



Community of Christ

Historic Sites Foundation

Like a Child

Community of Christ Heritage Day

Sunday, September 20, 2015

Prelude and Gathering

While the worshippers enter the sanctuary, have meditation music playing with a slideshow of youth images from the congregation. Encourage members to contribute photos of themselves as children, their children, and grandchildren. Pictures may include baby blessings, youth retreats, youth service projects, congregational-sponsored activities, etc. The purpose is twofold: (1) to reflect on individual and congregational heritage, and (2) to encourage a sense of gratitude for the youth.

Congregational Life (Announcements)

Hymn of Preparation: CCS 16: “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

Prayer for Peace

You may use the Prayer for Peace materials posted on the Community of Christ website (www.CofChrist.org/prayerpeace) or adapt the prayer to reflect this special Heritage Day service.

Welcome and Call to Worship: Mark 9:30–37

While welcoming the congregation, the worship leader should introduce the Heritage Day theme and share the following as an introduction to the significance of heritage: (Robert Coles, Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion [Da Capo Press, 1989, ISBN 9780201079746], p. 109):

“We are communities in time... Our lives are touched by those who lived centuries ago, and we hope that our lives will mean something to people who won’t be alive until centuries from now. It’s a great ‘chain of being.’”
—Dorothy Day

Following the reading, and before reading the scripture from Mark, explain how the slideshow relates to the overall theme of the service and how stories shared during the service will reflect our shared tradition and Christ’s mission as exemplified by the youth of the past.

Scripture Reading: Mark 9:36–37 NRSV

“Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”

A Heritage Day service would not be complete without singing the historic hymn, “The Spirit of God, Like a Fire is Burning,” written by W.W. Phelps in preparation for the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. This hymn, near and dear to the heart of every Latter Day Saint, was written while early church members were living in poverty. But, like the trust of a child, the early Saints trusted in God and chose to make sacrifices to build this “House of the Lord.” Following the hymn and invocation, the congregation will share in a Children’s Moment, focusing on the building of the Kirtland Temple and the first time the Saints sang this special hymn.

Hymn of Heritage: CCS 384: “The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning”

***Invocation**

***Response**

Children’s Moment: Kirtland Temple, the “House of the Lord”

When the first members came together and founded our church in New York in 1830, it was called a “church”—the “Church of Christ”—but the people didn’t own a church building for many years. The first church president was Joseph Smith Jr. When the people gathered to the town of Kirtland, Ohio, he brought a revelation to the church, asking people to build a “House of the Lord.”

The people had built log cabins before, but no one ever had built a large building like a church. Also, the people had hardly any money. At first they thought they might answer the revelation by building a big log cabin to be the Lord’s House. But they read in the Bible that when King Solomon, who was the wisest king, built a House of the Lord in Jerusalem, he had used only the most precious materials.

So the people decided logs wouldn’t be good enough. Instead they tried to build with bricks. Sadly, the materials they used to make the bricks were too soft. The bricks all crumbled and had to be thrown away. The people didn’t know what to do.

A new member named Artemus Millet joined the church. He was from Canada and was a professional builder. He knew how to build large buildings of stone. He taught the people to quarry stone and use it to build the Temple walls. It took three years, because the Temple was such a large building for that time. Also there weren’t many church members yet, they were still very poor, and they wanted to make the building a house fit for the Lord. Everyone helped, donating time and money and even going into debt.

Finally it was finished. When they had a dedication service, the Temple filled up. Worshipers opened the windows so people outside could hear, too. They were so excited that they went to church for seven hours and didn’t get bored—they wanted to go back for more.

This was the first time people sang the special hymn, “The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning.” Everyone said they felt the Spirit of God like a fire burning inside them, making them feel extremely happy, hopeful, and peaceful. Some people said they saw visions of angels in the Temple. It was such a special time that people felt it was like the day of Pentecost in the Bible, when the first apostles felt the Spirit in a similar way.

***Note:** Following the Children’s Moment, you may want the children to work jointly on related crafts, including a coloring sheet and paper model of the Kirtland Temple. (see attachments).*

Connecting our Shared Past with Today’s Mission Initiatives

The following section will walk the congregation through five stories from Community of Christ history as they relate to each Mission Initiative. Each story involves children from church history. Consider having the older youth share the stories. Invite the congregation to sing one verse of the hymn, "Community of Christ," between each story. You also may replace the hymn with one that holds a special significance with the congregation and/or any of the stories below with a story from your congregation that relates to the Mission Initiatives.

Invite People to Christ

Story:

At a young age, Emma Smith went to a forested area near her home to pray for her father, Isaac Hale. Emma was worried about her father and his refusal to attend church with his wife and children. The young girl poured out her heart to God as she knelt. Isaac happened to be walking nearby and overheard Emma's heartfelt prayer. He was so touched by his daughter's compassion and concern that he later joined his family's Methodist faith.

CCS 354: "Community of Christ" (verse 1)

Abolish Poverty, End Suffering

Story:

During the winter of 1843, a group of teenagers gathered at Heber C. Kimball's home in Nauvoo, Illinois. The topic of conversation that night centered on the young men and women's concerns that they were spending too much time at parties and not enough time helping their community. Brother Kimball suggested they meet again in a more-formal atmosphere to create an organization for the needs of the youth and Nauvoo community.

Attendance continued to grow as the organization met several times in various places. Soon the youth chose the name "The Young Gentlemen and Ladies' Relief Society of Nauvoo," elected officers, and adopted a charter.

The prophet/president of the church, Joseph Smith Jr., attended one of the meetings and praised the youth for their remarkable conduct. He encouraged the group to dedicate its service to the relief of the poor in Nauvoo. To promote their good works, Joseph gave the youth a request from Brother Maudsley, an English convert who recently had moved to Nauvoo and needed help building a home. The teenagers agreed to raise funds and support for Maudsley. A local newspaper praised the group as a model society:

"If the youth throughout our land would follow this good example and form themselves into such societies...there would not be as many suffering poor, neither would there be as much immorality among the people. But on the contrary, peace, good order, happiness, cheerfulness and plenty would reign in the land, the Lord would look down from his holy habitation and smile upon us, and bless us all."

CCS 354: "Community of Christ" (verse 2)

Pursue Peace on Earth

Story:

After the State of Illinois revoked the Nauvoo charter, the community attempted to keep peace and order through various policing measures. During this period the "Whistling and Whittling Brigade," made of teenage boys, was used to intimidate strangers who appeared to be threats to the community. The brigade's goal literally was to chase offenders out of town.

In 1845, young Joseph Smith III saw the brigade intimidating Austin Cowles, an old family friend and former member of the church. Joseph said the youth surrounded Cowles “urging him with wicked knives, saying nothing to him, except to tell him to move on when he stopped to speak to anyone.” Joseph attempted to speak with Austin and interfere with the Whistling and Whittling Brigade to protect his friend. However, his attempt failed as the boys “struck up their din of whistling and whittling, hustling the poor man with the ends of broken boards and the sticks they were whittling.” Joseph watched as Austin hurriedly left town. Although Joseph failed to protect Austin, he did his best in pursuing peace between Austin and his aggressors.

CCS 354: “Community of Christ” (verse 3)

Develop Disciples to Serve

Story:

Francis Cole knew education was crucial for the future of her son, Clifford, but there simply were no valid options in her rural community. A Presbyterian minister named Elbert Nash heard of Francis’ concerns and invited Clifford to move in with his family in Moorcroft, Wyoming, 35 miles away. The Coles accepted the hospitable offer, and Clifford felt like a member of the Nash family throughout his high school years. Each night following dinner, the Reverend Nash would pull out the scriptures, and the family would read and discuss. While sitting at the dinner table, Elbert and Clifford would carry on long conversations—spanning theology to Restoration history—about Clifford’s Community of Christ roots. During this time Clifford discovered there were devoted Christians outside his own denomination, and “genuine religious experiences” could happen outside an RLDS/Community of Christ church.

His experience of being welcomed into the Nash family inspired him to devote his life to the ministry of Christ. Clifford entered church appointment in 1946, a time when the traditional faith of the church was undergoing one of the most rigorous self-examinations in its history. Faith often was measured by one’s ability to defend the “one true church.” Clifford set out to change this mentality by working with others to reform church education.

In 1954 he was named director of Religious Education. In this role Clifford published new materials for youth from primary to senior high. In addition, he widely published materials for adults that included the historic context surrounding the scriptures. For the first time the works of several major biblical scholars were cited, and teachers were encouraged to use them in congregations. Clifford worked on church-wide curriculum for more than 25 years. The impact he made is still felt in the church today.

One family bravely opening its home to a teenager in need led to extraordinary things within our faith community.

CCS 354: “Community of Christ” (verse 4)

Experience Congregations in Mission

Story:

Following WWII, Rosie Sellars and her family struggled to survive in Germany. Her father was killed during the war, and the responsibilities of providing for the family were in her young mother’s hands. Everywhere Rosie looked she saw homelessness and food scarcity. She remembered food being rationed. Some nights, there wasn’t enough bread on the table to feed her family. She described their desperation, “Many times some of my family went on an all-day bike trip out to beg for a piece of bread from a farmer or, if really lucky, an egg.”

During this time Rosie relied on the support of the local congregation and those abroad to help her family survive. She explained:

“...In 1947 my mother was thrown off her bicycle when hit by a truck. The doctors thought she would die that night, but I trusted in Jesus and prayed all night. The next day I went to an elder and asked him to go and see Mother in the hospital to administer to her. She remained in the hospital for four months before she came home. It was during these four months that we received several CARE packages from church members in Independence, Missouri. They meant a lot to us, especially the food. They were an answer to prayer.”

Ministry of Music

Those sharing in the Ministry of Music may wish to choose their own selection or sing “like a child,” CCS 403.

A Time for Reflection and Commitment

You might begin by having one or two congregation members share personal testimonies about how encounters with children strengthened their faith, or how an experience in their childhood or youth influenced who they are today. Encourage the speaker or speakers to point out that these experiences have become part of their personal heritage of faith in Community of Christ.

Another option is to invite congregation members to divide into groups of three to five and share (1) their personal testimonies of being blessed by the presence or action of a child, and/or (2) what aspects of our church’s heritage are most meaningful in their discipleship. If time permits, each group can share aspects of its discussion with the entire congregation.

A Disciple’s Generous Response:

Individuals and the congregation are invited to designate all or a portion of an offering for the Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation to help preserve and share church heritage for future generations. Donations may be sent to: Community of Christ Historic Sites Foundation, P.O. Box 338, Nauvoo, IL 62354. If individual donors wish to receive a receipt acknowledging their tax-deductible donation, please indicate this when submitting the donation.

Offertory Reading:

Throughout Community of Christ history, we discover empowering examples of generosity. Below is a story about Joseph Smith III and his mother’s generosity to a group of mischievous boys.

Story:

Peter Schenk arrived in Nauvoo as a curious boy in 1848. The young German immigrant lived in the small river town more than 50 years and was considered one of the more influential and highly respected citizens. When the local newspaper, *The Independent*, prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary, Peter wrote a letter to the editor. Of all the memories and experiences during his time in Illinois, he chose to share a story from his childhood that involved a memorable interaction with Joseph Smith III.

One day while walking home from school with his friends, Peter noticed some delicious-looking apples in the Smith family yard. The boys sneaked to the trees and began filling their arms and pockets with apples. Just as they collected their fill and prepared to leave, they were surprised to see Joseph Smith III walking toward them. Knowing he was caught red-handed, Peter quickly emptied his pockets and dropped all the apples in his arms, except for the one he was eating.

Even more surprising than Joseph Smith III's sudden appearance was his response to the boys. He said to the young apple thieves, "Those apples are no good, throw them away, and come back to the house with me, and I'll give you some good ones." Peter and his friends followed Joseph into the house, where they found Joseph's mother, Emma, and received several very good apples. The boys then continued on their journey home "feeling mighty happy at being left off so easy." Peter Schenk and his friends experienced grace and generosity at the Smith house that day.

This story exemplifies Community of Christ's timeless calling to give generously. Today, we have the opportunity, like Joseph Smith III and his mother in Nauvoo years ago, to model compassion and generosity for future generations.

Blessing and Receiving of Mission Tithes

Closing Hymn, CCS 388: "Redeemer of Israel"

***Sending Forth/Benediction**

In lieu of a formal benediction, you may consider reading the words written by Mary Nelson Keithahn in her hymn, "God of Every Generation" (CCS 361) as your sending forth.

Postlude

*** Please stand as you are able.**