

Receive, Embody, and Share Christ's Peace

Generously Receiving and Sharing the Invitation



A Twelve Week Study Guide



Community of Christ

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Introduction

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. In recognizing his own poverty of faith and vision he could *make room* for a life changing encounter and 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 would 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* encountering and receiving Christ's peace as life giving and life disrupting presence!

In this story and so many others Mission Begins with Encounter! It continues with a heart-pounding, exciting, and disruptive impulse to then share out of our newly found abundance with others! As we intentionally make room to receive, embody, and share Christ's peace with others we "*free the full capacity of Christ's mission through generosity that imitates God's generosity*"¹ in all its dimensions (time, talent, treasure). Christ's mission of peace and justice is only liberated when we *risk something new* by generously sharing our lives, ministry, and resources with others!

If relationships are the medium through which the peace of Jesus Christ is encountered, 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."²

¹ 2013 Words of Counsel to the Church – President Stephen M. Veazey

² Luke 18:22

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."³

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."⁴

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?*

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 risk living into a life of invitation with others?*

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

Share the Invitation – *Generously Share!*⁵ Become increasingly aware of the Spirit's movement leading us to risk deeper relationships and risk *speaking* the

³ Luke 18:22

⁴ Mark 16:15

⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 163:2b

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?*

Suggested Practices: Sharing in the Round, Holy Curiosity for the Other, Sharing My Story, Walking the Neighborhood, Third Place Ministry, Making Room

The need has never been greater to move beyond our fears, make room for Christ's peace, and extend Christ's hospitality to the stranger.

Receiving, embodying, and sharing Christ's hospitality is at the heart of creating space for others to receive Christ's invitation. 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 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 relationships 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."⁶

Using This Resource

The following twelve explorations are designed for small group study of the three dimensions of Christ's invitation – *Receive, Embody, and Share*. Each exploration will include fellowship, prayer, Dwelling in the Word, an essential question, focus thoughts, and a practice. These sessions can be utilized as a small group experience or the Sunday morning worship experience. Please plan on 60 – 90 minutes for each session.

The proposed practice each week is a central component of this experience. Commit as a group to try the practice and then come back and share what is emerging in your daily experience. Although this is designed as 12-week experiences adopt it to meet your needs and availability to meet. May you experience profound joy as receive, embody, and share Christ's peace in relationship with one another and your neighbors.

A Word about Missional Practices

Missional practices are intentional and repetitive patterns of individual and community actions. They lead to encounters where God's activity and God's invitation to Christ's mission are discovered. They lead us into relationships with God, the Living Christ, and the Holy Spirit that in turn lead us to develop relationships of healing and wholeness with others. Awareness of the deeply relational and communal nature of God leads us to new levels of generosity in our engagement and hospitality with our neighbors.

⁶ 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. 17. Print.

Receive the Invitation

Exploration 1: Receive the Living Christ

Sharing and Prayer

Dwelling in the Word:

Doctrine and Covenants 163:2 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.

- *What is God's invitation to me in this text?*
- *What is God's invitation to our congregation/small group in this text?*

Focus Thoughts:

Receiving Christ's invitation begins with our willingness to risk something new a relationship with the One who seeks to be present with us. What a marvelous possibility to encounter a love beyond words and hope beyond our greatest dreams.

Questions for Discussion:

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

Practice:

Receive the presence of Christ by observing 5 minutes of silence at morning, at midday, and in the evening.

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something

new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 2: The Beauty and Fear of Being Known

Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Psalm 139: 1-18 (NRSV)

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
3 You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
5 You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
7 Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
13 For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ I try to count them they are more than the sand;

I come to the end I am still with you.

- *Is there a word or phrase that leads me deeper into the reality of God's love for me?*
- *Am I willing to be known by God, to enter into such a level intimacy?*

Focus Thoughts:

"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."

—Stephen M. Veazey 2005

Questions for Discussion:

1. Doctrine and Covenants 164:9 challenges us to move beyond our fears of relational and spiritual transformation. What does this mean to you?
2. What would need to occur in our congregations/small groups for us to move beyond our fears to a new place of intimacy with God and one another?

Practice:

Each day during your time of prayer, practice sharing with God something about yourself that is difficult to talk about or that you wished were different. Allow this sharing to simply be received as an act of intimacy with God.

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 3: See What was Hidden

Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Luke 12:22-34

²⁻²⁴ He continued this subject with his disciples. "Don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or if the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your inner life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the ravens, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, carefree in the care of God. And you count far more.

²⁵⁻²⁸ "Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? If fussing can't even do that, why fuss at all? Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don't fuss with their appearance but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you?

²⁹⁻³² "What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with *getting* so you can respond to God's *giving*. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find

all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself.

33-34 "Be generous. Give to the poor. Get yourselves a bank that can't go bankrupt, a bank in heaven far from bank robbers, safe from embezzlers, a bank you can bank on. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.

- *How is the Spirit inviting you to "relax" and receive "God's giving"?*
- *What do you need to let of so you can make room to receive?*
- *What may be currently hidden that God is now seeking to reveal to you?*

Focus Thoughts:

In this story and so many others Mission Begins with Encounter! It continues with a heart-pounding, exciting, and disruptive impulse to then share out of our newly found abundance with others! As we intentionally make room to receive, embody, and share Christ's peace with others we "*free the full capacity of Christ's mission through generosity that imitates God's generosity*"⁷ in all its dimensions (*time, talent, treasure*).

Christ's mission of peace and justice is only liberated when we *risk something new* by generously sharing our lives, ministry, and resources with others!

Questions for Discussion:

1. Are there things I need to let go of or clear out of my life so there is more room for God?
2. Are there activities, tasks, or ministries we need to clear out so there is more room for God in our midst?

Practice:

Try the practice entitled **Making Room**, page 17.

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 4: Awaken to the Spirit's Movement

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about you prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Mathew 5:4-11 (The Message)

4-7 When he finished teaching, he said to Simon, "Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch." Simon said, "Master, we've been fishing hard all night and haven't caught even a minnow. But if you say so, I'll let out the nets." It was no sooner said than done a huge haul of fish, straining the nets past capacity. They waved to them with the catch.

8-10 Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell to his knees before Jesus. "Master, leave I'm a sinner and can't handle this holiness. Leave me to myself." When they pulled in that catch of fish, awe overwhelmed Simon and everyone with him. It was the same with James and John, Zebedee's sons, coworkers with Simon.

10-11 Jesus said to Simon, "There is nothing to fear. From now on you'll be fishing for men and women." They pulled their boats up on the beach, left them, nets and all, and followed him.

- *What might Jesus have really been saying to Simon (Peter) when he told him to push out into deep water?*

⁷ 2013 Words of Counsel to the Church – President Stephen M. Veazey

- *Why was Simon (Peter) and the other disciples so overwhelmed?*
- *How is the Spirit inviting you to move beyond your fear and push out into the deep?*

Focus Thoughts:

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* encountering and receiving Christ's peace as life giving and life disrupting presence!

Questions for Discussion:

1. What would it look like for you to follow Christ into the deep?
2. How is God calling our congregation or small group to put aside our agenda and follow Christ into the deep?
3. What fears do we need to overcome in order to respond to the invitation "come and follow me"?

Practice:

Find a public place (i.e. mall, city street, coffee house) and observe the people coming and going for about 30 minutes. Do they seem at peace, stressed, or perplexed? Who is the Spirit inviting you to make room for in your life? Be open to sensing their fears, hopes, and aspirations. In your thoughts hold them in the light of God's love.

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Embody the Invitation

Exploration 5: Slow Down, Widen Spaces

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Doctrine and Covenants 163:4a

4 a. God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God's will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.

- *How is the Spirit prompting us to hear what we have not heard before?*
- *What is God's invitation to me/us in this text?*

Focus Thoughts:

Perhaps our inclination to grasp for quick answers to the perplexing problems in our modern world is symptomatic of a much deeper problem – one that is both opportunity and gateway to the future. Imagine a people who *slow down* and *rediscover* inspiration and hope in their relationships with God, one another, and their neighbors.

Consider a future dependent on our willingness to *risk* going deeper much deeper in relationships that courageously embody and live Christ's love and mission *with* our neighbors.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What are some specific ways I can slow down and be more aware of the movement of God all around me?

2. How do we slow down as a congregation/small group and awaken to the Spirit's movement around us? Try to be specific.

Practice:

Refer to **Breathing in the Spaces**, page 18. Focus on slowing down and intentionally creating spaces to be aware of God's movement throughout your day.

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 6: Risk New Encounters with Others

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Doctrine and Covenants 153:9b

My Spirit is reaching out to numerous souls even now and there are many who will respond if you, my people, will bear affirmative testimony of my love and my desires for all to come unto me.

- *How does this passage invite you into God's movement in the world?*
- *How do I/we become more awake to God's promptings?*

Focus Thoughts:

Why is it that our greatest need to connect with one another as human beings is also our greatest fear? 2014 Words of Counsel remind us, "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." Is it possible that the "good news" is first and foremost that everyone is invited to the table?

There is no secret path and everything God does is about restoring and healing relationships! God wants everyone around the table no exceptions! Jesus modeled the *power of belonging* by inviting persons from all walks of life to sit around his table of unconditional acceptance and love. This amazing vision is worth RISKING SOMETHING NEW- new encounters with others we have yet to meet!

Questions for Discussion:

1. When have you risked a new relationship with a stranger? How did it turn out?
2. How do we move beyond our fear of the stranger so we can risk new relationships with others?
3. How can we as a congregation/small group better support one another in our call to risk new relationships with others?

Practice:

Refer to the Sharing in the Round practice, page 20. Considering inviting a neighbor or someone you would like to get to know better over or out to dinner. Consider partnering up to do this exercise in order to support one another.

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 7: Have Courage to Listen Deeply

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Doctrine and Covenants 161:3

3a. Open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.

b. Do not be fearful of one another. Respect each life journey, even in its brokenness and uncertainty, for each person has walked alone at times. Be ready to listen and slow to criticize, lest judgments be unrighteous and un-redemptive.

c. Be patient with one another, for creating sacred community is arduous and even painful. But it is to loving community such as this that each is called. Be courageous and visionary, believing in the power of just a few vibrant witnesses to transform the world. Be assured that love will overcome the voices of fear, division, and deceit.

- *Are there words, images, or phrases that call you into a deeper understanding of Christ's mission?*
- *What does it mean to be "ready to listen"?*

Focus Thoughts:

To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their

presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept.

Listening is much more than allowing another to talk while waiting for a chance to respond. Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very beings. The beauty of listening is that, those who are listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their own true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you.

—Henri Nouwen

Questions for Discussion:

1. When was a time when you felt fully heard and understood? Describe the experience and you felt.
2. How can we practice deep listening with one another?

Practice:

Refer to the practice entitled **Holy Curiosity, pages 23-24**. Consider using this practice to go deeper with a friend over the next week. Think about how this practice might help you create safe space to free others to share their story as you risk new relationships.

Consider trying the practice: **Valuing the Other, page 26** at your next meeting or several meetings when discussing the questions. This will help refine listening skills and shift the focus from speaking to listening.

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 8: Trust in the Slow Work of God

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in Poetry: Trust in the Slow Work of God

Above all, trust in the slow work of God
We are quite naturally impatient in
everything to reach the end without
delay We should like to skip the
intermediate stages. We are impatient of
being on the way to something unknown,
something new. And yet it is the law of all
progress that it is made by passing
through some stages of instability and
that it may take a very long time. And so I
think it is with you. your ideas mature
gradually let them grow, let them shape
themselves, without undue haste. Don't
try to force them on, as though you could
be today what time (that is to say, grace
and circumstances acting on your own
good will) will make of you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be. Give
Our Lord the benefit of believing that his
hand is leading you, and accept the
anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense
and incomplete.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.
(1881-1955)

- *How does this poem invite you into a new way of thinking or being?*

Focus Thoughts:

Doctrine and Covenants 155:8 reminds us, "I know your perplexities and I am aware of your uncertainties, but if you will call upon my name my Spirit will go before you into whatsoever place you are sent and I will continue to bless you as you have need." We have a difficult time

trusting in the slow but deliberate work of God in the world.

We struggle to see our personal journey with all its complexities as part of a long journey in the same direction. Trust comes from the deep well of living faith that lifts our sights beyond the present reality to the possibility of God's emerging future. When we are grounded in this emerging reality we are blessed with vision, patience, and hope.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What does it mean to me to trust in God?
2. How do we as a congregation/small group pay more attention to God's presence and give thanks along the way?

Practice:

Try the Prayer of Examen, page 21. How does intentional reflection at mid-day and evening ground you in the reality of God's movement in the world?

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Share the Invitation

Exploration 9: Share in Sacred Moments

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Doctrine and Covenants 161:4

4a. Do not neglect the smallest among you, for even the least of these are

treasures in God's sight. Receive the giftedness, and energy of children and youth, listening to understand their questions and their wisdom. Respond to their need to be loved and nurtured as they grow.

b. Be mindful of the changing of life's seasons, of the passage from the springtime of childhood and youth to the winter years of life. Embrace the blessing of your many differences. Be tender and caring. Be reminded once again that the gifts of all are necessary in order that divine purposes may be accomplished.

- *How is the Holy Spirit calling us to be more fully present with one another and our neighbors?*

Focus Thoughts:

Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional. Our only choice is a question of engagement. Our willingness to own and engage with our vulnerability determines the depth of our courage and the clarity of our purpose; the level to which we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and disconnection.

—Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*

Entering into the sacred space that exists as two individuals risk diving beneath the surface of superficiality and into the depth of what constitutes their fears, aspirations, and hopes is daring work! When we become fully human and vulnerable to one another the Spirit creates a connection we cannot fully understand. It can only be understood as the relational impulse of Christ reconciling and connecting all living things.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do I authentically invite others into the sacred space of deep and meaningful conversation?

2. How can we authentically invite one another into the sacred space of deep and meaningful conversation?

Practice:

This coming week invite someone you would like to know better for coffee (or your favorite drink). Share with them the meeting is simply your desire to know them better. Consider the following questions as examples:

- What's your story?
- What are you passionate about?
- If I really knew you, what would I know about you?
- What in your life makes you feel the most fulfilled?
- What in your life do you find the most perplexing?
- What's a story of yours that you don't get to tell often enough?

Remember, you also need to be prepared to share. This is not an interview but a conversation.

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 10: Discover Their World of Experience

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23
(The Message)

¹⁹⁻²³ Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I have voluntarily become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious,

meticulous moralists, loose-living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized whoever. I didn't take on their way of life. I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried to experience things from their point of view. I've become just about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God-saved life. I did all this because of the Message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be *in* on it!

- *Is there a word, phrase, or image that draws you to consider deeper or new ways of living Christ's mission?*
- *How do we enter the world of another person? How is this different from traditional evangelism in the U.S.?*

Focus Thoughts:

Connection is why we're here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives. The power that connection holds in our lives was confirmed when the main concern about connection emerged as the fear of disconnection; the fear that something we have done or failed to do, something about who we are or where we come from, has made us unlovable and unworthy of connection.

—Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*

When we seek first to understand the experience of another person we convey our deep conviction of their inherent worth as a person. By creating safe space for them to be authentically who they are, we free them to rediscover the essence of that they are a beloved child of God. Words alone cannot convey this truth, only a willingness to enter their world without judgment and journey with them in love. This is how we become the *Word made flesh* in ways they can tangibly experience.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can I intentionally discover experiences of others different from my own?
2. How can we as a congregation discover the *world of our neighborhood* around the church and neighborhoods where we live?
3. What does it look like to truly enter the world of someone's experience?

Practice:

Try the **Walking the Neighborhood** practice, page 22 several times during the next week. Be open to the possibility of conversation with those you meet along your way. Pay attention to what you learn about the neighborhood and those you meet.

Prayer of Sending Forth:

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 11: Share Your Invitation to Loving Community

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Doctrine and Covenants 163:1

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.

- *How does this passage invite me/us into Christ's mission today?*
- *What does sacred community look like?*
- *How does this passage call for a reordering of our priorities as a congregation or small group?*

Focus Thoughts:

There can be no vulnerability without risk; there can be no community without vulnerability; there can be no peace, and ultimately no life, without community.

—M. Scott Peck

Was it an oversight that the word “church” is nowhere in our name? Is it possible that our name calls us to a much deeper expression of Christ-centered loving community? Is it possible in our modern world that the word “church” has so much baggage attached to it that the word “community” better expresses a movement that seeks to embody and live the very essence of God as a loving community?

Michael Frost reflects, “When we have no impressive buildings and no swollen budgets to sustain our work, often only then do we realize that the best we have to offer this post-Christendom world is the quality of our relationships, the power of our trustworthiness, and the wonder of our generosity.”

- *What if our generous invitation is exactly what they are waiting for?*

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we create opportunities to be in Christ-centered community outside of the traditional church experience?
2. How can we support one another in risking the invitation?
3. How do we make becoming an *invitational community* central to everything we do?

Practice:

Refer to the practice: **Sharing My Story, page 25**. Set aside some time in the coming week to reflect on your living faith story? Are you ready to share and invite when prompted to do?

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Exploration 12: Share Your Invitation to Journey Together with Christ

Time of Sharing and Prayer (*Remember to share about your prior week's practice*)

Dwelling in the Word: Mark 16:15 and Doctrine and Covenants 163:1, 2a

¹⁵ And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news^[d] to the whole creation.

1. “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.

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.

- *How do these passages lead you into deeper or new understandings of Christ's mission?*

- *How would you define “the good news” in language that might connect with the “spiritual but not religious” in our society?*
- *How is our name the key to our future?*
- *What is our name calling us to become?*

Focus Thoughts:

God moved toward us in Jesus Christ. We are now called to join God’s movement toward others in Christ. We are called to have a *movement mind-set* that challenges us to discern and follow the disruptive promptings of the Holy Spirit in mission with one another and the stranger. If God is truly moving then we can expect our lives to be disrupted if we are truly following.

We are the *Word made flesh* in the world today. If we are not willing to risk an invitation to loving Christ-centered community then the predominant voices promoting fear, separation, and even withdrawal from the world will prevail. There is no question that people are searching for meaning and connection through the internet, books on spirituality, and a surge of mini-movements springing up that seek to make a difference in towns, cities, and neighborhoods.

As Doctrine and Covenants 164:9 challenges us, “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?”

Our words and actions matter in this defining moment of human history! There are many waiting to be reintroduced to the living Christ. Receive, Embody, and Share the Invitation to Christ’s Peace! Many will respond!

Question for Discussion:

1. How do I authentically invite others into a life changing relationship with Jesus Christ?
2. How do we support one another in exploring the essence of our living faith stories so we are better prepared to share and invite?

Practice:

Refer to the **Mission Prayer, page 19**. Consider who God is calling you to be fully awake to in your daily experience. Will you risk a new relationship? Will you risk an invitation?

Prayer of Sending Forth

God, where will your spirit lead us this coming week? Help us be fully awake and ready to respond. Grant us the courage to risk something new and become a blessing of your love and peace. Amen.

Making Room – A Missional Practice

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.*

Purpose: Intentionally and prayerfully record and reflect on your purchases and time spent each week. Seek the Spirit's guidance in what you can eliminate to make room (i.e. increase your capacity) to deepen your ministry and share with others. "It is easy to say no when there is a deeper yes burning within" – Richard Foster

Suggested Steps:

1. Begin each week with personal reflection on Luke 12:22-34 from The Message Bible each week.
2. Find a journal, inexpensive notebook, or simple note taking application on your smartphone.
3. Create two columns. Under the one column write down all our purchases for the week. Under the second column record how you spent your time during the week.
4. Pick a day toward the end of the week and set aside 30 minutes for prayerful reflection. Begin with prayer asking for insight and courage to evaluate your capacity openly and honestly in the presence of God.
5. First review your purchases for the week.
6. Place a check next to purchases that you decide are not necessary.
 - a. Next place a question mark next to purchases you would like to eliminate but are unsure if you want to or have the will to eliminate.
 - b. Pray over your list and commit to eliminate one purchase in the coming week in order to increase your capacity.
 - c. Share your commitment with a spouse or friend. Determine an alternative use for your money that will increase your capacity (i.e. either saving or giving to a worthy cause)
7. Second review your time spent during the week.
 - a. Place a check next to time spent that was clearly not useful. (*Remember that finding times for Sabbath rest is useful and renewing for the soul*)
 - b. Next, place a question mark next to time spent that could have potentially been used in better ways.
 - c. Pray over your list and consider replacing one of your activities with one that will increase your capacity for ministry or directly benefit others. Share your commitment with a spouse or friend.
8. End your time with a prayer of thanksgiving.

Consider repeating this practice weekly or several times a month. Invite several friends to join you in this practice and commit to sharing your decisions and experiences together. Support one another in prayer.

***Breathing in the Spaces** — A Missional Practice**

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.*

Purpose: To center ourselves and be more aware of people and God's presence by stopping and consciously taking a breath as we enter various spaces during the day. When you step or move into different spaces, consciously place yourself in the new setting with a desire to be alert to what God might be doing in the lives of people. Over time simply taking a deliberate breath will remind you that you are in God's presence and that you want to be alert to God's purposes in that setting.

Suggested Steps:

Here are simple ways *to breathe in the spaces* in your daily life:

1. Start each day with the *Mission Prayer* or a spiritual discipline that helps you to be open to God's blessings and purposes in your life.
2. In your home, as you enter shared space, pause to take a breath and be aware of how precious this space and the people are (or have been) to you and the gratitude you have for them.
3. When entering the different spaces in your day (workplace, a colleague's office, a restaurant or place of business, school or places where people meet) pause and take a deliberate breath.
4. When returning home pause to take a breath. If you share your home with others, be a loving presence.

Tips for the Process:

Let the Spirit breathe! (Doctrine and Covenants 162:2) As you take a deep breath, breathe in the goodness of the profound presence and purposes of God in each place you find yourself. Allow yourself to be drawn to people who may be blessed in simple ways by you being aware of them as persons of worth.

*This missional practice draws on *Centering Prayer—A Missional Practice* and its use of "breath" as a way to breathe in and consciously be aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It also draws on the practice *Listening in the Spaces* (see Pastors and Leaders Field Guide). In *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990) by Joan Chittister, she explains how members of the Benedictine community stop outside the chapel for a few minutes before entering for prayer. "The practice of *statio* is meant to center us and make us conscious of what we're about to do and make us present to God who is present to us. *Statio* is the desire to do consciously what I might otherwise do mechanically. *Statio* is the virtue of presence."

Mission Prayer — A Missional Practice

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.*

Mission Prayer

*God, where will your Spirit lead today?
Help me be fully awake and ready to respond.
Grant me courage to risk something new
and become a blessing of your love and peace.
Amen.*

Purpose: For all participants (Congregation Support Ministers, Pastor Leadership Teams (PLT), members and friends, and staff) in Leading Congregations in Mission (LCM) to pray daily to be led by the Spirit and to have courage to go where the Spirit leads. LCM is about being fully awake to God's activity in all the contexts of personal and congregational life **and** responding to God and human needs by embodying and living the concerns and passion of Christ.

Suggested Steps:

1. Make a personal commitment to offer this prayer at the beginning of each day.
2. At PLT and LCM team meetings, share with one another how this prayer is impacting your sense of where God is leading and subsequent changes.
3. For the PLT, encourage members of the priesthood and the congregation to join you in using this missional practice.

Tips for the Process:

Remember the importance of this missional practice becoming a new norm for your congregation. Missional practices are not just personal behaviors. As leaders, let's give the *Mission Prayer* a priority in our personal life. Look for how this missional practice helps you encounter God, deepens relationships and builds community, and promotes hospitality and healing by "loving your neighbor" in contexts outside of the congregation. Consider recording your daily experiences and reflections in a journal. Then share your experience with the congregation.

Sharing in the Round — A Missional Practice

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's Mission.*

Purpose: Bring people together in meaningful conversation over a meal to develop and deepen relationships. Sharing in the Round is an ancient practice of table fellowship. The round table as symbol of Christ's mission is significant. There is no place of honor at a round table – all are equal and all are welcome. Some of the most meaningful ministry by Jesus occurred around the table of invitation and hospitality. Good food, friends, and meaningful conversation lead to deeper relationships and community.

Suggested Steps:

1. Commit to the missional practice of *Sharing in the Round* on a regular basis (every other week or once a month) by inviting a person or family to have dinner either in your home or a place suitable for good conversation.
2. Be prayerful for opportunities to invite people around the table. The counsel offered in Doctrine and Covenants Section 154 — *My Spirit is reaching out to numerous souls even now...* may guide you.
3. Invite people from your congregation as a way of deepening relationships and building sacred community.
4. Expand the practice beyond your circle of friends by inviting friendly strangers from your neighborhood, work, school, or the store down the street.
5. Be willing during conversation to be vulnerable by sharing some of what is going on in your life. This often opens the pathway of trust for others to share. Balance sharing with listening. Pay attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit in your conversation. The Holy Spirit may be prompting you to pray for a concern expressed or to extend understanding and compassion.

Tips for the Process:

Risk something new beyond inviting friends or close associates in ministry. When you plan your invitation list, consider inviting people outside of your comfort level such as people in your or the congregation's neighborhood, people from your workplace, and those in the congregation you do not know well.

Prayer of Examen: Receiving Christ's Invitation — A Missional Practice

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.*

Purpose: to be awake to Christ's invitation in a story of scripture from the four Gospels and reflecting on your life as it unfolds each day. To receive Christ we must know him! This practice is inspired and adapted from the spiritual practice "Prayer of Examen" developed by Ignatius of Loyola.*

Suggested Steps:

1. Become aware of the presence of God and awake to Christ's invitation. Take a moment to become calm and centered.
2. Choose and read a text from the four Gospels in the spirit of prayer, seeking to be closer to the Living Christ.
3. Spend a few moments recalling your day with gratitude and reverence. Let the details, events and conversations drift through your memory. Identify feelings, emotions, insights or times that touched your heart—either enlivening or disheartening.
 - Gratitude reveals what we value and what brings us joy or meaning.
 - Reverence allows us to see the ordinary parts of our day as sacred opportunities.
4. Choose a feeling, emotion, insight or time in your day and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how this may draw you closer to the Living Christ and his invitation.
5. Look forward to the remainder of the day or toward tomorrow. Talk with Jesus like a friend. Be honest and open. Use everyday language. Leave times for silence to listen. Share your feelings. Ask for his help and wisdom about the questions you have, the desires of your heart and the problems you face.

Tips for the Process:

- Request the Holy Spirit to draw you closer to the Living Christ by remembering his promise to always be with you and his invitation to share life with you.
- Do not rush—take time. There may be days when you follow each step. Other days, you may want to stay with only one or two steps. There is no particular length—less or longer than 10 – 20 minutes is fine.
- The key is simplicity and not being constrained by each step.
- Find and follow a pattern that works for you.
- Consider beginning your day with the Mission Prayer then with a Prayer of Examen at noon and before you go to bed.

*See more about Ignatian Spirituality at <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/#sthash.u7RB006Q.dpuf> and Pastors and Leaders Field Guide at <http://www.CofChrist.org/common/cms/resources/Documents/pastors-and-leaders-field-guide.pdf>

Walking the Neighborhood — A Missional Practice

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.*

Purpose: For people, as individuals or in pairs, to walk their congregational or personal neighborhoods to sense where God is active, enter opportunities for conversation, and offer blessings through silent prayer. By learning to listen and pay attention to what is happening in the lives of people new understandings, ways of being and living Christ's mission are gained.

The Worth of All Persons and the Blessings of Community, two of the church's enduring principles help us to understand that our only motive for this missional practice is to be open to God's presence in and desires for any resulting relationship.

Suggested Steps:

1. Step out in faith as you offer the *Mission Prayer* and reflect on the counsel found in Doctrine and Covenants 161:3 and 4. (See the following page.)
2. Take a family member or go with a friend and begin walking in your home neighborhood or in the neighborhood around your church. As you walk, pray for God's guidance and offer God's blessing on each home and the people who live there. If people are out in their yards or on their porch, greet them and wish them a good day.
3. As you become a regular presence in the neighborhood, begin conversations with neighbors. Ask God to lead you to the people with whom God wants you to share in conversation. Listen for where God is moving in their lives. Consider offering this prayer: *God, who do you want me to meet and form a caring relationship with today?*

Tips for the Process:

This missional practice requires genuine investment in forming relationships and takes time. This is not designed to simply, "invite people to church." This missional practice helps us understand what God is up to in the lives of people in our neighborhoods by being present where we live and worship. Between walks share with your partner in prayer and conversation about the people you meet and where God may be leading you in mission. Be creative – bring some cookies to offer to people on your walk, or some freshly picked vegetables—anything you can offer them as a way of sharing God's love in a practical way.

Holy Curiosity for the Other — A Missional Practice

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.*

Purpose: Deeply rooted in our enduring principle Worth of All Persons this practice helps us begin to embody the invitation to Christ's peace. This practice is about how we create safe and inviting space in meaningful conversation with others. By risking new and deeper relationships we meet people in the context of their lives and free them to express and even discover the essence of who they are and desire to become in the presence of the Spirit.

Note: *Although this practice emphasizes risking new conversations with those we don't know well or at all, these steps are equally important in going deeper with those we think we know but have never really heard their story.*

Suggested Steps:

As we approach others in meaningful conversation we create safe and inviting space by practicing the following steps:

- **Be Prayerful** – Seek to be fully present with God and the other person. Ask for courage, patience, and insight to cultivate in yourself a holy curiosity that transcends your own needs for affirmation or expression and calls you into full attentiveness and discovery of another person's life and story. This is not a one-time prayer but a posture of prayerful awareness as we discover the essence of God in the other person.
- **Ask Genuine Questions** – Out of genuine curiosity for the other we ask questions that gently lead to deeper sharing. Questions like, "We don't know one another very well, would you be willing to share a little about yourself?", "I would really like to get to know you better, where would be a good place to start?", or in response to a statement "That is interesting, can you share with me what has led you to this place?"

If you sense the relationship has evolved to a place of intimacy and openness you can begin to explore questions of faith. Questions/statements like, "As you shared I could not help but sense your choices (or decisions) seem grounded in something beyond yourself – has this been your experience? Can you share more?" or "Where or how did you find peace (or renewal) in the midst of that difficult time?" or "What is your source of inspiration?"

As you can see, when talking with persons we are getting to know or that have little "religious" background we can ask questions that uncover dimensions of their spiritual life without resorting to "religious" or doctrinal language. This is not a trick to work God into the conversation but comes from our genuine desire to explore all dimensions of their story when we sense the time is right. Continue to be prayerful and open with your sole purpose to more deeply understand the essence of God in the other person.

- **Pause and Reflect** – We tend to interpret another person's story through the filters of our own experience. Reflection is about both hearing and understanding the other so they feel they have been heard and understood. When our curiosity is genuine and Spirit led we desire deeper understanding to ensure we are truly stepping inside their story and experiencing things from their perspective.

The best way to do this is to pause and reflect back with them from time to time what you believe you are hearing. Statements like, “So what I think I heard you share is . . .” or “I think you shared something significant – let me make sure I heard you correctly”. This is not about simply repeating back what we heard but processing it in the context of our life experience and then sharing it in our own words to test our understanding.

When the other person feels both heard and understood it frees them to continue to share more deeply and results in a deeper understanding between two people. Like asking good questions this takes practice and will result in deeper levels of conversation over time.

- **Affirm the Other** – It is important to convey to the other person they have your total attention. When it is genuine, affirming what you hear by direct eye contact, a nod, or following up with an affirmative statement (i.e. I understand or tell me more about that) conveys genuine interest and attention.
- **Follow the Spirit’s Lead** – Entering into conversations of significance take us right to the heart of the gospel – relationships! We can depend on the Spirit’s guidance to help us balance how our personal sharing in a conversation can help lead a conversation deeper or limit the other person’s sharing. Sometimes a willingness to be vulnerable by sharing a thought or feeling that reveals something significant about our self creates a pathway for the other to follow. It is critical that we maintain prayerful self-awareness so the conversation does not become more about us than the other. Conversation is more art than science. As we risk new and deeper relationships our conversations will mature over time and we will become more skilled at cultivating conversations of significance.

Tip for the Process:

- Be patient. Remember we live in a transactional world and our conversations have also become that way in many respects. Having conversation for the sake of truly getting to know another person is rare and may even feel a bit unsettling at first. Some conversations will go well and others not so well. Do not get discouraged. We are charting new path here that will lead to a new kind of community!
- Be prayerfully self-aware. Some of us have difficulty being fully present with another person. Every story or experience shared reminds us of a story we want to share. This particular practice is about developing a holy curiosity for another person so be aware of how much you are sharing your own story.
- Practice on those you know – you will be surprised what you learn! Seek their honest and constructive feedback.

The Spirit moves in our relationships in ways we do not fully comprehend. When we provide safe, inviting, and prayerful space for another to share, transformative encounters with God and one another occur over time. *Trust in the Holy Spirit.*

Sharing My Story — A Missional Practice

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.*

Purpose: To contemplate your daily journey with Christ and how you would share that journey when prompted by the Holy Spirit. This practice is about being prepared to share with another person, when prompted, glimpses of your journey with Christ. In conversations it is important to listen and be compassionate, hospitable and genuinely interested in the other. Yet, it is also important to discern and be ready to share meaningful moments from your spiritual journey with Christ. When we are genuine and vulnerable we open the door for others to feel safe and to explore the essence of their spirituality and relationship to the divine.

Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. - 1 Peter 3:15 The Message

Suggested Steps:

1. Take a moment to be calm, centered, and aware of the presence of God.
2. Offer in your own words or mind the spirit of this prayer: "God, help me be fully awake and ready to share meaningful moments in my journey with Christ when I discern openness in the life of another. I need your Spirit to help me see your imprint in the ordinary events of my life and the courage to risk sharing with another when guided to do so. Amen."
3. Take time to reflect on your life experiences over the past several days or weeks. What have you seen, heard, or experienced that may have been the presence of God gently revealing new insights. Be open to the Holy Spirit helping you to identify even the small events or changes that can be significant.
4. Write down specific experiences that on reflection were moments of new awareness, deeper relationships, or an impulse to respond in some way. Consider keeping a journal to recall your experiences and see emerging themes of your journey with Christ.
5. Offer a prayer of thanks and that you may be ready to share your story or witness when prompted by the Spirit.

Tips for the Process:

- Setting a routine time and place for this practice can be helpful, such as the end of your day or week. Commit to weekly times of reflection, writing, and prayer as you prepare yourself to be ready to share.
- Do not rush—take time. There may be days when you follow each step. Other days, you may want to stay with only one or two steps.
- The key is simplicity and not being constrained by each step.
- Find and follow a pattern that works for you.
- Consider beginning your day with the Mission Prayer then with Sharing My Story before you go to bed.

Valuing the Other — A Missional Practice

Missional Practices: *cultivating new understandings, ways of being, and living Christ's mission.*

Purpose: To deepen conversation and understanding by developing active listening skills when meeting with your team or in a group. This is a critical part of the congregation's missional journey for deepening relationships and creating a safe place for people to share their insights and feelings.

Suggested Steps:

Have an easily seen object such as a rain stick or ball that participants pass from person to person.

Study the following ground rules for group discussion:

1. When the group discusses a topic or question, the person holding the object speaks while all others listen. Set a time limit for speaking such as three minutes unless the questions or sharing need more time. Each person is responsible to listen carefully to the person speaking.
2. For a person to speak he or she must receive the object from the person speaking. To receive the object from the person speaking, one restates what the person said to that person's satisfaction. Note: it is important that each person feels heard and understood.
3. Follow these steps for question or topic under discussion.
4. End with discussion about how people felt about the experience. Some people will feel the process was cumbersome. Sometimes we think we are listening carefully when often we are crafting our response.

Tips for the Process:

The discussion leader should be alert to how people are responding both verbally and nonverbally. Ask participants if they felt heard before they pass the object to the next person. Using all our senses so we not only hear but feel what the other person said takes concentration and time to develop. Be patient with one another.