



## **Framework for Discerning and Leading Mission in the USA and Canada**

### **Introduction**

In LCM we begin with a foundational principle - Mission Begins with Encounter. When we encounter the living Christ it changes everything. We see and hear things we did not see and hear before. Situations, places, and relationships that once seemed desolate become places of hope and possibility.

Missional Practices are those initial steps we take to risk living into an alternative way – the way into God’s future. Missional practices are central to everything we do because they ground us in a relationship with God, one another, and our neighbours. Disciples throughout the ages have engaged in practices as a way to take incremental steps into God’s future – a future that is found in the everyday struggles and hopes of men, women, and children everywhere.

Everything we do in LCM flows out of our ongoing encounter with *“something not fully explainable but utterly transforming”* in community.<sup>1</sup> This is the essence of what it means to discern, embrace, and live fully into our identity and calling as Community of Christ in a changing world.

### **The Prophetic Challenge and Question**

Doctrine and Covenants 163:1 challenges us:

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

If we discern and embrace the full meaning of our identity and calling we will discover our future! The leads to a pivotal essential question that we are called to discern and live with as we seek to discover our future:

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

How does our *relentless* pursuit of this question begin to shape everything we do when we gather and are sent in mission? As we consider our contexts for mission we begin to recognize just how prophetic this question is for our time and place. This is much more than a new program or set of objectives. This question is calling us to imagine *a whole new way*

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<sup>1</sup> Share the Peace of Jesus Christ – President Steve Veazey’s 2005 World Conference Sermon

*of being the church* that reintroduces our neighbourhoods, towns, and cities to the living Christ and the church as though they met them both for the first time!

## **Context and Trends in Western Nations**

There is much written on cultural, political, and religious trends over the past several decades and their impact on our religious landscape today. How do we make sense of the many factors and how they shape our religious experience today and into the future? As we attempt to absorb the hundreds of pages of analysis and conclusions we can summarize them into three key trends. These trends are present in the facts, figures, and analysis and expose the deepest needs of our shared human experience.

## **Three Critical Trends, Three Pathways into the Future**

The following three trends, *Renewal, Relationships, and Relevance*, are pathways to our future. They not only summarize much of what we understand about our contexts in the western world but also have a direct link to our identity and calling as Community of Christ in the world today.

***Renewal*** - our deepest intellectual and spiritual longings to know and experience the essence of God as love, joy, hope, and peace

Essential Questions:

- Who is Jesus Christ and why does he matter in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- How do we connect with the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus to his followers?
- How do we become *invitational communities of encounter* where together we become part of a new creation?

Key Practices and Initial Approaches:

- Mission Prayer
- Dwelling in the Word
- Prayer of Examen, Receiving Christ's Invitation
- Worship as Community Missional Practice
- Pastor Leadership Team Meeting Flow
- An Altar in the World by Barbara Brown Taylor

***Relationships*** - our deepest intellectual and spiritual longings to belong, to experience unconditional acceptance, and to walk life's journey in companionship with God and one another

Essential Questions:

- What is the church and why does it matter?

- How does our identity and calling as Community of Christ begin to radically reshape our shared experience (i.e. as congregations and new expressions of the church) and our approach to mission?
- If mission is relational, how do we re-envision our approach to evangelism in our neighbourhoods, towns, and cities? What does this look like?

#### Key Practices and Initial Approaches:

- Mission Prayer
- Sharing in the Round
- Dwelling in the Word
- Valuing the Other
- Third Place Ministry
- Sharing Our Story
- Making Room
- Walking the Neighbourhood
- Pastor Leadership Team Meeting Flow
- Community Building Approaches (Colour Exercise and Spiritual Types)
- Receive, Embody, Share Christ's Peace – New Approaches to Holistic Evangelism

**Relevance** - our deepest intellectual and spiritual longings to participate in co-creating a meaningful and hopeful future for all in partnership with God

#### Essential Questions:

- How does the mission and message of Christ specifically relate to the challenges and issues before us locally and globally?
- How do we create safe places for all ages to discern, explore, and experiment their way into God's emerging future?
- How do we receive, embody, and share the invitation to Christ's peace with those who are "spiritual but not religious"?

#### Key Practices and Initial Approaches:

- Mission Prayer
- Dwelling in the Word
- Sharing in the Round
- Valuing the Other
- Difficult Conversations Resources and Approaches
- Prophetic Imagination Resources and Approaches
- Designing, Launching, and Evaluating Experiments
- Envision, Experiment, Evaluate Planning Template
- Discerning and Mobilizing the Gifts of All Ages
- Receive, Embody, Share Christ's Peace – New Approaches to Holistic Evangelism

As we think about our discipleship and how it is expressed in congregations and new expressions of the church we will continue to come back to three essential questions:

1. **Renewal:** How does this practice, approach, or ministry bring renewal for us *and* the “spiritual but not religious” who have turned away from God and the church?
2. **Relationships:** How does this practice, approach, or ministry lead us into new and deeper relationships with God, one another, our neighbours, and strangers?
3. **Relevance:** How does this practice, approach, or ministry help us embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ in our neighbourhoods, towns, and cities?

## Mission Planning Grid for Congregations and New Expressions of the Church

In each of the boxes down the far left hand column, list the practices, activities, and/or ministries of your congregation or new expression of the church you hope to initiate. Then use the three boxes to the right and questions above to evaluate how your practices, activities, and ministries specifically address the three critical trends and pathways into the future. Also think of new practices, approaches, or ministries that could be initiated as experiments to respond to the three trends.

<b><i>Current or New Ministries and Activities of Our Congregation</i></b>	<b><i>Renewal:</i></b> How does this practice, approach, or ministry bring renewal for us <i>and</i> the “spiritual but not religious” who have turned away from God and the church?	<b><i>Relationships:</i></b> How does this practice, approach, or ministry lead us into deeper and new relationships with God, one another, our neighbours, and strangers?	<b><i>Relevance:</i></b> How does this practice, approach, or ministry help us embody and live the concerns and passion of Christ in our neighbourhoods, towns, and cities?

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**Remember,** the three trends are also pathways into our future. Our movement began in a grove as a young boy encountered God and found renewal. Our first experiment in Kirtland Ohio involved struggling to live the Acts 2 model of the church in sacred community. It was a deeply relational expression of the gospel. Our first experiment in Kirtland was also relevant to the questions and physical and spiritual needs of the people at that time.

We are also called to be a people on the prophetic edge with God who find renewal in our relationships with God, one another, and our neighbours as we seek together to co-create God’s future of justice and peace for all. Like those who went before us we will make mistakes, but our heritage calls us to be a people on the move with God!