions

to emerge that do not have easy answers. Pay attention to how you feel as you read, engage in spiritual practice, and listen to the perspectives of others. An important part of discernment is awareness of interior movements. If you feel uncomfortable, ask yourself why. Could discomfort or resistance be an opening to discover a place within that needs healing, tending, or deeper understanding? Is the Spirit inviting you or your congregation to explore or see something in a new way?

This guide will help you prepare for World Conference 2016. Whether or not you can attend, your prayerful preparation is important. We prepare our hearts to be open to the Spirit's leading as we gather to seek God's guidance and make choices that open pathways into God's future. Yet, it is after our global gathering and decision-making that the mission of Jesus Christ is made real where and how you live. These words will come to life only as we speak and live them. We speak and live them by allowing them to take root in our hearts.

How to use this guide is your choice. Consider what is best for you, your family, or your congregation. These 13 sessions are intended to begin 13 weeks before World Conference. You could use them for Christian education, small-group study, or family devotions. Though individual work is encouraged, your experience with this guide will be enriched when shared in a group so individual and community discernment can be tested and blended.

There is opportunity for discussion and sharing, but rather than an analytical study, this guide is about paying attention to God's movements deep within. Remind one another of this difference at the begin-

ning of each session. Sometimes it can be difficult to move from talking about what we “think” to expressing what we “feel,” or sharing what we sense about where the Spirit is leading. We are invited to take everything with us into prayer, including our God-given minds, inviting the Spirit to speak to us through everything!

We gather as a diverse people with many ways of connecting with God. It is OK if a certain practice feels awkward at first. The goal is discernment, relationship with one another and God, and full participation in this faith adventure. Allow each practice, question, and reflection simply to be a doorway. Feel free to adapt as necessary, to find the best fit for your setting.

May this guide and words of counsel “open new horizons for living the meaning of true community in Christ.”¹

May your discernment be blessed

Your heart receptive

Your imagination open

Your courage enough

Your life poised

Amen.



Words of Counsel Presented at the 2013 World Conference

Until recently I thought words of counsel would not be given before or during the 2013 World Conference. However, over the past months, as I have prayed for the church and the world we serve, I have been surprised by regular promptings of the Spirit to offer words of counsel again.

Some themes of this counsel have been presented previously. Evidently, it is important to highlight and further clarify certain principles to advance the response God desires. Other parts of the counsel, while clearly related to previous instruction, begin to open new horizons for living the meaning of true community in Christ.

I pray these words will serve as a pathway for those who sincerely seek to discover God’s will through their own experience as we continue our faith adventure together. I do not intend to submit this counsel for inclusion in the Doctrine and Covenants now. I believe broad exploration of the

spiritual concepts in this counsel should precede any formal consideration in that regard. At the same time, this counsel is shared as an expression of my calling as prophet-president of the church in response to God’s gracious revealing of the way ahead for this faith movement.

To the church:

Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ’s mission.

As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God’s vision for the church and creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God’s nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ’s love and mission.

Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.

Undertake compassionate and just actions that seek to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth.

Let nothing separate you from this mission.

Continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives forward. Additional innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting groups of disciples and seekers are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world.

Free the full capacity of Christ’s mission through generosity that imitates God’s generosity. Discover deep joy and life’s meaning by promoting divine purposes on Earth. Listen to the testimonies of those who are responding and follow your soul’s yearning to come home to God’s grace and generosity.

Remember, a basic discipleship principle is growing Christ’s mission through both local and world mission tithes according to true capacity. Giving to other worthwhile organizations, while an important part of A Disciple’s Generous Response, follows world and local mission tithing and should not diminish or replace it. If a law is needed to focus and balance response, then let these tithing principles serve that purpose.

Tithing is a spiritual practice that demonstrates willingness to regularly offer every dimension of one’s life to God. When defined by faith, love, and hopeful planning, including resolving indebtedness, capacity to respond becomes much greater than initially assumed.

1. Stephen M. Veazey, 2013 words of counsel

Following the approval of Doctrine and Covenants 164, I continued to prayerfully explore certain principles in it. A particular focus was paragraph 5, where the following words appear, approved by the World Conference as authoritative for our life together:

It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourself and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ, a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

As indicated in the preface to Section 164, study of Galatians 3:27–29 was foundational to this counsel. Following the approval of Section 164, I persisted in asking God about the meaning and implications of paragraph 5 and Galatians 3:27–29. I sought additional understanding of the spiritual condition that would allow us to see ourselves and others from the changed perspective emphasized in Section 164:5. My journey continued as I was encouraged to study John 17.

John 17 conveys the prayer of Jesus for his disciples as he approaches death on the cross. As I reflected on this text, the Spirit urged me to invite the church to go much deeper in its understanding of the oneness with and among his disciples, who Jesus prayed for. Catching sight of the possible future, I marveled at the blessings that could be enjoyed by the church as we respond. I was left with two questions: “Are we willing to continue to become such a community for Christ and the cause of Zion?” And, “What will it take for us to truly be a community of oneness, mutuality, and revelation of divine love through Christ?”

The following words arose as the Spirit’s voice to the church in response to that experience and those questions:

More fully accept and embody your oneness and equality in Jesus Christ, who dwells in oneness with God.

Oneness and equality in Christ are realized through the waters of baptism, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, and sustained through the sacrament of Communion. Embrace the full meaning of these sacraments and be spiritually joined in Christ as never before.

However, be aware, it is not right to profess oneness and equality in Christ through sacramental covenants and then to deny that equality by attitude, word, or action. Such behavior wounds Christ’s body and denies what is eternally resolved in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

You do not fully understand many interrelated pro-

cesses of human creation. Through its wonderful complexity, creation produces both diversity and order. Be not consumed with concern about variety in human types and characteristics as you see them. Be passionately concerned about how God is revealing divine nature through sacred communities of love, oneness, and equality that embody God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.

Oneness and equality in Christ do not mean uniformity. They mean unity in diversity and relating in Christ-like love to the circumstances of others as if they were one’s own. They also mean full opportunity for people to experience human worth and related rights, including expressing God-given giftedness through the church community.

Regarding priesthood, God calls whomever God calls from among committed disciples, according to their gifts, to serve and reach all humankind. Priesthood policies and procedures provide a clear way for disciples to respond to calling. They also define the difference between a sense of call as potential and the need to align one’s life with principles of moral behavior and relationships that promote the well-being of the church community.

Involvement in Christ’s mission is enriched and focused through spiritual growth and guidance. Following direction already emerging, the presiding evangelist and the Order of Evangelists, in concert with their colleagues in ministry, should concentrate on spiritually forming communities of disciples and seekers that live deeply and generously in Christ’s Spirit.

For this purpose, offer the sacrament of evangelist blessing not only to individuals and congregations, but to families, households, and groups of people seeking spiritual guidance to more completely give themselves to Christ’s mission.

The presiding evangelist will provide instructions for implementation at the appropriate time. Nothing in the instruction should be construed to lessen the importance of the sacrament of evangelist blessing for individuals.

In conclusion, the following words also are shared in response to the radiant light and love of God’s Spirit:

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

As Christ’s body, lovingly and patiently bear the weight of criticism from those who hesitate to re-

spond to the divine vision of human worth and equality in Christ. This burden and blessing is yours for divine purposes.

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

Trust in this promise.
Amen.

Stephen M. Veazey
President of the Church



Session One: Foundations for Discernment

Gathering

Breathe deeply and rest into awareness of the Spirit, which already is with us. Enter silence, imagining God's loving gaze on you. If there is chatter within, recognize it gently. Know you are welcome in this space as you are.

Scripture Meditation: Dwelling in the Word

Read this text twice, with a pause for silence between. Listen for an invitation as we prepare spiritually for World Conference.

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.

Listen carefully to your own journey as a people, for it is a sacred journey and it has taught you many things you must know for the journey yet to come.

Listen to its teachings and discover anew its principles. Do not yearn for times that are past, but recognize that you have been given a foundation of faithful service, even as you build a foundation for what is yet to be.

As a prophetic people you are called, under the direction of the spiritual authorities and with the common consent of the people, to discern the

divine will for your own time and in the places where you serve.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:1b–2c

Reflect

Invite group members to reflect, through one word or phrase, on what invitation arises from this text as we enter this time of discernment.

Opening Prayer

Read the following prayer or offer your own.

It is for openness we pray, O God.

Open hearts, Open minds

Open and willing to receive you

Open and willing to receive you
through one another

Open and expectant to hear your direction

Open and eager to follow wherever you may lead.

Grant us wisdom as we seek you

And patience when we struggle to seek you

And courage when we find you

To live the vision you dream within us

For the blessing of the world.

Amen.

Suggested hymn

"Breathe On Me, Breath of God," *Community of Christ Sings* 190

Introduction

This guide uses the 2013 words of counsel as the focus for discernment as we prepare for World Conference 2016. As a group, read the next essay as a catalyst for conversation about the nature of discernment and the purpose of our time together.

Discerning the Heart of God's Vision

While discernment is critical for disciples to make decisions, the heart of discernment goes beyond any specific decision. Discernment is the constant invitation of a whole-life orientation toward the Spirit's movement in all things. A lifestyle that cultivates a habitually discerning heart will see the fruit of discernment ripen in specific decision-making moments. Discernment is less about something we do and more about who we become as people focused on God's movement and direction. Our hearts become more and more in tune with the divine song singing through us. As we hear this holy melody more and more, we become aware of when we are out of tune or experience dissonance.

Discernment is the process of aligning our lives, personally and in community, with the divine will, vision, or dream. It is the work of co-creation. In discernment, we seek to unearth all agendas, conscious and hidden, the attachments and assumptions that influence us, so we become more faithful to the deepest call of the holy in our ever-evolving lives. As a prophetic people who embrace Continuing Revelation, we especially are attuned to the ways God always discloses more “light and truth.” Distilled to its most basic expression, discernment is a deepening, vibrant *relationship* of attention and response to God, who is always on the move.

Discernment, by nature, requires deep listening to the voice of the Spirit, the One we seek. We often are tempted to be self-sufficient, proposing our agendas to God, rather than recognizing that mission is God’s initiative. We hope to be attentive enough to the Spirit to see and respond to God’s movement and invitation already happening around us. Seeking first God’s vision is not blind obedience, but eyes wide open, searching for the One for whom our souls yearn, inviting expression in the details of daily living. We are not asked to suspend our “thinking minds” but to take them with us into prayer. The invitation is to be humble enough to realize that sometimes our plans are too small, our logic too limited, to be able to grasp the dream of God with and for us.

Nothing is too small or too large to take to discernment. In fact, when urgency presses in and fear tightens within us, the work of discernment invites us to remember to whom we belong and for whom we live—realigning with and reaching toward the eternal voice of love. Sometimes we feel there is no time or no hope. Sometimes we question the efficiency of prayer. Those may be the moments precisely when the voice of love is trying to speak to us and return us to the rhythm of the One who is all time and all hope.

We discern individually and in community. While no one can discern for us, discernment is more about connection than isolation. When we seek to align our lives with the divine vision it is about us and beyond us. We have the joy of belonging to a dream of shalom that unwinds its expansive possibility through even the most seemingly insignificant moments and choices.

When we genuinely seek and respond to God’s vision, we can be assured we will be led closer to the peaceable kingdom of God on Earth. Nothing we take to discernment, no matter how personal, is outside the scope of God’s deep dream for the whole world. This means discernment is always about living Christ’s mission.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important for disciples to engage in discernment?
2. What does it look like to cultivate a habitually discerning heart?
3. What is the connection between discernment and Continuing Revelation?
4. What is the difference between proposing an agenda for God and being open to God’s agenda?
5. Why is humility necessary for faithful discernment?
6. How is discernment personal and communal?
7. What is the connection between discernment and mission?

Spiritual Practice: What Matters Most?

Discernment is rooted in what some traditions call the “principle and foundation,” which is a reminder of who created us and why we were created. Remembering our reason for being becomes the testing ground for whatever we are deciding. If something does not align with this core essence of whom we are called to be, it may indicate it is not the choice we are called to make.

As Community of Christ, how might we express our principle and foundation as a faith community? We can find help in several key resources, including:

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

Mission Initiatives: Invite People to Christ; Abolish Poverty, End Suffering; Pursue Peace on Earth; Develop Disciples to Serve; and Experience Congregations in Mission

Enduring Principles: Grace and Generosity, Sacredness of Creation, Continuing Revelation, Worth of All Persons, All are Called, Responsible Choices, Pursuit of Peace (Shalom), Unity in Diversity, and Blessings of Community

Sharing in Community of Christ: *Exploring Identity, Message, Mission, and Beliefs*, 3rd Ed. (visit www.Cof-Christ.org and use the search box in the page’s upper-right corner)

We also can rely on wisdom from Doctrine and Covenants 164:9f, “The mission of Jesus Christ is *what matters most* for the journey ahead.” We are invited to discern *how* the mission of Jesus Christ is made real in each ministry setting as a response to *what matters most*?

Reflect on our principle and foundation as the grounding for discernment. How might you explain, in two or three sentences what matters most or is at the core of who we are created and called to be as Community of Christ?

Facilitator note: Give group members eight to 10 minutes to do this individually. You may choose to play meditative music quietly in the background. Recognize that for some writing will be helpful, but it is not compulsory. Invite people to take part at the level that feels most genuine for them.

Share statements: Form a circle and invite each one who is willing to share.

Questions for Reflection

(After statements are read):

1. Share about trying to explain a principle and foundation for Community of Christ.
2. How does hearing one another's principle and foundation statements clarify our core essence as a faith community?
3. How does grounding discernment in this core identity affect how you approach decisions (personally and as a community)?

For Next Time

Ask everyone to read "A Rhythm for Communal Discernment" (below) and the 2013 words of counsel.

Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of God's presence.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Blessing

That we may become a people who hear your Word spoken everywhere, in everything

That we may form the habit of listening for *your voice* among the many, wherever we are

That the longing for you will grow as the deepest motivation within us

That we will have strong hearts and courage enough to be your faithful people

That we may do all this in the name of the One who calls us. Amen.



Rhythm for Communal Discernment

Every time we gather, we will engage the same rhythm as a way of deepening our discernment as a communal discipline. For some, the practices may feel awkward or uncomfortable. Do not worry. You will become more comfortable in time. The goal is not to do everything perfectly but to create openness to receive what *God is doing* in and through us.

We discern individually and in community. While no one can discern for us, discernment is more about connection than isolation. We are a discerning community, but you also are invited to take this rhythm into your daily life. Be open to God's invitation and direction throughout the week. Cultivate within yourself the *habit of discernment* in everything you do.

1. Gathering

What insights or questions have been present within you this week from our last time together? Moving through discernment, this time of gathering will become increasingly important. This is a way to check in with one another about how our discernment is affecting us throughout our daily lives. Where do you notice the Spirit's presence? How is the habit of discernment, seeking God's presence in everything, becoming more alive in you? What feels significant, related to the specific question before us?

2. Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom

Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you

as you begin to focus on being present fully, here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

3. Dwelling in the Word

Each time we gather, we'll have opportunity to dwell in the words we are invited to discern. Read the selected text slowly and prayerfully, paying attention to where you feel drawn to explore. Listen for God's invitation for your life, the church, and the world. Our tendency when encountering sacred text may be to analyze or impose meaning. The invitation is to get beneath what may seem to be the obvious "answer." Contemplative reading seeks first God's presence and invitation.

The Practice: Dwelling in the Word

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

4. Practicing prophetic imagination

We are called to embody our prophetic tradition by living in the spaces between what is and what can be. We need to see honestly what is and imagine what can be! Imagination can be difficult for many. It can be hard to set our sights on something we never have seen fully, but every time we speak of the peaceable kingdom of God on Earth, we are exercising our imagination. We are imagining a time of equality, justice, and shalom for all creation. Sometimes we even experience this hoped-for reality for a few moments and express that we have glimpsed this imagined future in God's reign.

These imagined realities have real-life implications in our call to "...Break free of the shackles of conventional culture..." (Doctrine and Covenants 163:9). As a prophetic people, we are called to imagine what can be and let it shape our engagement with the world before us here and now. Prophet-President Stephen M. Veazey expressed this concept in the December 2014 *Herald*:

There is always the future (*adventus*) that comes toward us from God as promise. In relation to the *adventus* our question is not "When will it happen, if ever?" but "How can we live now as if the horizon of our future had already broken in our lives through the Spirit of Jesus Christ?"

An important part of discernment is creating space to imagine the possibilities of what could be. If we were living the words of guidance in this text, what might change in our lives, congregations, and communities? What are the implications of living this text? Can we imagine them coming to life in the circumstances and relationships of our everyday lives? Invite God to imagine within you what this text made real may look like where you live.

The Practice

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

5. Paying attention to God's Spirit within

Discernment engages our whole selves. Discernment is different from problem solving. It is Spirit-seeking, which invites us to use multiple resources to encounter the One we seek! In some cultures, we may be wary of trusting what we feel as a path to divine understanding. Yet, our inner senses can reveal powerful messages to us about what the Spirit is doing.

We've all probably decided something but still felt "sick to our stomach" about what we chose. Or perhaps we felt a sense of Spirit-nearness as confirmation that we were heading in a good direction. As you read the text we are discerning, there may be moments when you feel angered, energized, confused,

joyful, or hopeful. Could discomfort or resistance be an opening to discover a place within that needs healing, tending, or clarity? Is the Spirit inviting you to explore or see something in your own life or congregation in a new way? We are invited to explore whatever is happening within us, not as an answer, but as a doorway to deeper understanding.

You may ask, "Why did that part of the text excite me? Why did I feel a pang of sorrow during that time of prayer? Why did I resist that last spiritual practice?" In this time of honest interior seeing, we invite the Spirit to speak to us through how we respond to what we encounter. Maybe there is an invitation to return to the prayer for spiritual freedom. Maybe something significant within you wants to be noticed for greater clarity.

The practice: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide:

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Seeking confirmation: Engaging the 2013 words of counsel in sections, we constantly hold the entire document in the light of God's vision for us as a faith community. Prayerfully, we consider the inspired nature of this document and the guidance it brings. We remain open, always, to the leadings of the Spirit when the prophet-president is inspired to present such words of counsel for consideration.

Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Two: A Divine Vision

Opening hymn suggestion:

"Mayenziwe 'Ntando Yakho (Your Will Be Done)"
CCS 191

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

Community of Christ, a divine vision is set before you. Presented over the years through various inspired phrases and symbols, it is expressed now through initiatives in harmony with Jesus Christ's mission.

As a spiritual venture, boldly follow the initiatives into the heart of God's vision for the church and

creation. Then, in response to growing insight about God's nature and will, continue to shape communities that live Christ's love and mission.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silently reflecting, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide:

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements?

Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Seeking confirmation: Engaging the 2013 words of counsel in sections, we constantly hold the entire document in the light of God's vision for us as a faith community. Prayerfully, we consider the inspired nature of this document and the guidance it brings. We remain open, always, to the leadings of the Spirit when the prophet-president is inspired to present such words of counsel for consideration.

Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Three: Let Nothing Separate You

Opening hymn suggestion:

"Santo, santo, santo (Holy, Holy, Holy)" CCS 159

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we

want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

Lovingly invite others to experience the good news of new life in community with Christ. Opportunities abound in your daily lives if you choose to see them.

Undertake compassionate and just actions that seek to abolish poverty and end needless suffering. Pursue peace on and for the Earth.

Let nothing separate you from this mission.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silently reflecting, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide:

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members we are listening to understand, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.

- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Four: Continue to Align

Opening hymn suggestion:

"Wa Wa Wa Emimimo (Come, O Holy Spirit, Come)"
CCS 157

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

Continue to align your priorities with local and worldwide church efforts to move the initiatives

forward. Additional innovative approaches to coordinating congregational life and supporting groups of disciples and seekers are needed to address mission opportunities in a changing world.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read the text again**, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silently reflecting, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide.

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?

- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Five: Free the Full Capacity

Opening hymn suggestion:

"From You I Receive" CCS 611

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom: Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become in-

creasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

Free the full capacity of Christ's mission through generosity that imitates God's generosity. Discover deep joy and life's meaning by promoting divine purposes on Earth. Listen to the testimonies of those who are responding and follow your soul's yearning to come home to God's grace and generosity

Remember, a basic discipleship principle is growing Christ's mission through both local and world mission tithes according to true capacity. Giving to other worthwhile organizations, while an important part of A Disciple's Generous Response, follows world and local mission tithing and should not diminish or replace it. If a law is needed to focus and balance response, then let these tithing principles serve that purpose.

Tithing is a spiritual practice that demonstrates willingness to regularly offer every dimension of one's life to God. When defined by faith, love, and hopeful planning, including resolving indebtedness, capacity to respond becomes much greater than initially assumed.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?

- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflecting, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide.

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Seeking confirmation. Engaging the 2013 words of

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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Six:

Oneness and Equality in Christ

Opening hymn suggestion:

"We Are One in the Spirit" CCS 359

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the

Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

Oneness and equality in Christ are realized through the waters of baptism, confirmed by the Holy Spirit, and sustained through the sacrament of Communion. Embrace the full meaning of these sacraments and be spiritually joined in Christ as never before.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become

aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.

- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide:

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Seven: Behavior that Wounds

Opening hymn suggestion:

"Senzeni Na" CCS 200

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

...be aware, it is not right to profess oneness and equality in Christ through sacramental covenants and then to deny that equality by attitude, word, or action. Such behavior wounds Christ's body and denies what is eternally resolved in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?

- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- Read the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide.

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Eight: Wonderful Complexity

Opening hymn suggestion:

"Ososō" CCS 225

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

You do not fully understand many interrelated processes of human creation. Through its wonderful complexity, creation produces both diversity and order. Be not consumed with concern about variety in human types and characteristics as you see them. Be passionately concerned about how God is revealing divine nature through sacred communities of love, oneness, and equality that embody God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become

aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.

- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide:

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Nine: Unity in Diversity

Opening hymn suggestion:

"Sing of Colors" CCS 332

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

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The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

Oneness and equality in Christ do not mean uniformity. They mean unity in diversity and relating in Christ-like love to the circumstances of others as if they were one's own. They also mean full opportunity for people to experience human worth and related rights, including expressing God-given giftedness through the church community.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God’s invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God’s invitation through these words?
- Enter silence, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God’s Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ’s peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God’s Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God’s Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide.

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God’s vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice

holy curiosity, seeking God’s Spirit through one another.

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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God’s presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit’s presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Ten: God Calls

Opening hymn suggestion:

“Uyai Mose (Come All You People)” CCS 84

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

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Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

Regarding priesthood, God calls whomever God calls from among committed disciples, according to their gifts, to serve and reach all humankind. Priesthood policies and procedures provide a clear way for disciples to respond to calling. They also define the difference between a sense of call as potential and the need to align one's life with the principles of moral behavior and relationships that promote the well-being of the church community.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live.

Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.

- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide.

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Eleven: Spiritually Forming Communities

Opening hymn suggestion:

"Jesu, Tawa Pano (Jesus, We Are Here)" CCS 71

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom:

Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

Involvement in Christ's mission is enriched and focused through spiritual growth and guidance. Following direction already emerging, the presiding evangelist and the Order of Evangelists, in concert with their colleagues in ministry, should concentrate on spiritually forming communities

of disciples and seekers that live deeply and generously in Christ's Spirit.

—2013 words of counsel

- Read the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- Enter silence, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- Read the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- Enter silence, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- Respond: Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide:

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements?

Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Seeking confirmation: Engaging the 2013 words of counsel in sections, we constantly hold the entire document in the light of God's vision for us as a faith community. Prayerfully, we consider the inspired nature of this document and the guidance it brings. We remain open, always, to the leadings of the Spirit when the prophet-president is inspired to present such words of counsel for consideration.

Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Twelve: This Burden and Blessing

Opening hymn suggestion:
"Spirit of the Living God" CCS 567

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom: Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become in-

creasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

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

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

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or engage in reflection with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice

holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide.

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or push you further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Seeking confirmation: Engaging the 2013 words of counsel in sections, we constantly hold the entire document in the light of God's vision for us as a faith community. Prayerfully, we consider the inspired nature of this document and the guidance it brings. We remain open, always, to the leadings of the Spirit when the prophet-president is inspired to present such words of counsel for consideration.

Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.

- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer



Session Thirteen: Trust in this Promise

Opening hymn suggestion:
"Seek Ye First" CCS 599

Opening Prayer

Gathering

Invite participants to share as we begin this communal discernment. Did an insight or question from our previous session capture your attention throughout the week or seem significant?

Preparing the heart—praying for spiritual freedom: Our ultimate goal in discernment is to become increasingly faithful to God's vision. Like an athlete preparing to move in whatever direction needed, we want to be ready to move at a moment's notice when we sense the Spirit's direction. Each time we gather, we will begin with a prayer for spiritual freedom to bring light to places within that may be keeping us from making the most faithful decisions. We intentionally open our hearts to *listen* for the voice of the Spirit and make space within to receive the gifts of divine grace.

The practice: Enter silence. Take a few moments to breathe deeply and listen within. Pay attention to whatever stirs within you as you begin to focus on being present fully here and now.

Gently notice what you carry into this discernment. What is the state of your heart? Are other priorities, tasks, or motivations competing for your attention? Be nonjudgmentally honest about your interior spaces as you create room within to receive the Spirit.

Prayer for spiritual freedom: God, may my deep hope align with your deep vision. Release from me anything that keeps me from fully receiving your guidance and following your Spirit. Amen.

Dwelling in the Word

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

Trust in this promise.

—2013 words of counsel

- **Read** the text, noticing what captures your attention. What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Read** the text again, slowly and prayerfully. What captures your attention? What is God's invitation through these words?
- **Enter silence**, simply being present with what you just heard. Notice your interior responses.
- **Respond:** Write your reflections, share with a partner, or reflect with the group.

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Practicing prophetic imagination: You may play meditative music in the background. Take eight to 10 minutes for this imaginative reflection.

- **What is:** Through writing or silently reflecting, begin to imagine the realities of the place you live. Imagine your family, congregation, or neighborhood. Imagine the details of daily life. Become aware of any injustices or circumstances where Christ's peace is needed.
- **What can be:** Read the selected text. Through writing or silently reflecting, imagine what these words could mean in your environment. If this

guidance were followed to its potential, what might change? What might be the implications of this text where you live?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

Paying attention to God's Spirit within: Through writing in a journal or silent reflection, pay attention to interior movements. Allow the questions below to be a guide.

- Where has the Spirit been moving most strongly within you?
- What has captured your attention or stirred your heart? What was the source of these movements? Did they draw you closer to the heart of God's vision for creation or further away?

Invite the group to share responses: Remind members to listen for understanding, not debate. Practice holy curiosity, seeking God's Spirit through one another.

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Closing Practice

- Breathe deeply. Enter silent awareness of the presence of God.
- In the silence, offer gratitude for God's presence and movement in our time together.
- Pay attention to moments when you resisted a practice, person, or idea. Pray for wisdom to understand the roots of your resistance.
- Offer the next week to God, praying for sharpened attention to the Spirit's presence and invitation.

Closing Prayer