



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

Identity Initiative: Study Guide

Understanding **Who We Are** As Disciples of Christ

We are the 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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Understanding Who We Are As Disciples of Christ

SUGGESTED POSSIBILITIES FOR CURRICULUM

Background Information

Understanding our identity is a vital concern for all of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Many long-time Disciples want us to name and claim our foundational values and commitments as a church. New Disciples want to know about our distinctive gifts as a community of faith. All of us need to have clarity about who we are in order to be faithful and effective witnesses to Jesus Christ, especially in a world that is increasingly pluralistic, globally connected, and yet so often violently divided.

The Council on Christian Unity (CCU) and Communication Ministries (CM) have teamed up to launch an “identity initiative” to help Disciples understand and claim who we are as a distinctive community within the whole church of Jesus Christ in our world today.

In this partnership, the CCU has produced a series of brief videos, with an accompanying discussion/study guide for regions, congregations, church leadership, and small groups, that focus upon the four key concepts found in the Disciples “Identity Statement” adopted by the General Board in 2009:

*“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.”*

Supporting congregations in their local efforts, Communication Ministries is offering a series of practical suggestions and materials for Disciples to share what is unique about the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Study Guide: Suggested Possibilities for Curriculum

The possibilities for this curriculum are as endless as your and your congregation’s imagination. It is our hope that you use these materials in the most fitting way for your individual congregational needs. We offer these suggestions, as well as a possible meeting outline to use as a jumping-off-point for this curriculum’s ministry in the life of the church.



- ▲ **Suggested groups:** Elders, deacons, Adult Sunday School Classes, Small Groups, CYF & Chi Rho*

**If using these materials with CYF or Chi Rho groups, we suggest you shorten the time for the study, limiting discussion time to 30 minutes, and possibly reframing the questions for a more youthful approach.*

- ▲ **Suggested time:** 45-60 minutes, in 4 different sessions

- ▲ **Suggested Leadership:** These materials can be facilitated by a minister, a leader, or shared leadership within the group of participants. If you share facilitating leadership, it is important to establish who the facilitator is at the beginning of each session.

- ▲ **Suggested Adult Outline:**

- **Gathering:** Include introductions, with possible response to an “ice breaker” question (an “ice breaker” is suggested below for each session)

Allow 10 minutes for Gathering time.

- **Opening Prayer:** This can be led the facilitator, or a volunteer.

Allow 5 minutes for Opening Prayer.

- Watch Video (3-4 minutes)

- Discussion Questions

Allow 40 minutes for Discussion Questions

[In each of the four suggested “discussion guides,” re-watching the video (or just one or two sections of the video) might be fruitful, either in the midst of the discussion or as a concluding summation of the group’s conversation.]

- Closing Prayer

Allow 5 minutes for Closing Prayer

- ▲ **Suggested Youth Outline:**

- Opening question & prayer (include introductions if needed): What’s your hope or prayer for tonight as we discuss [insert theme] tonight? After each person shares, collectively say “Amen.”

Allow 10 minutes

- Possible Opening Game: Group building, team work, or community focused games help illustrate the four themes.

Allow 15 minutes

- Watch Video (3-4 minutes)

- Discussion Questions

Allow 30 minutes

[In each of the four suggested “discussion guides,” re-watching the video (or just one or two sections of the video) might be fruitful, either in the midst of the



discussion or as a concluding summation of the group's conversation.]

- Closing question & prayer: "Where did you hear or see God tonight as we discussed [insert theme]? After each person shares, collectively say "Amen."

Allow 5 minutes

Links to Videos (these are found under the tab "Who Are We" on www.disciples.org – click on "Our Identity")

- "Movement"
- "Wholeness"
- "Welcome"
- "Table"

Discussion Questions related to each Video

▶ "Movement" Video Discussion Guide:

Icebreaker question - "How long have you been a member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)?"

1. Which description of "movement" rang true for you? What words were the most surprising?
2. As Disciples of Christ, we strive to follow Christ. Cathy Hubbard understood the life of the disciples as a journey of change. What changes have occurred because of the church? What changes is God calling this movement to create?
3. Michael Swartzentruber states a movement as being risky, bold, and creative. How does our church live out this understanding? Where are places where we could live this out more fully?
4. "Syncopated with heaven!" Christal Williams offers us a vivid metaphor of "movement." Where is our church in sync as we move together? Where might we need to find more syncopation together?

▶ "Wholeness" Video Discussion Guide:

Icebreaker question - What examples of fragmentation in our world can you think of?

1. The video begins with "What does Wholeness mean to you?" Take a moment and share with the others in the room how you understand "wholeness."
2. "Wholeness is ... celebrating the dignity and diversity of difference – not tolerating, but embracing difference." These are the hopeful words of Alvin Jackson, highlighting the beauty and challenge to wholeness. Where do you see moments of dignity and diversity within your congregation?



3. What are the challenges to wholeness you see within our church?
4. While we live to become whole people, a whole church, Michael Karunas reminds us that wholeness is a process. How is God calling you and your church into greater wholeness?
5. Molly Goodrich shared many images and stories of wholeness. What's your wholeness story?

▲ **“Welcome” Video Discussion Guide:**

Icebreaker question - Describe a time when you felt welcome. How did it feel? Describe a time when you felt unwelcome. How did it feel?

1. We greet everyone as they come into the church doors, but how do we understand the ways our church “welcomes” people?
2. Paul Tche hopes authentic welcome is a community that transforms lives. In what ways does the church embody this hope? How is the church transforming lives?
3. Susan Shank Mix gave us a list of the many things a church welcomes – fun, fellowship, laughter, shared sorrows, fascination & frustration. How do you see the church welcoming this list? What would you add to this list?
4. True welcome “makes me feel at ease and understood.” Chimiste Doriscar names what we all hope for. How does the church live this out and what can we do to ensure everyone feels welcome and understood?
5. Is there anyone you believe would feel unwelcomed at our church? Why?

▲ **“Table” Video Discussion Guide:**

Icebreaker question - Describe a meaningful time you've had that involved the Lord's Table.

1. The table is the center of our sanctuaries, the center of our worship, and the center of our identity as Disciples of Christ. How do you understand the “table?”
2. Anne Tche suggests that the table is more of a verb, than a noun. How do you see the table in action within the church and world?
3. In thinking about the “communion table” in your congregation, do you see a connection to the “family table” in your home where you gather to share meals? (And, how would do describe that connection?)
4. “For me the table is a justice issue.” Don Gillett invites us to see the call for justice coming from the table. Where have you seen the church respond to this call?
5. As we come to the table every week, we have the chance to recommit ourselves to following Christ. To which description of the table do you think we should commit ourselves? What commitment would you add to our unity at the table?



Appendix:

Principles of Identity (prepared by the 21st century Vision Team to accompany the Disciples "*Statement of Identity*," 2009)

1. We confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world, requiring nothing more - and nothing less - as a basis of our life together.
2. We hold the centrality of scripture, recognizing that each person has the freedom - and the responsibility - to study God's Word within the community of the church.
3. We practice the baptism of believers, which emphasizes that God's grace demands a response of faith and discipleship, while also recognizing the baptism performed in other churches.
4. We gather for the Lord's Supper, as often as possible, experiencing at this table the gracious, forgiving presence of Jesus Christ.
5. We structure our community around the biblical idea of covenant, emphasizing not obedience to human authority but accountability to one another because of our shared obedience to Christ.
6. We participate in God's mission for the world, working with partners to heal the brokenness of creation and bring justice and peace to the whole human family.
7. We hear a special calling to make visible the unity of all Christians, proclaiming that in our diversity we belong to one another because we commonly belong to Christ.
8. We witness to the Gospel of God's saving love for the world in Jesus Christ, while continuing to struggle with how God's love may be known to others in different ways.
9. We affirm the priesthood of all believers, rejoicing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit - which include the gift of leadership - that God has given for the common good.
10. We celebrate the diversity of our common life, affirming our different histories, styles of worship, and forms of service.
11. We give thanks that each congregation, where Christ is present through faith, is truly the church, affirming as well that God's church and God's mission stretch from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.
12. We anticipate God's coming reign, seeking to serve the God - Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer - whose loving dominion has no end.

