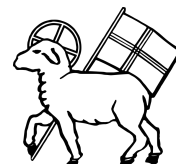




# LIVING FAITH

MORAVIAN SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

*for Spiritual Growth, Intentional Care, & Faith Outreach*



@MoravianBCM  
MoravianBCM.org

The Living Faith initiative provides a model of intentional congregational care, spiritual growth, and faithful service that draws on our past heritage while pointing us to a future built on faith, love, and hope.

## Acknowledgements:

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## ***Living Faith–Together While Apart*** **Virtual Gatherings**

*As for us, brothers and sisters, when for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you—in person, not in heart—we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. For we wanted to come to you—certainly, I, Paul wanted to again and again.*

*1 Thessalonians 2:17*

Distance was a major challenge for Paul and those who worked with him in their ministry. Their work required connecting with people on a personal level. Distance was a barrier to their efforts. They worked tirelessly to find ways to overcome this hindrance. They traveled. Paul, a central figure in this work, recruited others to travel on his behalf. They wrote letters to bridge the distance, pouring their hearts into words on a page. 1 Thessalonians is but one example of how Paul and his co-workers sought to convey by written word their earnest affection for others in the Church. Finally, they offered fervent prayers for those in other places. They demonstrated that it is possible to bridge the miles which separated believers who lived in wide-spread cities and towns.

*Living Faith* was first conceived in 2016 as a different approach to the life of a congregation. It's focus is primarily on spiritual growth and development as a critical component of church life. It's premise is that this growth happens principally in the context of 4 to 5 persons gathering frequently to share with each other their spiritual journeys. Neither public worship nor private devotions—both of which are also critical—is sufficient without these small groups of individuals dedicated to walking alongside one another.

There are times when various factors make these small group gatherings difficult or impossible. Conflicting schedules and distances apart are common challenges to such efforts to gather. In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic required numerous “stay at home” orders throughout the world. Many state and local governments within the United States imposed such orders. Church groups—boards, service groups, Sunday School classes—and even congregational worship services were cancelled for weeks.

This dramatic shift in cultural norms throughout the world has caused a re-examination of how we interact with each other. For the Church, it has become necessary to re-think how we maintain fellowship and function as living communities. Many in the Church, as well as in the larger society, feel that things likely will not return to the “pre-COVID” status quo once the current crisis is behind us.

This version of the *Living Faith* manual is intended to explore ways of staying together while physically apart. It is designed to adapt this model for use on a remote, video platform on the Internet. We will explore some of the technical issues as well as how the interpersonal dynamics are affected by this type of medium.

### **Can online gatherings enable genuine connections?**

The short answer seems to be ‘yes,’ but the experience is different from physical gatherings. This is based on the experiences of those who have nurtured similar relationships since the development of the Internet. Initially, these experiences were similar to a steady stream of group emails. Sometimes they were called newsgroups. Later, graphics were added. Social media were invented which were constantly expanded to include public posts, private messages, photos, videos, and new iterations of each of these forms of expression.

Online video meetings have been around for several years. This format has benefitted from the constant improvement of Internet speed. This is now the most effective and popular way for groups to gather remotely. Businesses use it regularly, but it also is an effective way for small, spiritual growth groups to gather when physical meetings are not feasible.

### **Which type of gathering is better?**

A physical gathering is always preferable when possible. It allows for richer connections among members of a group. It enables non-verbal communication to be noticed. There are no technical issues to interrupt or distract from conversations. Informal fellowship flows more naturally. There are no temptations to disengage from the group “for only a minute.”

However, there are advantages to remote meetings, too. Chief among these may be the relative ease of scheduling gatherings and fitting them into one’s schedule.

There are a few complications to remote meetings, however. Distractions are one of these. The physical location one uses as a meeting place must be free of distractions—phone calls, pets, family members, chores, emails, etc. One must be wholly focused on the visual and audio connection with the group.

A related issue is confidentiality. Others at one’s physical location must be unable to hear either side of a conversation. If one lives with family members, that probably means that a room must be designated and the door shut during a gathering with the understanding that one’s privacy must be invaded only in very urgent situations. A good rule of thumb may be that the rest of the family must be able to manage without the group participant just as if that person were not home.

### **Ideas to Make an Online Gathering Go Smoothly**

- 1. Log in from a noise-free location:** Everyone participating in the video conference can hear every noise that you make. You must close the door if there are others in the residence.
- 2. Call in on time:** Ensure that as a participant of the meeting, you are on time. You may want to join the meeting a few minutes prior to the official start time: This allows for troubleshooting before the conference begins as well as a few minutes for fellowship. The host should be available 5 to 10 minutes prior to the scheduled conference.
- 3. Remove background distractions:** What do others see behind you? Sunlight through a window? A TV that’s on? Telephones that might ring? Anything that draws attention away from you or from your online conversation? How can you remove, adjust, or conceal these?
- 4. Camera and Video Issues:** Look into the camera when talking. Direct eye contact with the camera while speaking gives attendees the impression that you are looking at them. Others feel that you are engaged with them. If you use a portable device, don’t try to hold it. Prop it on a table so that your image doesn’t shake constantly.
- 5. Be aware of your audio settings:** One important feature in a video conference is the mute function. When one is listening to others speak, it is helpful to have one’s microphone muted. Background noise—including page turning, a creaking chair, a cough, or stirring a drink—are surprisingly noisy to an open microphone. Depending on settings, these sounds can mute another person who is speaking or even cause ‘speaker views’ to switch back and forth. The exception to this practice of muting oneself is when there is a time for informal fellowship such as initial greetings, during a break, or a discussion time.
- 6. Be a good host:** As a host you must be on time. You should greet each of the participants and periodically check in with all participants to see if they have comments, suggestions, or questions.

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# Introduction

**They who Jesus' followers are and enjoy His faithful care,  
by a mutual, hearty love their belief in Jesus prove.**

Stanza 1 John Gambold (1742)

*Moravian Book of Worship*, 672

***“Jesus Christ came not to be served but to serve. From this, His Church receives its mission and its power for its service, to which each of its members is called . . . we seek to follow Him in serving His brothers and sisters. Like the love of Jesus, this service knows no bounds. Therefore we pray the Lord ever anew to point to us the way to reach our neighbors, opening our hearts and hands to them in their need.”***

*The Ground of the Unity*, Sections 8 & 9.<sup>1</sup>

For Moravians, Christianity is grounded in the living experience of faith in Christ, active love for others, and joyful hope. We believe that this living relationship with Christ is born and nurtured in local faith communities, in relationship with and in service to one another and the world. The *Living Faith* initiative provides a model for intentional congregational caring, spiritual growth, and faithful service that draws on our past heritage while pointing us to a future built on faith, love, and hope.

*Living Faith* is a covenant relationship within a small group of believers and a tool for achieving spiritual maturity. We hope this experience guides group members toward a deeper, living faith in Christ.

## **The Earliest Roots of Moravian Faith Community**

The wisdom of the earliest Moravians and their emphasis on the essentials of Christian teaching provide guidance for us. The Moravian Church was founded in 1457 by the followers of John Hus, a Catholic priest who was martyred in 1415 for his criticisms of the Roman Catholic Church. At that time it was illegal to separate from the Catholic Church, so the original followers of Hus did not take this break from the established church lightly. They were striving to return to the basics of

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<sup>1</sup> *The Ground of the Unity, a Doctrinal Statement by the Unity Synod of the Unitas Fratrum* (Bethlehem, PA: Interprovincial Board of Communications, 2014).

following the way of Christ from the New Testament, believing that many in the church had lost the true spirit of Christianity.

According to the Ancient Unity (the Moravian Church from 1457 to 1727), the New Testament tells us clearly what is essential: faith, love, and hope. Everything the church does should be for the purpose of building people up in faith, in love, and in hope.

By the mid-1500s, the early Moravians had further refined this belief as two essential teachings: First, the essential works of God (Grace) are creation, redemption (salvation), and sanctification (or blessing). Second, the ways we respond to God's work are faith, love, and hope. God's work comes before our response, but the work of God and our response are both essential.

After 2 ½ centuries of faithfulness to their faith and convictions that included periodic times of severe persecution, the Moravian Church had been almost crushed into extinction. Only a remnant remained that worshiped in secret. In the 1720's many of these began to find refuge across the border in eastern Germany on the estate of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. These immigrants came from different backgrounds, regions, and theological perspectives. Their differences caused sharp conflicts in the fledgling community of Herrnhut built on Zinzendorf's property. This culminated in a time of reconciliation and spiritual renewal in the summer of 1727 with a moving time of spiritual renewal and interpersonal reconciliation on August 13.

A deeper exploration into the conflict that preceded the August 13<sup>th</sup> renewal reveals that the religious groups in Herrnhut came from very divergent points of view and had little ability or desire to understand or to appreciate the ideas of those who disagreed with them. Count Zinzendorf used specific methods to transform these diverse spiritual pilgrims at Herrnhut. He stressed obedience, persuading them to sign a number of statutes, including the Brotherly Agreement (July 4, 1727) which we now call "the Covenant for Christian Living." He taught love (which reveals itself in the August 13<sup>th</sup> Communion) and deepened spiritual experience through prayer bands, classes, hourly intercessions, singing meetings, and the daily watchword. Finally, expeditions went

out into other communities in Europe and the world to share the Good News.<sup>11</sup>

Count Zinzendorf's methods helped resolve the community's deep divide, enabled residents to heal their relationships, and resulted in profound spiritual growth allowing them to thrive in service to the Savior.

While the Moravians of the Renewed Church in the eighteenth century talked about these essentials differently, their life together demonstrated the presence of God's grace and their response. After the spiritual renewal of August 13, 1727, they emphasized their deep commitment to an individual, intimate relationship with Christ and their belief that this relationship is expressed in community. This profound experience of Christian community developed into a passion for living each day for Christ, and led our brothers and sisters to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those most marginalized throughout the world.

## **The 18<sup>th</sup> Century Prayer Bands as a Model for Today**

Much of the work done to invigorate and inspire the community of Herrnhut relied on strong spiritual care and leadership, both of which continue to shape congregational life today. The practice of the prayer bands provides a particularly relevant example. In the Summer 2012 issue of the *Hinge* (a Moravian forum for theological discussion), former assistant archivist for the Moravian Church Northern Province, Lanie (nee Graf) Yaswinski, describes the 18<sup>th</sup> century Moravian prayer bands and how that tradition might be used to invigorate congregations today.

Yaswinski writes, "Through a highly developed system of pastoral care provided through the prayer bands and choir system, Moravians of old were kept on their spiritual 'tippy toes' through constant spiritual self-examination, which ensured individual spiritual growth as well as congregational health and vitality."<sup>22</sup> The choir system (groupings of

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<sup>11</sup>J. E. Hutton, *A History of Moravian Missions*. (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1923), 11.

<sup>22</sup>Lanie Graf, "Learning from Our Past: Ideas for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Choir System," *The Hinge* 18:3 (2012): 3.



Moravians based on their current life status, i.e. age, gender, marital status, etc.) and prayer bands (smaller groups within each choir of about 5 to 10 persons) enabled this focus. Congregational elders provided leadership and direction. “. . . elders played a very different role in church life [than they do today]. They served not as a general advisory board, but instead as a group of lay spiritual mentors known as the choir helpers, each responsible for the pastoral care of everyone in his or her choir.”<sup>33</sup>

The activities conducted within these smaller bands were of a personal, spiritual nature: “prayer, singing, scripture reading, and heartfelt conversation, in an atmosphere that was above all honest, humble and without pretense.” The prayer band leader, working under the direction of the choir helper, worked to ensure that this care of the soul was the focus of the band’s meetings. Yaswinski quotes Peter Zimmerling:

The band leader’s task should be to pay attention to the state of souls, to visit them even outside the bands, to inquire after every soul in a special way to make everything brief; not to divulge things but to carry them on their heart, to teach in a very private fashion; to be a blessing and example at public worship and general prayer time.<sup>44</sup>

In his biography of Zinzendorf, Spangenberg quotes the Count as to the impact of this structure on the Moravian Church: “[bands] were established throughout the whole community . . . and have been productive of such blessed effects, that I believe, without such an institution, the church would never have become what it is.”<sup>55</sup>

Arthur Freeman points out the crucial role that bands played in the formative years of the Renewed Moravian Church:

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<sup>33</sup>Graf, 5.

<sup>44</sup>Peter Zimmerling, “Pastoral Care in the Community: Zinzendorf and Pastoral Care,” *Transatlantic Moravian Dialogue-Correspondence (TMDK)* 11 (1997): 58-59.

<sup>55</sup>August Gottlieb Spangenberg; Samuel Jackson, trans., *The Life of Nicholas Lewis Count Zinzendorf, Bishop and Ordinary of the Church of the United (or Moravian) Brethren* (London: Samuel Holdsworth, Amen-Corner, 1838), 86.

Another very significant development was that the Moravian leadership encouraged people in Herrnhut to come together in small groups or 'Bands' to study and apply the Bible and to pray. Zinzendorf insisted that such community life was 'apostolic' – patterned after the early church as set out in the New Testament. By 1734, as Herrnhut continued to grow, the number of 'Bands' within the community had grown to 100. It was out of the small groups that people were called to missionary service. Thus Christian David, a carpenter who was one of the refugees from Moravia and who became a leader at Herrnhut, spoke of the 'Bands' as contributing to making a community that was *proper Evangelio*, 'appropriate to the gospel.'<sup>66</sup>

What is remarkable is how ingrained this concept of communal faith is in Moravian tradition and yet how foreign it is to the practice of church life today. With the unveiling of *Living Faith*, we urge congregations to re-visit this important part of our Moravian heritage and consider how we might introduce this practice into our 21<sup>st</sup> century church life.

## **Living the Essentials and *Living Faith***

The wisdom of the Scriptures and the faithful example of the Ancient Unity and the Renewed Church provide a way to understand our Christian experience today. God creates; God redeems; God blesses. And we respond in faith, in love, and in hope. Everything in the church should be grounded in these essentials, as we grow together spiritually, following Jesus in serving the world.

The *Living Faith* idea began as a discussion among members of the Aging Well Team, a sub-group of the Senior Friends Advisory Council of the Southern Province, who wanted to help congregations provide meaningful programming and resources for their members as they age and deal with a variety of challenges. They believed that small groups of Moravians who would come alongside others to assist them in times of need could provide effective, intentional congregational care. The best

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<sup>66</sup>Arthur Freeman, "Gemeine: Count Nicholas Von Zinzendorf's Understanding of the Church," *Brethren Life and Thought* 47, Nos. 1 and 2 (2002): 15-16.

preparation for this type of serving requires more than just training in practical or even in interpersonal skills. It also involves the development of spiritual community in which the members of that community nurture the faith of each other to such an extent that their fellowship equips them with faith to love each other and the world. Very early in these discussions it was realized that these principles of caring and mutual caring are relevant for Christians of all ages.

The model described here is based on practices found in the Scriptures and on the example of our spiritual ancestors which provide a way of living as Moravian Christians in the world today -- building each other up in faith, love, and hope. Much of this occurs through our worship, our educational efforts, our stewardship, our fellowship, our leadership, our outreach, and other critical aspects of congregational life.

We pray that the *Living Faith* initiative provides a model for intentional congregational caring, spiritual growth, and faithful service that draws on our past heritage while pointing us to a future built on faith, love, and hope.

**Grant, Lord, that with thy direction "Love each other" we comply.**

**Aiming with unfeigned affection, thy love to exemplify.**

**Let our mutual love be glowing; thus the world will plainly see  
that we, as on one stem growing, living branches are in thee.**

Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1723)

*Moravian Book of Worship, 673: 3*

## Foundations

**Let us each for others care, each another's burden bear,  
to your Church a pattern give, showing how believers live.**

Stanza 3 Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

*Moravian Book of Worship, 672*

## Congregational Life: We Need Each Other to Grow

An individual relationship with Christ, vibrant community, and meaningful mission characterize the life, witness, and ministry of the Renewed Moravian Church to this day. And while spiritual growth

occurs when we pray, study, and reflect as individuals, *Living Faith* emphasizes the spiritual fellowship or community that leads to greater spiritual maturity, caring for each other, and acting together.

The idea of faith community is found throughout the scriptures, from the creation story pronouncement that we should not be alone to the New Testament emphasis on mutual fellowship and care within the churches of the first century.

Small group ministry expert Gareth Icenogle suggests that God is all about community. “In the Bible covenant is relationship defined by God. It is God’s nature to be in relationship, and covenant is what God wants the relationship to be.” When reading the Bible, it’s always helpful to keep in mind that God calls us into spiritual fellowship with each other as well as with the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Another Christian author expands on spiritual fellowship, describing how an “awareness of one’s new individual identity before God inevitably and necessarily involves one in community. Life in the Spirit is a life of new openness to others in a fellowship of reconciliation.”<sup>3</sup>

Just as the 18th century Moravians discovered, Icenogle maintains that “spiritual growth is the process [as well as the] product of being in community. Isolated individuals cannot grow spiritually. Spirit demands community. Persons grow when they are in relationship with God and with one another.” And, “as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews argued, the main way to ‘spur one another on toward love and good deeds’ is through ‘meeting together’ (Heb. 10:24-25).”<sup>4</sup> Icenogle further argues that the work of the Spirit in one’s life happens only in the context of a faith community: “The health of the apostles flowed from the fullness of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Being ‘all together in one place’ preceded being ‘filled with the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>5</sup>

Often, God works in our lives through shared, spiritual fellowship with each other. Christian fellowship opens our lives to God’s work. Spiritual

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<sup>2</sup> Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry, an Integrational Approach*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 36.

<sup>3</sup> C. Norman Kraus, *The Authentic Witness: Credibility and Authority*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979, 89.

<sup>4</sup> Icenogle, p. 281.

<sup>5</sup> Icenogle, p. 251.

growth and fellowship exist as intertwined, critical parts of a church's small group ministry.

Henri Nouwen writes of the necessity of community to our spiritual development while balancing this with solitude:

“People of faith need community, for without it we become individualistic and, at times, egocentric. . . . We are called to God's table together, not by ourselves. Spiritual formation, therefore, always includes formation to life in community. We all have to find our way home to God in solitude and in community with others.”<sup>6</sup>

## **Mutual Care: God Calls Us to Care for Each Other**

When it comes to spiritual care, most congregations look to a pastor who is trained and called to serve the people of that church. The pastor visits with individuals to encourage and comfort, offer guidance, suggest Scripture for reflection, and to pray with and for those facing challenging times. Other models of church life include multiple pastors or trained lay people prepared to care for members and others in the church community. In each case, there are care givers, and there are care recipients.

The *Living Faith* approach to congregational caring affirms the need for care that all people have, the need and capacity of all Christians to give care, and involves more people both in receiving and giving care. This ministry model answers the question: “How might we strengthen the ways we care for each other within our faith communities?” by offering three distinct types of care:

1. **Spiritual care**, by which a caring person embodies faith in Christ in what he or she does. This type of care matches closely care often provided by pastors. While there are many times when the skills and the training of a pastor are needed, *Living Faith* provides for consistent, regular spiritual care that church members might offer to one another.

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<sup>6</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction-Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 114-5.

2. **Interpersonal care**, which includes words and actions of encouragement, affirmation, and esteem. Close friends often give this kind of care to each other. Active listening would be an example of interpersonal care.
3. **Practical care**, such as chores, deeds, errands and other specific activities which address a person's practical needs. These needs might arise during times of crisis or as part of an ongoing situation.

With *Living Faith*, care happens within the context of **community**. Care is mutual; care is interpersonal; and care is experienced within a small group of participants. A group can be formed with these objectives in mind, and an existing group might also choose this model of Christian group life and outreach.

### **Group Size: Big Enough to Care; Small Enough to Share**

Small groups come in different sizes. Some models suggest as many as a dozen in a group or even more. Some Sunday School classes average an attendance of 25 or 30. Some who are experienced in this model of congregational life suggest as few as 3 as an ideal size.<sup>7</sup> This is a similar size to the way Jesus may have related to his disciples. We are most familiar with his interactions in a group of 4—Jesus, along with Peter, James and John.

*Living Faith* uses 5 as a guideline for group size. Some groups may be slightly larger or smaller. A group of 5 allows enough time in a gathering for each to share thoughts and responses. This size allows for personal sharing in a setting that is not too intimidating. It is not too large for the group and its leader to hold each member accountable to the covenant without being domineering about it.

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<sup>7</sup> Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship, Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 199-200.

## **Leadership and Flexibility: Keeping the Group Vibrant**

*Living Faith* groups are led by a **leader** who coordinates the group's activities. Although care giving is mutual and organic, it is guided by a designated person within the group. The style of this role is not to guide from a position of absolute authority but rather as one who comes alongside group members to work with them, to support them in their efforts and to learn alongside them.

*Living Faith* is **flexible**, as it relates to the type, frequency and scheduling of outreach projects which a group chooses to undertake and also of the group's gatherings. The type of outreach undertaken may affect the scheduling, duration and tone of group gatherings.

*Living Faith* provides an experiential introduction to this model of ministry and offers the training necessary for giving compassion and care to each other and to those outside the group. The hope is to foster spiritual growth through face-to-face sharing by the participants in small groups and to experience that growth through fellowship with each other as well as through outreach.

In this shared experience, the spiritual journeys of a group's members begin to overlap, to shape each other, and to energize each other. The church as it is expressed in such a group becomes vibrant because two or three are gathered together in Christ-centered faith, love, and hope.

## **Outreach: Our Faith Lives in Our Actions**

We want all *Living Faith* participants to be able to give and receive the love of Jesus Christ as we care for each other. Eventually (or for some, simultaneously), we want to go beyond the boundaries of our own congregations and serve the wider world as well.

This is the approach Jesus used in training the disciples. Jesus began by teaching the disciples about spiritual life in the context of interactive, face-to-face fellowship in which people aid and share in each other's spiritual journeys. This teaching was more about experience than content, and more about living than knowing. Once they had made some progress on this first component, Jesus challenged them with opportunities to proclaim the good news as he had been doing. Jesus urged them to be both one with each other as he was one with the

Father and then to be focused outward together to respond to the ripeness of the harvest.

Luke 10 tells the well-known story of Jesus sending out the 70 disciples into the surrounding villages. These verses summarize this phase in their preparation for the time they will be leaders of the Church without Jesus' physical presence. Jesus begins with instructions on their behavior, activities and relationships with village residents (vss. 1-11). This is a time of growth and training which prepared the 70 for these excursions to nearby towns. The disciples then carry out their mission in groups of two, then return with reports of their successes. Jesus guides them in reflecting on their experiences and reminds them that their relationship with God is most important. He teaches them that the deeds are not faith or even the proof of faith. Rather, the deeds bring faith into a real world experience.

Nouwen suggests that this experience of community and outreach are two of three disciplines—along with solitude—to which Christians are called. “These are the three disciplines we are called to practice on the long journey home: (1) solitude or communion with God in prayer; (2) recognizing and gathering together in community; and (3) ministry or compassion in the world.”<sup>8</sup>

In similar fashion, *Living Faith* enables group members to grow spiritually through group fellowship. This prepares them to serve each other and to reach out to others beyond their own circle. Of course, it is important to come back together to reflect and learn from their experiences. This, also, is built into the *Living Faith* model.

Icenogle writes, “Relationship without mission (purpose or task) is not a complete view of small group life and not a true reflection of the nature of God.” He adds that “relationship and work are both forms of community” and that “small groups are called to be work teams (or supportive teams of workers) who build their community while accomplishing a purpose.”<sup>9</sup> He also states: “Groups should ensure that

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<sup>8</sup> Nouwen, p. 110.

<sup>9</sup> Icenogle, p. 24.



their two primary reasons for meeting are for building relationships and accomplishing mission or tasks.”<sup>10</sup>

The Moravian bands were for the sole purpose of spiritual development fostered in fellowship. However, they also became a key place of nurture for a sense of call to outreach. As a group serves together in any type of endeavor, the bonds which were first felt as they gathered for prayer, sharing and Bible reading are strengthened exponentially as the group then faces the challenges of serving together. These experiences of learning through interaction with each other about their faith and then serving together in outreach and proclamation produced strong bonds within their fellowship. The sense of community that develops in the spiritual growth and outreach which should occur in and through small groups of Christians can transform all aspects of congregational life, including worship, education, stewardship, and more.

## **Creating More Groups: As Our Faith Grows, So Does Our Ministry**

One of the intriguing traits of the 18th century prayer bands was that they were not seen as permanent. They were open-ended, and occasionally even suspended for a short while. There were times when group members were interchanged. Spangenberg writes in his biography of Count Zinzendorf: “. . . when these societies [the bands] required a change, it was undertaken as soon as possible, after mature deliberation. But though the brethren and sisters generally left their societies unwillingly, yet the changes were particularly useful; since the members of the church became, in this manner, gradually acquainted with and heartily united to each other.” The early Moravians also knew when to move on: “. . . when there was a perception that the bands were no longer beneficial, they were suspended and later renewed.”<sup>11</sup> Little explanation is offered about the reason for the re-organization or suspension of groups other than this hint that the changes were helpful. Perhaps the bands became cliques, experienced unresolvable conflicts, or lacked spiritual growth.

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<sup>10</sup> Icenogle, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Spangenberg, p. 87.

These changes kept the bands vibrant and beneficial. *Living Faith* provides for this through group birthing. Creating more groups energizes fellowship and allows more people to experience spiritual growth and vitality while seeking a closer walk with the Savior. Expanding to multiple groups makes sense, because:

**More people benefit.** If only one group is formed, a handful of people benefit. If one new group is formed each year, about 18 people benefit over three years. But if groups multiply and even four new groups are formed each year, then 46 people participate in the first three years. If six new groups form during the second and third year, then 66 members participate. How powerful this can be for a community of faith! If spiritual growth and outreach are priorities for the church, then birthing Living Faith groups will help.

**Efforts may attract visitors and even, new members.** If groups continue to form, people from outside the church are likely drawn into congregational life. This may not be a solution for numeric decline, but it indicates that a church experiencing renewed spiritual vitality will draw others into its fellowship.

**We can celebrate our diversity and remain vibrant.** We certainly value long-term relationships, but we find that groups maintaining the same membership for multiple years tend to plateau and sometimes decline in spiritual growth and vitality. Creating new groups not only allows additional people to grow spiritually, it also helps more experienced members to deepen and to grow their faith.

**It's Biblical!** Christ and the Scriptures provide a clear mandate that the Church is to do everything possible to make disciples. This happens often in face-to-face interaction as we share our spiritual journeys with each other.

## **Worship: a Final Stone in the Foundation**

Although *Living Faith* lays heavy emphasis on interaction within a small group and on outreach, it's important to remember that all that we experience together is most wonderfully celebrated when we worship together. That is why a commitment to worship is a part of the covenant found later in this manual. We bless each other when we worship with each other. It is in worship that we connect with the larger church. It is

in worship that together we encounter and experience God in a way that we can not in any other setting.

## Key Components of *Living Faith*

The following section gives a snapshot of *Living Faith*. The remainder of this section discusses this model in more depth. You will find more information on some of these components in this manual. Check the Table of Contents.

The main component of *Living Faith* is a **small group consisting of 4 to 5 individuals**. They may or not all be associated with the same congregation. However, it is envisioned that this will usually be the case.

The group has a **leader who has been designated** as such by the leaders who are working to establish this model in a given context, again usually a congregation. This leader shares this role of leadership with all group members in various ways. The leader is not an authority on spirituality, but explores faith along with the group.

A **daily practice of spiritual disciplines** or practices by all group members is assumed. This may vary in some ways.

Typically a group meets **weekly to bi-weekly**. This may vary some from time to time, but an extended pause is not ideal during the time that the group exists.

A **covenant** is adopted by the group at its inception. A standard covenant is found on page 33-34. However, a group may agree to modifications or additional provisions. The group seeks to hold its members accountable in a spirit of humility.

**Study guides** are provided for the group's use. A few basic guides are included in this publication. Others may follow. In addition, a list of additional recommended resources is included at the end of this publication.

*Living Faith* includes opportunities for the group to **reach out** and impact the world. A group will discern its sense of call in this matter and work together in its outreach.

Participants are given the opportunity to share this experience with others as they consider when they are ready to **birth new groups**.

Many congregations include **existing groups** which are great sources of nurture for their members. These groups may study the characteristics of *Living Faith* and choose to modify their customs to incorporate these components into their fellowship.

## Getting Started

### How to Begin: Congregations

- Make it a congregational priority. On its own initiative or at the request of a member or group within the church, the Board of Elders or Church Board studies the *Living Faith* model and adopts it as a priority in the church's life. The Board might also do this at the encouragement of a provincial agency.
- **Provide ongoing support.** The Board then provides ongoing support, supervision, and guidance; and small group leaders should report periodically to them on their efforts. (See next section to consider use of this model in existing small groups such as circles, small classes, etc.)
- **Identify & train leaders.** Small group leaders are identified, recruited, and trained. These initial leaders should be key leaders whose spiritual maturity is recognized by the congregation. The pastor should be one of those key spiritual leaders, and his or her involvement communicates that this is a priority for the church and provides a level of experience in this type of fellowship. Leaders model spiritual growth and maturity and also grow along with other members. These initial leaders work with BCM's project developer to experience *Living Faith* in a pilot group.
- **Form group(s).** Once leaders are prepared, the Board invites members (or even non-members) to participate in a *Living Faith* group which is dedicated to:

- spiritual growth and mutual care through fellowship,
- outreach as a group, and
- the possibility of creating new groups with members of these first groups serving as facilitators in the new groups.

Group members should have an openness to something new, and a commitment to stay with the group for a year (or whatever designated time frame upon which the group decides).

Groups should be no larger than 4 or 5. This allows for more closeness, more time to share, and an easier time of coordinating schedules.

- **Get started!** The group meets approximately weekly, and at least bi-weekly, for 1½ hours to:
  - share spiritual journeys as group members perceive God’s work in their lives,
  - seek understanding from selected biblical passages and other readings,
  - care for and encourage each other,
  - develop caring skills that will enable them to bless others, and
  - pursue opportunities as a group for outreach to persons within the congregation and/or others in the community and the world.
- **Share leadership.** After an appropriate amount of time, the leader shares his/her responsibilities so that group members may explore and strengthen their own leadership skills.
- **Create new groups.** After a significant number of regular meetings (perhaps 8-10 months), group members consider birthing new groups which they would initially facilitate. Thus a group of 5 could become 5 groups. The original group would no longer meet regularly but might gather occasionally for mutual support.

## **How to Begin: Existing Groups in Congregations**

- **Make it a congregational priority.** On its own initiative or at the request of a member or group within the church, the Board of Elders or Church Board studies the *Living Faith* model and adopts it as a priority in the church's life. The Board provides ongoing support, supervision, and guidance; and small group leaders should report periodically to them on their efforts.
- **Invite groups.** Existing groups within the congregation are invited to study this model of group life and consider creating group(s) dedicated to spiritual growth and mutual care through fellowship, outreach as a group, and the possibility of creating new groups with members of these first groups as facilitators in the new groups.
- **Identify & train leaders.** A few leaders within these groups are identified and recruited. Usually these will be the existing leaders. They should be key leaders whose spiritual maturity is recognized within the group. These leaders are a vital key in the development of spiritual growth and outreach in and by the group. The leaders will model spiritual growth and maturity and also grow along with other group members.
- **Get started!** The group meets approximately weekly, and at least bi-weekly, for 1½ hours to:
  - share spiritual journeys as group members perceive God's work in their lives,
  - seek understanding from selected biblical passages,
  - develop caring skills that will enable them to bless others, and
  - pursue opportunities as a group for outreach to persons within the congregation and/or others in the community and the world.
- **Share leadership.** After an appropriate amount of time, the leader shares his/her responsibilities so that group members may explore and strengthen their own leadership skills.
- **Create new groups.** After a significant number of meetings, the issue of birthing new groups is explored more closely, and group members are encouraged to consider forming new groups which they would initially facilitate. Thus a group of 5 could become 5 groups. The original group would no longer meet regularly but might gather occasionally for mutual support.

In some cases, an existing group may continue to exist rather than branching out into new groups. However, the focus must remain on personal spiritual growth. More time for gatherings may be needed to allow for personal sharing, and a larger group might need to break into small groups to enable this sharing.

- **Consider size.** If the group grows larger than 5 or 6, members should recognize and adapt the model to preserve interactions in conversations and close fellowship which exist within a smaller size group.

## Guidelines for Gathering

*Time allotted for each segment of a gathering is a suggestion. A group might find it helpful to make an adjustment depending on a number of factors. Careful planning is helpful.*

<b>Time Allotted</b>	<b>What</b>	
5 minutes	<b>Coming Online</b>	This allows for entering the virtual meeting room. This may take more time in the beginning; less as the group members become more adept at this platform.
10 minutes	<b>Worship &amp; Prayer</b>	Daily Text for the day. Assigned scripture and stanzas read followed by silence.
20 minutes	<b>Connecting</b>	<p>This time is for reflection on life's experiences and lessons learned since the last time the group was together. Share thoughts on these two questions–</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways has God moved in your life since we last met?</li> <li>• In what ways has God been silent in your life since we last met?</li> </ul> <p>As each shares in turn, it is helpful if others listening are muted.</p>
5 to 10 minutes	<b>Break</b>	
20 minutes	<b>Spiritual Growth &amp; Caring Skills</b>	Follow curriculum or use other resources.
15 minutes	<b>Outreach Planning</b>	Discuss how to care for church members and/or outreach beyond the congregation. It may include consideration of the birthing of new groups by the group.
10 minutes	<b>Closing &amp; Prayer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the areas of growth and blessing in this gathering?</li> <li>• For what should the group pray?</li> <li>• Offering prayers for the concerns of each other in the group. (Using best listening skills and sharing love by offering earnest prayers for each other, building group fellowship.)</li> </ul>



# **A Closer Look at a Typical Gathering**

## **Coming Online (5 minutes)**

Once all group members become accustomed to the technology of an online meeting, this should only take a moment. Sometimes there may be broadband issues that slow the connection speed. A member who experiences difficulties may need to contact a technician or the Internet service provider.

## **Worship and Prayer (10 minutes)**

Worship is done together. The group might read the watchword for the week the Moravian Daily Text for the day. Some might prefer devotional guides and/or liturgies, especially during particular seasons of the liturgical year. See the appendices for more worship resources.

After worship, a few moments for quiet meditation and reflection allow group members to focus their thoughts on the gathering and its purpose. They might reflect on their spiritual journey in general or during the days since the group last gathered. Some might make notes on their thoughts or review their journals.

## **Connecting (20 minutes)**

During this time, group members share:

- how God has been working in their lives since they last met,
- specific prayer requests, and
- his/her challenges and joys, including requests for encouragement or guidance from other group members.

Leaders should guide the conversation to minimize over-sharing or monopolizing by one member.

## **Break (5-10 minutes)**

## **Spiritual Growth and Caring Skills (20 minutes)**

Study guides are available for use by the group. The first few of these are designated in the Session Overviews and will focus on the concepts which are the foundation for *Living Faith*. Other study guides will focus on areas of spiritual development and caring skills. Listening skills, prayer with and for others, and visitation guidelines are a few which are available.

## **Outreach Planning (15 minutes)**

Here the group plans its outreach to others through service or ministry to person(s) outside the group. More time may be needed when a new effort or phase of a project is started and less time may be needed if a project is ongoing.

Remember, birthing new groups is also considered outreach. This gives others the opportunity to experience spiritual growth and outreach in fellowship with others.

If group members live some distance apart and are meeting online, they may have to be creative in planning outreach that works for all.

- Can they meet quarterly in a place of service?
- Can they agree on the type of outreach done but each in his or her respective community?
- Is a type of online outreach possible?

*Note: as this online version of Living Faith is being written, 90% of Americans are under a 'stay at home' order due to the Corona virus. Outreach efforts must be planned to accommodate this reality. How can compassion be shown to others in ways that don't endanger those involved?*

## **Closing & Prayer (10 minutes)**

Spend time reflecting on the session together. Has someone found resolution to an issue he or she faces? Has the group made significant discoveries which are helpful to their goals of spiritual growth and outreach? What have you learned?

Enter into a time of prayer. Pray first for each other, recalling any requests that emerged during the “Connect” time. If the group is involved in some form of outreach, pray for those efforts and those who are blessed to be involved in these efforts. Include prayers as you desire for the congregation, community, and world.

Ideally, all group members eventually participate and even lead the prayer time. Some group members may opt out initially, but hopefully, as trust builds within the group, members overcome this hesitancy. Time and gentle persuasion are key. It is often helpful to ask individuals to lead just a portion of the group’s prayer and/or to focus on only one of the prayer concerns.

## **Guidelines on Scheduling**

The gathering schedule is flexible, according to the needs of group members. While the ideal frequency is weekly, groups should meet at least bi-weekly in order to maintain the continuity of fellowship. Some groups may make a schedule work that is somewhere between weekly and bi-weekly such as every 10 days. Pull out those calendars and make it work!

Scheduling challenges might mean a group will meet for a couple of months and then pause for two or three weeks. Other groups may consider taking off for the summer, but this can be disruptive to group cohesion and personal spiritual growth. Such groups should consider meeting every three weeks during vacation seasons.

If a group plans a major outreach project, adjusting the gathering schedule allows members to attend to work and family priorities. Remember, gatherings provide critical times to prepare for outreach—spiritually and practically—and to reflect on and evaluate those efforts.

## Session Overviews

Prompts for Connecting	Spiritual Growth & Caring Skills	
<b>Session One</b>		
What are your expectations for this group? What will you bring to the group?	Study Guide on <i>'Introduction to Living Faith'</i>	
<b>Session Two</b>		
How will our group covenant affect our interactions?	Study Guide on <i>'Introduction to Living Faith'</i>	
<b>Session Three</b>		
In what ways has God moved in your life since we last met? In what ways has God been silent in your life since we last met?	Study Guide on <i>'Introduction to Living Faith'</i>	
<b>Session Four</b>		
In what ways has God moved in your life since we last met? In what ways has God been silent in your life since we last met?	Study Guide on Listening	
<b>Session Five</b>		
In what ways has God moved in your life since we last met? In what ways has God been silent in your life since we last met?	Study Guide on Listening	
<b>Session Six</b>		
In what ways has God moved in your life since we last met?	Outreach Reflections and Discernment	

In what ways has God been silent in your life since we last met?		
<b>Session Seven</b>		
In what ways has God moved in your life since we last met? In what ways has God been silent in your life since we last met?	Outreach Reflections and Discernment	
<b>Sessions Eight - Thirteen</b>		
In what ways has God moved in your life since we last met? In what ways has God been silent in your life since we last met?	Six sessions on prayer–Use <i>Grounded in Prayer</i> by Brent Dahlseng, Augsburg Fortress, 2003. Companion leader’s guide available and recommended. Next cell will be needed each session of this series. Other cells may need adjustment.	

## Living Faith Leadership

The leader in a *Living Faith* group is not the teacher or the sole source of knowledge in things spiritual or Biblical. The leader walks a spiritual journey along with the other group members and grows in his or her faith.

The leader is the convener and facilitator for the group. As time passes, other group members begin to assist with the responsibilities of facilitator.

There are three roles which the group leader brings to the group.

1. The leader serves as a **role model** who has had the opportunity to participate in a similar group and has experienced the group objectives and dynamics built into the *Living Faith* program.
2. The leader is responsible to **convene** the group initially, including finding a time and place which will be suitable for those who will participate.
3. The leader is the person who will help to keep the group **on task** when this is needed. Greg Ogden calls this role the “keeper of the covenant.”<sup>33</sup> More will be said about the content of the covenant below.

The leader’s example sets the tone for the depth of the group’s interaction and for the degree of regularity in the daily devotions and study by members.

In addition to these responsibilities within the life of the group, the leader is also the contact person for the group to the wider church. The person who oversees *Living Faith* within the congregation will stay in touch with this person to see if there is a need for resources, study guides, ideas or support. These conversations will also center around whether or not the group is achieving its goals of spiritual growth through the interaction and fellowship of the group, outreach as a group, and the possibility of birthing of additional groups.

Other leadership tasks are shared. The exploration of opportunities for outreach is one example. Different group members will have different passions for service which they can bring to bear in the group’s decision on where and how to serve. Leadership of the gatherings is shared after the first few months during which group members have had the opportunity to experience the dynamics of spiritual sharing and fellowship and have begun to understand their own gifts and ways in which those gifts can be developed.

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<sup>33</sup>Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, p. 169.

## Daily Disciplines

An important part of spiritual growth consists of daily time dedicated to prayer and devotion. Time—and energy—must be allotted for this practice. *Living Faith* group members are asked to commit to 30 to 40 minutes each day for prayer and study:

- A suggested basic activity is found in the *Moravian Daily Text*. The use of the texts, hymn stanzas and prayers assigned for each day is the beginning.
- The reading of the Scripture passages assigned for the day comes next. These are found in the sidebar on each page.<sup>44</sup> Since the passages listed on the pages for the Sundays are for use in public worship, it is not necessary to read these. Those passages will be covered at some point in the weekday readings. These first two steps usually take about 10 to 12 minutes.
- A few moments of quiet prayer can follow. This prayer would include moments of silence, prayer for family and group members, and a time of worship and thanksgiving.
- Finally, attention should be given to the study guide the group may be currently using. Usually, this material will not take more than 15 to 20 minutes on average to cover.

This discipline may require some adjustment to one's daily schedule, especially if a person has children in the home. However, everyone needs time for self to avoid becoming empty emotionally and spiritually. This daily time focused on one's faith should be seen as time to be blessed, not just a duty to God—or a commitment to a group covenant.

It is helpful if the materials used—*Moravian Daily Text*, Bible, study material, etc.—are kept in one place where they will be used each day. It is also helpful if this place is relatively quiet. However, family members and their activities are a part of life to be enjoyed, not endured or seen as a disruption. They are a part of one's faith, not a competition with it. If there is an occasional interruption or disruption to your time of prayer and devotions, let it be an

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<sup>44</sup>Note: Passages assigned for Sundays come from the Lectionary—a 3-year cycle of readings designed for worship services. The readings assigned for the remaining days of the week will cover the Psalms in one year and the rest of the Bible in two years.

opportunity to put into practice the love you are receiving through your daily times of spiritual discipline. Make these moments a part of faith.

Sabbath practices—We learn from the Scriptures the value of Sabbath observation. This has often become so legalistic that it has lost its restorative benefit. However, this practice feeds our souls when done well. The Sabbath should be seen as a gift rather than a duty. It should be a day for pursuing blessings, not a day to focus on what should not be done. It is a day for worship with friends and family. It is a day to fellowship with these same people who bring joy to us. It is a day for rest and for reflection on life. As such, it might also be considered a good day for writing in a journal even if this isn't done on other days of the week.

*Living Faith* will stretch most participants. Many will struggle to set aside time on a daily basis for prayer, study and reflection. This is especially true for those who prefer to be doing something for God or for people rather than sitting around thinking or talking about it.

However, those who like these quiet activities may also be stretched by *Living Faith*. They may feel challenged by the emphasis on their involvement in outreach. They may feel awkward in their initial efforts to touch the life of another person. When we feel a little uncomfortable with our involvement in *Living Faith*, we can remember that most of God's people were called to stretch their faith at certain points in their lives. When things seem a little awkward, we are in good company.



# **Principles of Group Dynamics**

## **Be Faithful to Time Allotments, but Be Open to Agreed-upon Adjustments**

In order to respect the commitment made by group members, it is important that all are punctual and that gatherings end by the time set. If there is a need for an adjustment to the schedule, this should be discussed by all and a consensus reached.

## **What Is Said in a Gathering Stays in the Gathering**

Things are not shared in any way with others. The only exception is in those rare occasions when a group member reveals the possibility that he or she may be harmed by someone or that he or she may cause self-harm. Even then, this must be handled with careful deliberation.

## **Share Journeys, but Not to an Excess of Intimacy**

Groups will vary in the depth of intimacy achieved or desired. Group members must be sensitive to the level of trust that has been reached. We should not pry beyond what someone has shared so that no one feels pressed to share more than one wishes to share. It is also important to avoid sharing more than others wish to hear. That requires discretion, listening, and honest conversation about the comfort level of group members.

## **Share Food Together**

Ever since Abraham shared food with the messengers who told him that Sarah would bear a son, to the Passover meal of the Old Testament, then the Last Supper, to the Agape meal of the fledgling church, to the first Moravian lovefeast, eating together has been an important part of spiritual fellowship. There is something about the act of sharing food that enhances fellowship.

When gatherings are held online, sharing food must take a different form. A break time might not include food. Members might have a snack on hand, but it won't be shared. Some things can't be duplicated online.

## **Don't Try to Fix Each Other**

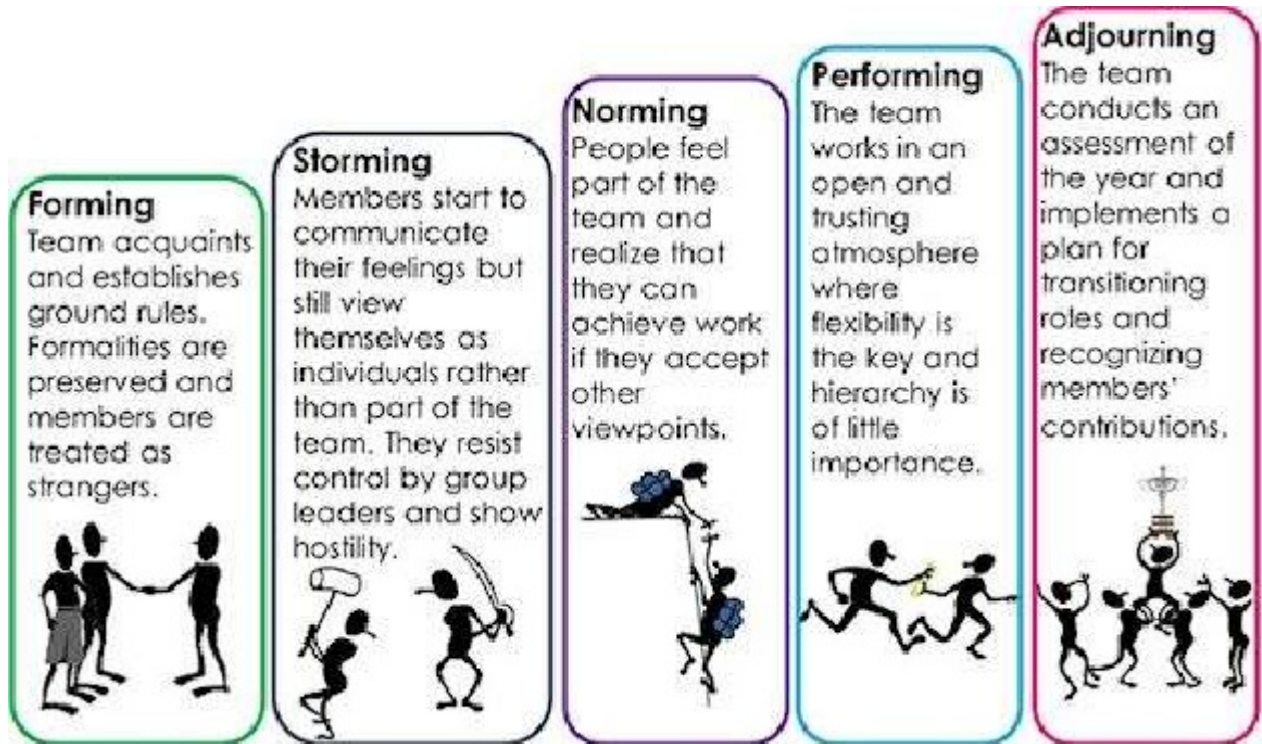
*Living Faith* is not intended to be group therapy or counseling. Our goal is not to correct the mistakes we see in each other. Instead, our goal is to recognize the Spirit's work in each other and to encourage each other to allow that to happen. Part of our task is to love and to respect each other despite the errors we perceive in each other.

## **Don't Try to Convince Each Other**

When we disagree on some topic, our gatherings are not the time or place to engage in debates about the correct views on that topic. It's important that we focus solely on what Christ seeks to accomplish in us.

## **Leave Room for Silence**

As we communicate with each other, silence is not our enemy. A pause for brief reflection after a person shares allows us time to respect the person who has just spoken and to reflect on what has been said. That silence enables us to decide whether or not a response is needed and, if so, what that response should be.



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## A Model of Group Development<sup>22</sup>

**Forming**—The group meets and learns about the opportunities and challenges, and then agrees on goals and begins to tackle the tasks. Group members tend to behave quite independently. They may be motivated but are usually relatively uninformed of the issues and objectives of the group. Group members are usually on their best behavior but very focused on themselves. Mature group members begin to model appropriate behavior even at this early phase. The forming stage of any group is important because the members of the group get to know one another, exchange some personal information, and make new friends. This is also a good opportunity to see how each member of the group works as an individual and how they respond to each other. So forming plays a great role in group development.

<sup>22</sup>“Tuckman’s Stages of Group Development”

<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuckman%27s\\_stages\\_of\\_group\\_development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuckman%27s_stages_of_group_development)>, (2015).

**Storming**—Tolerance of each group member and their differences should be emphasized. Without tolerance and patience, the group will not achieve its potential. Some groups will never develop past this stage; however, disagreements within the group can make members stronger, more versatile, and able to work more effectively as a group. The group members will therefore resolve their differences, and members will be able to participate with one another more comfortably. The ideal is that they will not feel that they are being judged, and will therefore share their opinions and views.

**Norming**—Resolved disagreements result in greater intimacy, and a spirit of co-operation emerges. In this stage, all group members take the responsibility and have the ambition to work for the success of the group's goals. They start tolerating the whims and fancies of the other group members. They accept others as they are and make an effort to move on. The danger here is that members may be so focused on preventing conflict that they are reluctant to share controversial ideas.

**Performing**---"With group norms and roles established, group members focus on achieving common goals. . . ." By this time, they are motivated and knowledgeable. Dissent is expected and allowed as long as it is channeled through means acceptable to the group.

**Adjourning**---In 1977, Tuckman, jointly with Mary Ann Jensen, added a fifth stage to the four stages: adjourning that involves completing the task and breaking up the group.

## Making a Group Covenant

A covenant is a promise. Covenants happen all the time. Families have covenants—often unspoken but understood—that govern the way members of those families relate to and treat each other. Business partners have covenants in the form of written contracts. Friends have covenants rarely discussed and often different in the mind of each person.

The covenant in your *Living Faith* group will be personal but will also be written so that each group member understands what the group needs from each person. The covenant will be discussed and agreed to in an early session of a group's existence. The following are basic points for any *Living Faith* group covenant:

- I will attend all group gatherings being sure that I arrive promptly at the scheduled time. If I am unable to attend or must be late, I will contact the group leader.
- I will participate to the best of my ability in the outreach work of my group.
- I will hold in confidence all that happens or is said within my group. This trust is so essential to our fellowship and is so difficult to regain if lost, that I will consider this to be a “make or break” part of my covenant with my group. The only time that this will be considered a flexible commitment is if the possibility of harm to a group member or to others is indicated.
- I will focus my comments on my own spiritual journey, not on others.
- I will complete the devotional and study assignments for the group gatherings.
- I will accept the rotating leadership tasks during the meetings as they are assigned.
- I will honor and respect the spiritual journeys and struggles of other group members without criticism or condemnation but in a humble spirit of love. I will keep group members in my prayers regularly.
- I will be open to the work of the Spirit in my own heart and in the life of the group.
- Eventually, I will consider continuing *Living Faith* with 3 to 4 other individuals in a new group to broaden this opportunity and continue my own spiritual growth.

Additional provisions included by the group:

Signed:

Date: \_\_

## **Planning Your Outreach or Service**

Outreach solidifies the bond of fellowship developed in small group interaction. A key element of *Living Faith* is the outreach efforts undertaken by a group. As was noted in the introduction, this was a pattern which Jesus used in training his disciples—he taught them in face-to-face interactions and then sent them to learn by doing in nearby communities. We saw this in Luke 10, (see page 12) but the Gospels are not the only place this can be found. It was also seen in the Introduction (see page 3) that this technique was used by Count Zinzendorf in his work with the residents of Herrnhut in the early years of its existence. Outreach solidifies the bond of fellowship developed in small group interaction. The outreach project is really about being the church. Both factors—committing to an outreach endeavor and being the church—are needed in order for an undertaking to be balanced, but it begins with the development of the fellowship.

Whatever happens should take you beyond your comfort zone. It should challenge you and cause you to grow in faith. Consider how group members might grow in their love of Christ as well as serve.

Ideally, group members will share in a common outreach effort. However, sometimes this is not feasible. The project chosen by the group may only need two or three persons at a time. Some group members may be unable to help because of personal circumstances or limitations. Even when this is the case, during the group's gatherings, all group members can share in the reflections about the group's outreach experience. Those who can't participate personally

can pray for the undertaking; they can offer their reflections on the experiences shared by those who are personally involved. In this way, the outreach project belongs to the entire group.

In many cases, groups will not be constantly engaged in outreach. Some projects might require monthly, quarterly, or even annual activity. An ideal pattern would be that the less frequently an activity is scheduled, the greater the commitment of time that would be needed. For instance, a mission trip might be an annual event, but it might last a week. Whereas a monthly group visit to a prison or a nursing home might last only a couple of hours.

The discussion about outreach options begins after several gatherings have occurred and the group has had an opportunity to develop. However, actual outreach may take a few weeks to plan and to schedule. This is to be expected and is better than rushing into a project without sufficient thought and planning. A study guide for choosing and planning an outreach activity is included on page 46. It begins with individual reflections. A group discussion is based on these reflections.

During the *Living Faith* experience, each group has the opportunity to explore options for outreach. This document cannot describe the opportunities for every group in every congregation. Communities and neighborhoods vary too much; and the interests, resources, skills and passion of church members vary too much among congregations. Pastors and other church leaders may provide guidance as to what opportunities are available. Questions must be asked. Phone calls must be made. Web sites must be visited. These methods of research can be used by those who are prayerfully seeking a place to give of themselves under the guidance of the Spirit.

## **Birthing *Living Faith* Groups**

Aside from adjusting one's schedule to make room for *Living Faith*, one of the greatest challenges of *Living Faith* may be to birth new groups. If the experience of one's group fellowship has become the rich blessing it is intended to be, it will be difficult to relinquish this even if it is in order to pursue greater blessings. This was true in the early years of Herrnhut as we found in Spangenberg's work on Zinzendorf.

Consideration of birthing new groups begins when a group is started and participants are asked when signing their covenant to be open to the option of reaching out to others by initiating a new group after they have participated in a group for a while. Once they have experienced *Living Faith* group life for this time, they are asked to consider whether or not they are ready to use what they have learned to initiate another group.

When they are ready, they reach out to those they think might be interested, or they may contact those who respond to an invitation extended to the congregation. They are always supported and guided by church leaders involved in the *Living Faith* effort.

Greg Ogden suggests two criteria: teach-ability, and the ability to continue to participate throughout the months the group expects to last.<sup>66</sup> Skills, talents, knowledge of the Bible and church experience are much less important. This can be seen in the background of Jesus' disciples. Who would have guessed that Jesus would choose such a group of people who had never had extensive training in the scriptures or experience in religious leadership?

Just as with other aspects of *Living Faith*, the formation of a group involves a good bit of time in listening prayers. Jesus spent a night in prayer before designating his twelve disciples. Listening prayers are times of quiet reflection, reflection on the personal qualities that make a group successful and thinking about acquaintances that might come together to make a thriving group. Someone who is thinking of convening a group should spend some time also on remembering the level of commitment that made past group experiences positive.

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<sup>66</sup>Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, pp. 179-80.



When approaching others about a new group, the commitment needed should be made clear. Mention the length and frequency of gatherings that you envision. Describe a typical gathering. Explain the daily times of prayer and reading involved. Although it would not yet have been decided, point out that some type of outreach is included. Share and discuss a copy of the covenant with each person.

It may not be best to bring together a group of persons who are already connected through some other type of activity or relationship such as a hobby, work or family relations. These things could easily distract from a focus on spiritual growth. However, sometimes an existing group might agree to take on the characteristics of a *Living Faith* group. Some guidance would be helpful in making this conversion.

A new group begins at the same place an initial group begins—with the session outline found on page 20. The leader studies the material again along with those who have not used it before. Once the basic study guides have been used, the group might use other different from those used in the leader's previous experiences.

# Study Guides

## An Intro to Living Faith

### What We Hope Will Happen

This lesson is designed to be used individually. The text is to be studied, and the questions answered over the course of several days. Once this study guide has been completed individually, take time to discuss it as a group in two or three sessions. The group can discuss how much to read, what questions to discuss, and how much time to spend on each section and question. Your group leader may have ideas to offer on this. Read the Introduction and Foundations chapters, found on pages 2-15 in this manual. First as an individual, and then as a group, discuss the questions below.

### Introduction (page 2)

- Do you see your church as a serving body? In what ways have you and others been involved in serving beyond your church?
- How did this impact the lives of those you served? What did you see in them that showed that God's love was felt through your efforts?
- How did this impact your life and the lives of the others in your group?
- Among congregational caring, spiritual growth and faithful service, which generates the most interest for you?

### The Earliest Roots of Moravian Faith Community

(pages 2-4)

- Have you seen church conflicts healed? What brought that healing about? If you think of a person who was key to this, what did the person do or what was the person's influence that brought about this healing?

- What persons and/or what experiences in your Christian community generate and influence your “passion for living each day for Christ”?
- When you think of “those most marginalized,” what kinds of people come to your mind?

## **The 18th Century Prayer Bands as a Model for Today** (pages 4-6)

- Where have you seen something similar to choirs? to prayer bands?
- Have you participated in a group similar to a choir? a prayer band? Describe your experience in either type of group.
- How did this affect your faith?

## **Living the Essentials and *Living Faith*** (pages 6-7)

- How would you summarize the characteristics of Living Faith?
- Which of these characteristics intrigue you?
- Where do you think you would be challenged by your involvement in Living Faith?

## **Foundations**

### **Congregational Life: We Need Each Other to Grow** (pages 7-9)

- What three traits characterize the “life, witness, and ministry of the renewed Moravian Church? (see first paragraph of this section)
- Where or when have you seen these traits first hand?
- Who are those with whom you share your spiritual journey either in occasional conversations or in a more deliberate fashion?

## **Mutual Care: God Calls Us to Care for Each Other (pages 9-10)**

- Describe a couple of experiences in you were able help others as you worked alongside others in this effort.
- What did the person(s) you served do for you?
- How were you enabled to grow spiritually?

## **Outreach: Our Faith Lives in Our Actions (pages 11-13)**

- When you have been involved in outreach projects in the past, what did you do to reflect later on their significance and on the effect they had on your faith?
- What possible outreach ideas come to your mind as you study this section?

## **Creating More Groups: As Our Faith Grows, So Does Our Ministry (pages 13-14)**

- As you read this section on birthing new groups, do you sense a call to seek ways of making the blessings of spiritual community available to others?
- What are some ways of overcoming the hesitancy of others or yourself to the idea of multiplying an existing group?

# The Gift of Listening

## What We Hope Will Happen

This material will strengthen your listening skills. This is never a completed process. You will continue to become a better listener throughout your life as long as you focus on this important skill.

This study guide is designed to be used individually. The text is to be studied, and the questions answered over the course of several days.

Once the lesson has been completed individually, it can be discussed as a group either in one or two sessions. The group can discuss how much of the text to read, what questions to discuss and how much time to spend on each section and each question. Your group leader may have ideas to offer on this.

## The Gift of Listening

If you are involved in a *Living Faith* group, you will have been developing your listening skills already by the time you read this. You have listened as the other members of your group shared their reflections on God's work in their lives. You've heard some of their burdens as well as their joys.

You might have noticed the way that listening to others has affected your mindset and spiritual life. Have you become more attentive to others in your daily life? Have you been more patient because you are more aware of what might be stirring in another's heart? Be honest. It's not easy!

Although you might not be seeing it much yet, the effort you are investing in listening to your group's members is changing you. It's making you more compassionate. It's stretching your patience. You are growing in your understanding of other people—and of yourself.

Although you have been developing your ability to listen to others at a deeper level, this curriculum will focus more deliberately on this loving act. Listening is a discipline which warrants our focused attention because it is so vital to rich, nurturing relationships. It's one of the best ways to care for and nurture each other.

## Reflections

- Do your best over the next couple of days to notice the number of times your responses in a conversation are affected by your assumptions about the others involved in those conversations. What were you assuming about their situations? Attitudes? Emotional condition? Comments? Intellect?
- Write down your observations so you can remember them.
- How have your assumptions shaped your comments in those conversations?

## The Role of Listening

Dietrich Bonhoeffer makes this observation about the role of listening in our relationships:

“The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship of caring consists of listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to God’s word, so the beginning of love for people is learning to listen to them. It is God’s love of us that not only gives us God’s word but also lends us God’s ear. So it is God’s work that we do for our brother and sister when we learn to listen to them.”  
“[Christians] forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.”

James writes of listening as a gift we give:

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. (James 1: 17-20)

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrases these verses in this way:

Every desirable and beneficial gift comes out of heaven. The gifts are rivers of light cascading down from the Father of Light. There is nothing deceitful in God, nothing two-faced, nothing fickle. He brought us to life

using the true Word, showing us off as the crown of all his creatures. Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God's righteousness doesn't grow from human anger.

At least three lessons can be found here.

First, these verses in James tell of gifts that come from God. These gifts are more about giving grace than about the skills we usually envision when we think about spiritual gifts provided by God. We can conclude from this passage that listening is a gift God enables us to give to someone else. We impart God's grace when we listen from the heart. In the act of focused listening, we demonstrate and communicate that the one we hear is of immeasurable value. Even more important, we make clear that the person speaking to us is not alone. Few things that we can offer can bless a person more than this.

Second, listening should be the first communication skill that we use in our conversations with others. We can have greater wisdom than anyone we know, but this is of no value unless we first hear the one we hope to guide. We can't know what type of message is most helpful in a dialogue unless we first understand the experience of the other person. We can't know what kind of ministry of the heart is needed by those with whom we are in fellowship unless we first understand their present situation and the condition of their hearts.

We can only gain this understanding by hearing their stories. Once we have heard about their experiences, it's still necessary that we hear more. Those who think we are listening and interested will share much more. They will talk about their attitudes, their emotions and how those experiences are affecting their attitudes and their responses to their circumstances. When we've heard all of these, then we can begin to understand their situations and then offer reflections and responses that communicate that we understand and care. It's important that we understand that usually our advice is not needed or wanted; just our attentive presence.

Finally, God is eager for us to be able to give this gift to others. God makes us like the "first fruits" or "crown" (Peterson) in order to make it clear that God is the one who enables us to bless each other with such a sacred gift as listening. When we listen intently, God is revealed and exalted as we care for others in

this way. A miracle of relationship is accomplished. This is God's desire for us as Christians, and it is God's desire for our fellowship with others. The principle prayer that Jesus prayed for his followers, including us, is that we be one with each other, and a principle command that he presents to us is that we love each other. Loving and listening are intertwined with each other.

## Reflections

- Take a while to remember a time when another person listened to you deeply. Write down a description of that experience.
- Recall times when you have sought to be helpful to someone. Compare the amount of time you spent talking and the amount you spent listening. What do you remember?

## Rules for Listening

- Use silence. Silence allows time for reflection, for considering where the conversation should go next. It gives you a chance to discern what you should say next or if you should continue to listen. It demonstrates that the listener values the comments just shared. It allows time for silent prayer. In fact, a listener might even say after a brief silence, "I'm praying for you."
- **Explore different meanings for words and phrases**, such as "I'm at peace with this." Some possible meanings might be:
  - I'm resigned to my fate in this situation.
  - I've learned to tolerate these difficulties.
  - I don't want to talk about how hard this is for me.
  - I'm trying to be at peace with this.
  - I think I understand how to move beyond this issue.
  - I'm beginning to feel joy again.
  - I feel alive again.
  - I don't mind if that other person suffers some.



- Follow up such comments by indicating an interest in **delving deeper**, perhaps asking:
  - How did you reach that point?
  - What brought you that peace?
  - Where do you go from here? Or What happens next?
- **Wait until the speaker has finished to consider your response.** When you begin to think about your next comment while a person is speaking, you might still be hearing, but you have definitely stopped listening.
- The main purpose of listening is to **know the person and to be present with them.** Refrain from responding with advice, as that makes clear that you have missed the point of the message or story shared. There is a time for advice, but that time comes very late in a conversation and might never be needed or appropriate.
- **Keep the attention on them.** When the focus is on another person's issue, it is not the time for you to share a similar experience. Although this seems to demonstrate empathy, it brings the attention to yourself rather than to the person who has shared his or her experience.

### Comments That Invite Deeper Sharing

- What was that like?
- Was that painful? Frustrating? Surprising? Exciting? (Depending on the nature of the experience) or: That must have been painful, etc.
- So he really hurt you.
- I can't imagine how that must have hurt.
- That's incredible/wonderful.
- That must have been a real shock.
- I'm sorry.
- I'm glad for you.

### Non-verbal cues

- Focus on the face of the person speaking. Ignore visual distractions.
- Avoid rocking or shaking a foot or frequent use of your hands.
- Avoid a deadpan expression.
- Don't express dismay or frustration with your face.
- Let your expression and demeanor reveal that you see the person as sacred.
- Ignore the time unless you are in a group setting and you are the group leader.

### Reflections

- How successful have you been in listening to members of your *Living Faith* group?
- A friend just revealed to you that he/she doesn't think his/her prayers are working any more. How would you respond?

## Three Levels of Listening

In *Effective Coaching*, Marshall Cook and Laura Poole write of three levels of listening. Level 1 is the level used in most superficial and task-oriented conversations. They suggest that we miss half to three-quarters of what another person is saying. At this level we tend to be thinking of our next response while still listening to another person. They call this “head-centered listening.”

They refer to Level 2 as “heart-centered listening.” “In Level 2 listening, you consciously slide out of your own worldview (move from your head to an open heart) so that you can learn more about the speaker. You ask a lot of questions instead of looking for a conversational opening . . . .” The listener works to discover the person’s interests and concerns and asks about these.

Level 3 listening aims for the person’s dreams and goals in addition to his or her interests and concerns. Level 3 listening “encourages the speaker to think even bigger, connecting his or her viewpoint and thoughts to a broader vision.” This vision could be his or her hopes regarding the person’s life, family, church or Living Faith group.

In this outline of listening offered by Cook and Poole, level 2 focuses on the content of one’s life—what is happening. Level 3 is about a person’s hopes of what life will be. Level 2 listening asks what happened in the past week, for example. Level 3 listening asks what one hopes will happen in a given area of life this coming week, or month, or year.

## Reflections

- Keep a journal of your conversations even if you don’t normally follow this practice. If necessary, focus on just two or three conversations. Try to include brief conversations as much as possible. Determine what level of listening you used in each case. Did you vary from one level to another within the same conversation?
- What did you learn about the person in each case? (Don’t identify the person or share sensitive content.)
- What did you learn about yourself and your listening skills?

## Practice Your Listening Skills

This exercise will take most of a group gathering. It is designed for a session apart from the group's discussion of the previous questions in this study guide.

**Directions:** During your group's time of Connecting, break into groups of three. If necessary, have a group of two.

Share your "life's experiences and lessons" as a conversation between two persons in this smaller group. The third person should listen and make observations to share with the whole group later. In a group of two, observations must be noted by the pair. Keep all of the principles of this study guide in mind. Each person in this smaller group should have a turn at sharing. The group leader will need to keep careful watch of time in order for everyone to have a turn.

During "Spiritual Growth and Caring Skills," share your observations you made when you were the listener.

Whether you are focused on your listening skills in your *Living Faith* group, with someone you are visiting, or with a friend or relative, your efforts must be genuine. This must be more than an exercise. Your focus must be on the sacredness and value of the individual, not on your desire to improve a skill. Always enter an encounter with another person with a prayer of thanksgiving that you have an opportunity to be near the sacred presence of God in that person.

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# A Way to Discern the Group's Call to Outreach

## What We Hope Will Happen

Outreach is an integral part of *Living Faith*, and it is intended to be a group effort. This material is intended to help your group to discern the outreach effort that you should pursue. A few guidelines as you enter this process:

- This is not a questionnaire. It is a discernment process. Use your personal devotional times this week to pray and seek God's guidance through the Scripture passages below and by reflecting on the questions that follow. .
- Reflect on one Scripture passage each day for the first three days and then on one question each day for the next three days.
- Take your time. Think about past experiences that relate to this subject. Recall times that you've imagined the way you would reach out to others.
- You might even write a prayer that you pray each day to make it more thoughtful and deliberate.

## Meditate on These Passages

**John 4:23-38** (end of the story of Jesus with the woman at the well)

- What faces do you imagine that Jesus was envisioning when he talked about the harvest?
- Was he thinking particularly about the group from Sychar that was walking toward him?
- Whom will you be seeing later today or tomorrow?

**Luke 4:14-21** (one story of Jesus' sense of call)

- What had Jesus just experienced that left him “filled with the Holy Spirit”?
- What would a parallel experience be for you?
- What was Jesus’ relationship with those who heard him speak in this story?
- What line of verses 18 and 19 catches your attention the most?

### **Acts 16:6-15 (call to Macedonia)**

- Have you ever wanted to do something for someone but things just didn’t work out to make it possible? Write down that story.
- Have you ever felt a deep burden for someone who needed help or for a group with a common need? Describe that experience. Who was it about? What happened? Etc.

### **Questions for Individual Reflection**

- When you think about people to help or serve, what kind of faces come to mind? Young children? Teenagers? Adults? Seniors? Older seniors? Other images? Male or female? Describe in your own words the faces you see. Are the faces in your mind close by or far away?
- What type of issues, situations or needs stir your heart? Hunger? Homelessness? Domestic abuse and violence? Discrimination? Imprisonment? Loneliness? Guidance for children or youth? Medical needs? Disabilities? Grief and loss? What other burden keeps coming back to your mind?

- When you consider your strongest answers to these two previous questions, what experiences have you had that connect with those answers?
  
- What were your abilities that you found helpful in those situations? What did you wish you could have done better?

### **Sharing with Your Group**

Now that you have used this discernment process individually, gather with your group and share your responses.

- What common themes do you notice in the responses of your group members?
- Are there some visions or burdens expressed that fit closely together?
- What opportunities exist that fit well with the visions that are shared by many members of the group?

List the tasks that must be done to explore these possibilities. Consider asking someone to meet with the group who has some experience in the type of outreach being considered. Your pastor may be able to help with this.

This discernment and planning work may take two or three sessions. If it's a major undertaking, even more time may be needed for preparation. Be aware of the progression of your spiritual growth and your group's cohesion during this time. **Your unity is the foundation for the success of your outreach because it all depends on the depth of Christ's spirit within you.**

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