

A 16-session series of studies to make disciples  
in small groups and congregations.



# Begin anew

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## Christian Discipleship Seminars

- Believe in God
- Belong in Community
- Become Mature
- Behave like Christ



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<http://mennoniteusa.org/resource/begin-anew/>  
<http://www.commonword.ca/go/797>

# LEADER'S GUIDE

**Palmer Becker**, General Editor

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# Introduction

*Begin Anew* is designed for a wide range of participants with different backgrounds and acquaintances with the Christian faith. These individuals may be youth preparing for baptism, young adults who dropped out of the church, or those who have recently moved into a new area. They may be new to the faith and to a congregation, or they may be members of the church who want to go deeper in their experience of what it means to follow Jesus in daily life. This study can help these individuals gain a new perspective on the church and its mission.

Participants in this study acknowledge that becoming a Christian, joining a church, or serving in the church are sufficiently significant to merit a semester of study. The sixteen sessions also form an excellent semester of Sunday School studies for those who want to understand the Christian faith from an Anabaptist perspective. The sessions are easy to use and yet profound in content.

The **text** of this study is the ninety-six-page participant's manual called *Begin Anew*. Each of the sixteen sessions is built around five or six main questions with biblical and practical responses. This leader's guide provides a suggestion for each question in the participant's manual to help you teach or discuss it. Often, you may need to decide which of the five or six questions in a session are most relevant to your group. You might want to time the sections of a study so you can give priority to the most important questions.

**Videos** (approximately eight to twelve minutes in length) are available free of charge at [[www.commonword.ca/go/1175](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1175)] to help you enter into each session. These videos feature creative leaders and church members who have made a new beginning, and they will provide you with examples of how the Christian faith might be lived. While the written materials in *Begin Anew* focus on the "what" and "how" of being a follower of Jesus, the videos speak to the "why." *Why is it important to believe in God? Belong to a community? Adopt devotional practices? or Have a ministry in the church?* You will want to preview each of these videos before your group meets so you can make the most of it and emphasize the main point of each session's study. If your group is small, you can simply use a laptop computer to show the videos.

To help guide your preparation, each session begins with a **statement of objectives**. An excellent way to introduce each lesson is to open with prayer, thanking God for the subject being studied and asking for his guidance in understanding his desire. In addition, this leader's guide will often encourage you to break into smaller groups for more personal discussion. Husbands and wives will usually speak more freely if they are encouraged to be in different groups. Many of the sessions end by inviting participants to make life-changing commitments.

Carefully read the **"Introduction for Group Leaders"** in the *Begin Anew* participant's manual before you begin leading these sessions, as it includes background information, comments on the use of Scripture, and credits for those who have helped create this set of materials.

## Three Ways to Use Begin Anew

### 1. One on One

*Begin Anew* can serve as an excellent guide for anyone who is exploring either the Christian faith or membership in your church. Give a copy of the participant's manual to the individual and offer to meet with him or her once a week. If the individual is seeking to transfer membership to your church, you may want to begin with unit 2. Ask the person to read the appropriate session in advance. When you get together, you might inquire, "What question in this session is of greatest interest to you?"

## 2. Class or Small Group

*Begin Anew* is written in easy-to-teach question-and-answer style and is ideal for use during a Sunday morning study hour or at any time during the week in home groups. Provide a copy of *Begin Anew* for each member of the class or group. This leader's guide will suggest how you can help the group have interesting discussions and creative activities.

While most groups will want to begin with unit 1, you can go through the units in any order. For example, if your group has questions about acceptance or friendships in the church, you may want to start with unit 2. If the primary interest is in developing spiritual disciplines, you might want to begin with unit 3. (Baptism might take place after unit 1, and church membership after unit 2.)

## 3. Whole Congregation Emphasis

One of the best ways to use *Begin Anew* is to plan for an all-church emphasis. There are several reasons why this might help your church:

- *An all-church emphasis will allow you better focus.* Instead of having one theme in worship, another in adult study or small groups, and still another in personal devotions, everyone is focused on the same theme. Familiarity with the content and knowledge of what is coming will make it easier for your church members to invite their friends and relatives.
- *An all-church emphasis will provide new opportunities for developing leaders.* Because everyone will be encouraged to be part of a small group, you will need to recruit additional leaders or facilitators and give them an orientation. Experience shows that when a church presents a vision and a need, people who are not presently involved will rise to the challenge for a specific period of time.
- *An all-church emphasis will give pastors the opportunity to shepherd their flock and lead the body in a new and unified way.* This emphasis is not about fund-raising; it is about faith-raising. Your people will grow in their faith!

## How to Structure the Time

As previously noted, you can use *Begin Anew* for sixteen consecutive weeks in study groups or even in a whole-congregation emphasis. However, dividing the material into two eight-week or four four-week periods of time may be more workable for most church situations. The first two units fit together well:

- **Unit 1, "Believe in God,"** is more theological in nature. It will help you take a fresh look at your understanding of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the grace of God. You might begin with an introductory sermon on the importance of believing and follow up with sermons on believing in God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the grace of God. Study groups and personal devotions will help people deepen their beliefs in God and experience him.
- **Unit 2, "Belong in Community,"** is more practical in nature. It explains how a healthy church is like a family with clear statements of purpose, faith, and strategy. You will explore the history and purpose of your congregation and its vision for the future. The unit ends by inviting participants to become members or to affirm their membership covenant.

Units 3 and 4 also go together well:

- **Unit 3, "Become Mature,"** is also more theological in nature. It uses Scripture to introduce four practices that will help participants choose creative, meaningful patterns for daily Bible

reading, prayer, generous living, and small group fellowship.

- **Unit 4, “Behave like Christ,”** is again more practical in nature. It explores the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of your people and community and the gifts your people have for meeting them. The goal of the unit is to help participants choose to have a ministry in the church and a mission in the world to which they feel called and to which they would like to commit themselves.

### **Daily Meditations and Follow-up**

Five days’ worth of *Daily Meditations* that correlate with the theme of the week are available free of charge at [[www.commonword.ca/go/1176](http://www.commonword.ca/go/1176)]. If your church is doing a whole-church emphasis, you may want your church secretary to send the daily meditation to each member via email. The meditations for Saturday will help participants to prepare for the upcoming session. Sunday is left open for actual study of the materials.

As you lead the sessions, encourage participants to interact with you by circling words and making notes in the margins of their *Begin Anew* participant’s manual. After each question and discussion, allow liberal time for comments and concerns.

May God bless you and your congregation as you seek to *begin anew!*

Palmer Becker, General Editor

# Unit 1 / Session 1

## Believing in God

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly welcome each participant* as he or she arrives. Build a relationship!
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To help individual participants become a cohesive, relational group
  - To introduce the ***Begin Anew*** Christian discipleship seminars and gain enthusiasm for these seminars' stated goals and content
  - To come to new understandings of God and have an intimate encounter with him
3. *Open with prayer*, giving thanks for this occasion and the material for study. Ask for God's guidance as you make this new beginning to understand and practice the Christian faith.

### II. Introduce Begin Anew

***Suggestion:*** Take fifteen minutes to give an overall introduction to ***Begin Anew*** based on pages 4–5 in the participant's manual. Describe what it is: a sixteen-session discipleship series that will help participants make a new beginning in what they believe, in how they belong together, in how they can become more spiritually mature, and in how they can behave like Christ in their daily lives.

### III. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

***Suggestion:*** Explain to the group that each week there will be an eight- to ten-minute video to introduce them to the theme of the day. After the video, they will have the opportunity to comment on what struck them. Today's session will feature Palmer Becker, a pastor, author, and general editor of the ***Begin Anew*** series, and Andalyne Tofflemire, a naturalist at the Cambridge Butterfly Conservatory in Cambridge, Ontario. They will introduce the four units of the ***Begin Anew*** seminars by comparing the four stages of a butterfly's development to the transformation that they hope the participants will experience as they go through the four units of ***Begin Anew***. The video ends by introducing participants to the key questions for session 1.

### IV. Four Discussion Questions

***Suggestion:*** Leave some time to discuss questions about the videos, the materials, and the plans for the study. Make sure everyone has a participant's manual and knows how to access the daily meditations that go with each week's sessions.

#### 1. Is your concept of God too small? (page 9)

***Suggestion:*** Don't take yourself too seriously. Be prepared to laugh at the false and inadequate concepts of God that you and others have held. Note the five inadequate concepts of God that people sometimes hold.

***Discussion:*** Divide into groups of three people each and try to place husbands and wives in separate groups. Give each person an opportunity to share how he or she as a child has

understood or pictured God. After five minutes, invite a few people to share some childhood understandings.

## 2. How can you know that God exists? (page 10)

**Suggestion:** Be open and non-defensive to the many questions about God that people may ask, but also seek to go beyond knowing God to experiencing God. Where in your lives have you seen or felt the embrace or reality of an invisible God?

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of six and encourage each person to read and introduce one way of knowing God. Note that the first three ways of knowing God—nature, moral laws, and inner experiences—are related to human reason, while the last three—supernatural phenomena, divine communication, and Jesus—emerge from divine revelation. Encourage participants to be vulnerable and honest as they share where and when they have experienced or seen God.

## 3. What does the Bible tell us about God? (page 11)

**Suggestion:** Have participants go around the circle reading the eight Scriptures and qualities of God given on pages 11–12.

**Discussion:** Ask each participant to use one of the six qualities of God, or another from their experience, to finish the sentence, “For me, God is . . .” (e.g., “relational”).

## 4. What kind of parent is your God? (page 13)

**Suggestion:** Have participants reflect on the qualities and nature of their dominant parent. Was he or she loving? Distant? Nurturing? Harsh? Adoring?

**Discussion:** Divide participants into groups of three. Ask each person to share honestly how the nature of his or her dominant parent has influenced the way he or she thinks of God. Next week, the group will explore how a relationship with Jesus can correct negative concepts of God.

## V. Closing

1. **Summary:** Ask the group members what insight was new in today’s session and what questions they have that remain.
2. **Assignment:** In preparation for the next session, encourage participants to read session 2, pages 14–20, and seek to answer each of the six main questions. There will be too much material for the participants to cover, so invite them to come with a suggestion as to what will be the most helpful to discuss. They should feel free to bring their own questions about Jesus or about what it means to make him lord of our lives.
3. **Blessing:** End each session with a blessing. Note that a blessing is not a prayer but rather an affirming statement declaring something God is ready to give to or do for the person being blessed. With your eyes open, speak into the eyes and hearts of your group members, saying something like, “May the love of God our Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, go with you!”

## **For Further Study**

J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961).

Philip Yancey, *Finding God in Unexpected Places* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1994).

# Unit 1 / Session 2

## Believing in Jesus

### I. Opening

1. *Welcome each person* by name as he or she arrives. If possible, have participants sit in a circle. Ask married persons to sit separately from each other.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To learn to know Jesus and what he came to do
  - To learn how to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
  - To give participants an opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior

**Alert!** There is too much material in this lesson for one hour. It is recommended that you skip question 2 (“What did Jesus reveal about God?”), question 3 (“What did Jesus come to do?”), and question 4 (“What prevents you from having a relationship with God through Jesus?”). Focus instead on question 1 (“Who is Jesus?”), question 5 (“What brings you closer to Jesus?”), and question 6 (“From what does God, through Jesus, save you?”).

3. *Open with prayer*, giving thanks for the coming of Jesus as our example, Lord, and Savior. Ask God for help on how we can know and experience Jesus in a personal way.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Bruxy Cavey is the teaching pastor of The Meeting House in Oakville, Ontario, and gave the final address at Mennonite World Conference in Harrisonburg, Pennsylvania. Cavey will make strong statements about the central importance of Jesus and how we can share our faith in him with others.

**Discussion:** What did you find most helpful in what Bruxy said? (Responses might include Jesus is God with us; Jesus shows us God’s heart; begin sharing with Jesus as teacher; eternal life begins now.)

### III. Six Discussion Questions

#### 1. Who is Jesus? (page 14)

**Suggestion:** On a whiteboard, list the six titles about Jesus found on pages 14–15. Discuss them one at a time. Invite participants to read the statements.

**Discussion:** After discussing the questions, divide into groups of three. Ask the groups to share how they would respond to a friend who asked, “Who is Jesus?”

#### 2. What does Jesus reveal about God? (page 15; omit if needed)

**Suggestion:** Summarize the three truths that explain what Jesus reveals about God. Recall that last week we ended by asking, “How can negative concepts of God be corrected?” The short answer is, “Take a good look at Jesus!”

### 3. What did Jesus come to do? (page 16; omit if needed)

**Suggestion:** Focus on the fact that Jesus came to proclaim the kingdom of God (see Mark 1:14–15). Using the model on page 17, draw on a whiteboard and describe the three types of kingdom:

- a. *God's kingdom: ruled by love.* God's kingdom is where God is king. In God's kingdom, there are right relationships with God, with self, with each other, and with all creation. Love is the ruling principle. Jesus is lord.
- b. *Civil government: ruled by law.* Civil governments rule by law and power. People are forced to do what they are commanded to do.
- c. *Satan's kingdom (principalities and powers): ruled by self.* Satan seems to believe that self-rule is the best way to live. However, selfishness and self-rule leads to chaos in lives, families, communities, and the world. The Apostle Paul calls selfish forces "principalities and powers" (Ephesians 6:12).

**Discussion:** Discuss what it means to say, "God's kingdom is wherever God is king."

### 4. What keeps you from a relationship with God? (page 18; omit if needed)

**Suggestion:** Outline the four attitudes that prevent people from having a deep and personal relationship with God.

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three and let participants describe which of the statements from page 18 are true for them. What are the consequences?

### 5. What brings you closer to God? (page 19)

**Suggestion:** Explain that we come closer to God by coming closer to Jesus. Make yourself vulnerable and, as comfortably as you can, share your own story of how you:

- a. Admitted that Jesus had not been your Lord (following other lords is often the greatest sin)
- b. Asked God to forgive you for neglecting him or doing wrong
- c. Accepted the free gift of forgiveness and relationships that you have available to you through Jesus

**Commitment:** Ask participants to underline the statements in the prayer on page 19 that they want to honestly pray to God. After they have underlined the phrases that are important to them, pray the prayer slowly, one phrase at a time. Allow the Holy Spirit to make this a holy moment for the group.

**Discussion:** Ask, "What questions do you have about accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" After the discussion, ask participants to turn to page 28. Encourage those who have made a commitment to Jesus as Lord (either now or at an earlier time) to sign their name and date their experience.

### 6. From what does God save you? (page 19)

**Suggestion:** Ideally, each participant will be able to specifically name that from which they have been saved or delivered.

*Discussion:* Read the eight statements on page 19. Ask the group, “From which of these are you being delivered?”

#### **IV. Closing**

- 1. Summary:** Help the participants reflect on the session by asking questions such as, “What did you think previously about salvation? How has this study changed some of your understanding? Do you think of salvation/deliverance more as something here and now or something that will take place in the future, after death? What difference does it make?”
- 2. Offer** to have individual conversation and prayer with anyone who desires it.
- 3. Assignment:** Encourage participants to read session 3, “Believing in the Holy Spirit.” Encourage them to tentatively answer each of the three questions before coming to the next session.
- 4. Blessing:** Close by asserting, “May Jesus, and the relationship that you have with him, fill your life with purpose and joy both in this life and the next!”

## Unit 1 / Session 3

# Believing in the Holy Spirit

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly and individually welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To become acquainted with the Holy Spirit
  - To explore how we receive the Holy Spirit
  - To be transformed by the Holy Spirit
3. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for guidance through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Ask for his presence as you explore what it means to believe in the Holy Spirit.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Fanosie Legesse, formerly from Miserete Kristos (Mennonite) Church of Ethiopia, is now pastor of Zion Mennonite Fellowship in Elmira, Ontario. Note the difference the Holy Spirit made in his life and the difference the Holy Spirit can make in ours.

**Discussion:** What impression did Fanosie leave with you? (For example, *the Holy Spirit stamps our hearts; changes were all good; God runs the church through the Holy Spirit; the key work of the Holy Spirit is the transformation of our lives.*)

### III. Introduce the Session

1. **Help the participants develop a desire to encounter the Holy Spirit by giving these reasons for this study:**
  - a. The Holy Spirit is **God at work in the present**. While the Father's work was most conspicuous within the Old Testament period, and the Son's work took place within the period covered by the Gospels, the Holy Spirit has been at work and has occupied center stage from the time of Pentecost onward.
  - b. The Holy Spirit is the point at which God **becomes personal** to us. We generally think of the Father as transcendent and far off in heaven. Similarly, we think of the Son as rather far removed in history. But the Holy Spirit is resident within us and within our circles.
  - c. Our current culture stresses **the experiential**. It is primarily through the Holy Spirit's work that we feel God's presence within us. Dying churches are information-oriented, while thriving churches are experientially oriented. When the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives, we have stories to tell!
2. **If you have time, share that there have been at least six waves of the Holy Spirit:**
  - a. The first wave began at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came mightily on the first believers. The book of Acts could be titled, "The Acts of the Holy Spirit."

- b. A second wave came with the Monastic movement of the Middle Ages. Saints withdrew from society and emphasized the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- c. The early Anabaptists were the charismatic movement of the sixteenth century. They talked more about the Holy Spirit than the Lutheran, Reformed, or Catholic leaders. Because of their reliance on inner transformation and the Holy Spirit, they were known as changed and empowered people.
- d. In 1900, Charles Parham, head of a small Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, assigned his students to study the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Their unanimous conclusion was that the Bible teaches there is to be a baptism (or coming) of the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion and that speaking in tongues is a sign one has received what God has to offer. The students experienced this phenomenon, and soon the Pentecostal movement spread to Los Angeles and throughout the United States (especially in churches of lower socio-economic levels).
- e. A further wave of the Holy Spirit began in the early '50s and extended into the '70s and '80s. This time, believers in Anglican, Catholic, and even Mennonite churches experienced a second work of grace. Christian faith became a personal experience for many. Goshen College convened a conference on the Holy Spirit, and the Mennonite Church added a Charismatic representative to its General Board. Many believers were filled with a new enthusiasm for how God could change lives and situations.
- f. Another wave of the Holy Spirit is currently happening in Mennonite and other churches, especially in the Global South. People are being delivered not only from sin but also from illness, evil spirits, depression, and stubborn attitudes. God is actually making a difference in how they think, feel, and live!

#### IV. Three Discussion Questions

##### 1. Who is the Holy Spirit? (page 21)

**Suggestion:** Have participants read the statements in turn.

**Discussion** questions might include:

- a. *In what way is the Holy Spirit a person?* Read in unison Romans 8:26–27 at the top of page 21 in the participant's guide.
- b. *Does the Holy Spirit have a body?* It has been suggested that a spirit-filled group of people represents the body of the Holy Spirit. Divide into groups of three and discuss when or where in the church you have experienced fruit of the Spirit such as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control” (Galatians 5:22).
- c. *Some say that Jesus was a normal human being who was totally filled with the Holy Spirit. Would you agree?* Note that the Gospel of Luke says the Holy Spirit was present in or with Jesus at his birth, baptism, temptation, teaching ministry, healing ministry, trial, death, and resurrection. The terms, “The Holy Spirit,” the “Spirit of Jesus,” and the “Spirit of God,” are often interchangeable. Some believe the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the Second Coming of Jesus are the same thing.

##### 2. How can you receive the Holy Spirit? (page 22)

**Suggestion:** Explain that receiving Jesus as Lord and receiving the Holy Spirit have much in common. When we accept Jesus as Lord, we also receive the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of Jesus. It would seem that God wants receiving Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit to happen simultaneously; however, we are sometimes not ready to receive his Spirit. When we are ready, God works further in our lives by coming more fully. (Make yourself vulnerable and share in ways you have received or experienced the Holy Spirit in your life.)

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three and have participants share the desires they have to receive the Holy Spirit and why they want to receive him. If appropriate, pray a prayer on behalf of the group:

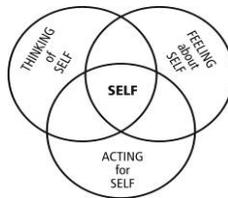
- Admitting that you have not been totally obedient to Jesus as your Lord
- Asking for forgiveness for your neglect, disobedience, or offences
- Surrendering as much of yourself as you can to as much of the Spirit as you can understand

### 3. How might you be transformed by the Holy Spirit? (page 23)

**Suggestion:** Draw three interlocking circles on a whiteboard as diagramed below. Label them “thinking,” “feeling,” and “acting,” with “Spirit” in the center.



- Explain that God is a **thinking** God who is the source of all thought and truth. God is a **feeling** God who loves but also has the capacity for jealousy and righteous wrath. And God is an **acting** God who led the children of Israel out of Egypt, came in Jesus, and continues to deliver and empower us. In essence, God is **Spirit** and made us in his image to be thinking, feeling, and acting persons who, in essence, are spirit!
- Unfortunately, we all fall short of what God intends for us, and the Spirit of God is replaced with self. (Replace the word “**Spirit**” with “**self**”) As a result, we are prone to **think, feel,** and **act** selfishly.



- When we recognize this, turn from our selfishness, and invite Jesus to become Lord of our lives, the Holy Spirit takes control of us and we become transformed persons. (Replace the word “**self**” with “**Holy Spirit.**”)



- d. Ask individual participants to read statements 4, 5, and 6 on page 24, adding the phrases “as a student teacher,” “as a forgiven reconciler,” and “as a servant leader” to the statements. These are our new identities!

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three and ask, “What comments or questions do you have about becoming a transformed student-teacher, forgiven-reconciler, and servant-leader? What will actually change in how you think, feel, or act?”

## V. Closing

1. **Summarize** what has been learned about the Holy Spirit.
2. **Assignment:** Have the participants read session 4, “Believing in the Grace of God.” Encourage them to reflect on how they have experienced the grace of God.
3. **Blessing:** Close by asserting, “May the Holy Spirit remind you of all that Jesus has taught you and empower you to follow him in everyday life!”

## Unit 1 / Session 4

# Believing in the Grace of God

### I. Opening

1. *Welcome each participant* warmly as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To clearly understand and celebrate the grace of God
  - To help participants identify an incident or experience of grace in their lives
  - To help each person write the story of how he or she has experienced the grace of God in salvation or in another experience
3. *Open with a prayer*, thanking God for his undeserving love and acceptance. Ask for insight on where you and the group members have already experienced God's grace.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Dr. Nakhle Bishara is co-founder of the Nazareth Village in Israel/Palestine, a medical doctor, a friend of Mennonites, and an active lay leader in the Greek Orthodox Church. He will share his experiences of how he encountered the grace of God in his family and church experience.

**Discussion:** What about Dr. Nakhle or about what he said did you find helpful? (For example, *grace is the undeserved gift of what we need; inner peace and confidence is the grace of God; we need to be humble to receive the grace of God.*)

### III. Introduce the Session

**Suggestion:** Clarify that the goal for today's session is for each person to write a story of how he or she has experienced the grace of God.

1. Grace is "unmerited favor." It is receiving something without deserving, earning, working for, or being good enough to deserve it. It is the opposite of entitlement, or feeling that someone owes us something. Divine grace means that God gives us something free of charge. A key verse is, For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).
2. Some people believe the Old Testament conveys God as a God of law and justice while the New Testament presents God as a God of love and grace. This is false. The main theme of the Old Testament is how God graciously delivered the people of Israel from slavery, even though they did not deserve it, and then gave them food and water in the wilderness. This was before he graciously gave the law to guide them. In Exodus 34:6, God says that he is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." In the New Testament, we see the fullness of God's love and grace.

### IV. Write Your Story

1. **What are examples of God's grace?** (page 25)

**Suggestion:** Ask four participants to read the four statements on page 25. In each statement change the words “we” and “us” to “I” or “me.”

**Discussion:** Ask the participants to check which of the four ways of experiencing God’s grace is most real for them. Then refer them to the bottom of page 25 and ask them to check one of the eight specific situations listed from which they, by the grace of God, have been delivered.

## 2. Sharing your story (page 26)

**Suggestion:** Explain the three reasons given for sharing our stories. State that sharing our stories may happen at baptism or any other appropriate setting.

**Discussion:** Where and when are stories being told in our church? List the places and settings.

## 3. How to organize your story (page 26)

**Suggestion:** Provide the participants with a pencil and paper, and then guide them through the process of writing a story.

- a. **Choose a story.** Ask, “How have you experienced the grace of God?” Tell them to choose a situation from pages 25–26 and give that story a title, such as, “How I received *acceptance after being rejected*.” Don’t proceed until each participant has chosen a story and given it a title.
- b. **Write the story in four parts.** Indicate that you will give the participants two minutes for writing each part.
  - **Part 1:** *What was life like before you experienced God’s love, forgiveness, acceptance, or guidance?* Ask the participants to take two minutes to answer one or more of the questions listed under point 1 at the bottom of page 26. Have them quickly write anything that comes to mind.
  - **Part 2:** *What caused you to realize your need for Christ?* Read the questions under point 2 at the top of page 27 and encourage the participants to choose the one that best fits their situation. Give them two minutes to write.
  - **Part 3:** *How did you receive the grace of God?* Read the questions under point 3. Challenge the group members to answer all of them.
  - **Part 4:** *What difference has Christ made in your life?* This should be the longest part of the participants’ story. Read the questions under point 4 and give them three minutes to write. Give extra time if needed, but reserve ten minutes at the end of the hour for sharing their stories. At the end ask them to give thanks to God and the people that he used to bring salvation/deliverance to their lives.

**Discussion:** Invite the participants to share this first draft of their story with the group. Affirm and celebrate what God has done in their lives! (Note that if they prefer not to share, you can allow them to “pass.”)

## 4. How to refine your story (page 27)

**Suggestion:** Ask any participants who are having difficulty writing their story to review this section in the guide. Encourage them to continue working on their story at home using these suggestions, as they provide a vision for how it might look or feel.

## V. Closing

1. **Review** how members have experienced the grace of God. Allow any person who did not make a commitment to Jesus at the end of session 2, but who is ready now, the opportunity to do so.
2. **Assignment:** Invite participants to read pages 29–33. This section will help them look forward to the next unit, *Belong in Community*.
3. **Celebrate** the conclusion of unit 1. Invite comments and suggestions.
4. **Blessing:** Close by asserting, “May the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, go with you now and always!”

## Unit 2 / Session 1

# Belonging in Community

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly welcome each person* as he or she arrives. Address each by name.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To understand the subjects and objectives of unit 2
  - To understand the church as a community, family, body, upside-down kingdom, and an answer to the world's major problems
  - To celebrate what the church has to offer
3. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for the fellowship of the church. Ask for guidance as you enter unit 2. Request God's help in seeking to understand the church as a community, a family, a body, an upside-down kingdom, and an answer to the fundamental problems of the world.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Stuart Murray is an international consultant in church planting and a leader in the emerging church movement. He has served as the director of the Anabaptist Network in England. Note what he says about what things receive emphasis in the post-Christian church.

**Discussion:** What thought or phrase expressed in this video did you find most helpful? (For example, *the church is a community of those who are following Jesus; emerging churches stress what people can give rather than what they need; Jesus, peace, and social transformation are essential.*)

### III. Introduce the Session

**Suggestion:** Help the participants anticipate what unit 2 has to offer by reviewing the Table of Contents and the Introduction on pages 30–31. Takeaways from this unit will hopefully be:

- A rich and deep appreciation for the church
- A clearer understanding of the purposes, faith, and workings of your congregation (note that some modifications will need to be made)
- Enthusiasm for the visions of your church
- A new and stronger sense of “belonging” in the church

Explain that human beings are relational and social in nature. Everyone has a need to belong to a partner, family, or clan. It is not natural to be a hermit. The need to belong is found across all cultures and among different types of people. That need motivates us to participate in social activities such as family, teams, and the church. By belonging to a group, we feel as if we are a part of something bigger and more important than ourselves.

The church offers the sense of belonging the world needs! Abraham Maslow places the “need to belong” at the center of his hierarchy of human needs. (List the needs in pyramid fashion from bottom to top on a whiteboard: [1] food, water, air and shelter; [2] safety and health; **[3] belonging and love**; [4] self-esteem; [5] self-actualization.)

We believe God wants everyone to belong to a healthy, creative family in this life and the next. Jesus said, “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well” (Matthew 6:33). He taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Healthy relationships in the church—and especially in a healthy spirit-filled small group—will likely be the closest we will come to the kingdom of God on earth!

#### IV. Five Views of the Church

**Suggestion:** One way to teach this lesson is to ask five participants to review one of the five answers to the question “what is the church?” given on pages 32–33 of the guide. Give the participants a few minutes to prepare, and then let them “teach” the class. Have each presenter take four to five minutes to present his or her view of the church.

##### 1. A community of people (page 32)

*Suggestions for the presenter:*

- a. Consult a dictionary for a definition of the word “community,” such as, “people in an area,” “people with a common interest or background,” or “people with a common interest in Jesus.”
- b. Reflect on 1 Peter 2:10. The church is not a building or a place but a *people*—God’s people in Christ. In a sense, the early Catholics were right when they said there is no salvation outside of the church, because it is when we are together and interacting with each other in community that we fully experience the saving love of God, the guidance of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Be enthusiastic when you talk about the church as a community!
- c. Share a way in which you have experienced the church as a special community of people in contrast to a building, club, or performance.

**Discussion:** Ask, “What common interest or background draws us together as a community in our church?”

##### 2. A family (page 32)

*Suggestions for the presenter:*

- a. The New Testament uses many metaphors for the word “church,” such as a family, fellowship, bride, people, and temple. Introduce your congregation as “a group of relatives,” “people living together,” “a place where we call each other ‘brother and sister,’” and so forth.
- b. It is impossible to answer the question “what is a Christian?” without engaging in a conversation about the relationships Christians have with each other.
- c. Reflect on 1 Timothy 5:1–2 and Ephesians 2:19. Be enthusiastic when you talk about the church as a family.

**Discussion:** Ask, “What are examples in our church where we feel like brothers and sisters in a family? Do you have someone in the church who is like a father or mother to you?”

##### 3. A body (page 32)

*Suggestions for the presenter:*

- a. Highlight the church as a body with many parts. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 12:27. Be enthusiastic when you talk about the church as a body.
- b. Definitions of the word “body” include “physical form of a human” or “an organization with parts such as an orchestra or the United Nations.” Share a time when you experienced the church as a body that was working together. What gifts were evident?
- c. The same Spirit that was in Jesus entered his new body, the church. As a result, the members continued to do what Jesus began. Through his many bodies—perhaps 200 million in the world—the words of Jesus can be fulfilled: “You can do greater works than these because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12).

**Discussion:** Ask, “In what way is our church continuing to do what Jesus did? In what ways might we be lacking?”

#### 4. An upside-down kingdom (page 33)

*Suggestions for the presenter:*

- a. Define the word “kingdom” as “a monarch’s territory,” “a sphere of activity,” or “a classification for natural things.”
- b. Donald B. Kraybill, in his book *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, shows how the kingdom of God that Jesus announced appears upside-down. In God’s kingdom, the poor are the blessed ones, and the last become the first. Jesus wins by serving and triumphs by losing.
- c. Describe the church as an upside-down kingdom. You could draw two ladders with “servant” at the top of one and “lord” on top of the other.

**Discussion:** Ask, “In what ways are our members or our objectives ‘upside-down’ in our church?”

#### 5. God’s primary answer to the world’s problems (page 33)

*Suggestions for the presenter:*

- a. Define the word “answer” as “a way of solving a problem.” Emphasize Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:18b–19.
- b. When it functions properly, the church—with its more than 200 million congregations—is the only entity that has the resources, spiritual power, and moral foundations to tackle the world’s greatest problems.
- c. Try to identify some of the world’s greatest problems (those that affect more than a billion people) and the solutions offered through the church. Consider the following:

##### The Major Problems

1. Spiritual emptiness
2. Dictatorial leadership
3. War and poverty
4. Disease and illness
5. Lack of education

##### The Solutions via the Church

1. The presence and guidance of God
2. Equipping servant leaders
3. Conflict resolution and development
4. Medical and personal care
5. Educating the next generation

*Discussion:* Ask, “In what ways is our church helping to provide solutions to some of the world’s greatest problems?”

## V. Closing

1. **Summary:** Commend the “teachers” of the class and the insights gained. Summarize the insights.
2. **State** that next week the group will explore statements of purpose, faith, and strategy. Ask them to consider to which they want to give primary attention.
3. **Assignment:** Encourage participants to read pages 34–36 and ponder the question, “Why does our congregation exist?”
4. **Blessing:** Close by saying, “May the Lord bless you with deep, satisfying relationships in your family, small group, and church.”

## Unit 2 / Session 2

# Belonging with Purpose and Unity

### I. Opening

1. *Welcome each person warmly.*
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To understand and celebrate our statement of purpose
  - To understand and celebrate our statement of faith
  - To understand and celebrate our statement of strategy

**Alert!** This session contains a large amount of material, so decide which statement you will give priority. Feel free to modify the material according to your group's situation.

3. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for establishing the church. Ask God for clarity on why your church exists and what it should do.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Catherine Gitzel is a pastor at The Gathering, a newly planted church in Kitchener, Ontario. She and her teammates believe the church exists for the community rather than for itself. Notice how enthusiastic she and her team members are as they fulfill their purpose.

**Discussion:** What thought or concept expressed in this video did you find most helpful? In one sentence, or in five words, can you describe the purpose of the church? (For example, *continuing what Jesus began; inviting people to follow Jesus; building community beyond their church.*)

### III. Statements About Our Congregation

#### 1. Our congregation's story (page 34)

**Suggestion:** Be prepared to tell the story of your congregation. When, where, and why did it begin? Who were the key founders? What needs brought your church into being? (An example of a congregation's story is given on page 34.)

Recognize that your church is a diverse group of people and that it might be "a church for all peoples." Note to the group that this session assumes anyone—regardless of race, age, economics, sexual orientation, or religious background—is welcome in a church as long as he or she agrees to its statements of purpose, faith, and strategy. Agreement to support these three statements is essential for unity.

**Discussion:** Ask, "Is your church 'a church for all peoples'? Should it be? What does that mean?"

#### 2. Statement of purpose (page 35). *Why does our congregation exist?*

##### a. The importance of purpose.

**Suggestion:** Briefly introduce the importance of having a clearly worded purpose statement. Stress that nothing will revitalize a discouraged congregation more quickly than when its members rediscover their purpose. The benefits of having a clear purpose statement include:

- A congregation will know why it exists and what it wants to achieve.
- It provides a basis for the congregation to know what it will and what it will not do. Most congregations try to do too much.
- Purpose attracts cooperation. People want to be part of a church that knows where it is going.
- Purpose assists evaluation. It helps a congregation measure progress and make plans for the future.

**Discussion:** Ask the group if they can name examples of where a clear purpose was of help to a person, an organization, or a country. (Examples include John F. Kennedy, “We will go to the moon in our generation”; Dr. Martin Luther King, “I have a dream”; and Terry Fox, “Marathon of Hope.”)

**b. What motivates our congregation?**

**Suggestion:** Recognize that all churches are motivated by something. Have each participant read one source of motivation (see page 35).

**Discussion:** In what ways is your church motivated by each of these possibilities? To what extent are you motivated by purpose?

**c. Why does this congregation exist?**

**Suggestion:** Draw attention to the pyramid on page 36, which represents a congregation with a clear purpose. Note its parts and Scriptural basis.

- 1) This congregation can state its purpose in one sentence: “Our church exists to continue what Jesus began through worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission.” As Jesus said, “One who believes in me will also do the works that I do” (John 14:12).
- 2) This congregation has identified five sub-purposes based on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission of Jesus:
  - i) It exists to worship: “*Love God with all your heart, soul and mind*” (Matthew 22:37).
  - ii) It exists to offer ministry: “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” (Matthew 22:39).
  - iii) It exists for mission: “*Make disciples of all nations*” (Matthew 28:19).
  - iv) It exists to fellowship: “*Baptize them*” (Matthew 28:19; e.g., incorporate them into the fellowship).
  - v) It exists for discipleship. “*Teach them to obey*” (Matthew 28:20).
- 3) The activities of this congregation flow from its overall purpose and sub-purposes.

**Discussion:** Let the participants help you fill in the chart you have drawn on the whiteboard. Discuss what are your overall purposes, your sub-purposes, and some of the activities you do to carry out your purposes.

**3. Statement of faith** (page 37). *What does our congregation believe?*

**Suggestion:** Ask the participants to turn to pages 37–39, where the Confession of Faith is divided into four sections. These are abbreviations of the total document. Explain that the original intent of the Confession in 1995 was to show that different Mennonite groups had a body of truth on which they agreed. As you move through the statements, ask with which of these statements participants agree, with which they disagree or have difficulty, and with which they would like to have more clarity.

- a. **Common Themes of Faith.** The first eight themes (1–8) are held in common with the wider Christian church.

**Suggestion:** Invite participants to say the eight title words with you: “We believe in God; we believe in Jesus Christ; and so on.

- b. **The Church and its Practices.** The next eight themes (9–16) relate to the church and its practices.

**Suggestion:** Invite participants to say the eight title words with you: “We believe in church; we believe in mission,” and so on.

- c. **Discipleship.** The next seven statements (17–23) are related to discipleship.

**Suggestion:** Ask the group to say these with you: “discipleship, spirituality,” and so on.

**Discussion:** These seven statements on discipleship differentiate us somewhat from other Christian groups. Ask the group members how they feel about being “different.”

- d. **The Reign of God.** This statement (24) affirms that while we are already living under the reign of God, we await God’s final victory and the end of this present age of struggle.

**Discussion:** Admit there has been some diversity in regard to how members see these confessions. We have agreed that in essential beliefs, we have unity; while in non-essential beliefs, we have liberty. In all our beliefs, we show charity.

Explain that the Confession is the teaching position of the church. For example, we don’t expect every new believer to suddenly become a non-resistant pacifist. However, if new members are chosen to teach a youth Sunday School class, they are to teach the biblical peace position included in the statement.

While some see the Confession legalistically, others see it as a guide to help congregations and pastors interpret Scripture and adopt practices according to their convictions. Discuss the group’s understanding of the Confession.

#### 4. **Statement of strategy** (page 40). *How does our congregation serve?*

**Suggestion:** Write the words “Episcopal,” “Presbyterian,” and “Congregational” on the whiteboard. These are the three major forms of denominational polity by which congregations are directed. Explain each as follows, and then interpret your congregation’s pattern:

- a) **Episcopal:** A bishop makes final decisions. He or she helps the congregation resolve conflicts and choose a pastor. In some situations, the bishop assigns pastors to their churches.
- b) **Presbyterian:** A board of elders, which includes the pastor, makes final decisions. At times,

elders need to make hard decisions that may not be according to the majority in the congregation.

- c) **Congregational:** The members of the congregation make the final decisions. Members need to be informed, active, and sensitive.

Explain your congregation’s polity. For example, say, “Our congregation is partially Episcopal, in that a conference minister is available to give oversight to our congregation in time of special need. It is partially Presbyterian, in that between congregation meetings the church council gives guidance and makes needed decisions. But our congregation is primarily Congregational, in that members vote on the employment of pastoral staff, the doctrinal stances of the church, and the budget—and thereby the programs and property of the church.”

Our church has a constitution and organizational chart that describes how we currently go about our work of ministry and service and who is responsible for what. An organizational chart should be simple and clear enough so that viewers will be able to understand in thirty seconds how the church works.

**Discussion:** Study the organizational chart of your congregation. Does it clearly indicate who is responsible for what and whom volunteers can go to for support? Compare it to the following simple chart:

**Church Council**

**Ministry Team**

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<b>Worship</b>	<b>Fellowship</b>	<b>Nurture</b>	<b>Ministry</b>	<b>Mission</b>	<b>Administration</b>
Leaders	Small groups	Sunday School	Visitation	Overseas	Facilities
Preachers	Pot lucks	Adult study	Care team	National	Yard
Music	Senior fellowship	Youth	Welcoming	Local	Web
Prayers	Retreats	Library	Mentoring	Relief	Finances

**IV. Five Ways in Which We Give and Receive Ministry**

Ministry is the key product of our congregation. If it were a factory, ministry is what we would offer to our customers. Ministry is what we seek to receive from the church and what we have to offer to others. It is why we have pastors, programs, and small groups. Our goal is to offer more and better ministry.

**Suggestion:** Ask participants to read the paragraphs on pages 40–41. Discuss the ways in which you offer and receive ministry in your church.

**1. How do our pastors equip us and inspire us for ministry?**

**Discussion:** Ask the group in what ways their pastors minister, in what ways they administer, and how much time they spend in equipping.

**2. Do elders give overall direction to our congregation?**

*Discussion:* Ask the members to name their elders and what they do.

### 3. How do we choose the lay leaders who develop and guide the ministries of our congregation?

*Suggestion:* Ask four participants to describe one of the following options for choosing leaders (variously called elders, deacons, facilitators, and chairs):

- a) Members of the congregation nominate candidates for each lead position, followed by a vote between the top persons nominated. This gives ownership to the congregation and affirms the candidates.
- b) Members of the congregation nominate candidates for each lead position, and then a gifts discernment committee interviews the nominees and makes the final decisions.
- c) Members of the congregation nominate candidates for each lead position, and then a committee determines if those candidates are qualified. The final decision in appointing a nominee is made by casting lots.
- d) The gifts discernment committee fills all positions.

*Discussion:* Ask the group members how their church chooses lay leaders. Who are they?

### 4. Are small groups the key pastoral structure of our church?

*Suggestion:* Explain to the group that each person in their congregation is strongly encouraged to be part of a small group. People personally experience some of the items listed on page 40 of their guides.

*Discussion:* Ask the group members to name who they go to in their church when they need pastoral care.

### 5. Is every member ministry and every member mission encouraged in our church?

*Suggestion:* Explain to the group that each person in the congregation is encouraged to have a ministry in the church and a mission in the world. In unit 4 they will examine needs that call for ministry, along with the abilities, gifts, and experiences a person must possess for meeting them.

## V. Closing

1. **Summary:** Ask the group members how they respond to their congregation's statements of purpose, faith, and strategy. Which of these do they particularly affirm? Which of these do they particularly question?
2. **Assignment:** Encourage participants to read session 3, "Belonging with a Common Vision."
3. **Blessing:** Close by asserting, "The Lord desires to lead and enable us and our congregation to fulfill the vocation that he has for us. Let us allow him to guide and empower us for the task."

## Unit 2 / Session 3

# Belonging with a Common Vision

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To capture the importance of vision
  - To understand the Anabaptist vision
  - To discuss visions the church has for mission, commitment, and training
3. *Open with a prayer* that gives thanks for your church. Ask that you might receive a clearer vision for what God desires.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Steve Drudge is co-pastor of Steinman Mennonite Church in Baden, Ontario. Notice how he and the leaders of his church gain energy and perspective by beginning each council session with a time of visioning.

**Discussion:** What thought or concept expressed in this video did you find most helpful? (For example, “why” needs to come before the “what” and “how”; we need to know why we are doing these things; the vision-focus team is life-giving.) How does what you have heard apply to your church?

### III. Four Aspects of Mission

#### 1. The Anabaptist vision (page 42)

**Suggestion:** Take five minutes for participants to silently read “The Anabaptist Vision,” and then invite them to call out answers as you ask the following questions (be prepared to give answers based on pages 42–43):

- a. What was the Protestant Reformation all about?
- b. What were Luther’s and Zwingli’s original visions?
- c. What kept these men from successfully fulfilling their visions?
- d. What did they retain?
- e. What were the key Anabaptist visions?
- f. What are three core values of Anabaptist Christians?
- g. What was the experience of the Anabaptists during the first 100 years of their existence?
- h. According to Rufus M. Jones, what have been the results of the Anabaptist vision?

## 2. Our vision for mission (page 43)

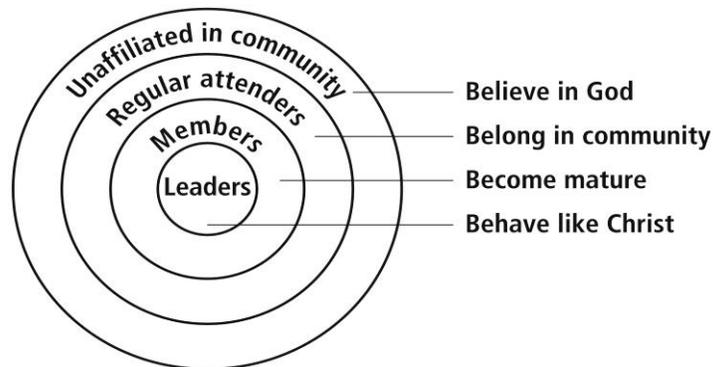
**Suggestion:** Summarize in a positive way what your congregation is doing in the area of mission. You might want to consult your congregation's budget and literature from conference agencies. Seek to report what is happening:

- a. Through local people and organizations
- b. Through the regional conference
- c. Through the national conference
- d. Through Inter-Mennonite Mission and Service agencies such as:
  - Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)
  - Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS)
  - Mennonite World Conference (MWC)
  - Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)

**Discussion:** In what mission have you been involved? In what way were you involved?

## 3. Our vision for commitment (page 45)

**Suggestion:** On the whiteboard, draw four circles, one inside of the next. Ask a participant to read paragraphs 1, 2, 3, and 4 on page 45 and label the circles accordingly. Indicate how the units of *Begin Anew* seek to lead people from one level of commitment to the next. (Note that in reality, the transitions may not be so specific.)



**Discussion:** It is said, "The best days of our lives are the days on which we make our greatest commitments." Is that true for you?

## 4. Our vision for training (page 46)

**Suggestion:** On the whiteboard, list the training programs offered in your church, such as membership preparation, mentoring programs, sermons, Sunday School studies, boards, committees, task forces, and special workshops.

**Discussion:** In groups of three:

- a. Share what you have found helpful in these *Begin Anew* discipleship seminars. What has been your experience thus far? In what ways might you use these studies (or parts of them)

- for training in the future?
- b. What is working well in your current training programs? What are the weaknesses and strengths of your programs? How can the programs be strengthened?
  - c. What is your vision for training in your congregation?

#### **IV. Closing**

- 1. Summary:** Summarize the visions that have come to you through this session.
- 2. Assignment:** Encourage participants to study session 4, “Belonging through Meaningful Membership.”
- 3. Blessing:** Close by asserting, “May the Lord bless you with a vision for your life, your family, and our church.”

## Unit 2 / Session 4

# Belonging through Meaningful Membership

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To understand the meaning and importance of baptism and the Lord's Supper
  - To understand the reasons for and responsibilities of membership
  - To affirm or reaffirm membership in your congregation
3. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for the rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Ask for his guidance in understanding the meaning and importance of membership.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Sara Wenger Shenk, President of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, expresses her love and "hate" for the church. She describes an organism that shows love and care for hurting people.

**Discussion:** Discuss with which of Dr. Shenk's statements the group members would most readily agree. (For example, *I love the church, and I am deeply disappointed that often it does not live up to its calling; we are in challenging times; the church is a place of welcome; we expect the living Jesus to be present wherever we might gather; the seminary seeks to educate followers of Jesus to be leaders of God's people in the world.*)

### III. Lesson Themes and Questions

#### 1. Baptism (page 47)

##### a. Introduction

*Suggestion:* To establish the proper atmosphere, prepare a small table laden with the symbols of baptism and the Lord's Supper: a baptismal bowl, a plate of bread, and a cup of juice.

Explain that we have two ordinances in the Mennonite church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are sometimes referred to as *symbols*, which means they stand for or represent something else. The Confession of Faith calls them signs of what has taken place. We will discuss these two signs and then explore the meaning of church membership.

Provide a background for understanding baptism by stating it has its roots in the Old Testament practices of ceremonial sprinkling, pouring, and washing with water, oil, and blood. These ceremonies took place when the people dedicated something to the Lord or when something had become unclean through disease, sin, or other causes (see Leviticus 8:6, 10-12, 30) Gentiles were ushered into Judaism through baptism.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist baptized people as a symbol of their repentance, or turning from sin. Jesus was baptized at the beginning of his ministry and as a sign that the

Holy Spirit was very present and active. A voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

Baptism has several symbolic meanings, including forgiveness of sins, receiving the Holy Spirit, and being prepared or commissioned for ministry (see Acts 2:38).

**b. Who should be baptized?**

**Suggestion:** Briefly outline the three types of persons who, according to the church’s understanding, should be baptized.

- 1) *Every follower of Jesus Christ should be baptized.* Why? To let people know where they stand in their relationship to Jesus Christ.
- 2) *Those who want to celebrate their adoption into God’s family.* Baptism is like the wedding ring of the Christian faith. It is a sign that a person is committed and in union with Christ and his church. This includes young people who are old enough to understand the meaning and consequences of choosing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
- 3) *Those who have been baptized before coming to personal faith in Jesus Christ.* Through baptism, a believer symbolically confesses that he or she believes in and has accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior. If a person is baptized before such belief or acceptance occurs, he or she did not truly confess that he or she had faith.

The early Anabaptists did not believe in original sin, and therefore did not believe that infant baptism was needed to remove it (as did Augustine and Luther). Currently, we see infant baptism as having much the same function as a child dedication. We see confirmation of faith as a public confession or proclamation of personal faith, and therefore as having the same function as adult or believer’s baptism. We believe all members of the jailor’s family in Acts 16:33 were baptized because all had become believers.

**Discussion:** In what ways is infant baptism and child dedication the same? Under what conditions are a believer’s baptism and confirmation the same?

**c. When should you be baptized?**

**Suggestion:** Clarify that baptism is the rite of initiation into the Christian faith and the church. It is a response to the grace of God. We are invited to prepare for baptism as soon as following Jesus in daily life becomes a settled issue. Baptism helps confirm our identity and, at the same time, lets people know where we stand in our faith. We can’t delay baptism until we think we are “good enough” or “know enough.” Salvation is by grace and therefore cannot be gained or earned through more education.

**Discussion:** When would be the right time for you to be baptized?

**d. How should you be baptized?**

**Suggestion:** Emphasize that one form of baptism is not superior to another. The words “in water” and “with water” receive the same preposition in the Greek New Testament.

- 1) **Pouring:** Ask for two volunteers. Invite one volunteer to slowly read the ten points on page 49 while you and the second volunteer physically demonstrate each step of the pouring form of baptism. Go slowly! Comment on the meaning of each step.

**Discussion:** What comments or questions do you have related to this form of baptism?

- 2) **Immersing:** Again ask for two volunteers. Invite one volunteer to slowly read the eight points on page 49 related to baptism by immersion while you and the other volunteer physically demonstrate the form of immersion. Go slowly! Comment on the meaning of each step.

**Discussion:** What comments or questions do you have related to this form of baptism?

## 2. The Lord's Supper (page 50)

### a. What is the Lord's Supper?

**Suggestion:** Emphasize that the Lord's Supper is a light fellowship meal shared by people gathered together to celebrate the fact that they have been forgiven by God and by each other. Set out the elements of the Lord's Supper. Note that we are people in joyful fellowship with God and each other.

Explain that the Lord's Supper symbolizes what Christ has done. What God has done for us in Jesus is too great to be expressed in any one theory of atonement. However, in the Lord's Supper we can celebrate that through Christ's death and resurrection:

**Discussion:** Share with each other which of these four explanations is most meaningful for you.

- God has shown us his great love (see John 15:13)
- Jesus paid the penalty for our sin (see 1 Peter 2:24)
- Jesus came as an example to show us how to live (see 1 Peter 2:21)
- Jesus gives us victory over the powers (see 1 Corinthians 15:57)

### b. How often should we observe the Lord's Supper?

**Suggestion:** Ask four participants to take one of the positions stated below and express the advantages of these timetables for observing the Lord's Supper:

- 1) *Every time we meet* (the practice of Catholics, Plymouth Brethren, believers in Acts 2:46)
- 2) *Once a month* (the pattern of many churches)
- 3) *On special occasions* (see list of seven such occasions on page 50)
- 4) *Quarterly or twice per year* some churches have a full Sunday evening service in which participants are invited to share, "How have you experienced God since we last met?"

**Discussion:** Which of these patterns do you prefer?

### c. Who should participate?

**Suggestion:** Choose three participants to read one of the answers to the question, "Who should participate?" on page 51. Point out that some churches extend an invitation to all by saying, "You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins . . . draw near with reverence, faith, and thanksgiving. Make confession to Almighty God and receive the comfort of his forgiveness."

Explain that there are diverse points of view in regard to how believing but unbaptized children are treated:

- Some churches give them a grape as a symbol of God's love.

- Some invite believing children to participate along with members.
- Some dismiss them for a special children’s time. When the children come of age and are baptized, the Lord’s Supper becomes a special experience for them.
- Some let all the children participate. They believe it is a fine time for all to celebrate what God has done in Jesus.

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three. Ask the participants to discuss what lingering questions they have about the Lord’s Supper and what emotions they experience while the Lord’s Supper is being served. Gather back together and have the participants share their comments and questions.

If you are comfortable in doing so and participants are open to receiving the grace of God, read 1 Corinthians 11:23–24, have a prayer of thanks for forgiveness, and eat the bread. Then read verses 25–26, have a prayer of thanksgiving for new life in Christ, and drink the juice.

**Discussion:** What comments do you have about this experience?

### 3. Membership (page 51)

#### a. Why do we have membership?

**Suggestion:** Ask three people to explain the three reasons given for membership, and then share your own experience of being a member.

- 1) *Biblical reason:* the church is the body of Christ
- 2) *Personal reason:* membership aids spiritual growth
- 3) *Practical reason:* Membership defines who to count on

**Discussion:** Discuss the suggested statements in “My Commitment” on page 52. Can the group members affirm each of these statements? If there are those who feel membership is not important or not necessary, let them express their reasons why.

#### b. My commitment to membership

**Suggestion:** Invite participants to affirm or reaffirm their membership in your church. Review the usual affirmations and promises made at the time of membership. Encourage participants by sharing the following quote:

“Until I am committed, there is a hesitancy, a chance to draw back. But the moment I definitely commit myself, then God moves also, and a whole stream of events erupt. All manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings, persons, and material assistance, which I could never have dreamed of, come my way and begin to flow toward me . . . the moment I make a commitment.” —H.M. Murray

Offer a prayer before inviting participants to sign and date their commitment.

#### **IV. Closing**

- 1. Review** what you have experienced in this session.
- 2. Assignment:** Encourage participants to read pages 55–62 to prepare for unit 3, “Become Mature.”
- 3. Blessing:** Close by asserting, “May the Lord bless you with a warm sense of belonging in this church and a rich sense of fellowship with God and your friends.”

## Unit 3 / Session 1

# Becoming Spiritually Mature through Bible Reading

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To introduce unit 3 and the concept of Christian spiritual maturity
  - To help participants understand the importance of the Bible
  - To invite each person to adopt a Bible reading practice
  - To teach concepts and principles for the proper interpretation of Scripture
3. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for revealing himself in various ways and especially through the Scriptures and Jesus Christ. Ask for the group members to have open spirits so that they might be instructed, guided, and inspired by God and the Scriptures.

### II. Introduction

Provide a general introduction to unit 3 by taking a quick look at the Table of Contents on page 54 and the explanations on page 55. Alert the participants to the four basic practices that you will be exploring with them. State that the goal will be for them to encourage and enable each other to adopt regular disciplines in:

- Bible reading
- Prayer
- Generous giving
- Regular fellowship and accountability in a small group

Explain that “being spiritual” may mean accepting and trusting supernatural, mystic phenomena and believing in numerous spirits. On the other hand, “Christian spirituality” means becoming more like Jesus. It includes turning from that which is not like Jesus and affirming the values and spirit of Jesus.

### III. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Palmer Becker, General Editor of *Begin Anew*, and his sister, Grace Buller, a retired nurse from Longmont, Colorado, share two different ways of reading Scripture.

**Discussion:** What thought or concept expressed in this video did you find most helpful? (For example, practices bring us into the presence of God; the Bible gives inspiration and guidance; we have to find our own way; how we read the Bible is as important as whether we read it.) Do you know of people who have read through the entire Bible? What do you think of reading Scripture until something speaks to you personally? What was the place or use of the Bible in your home or church? How did you experience it?”

## IV. Six Questions for Discussion

### 1. Why read the Bible? (page 56)

**Suggestion:** Move quickly through the first four questions on pages 56–57 so you will leave ample time to discuss the questions on how to study the Bible.

Go around the circle and ask participants to read one of the five statements and the corresponding verse of Scripture. Ask each person, “What comes to mind in regard to that reason for reading the Bible?” As they read the statements, emphasize the key words “fellowship,” “devotion,” “direction,” “transformed,” and “effective.”

### 2. When is the best time to read? (page 56)

**Suggestion:** In your group, determine who are the “morning” persons. Have one of them give reasons for having an early morning quiet time. Some people make a meaningful pledge in which they state, “I don’t want to read anything in the morning until I have read something from God’s Word.” Consider whether you would like to encourage your group to make a similar pledge.

Next, determine who are the “evening persons” in your group. Have one of them give reasons for having an end-of-the-day quiet time.

### 3. Where might you read? (page 57)

**Suggestion:** Ask, “Where is your favorite place to read?” Let the participants suggest some places, and then share your own favorite place and practice. Encourage the group to read Scripture both on their own and in family settings.

### 4. How much should you read? (page 57)

**Suggestion:** Describe the four patterns for reading Scripture described on page 57. Share your experience with the four patterns and which most appeals to you. Ask if there are any other patterns for reading Scripture. Note the challenge on page 58 for the participants to read through the three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount in one month.

**Commitment to reading regularly:** Invite participants to go to page 62, and then lead them through the experience of commitment to daily Bible reading. Don’t force them, but encourage them by asking, “With what book or reading guide would you like to begin? How about you try it for a week?” Go around the circle and invite participants to share what they are hoping to do. Indicate that next week they will have an opportunity to report back on how they have experienced Bible reading. Promise that you will give each person an opportunity to “pass” if they choose not to participate.

### 5. How should you interpret the Scriptures? (page 59)

Under this question, you will discuss the inspiration, interpretation, and authority of Scripture.

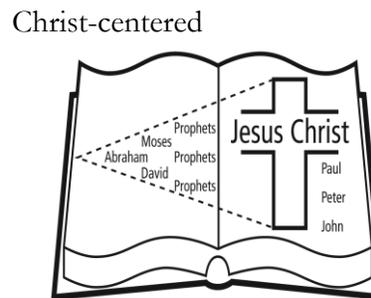
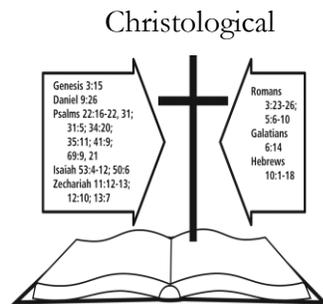
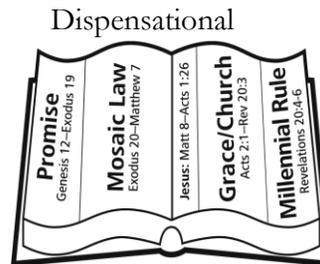
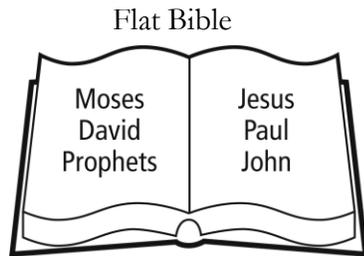
#### a. Recognize that all Scripture is inspired.

**Suggestion:** Read the Scriptures and explanations given.

**Discussion:** What does “inspiration” mean? (It means “in-spirited” or “revealed by the Holy Spirit.”)

**b. Interpretation**

**Suggestion:** Stress that the way we interpret Scripture is as important as whether or not we read it. Different approaches to interpretation can lead to very different understandings and applications. Sketch the following images on the whiteboard. Give a brief description of each approach listed on page 59. Provide reasons why the first three approaches are inadequate and reasons why the Christ-centered approach is most helpful.



**Discussion:** Have a participant read Exodus 21:23–25 and Matthew 5:38–42. How might we interpret Exodus 21 through the eyes of Jesus? How would Jesus fulfill the concern of the Exodus passage?

**c. Jesus is the final authority.**

**Suggestion:** Read Hebrews 1:1–3b. Describe how Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, and the apostles came to understand God and his will with increasing clarity. Explain that because Jesus is the fullest revelation of God and God’s will, he is our final authority.

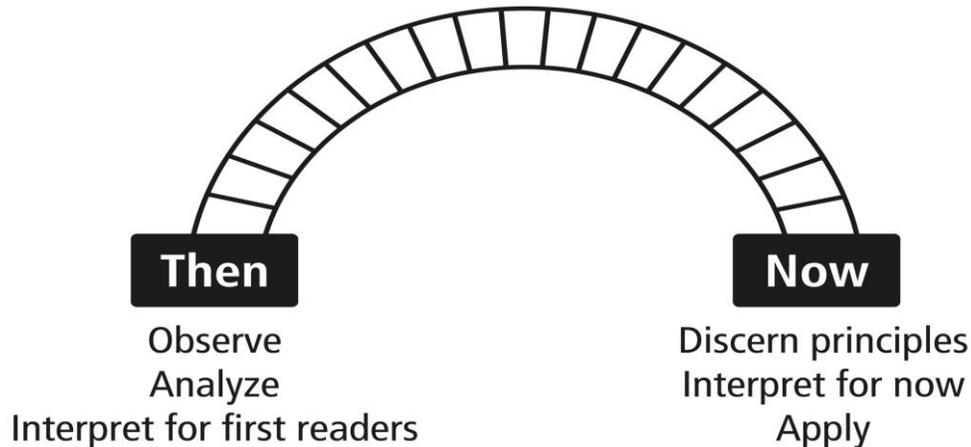
**Discussion:** Professor Marion Bontrager says, “If two passages of Scripture seem to disagree, let Jesus be the referee!” Do you agree?

**6. How should you study the Scriptures?** (page 60)

**Suggestion:** Draw the following “Application (Hermeneutical) Bridge” on the whiteboard as illustrated. Write “then” on the left side of the bridge and “now” on the right. Explain that studying a passage of Scripture needs to start on the left (“then”) side of the bridge by *observing*

what it says and *analyzing* how the first readers understood it. After this is done, you can cross over to the right (“now”) side of the bridge and ask questions such as, “What is an enduring principle? What does it say to us now? What are we to do?”

### Application (Hermeneutical) Bridge



Study Matthew 5:23–24 as a group, using the three steps given on page 60:

**a. Observe:** Invite participants to observe what the passage says. Ask *who, where, what, and how* questions. What are the facts? Don’t interpret for the participants at this time or try to explain the *why*. Responses might include:

- the subject is “you”
- a gift is being offered
- at the altar
- you remember something
- your brother or sister has something against you
- you are instructed to
  - leave your gift
  - go reconcile
  - come back and offer the gift

**b. Interpret:** Ask, “What did this mean to the first readers?” Explain that this may require study of the customs and culture to determine what was meant by the following terms at that time and in that culture. The participants can then reflect on what those terms might mean today.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Then</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an “altar”</li> <li>• a “brother” or “sister”</li> <li>• the “something” he has against you</li> <li>• your “gift”</li> <li>• “be reconciled”</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Now</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communion table</li> <li>• Ron</li> <li>• critical comment</li> <li>• prayer of thanks</li> <li>• apologize</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

**c. Apply:** Ask, “What should we do about it?” Brainstorm as a group and choose an application. Possibilities might include:

- Reconciling a relationship before communion
- Paying back an overdue loan

**Discuss:** Challenge participants to describe an action they will take. Who or what came to mind? How will they respond?

## V. Closing

1. **Summary:** Share as a group what you have committed to do in regard to Bible reading and study.
2. **Assignment:** Encourage participants to read pages 63–67 for next week.
3. **Blessing:** Close by asserting, “May the Lord bless and inspire you daily with a guiding insight, an encouragement, or a promise.”

## Unit 3 / Session 2

# Becoming Spiritually Mature through Prayer

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To communicate the importance of prayer
  - To teach new practices of prayer
  - To invite each participant to adopt a practice of prayer
3. *Open with a prayer*, thanking God for wanting to have a relationship with us. Ask him to teach us how to pray.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Ralph Brubacher, a spiritual director and marathon runner, prays while he runs. Note how he defines prayer and why he prays. During this session, the group will discuss the ACTS form of prayer mentioned in the video.

**Discussion:** What thought or concept expressed in this video did you find most helpful? (For example, *prayer is connecting to God; I need to open my head, heart, and body to God's presence; without prayer there is no religion of any kind.*) Try to name as many settings and postures for prayer as possible.

### III. Introduce the Session

Before the group members look at the session in the book, ask them to consider two basic questions about prayer:

#### 1. What is prayer?

Prayer is like taking a time exposure. In prayer we deliberately expose ourselves to God. We open our minds and personalities to him and allow his love and personality to make an impression on our own. Prayer is God's way of coming into our lives. The result is that after prayer, our spirit is more like God's spirit, our will is more like God's will, our thoughts are more like God's thoughts, and our lives are more like God's life.

#### 2. How important is prayer?

Prayer leads to effectiveness. Some have gone so far as to say, "Anybody who has ever amounted to anything for God has had prayer in some form or another at the core of his or her personal priorities." Invite participants to name some biblical people of prayer. Some suggestions include:

- Abraham (Genesis 18:23–33)
- Moses (Exodus 31:18; 32:9–14; 33:12–15; Psalm 90)

- Miriam (Exodus 15:20–21)
- Hannah (1 Samuel 1:10–12; 2:1–10)
- David (2 Samuel 7:18–29; Psalms 3–7, 23, 25, 51)
- Solomon (1 Kings 3:6–9; 8:23–61)
- Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:20–22; 18:38–39)
- Daniel (Daniel 2:19–23; 9:4–19)
- Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:46–55)
- Jesus:
  - at his baptism (Matthew 3:16–17)
  - during his temptations (Matthew 4:1–11)
  - when he taught others to pray (Matthew 6:6–15)
  - before choosing his twelve disciples (Luke 6:12–16)
  - during preaching/healing missions (Luke 5:16; Mark 8:6)
  - upon completing his teaching ministry (John 17)
  - before being arrested and killed (Mark 14:32–42)
- Apostles Peter, James, and John
- Apostle Paul (Ephesians 1:17–19; 3:16–19)
- The New Testament church (Acts 4:23–31)
- Great people in history:
  - Augustine, St. Frances of Assisi, and many other saints
  - Martin Luther, Menno Simons, John Wesley, Susanna Wesley
  - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa
  - Church leaders in various parts of the world

**Discussion:** Can a person be a Christian (or a Muslim, Hindu, or other faith) and not pray? (*Prayer is basic to any religion. Without prayer, there is no religion. Prayer is the way in which humans connect with the supernatural.*)

#### IV. Five Discussion Questions

##### 1. Why pray? (page 63)

**Suggestion:** Read the five statements in bold on page 63. After each statement, invite participants to read the Scripture in unison.

**Discussion:** How much should we pray? If what we read is true, should we not:

- Pray until we have had *fellowship* with God?
- Pray until we have received *guidance* from God?
- Pray until we have *surrendered* ourselves to God and God’s will?
- Pray until we have *expressed* our honest thoughts and feelings?
- Pray until we have *interceded* and offered to care for people?

##### 2. When is a good time to pray? Where can you pray? (pages 63–64)

**Suggestion:** Review the times and places suggested on pages 63–64. Make yourself vulnerable by sharing experiences of when *you* have prayed. For example:

- After reading Scripture
- After journaling

- When forgiveness was needed
- When you were grateful
- In a time of illness or special need

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three. Ask the groups to share *when* (if ever) was their best or most real experience of prayer. *Where* were they?

### 3. In what ways can you pray? (page 64)

**Suggestion:** Give each participant a blank sheet of paper. Using the instructions provided on pages 64–65, guide them step by step in preparing a thoughtful balanced ACTS prayer. Write a word or sentence expressing:

- **A**doration of God
- **C**onfession of an emotion, attitude, or failure
- **T**hanks for God’s gifts, people, and opportunities
- **S**incere desire for God’s will regarding their work, relationships, and people for whom they have a concern

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three and have them share with each other what they have written. Ask the group members to help each other identify their feelings and what they want to say to God.

### 4. What are other ways to pray? (page 65)

#### a. Make a prayer list.

**Suggestion:** On the whiteboard, list the days of the week as seen on pages 65–66. Instruct participants to copy this to the other side of their ACTS sheet and list people who come to mind under each day of the week.

**Discussion:** Discuss whether this would work for them.

#### b. Pray a ripple prayer.

**Suggestion:** On the whiteboard, draw circles like the ripples made by dropping a stone into a still pond. Label the circles *self*, *family*, *friends and co-workers*, and *world leaders*. Explain that intercession is not trying to get God to do something; rather, it allows God to call our attention to the needs of people in the rings.

**Discussion:** Discuss the difference between praying, “Dear God, help John,” and “Dear God, show me how to help/love/accept John.” Who is being asked to do what?

#### c. Keep a record of your prayers.

**Suggestion:** We are encouraged when we identify and celebrate answered prayers. We can share comfort with others when it seems our prayers are not being answered. Ask the participants to write the following on their sheets:

## My Prayers

Date made	The request	Answer	Date of answer
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Instruct them to record the dates and requests they are making on a regular basis. They should also regularly note answers and the dates those answers are received.

**Discussion:** As you think of these different ways to pray, which seems the most genuine for you?

### 5. Commitment

Invite participants to view page 67, “My Commitment to a Daily Time of Prayer.” Review the specifics and invite participants to make a commitment to have a daily time of prayer.

## V. Closing

- 1. Summary:** Invite the participants to share their intention or commitment in regard to prayer. Extend strong affirmations.
- 2. Assignment:** Encourage the participants to prepare for next week’s session, “Becoming Spiritually Mature through Generous Giving.” The goal is for this lesson to lead to more generous living.
- 3. Blessing:** Close by asserting, “May you be blessed with times of fellowship with God that will provide guidance, encouragement, and hope. As you pray for those people whom God brings to mind, may you grow in compassion and responsiveness to God’s grace.”

## Unit 3 / Session 3

# Becoming Spiritually Mature through Generous Giving

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To learn reasons for giving generously
  - To explore creative models for giving
  - To invite each participant to decide on a pattern for giving
3. *Open with a prayer*, thanking God for giving us time, ideas, resources, and opportunities to alleviate suffering and share his love. Ask God for wisdom in knowing how to be generous with what has been given to us.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Shane Claiborne, an author, activist, and founder of The Simple Way, is a popular speaker who does what he says. If it is not possible for you to show the video, have the group study 2 Corinthians 8:1–15. The people of Macedonia were Gentiles who had received help from the Jewish Christians and were now ready to give back when their Jewish friends needed help. Notice they gave far more than expected. The key was that they “first gave themselves.”

**Discussion:** Ask the group members what can we learn from Shane Claiborne (or the Macedonians) concerning our priorities in life.

### III. Seven Questions for Discussion

#### 1. What does the Bible say about tithing? (page 68)

**Suggestion:** Read through the five answers to the question on page 68, and then without pause have a participant read the supporting Scripture verses.

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three. Ask the groups to answer these questions: “What is your story and experience in regard to tithing? Do you know people who tithe?” Invite the groups to share highlights from their discussion. Make some concluding comments such as, “We are not commanded or under law to give the tithe. Jesus didn’t increase the tithe to 12% or reduce it to 7%. Rather, he gave us visions. Vision motivates people to give.” Give an example of a vision-filled fundraising project.

#### 2. Why should you give? (page 68)

**Suggestion:** Read the six statements and add comments such as the following:

- a. **Giving reflects the character of God.** God is a giver. He gives us creativity, ideas, attitudes, love, and acceptance. Most of all, God gave us his one and only Son, Jesus!

- b. ***Giving draws us close to God and God's work.*** Through giving, we become partners who share common goals and values.
- c. ***Giving proportionately helps us plan.*** Draw a pie graph on the whiteboard showing 10% for charity, 40% for housing, 40% for living expenses, and 10% for savings. Explain that deciding on a percentage in one area forces further planning in other areas.

***Discussion:*** On the pie graph, increase the living expenses wedge to 60% and ask participants to suggest what areas will need to be reduced. Increase charity to 15% and decide what might be reduced to make that possible. Challenge each participant to draw an approximate pie graph of the way they currently spend their income. Ask, "Does your pie graph reflect your values?" State that they will not need to show their graph to the group unless they desire to do so.

- d. ***Giving in times of difficulty will strengthen our trust in God.*** Invite participants to share a time of economic difficulty. Share your own.
- e. ***Giving generously is a way to work for justice and meet the needs of the disadvantaged.*** One of the world's greatest problems and reasons for conflict is disparity between the rich and the poor. Giving helps equalize the difference between those with resources and those in need. Share some examples of how you have done this in your life (for example, sponsoring an orphaned child.)
- f. ***Giving is an investment for eternity.*** Relationships are all that will continue into the next life. How can we spend money on that which builds relationships?

***Discussion:*** Share your thoughts on which of these six reasons for giving are most motivating for you and why you chose that reason.

### 3. When should you give? (page 69)

***Suggestion:*** On the whiteboard, list some ways you might give, including:

- a. ***Regularly:*** weekly, monthly, or at the end of the year.
- b. ***Special income:*** a generous gift in response to a pay increase, a bumper crop, a profitable business deal, or an inheritance.
- c. ***During your lifetime:*** giving your money instead of saving it for a large estate will help you be involved in mission and service.
- d. ***Express your values through your will:*** Some people give half their money to their children and half or more to a charity or important cause. What will reflect your values?

### 4. Where should you give? (page 69)

***Suggestion:*** To prepare for this question, go to the internet and check how much some charitable organizations spend on fundraising and how much goes toward the actual work. Also note the three suggestions in the guide.

***Discussion:*** When might it be appropriate to give to a non-church charity?

**5. How much should you give?** (page 70)

**Suggestion:** Explain these four plans. Don't be afraid to share your own story.

- a. **Give as much as possible:** instead of seeing how much you can save, see how much you can give.
- b. **Give a graduated tithe:** increase your percentage as your income increases.
- c. **Give an “abundant portion”:** consider what is especially important to you.
- d. **Draw up a budget:** let it serve as a plan for your giving and spending.

**6. What should you give?** (not in the participant's guide)

**Suggestion:** Stewardship isn't just about money; our goal is generous living in all areas of life. One congregation reports the following monthly pattern of giving:

- First Sunday: *money*. They take an offering of money as usual.
- Second Sunday: *time*. Each person pledges on a form the time he or she will give to the church or needy persons during the month. The goal is a tithe of time.
- Third Sunday: *ideas*. The congregation places written ideas in the offering plate. These might be in the form of nominations, projects, books for the library, or a letter of advocacy.
- Fourth Sunday: *themselves*. Members and/or the congregation offer themselves through child dedications, baptism and communion services, commissioning, altar calls, and the like.
- Fifth Sunday: *missions*. They take an offering for a special mission endeavor.

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three. Have the groups discuss the following questions: “Would this offering schedule work in our church? How can we stress generous living in addition to generous giving?”

**7. With what attitude should you give?** (page 70)

**Suggestion:** Have a participant read each of the statements and Scriptures. Nothing more needs to be said.

**Discussion:** What do you think of the principle, “I will give as much as I can”?

**8. Will generous giving cause you to prosper?** (page 71)

**Suggestion:** Caution your participants in regard to “the Prosperity Gospel” that says godly people will always prosper. Possessing godly goals, management ability, and dedication may cause you to prosper (see Deuteronomy 28:2,15), but righteous people may also suffer (see Matthew 5:11). Assure the participants that there will always be a reward—if not in this life, then in the next!

**9. My commitment to give generously** (page 71)

Lead participants through the experience of making a commitment to generous giving. You may want to invite them to modify the commitment to go beyond generous giving to include generous living.

#### IV. Closing

1. **Summarize** what the group has learned in this session.
2. **Assignment:** Encourage participants to prepare for the next session by reading “Becoming Spiritually Mature through Small Groups” on pages 72–75.
3. **Blessing:** Close by asserting, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness in all that you do, and all that you really need will be yours.”

## Unit 3 / Session 4

# Becoming Spiritually Mature through Small Groups

### I. Opening

1. *Welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To understand the importance of small group fellowship and accountability
  - To learn how the church can be best structured for community
  - To share specifics about small groups
  - To invite each participant to commit to a small group
3. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for the fellowship you are experiencing in the church and in your group. Ask God to help you be willing to be held accountable for living as Jesus lived.
4. General introduction:

**Suggestion:** Introduce the material on small groups with comments such as:

- Many believe the small group movement is the best thing that has happened to the church since the Reformation. Just as the Reformation returned the Bible to the people, small groups are returning the ministry to the people.
- Most people are either in a small group or wish they were in one. Small groups take many forms to meet people's needs.
- A healthy small group is probably the closest we will come to the kingdom of God on earth!
- Briefly tell the story of how your family, Sunday School class, or other group has provided the fellowship and support you have needed to this point in life.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

The Meeting House of Oakville, ON is a church “for people who aren’t into church.” It has a pastor at a central campus, but it also has satellite congregations. These congregations meet each Sunday in eighteen different movie theatres and watch the central pastor’s message via video. Although the people worship in a public theater on Sundays, their most important experience of church occurs during small group meeting times in homes on Wednesday nights. Notice what gives them meaning in life.

**Discussion:** What struck you in this video? What might be transferable to your church?

### III. Six questions for discussion

#### 1. How might the church be structured? (page 72)

- a. **God has always worked though both large and small groups.**

**Suggestion:** Draw a contrast between a large and a small group. In a large group, participants usually *sit in rows* and focus on the speaker, agenda, or task. In a small group, participants *sit in a circle* facing each other and focus on the thoughts, feelings, and needs of

the individuals in the group. Read the definitions of a large group and a small group on page 72. If your group consists of twelve people or less, and they are not seated in the form of a small group, rearrange your chairs into a circle.

**Discussion:** Discuss Pastor Takashi Yamada's findings that "the uniqueness of the early church and the early Anabaptists was that they met in small groups where they confronted each other and made each other strong enough to confront the world" (page 72). Ask the group members how they can best strengthen one another.

**b. A healthy church is like a two-winged bird.**

**Suggestion:** Point out the image of the bird on page 73 of the guide and explain that it depicts the balance needed in a healthy church between a large worshiping congregation and small fellowship groups. The educational program of the church might be seen as the tail that stabilizes it.

**Discussion:** What is the balance in your church between the worshiping congregation and the small groups? Are they of equal importance?

**c. Small groups are the key pastoral structure of our congregation.**

**Suggestion:** Read the paragraphs on page 73 that describe how pastoral care can be offered in small groups.

**Discussion:** Discuss the statement by Paul Tournier. How, and by whom, are 90% of people's problems being handled in your church or community?

**2. Why meet in small groups? (page 73)**

**Suggestion:** Assign the eight reasons given for why we meet in small groups to eight different participants. Ask the participants to read their statement and the supporting Scripture and then make comments on it based on their experience and observation of small groups. Communicate to the participants that small groups:

- a. Provide a sense of belonging
- b. Help us experience God's presence and guidance
- c. Provide a time for fun and fellowship
- d. Enhance our spiritual growth
- e. Provide encouragement in times of difficulty
- f. Help us provide more and better ministry and mission

**Discussion:** When or where have you seen one of these aspects in your small group? Tell stories!

**3. What will your group be like? Where and when will your group meet? (page 74)**

**Suggestion:** Share the basics of small groups. State that small groups:

- a. Are where friendships emerge

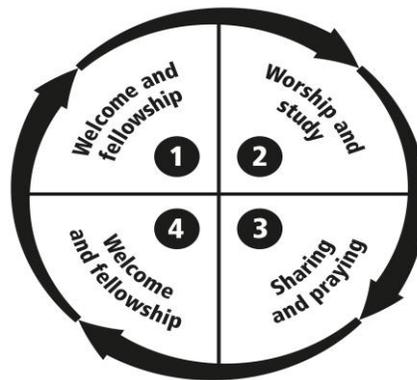
- b. Are a voluntary choice
- c. Decide what they will do
- d. Meet in homes, offices, restaurants, and other places

**Discussion:** Brainstorm additional options for where and when small groups might meet. Ask participants for their preferences.

**4. What might your group do?** (page 74)

**Suggestion:** Draw the following diagram on the whiteboard to illustrate four important components of most small groups. (Note that this diagram varies slightly from the one in the participant’s guide.)

**Possible Components of a Small Group Meeting**



Choose four people to help you demonstrate a small group meeting. Set five chairs in a circle facing each other, and then lead that group through the four suggested stages. (Take no more than fifteen minutes for this experience.)

**Stage 1: Welcome and Fellowship.** Warmly welcome or embrace each of the four people as they arrive and are seated. Serve a cookie and a glass of water. Ask a simple sharing question that combines fact and feeling, such as, “What is the most important thing that happened in your life today?” Invite each person to give a one- or two-sentence response.

**Stage 2: Worship and Study.** Transition to the main part of your meeting with an opening prayer or song. Recognize that the presence of Christ is the DNA of a good small group meeting. Study an article, a pertinent subject, or a passage of Scripture. (For today’s demonstration, use Matthew 5:23–24, which the group studied in unit 3, session 1, on Bible reading.) Have one member read the passage while the other three:

- a. **Observe:** “*What does it say?*” Have them stick to the facts and not try to interpret or explain the passage.
- b. **Interpret:** “*What did it mean then, and what does it mean now?*” Explain what words such as “gift,” “altar,” “something against” and “be reconciled” meant to the first readers

and what they might mean now.

- c. **Apply:** *“What should we do?”* Suggest possibilities such as apologizing to a person they have wronged before taking communion.

**Stage 3: Sharing and Prayer.** Ask each person, “How can we pray for you or your mission?” Some options for prayer at the end include:

- The leader prays for each person or concern
- Each person prays for the person to his or her right
- The leader suggests who might pray for what or whom
- Each person prays silently

**Stage 4: Outreach and Mission.** Draw a chair into the circle and ask, “Who would we like to invite to join us?” (Do this occasionally.) Invite members to hang around for a second cup of coffee. Share with each other about your ministry and/or mission in the church and community. Say farewell to each of the four persons with a warm word of encouragement for what they are facing or an affirmation for what they have done. Confirm the time for the next meeting and thank the four who helped with the demonstration.

## 5. How might you begin a new group? (page 75)

**Suggestion:** Walk through the following steps for beginning a new group (this is especially important if your church currently does not have small groups):

- a. Choose a partner with similar needs and concerns. (Help participants decide who that person might be.)
- b. Decide on the purpose, place, and time of the first meeting.
- c. Create a list of persons to invite. Invite them and enjoy a time of fellowship.
- d. After a time of fellowship, ask, “Why would we meet regularly as a small group? What would we do? Where would we meet? When would we meet? Who would lead the meetings? How about families with children?”

**Discussion:** Is there a need for small groups or additional small groups in your church? If so, what types are needed? Who gives guidance to starting and encouraging small groups in your church?

## 6. My commitment to meet in a small group (page 76)

Lead participants through the exercise on page 76 and invite them to commit to being part of a small group. Don’t force them, but encourage them to check the statements to which they would like to commit or recommit themselves.

## IV. Closing

1. **Assignment:** Encourage participants to prepare for unit 4 by reading pages 79–83. Ask them to give some thought as to what it means to behave like Christ.
2. **Blessing:** Close by asserting, “May God bless you with a small group in which you feel warmly accepted, strongly challenged, and given the support you need to follow Jesus in daily life.”

## Unit 4 / Session 1

# Behaving Like Christ in Response to Need

### I. Opening

1. *Welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To introduce unit 4 and its objectives:
    - Session 1: Explore what needs we might be called to meet
    - Session 2: Do some self-analysis—what are our gifts?
    - Session 3: Explore our past experiences—what have we done?
    - Session 4: Seek to choose an appropriate ministry in the church and a mission in the world
  - To learn how Jesus behaved in ministry
  - To explore what we believe about ministry
  - To commit ourselves to a ministry and mission
3. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for coming in Jesus Christ to show us how to live and to die. Ask God to make your hearts ready for a ministry in the church and a mission in the world.
4. Introduction

**Suggestion:** Use the material on page 79 to introduce unit 4. Point out that *Begin Anew* is built on the understanding that Christianity is a combination of:

- Believing in God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the grace of God
- Belonging to a family with purpose, vision, and meaningful rituals
- Becoming spiritually mature through adopting spiritual practices
- Behaving like Christ in regard to ministry and mission

**Discussion:** What thoughts, concerns, or comments do you have as we enter this final unit?

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Rick Cober Bauman has given his life to meeting human need. Currently, he is Director of Mennonite Central Committee, Ontario. Note what he says about different kinds of need.

**Discussion:** What are your responses to Rick's concerns?

### III. Six questions for discussion

#### 1. What are our natural human tendencies? (page 80)

**Suggestion:** Refer back to unit 1, session 3, on the Holy Spirit. What happens when self is in the center rather than the Holy Spirit? Give examples of people who have emphasized:

- a. Position

- b. Power
- c. Prestige, greed, or wealth

**2. How did Jesus behave in ministry? How can you behave like Christ in ministry?** (pages 80–81)

**Suggestion:** Before the session, write the following comparisons on the whiteboard:

<u>Our tendencies</u>	<u>How Jesus behaved</u>	<u>How we are to behave</u>
Position	Spirit-empowerment	Have spirit of Christ
Power	Obedience	Obedience to Christ
Prestige	Servanthood	Live for others
Greed	Non-violence	Be a peacemaker

**Discussion:** What do you observe as you compare these lists? For example:

- a. Jesus didn't clamber for position. We are to have the spirit of Christ.
- b. Rather than pursue power over others, we are to be obedient to Christ.
- c. Rather than seeking prestige, we are to live for others as Jesus did.
- d. We are to renounce greed, affirm non-violence, and commit to peacemaking.

**3. What do we believe about ministry?** (page 81)

**Suggestion:** Number your participants off into five groups. Transform the five statements on pages 81–82 into five “why” questions and assign one question to each group. Each group should be prepared to give an answer to their question in terms of why and how it applies to your church:

- a. Why does each Christian in your church receive a call to ministry?
- b. Why is ministry your primary vocation?
- c. Why does each person need help in discerning his or her place in ministry?
- d. Why is there so much diversity in our church?
- e. Why do we ask members to commit themselves for two years?

**Discussion:** Have the groups share the answers to their questions and reflect on where their congregations are in terms of practice.

**4. What needs might you be called to meet?** (page 82)

**Suggestion:** Give participants five minutes to read the five needs and choose the one to which they are most clearly drawn.

**Discussion.** Go around the circle and have each participant share the need for which he or she has the greatest concern or passion and why he or she feels that way. After each person shares, encourage the group members to give feedback on how they see that individual meeting that need.

When the sharing is complete, ask the participants to record on page 90 the type of need to which they are most clearly drawn. (Insist they do this so they will have data to work with in session 4, when you will help each person choose a ministry in the church and a mission in the world.)

## 5. What does your church have to offer? (page 83)

**Suggestion:** If we believe it is our responsibility to solve people's problems, illnesses, and the like, we will become exhausted. Emphasize that our work is to do the caring, while God's work is to do the curing.

### **Discussion:**

- a. If a *non-church neighbor* asked, "What does your church have to offer me?" what would you say? Could you say the following?
  - We offer *fellowship* in place of loneliness
  - We offer *forgiveness* in place of guilt or shame
  - We offer *meaning to life* in place of emptiness
  - We offer *peace and hope* in place of fear and despair

Have the participants share some specific examples of when and how they offered each of these gifts of ministry in the church.

- b. If *your community* asked, "What does your church have to offer to our community?" what would you say? How does your congregation help bring about social transformation?

## IV. Closing

1. **Summarize** what you have learned in this session.
2. **Assignment:** Encourage participants to complete the Spiritual Gifts Discernment exercise on page 85. **Important!** Make sure they complete this exercise before the next session as they will not have time to do it during the group meeting.
3. **Blessing:** Close by saying, "May God bless you on a regular basis to meet a need to which you are drawn and, in so doing, show the love and spirit of Christ."

## Unit 4 / Session 2

# Behaving like Christ in Knowing Yourself

### I. Opening

1. *Welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To discover our abilities, interests, and gifts
  - To identify, declare, and record our abilities, interests, and gifts
  - To get excited about each person's resourcefulness
3. Introduction

**Suggestion:** While we often study science, mathematics, and other subjects, the subject for today's study will be about *ourselves*. We will learn about our natural abilities, our interests, and our spiritual gifts.

Most schools, families, and organizations begin with the idea that we need to “fix what’s wrong.” For example, parents and teachers often draw attention to a student’s lowest grades rather than his or her highest. Instead of focusing on our lack of abilities, interests, and gifts, in this session we will build on our strengths.

God made each of us in a specific way and for a specific purpose. Just as each leaf is different, so each of us is different. God wants us to claim what he has made. When we know our abilities, interests, and gifts, we will be able to serve with greater confidence.

An up-to-date understanding of ourselves will help us develop a clear self-identity and understand what God wants us to do. Let's begin by reading 1 Corinthians 12:4–7.

4. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for giving each person a broad range of abilities, interests, and spiritual gifts. Ask God for wisdom in knowing how to identify and use them.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Jessica Reesor Rempel, Co-director of Pastors in Exile, introduces a creative effort to minister to people of faith who are outside the traditional church. Note what Jessica has to say about listening.

**Discussion:** What thought or concept expressed in this video did you find helpful? (For example, *everyone has something to offer; listen; people are drawn in when their gifts are being used.*) Do you agree that everyone has something to offer? Can you give some examples?

### III. Four questions for discussion

1. **What are your natural abilities and interests?** (page 84)
  - a. **Natural abilities are strengths received at birth.**

**Suggestion:** Ask participants to read the six statements about natural abilities. Move from person to person and have the group suggest what seems to come naturally for him or her. Is it meeting people? Asking questions? Singing?

**Discussion:** Have the person add his or her own thoughts. **Important!** Ask each participant to record two or three of their natural abilities on page 90. This will be essential in helping them successfully discern a ministry in the church and a mission in the world.

## 2. Your interests draw you to another person or challenge.

**Suggestion:** John L. Holland and other social scientists have observed that a person's primary interests will fall into one of seven general areas. Have participants privately read each of these interest areas and ask themselves, *Is this of high interest for me? Is this what I like to do or talk about?* Have them check three of the seven areas and rank them 1, 2, and 3 in order of priority.

**Discussion:** Go around the circle and ask, "What did you mark as your three top interests? Which is your highest interest?" Explain that if a person can find a job or volunteer position that combines his or her three top interests, it generally turns out to be a "winner."

**Important!** Ask participants to record their three top interests in rank order on page 90.

## 3. What does the Bible teach about spiritual gifts? (page 85)

**Suggestion:** Read each of the seven statements and ask a volunteer to read the related Scripture verse.

**Discussion:** What statement was new for you or struck you in a new way?

## 4. What are your spiritual gifts? (page 85)

**Suggestion:** Assume that participants have completed this exercise before coming to the group meeting. Read the introductory paragraph and proceed to helping the participants discern their gifts.

**Discussion:** Begin by asking the group, "What do you think is \_\_\_\_\_'s strongest gift?" Give participants an opportunity to share before asking the person to share what he or she has chosen as his or her strongest gift. Give appropriate affirmation or caution. **Important!** Have each person record the findings on page 90.

## IV. Closing

1. **Summary:** Invite the participants to put into one sentence what they have learned about themselves during this session. For example, "I have a natural ability to learn quickly, have an interest in material and manual things, and have been given the spiritual gift of healing that I use in my nursing career."
2. **Assignment:** Explain that in the next session, the participants will share experiences that they have had. Ask them to write answers to the five questions on pages 88–89 before coming to the group meeting.
3. **Blessing:** "God has blessed each of you with natural abilities, interests, and spiritual gifts. God wants to bless the lives of others through those abilities, interests, and gifts. Go in peace!"

## Unit 4 / Session 3

# Behaving like Christ in Using Your Experiences

### I. Opening

1. *Warmly welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for the session:*
  - To identify and share our most rewarding and most painful experiences
  - To explore how our experiences can contribute to meaningful ministry
  - To get excited about having something to offer in ministry
3. *Begin with prayer*, thanking God for coming in Jesus to experience both our human pains and our human joys. Ask God for insight as the group members share their experiences with each other.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

David Klassen grew up in Africa and has served in Nigeria as Country Director for Mennonite Central Committee. Mary Lou is an instructor at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario. Note how their experiences have prepared them for ministries both in Nigeria and back in North America.

### III. Introduction:

Indicate that today you want the group to spend most of the time telling stories that come out of the experiences they have had in their lives. People like to hear stories! They like to hear about others' success and achievements, but they are helped most by stories of tragedy and pain. Today, you want to explore how the group members' stories—both good and painful—can be used in ministry.

Explain that people respond to “experience-oriented” ministry more readily than to simple “information-oriented” ministry. Stories often tell how people have experienced a product. If our product is “ministry,” how have people experienced it in times of joy and in times of pain?

Note to the group that the next fifteen minutes might feel as if they are back in school. They will complete pages 88–89 one question at a time. They will begin with the first of five major questions.

### IV. Five questions for discussion

#### 1. What spiritual experiences have you had? (page 88)

**Suggestion:** Read the verse and paragraph, and then give the participants sixty seconds to finish this sentence: “I had a special spiritual experience when \_\_\_\_\_.” This might be when someone prayed for them, or they had a special vision, they were singing in a choir, or some other experience. Share a story from your own life and invite others to share.

**Discussion:** Give another sixty seconds for each participant to reflect on the question, “How might your most important spiritual experience be used in ministry and mission?” **Important!** Have the group members transfer their reflections under item 5 on page 90 of their guides.

**2. What painful experiences have you had?** (page 88)

Read the Scripture and paragraph, and then give the participants sixty seconds to finish this sentence: “One of the most painful experiences in life was when \_\_\_\_\_.”

Give another sixty seconds for participants to reflect on how this painful experience might be used in ministry and mission. **Important!** Have the group members record their reflections under item 5 on page 90. Give them an opportunity to share.

**3. What educational experiences have you had?** (page 89)

Read the Scripture and paragraph, and then give the participants sixty seconds to finish this sentence: “I graduated from \_\_\_\_\_ and gained skills in \_\_\_\_\_.”

Give another sixty seconds for participants to reflect on how this educational experience or skill might be used in ministry and mission. **Important!** Have the group members record their reflections under item 5 on page 90. Give them an opportunity to share.

**4. What work experiences have you had?** (page 89)

Read the Scripture and paragraph, and then give the participants sixty seconds to finish the statements, “I have had vocational experience as a \_\_\_\_\_,” and, “In my work environment, I have the opportunity to \_\_\_\_\_.”

Give another sixty seconds for participants to reflect on how this work experience might be used in ministry and mission. **Important!** Have the group members record their reflections under item 5 on page 90.

**5. What ministry experiences have you had?** (page 89)

Read the Scripture and paragraph, and then give the participants thirty seconds each to finish the following statements:

- a. I have ministered to the following age groups . . .
- b. The ministry that I have enjoyed the most is . . .
- c. In the community, I have been involved in . . .
- d. Beyond my community, I have been involved in . . .
- e. The ministry that has been most blessed is . . .

**Important!** Ask the participants to record their insights under item 5 on page 90. Give time for them to do this.

**6. Sharing in Teams of Two**

**Suggestion:** Ask participants to choose a partner of their own gender. State that they will be going to another area of the room or building and, for the next twenty minutes. They will be sharing with each other as follows:

Partner 1 (with partner 2 doing active listening):

- Share a positive experience (5 minutes)
- Share a painful experience (5 minutes)

Partner 2 (with partner 1 doing active listening):

- Share a positive experience (5 minutes)
- Share a painful experience (5 minutes)

Use a timer (such as on your cell phone) to notify the participants every five minutes when it is time for them to move to the next item.

Give clear directions before the partners begin. For example, say, “Decide who will go first. Choose a positive and a painful experience based on what you recorded under item 5 on page 90. When you are listening to your partner, help him or her go deeper by paraphrasing what is being said. This is called ‘reflective’ or ‘active’ listening. Once you have shared positive experiences for five minutes, you will share a painful experience for five minutes. You will then allow your partner to share for ten minutes.”

Explain that the painful experience the partners will share might be in any of the five life-areas they considered. Tell them to dare to be vulnerable—stories might include times of divorce, abuse, death, rejection, alcoholism, cancer, depression, job loss, bankruptcy, eating disorders, failure in school, miscarriages, suicide, abortion . . . the pain-producing possibilities are endless.

## V. Closing

1. **Reflect** on how these exercises have helped the group members gain greater self-understanding—how it has helped them introduce themselves at a deeper level.
2. **Assignment: Important!** Make sure the participants complete pages 90–92 and 94 before the next meeting. The discoveries will be used to help each person in the group choose a new ministry in the church or affirm an ongoing one and a mission in the world. The hope is that each person will be able to say, “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I serve as a \_\_\_\_\_ in this church and as a \_\_\_\_\_ in the world.”

Note that on pages 91–92, there is a list of about eighty to eighty-five possible roles for ministry in the church. (Some churches have many more, while others will have less.) Before coming to the next session, ask the participants to review the roles and to check several ministries to which they feel drawn. Have them do the same on page 94 for a mission in the world. Feel free to add ministry or mission options.

3. **Closure:** Next week will likely be the last *Begin Anew* session. Explore how the group might want to bring closure and celebrate.
4. **Blessing:** Conclude by asserting, “May God give you the needed courage and wisdom to use the experiences we have shared in ministry when and where they are appropriate. Go in peace!”

## Unit 4 / Session 4

# Behaving like Christ in Ministry and Mission

### I. Opening

1. *Welcome each person* as he or she arrives.
2. *Objectives for this session:*
  - To help each participant identify a ministry in the church
  - To help each participant identify a mission in the world
  - To have a celebrative closure
3. During today's session, the group members will be challenged to affirm or choose a ministry in the church and a mission in the world that is an appropriate match for who they are and the needs that have been brought to their attention. Assume that they have recorded on page 90 what they have learned about themselves. They will build on that information during the session and on their personal interactions.
4. *Open with prayer*, thanking God for the ***Begin Anew*** experience that the group has had. Ask that each person will be led to a ministry in the church and a mission in the world.

### II. Show the Video (be sure to preview it)

Cesar Garcia, General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, helps coordinate and facilitate the four commissions of Mennonite World Conference and its general meeting. Note what he says about working together.

***Discussion:*** What did you find helpful in what Cesar has shared with us?

### III. Introduction

***Suggestion:*** Clarify that it is important for people in the church to each have a ministry and a mission. If they do not, they will undoubtedly feel inferior or inadequate. They will either feel as if they don't have anything to contribute, or they will feel bitter because they know they have something to offer but have not been asked.

Also every member ministry is important, because every gifted person is needed to minister to some other person or agency's need. God has a church with a mission and participants in that church are responsible to meet the human need that God draws to their attention. Each of us needs to come alongside each other to complete the mission.

***Discussion:*** Do you agree that it is important and possible for every member to have a ministry in the church and a mission in the world? Are there questions or comments about what we hope to do today?

#### IV. Six questions for discussion

##### 1. What have you learned about yourself? (page 90)

**Suggestion:** Encourage the participants to review what they have learned about themselves. Have them write a paragraph introducing themselves, such as, “My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am interested in \_\_\_\_\_ and seem to have natural abilities in \_\_\_\_\_. My strongest spiritual gift is in \_\_\_\_\_, and I have had experience in \_\_\_\_\_ that may help me meet \_\_\_\_\_ need.”

**Discussion:** Have the group members read their paragraphs to each other.

##### 2. To what ministry in the church do you feel called? (page 91)

**Suggestion:** Ideally, you as the leader, or some other trained person in the group, should schedule an hour-long interview with each of your participants. In the interview, go over the information that person recorded on pages 90–95. However, this lesson assumes the group time will last fifty-five minutes, so if someone desires a personal hour-long interview, offer to arrange for it.

**Discussion:** Divide into groups of three. Lead these groups by asking the following questions, and then have the participants share their answers with each other. Allow one minute per person per question in the groups of three for a total of about 18 minutes for the individuals to share.

- What human need touches you most? Share an example.
- With what natural ability have you been blessed? How does it show itself?
- What interests you? Share an example of what you like to do.
- What are your strongest spiritual gifts? What has God blessed?
- What experiences have you had that might be useful in your ministry or your mission?
- What possible roles did you check on the Roles for Ministry exercise?

After concluding the above, ask each participant to prayerfully write his or her responses to the following four questions on page 91:

- As you consider your interests, abilities, spiritual gifts, and experiences, and as you look at the needs in your congregation, to what ministry might God be calling you?
- What do you feel an inner urge to do?
- What are people inviting you or encouraging you to do?
- If you knew that you could not fail, what would you like to do?

**Discussion:** Go around the circle and invite each person to share what he or she sees as a possible ministry in the church. Affirm what you sense are proper inner calls to ministry.

##### 3. My commitment to a ministry in the church (page 93)

Using the form, guide your group members to confirm their commitment to a particular ministry in the church. Invite them to sign the form and date it. (For some this might be a recommitment to an ongoing ministry.)

##### 4. To what part of God’s mission in the world do you feel called? (page 94)

**Suggestion:** Clarify that ideally, each person in the church should have both a ministry in the church and a mission in the world. Ask the members to return to page 94 and help your group members to explore possibilities by answering the following questions:

**a. To what special concern are you drawn?**

**Suggestion:** On page 94 are twenty-five needs, social concerns, and ministries in which many persons are involved. If you had the time and energy, which of these might you want to do?

**Discussion:** Go around the circle and share what you have checked.

**b. How might you work for peace?**

**Suggestion:** Ask the group members to review the five ways listed in which people work for peace. What other ways come to mind? If you had the time and energy, which of these might you want to do?

**Discussion:** Go around the circle and share what you have checked.

**c. How might you bring people to Christ?**

**Suggestion:** Both peacemaking and evangelism are priorities for followers of Christ. Which way of witness is most attractive for you?

**Discussion:** Go around the circle and share what you have checked.

**5. My commitment to God's mission in the world** (page 95)

**Suggestion:** Explain that you will ask the four questions in the opening paragraph of page 94 and give the group members time to prayerfully write their responses in the margins or on page 95. The questions are these:

- a. As you consider your interests, abilities, spiritual gifts, and experiences, and as you look at the needs in your community and wider world, to what part of God's mission are you being called?
- b. As you look at the list of special concerns, which did you check? To which do you feel an inner urge?
- c. One of our themes is, "reconciliation is the center of our work." How might you work for peace? Note the five ways listed.
- d. How might you bring people to Christ? There are many options for fulfilling the Great Commission. With which option would you be most comfortable? In what way have you been invited or encouraged?

**Discussion:** Go around the circle and invite the participants to share what they see as their possible mission in the world. Affirm what you sense are inner calls to mission. Using the form on page 95, guide your group members to each confirm a particular mission in the world. Invite them to sign and date it. Consider having a prayer of commitment.

## B. Closing

- 1. Celebration:** Your group may want to plan a concluding celebration. Consider inviting your pastor, family members, and your friends. Have the group members share what has “begun anew” in their thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- 2. Affirmation:** Focus on each person for a minute and invite members of the group to express a word of appreciation or encouragement for that individual. Consider having a significant prayer of dedication or rededication.
- 3. Blessing:** Say a prayer of sending or a blessing such as, “The Lord bless you and keep you filled with courage. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and upon those whom you will serve. Go in peace to fulfill the call that you have received from God and from us.”
- 4. Appointments:** Make appointments with group members who would like to have the one-hour interview. During this interview, go through the same questions that you did during this session giving the person the time needed to discuss the questions and come to a decision.
- 5. Permission to share:** You have gained a wealth of information on your participants. Ask for their permission, and then report to your pastor, appropriate leaders, or discernment committee on what they have shared about being available for ministry in the church or mission in the world.