

A GUIDE TO
WHAT IT MEANS
TO LIVE THE
MISSION PRAYER
AS DISCIPLES AND
CHRIST-CENTERED
COMMUNITIES.

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.



Living the Mission Prayer as Way of Life

An Introductory Guide

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LIVING THE MISSION PRAYER AT A GLANCE

Have you ever been surprised by one of those moments when you were at the right place at the right time and your response made a difference in someone's life? It may have been someone who needed a listening ear or an opportunity to speak up for someone being marginalized. What if these opportunities abound in our daily lives if we could only see them? Seeing and responding to spirit-led opportunities get at the heart of living the Mission Prayer.

This simple prayer is becoming a shared way of life for individuals and communities of Christ across the globe. Translated in nine languages, individuals and groups are discovering a simple way of life that leads to spiritual awakening and new ways of embodying God's love and peace in the world.

This guide provides leaders an overview of what it means to live the Mission Prayer as disciples and Christ-centered communities. The Mission Prayer invites us as individuals and communities to:

- ***AWAKEN*** to God's movement in us, among us, and ahead of us.
- ***RISK*** new questions, conversations, relationships, and compassionate actions.
- ***BLESS*** as we generously receive and share God's love and peace.

> *"It takes courage to risk something new... acting as a conduit of Christ's love in our community. And we, pastors and community, seek to make the choice always to love."*
>
> *— Shandra Newcom*



OUR JOURNEY BEGINS WITH SPIRITUAL AWAKENING...

The Mission Prayer begins with spiritual awakening in our daily lives. Spiritual practices are repetitive actions, like habits that help us live Spirit-led lives. They help us live a life wide awake to what God is seeking to do in our lives. This *inward journey* is where we discover our true selves, the very essence of who we are, loved unconditionally by Christ.

This discovery frees us to embody Christ's love in relationship with



others. Inward-focused practices can be as simple as a time of reflection with a morning cup of coffee, listening to a daily devotion podcast, or praying the Mission Prayer. This is about creating space in our day for the Spirit's presence and work in our lives.

What is one way you can create space in your day for the Spirit's presence and work in your life?

Spiritual practices also have an outward dimension in which we awaken to what God is doing all around us to end human suffering and heal our planet. This *outward journey* inspires and compels us to share Christ's love and peace in relationship with others. Outward practices can be as simple as a daily walk in our neighborhood or a decision to participate in a local organization working to end racial injustice in our city. (See **Initial Practices** on page 38 or *www.cofchrist.org/spiritual-practices*.) There are endless ways we can encounter God as we engage with the situations and relationships in our neighborhoods, towns, and cities.

WE ACT AND THEN REFLECT ON OUR EXPERIENCES...

We act, we experience, we reflect and learn, and we take each faithful step into the future together.



When we choose to pray the words, "God, where will your Spirit lead today?", we are inviting God to disrupt and lead our lives. This is the point of spiritual practices. They help us recognize moments of encounter with God that can lead to new insights, questions, and compassionate actions. We then gather as spiritual companions to reflect on our experiences and envision the next faithful step(s). This is about choosing to live a life of ongoing discernment and compassionate action as individuals and Christ-centered communities.

Our choice to respond to God's love is where the journey begins. Acting and reflecting were embodied in the ministry of Jesus and the early Christian community. Jesus chose to teach, heal, and then reflect with his followers by asking them questions to uncover the deeper meaning of what they experienced. It was not just his actions of teaching and healing, but the intimate relationship Jesus shared with the disciples *in community* that was transformative.

Just as the disciples acted and reflected in intimate community, we, too, are called to risk new actions and then reflect on our experiences together. (See **Acting and Reflecting Our Way through Awaken, Risk, and Bless** on page 24 and **Reflective Conversation—A Closer Look** on page 31 for more information and support.)

The initial questions that follow lead individuals and groups into actions and opportunities for reflection as we live *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* as disciples and Spirit-led communities.

Exploring these initial questions, taking action, and reflecting in



loving community help us move through the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* over time. Engage in different spiritual practices and find what works for you. Help one another explore ways to encounter God. Risk new compassionate actions as you encounter God in the lives and suffering of others. Discover how you are receiving and sharing blessing as you live the prayer each day.



WE LIVE THE MISSION PRAYER IN AUTHENTIC AND LOVING CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY BY ENGAGING IN THE FOLLOWING STEPS:



1. ***WE PLACE HIGH VALUE ON OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER.*** Each time we gather we begin by sharing how we come into community, including our joys and concerns. (See Cultivating Awareness Practice.) We work to develop loving and authentic Christ-centered community where each person feels valued and safe to share fears, hopes, and wild ideas about the future. (See the "Listening Lens" and "Circle of Trust Touchstones for Safe and Trustworthy Space" at *https://www.couragerenewal.org/PDFs/CourageRenewal-Circle-of-Trust-Touchstones-(c)2015.pdf* to begin this conversation.)

   Authentic and loving relationships are the foundation for everything else we will do.

2. ***WE ENGAGE IN INWARD AND OUTWARD SPIRITUAL PRACTICES.*** We explore ways that are meaningful for us to encounter God individually and in relationship with others. We commit to an ongoing process of awakening to God's movement in us, among us, and ahead of us. (See "Awaken to God's Movement" [above] and **Initial Practices with Descriptions** on page 38.)







3. ***WE BRING EVERYTHING WE ARE EXPERIENCING INTO REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION WITH ONE ANOTHER IN COMMUNITY.*** (See **Reflective Conversation—A Closer Look** on page 31.)

   - ***We engage in deep listening and sharing.*** Whether we are discerning a question, coming together for study, or exploring new actions to address a missional challenge or opportunity, we engage in a quality and depth of conversation where we create safe and receptive space for new insights to emerge (see Doctrine and Covenants 164:9b).
   - ***We reflect on what we are learning.*** As we share our experiences (high and low points) on this journey we help each other explore what we are learning about ourselves, one another, our neighbors, and where God is inviting us to become a blessing of love and peace.
   - ***We envision how the Spirit may be inviting us to take the next faithful step.*** As we explore what we are learning, we consider together how the Spirit may be inviting us to take the next faithful step and the one after that. We encourage and pray for one another as we risk something new (See "Risk Something New" on page 5.)

4. ***WE PAUSE TO GIVE THANKS AND REFLECT ON WHO WE ARE BECOMING*** as individuals and communities of Christ's love and peace. (See "Become a Blessing" on page 5.) We pause from time to time simply to share our stories with one another and explore what is unfolding for us individually and together as Christ-centered community. We explore who we are becoming as disciples and communities of Christ's love and peace. We give thanks and renew our commitment to continue the journey together.

These initial steps can guide a congregation, small group, or new expression of Christian community as they discern and live Christ's mission. Whether you come together to discern a question or support one another on the journey of discipleship, these four steps ground us first in our relationship with God and one another.

Our commitment to be intentional in our relationship with God, one another, and our neighbors will lead to new insights, new compassionate actions, and opportunities for growth and renewal. The following pages provide an in-depth look at the concepts, practices, and resources to guide this journey.



USING THIS GUIDE

How might you use this guide? Living the Mission Prayer is not an end to itself but a way of discerning and living mission as disciples and Christ-centered communities. The rhythm of *Awaken*, *Risk*, *and Bless* is about adopting a posture of ongoing discernment and compassionate action that alleviates human suffering and harm to our planet.

Leaders, practitioners, and disciples can use this guide for study and practical application of the Mission Prayer to questions of discernment, spiritual life exploration, or experimentation with new forms of ministry and mission in community. There are questions for reflection and action at the end of each section. Take significant time with these questions and explore what they could mean for you as an individual and as an expression of Community of Christ.

As you will discover, the Mission Prayer always moves us outward toward invitation, hospitality, and compassionate action. We *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* in response to God's invitation to be co-creators of love and peace in Spirit-led communities. We then invite others to join us on this journey.

Living the rhythm of the Mission Prayer begins by praying it daily with intention and our eyes wide open expecting to see God's presence all around us! Try different practices and resources suggested in this guide. (*See* **A Path to Implementation for Your Community** on page 40 for a more in-depth multiple-year journey for your group.)

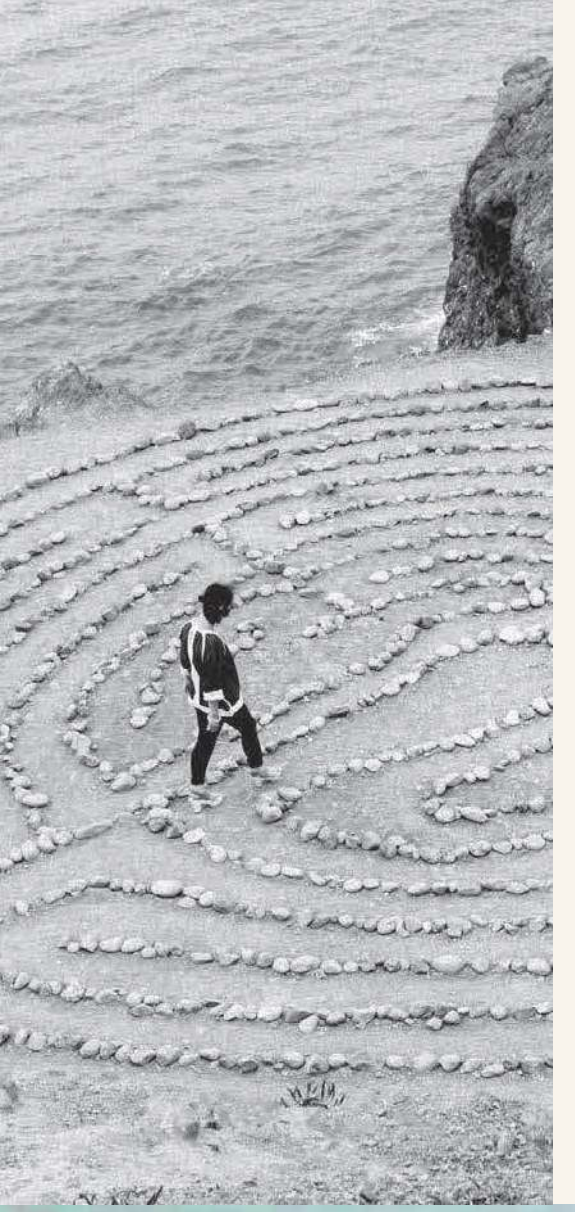


Living the rhythm of the Mission Prayer begins by praying it daily with intention....



[QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION]

How will I/we use this guide as a tool for exploration, reflection, and action as individuals and communities of Christ?



What specific action steps am I/are we prepared to take to begin our journey of discovery and action?

What does praying the Mission Prayer with intention and expectation mean to you?



WHAT TO EXPECT ON THIS JOURNEY?

Pray it daily with eyes wide open expecting to see God's presence all around us!

What should you expect on this journey? This journey leads ***less*** to a particular model or outcome and ***more*** to a way of being Christ-centered community — a community that is centered in ongoing spiritual practice and compassionate action as response to the Spirit's movement and revelation.

Although the journey will look different for each unique expression of Christ-centered community, we focus on three expectations below. This is not a checklist but does provide insight into specific areas of emphasis unique to our experience, challenges, and opportunities as communities of Christ:

- ***Awaken to a Way of Life*** that offers connection, meaning, and transformation in relationship with others.
- ***Risk New Entry Points and Invitations*** for those seeking a spiritual home and place of belonging.
- ***Bless Through Spirit-led Communities*** of mutuality, discernment, generosity, and compassionate action that work toward a more just and peaceful world.

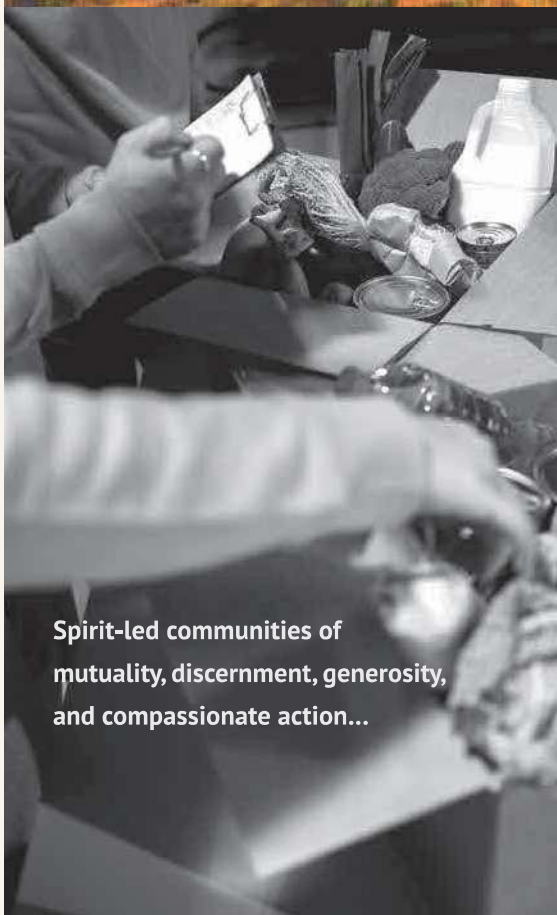
[QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION]

How have you sensed a stirring within for something more?

How do you see each of the expectations above bringing meaning and expanded understanding to your expression of Christ-centered community?







Spirit-led communities of mutuality, discernment, generosity, and compassionate action...







WHAT IS GOING ON AROUND US?

Have you sensed the yearning for meaning and connection in our world today? There is a relational and spiritual unsettledness across the globe. There is an awakening that we need each other not just for survival but to live fuller and more meaningful lives. There is a sense that there is something more, something beyond ourselves, that holds the possibility of transformation and hope for our future.

Take a moment and review the video *Mission Is Relational* at *www.missionalleaders.org*. What does the empty box represent to you? What is the challenge offered by this video for us as disciples and expressions of Community of Christ in a separated and hurting world?

It may seem strange in a high-tech connected world that isolation and loneliness are experienced by more people than any other time in history. Our ability to connect through technology is matched by our inability to connect at more intimate levels required for relationships of meaning and depth. There is a hunger for conversations and relationships of substance and purpose. (See video *The Art of Conversation* at *www.missionalleaders.org*. How does this video challenge us to something more?)

A wide diversity of spiritually curious young and old are responding to this hunger by discovering new ways to find meaning and come together outside traditional forms of religion. They are coming together just to be in relationship, to talk, to listen, to ask significant questions, to dream, and explore ways their lives can make a difference in our world.

We see the symptoms of this hunger as a gradual migration away from organized forms of religion over decades. Many are searching for that which they cannot even fully describe nor find in traditional forms of the church experience. Instead, they often find a lack of inclusion, preoccupation with correct doctrine, focus on self-preservation, and lack of relevance to individual, national, and global wellbeing. (See *The Great Spiritual Migration* by Brian McLaren for further study.)

Recent health, political, economic, religious, social, and environmental challenges are intertwined with a general state of uncertainty, isolation, and dissatisfaction with institutions including the church. The intersection of these events creates both challenges and unprecedented opportunities for the emergence of a living faith grounded in spiritual and relational communities of compassionate action.

[QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION]

How have you experienced separation and loneliness?

Where have you sensed a yearning for meaning and connection in the cultural spaces you inhabit (i.e. neighborhood, city, social media)? What are some symptoms of this yearning?



Have you at times yearned for a living faith? What does this look like amid the many challenges facing our planet? How might the Spirit be inviting you to a journey of transformation?



What stories in our neighborhoods, towns, and cities need to be shared? How and when will you risk an opportunity to listen in the coming weeks? (Engage the following practices: Listening to the Voices, Walking the Neighborhood, and Sharing in the Round found in the Appendix.)

> *The willingness of the pastors to act in community, to act as a team, began to transform the way the rest of the mission center began to act in one another's lives as a covenant community and in the world as prophetic people.*
>
> *— Shandra Newcom*

How might this hunger for something more be an opportunity to bring people together for listening, sharing, exploring, and creating a more hopeful future? What might this look like?





WHAT HAS GOD BEEN DOING IN OUR MIDST?

In the midst of this emerging reality, a small movement blessed with the name Community of Christ has been called to *reimagine* a big idea—the idea that authentic and loving Christ-centered communities can transform our world. Not just any communities, but spiritually formed communities of radical hospitality, compassionate action, and transforming peace. This is God's transforming vision expressed through the prophets, where we don't "just speak and sing of Zion," but "live, love, and share as Zion"—where we "strive to be visibly one in Christ" and among whom "there are no poor or oppressed."

Community of Christ President Stephen M. Veazey in his September 2017 "Time to Act" address expressed our transforming vision this way:

> *Our chief purpose is to birth, nurture, and multiply communities of disciples and seekers engaged in spiritual formation and compassionate ministry and action. This basic blueprint—spiritual formation, community, compassionate ministry and action—is true to the vision of Christ. Everything else, like organizational structure, resources, funding methods, congregational forms, etc., should support this primary purpose.*
>
> *Such communities of disciples and seekers can gather anywhere, any time. While some may choose to do so, they are not dependent on owning buildings or property. They will be connected locally and globally. They will be salt, leaven, and light.*

Interdependent and loving relationships of mutual wellbeing are at the heart of this vision. This ancient/new call reaches back to the final words Jesus shared with his disciples in the Gospel of John 15:9–12.

> *As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

Could the Spirit be inviting us to rediscover what lies at the heart of Christian community obscured at times by an insistence on a particular form or set of activities? What if our immersion in "our particular way" of doing church makes it difficult to see the deeper meaning and purpose behind authentic and loving Christ-centered communities? Might the symptom of declining participation in organized religion in some nations be pointing us to a future found in the yearnings of many outside the church searching for meaning and connection?

Reimagine **a big idea—the idea that authentic and loving Christ-centered communities can transform our world.**



For many, the centuries-old model of Sunday morning church is not connecting with the deepest yearnings of the human heart. For these individuals there is more to authentic and loving Christ-centered community than passive participation in a Sunday morning service. There is a hunger for deeper conversation, exploration, and support of one another as companions on the journey of spiritual formation and compassionate action. This is at the heart of Christian community. We must recover the life-giving power of truly walking life's journey together whether in traditional forms or new forms of the church. If we do this, we will discover our future.

Embedded in our DNA as communities of Christ are all the necessary elements for loving, supportive, and transforming relationships. The question is whether we are willing to risk new and deeper ways of gathering that transform us and connect with the yearnings of those who have gone in search of a living faith elsewhere.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

How do the statements in the paragraphs above reflect your concerns and hopes about the state of Christianity in general and Community of Christ today?



Review the video *Tables* at *www.missionalleaders.org*. How does our insistence at times on a particular form or set of activities obscure what lies at the heart of Christian community?





How has the experience of Christian community been transformative in your life? In the lives of others? What conditions were present when you experienced the transformative power of loving community?



Consider the following statement: "The question is whether we are willing to risk new and deeper ways of gathering that transform us and connect with the yearnings of those who have gone in search of a living faith elsewhere." How might this statement free us to finally let go of old forms that ceased to connect with needs of people long ago?

"THE QUESTION IS WHETHER WE ARE WILLING TO RISK NEW AND DEEPER WAYS OF GATHERING THAT TRANSFORM US..."

POISED TO FULFILL GOD'S ULTIMATE VISION

Our emerging identity and calling as *communities* of Christ is revealing a path to our future. For those who participate in more structured forms of the church, imagine small gatherings of friends in neighborhood gathering places and online in contrast to a weekly religious service. What if the birth of the church in Acts 2:45–47 provides insight for how we might rediscover the heart of Christian community today? It reads:

They sold some of their own things. Then they gave that money to any other believers who needed it. The whole group of believers met together every day in the yard of God's Great House. They shared their food and they ate meals together in each other's homes. They were very happy, and they were honest with one another. All the time, they praised God. All the other people thought that the believers were good people. Every day, the Lord saved more people so that the group of believers grew bigger (Easy English Bible, 2018).

Can you envision small, intimate, and practicing communities of Christ followers, breaking bread, sharing life, praying together, and caring for the needs of their neighbors? Can you envision the rebirthing of Christianity in our day through such intimate and transformative communities?

This vision is within reach for us! We have in our collective memory those experiences where we touched transformative Christian community and it changed us. This is where our movement began as we struggled to live the vision of Acts 2 in Kirtland, Ohio. This is about a willingness to go deeper, to become open to the possibility of spiritual and relational transformation with one another and our neighbors. "By the grace of God" we are "poised to full God's ultimate vision for the church" (Doctrine and Covenants 164:9a).

THIS IS ABOUT A WILLINGNESS TO GO DEEPER...



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

Review the video *Risk Something New* at *www.missionalleaders.org*. How is this video challenging us to discover our authentic selves in relationship with God, one another, and our neighbors?



What might some initial steps towards intimate and transformative Acts 2 communities look like today? (See "We Are Pilgrims on a Journey" *Community of Christ Sings* 550. Explore the vision of this hymn and consider next steps.)



HOW WE ENGAGE IN THIS BOLD RELATIONAL VISION SAYS AS MUCH ABOUT WHO WE ARE AS WHAT WE ACCOMPLISH.

If you were going to invite a group of friends to form a new expression of Christian community, what would it look like? Where would you meet? When would you meet? What would you do when you gather? How would you support one another between gatherings? How would you be Christ's presence in your neighborhood? What is inhibiting you from experimenting with this form of the church now?







HOW WE GET THERE MATTERS —THE RELATIONAL IMPERATIVE

Our bold relational vision of the peaceable reign of God is more than a distant dream. Early in our scriptural heritage we read the words "seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion." It is an invitation to transformation now! How we engage in this bold relational vision says as much about who we are as what we accomplish. Living the Mission Prayer in community will only take root in the fertile soil of loving and authentic relationships.

In Mark 4:1–9 (The Message) we find a helpful parable about planting seeds and types of soil. Before we get into specifics about *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* we want to explore this passage and its relationship to cultivating deep and meaningful relationships as essential to discovering God's future together.

Review Mark 4:1–9 and consider the following questions.

- How might the metaphor of rich and fertile soil relate to the quality of our relationships with one another?
- Why are relationships of love, authenticity, and trust essential to discovering God's future together?

- How might we assess the health of our relational soil as a group?
- What steps do we need to take to enrich our relational soil as a group?

This resource provides several tools to help build authentic and loving community including The Listening Lens and Parker Palmer's Circle of Trust Touchstones under **Resources** on page 46. In addition, refer to **A Path to Implementation for Your Community** on page 40. The first step, Building Relationships of Safety and Trust is all about cultivating the soil of authentic and loving community.





QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

How would you define authentic and loving relationships?



How might you use Mark 4:1–9 to talk about the health of your soil as a congregation or small group?

If relationships are central to our purpose, what does this look like when we gather and pursue Christ's mission in the places we live, work, and play?





AWAKEN

RISK

BLESS



LIVING THE MISSION PRAYER AS WAY OF LIFE

God is inviting us to a living faith as companions on the journey! This is our heritage as a prophetic people in a changing world. We sense the stirring within, but what does it look like to live this out? How might this living faith lead us to discover our future as transforming communities of Christ in a changing world?

The Mission Prayer, a prayer that emerged out of our journey as a people, is becoming a shared way of life for communities of Christ across the globe. Translated into nine languages, individuals and groups are discovering a simple rhythm that leads to a renewing and purposeful way of life:

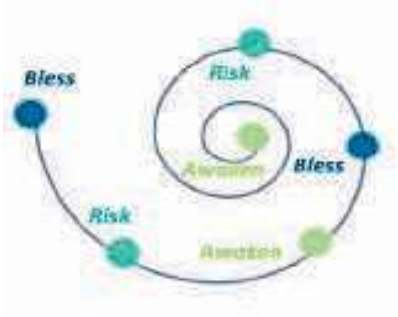


Awaken to God's movement in us, among us, and ahead of us,

Risk new questions, conversations, relationships, compassionate actions,

Bless as we generously share and receive God's love and peace with others and the Earth.

This prayer captures the essence of our bold relational vision and mission to share all the dimensions of Christ's love and peace in a world yearning for connection and hope. *Awaken*, *Risk*, and *Bless* is a rhythm that grounds us in spiritual formation and compassionate action for the sake of our world.



There is a natural progression in the Mission Prayer that moves from ***Awaken*** to ***Risk*** to ***Bless***. It is not a linear path but a way of life that at times draws us inward to the source of love and peace and other times pushes us outward to become a blessing of God's love and peace. Like the Temple spiral our spiritual journey is a constant inward and outward movement that leads to discovery and action in response to the Spirit.

The prayer reorients our primary focus from ourselves and spaces we have traditionally viewed as sacred (church buildings, campgrounds, retreat centers, for example) to all the places God is moving and inviting us to join in sharing Christ's love and peace. This reorientation begins with spiritual practices that help us discern

or awaken to God's movement in us, among us, and ahead of us. It continues with a willingness to risk new questions, conversations, relationships, and actions when we gather and when we reach beyond ourselves to our neighbors.

The rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* invites us to explore and live with two essential questions:

- **Where is God moving in us, among us, and ahead of us?**
- **How then shall we live as communities of Christ's love and peace?**

The sequence and nature of these questions is significant.

First, we begin with becoming spiritually awake to where God is already moving and revealing divine purpose in us, among us, and ahead of us. The Mission Prayer begins with, "God, where will your Spirit lead today?" This requires a level of spiritual receptivity and openness. We are not dictating the terms or our engagement. We are inviting God to lead us to situations and relationships where there is suffering and the possibility of transformation.

Second, our encounters with God and those around us become the fertile ground for new insights. These insights lead to "what if" questions. These questions lead to new experiments and compassionate actions. The Mission Prayer continues with, "Grant me courage to risk something new." If God leads us to encounter both suffering and the possibility of transformation, what do we do about it? What is the next faithful step?

Living the Mission Prayer is a continual process of spiritual awakening and courageous response to God's initiative as it unfolds over time. What is God doing? How then shall we live? These two questions invite us to live our faith in the world where ongoing discovery leads us to ask how we should respond as disciples and communities of Christ's love and peace.

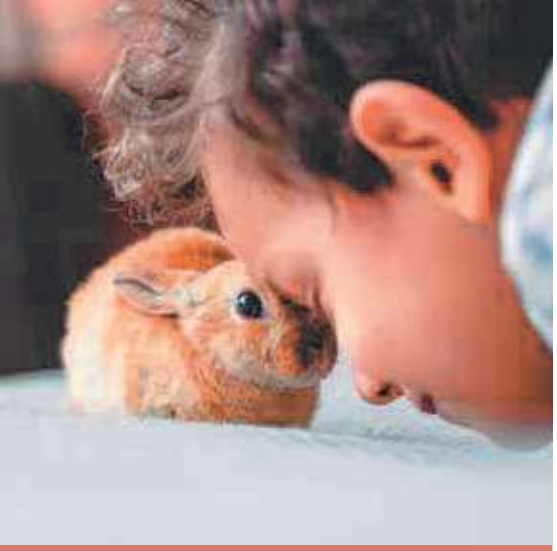


In Mark 10 some parents bring their children to Jesus. The disciples scold the parents. Jesus stops what he is doing and gives his full attention to the children and blesses them. He tells his disciples that they need to receive the kingdom with the same openness and wonder as these children.





WE BEGIN WITH BECOMING SPIRITUALLY AWAKE TO WHERE GOD IS ALREADY MOVING



JESUS REVEALS TO HIS DISCIPLES THEY NEED TO RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD WITH THE SAME OPENNESS AND WONDER AS CHILDREN.



Can you see these two essential questions at work in this story?

- ***What is God doing?*** Jesus reveals the importance of children to his followers.
- ***How then shall we live?*** Jesus totally reorients what he is doing to give them his full attention and blessing. This is his invitation to us.

Can you imagine communities of Christ that continually adapt their focus, ministry, and activities based on who is being invited and what their needs are for healing and wholeness? Our focus shifts when we permit the Spirit to lead us to new conversations, relationships, and compassionate actions. We begin to think less about ourselves and more about who may be joining us and their longings and needs.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

How has the Mission Prayer helped you become more awake to what God is doing in you and ahead of you?

Describe the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* in your own words. What aspects of the rhythm speak most to your deepest sense of God's call for you? For your group?

How might the two essential questions above begin to reorient your personal or group's focus?

Review the video *Prayer of Disruption* at *www.missionalleaders.org*. If God is moving, we can expect to be disrupted. Think about a time when your agenda was disrupted because you were awake. What were you doing that made you more open? How was your response to the situation led by the Spirit in that moment?

Think about how you or your group can be more open to Spirit-led disruption. What is one inward and outward spiritual practice you might consider adding to your daily routine? What practices might your group consider incorporating into your times of gathering?

Can you envision one next step to live the Mission Prayer more fully? What might this look like for you and your group?



HOW COULD YOU OR YOUR GROUP BECOME MORE OPEN TO SPIRIT-LED DISRUPTION?



LIVING INTO A SIMPLE FORM OF GATHERING

We have explored how the rhythm of the Mission Prayer helps us stay connected to the source, the movement of God's outpouring love and peace. What might it look like to live the rhythm in an intentional way when we gather?

My most profound experiences of Christian community have also been the most simple - gathering around the table for deep spirit-led sharing.

— Ron Harmon



Using the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* to guide your gatherings can be as simple as the following outline:

AWAKEN
TO GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

Connect with One Another. (See Cultivating Awareness Practice under **Initial Practices** on page 38.) Cultivating Awareness asks us to pay attention to how we are showing up (i.e. our quality of presence) when we gather by inviting each person to reflect and then respond to the following question:

- What do you bring with you to this gathering? As you are present in silence, pay attention to what dominates your focus, what your mind is drawn to, and how that brings you into the circle.

Note: Whether you engage in the practice fully or simply ask the question above, this invites people to an awareness of how we each come into one another's presence in community.

Share in Prayer, holding up the collective needs of the group.



RISK
NEW QUESTIONS, CONVERSATIONS, AND COMPASSIONATE ACTIONS

Engage in Group Spiritual Practice — Lead the group in a Dwelling in the Word or Hymn Text practice. (See **Initial Practices** on page 38.) Invite the group into a few moments of silent reflection and then share around the following question:

- What word, phrase, or image captured your attention?

Note: You may also choose other practices depending on the focus of your gathering.

Risk New Questions and Conversation through *either* of the options below:

- **Option 1 – Going Deeper with the Text** - Think about a question that relates your scripture or hymn text above to a need for God's love and peace in the world. This may be focused on our inward journey toward wholeness or outward journey of sharing God's love and peace with our neighbors*. Invite the group into conversation. End with the following question:

  What initial step(s) might we take to learn more and respond?

**Neighbor is defined broadly as in the parable of the good Samaritan. See Luke 10:25-37.*

- **Option 2 – Personal Reflection** - Ask someone to share a brief reflection on a local or global issue of peace and justice through the lens of Christ's mission and message. Provide time for discussion using the questions below.

  Key Questions: How does the life and ministry of Jesus illuminate our understanding of this issue? What initial steps might we take to learn more and respond?



Share reflections on local and global issues of peace and justice through the lens of Christ's mission and message.

BLESS

ONE ANOTHER, OUR NEIGHBORHOODS, AND THE EARTH

Respond Generously - Provide opportunity for a generous response to what you have experienced in community. This includes an opportunity for financial response and response through some form of commitment to action.

Bless One Another - Offer a prayer of blessing and encouragement. This could be a prayer, blessing, reading, scripture, song, or group expression of blessing.

As you intentionally plan time to be together, remember your purpose in gathering as represented in the Mission Prayer:

- We gather to awaken to God's movement in us, among us, and ahead of us.
- We gather to find courage to become a blessing, to end unnecessary human suffering, and to heal the Earth. This is at the heart of God's love and peace.



Offer a prayer of blessing and encouragement as an expression of God's love and peace.

For a more detailed outline see "Gathering around the Mission Prayer: An Outline" under **Resources for Further Exploration** on page 46.

[QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION]

What practices might help our group become more awake to what God is doing in us, among us, and ahead of us?





How might this way of gathering help us focus on the purpose of coming together and being sent as Christian community?



How might we create more opportunities to be in conversation about what we are experiencing, what we are learning, and what steps we may take next? (See **Reflective Conversation—A Closer Look** on page 31 as an additional practice.)

LET THE SPIRT BREATHE



A CHOICE TO GO DEEPER WITH OUR RESPONSE REQUIRES A LEVEL OF INTENTION ON OUR PART.

ACTING AND REFLECTING OUR WAY THROUGH AWAKEN, RISK, AND BLESS

Prior to reading this section you are invited to review the video *Let the Spirit Breathe* at *www.missionalleaders.org* and consider the following questions:

- How has the Spirit moved you to respond to opportunities in your daily life?
- How has your reflection on those experiences led to new understandings and actions?

Can you recall a time you sensed the divine impulse to respond, a stirring deep within to take action in response to a moving experience? Perhaps it was a powerful message, a moment in nature, or an

encounter with human suffering. What do we do with these impulses? How do we move from encounter to response? Is there a way to take one faithful step at a time, learning and growing as we go?

Reflective practice, grounded in the life and ministry of Jesus, helps us move into the future one step at a time. Jesus often reflected with his disciples after an experience by asking them questions. He wanted them to reflect with him on the deeper meaning behind his actions. He would then challenge them to go and do likewise.

Action and Reflection are at the heart of reflective practice and help us take small but significant steps as we move through the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless*. The process is simple, yet intentional.

Action is about choice:

- to be fully awake
- to risk something new
- to become a blessing

A choice requires a level of intention on our part. We sense an impulse to go deeper in our interior life or respond in compassionate action to human suffering. Viktor Frankl reminds us, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." As disciples, we understand this "space" to be sacred and the opportunity before us as spiritual freedom.

Reflection is about deep listening and sharing:

- with God
- with one another
- with our neighbors

In reflection we look back to reenter our experience in order to uncover the meaning of events in our lives. These insights can lead us to new and deeper levels of response as disciples and communities. Patricia O'Connell Killen reminds us in *The Art of Theological Reflection*, "Most of our life experiences go by unnoticed. Sooner or later, however, something happens that causes us to become more aware of our experience." In Reflection, we intentionally hit the pause button, so we don't miss the meaning of what we are experiencing and how it calls us into the future.

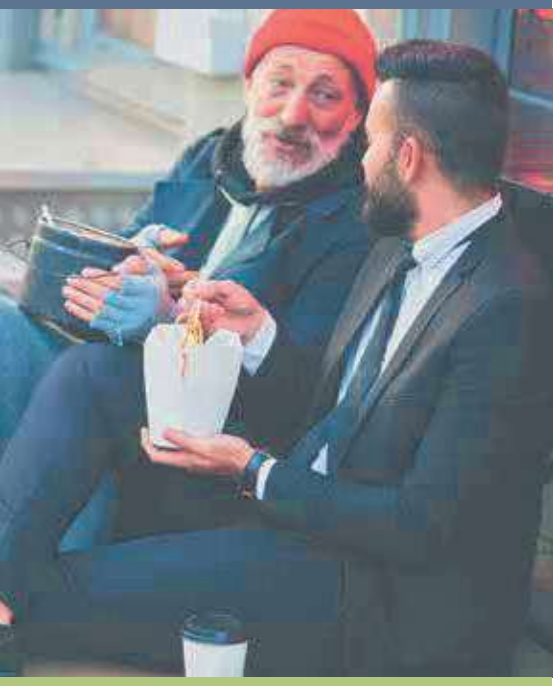
In western societies we have often placed significant emphasis on reflection before action. According to Maria Cimperman in her book *Social Analysis in the 21st Century*, "In action and reflection we are ultimately contemplatives in action, reflective persons working together in solidarity to bring about the just world we are offered in peace, hope, and love." Cimperman is suggesting there is a more holistic way of missional engagement that integrates reflection alongside action.







What might my next faithful step look like as I respond to an encounter with a homeless person in my city?



COMING TOGETHER FOR REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION IS AT THE HEART OF OUR AUTHENTIC AND LOVING CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY.



For example, I feel moved to respond to an encounter with a homeless person on a cold winter night in my city. I decide to help by paying for a hotel room. I can see the direct impact of my love in action and feel good about my decision. The next night I reflect on my experience with a small spiritual formation group I attend weekly. After I share my experience, a group member asks what I learned from the experience.

As I reflect deeper on the experience, I recognize I am unsettled about what will happen to this person tonight. I am uncertain about what I can really do and share my discomfort with the group. We discuss what it would look like to find a longer-term solution to this person's problem of homelessness. We also discuss the larger systemic problem of homelessness in our city that requires a long-term commitment to work for change. Although I am still troubled by the situation, I feel the support of my friends in Christ.

What might my next faithful step look like? Is there a next step I can take as a result of what I have learned? It may not solve this person's homelessness, but it would be a good next step. A group member suggests locating a homeless shelter and helping them get accepted as an interim step. They offer to go with me. I feel a sense of peace about this next step. We offer a prayer of gratitude for our time together.

This example illustrates how pausing to reflect and ask simple questions helps us avoid paralysis by the magnitude of situations we encounter. Notice in this example, the question was not how to solve the entire problem but what the next faithful step looks like.

Coming together for reflective conversation about our ongoing experiences is at the heart of authentic and loving Christ-centered community. When we pause to reflect as individuals and community, the Spirit helps us attach meaning to our experiences and envision the next faithful step.

We find this same pattern in many passages of scripture. In Luke 24 we discover a story of two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were distraught at what had taken place in the brutal execution of their teacher and friend, Jesus of Nazareth. They were walking along the road when a stranger (Jesus) started talking with them about the recent events that had occurred. For some reason, perhaps their grief, they did not recognize it was Jesus but still invited him to join them as they journeyed toward Emmaus. They engaged in a lengthy conversation about the meaning of all that had taken place.

The disciples decided to invite the stranger to stop, rest, and have a meal with them. As Jesus broke bread the disciples recognized who had journeyed with them and explained the meaning of all that had taken place. After Jesus left, the two disciples then reflected on their experience as their hearts burned within them. It was not just the conversation, but practice of intimate relationship revealed in the

breaking of bread, that caused them to recognize Jesus. They then envisioned and took their next step—they immediately returned to Jerusalem to tell the others. They did not know what the resurrection appearance would ultimately mean for their lives; they simply took the next faithful step toward Jerusalem.

Choosing to be fully awake, to risk something new, and become a blessing is about taking a series of small but intentional actions. We pause in between each action to reflect and explore two primary questions:

- What am I/are we learning and discovering?
- How might the Holy Spirit be inviting me/us into the next faithful step?

Taking time to pause and reflect is an essential part of the process. Things always look different when we look back and reflect. We can do this individually each day. (See Prayer of Examen under **Initial Practices** on page 38.)

We can also participate in the reflection process in community. We call this Reflective Conversation. (See **Reflective Conversation—A Closer Look** on page 31.) When we do this with receptive listening and open sharing, the Holy Spirit blesses us with new insights and illuminates the next faithful step.

The illustration below shows how acting and reflecting together moves us through the rhythm of *Awaken*, *Risk*, *and Bless*. Although we may initially move through the rhythm sequentially, *Awaken*, *Risk*, *and Bless* is not linear. We, of course, don't control how and when the Holy Spirit will move and how it might lead us to courageously respond. We strive to adopt a posture of openness and willingness to risk something new any time the Spirit moves.



We engage in specific actions as we move through each step of the rhythm. These actions are outlined below. We pause to reflect after each action and ask:

- What am I/are we learning?
- How might the Holy Spirit be inviting me/us into the next faithful step?

This intentionally moves us through the rhythm, one small step at a time.

Let's go a little deeper by exploring potential actions under *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* in the form of some questions.



The practice of *intimate relationship* revealed in the breaking of bread. caused the disciples from the journey to Emmaus to recognize Jesus.



WE STRIVE TO ADOPT A WILLINGNESS TO RISK ANY TIME THE SPIRIT MOVES.









AWAKEN

Engage in Individual and Group Spiritual Practices

(See **Initial Practices** on page 38.)

What would it look like for us to be more intentional in opening ourselves (as individuals and communities of Christ) to the Spirit?

What is one inward and one outward spiritual practice I will engage in to become more awake?

What is one inward and outward spiritual practice we can share in together that helps us become more awake as a community of Christ?

RISK

New Questions, Conversations, Relationships, and Compassionate Actions

As I reflect on my experiences individually and in community, what new insights or questions are challenging my/our status quo? Where am I being led to alleviate physical or spiritual suffering?

How might the Spirit be prompting me/us to risk a new conversation, relationship, compassionate action, or form of community?

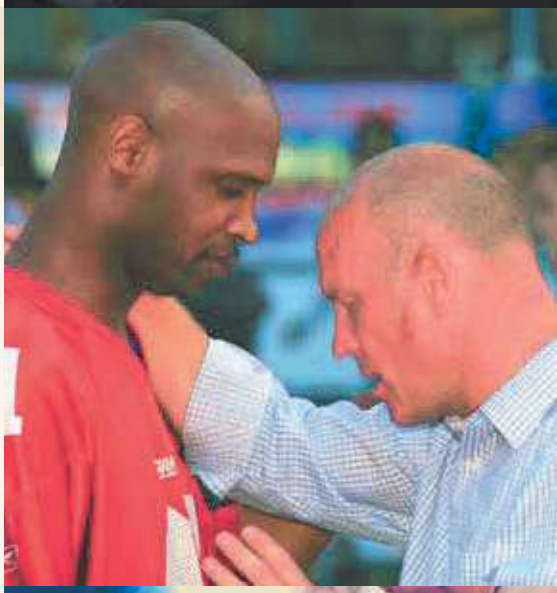


How will we support one another as we engage in ministry experiments or compassionate actions? Specifically, how will we be companions for one another, so no one walks alone?



BLESS

Explore and Celebrate Learnings, Clarify Core Identity and Purpose, Discover and Live a Sustainable Future



How will we create opportunity to pause and celebrate each faithful step taken and all the insights we have gained?

How have we received blessing as we have risked new conversations, relationships, and compassionate actions?



As we look back on our journey, what is at *the very center* of who we are and are becoming? Is our journey leading us beyond ourselves to new relationships and opportunities to alleviate human suffering and heal the Earth?



DISCOVERY IS AT THE HEART OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PROPHETIC PEOPLE.

Are there actions or experiments that have the potential to become ongoing and sustainable ministries?

Are there activities or ministries we need to discontinue to make room for what is emerging? (See "Evaluating Our True Capacity for Mission" at *www.missionalleaders.org*.)



At the heart of living the Mission Prayer is a willingness to experiment our way into the future one faithful step or action at a time. We create an open posture of discovery versus a rush to implement the next best solution or program. This openness to discovering our future, God's future, is at the heart of what it means to be a prophetic people.

WE ACT, WE EXPERIENCE, WE REFLECT AND LEARN, AND WE TAKE EACH FAITHFUL STEP INTO THE FUTURE TOGETHER.

Sometimes we have difficulty seeing the significance of small steps taken. As we reflect back over time, we can see how we have been shaped by the Holy Spirit to become who we are called to be—spiritually formed communities of compassionate action locally and globally. We become a people who don't just speak and sing of Zion but live, love, and share as Zion one faithful step at a time (Doctrine and Covenants 165:6a).

[QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION]



Review the video *Open Your Eyes* at *www.missionalleaders.org*. How can a simple spiritual practice shape what unfolds during our day? Why is this essential to our journey as disciples and authentic and loving Christ-centered communities?

Review how action and reflection apply to *Awaken, Risk, and Bless*. What specific actions do you feel drawn to explore as an individual and as a group?

Explore the critical importance of reflective conversation as we move through the rhythm. How is the process of reflection enhanced when we share our experiences in community? What might it look like for this to become an ongoing practice when we gather?

How can we engage children and youth in our conversations and actions? (See "Spiritual Practices for Children" under **Initial Practices** on page 38.)



How can we engage children and youth in our conversations and actions?



REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION—A CLOSER LOOK



Reflective conversation is when we share our experiences and listen deeply for how the Spirit is moving in our lives and the lives of others as we reflect on the following questions:

- What am I/are we learning and discovering?
- How might the Spirit be inviting me/us into the next faithful step?

In this practice we intentionally create the time and space to listen deeply and share with one another each time we gather. The point is not to fix problems or provide answers but to clarify, ask questions,



IT IS ESSENTIAL TO INVEST TIME IN BUILDING A CULTURE OF SAFETY AND TRUST.





share impressions, and support one another on the journey. It is about learning as we go.

Living the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* in community will only occur if we are willing to share our authentic experiences and listen to the experiences of others. Without this community experience we are simply living the Mission Prayer as individuals. This is what the practice of reflective conversation is all about. This creates space for the Spirit's work among us revealing new insights and illuminating the next step on the journey.

Before we can engage in meaningful reflective conversation, we must explore and address two important questions:

- Have we established a foundation of safety and trust with each other?
- Do we have a shared understanding of what safe and supportive community looks like?

If we don't feel it is safe to share, authentic and open sharing will be nearly impossible. Many often skip over this step assuming there is a level of trust and safety. Trust and safety mean we feel free to be ourselves and share what is truly on our hearts and minds without fear of judgement or rejection. This is more than being polite. This depth of relationship occurs when we are willing to be vulnerable with each other recognizing we all come into community with a level of brokenness.

Short cutting these important questions will lead to surface level experiences. No one will risk sharing their struggles. No one will risk sharing their hopes and ideas about the future. No one will risk anything new.

It is essential to invest time in building a culture of safety and trust. This does not happen by accident. Focusing on tasks will not divert attention from underlying dysfunction in a group. This takes courage, but such courage is necessary to move to the next level of intimacy in community.

See "Circle of Trust: Touchstones for Safe and Trustworthy Space" under **Resources for Further Exploration** on page 46. Review and affirm these important shared commitments each time you meet. In addition, review The Listening Lens under **Initial Practices** on page 38 and **How We Get There Matters: The Relational Imperative** on page 16.

What does reflective conversation look like in practice?

REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION PROCESS

- Often practiced in groups of three or four, each person has an opportunity to reflect on a specific action(s) or experience(s)

during the past week. These experiences may include a spiritual practice, new conversation, experiment in ministry, compassionate action, or unexpected encounter.

- Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence so each group member can focus on what they desire to share. This enables group members to be fully present with each other while other group members are sharing.
- Individual experiences are shared one person at a time by responding to the two questions below:
    - What am I learning and discovering?
    - How might the Spirit be inviting me into the next faithful step?

  In general, provide each group member 3-5 minutes to share. Before moving to the next person, provide a time for group reflection and clarifying questions. We are not solving problems and prescribing solutions. We are sharing impressions, uncovering insights, and exploring potential next steps.

- The process for three people to share and have group reflection typically takes about 30 minutes. Depending on the depth of sharing it can take much longer.

This process of reflective conversation can become an important opportunity for sharing each time you gather. This sharing and group reflection becomes the fertile ground for risking new ideas and actions.

If a group is living the rhythm of the Mission Prayer together there will be experiences to share each time we gather. These experiences will include joyful encounters and painful struggles. We learn together from all our experiences.

Over time individuals will look forward to this opportunity to share how God is moving in them and ahead of them in their neighborhoods. They will also look forward to hearing and being strengthened by the sharing of others. This is the essence of authentic and loving Christ-centered community.

It is important to remember this depth and frequency of sharing will take some time to live into as a group. It will likely feel awkward at first, but over time will become a meaningful dimension of your experience as trust develops and individuals feel the freedom to share in a loving and supportive community.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

Explore the significance of reflective conversation. Why is it important to create opportunities to talk about what we are experiencing when we gather? How can conversation lead to deeper relationships, new insights, and new compassionate actions?





"I was reading the Mission Prayer and stopped short with the questions, "How much do I really believe this? Have I done any risk taking?" Then the realization came. Since I do believe this to be true, then I should be willing to do what it says."

— Barb Duke





How can we create more time and space for reflective conversation when we gather? What do we need to consider suspending for a while to engage with one another more consistently as companions on the journey?



Is our community a safe place to share, envision, and risk new actions and experiments? If not, how can we begin to build trust and a willingness to risk sharing?

How can we create more time and space for reflective conversation when we gather?

ENVISIONING AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE



The Mission Prayer is about adopting a posture of discernment as a way of life. When we pray, "Help me be fully awake," we are asking for new vision, to see the world as God sees the world.

This vision includes two dimensions:

- The world as it is – our current reality.
- The world as it could be – the possibility of God's future.

When we become fully awake to our current reality it can be very difficult to see beyond these challenges. We can become discouraged and stuck in our current situation. This is normal. This is why we pray,

"Grant me courage to risk something new." Envisioning something new always involves risk. Envisioning something new is the first step to living into God's preferred future.

Where do we go for inspiration, for a new imagination? Can we slow down long enough to create the space for dreaming? This looks different for different people but here are some places we can go to stimulate a new imagination for our future:

- **Spiritual practice** – There is no substitute for the daily practice of opening oneself to the source of inspiration – the Holy Spirit. Spiritual practice by its very nature causes us to slow down, experience deeper thoughts, make new connections, and envision new possibilities. Find what works for you whether that be a daily walk, quiet time with a cup of coffee, or time in the evening on the front porch.
- **Places that open us up inside** – Where are those places you seldom get to but when you do, you become alive? Find ways to get to those places more often and pay attention to elevated thoughts and deeper questions. For groups, find places where you don't ordinarily meet that can create a feeling of openness and possibility.
- **The creative energy of vibrant group discussion** – Sometimes the best thing we can do is get out of our own head, lay our assumptions aside, and be stimulated by the ideas and imagination of others. Creating more time for group exploration without the pressure to make decisions will help stimulate creativity. Set the expectation that conversations will naturally mature over time. Commit to coming together just to explore, to sit together in times in silence, to laugh, and at times to cry together.
- **Art, music, theatre, poetry, movies** – The various mediums of self-expression carry within them imagination. Go to an art museum, a concert, or a movie. Read good poetry or a novel that has nothing to do with question at hand. Always have on hand a small journal to jot down new ideas that will come unexpectedly as you encounter the creativity of various forms of self-expression.
- **Hymnody** – Read through hymns as a spiritual practice. Pay attention to the inner movement of your own emotions as words and phrases connect with your deepest experiences, hopes, and aspirations. Explore hymn texts in groups and explore their invitation to you in this moment.
- **Scripture** – Read scripture as a flowing and unfolding story of people whose hearts beat in expectation of a better future. Allow the words, phrases, and stories to connect with your personal story. Where do these words, phrases, and images nudge you to explore? How do they invite you to write the lines of a



THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR THE DAILY PRACTICE OF OPENING ONESELF TO THE SOURCE OF INSPIRATION – THE HOLY SPIRIT.





story yet to be heard? Share in these questions as a group and allow the living word of scripture to inspire and illuminate the way forward.

- **Seek out stories beyond your circle of relationships –** Look for opportunities to engage people in conversation about their lives, interests, hopes, and questions. Engage with people in organizations that are making a difference in the community. Ask them what inspires them and gives them hope for the future. Write down thoughts and insights during these conversations. Explore their meaning for your future, for our shared future.
- **Seek out creative organizations –** Look for opportunities to be in conversation with people who lead or work in organizations that require creativity and innovation to be viable. How do they engage in creative discussion? How do they create space to allow for new imagination?

These are initial suggestions. There are many other ways we can disrupt our routine and create space for dreaming and inspired imagination. The call to envision the future with God is at the heart of our prophetic calling as a people. The promise of scripture is that God waits for us in the present and beckons us to a future waiting to be born.

> *"So, I have learned some things. While not taking risks can be described as safe, taking risks with God is the most exciting place to be and can lead a person to faith adventures you never in your wildest dreams had thought possible."*
>
> *– Barb Duke*





LIVING THE PRACTICES AS INITIAL STEPS INTO THE FUTURE

Living the Mission Prayer in community is about adopting a posture of openness and willingness to risk new things together. We sense the Spirit's invitation to go deeper but are often unsure where to begin. What does it look like to become more awake to God's presence and how do we take incremental steps into this new awareness?

Throughout the ages spiritual practices have helped spiritual explorers and disciples discern God's will for their lives and take each faithful step into God's future. We live in a culture that promotes action based on what feels good. The ways of Jesus are not the ways of our world. Spiritual practices invite us to specific behaviors that may feel uncomfortable at first but over time lead to inner change, a new awareness and imagination, and a willingness to engage in compassionate action.

Robert Mulholland, in his book *The Deeper Journey*, provides insight into the importance of practices. "To do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus is to live our life in the world from a deep center of abiding in God… It should be obvious by now that putting on the new nature is far more radical than attitude adjustments and behavior modifications. The life hidden with Christ in God is one of such grow-

ing union with God in love that God's presence becomes the context of our daily life, God's purposes become the matrix of our activities, and the values of God's kingdom shape our life and relationships; God's living presence becomes the ground of our identity, the source of our meaning, the seat of our value and the center of our purpose" (IVP Books, 2016, p. 139).

We may think of spiritual practice in a classical sense (prayer and meditation, for example). Spiritual practice also includes study, conversation, activism, and other ways we open ourselves to the Spirit's movement in us, among us, and ahead of us. Spiritual practices lead to awakening within and move us outward to a world in need of the restoring and redeeming power of the gospel.

The Mission Prayer invites us to awaken and live out of a divine center of love and peace. This is our purpose. This is how we become a blessing to one another and the Earth. Practices help us take steps to live out of this divine center, even when we are not sure we want to go where the Spirit beckons us to go.

There are many practices that can help us become more awake to God's presence and movement. Simplicity and intentionality are key to spiritual awakening. Find what works for you and stick with it. There are centuries of experience to draw on. There is no right or wrong way to do this. Some beginning practices are listed here as well as places to go to explore more practices. For further exploration, study, and application consider reading *Fully Awake and Truly Alive* by Jane E. Vennard (Skylight Paths, 2013).

[QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION]

What does it look like to become more awake to God's presence, and how do we take incremental steps into this new awareness?

How are you experiencing a deepening center of divine love and peace?





SPIRITUAL PRACTICES LEAD TO AWAKENING WITHIN AND MOVE US OUTWARD TO A WORLD IN NEED OF THE GOSPEL.





We have been exploring the essential foundation of spiritual formation throughout this guide. If we take the spiritual journey seriously, how does this impact what we do when we gather?



INITIAL PRACTICES WITH DESCRIPTIONS
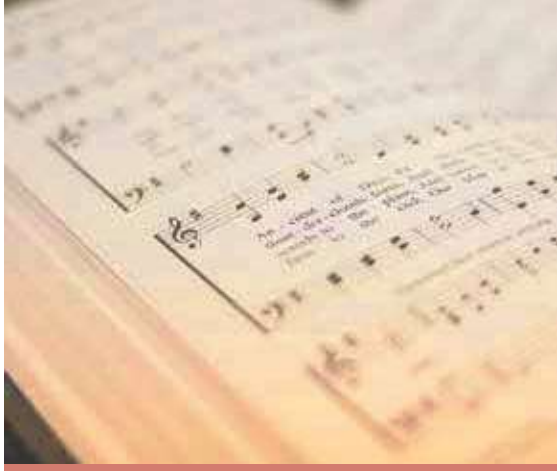


The practices below can be found on *www.missionalleaders.org* under the "Practices" tab along the top of the home page. They are also available as a separate PDF.

- **Becoming Fully Awake**—an expansion of the Mission Prayer that includes brief pauses throughout the day and reflection at the end of the day
- **Breathing in the Spaces**—helps us find natural transitions during our day and then uses them as opportunities to breathe in God's renewing presence
- **Centering Prayer**—an apophatic approach to prayer. Instead of speaking, we quiet our minds and create receptive space for the spirit's transformative work in silence
- **Compassionate Action** — an ongoing process of contemplation and action based off the Pastoral Spiral or Cycle in the book *Social Analysis for the 21st Century* by Maria Cimperman

This process is a cycle that continues as we commit to ongoing spirit-led reflection, learning, and action individually and in community

- **Critical Issues**: **Study and Conversation**—involves a group of people coming together to study a book, article, or video that addresses current peace and justice issues that require a gospel response
- **Cultivating Awareness**—helps groups develop awareness of self and others as foundation for a higher level of engagement in discussion, discernment, and decisions
- **Dwelling in Hymn Texts**—a way for everyone to engage with hymn texts as a spiritual practice. In this practice we connect our personal story with the texts of hymns and explore God's invitation to us
- **Dwelling in the Word**—a way for everyone to engage with scripture as spiritual practice. In this practice we connect our personal story with the story of scripture and explore God's invitation to us
- **Hospitality**—taking steps to live a life of hospitality
- **Invitation**—a prayer for awareness and courage to invite others into loving community
- **Listen to the Voices**—helps us discover our context for ministry through listening to stories, exploring local news, and listening carefully to contemporary cultural expressions of challenge and hope
- **Listening Lens**—helps cultivate deeper listening as precursor to authentic and loving community
- **The Mission Prayer**—a daily prayer seeking receptivity and courage to respond
- **Prayer of Examen**—a reflective form of prayer at the end of each day to explore our closeness to, and at times distance from, divine presence
- **Reflective Conversation**—a form of conversation and deep listening that invites us to reflect on our experiences and envision potential next steps
- **Reflective Walking**—a form of walking where we fully engage our senses to perceive the sounds, sights, smells, and healing needs of our environment
- **Sharing in the Round**—simple but meaningful conversation around a meal intended to build deeper relationships with friends and soon-to-be friends



DWELLING IN HYMN TEXTS ALLOWS US TO CONNECT OUR PERSONAL STORY AND EXPLORE GOD'S INVITATION.





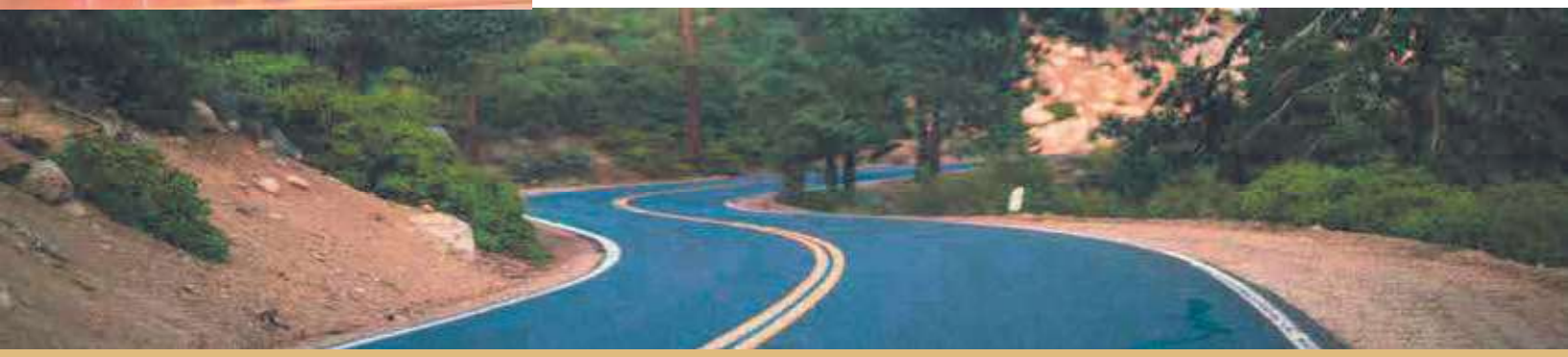


- **Spiritual Practices for Children** (PDF form at *www.cofchrist.org*)
- **Visio Divina**—a practice that invites us to see with the eyes of our heart
- **Walking the Neighborhood**—helps us awaken to our neighborhood by engaging in a prayerful remembrance of each home and person encountered

In addition, the following websites have spiritual practices for your review and use.

www.cofchrist.org

www.missionalleaders.org



A PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION FOR YOUR COMMUNITY



There are many ways to engage with the rhythm of the Mission Prayer in community. If you are looking for a more intentional way to integrate the Mission Prayer into your experience as a group, the following steps are offered as a way to go deeper on the journey over time. Although there is no specific time frame attached to each step, the nine steps typically take between 18-24 months.

1. **Building Relationships of Trust and Safety:** Evaluate the safety and trust of your group. By safe we mean an environment where individuals feel free to express their struggles, hopes, and wild ideas about the future. It is important ask your group members for honest feedback. Although group conversation will provide some helpful insights also consider individual conversations. This will result in more honest and open feedback.

   Consider the following:

a. What specific steps can you take to foster a feeling of safety and trust that will be important in simple conversation or deeper practices like reflective conversation?

   Note: This process can't be rushed and will take time. This is not transactional but a relational process where individuals must sense deep down that they are highly valued and loved for who they are and not what they do. How do we put relationships first in everything we do? Do we have assumptions about our community that need to be examined or challenged before we can move to a healthier place?

b. Develop and/or adopt a set of shared understandings of what constitutes safe and supportive community. This provides a starting place and mutual expectations for what is acceptable behavior in your group. It also provides a baseline for addressing behavior that is disruptive or threatening to the group. As you develop shared understandings be sure to discuss specific steps that need to occur to fulfill each shared understanding. Where do we need to improve and what would be most helpful to the community? (See "Circle of Trust: Touchstones for Safe and Trustworthy Space" as a place to begin this conversation at *https://www.couragerenewal.org/PDFs/CourageRenewal-Circle-of-Trust-Touchstones-(c)2015.pdf*.)

2. **Review This Guide:** Review this resource one section at a time.

   a. Pause at the end of each section to reflect thoughtfully on the questions. Take the time necessary to explore the questions fully and consider how the concepts, practices, and process can be applied to your setting for ministry one simple step at a time. The questions alone can prompt new ideas and guide incremental steps as you work your way through the guide.

      Note: We often don't invest the time needed to fully explore ideas and how they can be applied to our local ministry contexts. This guide is intended to provide questions that will stimulate discussion, more questions, further exploration and discernment, and new actions. Many of these questions are not questions you answer in one session but are questions you need to live with over time, pray about, discuss, and act on together.

   b. Consider inviting someone to join you or explore the material as a group. The concepts and questions provide meaningful opportunity for groups to explore how we can live our mission in a changing world.

      Note: Consider asking someone outside your group to facilitate the discussion of each section. They can function as a spiritual companion by grounding your experience in spiritual practice,



TAKE THE TIME NEEDED TO FULLY EXPLORE THE QUESTIONS AND IDEAS THAT WILL STIMULATE NEW ACTIONS.



PRACTICES CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS TAKING A MORNING WALK...OR COMMITTING TO THE STUDY OF A GOOD BOOK.





engaging in conversation with thoughtful questions, sharing fresh observations from outside your group, and freeing all group members to participate fully in the experience.

3. **Review Initial Practices**: In your group, set aside time to review the suggested initial practices. You may want to do this over several meetings.

   a. Explore why practices are essential as initial steps toward awakening.

   b. Provide opportunity to discuss individual struggles and hopes with respect to becoming more spiritually awake individually and in your group. Explore how you can support each other along the way.

   c. Discuss specific practices you would like to try as individuals and as a group. Some of the practices are focused on the inward journey and others focus on the outward journey through relationships and issues of peace and justice. It is important to have a balance between inward and outward practices.

   d. Assign practices to individuals to review and share with the group as part of your process of consideration. Consider selecting one inward and one outward practice individually and as a group to get started.

   Note: The purpose of spiritual practices is awakening. Find things to do that help you slow down and become more aware of God within you and how God may be leading you to persons or issues of peace and justice. Practices can be as simple as taking a morning walk in a spirit of openness and reflection or committing to the study of a good book that explores an issue of concern to you or your group.

4. **Begin Living the Rhythm:** Explore and experiment with ways you can integrate the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* into your times of gathering.

   a. Explore Living into a Simple Form of Gathering on page 21 earlier in this document and the resource "Gathering Around the Mission Prayer: An Outline" under **Resources for Further Exploration** on page 46**.** What aspects of this rhythm could you begin to implement in your times of gathering?

   b. Consider experimenting with this outline when you gather.

   c. If you anticipate significant resistance to any experimentation, consider an alternative time for a small group to meet to experiment with the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless*.

Note: There are a variety of ways a group can engage in living the Mission Prayer. If you determine there will be resistance but there are a few who might like to join you, consider initiating a small group to experiment with the practices and rhythm. This can become a new expression of Christian community that is connected with an existing congregation or not connected to an existing congregation. Discuss possibilities with your mission center president or invitation support minister for support.

5. **Go Deeper with Action-Reflection**: Review **Acting and Reflecting Our Way through Awaken, Risk, and Bless** on page 24. Specifically consider the following steps:

   a. Step 1: Begin by reviewing potential actions under Awaken and Risk on page 5. The questions will prompt you to engage in conversation and consider specific actions you can take together.

   b. Step 2: Build time into your gatherings for reflective conversation. There is an example of how to do this under **Reflective Conversation—A Closer Look** on page 31. Don't get caught up in the form but focus on the intent—sharing and listening to one another as we explore:

      - What am I/are we learning?
      - How might the Spirit be inviting me/us into the next faithful step?

      VERY IMPORTANT: Living the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* as communities of Christ depends on our willingness to be in ongoing conversation with one another about what we are experiencing and how it is leading us into the next faithful step. Reflective conversation provides a way to do this, but the important principle is this:

      Christian community is about supporting one another through deep listening, sharing, and envisioning next steps together.

      We can't support each other if we are not in authentic and open conversation about what is going on in our lives. *Creating the time and space for these conversations is critical to this journey.* Over time our gatherings will evolve into supportive communities that share the difficult questions, struggles, and joys of life.

   c. Step 3: Engage in one inward *and* one outward practice over time. This will lead to a new awareness of situations, people, and relationships in need of Christ's love and peace. *This is a critical juncture where the process either moves deeper into Risk or stays inwardly focused on your small group.*

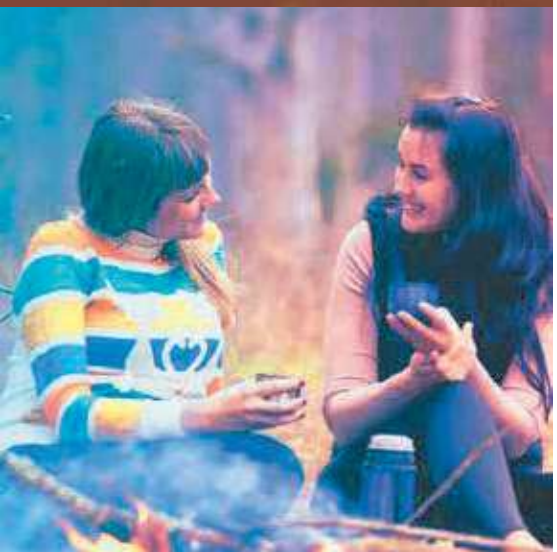


OVER TIME OUR GATHERINGS WILL EVOLVE INTO SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES THAT SHARE THE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS, STRUGGLES, AND JOYS OF LIFE.









Provide time for Reflective Conversation using the two questions below. This will help draw out potential action steps that move us beyond ourselves

- What am I/are we learning or discovering?
- How might the Spirit be inviting me/us into the next faithful step?

VERY IMPORTANT: If the substance of our conversations continues to be inwardly focused, consider practices like Listening to the Voices, Walking the Neighborhood, Sharing in the Round, Critical Issues: Study and Discussion, and Compassionate Action. Also consider exploring ***Receive, Embody, and Share the Invitation to Christ's Peace*** and Companion Study Guide at *www.missionalleaders.org*. This resource helps expand our understanding and practice of what it means to be a people of invitation and hospitality.

6. **Pause and Reflect Together:** After you have engaged in the rhythm for several months be sure to pause for conversation and reflection on the following questions.

   a. What are we learning? How are we doing with consistently implementing the practices? Where are we struggling and what adjustments need to be made? How are the practices leading us to deeper and new conversations, relationships, and loving actions toward one another? Toward our neighbors? For our planet?

   b. Is the rhythm being embraced by our group? If not, where are the points of resistance? Have we provided opportunity for conversation to express concerns and suggestions?

   c. Are we beginning to adopt some new ways of gathering as a result of the rhythm? Where is it leading us? Are there some things we need to consider discontinuing to free our capacity to live the rhythm more fully?

   d. Are there new practices that would be helpful in refocusing our attention on God's movement in us and among us?

   e. Do we need more emphasis on practices that lead us outside ourselves to discover God's movement in our neighborhoods, places of work, other places of gathering?

   f. What might the next faithful step look like on our journey together?

7. **Celebrate and Encourage One Another**: Celebrate your willingness to risk something new. After three to six months:

   a. Come together to share stories over a meal and truly cele-

brate how the Spirit has been moving among you. Offer gratitude for the Spirit's presence among you and ahead of you.

b. Set aside time for rest and renewal as a group. Consider setting aside a time you typically gather and encourage everyone to take the day to rest.

c. Repeat this step every three to six months.

8. **Move into Blessing**: Evaluate your journey using the following questions:

   a. As we look back on our journey, what is *at the very center* of who we are and are becoming? Why do we exist as sacred community? Whom are we called to serve? Is our journey leading us beyond ourselves to new relationships and opportunities to share Christ's love and peace?

      Refer to *Sharing in Community of Christ—4th Edition* as you consider what you have experienced and how it is leading you to embody our Enduring Principles and Mission Initiatives.

      VERY IMPORTANT: This is a time for open and honest reflection. Our mission and this journey are ultimately about generously sharing God's love and peace with others. If our journey has not resulted in new relationships and opportunities, we need to step back and consider where we have been placing our emphasis. Do we need to reconsider what it means to risk something new? What practices could help us focus more intentionally on invitation and connection with those outside our small group?

   b. Are there actions or experiments that have the potential to become ongoing and sustainable ministries?

   c. What do we need to let go of to make room for what is emerging?

9. **Continue the Journey:** *Awaken, Risk, and Bless* is a way of being and doing as individuals and communities of Christ's love and peace. This journey continues as we continue to risk new actions and reflect on what we learn together. The previous eight steps could take 12 to 24 months or longer depending on the size of your group and level of focus. This is not a race but a long journey in the same direction.

   Be sure to plan time to pause and reflect as you continue to live the rhythm of *Awaken, Risk, and Bless*. The view looks different when we look back and reflect. We see ways God has been moving in our midst and guiding us each step of the way.

   Our vision is a church where we don't "just speak and sing of Zion," but "live, love, and share as Zion," where we "strive to be









visibly one in Christ" and among whom "there are no poor or oppressed."[1] This is the adventure of a lifetime.

1 Doctrine and Covenants 165:6a (See also Isaiah 58, 61, and Luke 4:18,19)



Resources for FURTHER EXPLORATION



There are many resources that explore much of what is outlined in this guide. Here are a few places to start for further study and reflection.

RESOURCES:

1. *Sharing in Community of Christ*—4th Edition *https://www.heraldhouse.org/products/sharing-in-community-of-christ-exploring-identity-mission-message-and-beliefs*
2. "Getting Started with Experiments" *www.missionalleaders.org*
3. "Circle of Trust Touchstones" by Parker Palmer at *https://www.couragerenewal.org/PDFs/CourageRenewal-Circle-of-Trust-Touchstones-(c)2015.pdf*
4. "Gathering around the Mission Prayer: An Outline" *www.missionalleaders.org*
5. "Receive, Embody, and Share the Invitation to Christ's Peace" and "Receive, Embody, and Share the Invitation to Christ's Peace Companion Study Guide" *www.missionalleaders.org*
6. "Our Changing Context for Mission" *www.missionalleaders.org* under Resources
7. "The Role of a Spiritual Companion" *www.missionalleaders.org* under Resources
8. "Evaluating Our True Capacity for Mission" *www.missionalleaders.org*

VIDEOS: All videos available at *www.missionalleaders.org*

9. *Awaken, Risk, Bless Intro*
10. *Mission Dei*
11. *Let the Spirit Breathe*
12. *Risk Something New*
13. *Mission Is Relational*
14. *Living the Mission Prayer in Community* (under development)
15. *Living the Rhythm Through Action-Reflection* (under development)
16. *Envisioning the Future as Communities of Christ* (under development)
17. *Open Your Eyes*
18. *Prayer of Disruption*
19. *Tables*
20. *Who Is Jesus*
21. *You Are Loved*
22. *Mission Prayer Song*
23. *The Great Reversal*
24. *The Art of Conversation*
25. *Invite*

BOOKS:

26. *Sharing in Community of Christ*—4th Edition
27. *A Hidden Wholeness* by Parker Palmer
28. *Life Together in Christ* by Ruth Haley Barton
29. *The Heart of Christianity* by Marcus Borg (with study guide)
30. *A Way of Life* by Anthony J. Chvala-Smith
31. *Fully Awake and Truly Alive* by Jane E. Vennard
32. *Beyond Resistance* by John Dorhauer
33. *The Great Spiritual Migration: How the Largest Religion Is Seeking a Better Way to Be* by Brian McLaren
34. *The Art of Listening in a Healing Way* by James Miller
35. *Social Analysis for the 21st Century* by Maria Cimperman (chapters 3–6)

Additional support and consultation are available by contacting your mission center president, Larry McGuire at *lmcguire@cofchrist.org*, or Ron Harmon at *rharmon@cofchrist.org*.



THERE ARE MANY ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU BEGIN LIVING THE MISSION PRAYER.





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WITH GRATITUDE

This guide is the result of many hours of field work, assessment, and ongoing modification. I am deeply grateful to our development team of Larry McGuire, Shandra Newcom, and David Nii for their guidance and suggestions in writing this resource. Katie Harmon-McLaughlin and Emily Rose also provided valuable consultation and contributed to the development of additional resources referenced in this guide. Mission center leaders and ministers also reviewed this material and helped us develop the initial retreat experiences to test concepts and practices. Finally, the layout and graphics skills of Jeff Piedimonte and copyediting skills of Diane Maupin elevated the usability and readability of this guide.

It is our hope this resource provides leaders and practitioners with the basic tools and concepts to live fully into our identity and calling as communities of Christ one faithful step at a time.

—Ron Harmon
Council of Twelve Apostles

APPENDIX

List of Spiritual Practices

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BECOMING FULLY AWAKE

Living into the Rhythm of the Mission Prayer

Our minds like to put reality in compartments, with God there and we here and the rest of the world somewhere else. Sometimes we just have to remind ourselves that God's presence is not reserved for any particular space. Though we may be more aware of God's presence in one place than another, we need to remember that WHEREVER WE LOOK, WHEREVER OUR ATTENTION GOES, GOD IS THERE.

—Gerald May, *The Awakened Heart*, p. 167

PROCESS

This is an example of what several intentional pauses throughout the day using the Mission Prayer might look like. Experiment with this rhythm in your own life and discover the sacred pauses in your daily life that help you wake up a little more to God's presence and invitation in all things.

AWAKEN: MORNING (TWO-MINUTE PRAYER)

Breathe. Take a few moments to wake up.
Give thanks for the gift of your life this day.
Pray the Mission Prayer as a way of waking up to God's presence.

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

RISK: MIDDAY (ONE-MINUTE PRAYER)

Breathe. Pause in the middle of the day to return your awareness to your intent to be fully awake to God in all things.

BLESS: EVENING (FIVE-MINUTE PRAYER)

Breathe. Prayerfully reflect on your day.

Where did the Spirit lead today? When was I most fully awake? When was I least awake?
When did I risk response to the Spirit through a new awareness, action, or way of being? When did I resist response?
When today did I receive or share the blessing of your love and peace?
Amen.

BREATHING IN THE SPACES*

PROCESS

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

1. Start each day with the Mission Prayer or a spiritual discipline that helps you to be open to God's blessings and purpose for 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.

*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."

CENTERING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

Cynthia Borgeault, in her book *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, describes centering prayer as imitating the life of Christ by exercising our "muscle of surrender." It is a prayer that invites us to be present to *The Presence* without image, form, word, or thought.

The HEART OF THE PRAYER is in the RELEASE AND RETURN.
Gently release the thought that comes and return to the intention to simply BE with God.

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. Set a timer for 20 minutes. If that feels like too much at first, choose a time that will be comfortable for you as a starting place, committing to expanding that time in future prayer.
2. Breathe. Observe the rhythm of your breath for a while, allowing it to draw you deeper and deeper into the silence. As you breathe, pay attention to one sacred word emerging within you *(God, Christ, peace, grace, hope, trust, wonder).* This word is an *anchor to return you* to the intention of your prayer when your thoughts begin to wander.
3. Continue breathing and *being*. Exercise your "muscle of surrender" as you release the thoughts and images that come, making space for presence to the One that is with you *here and now*.
4. Rest in the promise that there is nothing here to achieve. The practice is about the intention to be present and the grace of maybe glimpsing the divine center that holds you fast.
5. Release, Return. Be present to divine grace.

COMPASSIONATE ACTION AS SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

WORDS FOR REFLECTION

"Let us not love in words, nor in mere talk, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

Love is the deed of justice, or, as the Medellín documents eloquently stated, "Love is the soul of justice. [The Christian who] works for social justice should always cultivate peace and love in one's heart" (CELAM, 1968, 71). For the Christian, this deed is done in spite of the Other deserving to be loved.

Hence, to love in this fashion is to question, analyze, challenge, and dismantle the social structures responsible for preventing people from reaching the fullest potential of the abundant life promised by Christ.

—de la Torre, Miguel A., *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*—Second Edition

3 a. You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.

b. Above all else, strive to be faithful to Christ's vision of the peaceable Kingdom of God on earth. Courageously challenge cultural, political, and religious trends that are contrary to the reconciling and restoring purposes of God. Pursue peace.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:3a,b

PROCESS

The following is an ongoing process of contemplation and action based off the Pastoral Spiral or Cycle in the book *Social Analysis for the 21st Century* by Maria Cimperman. This process is a cycle that continues as we commit to ongoing spirit-led reflection, learning, and action individually and in community.

1. Engage in prayerful reflection seeking the Spirit's guidance as you consider the following questions:
   a. What is happening in my village, town, city, or country that is causing human suffering or environmental degradation?
   b. Where is the Spirit nudging me to further explore an oppressive or unjust practice, policy, or system?
2. Why is this suffering happening?
   a. What do I need to learn to become better informed on the multiple dimensions of this issue? (i.e. sociological, economic, political, cultural, environmental, religious – See *Social Analysis for the 21st Century* by Maria Cimperman for support in this analysis)
   b. Who can I invite to join me on this journey of discovery?
3. What does this mean for me as one called to follow Jesus, the peaceful one?
   a. How does my personal faith journey with Jesus, the peaceful one, challenge me to understand and respond to this issue?
   b. How does my faith community (i.e. relationships, experiences, Enduring Principles, Mission Initiatives) challenge me to understand and respond to this issue?
4. How will I respond?

a. Where is God already moving ahead of me through persons and/or organizations working to bring about positive change?
b. How can I offer my specific gifts and skills to join with an existing organization or take initial steps to address this issue?
c. Whom can I invite to join me in this response?
d. How will I stay fully awake to the Spirit's prompting in personal spiritual practice, conversation with others, and engagement in next steps?



CRITICAL ISSUES: STUDY AND CONVERSATION

Adapted from Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*

INTRODUCTION

Richard Foster shares about the discipline of study, "Study is a specific kind of experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a specific direction. Remember, the mind will always take on an order conforming to the order upon which it concentrates."

The Apostle Paul reminds us that our minds will be renewed by applying them or engaging them with those things that will transform them. Study and conversation have this transformative effect. Jesus was also clear in John 8:23 that knowledge of the truth will set us free.

In this practice we seek to become informed about critical issues of our day that require our response as disciples and communities of Christ's love and peace. Conversation with others who think and look different from us helps us apply our learning through the multiple experiences of those we choose to interact with in deep listening and dialogue. Together we discern compassionate actions that will make a difference in our world and bring the kingdom a little closer.

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. Repetition—repetition regularly channels the mind in a specific direction. What are we putting into our minds on a regular basis and how is it moving us closer to Christ's vision of the peaceable kingdom of God on earth? Consider studying good books that move us toward Jesus and his mission as proclaimed in Luke 4:18,19.

   There are many issues that need to be addressed. Our willingness to become informed can set us free to engage as informed disciples and global citizens.
2. Concentration—concentration focuses the attention on what is being studied. We live in a culture that does not value concentration. Set aside the necessary time and place free of distractions to engage in study.
3. Comprehension—comprehension focuses on how knowledge is processed, absorbed, and applied through our interpretive lenses. Do we understand what the author is trying to convey? Do we need further help by reaching out to a friend or expert in the field of study?
4. Reflection—reflection is attaching meaning and significance to what we study. Reflection integrates our theological understanding with the field of study and the gift of discernment. Personal reflection is essential. Community reflection is equally essential to deeper understanding and application to real life circumstances.

BLESSING

Let the educational and community development endeavors of the church equip people of all ages to carry the ethics of Christ's peace into all arenas of life. Prepare new generations of disciples to bring fresh vision to bear on the perplexing problems of poverty, disease, war, and environmental deterioration. Their contributions will be multiplied if their hearts are focused on God's will for creation.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:4c

CULTIVATING AWARENESS

Quality of Engagement and Quality of Presence

(Based on Dynamic Dialogue resource materials)

QUALITY OF PRESENCE

"The quality of our presence is simply the way we show up. If we are genuine, authentic, compassionate, open, focused, and willing to listen, it is part of the quality of our presence."[1] This is beneficial for us as individuals as we gain a better sense of self-awareness and an ability to recognize what is influencing our interactions, decisions, and perspectives.

QUALITY OF ENGAGEMENT

"In the quality of engagement, we focus on how the Quality of Presence is impacted as we interact with others. Any of us can find ourselves reacting to another in ways that negatively impact the quality of our presence and the desired outcomes we seek."[2] By being aware of our own quality of presence and creating space for others to share their quality of presence, we gain the ability to be more sensitive to the feelings, experiences, and life circumstances of one another. This enhances quality of engagement and heightens our ability to have meaningful conversation in community.

CULTIVATING AWARENESS: Sharing Our Quality of Presence as Practice

The purpose of this practice is to discern our individual quality of presence, and also to hear through sharing the quality of presence of one another. This practice can be utilized to begin leadership team meetings, business meetings, and any time people gather in community.

1. Begin by inviting the group to spend five minutes in silence reflecting on the following question:

   What do you bring with you this morning? As you are present in silence, pay attention to what dominates your focus, what your mind is drawn to, and how that brings you into the circle.

2. Bring the time of silence to a close with a chime or simple invitation to journey back to presence in the circle. Invite the group to share reflections on their experience. As expectations, ensure the group is faithful to the following:
   a. honoring the silence between sharing as sacred
   b. listening deeply and fully to each person
   c. not responding to individuals' personal sharing. The invitation is only to share what happened within your own experience, not to affirm, relate, or respond in any way to the experience of others in the circle (this includes after this time of sharing has ended).
3. If meaningful and appropriate, create an opportunity for the group to share about the experience as a whole, without getting into specifics of individuals' sharing. *What was meaningful about this experience? How will this affect continued quality of engagement? How does this practice change the way you come into the circle?*
4. Bless the experience and name it as sacred, reiterating the significance of cultivating awareness when we share together.

1. Dynamic Dialogue Program Materials, 9.
2. Dynamic Dialogue Program Materials, 9.

DWELLING IN A HYMN TEXT

PURPOSE

This practice opens us up to the voice of God and each other in community. This practice is not about analyzing a particular hymn text. Dwelling in a Hymn Text is about allowing the words of hymns to speak to our hearts and minds as an expression of the Holy Spirit in our midst. We especially encounter the Spirit by listening deeply to one another.

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. Pre-select a hymn text. (See *Community of Christ Sings*).
2. Read the hymn twice allowing time for reflection between readings. Invite participants to consider the following questions:
   a. Is there a word, phrase, or image that is speaking to your life experience in this moment?
   b. How might the Spirit be inviting you to respond?
3. Invite people into group sharing around the questions provided above.
4. End your time together with a prayer of gratitude.

TIPS FOR THE PROCESS

Be patient. Take time for being with and deepening relationships with one another. Listen to, affirm, and encourage one another. In some cases, it might be helpful to have people form groups of two or three and encourage opportunities to get to know others.

Be open and allow moments of silence for the reading to transform our understanding and our way of being and doing. Do not let this become an intellectual exercise which will limit the transformative impact of this practice. If someone wishes to remain silent, that is acceptable.

DWELLING IN THE WORD

PURPOSE

Dwelling in the Word invites us to explore the text of scripture through the lens of our personal experience. Our personal unfolding story is not that different from those we read about in scripture. When we open ourselves the Spirit can speak to us through the text and the life experiences of others as we share in sacred community.

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. Pre-select a scripture text. Do not select a text longer than a few paragraphs.
2. Read the scripture twice allowing time (at least two minutes) for reflection between readings. After providing reflection time after the second reading, invite participants to consider the following questions:
   a. Is there a word, phrase, or image that is speaking to your life experience in this moment?
   b. How might the Spirit be inviting you to respond?

   You may choose to provide a copy of the scripture for those who find it helpful to follow along as the text is read.
3. Invite people into group sharing around the questions provided above.
4. End your time together with a prayer of gratitude.

TIPS FOR THE PROCESS

Be patient. Take time for being with and deepening relationships with one another. Listen to, affirm, and encourage one another. In some cases, it might be helpful to have people form groups of two or three and encourage opportunities to get to know others.

Be open and allow moments of silence for the reading of scripture to transform our understanding and our way of being and doing. Do not let this become an intellectual exercise which will limit the transformative impact of this practice. If someone wishes to remain silent, that is acceptable.

HOSPITALITY

PURPOSE

Hospitality is about creating welcoming space for the other. The practice of hospitality originated in the ancient world and was expected as travelers would seek shelter and food after traveling great distances. This practice is about living a life of hospitality. Henri Nouwen writes, "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 freedom not disturbed by dividing lines."

Source: *https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1003038-hospitality-is-not-to-change-people-but-to-offer-them*

We engage in hospitality because our actions flow out of our deep love and conviction of the worth of all persons.

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. Consider engaging in this practice several times each month.
2. Consider whom the Spirit is inviting you to surprise with an invitation and hospitality. This could be over a meal like the Sharing in the Round practice, an invitation for coffee, or simply an invitation to a conversation. Although not required, offering one's home as a space for conversation and sharing is an act of vulnerability.
3. Consider how you can make the other person feel welcome. How does your body language and attentiveness convey deep interest and invitation to share? How have you prepared the location to foster comfort and sharing?
4. Reflect on the experience afterwards. What did you learn about yourself and the other person? What might you do differently next time?

TIPS FOR THE PROCESS

Consider practicing on family members or close friends first. Ask them about their experience and what you could have done to make it better. Then expand hospitality to those you don't know well.



INVITATION

If we are genuinely concerned about the needs of strangers, offering hospitality requires courage. It involves not only a willingness to take some risks in welcoming others, but it also requires the kind of courage that lives close to our limits, continually pressing against the possible, yet always aware of the incompleteness and the inadequacy of our own responses. At the same time, living so close to the edge of sufficient resources increases our dependence on, and our awareness of, God's interventions and provision.

Christine Pohl – Offering Hospitality August 2, 2016 @ https://www.plough.com/en/topics/community/service/hospitality-in-christian-community

PURPOSE

Practicing invitation helps us extend hospitality to both friends and strangers. It pushes us to risk making room for others in our lives without knowing with certainty where the relationship will lead. Practicing invitation does not eliminate the uncertainty but helps us get more comfortable with one of the most significant ways we convey how much we value others.

PROCESS

1. Be prayerful about whom the Spirit may be nudging you to invite to a conversation, meal, or community gathering.
2. Make a commitment to extend one invitation a week to someone you don't know well. This may be to a phone conversation, a coffee house, or a meeting of a small group of friends.
3. Pray for courage and extend an invitation.
4. Pay attention to how you feel making the invitation and how the other person responds.
5. Offer gratitude in prayer for the experience. Reflect on what you learned about yourself in the experience.

LISTEN TO THE VOICES

"Perhaps one of the most precious and powerful gifts we can give another person is to really listen to them, to listen with quiet, fascinated attention, with our whole being, fully present."
—Kay Lindahl, *The Sacred Art of Listening: Forty Reflections for Cultivating a Spiritual Practice* (Kindle Locations 95–96). Kindle Edition

PURPOSE

Deep listening is difficult. As a result, our listening is often on the surface. We are distracted by our own ideas and ways to fix people or situations. Our response either frees or limits deeper sharing and understanding. Listening requires intentional action. To listen, to truly listen, is to attend to, to take in, to receive, to pay attention and to be fully present. To listen is to become fully awake to all the voices seeking to be heard and understood in a separated and suffering world.

This practice is about paying attention to the voices in our communities and discerning how we shall live in response to those voices.

Doctrine and Covenants 163:4 invites us to the practice of deep listening as the first step in shaping a relevant response to physical, spiritual, and environmental suffering.

> *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.*
>
> *b. The earth, lovingly created as an environment for life to flourish, shudders in distress because creation's natural and living systems are becoming exhausted from carrying the burden of human greed and conflict. Humankind must awaken from its illusion of independence and unrestrained consumption without lasting consequences.*

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. Create Daily Entry Points for Conversation

   Begin each day with a few moments of reflection as you consider the following question:
   With whom is the Spirit leading me to be in conversation today?

   You may find the Mission Prayer helpful to begin this reflection. Specifically focus on "Where will your spirit lead today?" What voices are you being led to seek out that need to be heard and that you need to hear? You may also consider reading the newspaper as a way to listen to the voices in your community. Look at the neighborhood section of your local paper and prayerfully consider opportunities to hear new voices.

   Consider conversations and relationships that you have not encountered in local nonprofits, faith groups, local government, and persons you may encounter in third places (public places of gathering).

   Simply begin a conversation and let others know you are interested in learning about their story. Ask questions to clarify understanding and explore areas you are interested in understanding more deeply.

   Deep listening sometimes surprises people. If someone asks why you are engaging them in conversation, simply share your desire to better understand the many voices in your neighborhood. Share your desire to get to know them better.

2. Reflect on Experiences.

   Two questions will inevitably arise as we pay attention to the voices in our neighborhoods and communities:

   - What am I learning from these conversations?
   - How might the Spirit be inviting me to respond?

   How can you as a disciple or Christ-centered community respond to what you have heard from your conversation partner? What action can you take in the next 30 days to respond to what you have heard? As you respond, what are you learning, and how are you being shaped as a disciple to continue to respond?

   Consider sharing your experiences and thoughts about response with a spiritual companion, friend, or your congregation or small group.

LISTENING LENS

Questions adapted from "Discerning God in Mission" from *Journal of Missional Practice* (*http://journalofmissionalpractice.com*)

1. Am I holding space for the speaker to share honestly and fully?
2. Am I focused on the speaker and open to what they have to say?
3. Am I talking less and listening more?
4. Am I asking clarification questions when appropriate?
5. Am I waiting until they are done talking before I speak?
6. Am I not worried about what I want to say in response?.



THE 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.

Make a personal commitment to offer this prayer
at the beginning and midpoint of each day.

Seek to be fully present in the moments of your day.

Risk a warm greeting, helping hand, or new relationship.

May the Spirit awaken you to God's presence and love everywhere!

PRAYER OF EXAMEN

INTRODUCTION

The Prayer of Examen is a prayer form developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) as part of his work on "spiritual exercises." It is often a prayer at the end of the day but may be used any time. It is a way of reviewing the day with God with the intent of examining our need for forgiveness and healing, reconciliation and recommitment.

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. I come before God in humble prayer. I am thankful for God's Spirit and for all God does for me and for all people. And I gently enter into this time of prayer with God.

2. After asking for God's enlightenment, I review my day. Where do I recognize God's presence? Where was God's Spirit touching me or someone else? In my thoughts and actions, when was I most Christ-like? When did I fall short?

3. I trust and receive God's grace, forgiveness, and healing for any actions that may have been uncaring or harmful to other people, creation, or myself.

4. I look forward to tomorrow, with a decision to be more conscious of all of my thoughts, words, and actions. I determine to be more aware of God's presence living within me and to act and respond as the Lord Jesus would.

5. I gently exit this prayer time by thanking God for this experience with God in remembrance, in gratitude for the gift of this day, and in determination that I will be more conscious of God's presence tomorrow.

—Adapted from Marvin Rice, "Open Our Eyes,"
Healing the Body of Christ (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 2003)



REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION

PURPOSE

As disciples, we seek to be fully awake and ready to respond to God's presence. Reflective conversation is the practice of sharing our experiences and listening deeply for how the Spirit is moving in our lives and the lives of others as we reflect on the following questions:

- What am I/are we learning and discovering?
- How might the Spirit be inviting me/us into the next faithful step?

In this practice we bring what we are experiencing in the world around us into our times of gathering. We intentionally create the time and space to listen and share, creating space for the Spirit's presence and guidance among us.

PROCESS

1. Often practiced in groups of three or four, each person has an opportunity to reflect on a specific action(s) or experience(s) during the past week. These experiences may include a spiritual practice, new conversation, experiment in ministry, compassionate action, or unexpected encounter.
2. Begin with 2-3 minutes of silence so each group member can focus on what they desire to share. This enables group members to be fully present with each other while other group members are sharing.
3. Individual experiences are shared one person at a time by responding to the two questions below:
   a. What am I learning and discovering?
   b. How might the Spirit be inviting me into the next faithful step?

   In general, provide each group member 3-5 minutes to share. Before moving to the next person, provide a time for group reflection, sharing, and clarifying questions. We are not solving problems and prescribing solutions. We are sharing impressions, clarifying understanding, and exploring potential next steps.
4. The process for three people to share and have group reflection typically takes about 30 minutes. Depending on the depth of sharing it can take much longer.

This process of reflective conversation can become an important opportunity for sharing each time you gather. This sharing and group reflection becomes the fertile ground for risking new ideas and actions.

REFLECTIVE WALKING

PURPOSE

Walking for many is a meaningful spiritual practice. In addition to the many health benefits, it can be helpful to go outside, walk, and reflect on a question or simply dwell in silence with God. Daily walking is one of the ways we can become wide awake to God's movement in us, among us, and ahead of us.

SUGGESTED STEPS

1. Choose a time of day you plan to walk.
2. You may consider a question, scripture, or choose to simply be in the presence of God in silence on your walk. Depending on the location of your walk, it may provide an opportunity to engage your senses in the sights, sounds, and smells of creation. If you are walking in the city you may choose to pay particular attention to the sights, sounds, and smells of the city. You may choose to pay attention to people you pass, perhaps remember them in prayer as your form of reflection.
3. After your walk consider taking a moment or two to record any internal feelings or thoughts that surfaced. Consider writing them in a journal so you can go back and look at what emerges over multiple walks.

BLESSING ON YOUR JOURNEY

We travelers, walking to the sun, can't see
Ahead, but looking back the very light
That blinded us shows us the way we came,
Along which blessings now appear, risen
As if from sightlessness to sight, and we,
By blessing brightly lit, keep going toward
That blessed light that yet to us is dark.

—Wendell Berry

SHARING IN THE ROUND

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 (once or twice 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 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. After a few experiences of sharing with people with whom you are familiar, expand the practice beyond your circle of friends by inviting friendly strangers from your neighborhood, work, school, or the store down the street to share with you.
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 neighborhood or the congregation's neighborhood, people from your workplace, and those in the congregation you do not know well.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR CHILDREN

1. As You See God

Using clay, play dough, or Model Magic™ create something that shows what you think God is like—whatever that looks like or feels like to you. Can you represent God's love? Can you make God's peace? Use your clay. Create something that represents God as you see God.

2. Good Morning Body Prayer

When you wake up in the morning, start your day with God by praying with your whole body. Stand next to your bed and reach for the sky. Say "good morning" to God. Now stretch your arms out wide and thank God for your blessings. Then hug your arms into yourself and ask God to be present within you today. Repeat two or three times. What other actions and words could you add to your morning body prayer?

3. Prayer Time

Make a prayer schedule using a printed calendar or one you created. Set a time for a peace prayer each day. Write the names of people you know or know of who do not get along well (you might include yourself) and pray for them. Pray for people who struggle and fight; for people who are not free; for people in charge of businesses, schools, villages, countries, and churches; and for people who are hurt and bullied. Imagine yourself sharing the peace of Jesus Christ with all these people. What difference would that make?

4. Point, Learn, and Pray

Using a globe or world map, close your eyes, turn around, and point to a place to learn about and pray for the people, animals, and environment there. Learn more about the place you chose by researching it online or at a library. What have you learned about that place? Do this each week to learn about a new place, new people, new animals, and plants that you can keep in your heart and pray for each day.

5. Prayer of Blessing for All People Everywhere

Hug a soft Earth ball or pillow in your arms and say a prayer of blessing for all the people of the Earth.

6. A Chalice Prayer

There are many stories in the news of people and places that are hurting. Form your hands into a bowl shape. Imagine holding those people or a difficult circumstance in your hands. As you say a prayer hold your hands up to God. This form of prayer is called a chalice prayer ("chalice" means cup).

7. See the Light of God

Think back through your day. What made you happy, or where did you see the light of God? Share that moment with your family. What made you sad, or where did you feel distant from God (maybe something you wish you could do differently)? Share that moment. Allow each member of the family to share. Once you have shared, consider what God might be inviting you to do tomorrow. Now offer a prayer thanking God for this time of sharing and ask for guidance as you start the new day.

8. Practice Time with God

Do you have a skill that you are learning that requires practice? Do you play the piano or other musical instrument? Paint? Dance? Play sports? Each time you get ready to practice think of that time as personal time with God. Celebrate your talent by sharing every facet with God. Talk to God about how you are feeling whether you are excited, frustrated, happy, sad, or even bored. Tell God all about it. Think of your practice time as a time with God. You are in this together!

9. Learn to Pray

Talk about prayer with your family. What is prayer? When do you usually pray? What are special times for prayer? When can you first remember prayer being a part of your life or how can you make prayer part of your life? What is your most memorable experience with prayer? Create three kinds of prayers: one about Jesus, one that shows you think of others, and one about peace. Pray with your family using one of the new prayers, or combine all three into on prayer!

10. Held in the Light of God

As you pray hold a battery-operated tea light candle and name the person or people you are praying for. Imagine holding the light of that person up to God. Now imagine God's light filling that person as you pray. Your prayer might sound something like this, "Loving God, tonight I hold the light of [Grandma] up to you. [She] is special to me because [ ]. I know God that you are with [Grandma] every day. Let her feel your light filling every part of her life. Amen." Use any words that come from your heart.

11. Thank you!

God's love flows not only when you give, but also when you receive. Encourage your child to say "thank you" regularly. Take time to help your child write a thank-you note to someone. Have your child draw a picture and then ask them what they want to say to the person. Write their words as they say them.

VISIO DIVINA: SEEING WITH EYES OF THE HEART

Settling and Shimmering

Breathe deeply. Move your awareness down to your heart center. Settle into this moment. Gaze on the image with a soft focus. Release any thoughts or expectations.

Explore all of the details, colors, movements, and shapes. Notice what shimmers for you. Let your eye rest somewhere on the image.

Savoring and Stirring

Staying with what shimmers, close your eyes and allow it to unfold in your heart, savoring your experience.

Make space within for images, feelings, and memories to stir. How does your body respond?

Summoning and Serving

Slowly shift your awareness to a sense of invitation or summoning which rises from your meditation.

How does the prayer stirring in you meet you in this particular moment of your life?

How might you be called into a new awareness or kind of service through this experience?

Slowing and Stilling

Release all the words and images and slow down even more deeply. Allow yourself some time for silence and stillness. Breathe gratitude in and out.

At the end of your prayer you might gaze one more time on the image just to see if you see anything new there.

—© Christine Valters Paintner
www.AbbeyoftheArts.com

WALKING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

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. 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 practice is to be open to God's presence in and our 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, 4.

2. With a family member or friend, 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, with whom do you want me to meet and form a caring relationship today?*

TIPS FOR THE PROCESS

This 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.

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.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

EVALUATING OUR TRUE CAPACITY

GATHERING AROUND THE MISSION PRAYER

GETTING STARTED WITH EXPERIMENTS

MAKING DECISIONS AS A TEAM

OUR CHANGING CONTEXT FOR MISSION

EVALUATING OUR TRUE CAPACITY FOR MISSION

This resource helps individuals and groups evaluate their capacity to engage in Christ's mission through a reflective process over time. It helps us consider who we are becoming and how we will respond to our individual and shared journey of discipleship in community.

PROCESS

You are encouraged to engage in this process over a period of several weeks. Begin each gathering with prayer and an opportunity to center in the living Word of scripture. Be patient and work your way through the questions, providing plenty of time for conversation and reflection.

1. Begin each gathering with prayer.

2. Use a Dwelling in the Word scripture. We suggest using Luke 10:1–12. Capture the insights and questions that emerge as you listen to one another and God in this passage.

3. Consider the following questions in order over several sessions. Consider asking a few individuals to be prepared with a song, reading, or prayer as moments of blessing during each session. Also consider asking someone to serve as a scribe for your session. As people respond to various questions, it would be helpful to have newsprint to record responses. Consider beginning each session by providing a few moments for individuals to review responses from the prior session.
    a. As you reflect over the past several months, in what ways have you received blessing as a result of living the mission prayer individually and in this community?
    b. What specific conditions were present that led to these experiences of blessing?
    c. As you think about our journey as a small group or congregation what is at the very core of who you are and are becoming? Make a list together and see if some common themes emerge. Are there one to three predominant themes that seem to capture the very core of who you are and are becoming as a group?

d. First, together make a list of all the tasks, activities, and ministries associated with your small group or congregation. Compare the list to your response to “question c.” Which of these tasks, activities, and ministries are most closely linked to the very core of who you are and are becoming? Which are not closely linked?
e. Prayerfully consider the next faithful steps of your congregation or small group in response to “question c.” What might some next steps look like?
f. Are there tasks, activities, or ministries you are feeling led to release in order to make room for what is emerging? Make a list and invite the group to prayerfully consider the list for the next time you gather.
g. Make a revised list of tasks, activities, and ministries that you feel led to continue into the future. Next to each task, activity, or ministry place the name of an individual(s) that currently or will have responsibility for that function in the future.
h. After everything has been assigned see how many names appear more than once on this list. Evaluate together whether there are those who may have too many functions assigned to them. Either redistribute the functions to others or take more tasks, activities, and ministries off the list until each person has responsibility for only one or two functions.
i. Pause for a few moments of reflection and ask each individual in the group to share how they are feeling about the revised list of tasks, activities, and ministries and distribution of responsibility. Is this at the core of who we feel God is calling us to become? Is this sustainable going into the future? Does this provide balance so no one person is overwhelmed with responsibility?

End your time together with prayer



GATHERING AROUND THE MISSION PRAYER

An Outline

The outline below provides one way to gather using the rhythm of the mission prayer. There are many ways to use the rhythm of Awaken, Risk, and Bless in planning your time together as Christian community.

Awaken to God and One Another

Community Gathering: Begin by sharing how you are coming into the experience of community. What is on your heart and mind and how is this impacting your ability to be fully present and engaged in the experience?

*Note: For larger groups consider doing this in groups of three or four. (See **Cultivating Awareness Practice** for a more detailed explanation of how to engage in this community practice.)*

End with a prayer of gratitude for thoughts expressed and unexpressed.

Risk New Questions, Conversation, and Compassionate Actions

Community Centering: Move into a time of centering in the Spirit's presence. There are many simple and meaningful ways to do this including a moment of silence, various prayer forms, hymn texts, and Taizé singing. The focus of this time is to create an opening within to be receptive to the Spirit's work as you move into Community Exploration.

Community Exploration: Engage in a community spiritual practice that provides opportunity to explore and apply Christ's message and mission to our lives, neighborhoods, and world today (See **Initial Practices** in the **Living the Mission Prayer as Way of Life Guide** and at *www.missionalleaders.org* and *www.cofchrist.org/spiritualformation*.) For practices that don't specifically reference scripture consider selecting a relevant scripture to use alongside the practice.

Note: Lectionary scriptures are a good place to start, but you may also be drawn to other scripture texts that are relevant to the journey of your group. (See 24 Months of Dwelling in the Word *on www.missionalleaders.org* as an example.)

As you engage in a selected practice, invite your group to reflect and share their responses to the following questions:

- What did I learn as I listened and shared with others?
- How might the Spirit be inviting me to respond in compassionate action for others or the earth?

Important: Consider how you will engage children and youth in your practice. This does not need to be complicated. Simple questions, activities like drawing, or crafts that provide ways for younger people and adults to express themselves are great ways to get everyone involved.

Note: *This approach to gathering is intended to be more participative than passive. If you choose to have someone share focus thoughts or a message in place of a community practice, be sure to provide opportunity for reflection and sharing as part of that experience. Consider using the two questions above and invite the group to reflect on what they heard and how they might respond.*

Bless One Another, Our Neighborhoods, and the Earth

Community Generous Response: Engage in the community practice of Disciples' Generous Response. Consider how the Spirit is inviting us to share through whole-life stewardship locally and globally in the mission of Christ today. See *https://www.cofchrist.org/disciples-generous-response-tools* for examples of how worldwide mission tithes are transforming lives around the world.

Community Blessing: Bring this time of sharing together to a close by offering words of encouragement and/or challenge. Consider a closing hymn, song, or some form of prayer or blessing to send the community to become a blessing of God's love and peace in the coming week.



GETTING STARTED WITH EXPERIMENTS

So how does a leadership team, small group, or congregation go about launching experiments? The following guidelines can help everyone know what the ground rules are and reduce potential misunderstandings or anxiety.

- It is helpful if individuals considering an experiment can convey their initial hopes for an experiment and how they will evaluate the outcomes of the experiment. Sometimes individuals may need a little help expressing their hopes and outcomes. Patience and attentiveness are critical at this stage! You are encouraged *not* be critical at this stage.
- When it comes to ministry experiments, we are often taking a leap of faith. It is important to remember that some experiments will work well and others not so well. In all cases we will learn together and celebrate our willingness to step into the future with God! Don't overanalyze a proposal or idea for an experiment.
- Experiments that affect the ministries or responsibilities of others in a congregation or small group need to be coordinated and supported by those affected. Providing an environment conducive to experiments does not mean anything goes.
- Like everything we do in mission, experiments are best when shared with others. It is ideal to ensure than anyone engaging in an experiment has at least one person supporting them in ways they mutually agree upon.
- Group/congregational approval is not needed for an experiment that will not use group/congregational resources or affect existing ministries of the congregation. The nature of experiments requires a group or congregation to create an environment favorable toward risk. Do not hamper experiments with elaborate or unnecessary steps for approval.
- Remember to pause at times for reflective conversation to explore successes, challenges, and lessons learned during or throughout the experiment. (*See Getting Started with Reflective Conversation for help.*)
- Be attentive to those willing to risk new experiments by praying often for them, offering words of encouragement, and helping coordinate any assistance they may need.

Unlike the scientific method, mission experiments are often less measurable. We don't always know the outcome of experiments when first started. Sometimes they are leaps of faith. Regardless of the outcome we want to create an environment that supports those willing to take the risk and learn from their experience.

Let's consider an example. Three people in a small group want to explore an essential question discerned by the congregation: How is God calling us to develop a relationship with our neighborhood? The group decides to meet every other week in a local coffee house. They commit to talking to others who come into the coffee house. The desired outcome of this experiment may be as simple as wanting to have at least one meaningful conversation with someone from the local neighborhood during each coffeehouse visit. The group agrees to meet for three months and then assess if they will continue based on how the group feels about the encounters.

Experiments don't need to be complicated. The role of the Christian community in any form is to encourage a willingness to risk something new in response to the movement of the Spirit in our lives together.

Questions to Encourage Experimentation

Questions to consider when you are in reflective conversation and preparing to risk an experiment:

1. What ideas are emerging for you as you have engaged in inward and outward practices? Or how are your experiences with others and their life challenges leading to potential ways you can share God's love and peace?
2. Do any of the ideas energize or disrupt you because they connect with your sense of call, giftedness, or an unfilled need?
3. How do the ideas connect with our mission?
4. What do you hope might happen with your idea or experiment?
5. How would you describe your idea or experiment?
6. Who else might you involve in your idea or experiment?
7. What do you need to start your experiment?
8. What is inhibiting you from getting started?
9. How can others help support you in your experiment?
10. How much time is needed for doing the experiment before stepping back to evaluate initial outcomes with others?
11. If the experiment unfolds as you had hoped and is becoming an ongoing ministry, what does ongoing support look like?

Remember, inward and outward spiritual practices create fertile ground for new insights as does our willingness to be in conversation and dream a little about God's future in the places we serve. On the last page of this document, you will find a suggested format entitled "Launching Experiments" for constructing an experiment.



Launching Experiments

The intent of this document is to assist an individual or group express their idea and approach for an experiment.

Proposed Idea or Question—In a few sentences describe your idea or question. You may also wish to share what led you to this idea or question.

Proposed Experiment—In a few sentences share how you would like to approach testing your idea or question. Consider the following as an outline:

- What steps will you take to experiment with your idea or question?
- Who will you involve with you in your idea or experiment? (Everyone should have at least one partner.)
- What is the time frame for your experiment?
- What outcomes do you hope to realize?

Resources—In a few sentences outline any resources you need (people, money, use of church building, for example) to launch your experiment.

Points of Collaboration—Does your proposed experiment touch any existing ministries or activities of your congregation or small group? If so, whom do you need to collaborate with prior to moving forward with your experiment?

Reflection and Evaluation—What are some initial ideas on how you might evaluate your progress against your hoped-for outcomes? This is not intended to discourage the experiment but to open up conversation that may be helpful in constructing and modifying the experiment as you gain experience.

Check In—At what intervals do you plan on sharing your experiences and progress? Also, when do you plan to step back and evaluate with your partner(s) if the experiment should continue?

MAKING DECISIONS AS A TEAM

Living Our Identity and Calling as Communities of Christ

Materials Needed

A set of green, yellow, and red index cards for each member of the team

Introduction

The purpose of "Making Decisions as a Team" is to *truly hear one another* so the decisions of the team reflect the best thinking and creativity of the members. This practice offers steps for building consensus by using colored cards to indicate the level of support for a decision about a particular question or issue.

Green means "I support this."
Yellow means "I need more information or time to think."
Red means "I disagree with this."

The benefit of using a colored card to represent a level of support for a decision or idea is that we hear from each member. This gives the team opportunity to truly listen and respond to all team members' suggestions and concerns to reach the highest level of support possible for a particular decision.

Remember in traditional group conversation we often don't hear from everyone present. Silence does not mean support. This approach engages everyone in the process.

Steps

1. Each team member has a red, green, and yellow card and understands what they represent.

2. The team decides what level of support must be reached to move forward with a decision. Members that hold up a yellow or red card have opportunity to express their views. In some cases, a member may disagree with a decision but still be willing to support the team if they are the only member that objects.
   For a small team like a Pastor Leadership Team (PLT), 80% level of support may be a good place to start. For a PLT with five persons, four green cards represent80% (one member will either have a yellow or red card). Deciding up front what constitutes a decision creates transparency and helps everyone recognize when the team will move forward with a decision or when more time is needed for conversation.

3. **Optional:** The team agrees that a team member who wants to speak after the first person speaks must briefly (in a few sentences) restate the position or concern of the person who just spoke to her/his level of satisfaction. It is important that *what was said was both heard and understood*. Do not short-change this step. Slowing down the conversation by taking this step will compel team members to listen more carefully to one another rather than just formulating responses.

4. Identify someone to be the facilitator. The facilitator poses the question to be decided, ensures everyone has an opportunity to speak, and asks if an acceptable level of support is being reached.

5. After adequate conversation has occurred, the facilitator asks members of the team to hold up the color card that represents their level of support for the emerging decision. Once each person's level of support is revealed, any person holding a yellow or red card explains his or her level of support for the team's decision. *Note: After hearing from those who hold yellow or red cards, green card holders may want to change their level of support, and the decision may need to be modified.*

6. During step 5 it may become apparent that a modification to the question/proposal would result in a higher level of support. If so, test the modification by using the colored cards to show the team's level of support.

7. Continue until one of two outcomes occurs: 1) the team reaches the level of support required to move forward, or 2) the team does not reach the level of support required and more time is needed before a decision is made. *Both outcomes are acceptable* and represent the will of the team.

Note: The process is as important as the outcome. Build trust and make decisions as a team. *It is critical for persons holding yellow or red cards to feel valued and not pressured to switch to a green card just so the group can move on to other agenda items.* The process takes longer but the results will provide a greater level of ownership of decisions and a higher level of trust in one another.

Faithful Disagreement*

Members may remain in disagreement to a decision and still abide by it and continue to support the overall direction of the PLT or congregation. This is perfectly acceptable. Attempts to force someone into consent will harm both the person and the decision-making process. There may be those who speak in disagreement, just so the discussion benefits from an alternative perspective. Members in "faithful disagreement," when heard and respected, help the team make better decisions with greater support.

*See *Faithful Disagreement,* World Church Leadership Council March 2013

Our Changing Context for Mission

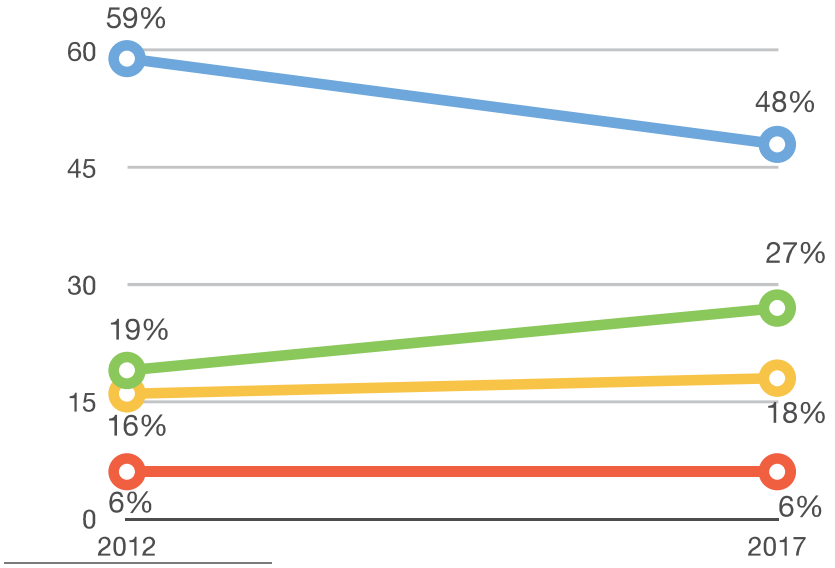
Awaken

"More than ever before, spirituality is not handed to us in reliable packages, and we must cultivate an incarnational worldview capable of finding God in all things-making our world a sanctuary instead of searching for a temple."[1]

"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."[2]

This is a moment in history with great cultural and religious upheaval. As we live into a rhythm of awakening, risking, and blessing, we will need to begin by awakening to the major shifts happening around us. What we have experienced as decline in numbers and participation in church is really pointing to something deeper.

Let's begin by taking a look at some of the trends in research:[3]

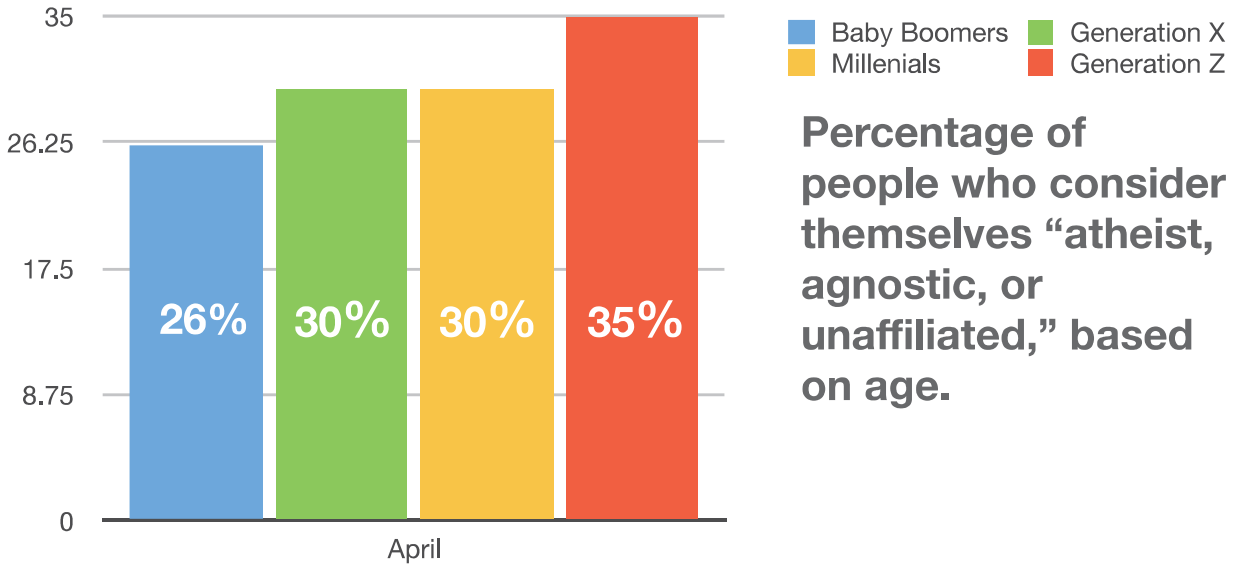


Statistics show a dramatic increase of those who consider themselves "spiritual" but not "religious."

[1] Joseph Stewart-Sicking and Diana Butler Bass, Spiritual Friendship after Religion: Walking with People While the Rules Are Changing (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2016), 54.

[2] Community of Christ, ed., *Community of Christ Sings*, Pew ed (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 2013), Now in this Moment, 96.

[3] http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/06/more-americans-now-say-theyre-spiritual-but-not-religious/



Percentage of people who consider themselves "atheist, agnostic, or unaffiliated," based on age.

Burna Group Study[4]

WHAT DO THESE NUMBERS MEAN?

The most important thing to understand about the statistics in our changing religious context is that although there is a decline in people who participate in religious institutions, there is an *increased* interest in the spiritual life. Notice that in the five year span of this study by Pew Research center, those who claimed to be "spiritual but not religious" increased from 19% in 2012 to 27% in 2017. That means that over one quarter of people in the US are hungry for spiritual fulfillment but are not finding that in the institutional church.

In a study by Barna Group (see second graphic), there is striking data that 35% of Generation Z considers themselves to be atheist, agnostic, or unaffiliated. That's an increase of 5% between Millennials and Generation Z (13-19 year olds).

[4] Barna Group: https://www.christianpost.com/news/gen-z-is-the-least-christian-generation-in-american-history-barna-finds-214856/

At first glance it would seem that these two studies contradict each other. How can there be an increase in spiritual yearning *as well* as an increase in atheism and agnosticism?

In reality, these studies teach us that spiritual hunger and longing for connection can also accompany deep theological questioning and skepticism. This skepticism may have driven people from the church, where they have often received a narrative that particular belief is required for belonging - but the yearning for spiritual connection has not gone away.

Diana Butler Bass frames this well in her book, *Christianity After Religion*. She writes, "For the last few centuries, Western Christianity ordered faith in a particular way. Catholics and Protestants taught that belief came first, behavior came next, and finally belonging resulted, depending on how you answered the first two questions."[5]

This order of faith - belief, behavior, and belonging - has led to the trends we are seeing in our changing context. When belief is required for belonging, those with questions or skepticism have often walked away. We are called reverse this order. As Bass writes, "Instead of believing, behaving, and belonging, we need to reverse the order to belonging, behaving, and believing. And therein lies the difference between religion-as-institution and *religio* as a spiritually vital faith."[6]

Risk

President Veazey shared the following insights about our identity and calling during his September 20, 2017 address to the church:

"The future church is being formed by a basic concept: Our chief purpose is to birth, nurture, and multiply communities of disciples and seekers engaged in spiritual formation and compassionate ministry and action. This basic blueprint—spiritual

[5] Diana Butler Bass, Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 201.

[6] Bass, 204.

formation, community, compassionate ministry and action—is true to the vision of Christ. Everything else, like organizational structure, resources, funding methods, congregational forms, etc., should support this primary purpose."

QUESTIONS TO FOR REFLECTION AND RESPONSE

- Have you experienced faith in the order which Diana Butler Bass describes - belief, behavior, and then belonging?
- What would the reverse look like?
- President Veazey has offered us a blueprint for the future church. What stands out to you in his words above?
- How might a community shaped by spiritual formation and compassionate action differ from our current models of church?

ACTION STEPS

- Go out into the neighborhood. Choose a time (even Sunday morning!) to get to know your context by walking the neighborhood, spending time in local shops or gathering places. Who is in your community? Who is not?
- If you choose to walk the neighborhood on a Sunday morning, notice what goes on in your community during the hours normally dedicated to church.
- Be open to forming new relationships! The Spirit is already moving ahead of us; all we need to do is risk following where is leads.



Bless

- Listen to the song Pray by Sam Smith. You can find a version on YouTube here: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhREiAarjVY*
- Share in the Round about what you hear in the song - what are the longings that you hear?
- Offer a closing prayer in response to what you hear in the song.



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