



Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Study Guide

for **Whole: A call to unity in a fragmented world**

Four Weeks-Modular Approach

Understanding Who We Are As Disciples of Christ

We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us. - Disciples Statement of Identity



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NOTE TO LEADERS:

This study is intended for use during an identity emphasis in your congregation along with other materials as posted on www.disciples.org under “Who We Are – Our Identity.” Included there are short videos with accompanying study guides for groups or individuals; sermon and worship resources. You are encouraged to share the results of your study as noted on the “Who We Are – Our Identity” page on www.disciples.org



You may want to review your lesson well in advance as the materials here are likely more than a typical 45-minute session would allow.

Suggested plans for an identity emphasis include:

4 Week Plan	8 Week Plan	12 Week Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a midweek study using the short book study plan. • Use a video in worship followed by a sermon on that same concept. Repeat for all four. • Have a culminating brainstorming session with your board and evangelism team to work on a slogan. • Use the “telling tactics” materials with your evangelism committee to revamp your presence in the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with the short book study (four weeks) either during the week or in a Sunday School setting or with other groups (elders, deacons). • Follow with four weeks featuring a Sunday sermon and worship emphasis on a topic and a midweek discussion group using the videos during the same four week period. (i.e. Movement sermon on Sunday, movement study on Wednesday, etc.) • Have a culminating event to come up with your own congregations’ slogan or identity statement. • In Week Nine turn your evangelism or communication teams loose with a revamp of your presence in the community using the “telling tactics” materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the book and questions as written for a six week study in small groups. • The following week have a retreat-style meeting of two to three hours to view videos and discuss in small groups (20 minutes) with sharing in the larger gathering after each discussion. • For four consecutive weeks, highlight an identity concept in worship and the sermon. • Have a wrap up session at a potluck (emphasizing welcome and table) where your congregation comes up with a new slogan for your own church. • Hand it off to a communications/ evangelism committee to revamp your community presence using the “telling tactics.”

Many thanks to Teresa Crist and David Torres, authors of this study guide.



Objective: Modular Approach

The objective in reading our General Minister and President's book is both to better understand the church-wide Identity Statement and to reflect more generally on what it means to be a Disciple – what our collective identity might be, filled with contradictions and varied expressions as it is. Using “Whole” as a beginning point, we aim to use selected passages and questions to open discussion and reflection on key points and terms that give us meaning as to why we are Disciples in the first place.

From this discussion, we hope to encourage more consideration of current identity statements, slogans, and the actions that arise therefrom, and to further develop these ideas for an ever-changing church.

Four-Week Division

1. **Table.** (key words: sharing, invitation, love)
2. **Welcome.** (key words: inclusion, transformation, “all means all”)
3. **Wholeness.** (key words: community, kingdom, “unity not uniformity”)
4. **Movement.** (key words: urgency, action, first steps)

[Each weekly division will include selections from the representative chapter as well as from the final 2 chapters. That way, general Disciples identity gets worked into the discussion of our official identity statement]

WEEK ONE: TABLE

Objectives:

- To *articulate* the value of the table metaphor
- To *connect* the table metaphor as an expression of God's love
- To *identify* the specific activities in daily life that represent the table metaphor
- To *verbalize* the link between the table metaphor and Disciples identity.

Reading Selections:

Chapter 1: “Table”:

Page 8 - “Where Food – and More – Is Shared”
 Pages 17 (“Through stories and actions...”) – 21

Questions to Consider:

1. (Watkins 1) “Recall tables that have been important in your life. Why were



they important? Was it the food, family activities, experiencing friendship, special celebrations, or other unusual events or activities?"

2. (Watkins 3) "What meanings do the communion table and communion service convey? To long-time members? To newcomers? To you?"

Sharing/Activity:

Draw a picture of your ideal table. This could be an actual table from memory, one you've never seen, or even a table in the most abstract sense. Share these pictures with the group.

**Facilitator – give examples. Table as 4 legs, table as picnic blanket, table as oasis in desert, etc.*

Chapter 5: "Disciples of Christ: Who We Are"

Pages 88-89 "Generic Disciples"

Reflection: Sharon describes disciples (little "d") as those who "bring the promise of wholeness into existence by living it already." We are those who follow Jesus' teachings every day. That means we do the things Jesus did – such as create tables, spaces of welcome and love.

Question to Consider:

1. How do we as Disciples CREATE tables?
2. When we think of the communion table as something all Christians share, it is easy to get caught up in the differences of how we approach that table (all are welcome, only baptized folk, clergy only officiating, etc.). But more important are the commonalities. What are some common threads of the table?

Chapter 6: "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ):

Part of the One Body of Christ"

Pages 96 – 98 "Want-to People"

Questions to consider:

1. What does it mean to be a "want-to" people? How does the table (both literally and metaphorically) help us as Disciples to be a want-to people?
2. How do you see your own congregation acting as a "Want-to" people?

Putting it all together:

Why is a table so important as an identifying marker for Disciples? Is it a leveler?



A way of evening the field to encourage welcome? What if we talked about the welcoming “Bench” instead?

Re-read the Disciples Identity Statement. Could it, on its own, serve as a sort of abstract table?

Going Deeper:

The openness of the table is created by our very maintaining it as open. We invite all who want to come to the table. Are there ways in which we might continue to battle the idea of “tokens for the table?” Ways that we can combat exclusion created by non-welcoming manners?

WEEK TWO: WELCOME

Objectives:

- To verbalize how you foster individual communion with God
- To articulate the connection between spirituality of individual communion and true community – love in action
- To define the particular actions you individually or as a congregation do in order to “expand your neighborhood.”
- To connect welcome with Disciples identity.

Chapter 2: “Welcome: We Welcome All to the Lord’s Table”

Reading Selections:

Pages 23-28 “Basking in God’s Love” and “Loving God by Welcoming Neighbor”

Pages 32 – 37 “Expanding the Neighborhood,” beginning with “Christian community is partly spiritual...”

Reflection: love through interaction

Questions to consider:

1. (Watkins 3) “What are some distinctive marks of hospitality as Christians practice it?”
2. (Watkins 4) “What are some ways that you and your church could “expand the neighborhood?” What would be the challenges? What would be the blessings?”
3. What ministries have you participated in that have lasted and transformed over time?



Chapter 6: "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): Part of the One Body of Christ"

Pages 98-100 "All Means All"

Questions to consider:

1. (Watkins 1) "Would people enter your congregation and feel the presence of the living God? Name some examples of how."
2. Change is difficult. And seeing the change that the welcome process brings is often disconcerting. Inviting those with whom we usually don't associate leaves us susceptible to the possibility that congregations, ministries, entire communities won't look the same anymore.

Activities:

Share. Share experiences of change brought on by welcome. Role-play welcome scenarios.

Going Deeper:

Both solitude and community are important parts of our relationship with God. Can we find welcome in solitude? God welcomes us and we welcome others. Spiritual reflection is such an important part of our relationship with God, and we find that reflection in solitude and prayer, are we challenging the concept of welcome? Can we find welcome in solitude? I like to think of prayer and reflection as being welcomed by God and aspects of God welcoming US. Then we turn around and welcome others in imitation of God. (Watkins 2) "In your experience, how does personal communion with God relate to experiences of God in community or to more public sharing of God's love?"

WEEK THREE: WHOLENESS**Objectives:**

- To distinguish the meanings of unity and wholeness (shalom)
- To identify taken-for-granted socio-economic structures that serve as barriers toward wholeness
- To provide a definition of justice work as an act of wholeness (i.e., mending brokenness in others)
- To understand unity over uniformity within Disciples identity.



Reading Selections:

Chapter 3: "Wholeness: Wholeness in a Fragmented World"

Pages 47 – 49 "Shalom" (ending with "In God's original intention, humanity is undivided. Whole.")

Pages 53 - 58 "The Reign of God" (ending with "live as if it already is.")

Page 62 – the justice river story.

Questions to consider:

1. (Watkins 2) "How does changing the word unity to wholeness (shalom) change the meaning of how separated Christians relate to one another and to the larger community?"
2. (Watkins 5) "What are other ways churches could provide wholeness for the community and the world? What are some ways you could promote wholeness?"
3. The justice river story is a very telling one. How might you seek to locate causes, rather than effects of fragmentation?

Chapter 5: "Disciples of Christ: Who We Are"

Pages 89- 92 "Resurrection Now"

Reflection: Disciples and Resurrection - tie-in with Wholeness. Believing in Jesus' resurrection and the eternal connection with God prepares us for an expanded world-view, a WHOLE world-view. The resurrection is a sign of God's love for us – shouldn't we share that love with the world?

Questions to consider:

1. How does the Resurrection and our eternal connection with God contribute to an expanded and whole world-view?

Chapter 6: "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): Part of the One Body of Christ"

Pages 102 – 105, beginning with "The 'question and answer' session..." and concluding with "...most important mark of covenant."

Reflection: UNITY NOT UNIFORMITY. Wholeness means remembering that all of humanity is of God. That means everyone has value. It follows, then, that we must fight for the justice of those who are oppressed – since there is no Gentile or



Jew, etc. and thus no true validation for such evil treatment. In the same way that Welcoming creates change and difficult transformation, how much more so must the active seeking of justice do so!

Questions to Consider:

1. (Watkins 2) “Are there controversial questions that your congregation finds difficult to discuss together? How does confidence in God’s reconciling love help you stay together as a community of faith?”
2. It is often very challenging in the church to engage in social justice because all Disciples are not of one mind on every issue. Remembering that we share in Jesus’ resurrection and in the uniting love of God can help us to strive for justice in spite of different opinions. How have you seen love among Disciples even when disagreeing?

Activities:

1. Share any experiences with justice/action causes. Have you found the church to be active enough in these arenas? Or is your experience outside the church?
2. In small groups, create a new justice platform. Imagine you have any resources you’d like, and develop a plan to help any oppressed group. Now, think of ways to implement this in the real world, where you don’t have all the resources necessary.

Going Deeper...

How does one live as if the world is whole already when there are so many signs and symbols of fragmentation? Differences between haves and have-nots only increase, and the haves only hold on tighter to what they claim as their own. If living wholeness means changing a lifestyle or giving up some comforts, it’s not hard to see why so many are resistant to it.

(Watkins 4) “Where do you see the promise of wholeness compromised by your own timidity? By the timidity of the church?”

WEEK FOUR: MOVEMENT

Objectives:

- To compare and contrast socio-cultural influences between past and current generations



- To identify how generational differences may affect sharing God's love
- To categorize what processes, perspectives, structures we need for our journey in the 21st century
- To realize that Disciples move forward together, constantly adapting with the times.

Reading Selections:

Chapter 4: "Movement: A Movement for Wholeness"

Pages 67 – 71 "Urgency for a world made new"

Page 73 "Multiple Generations....can go with us."

Pages 77 ("It takes some preparation...") – 78 ("Together we make a difference")

Page 78 – 79 "Church and Movement" thru "the reign of God"

Questions to Consider:

1. (Watkins 2) "What is different in the world today than it was in the world of your parents? How does this affect how we share God's love? Extend God's neighborhood of wholeness?"
2. (Watkins 5) "How can churches function effectively in the wake of the changes that are taking place in the world today? In our twenty-first century movement toward wholeness, what do we take with us from before? What do we leave behind? What do we invent that is new for this era?"

Chapter 5: "Disciples of Christ: Who We Are"

Page 83 ("If daily life poses...") – ("in the twenty-first century")

Reflection: church as oasis = IDENTITY as a movement. Align with ch. 4 selections.

Questions to Consider:

1. Sharon describes church as a place of "periodic reprovisioning for the next phase of life's journey." Does church feel like that to you? How does church re-charge your batteries to continue to the work of sharing God's love?

Chapter 6: "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): Part of the One Body of Christ"

Pages 105 – 108 "A Word for Disciples of Christ" and "Setting Sail"

Movement... looking forward and seeing how the church can continue to develop.



Questions to Consider:

1. Is the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) “a church whose time has come?”
2. (Watkins 4) “What are ways that you or your congregation make real the love of God outside the walls of your home or church? What are you saying about wholeness and hope?”

Final Thoughts/Activity:

1. Re-read the identity statement. Is it strong enough – or perhaps expansive enough – to encompass all our differences? After having looked at all four aspects of it, is there anything you would change?
2. Create a metaphor for the church... in the same way Sharon likens the church to a fleet of boats (as opposed to the “body of Christ”). What imagery would you use on a flyer announcing to the world all the good about to come out of a church whose time has come?

Going Deeper...

Movement is all about change. It is about going forward. What then is to be said of a movement trying to identify itself? Can a movement have a stable identity? How can you see that working? If church becomes an “oasis” as Sharon calls it, does it serve as an island of stability in a sea of turmoil? Or is the island more of a platform for developing and adapting our identity as a whole?

In what ways have you seen progress in the DOC movement? Is it truly “the time” for this church?

