

Discerning What Matters Most for the Journey Ahead

A Conversational Tool for Evaluating Current Ministries, Activities, and Experiments

The Prophetic Challenge and Question

Doctrine and Covenants 163:1 challenges us:

“Community of Christ,” your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go.”

We will discover our future if we discern and embrace the full meaning of our identity and calling! This affirmation about our future calls us to discern and live with a pivotal and essential question:

How do we discern, embrace, and risk living fully into our identity and calling as Community of Christ in a changing world?

How does our *relentless* pursuit of this question begin to shape *everything* we do when we gather and are sent in mission? Stated differently, how do our encounters with the physical and spiritual suffering of others locally and globally shape what we do when we gather and are sent as signal communities? **This is much more than a new program or a set of objectives.** This question is calling us to imagine *a whole new way of being the church* (literally embodying the concerns and passions of Christ). This *whole new way of being the church* will reintroduce our neighborhoods, towns, and cities to the living Christ and the church as though they met them both for the first time!

Three Cultural Longings

The following three cultural longings, *Renewal, Relationships, and Relevance* summarize much of what we understand about our changing contexts in the western world. Our identity and calling as Community of Christ challenges us to prophetically respond to these longings. Many of the principles of LCM also relate directly to these longings (i.e. mission begins with encounter, mission is relational, etc.). In short, the Holy Spirit has been revealing new insights and new ways to relate our mission to a changing world.

Outlined below you will find a brief definition of the cultural longing and an essential question for evaluating current and future congregational or small group ministries, activities, and experiments. Some ministries, activities, and experiments will address all three cultural longings and others will only address one. If a ministry, activity, or experiment does not address at least one cultural longing we should consider whether it has value for us as we relate Christ’s mission to our changing contexts.

As we engage in missional practices we have opportunities to *encounter* these cultural longings in relationships with one another, our neighbors, and strangers we have yet to meet. In these encounters the Spirit seeks to breathe new insights and new life so the Word can become flesh in every new context.

Cultural Longings and Essential Questions

Renewal - our deepest intellectual and spiritual longings to know and experience the essence of God as transformative love, joy, hope, and peace in sacred community.

Essential Question for Evaluating Current and Future Ministries, Activities, and Experiments:

How does this ministry, activity, or experiment bring renewal for us **and** the “spiritual but not religious” people who have walked away from God and the church?

Relationships - our deepest intellectual and spiritual longings to belong, to experience unconditional acceptance, and to walk life's journey in companionship with others.

Essential Question for Evaluating Current and Future Ministries, Activities, and Experiments:

How does this ministry, activity, or experiment lead us to *risk* deeper and new relationships with God, one another, our neighbors, and strangers?

Relevance - our deepest intellectual and spiritual longings to participate in creating a meaningful and hopeful future for all.

Essential Question for Evaluating Current and Future Ministries, Activities, and Experiments:

How does this ministry, activity, or experiment help us *embody and live* the concerns and passion of Christ in our neighbourhoods, towns, and cities? Specifically consider this question by discussing how the ministry, activity, or experiment connects with one or more of the five mission initiatives:

- Invite People to Christ
- Abolish Poverty, End Suffering
- Pursue Peace on (and for the) Earth
- Experience Congregations in Mission
- Develop Disciples to Serve

Suggested Process

1. Begin with prayer and reflection on Doctrine and Covenants 163:1,2, Doctrine and Covenants 164:9d-f and the first section of the 2013 Words of Counsel. Set aside *at least 30 minutes* for this reflection and conversation.
2. Make a list of all current and anticipated congregational or small group ministries, activities, and experiments.

3. Review each ministry, activity, and experiment by discussing the three cultural longings and associated questions. Specifically, how does the ministry, activity, or experiment connect or not connect with one of the three cultural longings? Go back and refer to the scripture passages in Step #1 as you discuss each one.
4. Discuss specific ideas for how to re-envision each ministry, activity, and experiment to better connect with the cultural longings. Are there modifications to consider or a whole new way to approach the ministry, activity, or experiment?
5. Consider if any of the ministries, activities, and experiments should be discontinued.
6. Review key discussion points or themes, decisions, and next steps.
7. Check in with participants to see how they are feeling about the process. Ask each person to share a brief word or phrase that captures their feeling.
8. End with prayer.

Note: *It is very important to intentionally create safe space for honest and open sharing. Approach the process prayerfully and thoughtfully. Do not rush. Be sure to invite all voices to be heard. This process should not be completed in one session but over several sessions to allow conversation to evolve, multiple voices to be heard, and the Spirit to breathe new insights among us.*

Reference Scriptures

“Community of Christ,” your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go.

Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God’s shalom, invites all people to come and receive divine peace in the midst of the difficult questions and struggles of life. Follow Christ in the way that leads to God’s peace and discover the blessings of all of the dimensions of salvation.

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. The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:1-2b

If you truly would be Community of Christ, then embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ.

The challenges and opportunities are momentous. Will you remain hesitant in the shadows of your fears, insecurities, and competing loyalties? Or will you move forward in the light of your divinely instilled call and vision?

The mission of Jesus Christ is what matters most for the journey ahead.

—Doctrine and Covenants 164:9d-f

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.

—Words of Counsel 2013