

Reclaiming Jesus:

A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis

**Bible Study and
Discussion Guide**

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Introduction for Leaders

This guide is a roadmap for conversations around the confessional document, **Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis**. (reclaimingjesus.org) We hope that it is helpful in bringing conversation, prayer, and reflection to this timely and important confession for our church and our world.

Before beginning to lead these sessions, we recommend that you read the Leader Guide in its entirety so that you understand the flow of each session and how they are all woven together.

You can do all of the sessions, some, do them out of order, or do them as a retreat. We encourage you to start with sessions one and two before moving on to anything else. This guide is meant to be used and adapted so it will work in your setting. Please make adaptations, and if you discover something wonderful you want to share with others on this journey of Reclaiming Jesus, please share it with us.

A note about language:

Some of the language in the confessional statement may not necessarily be the language your community would use. If this is the case, we invite you to also spend some time unpacking the language, what might make you uncomfortable, what might challenge you, or how you might say it differently. For example: some faith communities shy away from using Lord and Kingdom and instead use language like God, Creator and Kindom. During your discussions and sessions, you don't want the language of the document to get in the way of wrestling with the substance of what the confession is trying to convey. Having this discussion ahead of time or woven throughout your sessions is a good way to be honest about how language influences our interactions with the text.

Notes for the Leader/s:

- *Italics* signify the leaders script and instructions to the leader. Please adapt them to your own style and to fit your group.
- Each session is designed to be one-hour long but could be extended for longer conversation.
- You could combine sessions if you wish to use this in a retreat format.
- The discussions are best done in groups of 5-8 people to invite conversation and reflection.
- If your group is larger than 8, divide them into smaller groups.
- Set up the chairs in a circle to invite listening and conversation.
- You will need three readers each week. Take care to invite a variety of voices to read.

Materials for each week:

- Copies of the handout for each person
- Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
- Easel and paper at the front of the room
- Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
- Sticky Notes

For Session Two and beyond:

- You will need two clear sections of wall or window for the Sticky Notes. If you can't leave the Sticky Notes on the wall between sessions, you may want people to place them on easel paper or a white board that can be brought in and out of the room for the sessions. You will need to have these present at each gathering after session two. NOTE: If you have to move them in and out of the room, make sure to tape them down as the stickiness of the notes can wear off over time.

Session One:

Civil Discourse and Followers of Jesus

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Easel paper with the Civil Discourse Guidelines written on it (or the 11 topics if you don't want to write out the whole thing)
 - Easel paper with the following written at the top. "How you will go into the world and love one another just as God loves you?" (Do not put it up until the end.)
 - Sticky Notes
-

Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Open with prayer, using this or one of your own.

Gracious and loving God, we come together to meditate and examine your word. Give us ears to hear, hearts to receive, and minds to consider how we might be your hands and feet in the world. Show us your way, O God, that we might know you better. *Amen.*

Introductions (5 minutes)

Even if you think everyone knows each other, invite people to go around the circle and say their name and one thing they hope to learn.

Civil Discourse as a Way of Listening and Learning (10 Minutes)

Leader:

We are going to be spending some time together talking about how we can Reclaim Jesus in our world today. We will listen to scripture and reflect on the sections of **Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis** in our small groups.

I would imagine that our conversations, at times, might get a bit passionate and energized. As a way to engage in these conversations respectfully, I would like for us consider using the Guidelines for Civil Discourse as a way of engaging in these topics together.

These ground rules for civil discourse are centered on the Golden Rule: *doing unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

Your call to follow Jesus means that you are called to be the best version of yourself that you can be—who God made you to be. Civil discourse requires that we treat people with respect as we seek and serve Christ in each other and strive for the respect and dignity of every human being. It means treating people how we want to be treated, even in disagreement and even if we do not have shared values.

Invite the group to go around the room, having each person read one of these tenets. If someone does not want to read, they can simply say "skip." If you have a small group, you may have them go around the room a couple of times until all are read.

As people are listening and reading, invite them to mark words or phrases that stand out to them.

- **Respect** – Respect each person you meet and take the time to truly consider what they are saying. Respond, don't react. No blaming, shaming or attacking another person.
- **Listen Deeply** – Listen to what each person is saying, focus on the ideas presented, and discuss ideas and issues – not people. No side conversations as they distract from engagement and listening. Do not interrupt while others are speaking.
- **Speak for Yourself** – Use “I” statements when commenting or responding. Share your personal experience.
- **Try to Understand** – Try to understand the thoughts and ideas of others. Ask questions for clarification.
- **Share Talk Time** – Make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak before speaking again. Take notes if there are things you want to follow up on. Ask what others think.
- **Speak respectfully** – When you choose to speak, respect your fellow learners and do not try to be the one that knows everything about the topic at hand.
- **Gratitude** – If someone has shared something or asked a question that helps with your own learning, say thank you.
- **Suspend Judgment** – We all have presumptions, biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and other pre-judgments. Try to suspend these and seek to understand.
- **Disagree, Don't Debate** – We are here to learn and listen. You can disagree with someone and still love them and listen to them. This isn't about who is right, but about listening and learning together.
- **Practice Forgiveness** – We learn from trying things out and sometimes we make mistakes. Seek to forgive and to be forgiven as we learn together.
- **Pay Attention to your Feelings and Thoughts** – If you do not feel safe asking a question or commenting on a topic, write it down and ask someone to help you give voice to it or talk it through. If something hurts your feelings, acknowledge that the comment (not the person) hurt and explain why.

Once all of them are read, ask the group:

Are these guidelines something we can abide by? Are there changes or additions you may want to make? We can revisit these each week if there are things we find we want to add or change.

Scripture Reflection (10 minutes)

Leader:

We begin this study of how we are called to Reclaim Jesus in the world today by looking to our own commitment as Christians. Who is God calling us to be today? To what and to whom are we faithful and why?

We begin by reflecting on John 13:31-35. As you hear this scripture read, I invite you to note the word or phrase that stands out for you.

Invite the first reader to read the scripture.

John 13:33-35

³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

Reflection Questions:

Invite each small group to reflect on the reading.

- What word or phrases stood out for you?
- If we already had the 10 Commandments and all the other rules in the Bible, I wonder why Jesus felt they had to give them this new commandment.
- When do we find this commandment easy?
- When do we find this commandment difficult?

After 10 minutes have passed, ring the bell to signify that time is up.

Followers of Jesus (20 minutes)

Leader:

Let us listen to the introduction to **Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis**. As you listen, please mark the words or phrases that stand out for you.

Invite the second and third readers to read the following, alternating paragraphs.

We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake.

It is time to be followers of Jesus before anything else—nationality, political party, race, ethnicity, gender, geography—our identity in Christ precedes every other identity. We pray that our nation will see Jesus' words in us. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

When politics undermines our theology, we must examine that politics. The church's role is to change the world through the life and love of Jesus Christ. The government's role is to serve the common good by protecting justice and peace, rewarding good behavior while restraining bad behavior (Romans 13). When that role is undermined by political leadership, faith leaders must stand up and speak out. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state."

It is often the duty of Christian leaders, especially elders, to speak the truth in love to our churches and to name and warn against temptations, racial and cultural captivities, false doctrines, and political idolatries—and even our complicity in them. We do so here with humility, prayer, and a deep dependency on the grace and Holy Spirit of God.

This letter comes from a retreat on Ash Wednesday, 2018. During Lent, we feel deep lamentations for the state of our nation, and our own hearts are filled with confession for the sins we feel called to address. The true meaning of the word repentance is to turn around. It is time to lament, confess, repent, and turn. In times of crisis, the church has historically learned to return to Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

- What stood out for you in listening to this statement?
- For you, I wonder what it means to be a Christian first and everything else second?
- For you, what does it mean that Jesus is Lord? What does that look like in your life?
- How would our fellow citizens know we are Christians by our love?
- What does it mean to commit ourselves as Christians today?

When time is up, ring the bell to bring everyone back together.

Further Conversation (10 Minutes)

Based on your conversations, what does it mean to you to commit ourselves as Christians? Where have you seen God tonight?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Leader:

Before leaving tonight, I invite you to think about how you will go into the world and love one another just as God loves you. Write your response on a Sticky Note, and then come put it on the easel paper.

Once you think everyone has put their Sticky Note up:

Let us pray:

Loving God, we thank you for this time together to ponder the commandments you have given us and how we might live that out in our world today. Help us to commit ourselves as your followers and as your disciples each day. Guide us on our journey from this place that we might know and see your love in those around us, and that we might spread that love to all we encounter. In your name we pray. Amen.

Session Two:

Jesus is Lord: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Sticky Notes in two colors
 - Two clear sections of wall or window for the Sticky Notes. If you can't leave the Sticky Notes on the wall between sessions, you may want people to place them on easel paper or a white board that can be brought in and out of the room for the sessions. You will need to have these present at each gathering after this. NOTE: If you have to move them in and out of the room, make sure to tape them down as the stickiness of the notes can wear off over time.
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Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Remind them of our Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Open with prayer, using this or one of your own.

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

(Prayer attributed to St. Francis)

Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done (10 Minutes)

Leader:

As followers of Jesus, we choose to live our lives with Christ at the center. We gather, we pray, we worship God, we sing, we read scripture together, and we share the bread and wine. Together we proclaim that Jesus is Lord. But what does that mean for our daily lives? What does that mean that we believe? As you listen to our reading from the Gospel of Matthew, I invite you to notice words and phrases that stand out to you. Make notes for yourself on what this scripture calls you to believe.

Invite the first reader to read the following.

Matthew 6:9-15

⁹ Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

- Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
- ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.
- ¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- ¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.
- ¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹
- ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Reflection:

- What stood out for you as you heard the reading from the Gospel of Matthew?
- What does this scripture call you to believe about Jesus?
- When we say, “Your kingdom come, your will be done,” what does that mean for you?

Jesus is Lord (20 Minutes)

Invite the second and third readers to read the following, alternating paragraphs.

Jesus is Lord. That is our foundational confession. It was central for the early church and needs to again become central to us. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar was not—nor any other political ruler since. If Jesus is Lord, no other authority is absolute. Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of God he announced, is the Christian’s first loyalty, above all others. We pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Our faith is personal but never private, meant not only for heaven but for this earth.

The question we face is this: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? What does our loyalty to Christ, as disciples, require at this moment in our history? We believe it is time to renew our theology of public discipleship and witness. Applying what “Jesus is Lord” means today is the message we commend as elders to our churches. What we believe leads us to what we must reject. Our “Yes” is the foundation for our “No.” What we confess as our faith leads to what we confront. Therefore, we offer the following six affirmations of what we believe, and the resulting rejections of practices and policies by political leaders which dangerously corrode the soul of the nation and deeply threaten the public integrity of our faith. We pray that we, as followers of Jesus, will find the depth of faith to match the danger of our political crisis.

Reflection:

- Who is Jesus Christ for us today?
- What does our loyalty to him require?
- What does it mean to be disciples who regard Jesus as Lord at this moment in our history?

What Do You Believe? What Do You Reject? (20 Minutes)

Leader:

The statement says, “What we believe leads us to what we obey and what we reject. Our “Yes” is the foundation for our “No.”

I invite you to take a few minutes to name those things that you believe and also those things that you reject. Write each of those things you believe and those things you reject on Sticky Notes. Each belief and rejection should have its own Sticky Note.

Give them a few minutes to work on their Sticky Notes. Then, invite them to share them in their small groups.

After they have shared in their small groups, invite them to put their “Believe” Sticky Notes on one part of the wall, and their “Reject” Sticky Notes on another part of the wall.

Invite the group to stand around the Sticky Notes and clump together those things that are similar for both the beliefs and the rejections.

When there are -105 minutes left, invite them to share what they notice or what they are wondering about as they look at the beliefs and rejections of the group. If they wish to add more notes, they can.

Closing Prayer (1 Minute)

Invite the group to read the scripture together as your closing prayer.

Matthew 6:9-15

9 Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹

¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Amen.

Session Three: Made in God's Image and Likeness

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Sticky Notes
 - Believe and Reject Sticky Notes from Session Two
-

Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Remind them of our Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Leader:

God of Creation, God of Light and Love, you created us in your image and blessed us all to be a part of this magnificent world. Help us to live more fully into your image that we may care for the world around us, love all the people and diversity you have created, and work toward a world where all are loved, all are equal, and all are free. Amen.

God Blessed Them (10 Minutes)

Invite one of the readers to read the following.

Genesis 1: 26-28

²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them.

Reflection:

- What does it mean to you to be created in the image of God?
- How does it make you feel that the person who is vastly different from you is also created in the image of God?
- Since all of us on this earth are created in the image of God, how do we reconcile our differences?

Made in God's Image (30 minutes)

Invite reader one to read the following. As the person is reading, invite the participants to mark what stands out for them or what they have questions about.

WE BELIEVE each human being is made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). That image and likeness confers a divinely decreed dignity, worth, and God-given equality to all of us as children of the one God who is the Creator of all things. Racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God (the imago dei) in some of the children of God. Our participation in the global community of Christ absolutely prevents any toleration of racial bigotry. Racial justice and healing are biblical and theological issues for us, and are central

to the mission of the body of Christ in the world. We give thanks for the prophetic role of the historic black churches in America when they have called for a more faithful gospel.

Invite the third reader to read the following.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the resurgence of white nationalism and racism in our nation on many fronts, including the highest levels of political leadership. We, as followers of Jesus, must clearly reject the use of racial bigotry for political gain that we have seen. In the face of such bigotry, silence is complicity. In particular, we reject white supremacy and commit ourselves to help dismantle the systems and structures that perpetuate white preference and advantage. Further, any doctrines or political strategies that use racist resentments, fears, or language must be named as public sin—one that goes back to the foundation of our nation and lingers on. Racial bigotry must be antithetical for those belonging to the body of Christ, because it denies the truth of the gospel we profess.

Invite each table group to talk about what they marked or had questions about in both sections.

After they have shared with one another, invite them to use their Sticky Notes to write down beliefs that ring true for them. Once they have a few written down, invite them to share what they wrote with their table group and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes. Then invite them to write down and share with their table group what they reject and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes.

Once each group has completed this, have them clump them together where there are similarities. Note where there are differences and then pray as a group.

Further Conversation (10 Minutes)

If there is time left, you can invite further conversation of the whole group about what it means to be made in the image of God. How can we stand up against racial bigotry? In what ways can we work to dismantle the systems and structures that perpetuate white preference? How do we live into our beliefs?

Closing Prayer (1 Minute)

Leader: Let us pray.

Leader: God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.

***Participants:* And it was good.**

Leader: God created humankind, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

***Participants:* And it was good.**

Leader: God blessed them.

***Participants:* And it was good.**

Leader: God blesses each individual up on this earth.

***Participants:* And it IS good.**

Leader: God calls us to turn toward God and become the body of Christ together.

***Participants:* And it IS good.**

Leader: In the name of Christ, let us go into the world in God's image loving one another, making amends, working toward reconciliation, and creating with God the world God wants us to live in together.

***Participants:* And it IS good. Amen.**

Session Four: We are One Body

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Sticky Notes
 - Believe and Reject Sticky Notes from previous sessions
-

Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Remind them of our Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Leader:

Gracious and life-giving God, we gather together as your people, heirs to your promise. Help us to hear and hold one another in love as we talk about those things that have separated us from one another and you. Guide us as we remember that your vision for us is to be one body, one in Christ, one with each other. Amen.

One in Christ (15 Minutes)

Invite reader one to read the following.

Galatians 3:27-29

²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Reflection:

- What does it mean to you to be one in Christ?
- What does it look like to live as if we are one in Christ?
- We are reminded in Paul's letter to the Galatians that we are no longer divided, but one in Christ. Where do we still see, hear, or participate in the separation of male and female?

We Are One Body (30 Minutes)

Invite reader two to read the following. As the person is reading, invite the participants to mark what stands out for them or what they have questions about.

WE BELIEVE we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class (Galatians 3:28). The body of Christ, where those great human divisions are to be overcome, is meant to be an example for the rest of society. When we fail to overcome these oppressive obstacles, and even perpetuate them, we have failed in our vocation to the world—to proclaim and live the reconciling gospel of Christ.

Invite reader three to read the following.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women that has been further revealed in our culture and politics, including our churches, and the oppression

of any other child of God. We lament when such practices seem publicly ignored, and thus privately condoned, by those in high positions of leadership. We stand for the respect, protection, and affirmation of women in our families, communities, workplaces, politics, and churches. We support the courageous truth-telling voices of women, who have helped the nation recognize these abuses. We confess sexism as a sin, requiring our repentance and resistance.

Invite each table group to talk about what they marked or had questions about in both sections.

After they have shared with one another, invite them to use their Sticky Notes to write down beliefs that ring true for them. Once they have a few written down, invite them to share what they wrote with their table group and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes. Then invite them to write down and share with their table group what they reject and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes.

Once each group has completed this, have them clump them together where there are similarities. Note where there are differences and then pray as a group.

Further Conversation (10 Minutes)

If there is time left, you can invite further conversation of the whole group about how women are treated and what we can do to move more toward the vision of all being one in Christ. What are active steps you can take as an individual and as a community? How can we live into our beliefs?

Closing Prayer (1 Minute)

Leader:

Lord Jesus Christ, we come together, reminded that we are no longer separate, but that we have been baptized into one body with you and with each other. Bless us as we leave this place, that we may engage in the work and ministry of being one, of being equal, of being whole. We are all made in your image as amazing, unique individuals, belonging to you and to each other, working toward oneness and wholeness. Amen.

Session Five: To Protect and Seek Justice

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Sticky Notes
 - Believe and Reject Sticky Notes from previous sessions
-

Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Remind them of our Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Leader:

Jesus, you teach us to love and care for one another. Sometimes this is easy, and at other times we struggle with that that means and what that looks like today. Give us strength and humility as we continue to learn to love and care for everyone, especially our fellow children of God who are hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned. Amen.

Just as You Did it to the Least of These, You Did it to Me (10 Minutes)

Invite the first reader to read the following.

Matthew 25:31-40

³¹ 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Reflection:

- What stands out for you in this reading?
- Who are the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned?
- Can you give examples of when/how we have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, given clothing to those without, cared for the sick, or visited those in prison?
- How do we do these things in our local community? In our state? In our country?

To Protect and Seek Justice (30 Minutes)

Invite the second reader to read the following. As the person is reading, invite the participants to mark what stands out for them or what they have questions about.

WE BELIEVE how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. (Matthew 25: 31-46) “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” God calls us to protect and seek justice for those who are poor and vulnerable, and our treatment of people who are “oppressed,” “strangers,” “outsiders,” or otherwise considered “marginal” is a test of our relationship to God, who made us all equal in divine dignity and love. Our proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ is at stake in our solidarity with the most vulnerable. If our gospel is not “good news to the poor,” it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18).

Invite reader three to read the following.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the language and policies of political leaders who would debase and abandon the most vulnerable children of God. We strongly deplore the growing attacks on immigrants and refugees, who are being made into cultural and political targets, and we need to remind our churches that God makes the treatment of the “strangers” among us a test of faith (Leviticus 19:33-34). We won’t accept the neglect of the well-being of low-income families and children, and we will resist repeated attempts to deny health care to those who most need it. We confess our growing national sin of putting the rich over the poor. We reject the immoral logic of cutting services and programs for the poor while cutting taxes for the rich. Budgets are moral documents. We commit ourselves to opposing and reversing those policies and finding solutions that reflect the wisdom of people from different political parties and philosophies to seek the common good. Protecting the poor is a central commitment of Christian discipleship, to which 2,000 verses in the Bible attest.

Invite each table group to talk about what they marked or had questions about in both sections.

After they have shared with one another, invite them to use their Sticky Notes to write down beliefs that ring true for them. Once they have a few written down, invite them to share what they wrote with their table group and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes. Then invite them to write down and share with their table group what they reject and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes.

Once each group has completed this, have them clump them together where there are similarities. Note where there are differences and then pray as a group.

Further Conversation (10 Minutes)

Invite the community present to discuss how they can work to protect and seek justice. What does this look like in your community? What are the many ways people can be involved – from the homebound, to children, to young people, to adults, to those who want to march, to those who want to write/call their leaders, etc.? How do we live into our beliefs?

Closing Prayer (1 Minute)

Invite everyone to pray together:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen. *(Prayer attributed to St. Francis)*

Session Six: **Truth is Morally Central to Our Personal and Public Lives**

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Sticky Notes
 - Believe and Reject Sticky Notes from previous sessions
-

Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Remind them of our Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Leader:

Lord, you tell us that you are the way, the truth and the life. Guide us in heart, soul, strength and mind to follow the way, the truth, and the life you have set before each of us. Amen.

I Am the Way (15 Minutes)

Invite the first reader to read the following.

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.' ⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Reflection:

- What stood out for you in this reading?
- For you, what does it mean that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life?
- How do you seek and tell the truth in our world today?

Truth is Morally Central to Our Personal and Public Lives (30 Minutes)

Invite the second reader to read the following. As the person is reading, invite the participants to mark what stands out for them or what they have questions about.

WE BELIEVE that truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Truth-telling is central to the prophetic biblical tradition, whose vocation includes speaking the Word of God into their societies and speaking the truth to power. A commitment to speaking truth, the ninth commandment of the Decalogue, "You shall not bear false witness" (Exodus 20:16), is foundational to shared trust in society. Falsehood can enslave us, but Jesus promises, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32). The search and respect for truth is crucial to anyone who follows Christ.

Invite the third reader to read the following.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the practice and pattern of lying that is invading our political and civil life. Politicians, like the rest of us, are human, fallible, sinful, and mortal. But when public lying becomes so persistent that it deliberately tries to change facts for ideological, political, or personal gain, the public accountability to truth is undermined. The regular purveying of falsehoods and consistent lying by the nation's highest leaders can change the moral expectations within a culture, the accountability for a civil society, and even the behavior of families and children. The normalization of lying presents a profound moral danger to the fabric of society. In the face of lies that bring darkness, Jesus is our truth and our light.

Invite each table group to talk about what they marked or had questions about in both sections.

After they have shared with one another, invite them to use their Sticky Notes to write down beliefs that ring true for them. Once they have a few written down, invite them to share what they wrote with their table group and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes. Then invite them to write down and share with their table group what they reject and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes.

Once each group has completed this, have them clump them together where there are similarities. Note where there are differences and then pray as a group.

Further Conversation (10 Minutes)

Invite the community present to discuss how they can work to tell the truth? To call out lies that are becoming more prevalent and lead others to truth? How do we live into our beliefs?

Closing Prayer (1 Minute)

Leader:

Gracious and holy God,
Give us wisdom to perceive you
Diligence to seek you,
Patience to wait for you,
Eyes to behold you, and life to proclaim you;
Through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

- St Benedict

Session Seven: Christ's Way of Leadership is Servanthood

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Sticky Notes
 - Believe and Reject Sticky Notes from previous sessions
-

Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Remind them of our Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Leader:

Jesus, you taught us to be servants to one another, just as you served those around you. Give us the humility to serve as you served and remind us that power does not come from authority, but from a place of service and love toward You and one another. Amen.

Not to be Served but to Serve (15 Minutes)

Invite reader one to read the following.

Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. ²¹And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.' ²²But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to him, 'We are able.' ²³He said to them, 'You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.'

²⁴ When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ²⁶It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

Reflection:

- What stood out for you in this reading?
- What does it mean to serve?
- What does it mean to be a servant?
- How do we give our lives to service?

Christ's Way of Leadership is Servanthood (30 Minutes)

Invite the second reader to read the following. As the person is reading, invite the participants to mark what stands out for them or what they have questions about.

WE BELIEVE that Christ's way of leadership is servanthood, not domination. Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles (the world) lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:25-26). We believe our elected officials are called to public service, not public tyranny, so we must protect the limits,

checks, and balances of democracy and encourage humility and civility on the part of elected officials. We support democracy, not because we believe in human perfection, but because we do not. The authority of government is instituted by God to order an unredeemed society for the sake of justice and peace, but ultimate authority belongs only to God.

Invite reader three to read the following.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT any moves toward autocratic political leadership and authoritarian rule. We believe authoritarian political leadership is a theological danger that threatens democracy and the common good—and we will resist it. Disrespect for the rule of law, not recognizing the equal importance of our three branches of government, and replacing civility with dehumanizing hostility toward opponents are of great concern to us. Neglecting the ethic of public service and accountability, in favor of personal recognition and gain often characterized by offensive arrogance, are not just political issues for us. They raise deeper concerns about political idolatry, accompanied by false and unconstitutional notions of authority.

Invite each table group to talk about what they marked or had questions about in both sections.

After they have shared with one another, invite them to use their Sticky Notes to write down beliefs that ring true for them. Once they have a few written down, invite them to share what they wrote with their table group and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes. Then invite them to write down and share with their table group what they reject and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes.

Once each group has completed this, have them clump them together where there are similarities. Note where there are differences and then pray as a group.

Further Conversation (10 Minutes)

Invite the community present to discuss how they can work to be servants. What does servant leadership look like? How do we encourage others to this kind of life and leadership? How do we live into our beliefs?

Closing Prayer (1 Minute)

Leader:

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve;
To give, and not to count the cost;
To fight, and not to heed the wounds;
To toil, and not to seek for rest;
To labor, and not to ask for reward,
Save that of knowing that we do thy will;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

- St. Ignatius of Loyola

Session Eight: Go into All Nations Making Disciples

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Sticky Notes
 - Believe and Reject Sticky Notes from previous sessions
-

Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Remind them of our Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Leader:

Lord Jesus Christ, you have called us to go into the world to make disciples of all nations, to spread your Word throughout all the world, and to serve one another in humbleness and love. Grant us the grace to serve you throughout the world, to seek global connections wherever we go, and to respect all of God's children and creation. Amen.

Go Therefore (15 Minutes)

Invite the first reader to read the following.

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Reflection:

- What stands out for you in this reading?
- What do you think it means to go and make disciples?
- What does that look like today?
- What does that look like in your life?
- Is discipleship exclusive or inclusive for you?

Go into All Nations Making Disciples (30 Minutes)

Invite the second reader to read the following. As the person is reading, invite the participants to mark what stands out for them or what they have questions about.

WE BELIEVE Jesus when he tells us to go into all nations making disciples (Matthew 28:18). Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. The most well-known verse in the New Testament starts with "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16). We, in turn, should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants, rather than seek first narrow, nationalistic prerogatives.

Invite the third reader to read the following.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT “America first” as a theological heresy for followers of Christ. While we share a patriotic love for our country, we reject xenophobic or ethnic nationalism that places one nation over others as a political goal. We reject domination rather than stewardship of the earth’s resources, toward genuine global development that brings human flourishing for all of God’s children. Serving our own communities is essential, but the global connections between us are undeniable. Global poverty, environmental damage, violent conflict, weapons of mass destruction, and deadly diseases in some places ultimately affect all places, and we need wise political leadership to deal with each of these.

Invite each table group to talk about what they marked or had questions about in both sections.

After they have shared with one another, invite them to use their Sticky Notes to write down beliefs that ring true for them. Once they have a few written down, invite them to share what they wrote with their table group and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes. Then invite them to write down and share with their table group what they reject and then put them on the Believe wall with the other Sticky Notes.

Once each group has completed this, have them clump them together where there are similarities. Note where there are differences and then pray as a group.

Further Conversation (10 Minutes)

Invite the community present to discuss how they can work to create and nurture a spirit of connectedness. How can they create a feeling of mutual support and kindness toward each other? How do we live into our beliefs?

Closing Prayer (1 Minute)

Leader:

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Book of Common Prayer, page 815*)

Session Nine:

Change the World Through the Life and Love of Jesus Christ

Materials needed:

- Copies of the handout for each person
 - Pens, pencils, colored pencils, markers, etc.
 - Easel and paper at the front of the room
 - Bell or chime to use to mark time for people
 - Sticky Notes
 - Believe and Reject Sticky Notes from previous sessions
-

Gathering (1 Minute)

Invite people to sit in a circle in groups of 5-8.

Remind them of our Civil Discourse Guidelines.

Leader:

Grant us, O merciful God,
the will to see you, whom we desire above all,
that we may find you and be found in you;
may your love and wisdom
guide words spoken in your name;
may we find faith and hope
in the still small voice
which tells us of your presence;
may we be one with you
in Jesus our Redeemer. Amen.

- From Celebrating Daily Prayer

Rejoice in Hope, Be Patient in Suffering, Persevere in Prayer (15 Minutes)

Invite reader one to read the following.

Romans 12:1-13

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Reflection:

- What stands out for you in this reading?
- What does it look like to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by God?
- Where is God calling you to use your gifts?

Change the World Through the Life and Love of Jesus Christ (30 Minutes)

Invite readers two and three to read the following alternating paragraphs. As they are reading, invite the participants to mark what stands out for them or what they have questions about.

WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED for the soul of our nation, but also for our churches and the integrity of our faith. The present crisis calls us to go deeper—deeper into our relationship to God; deeper into our relationships with each other, especially across racial, ethnic, and national lines; deeper into our relationships with the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk.

The church is always subject to temptations to power, to cultural conformity, and to racial, class, and gender divides, as Galatians 3:28 teaches us. But our answer is to be “in Christ,” and to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable, and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)

The best response to our political, material, cultural, racial, or national idolatries is the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Jesus summarizes the Greatest Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:38). As to loving our neighbors, we would add “no exceptions.”

We commend this letter to pastors, local churches, and young people who are watching and waiting to see what the churches will say and do at such a time as this.

Our urgent need, in a time of moral and political crisis, is to recover the power of confessing our faith. Lament, repent, and then repair. If Jesus is Lord, there is always space for grace. We believe it is time to speak and to act in faith and conscience, not because of politics, but because we are disciples of Jesus Christ—to whom be all authority, honor, and glory. It is time for a fresh confession of faith. Jesus is Lord. He is the light in our darkness. “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Invite each table group to talk about what they marked or had questions about in both sections.

After they have shared with one another, invite them to go look at the Believe and Reject walls in silence. Ask them to note which beliefs and rejections they feel strongly about after they have heard the closing statement of the confession.

At their table groups, have them talk about what they noticed and saw on the Believe and Reject walls. After some discussion, invite them to use their Sticky Notes to write down a belief they are holding to and how they think they can live into that more fully. They can write as many of these belief statements as they feel they want to.

Then invite them to also write what they reject and how they can make that rejection a more full part of their life.

Have them put these on two new parts of the wall.

Once each group has completed this, have them clump them together where there are similarities. Note where there are differences and then pray as a group.

Further Conversation (10 Minutes)

Invite the community present to discuss the statements of belief and rejection in front of them. How do we live into these and how can you support each other? What gifts might be present in the community to help some people do these things together?

Closing Prayer (1 Minute)

Invite everyone to pray together:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

(Prayer attributed to St. Francis)

Session One Handout:

Civil Discourse and Followers of Jesus

Opening Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we come together to meditate and examine your word. Give us ears to hear, hearts to receive, and minds to consider how we might be your hands and feet in the world. Show us your way, O God, that we might know you better. Amen.

Civil Discourse as a Way of Listening and Learning

- **Respect** – Respect each person you meet and take the time to truly consider what they are saying. Respond, don't react. No blaming, shaming or attacking another person.
- **Listen Deeply** – Listen to what each person is saying, focus on the ideas presented, and discuss ideas and issues – not people. No side conversations as they distract from engagement and listening. Do not interrupt while others are speaking.
- **Speak for Yourself** – Use “I” statements when commenting or responding. Share your personal experience.
- **Try to Understand** – Try to understand the thoughts and ideas of others. Ask questions for clarification.
- **Share Talk Time** – Make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak before speaking again. Take notes if there are things you want to follow up on. Ask what others think.
- **Speak respectfully** – When you choose to speak, respect your fellow learners and do not try to be the one that knows everything about the topic at hand.
- **Gratitude** – If someone has shared something or asked a question that helps with your own learning, say thank you.
- **Suspend Judgment** – We all have presumptions, biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and other pre-judgments. Try to suspend these and seek to understand.
- **Disagree, Don't Debate** – We are here to learn and listen. You can disagree with someone and still love them and listen to them. This isn't about who is right, but about listening and learning together.
- **Practice Forgiveness** – We learn from trying things out and sometimes we make mistakes. Seek to forgive and to be forgiven as we learn together.
- **Pay Attention to your Feelings and Thoughts** – If you do not feel safe asking a question or commenting on a topic, write it down and ask someone to help you give voice to it or talk it through. If something hurts your feelings, acknowledge that the comment (not the person) hurt and explain why.

Scripture Reflection

John 13:33-35

³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’

Reflection Questions:

- What word or phrases stood out for you?
- If we already had the 10 Commandments and all the other rules in the Bible, I wonder why Jesus felt they had to give them this new commandment.
- When do we find this commandment easy?
- When do we find this commandment difficult?

Followers of Jesus (20 minutes)

We are living through perilous and polarizing times as a nation, with a dangerous crisis of moral and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and in our churches. We believe the soul of the nation and the integrity of faith are now at stake.

It is time to be followers of Jesus before anything else—nationality, political party, race, ethnicity, gender, geography—our identity in Christ precedes every other identity. We pray that our nation will see Jesus' words in us. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

When politics undermines our theology, we must examine that politics. The church's role is to change the world through the life and love of Jesus Christ. The government's role is to serve the common good by protecting justice and peace, rewarding good behavior while restraining bad behavior (Romans 13). When that role is undermined by political leadership, faith leaders must stand up and speak out. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state."

It is often the duty of Christian leaders, especially elders, to speak the truth in love to our churches and to name and warn against temptations, racial and cultural captivities, false doctrines, and political idolatries—and even our complicity in them. We do so here with humility, prayer, and a deep dependency on the grace and Holy Spirit of God.

This letter comes from a retreat on Ash Wednesday, 2018. During Lent, we feel deep lamentations for the state of our nation, and our own hearts are filled with confession for the sins we feel called to address. The true meaning of the word repentance is to turn around. It is time to lament, confess, repent, and turn. In times of crisis, the church has historically learned to return to Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

- What stood out for you in listening to this statement?
- For you, I wonder what it means to be a Christian first and everything else second?
- For you, what does it mean that Jesus is Lord? What does that look like in your life?
- How would our fellow citizens know we are Christians by our love?
- What does it mean to commit ourselves as Christians today?

Closing Prayer

Let us pray:

Loving God, we thank you for this time together to ponder the commandments you have given us and how we might live that out in our world today. Help us to commit ourselves as your followers and as your disciples each day. Guide us on our journey from this place that we might know and see your love in those around us, and that we might spread that love to all we encounter. In your name we pray. Amen.

Session Two Handout:

Jesus is Lord: A Confession of Faith in a Time of Crisis

Opening Prayer

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

(Prayer attributed to St. Francis)

Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done

Matthew 6:9-15

⁹ Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹

¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Reflection:

- What stood out for you as you heard the reading from the Gospel of Matthew?
- What does this scripture call you to believe about Jesus?
- When we say, “Your kingdom come, your will be done,” what does that mean for you?

Jesus is Lord

Jesus is Lord. That is our foundational confession. It was central for the early church and needs to again become central to us. If Jesus is Lord, then Caesar was not—nor any other political ruler since. If Jesus is Lord, no other authority is absolute. Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of God he announced, is the Christian’s first loyalty, above all others. We pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Our faith is personal but never private, meant not only for heaven but for this earth.

The question we face is this: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? What does our loyalty to Christ, as disciples, require at this moment in our history? We believe it is time to renew our theology of public discipleship and witness. Applying what “Jesus is Lord” means today is the message we commend as elders to our churches.

What we believe leads us to what we must reject. Our “Yes” is the foundation for our “No.” What we confess as our faith leads to what we confront. Therefore, we offer the following six affirmations of what we believe, and the resulting rejections of practices and policies by political leaders which dangerously corrode the soul of the nation and deeply threaten the public integrity of our faith. We pray that we, as followers of Jesus, will find the depth of faith to match the danger of our political crisis.

Reflection:

- Who is Jesus Christ for us today?
- What does our loyalty to him require?
- What does it mean to be disciples who regard Jesus as Lord at this moment in our history?

Closing Prayer

Read in unison

Matthew 6:9-15

9 Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

10 Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹

15 but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Amen.

Session Three Handout: Made in God's Image and Likeness

Opening Prayer

God of Creation, God of Light and Love, you created us in your image and blessed us all to be a part of this magnificent world. Help us to live more fully into your image that we may care for the world around us, love all the people and diversity you have created, and work toward a world where all are loved, all are equal, and all are free. Amen.

God Blessed Them

Genesis 1: 26-28

²⁶ Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them.

Reflection:

- What does it mean to you to be created in the image of God?
- How does it make you feel that the person who is vastly different from you is also created in the image of God?
- Since all of us on this earth are created in the image of God, how do we reconcile our differences?

Made in God's Image

WE BELIEVE each human being is made in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). That image and likeness confers a divinely decreed dignity, worth, and God-given equality to all of us as children of the one God who is the Creator of all things. Racial bigotry is a brutal denial of the image of God (the imago dei) in some of the children of God. Our participation in the global community of Christ absolutely prevents any toleration of racial bigotry. Racial justice and healing are biblical and theological issues for us, and are central to the mission of the body of Christ in the world. We give thanks for the prophetic role of the historic black churches in America when they have called for a more faithful gospel.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the resurgence of white nationalism and racism in our nation on many fronts, including the highest levels of political leadership. We, as followers of Jesus, must clearly reject the use of racial bigotry for political gain that we have seen. In the face of such bigotry, silence is complicity. In particular, we reject white supremacy and commit ourselves to help dismantle the systems and structures that perpetuate white preference and advantage. Further, any doctrines or political strategies that use racist resentments, fears, or language must be named as public sin—one that goes back to the foundation of our nation and lingers on. Racial bigotry must be antithetical for those belonging to the body of Christ, because it denies the truth of the gospel we profess.

Closing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray.

Leader: God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.

Participants: **And it was good.**

Leader: God created humankind, in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Participants: **And it was good.**

Leader: God blessed them.

Participants: **And it was good.**

Leader: God blesses each individual up on this earth.

Participants: **And it IS good.**

Leader: God calls us to turn toward God and become the body of Christ together.

Participants: **And it IS good.**

Leader: In the name of Christ, let us go into the world in God's image loving one another, making amends, working toward reconciliation, and creating with God the world God wants us to live in together.

Participants: **And it IS good. Amen.**

Session Four Handout: We are One Body

Opening Prayer

Gracious and life-giving God, we gather together as your people, heirs to your promise. Help us to hear and hold one another in love as we talk about those things that have separated us from one another and you. Guide us as we remember that your vision for us is to be one body, one in Christ, one with each other. Amen.

One in Christ

Galatians 3:27-29

²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

Reflection:

- What does it mean to you to be one in Christ?
- What does it look like to live as if we are one in Christ?
- We are reminded in Paul's letter to the Galatians that we are no longer divided, but one in Christ. Where do we still see, hear, or participate in the separation of male and female?

We Are One Body

WE BELIEVE we are one body. In Christ, there is to be no oppression based on race, gender, identity, or class (Galatians 3:28). The body of Christ, where those great human divisions are to be overcome, is meant to be an example for the rest of society. When we fail to overcome these oppressive obstacles, and even perpetuate them, we have failed in our vocation to the world—to proclaim and live the reconciling gospel of Christ.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT misogyny, the mistreatment, violent abuse, sexual harassment, and assault of women that has been further revealed in our culture and politics, including our churches, and the oppression of any other child of God. We lament when such practices seem publicly ignored, and thus privately condoned, by those in high positions of leadership. We stand for the respect, protection, and affirmation of women in our families, communities, workplaces, politics, and churches. We support the courageous truth-telling voices of women, who have helped the nation recognize these abuses. We confess sexism as a sin, requiring our repentance and resistance.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we come together, reminded that we are no longer separate, but that we have been baptized into one body with you and with each other. Bless us as we leave this place, that we may engage in the work and ministry of being one, of being equal, of being whole. We are all made in your image as amazing, unique individuals, belonging to you and to each other, working toward oneness and wholeness. Amen.

Session Five Handout: To Protect and Seek Justice

Opening Prayer

Jesus, you teach us to love and care for one another. Sometimes this is easy, and at other times we struggle with that that means and what that looks like today. Give us strength and humility as we continue to learn to love and care for everyone, especially our fellow children of God who are hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned. Amen.

Just as You Did it to the Least of These, You Did it to Me Matthew 25:31-40

³¹ ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’’

Reflection:

- What stands out for you in this reading?
- Who are the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned?
- Can you give examples of when/how we have fed the hungry, given drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, given clothing to those without, cared for the sick, or visited those in prison?
- How do we do these things in our local community? In our state? In our country?

To Protect and Seek Justice

WE BELIEVE how we treat the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner is how we treat Christ himself. (Matthew 25: 31-46) ‘‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’’ God calls us to protect and seek justice for those who are poor and vulnerable, and our treatment of people who are ‘‘oppressed,’’ ‘‘strangers,’’ ‘‘outsiders,’’ or otherwise considered ‘‘marginal’’ is a test of our relationship to God, who made us all equal in divine dignity and love. Our proclamation of the lordship of Jesus Christ is at stake in our solidarity with the most vulnerable. If our gospel is not ‘‘good news to the poor,’’ it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:18).

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the language and policies of political leaders who would debase and abandon the most vulnerable children of God. We strongly deplore the growing attacks on immigrants and refugees, who are being made into cultural and political targets, and we need to remind our churches that God makes the treatment of the ‘‘strangers’’ among us a test of faith (Leviticus 19:33-34). We won’t accept the neglect of the well-being of low-income families and children, and we will resist repeated attempts to deny health care to those who most need it. We confess our growing national sin of putting the rich over the poor. We reject the immoral logic of cutting services and programs for the poor while cutting taxes for the rich. Budgets are moral documents. We commit ourselves to opposing and reversing those policies and finding solutions that reflect the wisdom of people from different political parties and philosophies to seek the

common good. Protecting the poor is a central commitment of Christian discipleship, to which 2,000 verses in the Bible attest.

Closing Prayer

Read in unison

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

(Prayer attributed to St. Francis)

Session Six: **Truth is Morally Central to Our Personal and Public Lives**

Opening Prayer

Lord, you tell us that you are the way, the truth and the life. Guide us in heart, soul, strength and mind to follow the way, the truth, and the life you have set before each of us. Amen.

I Am the Way

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going. ⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Reflection:

- What stood out for you in this reading?
- For you, what does it mean that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life?
- How do you seek and tell the truth in our world today?

Truth is Morally Central to Our Personal and Public Lives

WE BELIEVE that truth is morally central to our personal and public lives. Truth-telling is central to the prophetic biblical tradition, whose vocation includes speaking the Word of God into their societies and speaking the truth to power. A commitment to speaking truth, the ninth commandment of the Decalogue, "You shall not bear false witness" (Exodus 20:16), is foundational to shared trust in society. Falsehood can enslave us, but Jesus promises, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32). The search and respect for truth is crucial to anyone who follows Christ.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT the practice and pattern of lying that is invading our political and civil life. Politicians, like the rest of us, are human, fallible, sinful, and mortal. But when public lying becomes so persistent that it deliberately tries to change facts for ideological, political, or personal gain, the public accountability to truth is undermined. The regular purveying of falsehoods and consistent lying by the nation's highest leaders can change the moral expectations within a culture, the accountability for a civil society, and even the behavior of families and children. The normalization of lying presents a profound moral danger to the fabric of society. In the face of lies that bring darkness, Jesus is our truth and our light.

Closing Prayer

Gracious and holy God,
Give us wisdom to perceive you
Diligence to seek you,
Patience to wait for you,
Eyes to behold you, and life to proclaim you;
Through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

- St Benedict

Session Seven Handout: Christ's Way of Leadership is Servanthood

Opening Prayer

Jesus, you taught us to be servants to one another, just as you served those around you. Give us the humility to serve as you served and remind us that power does not come from authority, but from a place of service and love toward You and one another. Amen.

Not to be Served but to Serve

Matthew 20:20-28

²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him. ²¹And he said to her, 'What do you want?' She said to him, 'Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.' ²²But Jesus answered, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?' They said to him, 'We are able.' ²³He said to them, 'You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.'

²⁴ When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. ²⁵But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.²⁶It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; ²⁸just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

Reflection:

- What stood out for you in this reading?
- What does it mean to serve?
- What does it mean to be a servant?
- How do we give our lives to service?

Christ's Way of Leadership is Servanthood

WE BELIEVE that Christ's way of leadership is servanthood, not domination. Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles (the world) lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:25-26). We believe our elected officials are called to public service, not public tyranny, so we must protect the limits, checks, and balances of democracy and encourage humility and civility on the part of elected officials. We support democracy, not because we believe in human perfection, but because we do not. The authority of government is instituted by God to order an unredeemed society for the sake of justice and peace, but ultimate authority belongs only to God.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT any moves toward autocratic political leadership and authoritarian rule. We believe authoritarian political leadership is a theological danger that threatens democracy and the common good—and we will resist it. Disrespect for the rule of law, not recognizing the equal importance of our three branches of government, and replacing civility with dehumanizing hostility toward opponents are of great concern to us. Neglecting the ethic of public service and accountability, in favor of personal recognition and gain often characterized by offensive arrogance, are not just political issues for us. They raise deeper concerns about political idolatry, accompanied by false and unconstitutional notions of authority.

Closing Prayer

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve;
To give, and not to count the cost;
To fight, and not to heed the wounds;

To toil, and not to seek for rest;
To labor, and not to ask for reward,
Save that of knowing that we do thy will;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen
- *St. Ignatius of Loyola*

Session Eight Handout: Go into All Nations Making Disciples

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have called us to go into the world to make disciples of all nations, to spread your Word throughout all the world, and to serve one another in humbleness and love. Grant us the grace to serve you throughout the world, to seek global connections wherever we go, and to respect all of God's children and creation. Amen.

Go Therefore

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

Reflection:

- What stands out for you in this reading?
- What do you think it means to go and make disciples?
- What does that look like today?
- What does that look like in your life?
- Is discipleship exclusive or inclusive for you?

Go into All Nations Making Disciples

WE BELIEVE Jesus when he tells us to go into all nations making disciples (Matthew 28:18). Our churches and our nations are part of an international community whose interests always surpass national boundaries. The most well-known verse in the New Testament starts with "For God so loved the world" (John 3:16). We, in turn, should love and serve the world and all its inhabitants, rather than seek first narrow, nationalistic prerogatives.

THEREFORE, WE REJECT "America first" as a theological heresy for followers of Christ. While we share a patriotic love for our country, we reject xenophobic or ethnic nationalism that places one nation over others as a political goal. We reject domination rather than stewardship of the earth's resources, toward genuine global development that brings human flourishing for all of God's children. Serving our own communities is essential, but the global connections between us are undeniable. Global poverty, environmental damage, violent conflict, weapons of mass destruction, and deadly diseases in some places ultimately affect all places, and we need wise political leadership to deal with each of these.

Closing Prayer

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Book of Common Prayer, page 815*)

Session Nine Handout: Change the World Through the Life and Love of Jesus Christ

Opening Prayer

Grant us, O merciful God,
the will to see you, whom we desire above all,
that we may find you and be found in you;
may your love and wisdom
guide words spoken in your name;
may we find faith and hope
in the still small voice
which tells us of your presence;
may we be one with you
in Jesus our Redeemer. Amen.

- From Celebrating Daily Prayer

Rejoice in Hope, Be Patient in Suffering, Persevere in Prayer

Romans 12:1-13

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. ⁶We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ⁷ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; ⁸the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Reflection:

- What stands out for you in this reading?
- What does it look like to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by God?
- Where is God calling you to use your gifts?

Change the World Through the Life and Love of Jesus Christ

WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED for the soul of our nation, but also for our churches and the integrity of our faith. The present crisis calls us to go deeper—deeper into our relationship to God; deeper into our relationships with each other, especially across racial, ethnic, and national lines; deeper into our relationships with the most vulnerable, who are at greatest risk.

The church is always subject to temptations to power, to cultural conformity, and to racial, class, and gender divides, as Galatians 3:28 teaches us. But our answer is to be “in Christ,” and to “not be conformed to this

world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable, and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2)

The best response to our political, material, cultural, racial, or national idolatries is the First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Jesus summarizes the Greatest Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind. This is the first commandment. And the second is like unto it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:38). As to loving our neighbors, we would add “no exceptions.”

We commend this letter to pastors, local churches, and young people who are watching and waiting to see what the churches will say and do at such a time as this.

Our urgent need, in a time of moral and political crisis, is to recover the power of confessing our faith. Lament, repent, and then repair. If Jesus is Lord, there is always space for grace. We believe it is time to speak and to act in faith and conscience, not because of politics, but because we are disciples of Jesus Christ—to whom be all authority, honor, and glory. It is time for a fresh confession of faith. Jesus is Lord. He is the light in our darkness. “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Closing Prayer

Read in Unison

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

(Prayer attributed to St. Francis)