

## Receive, Embody, and Share the Invitation to Christ's Peace!

*The intent of this paper is to stimulate conversation and live into ways we receive, embody, and share Christ's peace in a changing world. It is not the definitive word but part of an ongoing exploration of how we make the living Word tangible in every new context.*

In his 2005 World Conference sermon, President Stephen M. Veazey challenged the church to share the peace of Jesus Christ! It was a call to experiential *rediscovery* (i.e. encounter) of Christ as the source of our peace. It was also an invitation to embody and share all the dimensions of Christ's peace as our response to the church's historic call to seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion.<sup>1</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 163:2, given two years later, challenged the church to receive, follow (i.e. embody), and invite (i.e. share) others into the fullness of Christ's peace:

2 a. 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.

b. 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.

As a faith movement rooted in Jesus Christ we have explored the radically relational nature of God as revealed in Christ—the *source* of our peace. Our ongoing encounter with “something not fully explainable but utterly transforming”<sup>2</sup> reveals needless physical and spiritual suffering including our own brokenness. This is the origin of our mission initiatives—Jesus' encounter (i.e. spiritual anointing) and proclamation of mission in Luke Chapter 4.

***Jesus encountered and revealed God's deepest yearnings to “restore persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth.”<sup>3</sup>***

This relational impulse of Christ continues to move in our world today as the “Spirit reaches out to numerous souls even now”<sup>4</sup>. The sending of God or *missio Dei* as revealed in Christ expresses God's desire to restore, heal, and reconcile in relationship *with us* for the sake of our world now.

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<sup>1</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 6:3a

<sup>2</sup> Share the Peace of Jesus Christ – 2005 WC Sermon

<sup>3</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 163:1b

<sup>4</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 153:9b

David Bosch, a well-known theologian on the topic of mission, writes,

In attempting to flesh out the *Missio Dei* concept, the following could be said: In the new image mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God (cf Aagaard 1973:11-15; Aagaard 1974:423). "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church." (Moltmann 1977:64). *Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world: the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission* (Aagaard 1973:13). There is church because there is mission, not vice versa (Aagaard 1974:423). To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love.<sup>5</sup>

**God moved toward us in Jesus Christ. We are now called to join God's *movement* toward others in Christ. We are called to discern and follow the disruptive promptings of the Holy Spirit in mission *with* one another and especially the stranger.**

President Stephen M. Veazey, in his April 2012 address, called the church to join God's movement (i.e. evangelism) toward all people. In this address he defined evangelism as:

*"To bring good news to the poor"* means evangelism in the fullest sense of the term. It means gospel proclamation in word and action, including invitation and extravagant hospitality!

In today's varied social and economic settings, it means inviting people to Christ to experience the good news of the gospel whether they are poor in substance or poor in spirit. This invitation ALWAYS includes the understanding that people best experience the gospel through the fellowship, ministries, and sacraments of the faith community.

In Luke 5:1-11 Simon Peter, James, and John had an encounter with Jesus on the lake of Gennesaret. Simon Peter in his doubt recognized his own poverty of faith as boats were sinking with an unbelievable catch of fish. It was only in the recognition of his own spiritual poverty and vision that he could make room for a life changing invitation he would soon share with others.

Jesus' invitation, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" was a glimpse of what could be if the disciples would risk entering the depth of people's lives and *embody* hope and healing. Catching fish would be less risky than getting involved in the messiness of people's lives. However, Jesus called the disciples to move beyond their fears and risk something new with him.

The people Jesus invited were no different from you or me today. They had no extraordinary gifts that qualified them for this adventure. Their willingness to risk something new emerged *after* receiving Christ's peace as life-giving and life disrupting presence!

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<sup>5</sup> Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.Orbis 1991), 390.

**The receiving and sharing of Spirit led invitations are entry points through which we move deeper into relationship with God and others, encounter our mutual poverty, and turn toward new life in Christ together.**

Invitation is *not a one-time event* we work up to but a *collection* of Spirit led events that move us closer toward all the dimensions of Christ's peace (i.e. the Kingdom of God come near) in community and include:

- Invitation to conversation without agenda
- Invitation to tables of abundance where *body and soul* find nourishment
- Invitation to backyards, dinner tables, and ordinary places where people receive and share radical hospitality
- Invitation to safe space where thoughts and feelings can be freely expressed
- Invitation to prayer as discovery of Jesus as constant companion
- Invitation to new forms of loving community where no one walks alone
- Invitation to release from unnecessary suffering
- Invitation to reconciliation as restoring of healthy relationships
- Invitation to responsible choices that lead to wholeness and healing for all
- Invitation to the fullness of Christ's peace as invitation, hospitality, healing, and call to action
- Invitation to baptism as commitment to walk with Christ
- Invitation to confirmation as receiving the Spirit in community with others

When we *receive* and embrace Christ's invitation to be in relationship we risk seeing ourselves and others from a changed perspective. Christ's mission and message is disruptive and once encountered changes everything. When we *embody* and *share* Christ's invitation by risking new relationships we become vulnerable to the unnecessary suffering of others and God's prophetic vision (i.e. imagination) for an alternative future. This leads to unsettledness and a growing conviction to live and embody the fullness of Christ's peace stated in Luke 4:18, 19 and expressed in our mission initiatives.

***Invitation is the Entry Point!*** – The invitation is to receive (i.e. encounter) Christ's peace daily and embody and share *all the dimensions* of Christ's peace with others. This is the essence of our first three mission initiatives:



**Invite People to Christ**

*Christ's mission of evangelism*



**Abolish Poverty, End Suffering**

*Christ's mission of compassion*



**Pursue Peace on Earth**

*Christ's mission of justice and peacemaking*

**In practice, the mission initiatives cannot be separated or they don't lead to a fullness of Christ's peace. Inviting people to a *relationship with Christ* is ESSENTIAL because it leads to a change of heart and mind where we see what we could not see and hear what we could not hear before. When we truly experience the fullness of Christ's peace we can do no other than embody and share this peace out of our abundance!**

Doctrine and Covenants 164:5 challenges us to *re-member* the essential meaning of our baptism daily:

5 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 yourselves 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.

This is only the beginning. Living the meaning of our baptism daily is a commitment to continue to receive the invitation, embody the invitation, and share the invitation to Christ's peace so that together we:

*Invite People to Christ; Abolish Poverty, End Suffering; and Pursue Peace on and for the Earth*

### **Invite People to Christ – *Invite People into the Fullness of Christ's Peace!***

We have much *internal (i.e. spiritual) and external (i.e. relational)* work to do! Nothing frightens non-Christians and even many Christians more than the "E" word – EVANGELISM. Although historically there are many poor examples of evangelism, there are many compelling stories of lives changed because someone risked spiritual and relational transformation with a stranger.

In Community of Christ we understand our call to evangelism as a call to invite others into all the dimensions of Christ's Peace. David Bosch provides a helpful definition of evangelism that incorporates the essence of our mission initiatives:

"In Summary, Evangelism may be defined as that dimension and activity of the church's mission which seeks to offer every person, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged by the gospel of explicit faith in Jesus Christ, with a view to embracing him as Savior, becoming a living member of his community, and being enlisted in his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Chilcote, Paul Wesley, and Lacey C. Warner. "Chapter 1." *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008. 17. Print.

Returning to the lake of Gennesaret, Jesus, while calling Peter to follow, revealed disturbing but necessary insights into Peter's brokenness and poverty of Spirit. In our modern world that falsely values self-sufficiency and self-determination we must recover our passion for receiving, embodying, and sharing the invitation. This begins by recognizing our poverty of Spirit and increasingly seeing "ourselves and others from a changed perspective."<sup>7</sup> It continues with a heart-pounding, exciting, and disruptive impulse to then share out of our newly found abundance with others!

**It is imperative that we *fully explore and live into* what it means to receive, embody, and share the invitation to Christ's peace or we will bypass the spiritual revival so foundational to sustaining our discipleship and mission.**

David Bosch reminds us of the importance of this central call:

"I have called evangelism the "heart" of mission. If you cut out the heart of the body it becomes a corpse. With evangelism cut out, mission dies; it ceases to be mission."<sup>8</sup>

Why is evangelism so central? True evangelism at its core is a willingness to risk following the divine relational impulse that nudges us toward others. It is how we participate in the movement of God's love towards all people. It moves us toward the *last frontier of mission* – spiritual and relational transformation in community as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

Risking new relational space with others IS the portal through which we discover the many ways God calls us to receive, embody, and share the fullness of Christ's peace with others.

So what does it look like to receive, embody, and share Christ's invitation?

**Receive:** We receive by our willingness to risk spiritual and relational transformation—an encounter with the living Christ in relationship with one another. Jesus shared this invitation as "come."<sup>9</sup>

**Embody:** We then embody this invitation as we live and practice Christ's peace in relationship with others. Jesus shared this invitation as "follow me."<sup>10</sup>

**Share:** We then share this invitation as we give voice to God's deepest yearnings and our heartfelt desire for others to experience the fullness of Christ's peace. Jesus shared this as a commission "go and proclaim the good news."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 164:5

<sup>8</sup> Chilcote, Paul Wesley, and Laceye C. Warner. "Chapter 1." *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008. 10. Print.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 18:22

<sup>10</sup> Luke 18:22

Each of these dimensions is explored in more detail below:

**Receive the Invitation** - Embrace Christ's generous invitation to relationship, new life, wholeness, and a new way of seeing God, yourself, and others. This is where our journey begins. This is where we humbly but hopefully see our own poverty in all its forms. This is where we discover the voice that calls us beyond the limits of our own human pursuits for meaning to a new communion with the One in whose name we serve.

*Essential Question:* How am I making room daily to receive Christ's invitation to a relationship, new way of being, and new way of seeing?

*Initial Suggested Practices:* Mission Prayer, Prayer of Examen, Dwelling in the Word

**Embody the Invitation** – Become the invitation for others who are searching for Christ's peace. Slow down, be fully awake and approachable, risk new encounters with others, embody welcoming and safe space, listen deeply, cultivate holy curiosity in the other, respond to suffering in all its forms, and trust in the slow work of God.

*Essential Question:* How do I live into a life of invitation with others?

*Initial Suggested Practices:* Mission Prayer, Holy Curiosity for the Other, Walking the Neighborhood, Third Place Ministry

**Share the Invitation** – Generously Share!<sup>12</sup> Become increasingly aware of the Spirit's movement – leading us to risk deeper relationships and risk *speaking* the invitation! Share *in* sacred moments of mutual awareness. Share *in* questions and conversations of significance. Share the invitation to all the dimensions of Christ's peace (i.e. mission initiatives). Share the invitation to loving community (i.e. various forms of the church). Share the invitation to journey together with Christ!

*Essential Question:* How do I authentically invite others into a new awareness, loving community, and life changing relationship with the living Christ?

*Initial Suggested Practices:* Sharing in the Round, Holy Curiosity for the Other, Sharing My Story

The need has never been greater to move beyond our fears and extend Christ's hospitality to the stranger. Receiving, embodying, and sharing Christ's hospitality is at the heart of creating receptive space for others to receive the invitation to Christ's peace. Henri Nouwen, in his book *Reaching Out: Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, describes the centrality of the ancient practice of hospitality (pg. 71):

"Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer them freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not to lead our

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<sup>11</sup> Mark 16:15

<sup>12</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

neighbor into a corner where there are no alternatives left, but to open a wide spectrum of options for choice and commitment.”

Although we have a tendency to think of invitation as something we do *to others*, our willingness to enter more deeply into relationship *with others* will reveal our mutual need for healing and wholeness. As we hear the stories of others our invitation is also a commitment to journey *with others* as together we become “living member(s) of his community, and being enlisted in his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth.”<sup>13</sup>

### Essential Questions for Disciples, Priesthood, and Congregations

1. How have you encountered “something not fully explainable but utterly transforming” and how is it disrupting your daily life experience?
2. How are you moving beyond your fears of spiritual and relational transformation?
3. How are you experiencing Christ’s mission as “the movement of God’s love towards people?” What are some ways you can create opportunities in our gatherings, daily practices, and the neighborhood to *encounter and follow* God’s movement of love more fully?
4. When you think of the mission initiative “Invite People to Christ” what words or images might hinder full exploration and experimentation with this mission initiative? How can this paper, conversation, and shared practices be utilized to help explore and move beyond our hesitations and fears?
5. As you consider the fullness of Christ’s peace, why is Invite People to Christ central to *everything* we do in mission? What real or perceived barriers exist that must be addressed to live this critical aspect of mission fully as disciples and congregations?
6. If relationships are truly the entry point where we receive, embody, and share all the dimensions of Christ’s peace, how do we practice (i.e. take incremental steps) going deeper and risking new relationships?
7. What does it look like to embody and share Christ’s radical hospitality with one another? How can we practice and then support each other as we extend hospitality to strangers?

### Our Challenge –

“So what will it take to be successful in this mission? We must start with ourselves. The call of discipleship is the call to attach our lives fully and completely to Jesus Christ. Are we experiencing the peace of Jesus Christ in our heart, mind, and soul? Discipleship must be grounded in intentional spiritual formation that centers us in the presence of God, where we find inner peace. It is out of the depth and overflow of this peace that we find the capacity to cope with life and to extend ourselves in the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Chilcote, Paul Wesley, and Lacey C. Warner. "Chapter 1." *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008. 17. Print.

<sup>14</sup> Share the Peace of Jesus Christ – 2005 World Conference Sermon – President S. M. Veazey