



Leading Congregations in Mission Overview

*If you truly would be Community of Christ,
then embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ.
Doctrine and Covenants 164:9c*

Purpose of Leading Congregations in Mission (LCM)

Our contexts for mission are constantly changing. In recent decades congregations in western nations have experienced monumental shifts in societal views with respect to organized religion. In the midst of these changing contexts the basic approach and practices of the church (i.e. congregations) have remained largely unchanged.

The challenge before the church is not to withdraw but to boldly move forward in the light of its divine call and vision.¹ We live in a world with new challenges that require us to rediscover our prophetic heritage as a people on the move with God. There is no map to lead us in such a world, only the timeless navigational practices that have guided disciples throughout the ages – practices that awaken us to God's movement and unfolding mission all around us!

The purpose of LCM is to equip the Pastor Leadership Team to cultivate a new culture (i.e. way of being) where discernment, experimentation, and creation of new forms and expressions of ministry and mission become the new norms. Together we seek to become the "Word made flesh" in tangible ways that connect with our surrounding culture!

The outcome of LCM is not a new set of congregational objectives, but a new culture (shared experience) where discernment, experimentation, and creation of new forms and expressions of ministry and mission are the new norms.

Why not a new set of congregational objectives? Is it possible in our attempts to keep up with a changing world we have not paused long enough to discern the essential questions of our time – questions that lead to bold new ways of being and doing for the sake of others?

Perhaps our inclination to grasp for answers is symptomatic of a much deeper problem – one that is both opportunity and gateway to the future. Imagine a

¹ Doctrine and Covenants 164:9e

people who 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.

This is much more than a program or set of objectives. This is the radical new way of Jesus that leads us “into the heart of God’s vision for the church and creation.”² This is the essence of Leading Congregations in Mission.

The Nature of God = Relational Mission

God is mission. Mission emanates from the very nature of God and cannot be understood or fully expressed apart from God. As Daniel Migliore states so compellingly:

In all eternity God lives and loves as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In God’s own eternal being there is movement, life, personal relationship, and giving and receiving of love.

—*Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, pg. 77

“God’s nature is relational. The mission and ministry of Jesus Christ are relational. Mission and ministry focus on reconciling people to God and one another through loving, just, and peaceable relationships. Reconciling and redeeming people, relationships, social systems, cultures, and the whole creation is Jesus Christ’s mission. We look to Jesus Christ to show us how to engage in relationships that express God’s nature and purposes.”³

Our response to God’s radical and relational love *begins* with our *willingness* to take faithful steps toward Christ’s vision of the peaceable kingdom of God on earth in sacred community (See Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a). Congregations and other forms of the church are called to become living and tangible expressions of loving, just, and peaceful relationships that signal the beginning of an alternative path forward – God’s future.

David Bosch, author and theologian on the topic of mission, helps us understand the dynamic and relational nature of God that draws us into mission:

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

² Words of Counsel 2013

³ Part 1: Theological Foundations for Ministry and Priesthood - December 2013 (Community of Christ)

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.⁴

Alan Hirsch, in his book *The Permanent Revolution*, describes what it means for the church to be incarnational or totally reoriented around Christ's mission and agenda:

A missional [incarnational] church is a church that defines itself and organizes its life around its real purpose as an agent of God's mission to the world. In other words, the church's true and authentic organizing principle is mission. Therefore, when the church is in mission, it is the true church. *The church itself is not only a product of that mission but is obligated and destined to extend it by whatever means possible.* The mission of God flows directly through every believer and every community of faith that adheres to Jesus.⁵

President Stephen M. Veazey in his 2011 *Defining Moment* address to the church describes mission in the form of a question:

The most important question for a missional [incarnational] church is not about long-term survival. It is about how we passionately pursue Christ's mission in a suffering world that groans for the liberating truths of the gospel (Doctrine and Covenants 155: 7).

The question before the church is *how we passionately pursue Christ's mission in a suffering world* as ones who have been transformed by "something not fully explainable but utterly transforming."⁶ We pursue Christ's mission because God first pursued us in Christ. **This has changed everything.** We can no longer view others or ourselves from the same perspective (see Doctrine and Covenants 164:5). We can't help but respond out of the overflow of God's incredible love and grace in our lives!

Jesus put it in simple terms to his disciples,

"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John: 20:21)

Incarnational Mission is about *sending!* God *sent* Jesus to be the embodiment of God's love. God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (in sacred community) *send us*,

⁴ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y. Orbis 1991), 390.

⁵ Hirsch, Alan; Catchim, Tim (2012-01-06). *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (Kindle Locations 409-413). John Wiley and Sons. Kindle Edition.

⁶ 2005 World Conference sermon, Stephen M. Veazey

the church, to pursue Christ's mission through the five world-changing 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***Develop Disciples to Serve***Equip individuals for Christ's mission***Experience Congregations in Mission***Equip congregations for Christ's mission*

God is moving! In

President Veazey's 2005 World Conference sermon, he described Jesus Christ as "the movement of God to bring reconciliation and wholeness to all dimensions of life".

God moved toward us in Jesus Christ. We are now called to join God's movement toward others in Christ. We are also called to have a movement mind-set that calls us to discern and follow the disruptive promptings of the Holy Spirit in mission.

In Jesus' proclamation of mission (Luke 4:18 -19), Jesus declared the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. Immediately emerging from the wilderness experience, he was now ready to proclaim and live his mission in his time and place. His message and mission was difficult for many to grasp because it represented a radical departure from their understanding of God and the world. Jesus used stories and symbols understood by those who lived in the first century. In short, Jesus became a *cultural interpreter* of the gospel by conveying and living it in ways they could understand and experience in their everyday lives.

Like Jesus we are called to *live and convey* the good news (i.e. the gospel) in ways that connect powerfully with our surrounding culture. First, we admit it is challenging to grasp fully Jesus' message and mission in the first century. None of us lived in first century Palestine and we only have glimpses of it from reading historical depictions of the time period. Even with thousands of books and articles written on every aspect of Jesus' life and ministry, it is challenging to interpret fully the essential meaning of Jesus for our time and place. We must begin by recognizing our need to spend time in our spiritual *wilderness* where we encounter Christ, the One we seek to follow.

Second, we recognize we can't simply transport the gospel through time in some locked pure form and set it down in our time and place. We must continue to *reinterpret* its meaning, *discover* how it shapes us as disciples, and *work out* what it looks like to live it in community (in the church and in our neighborhoods).

Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e reminds us of our call as disciples in this generation to become *cultural interpreters* in word and action:

Again you are reminded that this community was divinely called into being. The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment of time, but is instead the call to every generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe.

Although essential truths remain unchanged, how we express and live them out (in successive generations) must speak compellingly to our contexts (environments) in ways that open new pathways of understanding. We, as the people of God, must allow ourselves to be shaped by that Spirit that has shaped and guided Christian faith communities throughout the centuries. **This is about our need for conversion or a reconversion to the One who call us to new life!**

Richard P. Howard and Barbara Howard state the challenge in their well-known hymn, *Now in this Moment*:

Now in this moment, now in this day,
God is creating and leading the way;
Life is behind us, life is before;
We write the story not heard before.

We are *living in* the continuing, unfolding story of God's vision of our world today in Christ through the Holy Spirit. We share our witness in word and action with the gospel writer of John:

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood. John 1:14
(The Message)

We, the church, are to become the living Word- to move into our neighborhoods and embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ! The question that must guide every thought, action, and ministry of the congregation is:

How are we called to become “the Word made flesh” in our families, congregations, neighborhoods, and world?

Invitation to a Journey

The themes of *invitation* (God's movement toward us in Jesus Christ), *journey* (our willingness to go), and *transformation* (disrupted and shaped by God) are at the heart of what it means to be God's people engaged in Christ's mission. It is about pulling up our tents, wandering in the wilderness at times, discovering new things about God, ourselves, and others, and responding to the disruptive promptings of

the Holy Spirit in mission. This amazing story of invitation, journey, and transformation is a pattern of meaning that runs through our scriptures and reveals to us God's desire to work out God's purposes in us and through us.

This pattern of meaning is found throughout the centuries in the Christian tradition and provides the foundation for **our story** of invitation, journey, and transformation – Community of Christ. From our roots where a young man prayed in a grove to our 21st century call to pursue peace, God has always been doing a new thing in our midst. We are on a divinely inspired quest to understand how God's invitation to a journey is a call to the *continuous shaping and sending* of a people to fulfill God's vision, not our own.

Our spiritual home is not found in bricks and mortar but in relationship with God and one another on a continuous journey of transformation. It is for this journey of transformation in our time and place that the navigational tools in this overview are presented. The navigational tools are what we take with us as leaders and congregations to truly discover, experiment with, and live into the concerns and passion of Christ in our local neighborhoods and world.



Our Backpack: In LCM we are accepting an invitation to discover, experiment with, and live into the concerns and passion of Christ in our neighborhoods and world. The **backpack** symbolizes our willingness to be ready, adaptive, and willing to go where the Spirit leads us in mission. We always have our backpack and of course some very important items for the journey:



Our Incarnational Lens: Eight foundational principles form an *incarnational lens* that help us see the big picture of what God is up to in our individual lives, congregations, and neighborhoods.



Our Compass: Shared Leadership, Mission Process, Mission (Incarnational) Practices, and Mission Context form the four points of our *compass* that help us embody and live Christ's mission in a *changing* world.



Our Thingamajig: Everyone needs a thingamajig! It is that handy tool for the expected and unexpected. LCM provides a variety of tools to help with expected and unexpected bumps or detours along the way.

One of the most important compartments in our backpack is the one left empty for us to place and bring all the shared experiences, stories, and meaning that equip and form our lives and that of our congregation. *We want to bring with us everything good that we have come to appreciate about our congregational life together.*

Foundational Principles – Our Incarnational Lens

Leading Congregations in Mission (LCM) is built on eight foundational principles. These principles are drawn from our sacred story as recorded in scripture and missional experiments in the fields of the church. The principles combined form an *incarnational lens* through which we see more clearly what it looks like to live into the radical and transformative ways of Jesus.



We represent this lens with ***binoculars*** to remind us to step back often to see the big picture of what God is up to in our lives individually, together, and in our neighborhoods.

The eight foundational principles provide a lens for our missional journey:

1. Mission begins with encounter.

- God's nature is incarnational or *outward moving*. Our response begins and is formed by God's enduring love for us revealed in the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.
- We encounter God, God's love, and God's mission in Christ through mission (i.e. incarnational) practices, in our relationships in community (congregations, small groups, and neighborhoods), in ministry with others, and in situations and places that don't yet reflect Christ's vision of the peaceable kingdom of God on earth. It is in our encounter with Christ that we increasingly see ourselves and others from a changed perspective (Doctrine and Covenants 164:5).

2. Mission is most fully lived out in Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.

- Mission in Community of Christ is built on Jesus proclamation in Luke 4:18-19 and defined by five 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



Develop Disciples to Serve

Equip individuals for Christ's mission



Experience Congregations in Mission

Equip congregations for Christ's mission

Our identity, message, and beliefs contained in *We Share: Exploring Identity, Message, Mission, and Beliefs – 3rd Edition* provide a unity of faith and vision while recognizing mission will be expressed locally in many different ways.

- Living out these initiatives in their totality brings the full reconciling and restoring power of Christ's ministry to all dimensions of life

3. Mission is relational.

- Authentic relationships provide the foundation for journeying together in discernment and mission.
- Creating a safe community of trust is critical for people to feel free to imagine and risk something new for their own lives, their relationships with others, their congregation, and their local neighborhoods.
- The foundation for discerning and doing mission is a willingness to be vulnerable with God and one another for the sake of the world.

4. Mission is disruptive.

- Following God's movement in the world is disruptive to our personal and congregational agendas. Our response individually and as the church is always limited by our human understanding.
- Becoming incarnational is about a willingness to follow the disruptive promptings of the Holy Spirit that cause us to see with new eyes people, situations, and relationships in need of the healing and restoring power of the gospel.

5. Mission is risking something new.

- God is constantly creating something new in Christ through the promised Holy Spirit. We are called to become a new creation by discerning and living out Christ's vision that is emerging and yet not fully realized.
- Christ's vision and mission challenges the attitudes, trends, and actions that are in direct conflict with the peaceable kingdom.
- We are called to risk living into the future of Christ's vision – a future that is more real than the reality of the present. When we trust and risk living into Christ's vision we co-create the future in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

6. Mission is contextual.

- Congregations and other expressions of the church have the capacity and imagination to engage meaningfully in their local contexts.
- The message and mission of Jesus Christ must be creatively lived out in each unique context. Each generation is called to live and express essential truths in their own language and form (see Doctrine and Covenants 162:2e).
- There is no one legitimate form for congregational life or small groups. Form follows prophetic vision (i.e. imagination) and function, and aligns with each congregation's or small group's unique expression of our identity, message, mission, and beliefs as expressed in *We Share*, 3rd Ed.
- We are a global faith community and are connected to local missional expressions occurring in many parts of the world. We share our gifts and resources in response to worldwide mission.

7. Mission is a unique expression of giftedness and calling.

- Mission emerges from the collective and unique giftedness of a specific congregation or small group. Becoming incarnational is not about developing a grand vision and then finding people skilled to realize the vision.
- Mission emerges when God's people envision how they can use their unique gifts for the sake of others in local and global contexts. Becoming incarnational does not occur at one time but emerges as individuals begin to imagine how they can live out the gospel together in tangible ways.

8. Mission is a long journey in the same direction.

- Lasting change only occurs when the culture (the collective perspective and norms) shifts.
- Becoming incarnational is about living into the strange and new behaviors of the peaceable kingdom of God in community.
- Leaders of mission lead by cultivating environments (cultures) of hope, discernment, discovery, and innovation – not by providing the answers. This is in direct contrast to leadership persuading a congregation, mission center, or field regarding a new program or direction.
- The Christian community has been striving to live into the strange and new behaviors of the peaceable kingdom for centuries. Culture change takes time. A true shift in an individual or group's paradigm of mission is normally measured in years.

The following working definition of the phrase “incarnational mission” summarizes the eight principles of LCM lived out in sacred community:

Incarnational Mission is . . . A sacred community that is shaped and sent by their ongoing encounter with the living Christ in relationship with one another and their neighbors, locally and globally.

Shared Leadership through the Pastor Leadership Team

LCM places intentional emphasis on *leadership teams* to increasingly make available a diversity of gifts, continuity, and support for discerning, leading, and sustaining Christ's mission in congregations and new expressions of the church. This highly relational approach to leadership is not only consistent with the life and ministry of Jesus but is deeply imbedded in our DNA as a movement.

This is a leader-cultivated model (not a leader-driven model)

- The primary role of the leadership team is to provide the environment for discernment, discovery, experimentation, and commitment to new forms of ministry and mission (i.e. the Word made flesh)

- LCM is not dependent on heroic or highly gifted leaders but teams of leaders who increasingly understand their leadership as creating rich environments for discovery, experimentation, and growth.
- Over time, as the culture begins to shift, new norms (i.e. practices) shape congregational life as much or more as any particular leader.
- The shift in culture increases the probability the congregation will not revert back to old patterns during a transition in leadership (i.e. pastor).

Key Indicators of a Community of Christ Mission-Focused Culture

The Pastor Leadership Team (PLT) seeks to cultivate a congregational culture that:

- is shaped by an ongoing encounter with the living Christ in community (in relationship with one another and their neighbors, locally and globally),
- is grounded in the witness of scripture,
- is radically relational and invitational,
- shares the joys and challenges of leadership in sustaining mission,
- is safe to explore and experiment,
- discerns and connects individual gifts and sense of call with opportunities to live Christ's mission in all its forms,
- Embodies and lives the concerns and passion of Christ

What Shapes a Mission-focused Community of Christ Culture?

Two primary dimensions of LCM help shape mission-focused Community of Christ congregational cultures over time:

1. Incarnational Practices of Mission
2. Shared Leadership in the form of Pastor Leadership Team Practices

Outlined below you will find two diagrams that provide an overview of these two dimensions:



The process above can be summarized as committing to a core set of incarnational practices that begin with *Encounter* and lead to a willingness to first *Envision* and then *Experiment* with new forms of ministry and mission. Fundamentally it is about a way of being that shapes and transforms how we are together in Christ and risk new relationships of invitation, hospitality, and healing with our neighbors.

The Pastor Leadership Team first models and then invites others into the incarnational practices that lead the congregation through the process above.

Incarnational Practices are lived out through three primary relationships:

Loving God: Practices of Encounter

Loving One Another: Practices of Community Building

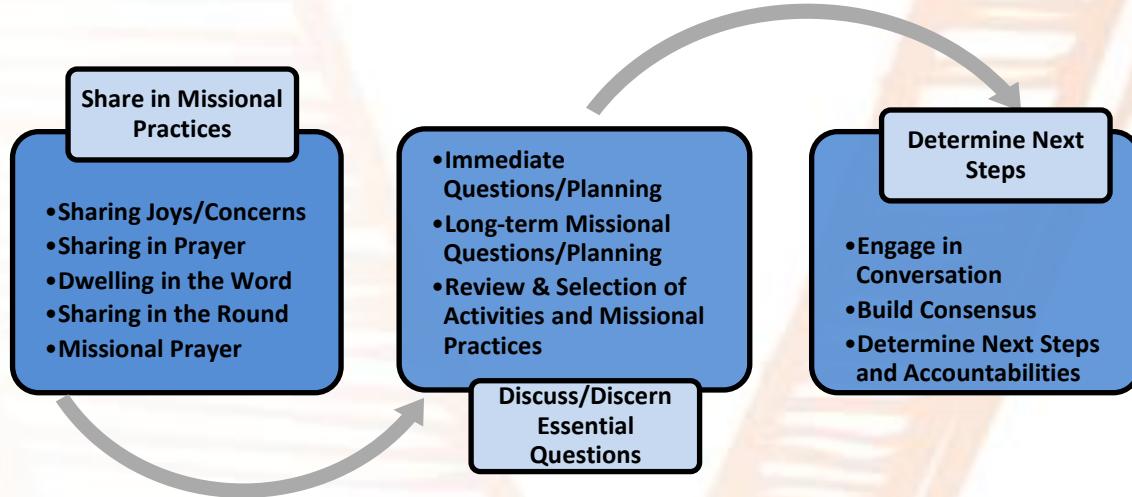
Loving our Neighbors: Practices of Invitation, Hospitality, and Healing

In LCM we ask all congregations to commit to three shared practices – Dwelling in the Word, The Mission Prayer, and Sharing in the Round

The Role of the Pastor Leadership Team - *A Closer Look*

As leaders we must ask this difficult question – **to what extent have we allowed our best thinking, logic, and plans to obscure or totally hide what the Spirit is seeking to reveal right in front of us?**

In LCM the Pastor Leadership Teams commit to monthly meetings to intentionally engage in missional practices, discernment, and short and long-term discernment and planning according the following model for meetings:



Discerning and Discussing Essential Questions

In our fast paced information age the focus is often on finding answers rather than asking essential questions. It is imperative that the PLT invest time to construct questions that lead to meaningful conversation, discernment, and movement toward meaningful engagement in mission. A key task is to articulate questions that lead to new discovery and experimentation with new forms of ministry and mission.

Identifying essential questions is critical to the relevancy of information we gather, insights we discern, actions we take, and outcomes we realize. The word “essential” signifies important, vital, and urgent. Framing or developing essential questions takes practice but will result in more focused conversation and deeper levels of discernment. Learning to ask good questions is as important to leading the congregation in mission as determining the answers.

An Essential Question:

- is thought provoking
- invites creative thinking
- stimulates reflective conversation

- generates positive energy and forward movement
- connects with deep meaning and purpose
- helps surface underlying assumptions
- focuses attention on what matters most

Congregation Support Ministers

Where feasible, Pastor Leadership Teams are supported by congregational support ministers. Their primary roles are:

- To serve as a companion or guide on the journey.
- To be a supportive presence.
- To provide helpful perspective, and
- Continue to affirm the PLT and their ability to lead as a team (most important).

Formation Retretts

Each member of the Pastor Leadership Team is expected to attend seven retreats. The retreats will explore the various elements of LCM and how the PLT can cultivate a mission shaped congregational culture. A summary of the foci for the 7 retreats:

- Explore the four key compass points of LCM (see LCM Field Guide Overview – Pg. 6)
 1. (Shared) Leadership
 2. Incarnational (i.e. Mission) Practices
 3. Mission Process
 4. Mission Context
- Explore incarnational mission or how to “embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ” in ways relevant to their local contexts (D&C 164:9d). The missional approach is highly relational and explores how relationships with God, one another, and our neighbors are the entry point for discovering how we:
 - Invite People to Christ
 - Abolish Poverty, End Suffering
 - Pursue Peace on Earth
- Practice the missional practices in a retreat setting and specific leadership processes explored during the retreats.
- Continue to deepen relationships as a pastor leadership team.
- Develop supportive relationships with other congregational leaders.
- Develop supportive relationships with mission center, field, and world church Leaders.
- Experience renewal in worship and fellowship.

Overview of LCM Seven Formational Weekends

Retreat 1- “Journey in Trust”

Key Foci: Initial experience for pastor's leadership teams will explore incarnational mission through the foundational principles of LCM.

- Incarnational mission shift that includes:
 - *Mission begins with encounter,*
 - *Mission is radically relational,*
 - *Getting started with PLT,*
 - *Shared leadership,*
 - *Missional practices.*
- Encounter stepping stone.

Retreat 2- “Discovering our Context through Stories”

Key Foci: Meaningful relationships provide the foundation for journeying together in discernment and mission.

- Discover stepping stone.
- Discovering our context through story, and incarnational mission shift – Rediscovering, sharing, and living into God's story for us in our time and place.
- Framing Essential Questions directly from our story that point the way forward.
- Worship – How does worship lead us into incarnational mission? How does the power of story inform worship planning?

Retreat 3 - “Envisioning our Future with God”

Key Foci: Incarnational practices, essential questions, and shared experiences lead to glimpses of God's future.

- Envision stepping stone
- Deepen understanding of incarnational mission.
- Mission Process (Prophetic Imagination and Beginning Experimentation)
- Mission is Relational -Proactively leading in transition and change.
- Practical ways to cultivate prophetic imagination in congregations.

Retreat 4 “Call to Renewal”

Key Foci: Cultivating the soil of relationships, trust, and encounter is essential to the ongoing journey of discovery and purpose.

- Mission begins and continues with encounter.
- Creating space for renewal and rest is essential to the journey.
- Finding joy in the journey.
- Living with the emerging questions.

- Connecting the dots of our experience.

Retreat 5 - "Living into God's Future Together"

Key Foci: Deepening understanding of incarnational mission and inviting people to Christ in a post-Christian culture.

- Experiment Stepping Stone.
- Reflections on what PLT's are experiencing
- Finding Joy and Balance in the Journey
- Disciple Formation Approaches
- Constructing and Launching Experiments
- Struggling with Plateaus

Assessing Culture Change (i.e. evaluation tool)

- Refining Essential Questions
- Practices that lead to new expressions of Christ's invitation and hospitality.

Retreat 6 - "Sustaining Mission among Competing Priorities"

Key Foci: Living out incarnational mission through compassionate ministries and evaluating what matters most.

- Evaluate Stepping Stone
- Practices that lead to new expressions of Abolish Poverty end Suffering.
- Reflections on what PLT's are experiencing
- Evaluation of Competing Priorities
- Developing Consensus in the Congregation

Retreat 7 - "Journey in Trust"

Key Foci: Explore how to discern, cultivate, and fully utilize the gifts of all ages. Becoming incarnational occurs when God's people imagine how their gifts can be utilized for the sake of others; Exploration of incarnational mission through ministries of peace and justice.

- Practices that lead to new expressions of Pursue Peace on Earth
- Becoming Signal Communities
- Reflections on what PLT's are experiencing
- Sustaining Mission through Shared Leadership – Finding Balance, Joy, and Renewal
- Sustaining Mission by increasing capacity to receive and give God's generosity.
- Getting Comfortable with being Uncomfortable
- The Journey ahead ...

Moving Forward

Recent counsel in Doctrine and Covenants 163 calls for the “the establishment of signal communities of justice and peace that reflect the vision of Christ.” We are seeking to become signal communities that look and feel like the peaceable kingdom of God on earth. Our call is to pursue Christ’s mission together in a world that yearns for the liberating truths of the gospel. This will take many forms as we are open to how God is calling us to embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ in a changing world.