

Fall 2016

Exploring God's Vision for Peace

*What does it mean
to be a community
that is Spirit-filled,
Compassionate,
Healthy,
Reconciled and Just?*

*Spiritual Growth
Group*

Peace Lutheran Church

FALL 2016 SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUPS “EXPLORING GOD’S VISION FOR PEACE” GROUP AGREEMENT

Peace Lutheran Church Vision Statement:

*We believe God’s vision for Peace is to be a diverse community of faith in the Hilltop
where all are welcome - a community that is
Spirit-filled, compassionate, healthy, reconciled, and just.*

What main topics will be covered?

- Week 1 - Week of October 16 – Spirit-filled
- Week 2 – Week of October 23 – Compassionate
- Week 3 – Week of October 30 – Healthy
- Week 4 – Week of November 6 – Reconciled
- Week 5 – Week of November 13 – Just

Why a 5-week small group study? Small groups are an opportunity outside Sunday morning to get to know a small number of folks in the congregation better and share Christian fellowship. We explore scripture, ask questions, listen to others’ responses, and care for one another. Small groups are biblical. Moses organized the Israelites into groups of ten (Exodus 18). Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20), and he gathered and sent the 12 disciples, a small group! Early Christians met in small groups in homes for worship and fellowship (Acts 2:44-47). Peace Lutheran Church started in 1909 as small groups meeting in Hilltop homes!

Why focus on God’s Vision for Peace? Each week we will study a different aspect of God’s Vision for Peace Lutheran Church as expressed in our Vision Statement. What does it mean for our lives, community, and church? The Vision Statement is a picture of what we believe is God’s dream for our community. We’re not there yet. This is an opportunity learn and grow together on a journey bringing us closer to God and God’s Vision for Peace.

What are the Fall small group practical arrangements?

- Meetings once a week for 5 weeks, beginning Sunday October 16 through Saturday November 19 in homes and at the church
- Each session will be approximately 1½ hours long
- Each session will include scripture study, reflection on the scripture as it applies to your life, and spiritual exercises.

What are the Fall small group values?

- We agree to make our meeting a high priority and attend regularly.
- We will pray for one another.
- We will not judge or attempt to fix one another no matter what is shared. We will not give advice to one another unless we are first asked.
- In order to provide an atmosphere of openness and trust, personal things spoken within our groups will remain within our groups.
- We will strive to become a caring community by sharing our experiences, our struggles, our feelings, our joys, our hurts, and our questions as we may freely decide to do.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE
RESPECTful Communication Guidelines
and Mutual Invitation

RESPECTful Communication Guidelines

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use EMPATHETIC listening

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong.

Mutual Invitation Explanation

In our small group, in order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak in response to a question, we will proceed in the following way: The facilitator or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Who you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share. If you have something to say but are not ready yet, say “pass for now” and then invite another to share. You will be invited again later. If you don't want to say anything, simply say "pass" and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION ONE: “Spirit-filled”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
 - b. Opening prayer
3. Introduction
 - a. Share your name, where you live, and how long you have been at Peace Lutheran Church.
 - b. Review together the Spiritual Growth Group Agreement on page 3.
 - c. The Vision Statement is a picture of God’s dream for our community, a long-term view of what God’s calling us to become with God’s help. It was written by Peace Lutheran Church in 2010 after a discernment process of studying scripture, listening to God, and sharing conversation with one another. We call it God’s Vision “for Peace,” which has double meaning: it’s a vision for Peace Lutheran Church but also a vision that, if fulfilled, would make for a community of peace.
 - d. Each year the church’s Ministry Plan of investments of time, talent, and treasure for mission is organized around the five Vision points. Our five-week study will focus on each of the five Vision points from this statement, recognizing we’re all on a journey together toward this Vision, and we’re not there yet.
 - e. Read the Peace Lutheran Church Vision Statement out loud together.
“We believe God’s vision for Peace is to be a diverse community of faith in the Hilltop where all are welcome - a community that is **Spirit-filled, compassionate, healthy, reconciled, and just.**”
 - f. **Proverbs 29:18** tells us, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” Discuss: What is the value of a good Vision Statement?
4. A Beginning Point for Spirit-Filled Community
 - a. Review the Mutual Invitation Explanation on the previous page. Using the process of mutual invitation, respond to this question: What comes to your mind when you hear the word “Spirit-filled” when it is applied to a community?
5. Learning and Sharing
 - a. We’re going to look at scripture and explore the question, What do we learn about what God’s Spirit is and what God’s Spirit does? Each person take one of the eight biblical points about God’s Spirit below and read the Bible passage to yourself, reflect on the question, and then share insights aloud with the group.
 - i. *Creating*: God’s Spirit is a creating, recreating, renewing power.
 1. Read **Psalm 104:30**. “When you send forth your *Spirit*, [all living things] are created; and you renew the face of the ground.”
 2. How have you noticed or experienced the *creating* power of God’s Spirit?

- ii. *Transforming*: God’s Spirit has the power to transform—to change—people and energize them for service in Jesus’ name.
 - 1. Saul, persecutor of Christians, has an encounter with Jesus in a vision, is blinded, and is taken to a house in Damascus. Ananias is sent by God to minister to Saul, who eventually becomes Paul, the great apostle of Jesus whom God uses to plant churches far away. Read **Acts 9:17-18**. “So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the *Holy Spirit*.’ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized.”
 - 2. How have you noticed or experienced the *transforming* power of God’s Spirit?
- iii. *Connecting*: God’s Spirit fills people of all languages and backgrounds and allows for true relationship and communication to happen (speaking and listening, giving and receiving) across cultures.
 - 1. Early followers of Jesus, gathered in one place in Jerusalem, have an encounter of the Holy Spirit in what becomes known as the Christian Pentecost. Read **Acts 2:4-6**. “All of them were filled with the *Holy Spirit* and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.”
 - 2. How have you noticed or experienced the *connecting* power of God’s Spirit?
- iv. *Empowering*: God’s Spirit fills people and gives boldness in sharing the good news of God and doing the work of Jesus in the world.
 - 1. Peter and John are arrested after healing a man. After they are released, they pray for boldness in sharing the good news and doing the work of Jesus in the world. Read **Acts 4:31**. “When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the *Holy Spirit* and spoke the word of God with boldness.”
 - 2. How have you noticed or experienced the *empowering* power of God’s Spirit?
- v. *Forming*: God’s Spirit works in our lives to form us in the image of God’s Son Jesus so our lives may bear good fruit.
 - 1. Read **Galatians 5:22-23a**. Paul writes, “By contrast, the fruit of the *Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”
 - 2. How have you noticed or experienced the *forming* nature of God’s Spirit?
- vi. *Inspiring worship*: God’s Spirit helps us worship God in a real and authentic way.
 - 1. Read **John 4:24**. Jesus said, “God is *Spirit*, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”
 - 2. How have you noticed or experienced the power of God’s Spirit to *inspire worship*?

- vii. *Guiding*: God’s Spirit is our Advocate, who is always with us, who teaches us what is true and good, helps us know God and grow in faith in Jesus, and guides us in our decision-making.
 1. Read **John 14:15-17, 25-26**. Jesus said to his disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the *Spirit* of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you... I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the *Holy Spirit*, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”
 2. How have you noticed or experienced the *guiding* power of God’s Spirit?

- viii. *Giftng*: God’s Spirit is a gift-giver, giving each person unique talents and abilities to use to build up the Christian community and serve the world and empowering us to work for the common good in community.
 1. Read **1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-13**. Paul writes, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed... Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same *Spirit*; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the *Spirit* for the common good. To one is given through the *Spirit* the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same *Spirit*, to another faith by the same *Spirit*, to another gifts of healing by the one *Spirit*, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same *Spirit*, who allots to each one individually just as the *Spirit* chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one *Spirit* we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one *Spirit*.”
 2. How have you noticed or experienced the *giftng* nature of God’s Spirit?

- b. In the Bible, individuals and communities are filled with the Holy Spirit. We’re focusing on Spirit-filled community. Bearing in mind the scripture passages we’ve explored and what we’ve learned about God’s Spirit and what it means to be filled with God’s Spirit, using mutual invitation, share about the following:
 - i. Tell a story about how you've experienced Spirit-filled community at Peace Lutheran Church and Peace Community Center. Which biblical points of Spirit-filled community above did you experience?
 - ii. What role have you played in Spirit-filled community at Peace?
 - iii. What is one direction God may be leading us to grow at Peace in the direction of Spirit-filled community?

6. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Each week you’ll have an opportunity to try one or more spiritual exercises. At the next session you’ll be invited to share about it. In this coming week, keep your eyes open for examples of Spirit-filled community. Where do you sense the presence of God’s Spirit? What does it look like and feel like? How might you personally be more aware of the presence of God’s Spirit in your everyday life? How does this change your attitude and actions? Look for opportunities to share in Spirit-filled community this week.

- b. If you desire, choose one of the spiritual exercises listed below and try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
 - i. Pray for God’s Spirit to guide you. Spend time in prayer this week asking for the Spirit to begin working in your life in a new and powerful way OR to give you guidance to make an important decision. Don’t make demands or have any expectations. Simply be open for the Spirit to fill you and impact the way you think and live. Then look for continued guidance from scripture, conversation with friends, or an intuitive nudge from God.
 - ii. Nurture the fruit of the Spirit. Set aside 15 minutes each day to meditate on the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22**: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Ask God to show you which of these virtues needs to be more evident in your life. Then ask the Holy Spirit to begin working in your mind and heart to cultivate this virtue.
 - iii. Discover your spiritual gifts. **1 Corinthians 12:8-10** lists nine gifts of the Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, discernment, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Explore these gifts through prayer, asking God to guide you to the gifts that may be neglected and need to be stirred up in your life and the life of the church.

7. Closing Thoughts

- a. God’s vision for Peace is to be a community that is Spirit-filled. God’s Spirit blows in us and through us, giving us energy and power and direction and renewal for ministry and mission. God’s Spirit fills us in worship, learning, giving, and serving. God’s Spirit brings us to faith and helps us grow in faith in Jesus. God’s Spirit is behind all we are and do as a community. God’s Spirit unites us in our diversity in an interdependent community of faith. We seek to create spaces and places open to the blowing of God’s Spirit, and we encourage each person to discover and use their unique spiritual gifts, those abilities and strengths given to each of us through God’s Spirit for building up the body of Christ (the church) and serving God in the world. As we journey into the future, we ask, “Where is God’s Spirit leading us?”

8. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
 - i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an “amen” as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today’s small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a “popcorn” prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may “pop” in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION TWO: “Compassionate”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
 - b. Opening prayer
3. A Beginning Point for Compassionate Community
 - a. Using the process of mutual invitation, respond to this question: What comes to your mind when you hear the word “compassionate” when it is applied to a community?
4. Learning and Sharing
 - a. Read aloud these Bible passages about compassion, then discuss as a group: Why is compassion so important to God?
 - i. Read **Colossians 3:12**. Paul writes, “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with *compassion*, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”
 - ii. Read **Matthew 9:35-38**. “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had *compassion* for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’”
 - iii. Read **Galatians 6:2**. Paul writes, “*Bear one another’s burdens*, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.”
 - iv. Read **Luke 6:36** in this translation: “*Be compassionate*, just as your Father is *compassionate*.”
 - b. The word “compassion” comes from the Greek *pathein* meaning “to suffer, undergo, or experience.” Compassion means “to endure *with* another person,” to put ourselves in somebody else’s shoes, to feel their pain as though it were our own, and to enter generously into their point of view. Compassion is summed up so well in the Golden Rule. Read **Matthew 7:12**. Jesus says, “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.” Now let’s look at a very famous story, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.
 - c. Mutual Invitation Bible Study:
 - i. A question for the first hearing of scripture: Read **Luke 10:25-37** (printed below) aloud as you hold this question in your mind: What word, phrase, or image sticks out for you from this passage? Then, using mutual invitation, share just the word, image, or phrase, without commentary or questions.

Luke 10:25-37 (New Revised Standard Version): Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’ He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.” Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’

- ii. A question for the second hearing of scripture: Read **Luke 10:25-37** (printed below) aloud as you hold this question in your mind: What is this passage teaching you about loving neighbor? Then, using mutual invitation, share your response to the question with the group.

Luke 10:25-37 (The Message): Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. "Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?" He answered, "What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?" He said, "That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbor as well as you do yourself." "Good answer!" said Jesus. "Do it and you'll live." Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbor'?" Jesus answered by telling a story. "There was once a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man. A Samaritan traveling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I'll pay you on my way back." What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbor to the man attacked by robbers?" "The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded. Jesus said, "Go and do the same."

- iii. A question for the third hearing of scripture: Read one of the above versions of **Luke 10:25-37** aloud as you hold this question in your mind: What is God inviting you personally to be, do, or change through this passage? Then, using mutual invitation, share your response to the question with the group.

- d. Loving neighbor, showing compassion, is at the heart of what we're called to do at Peace Lutheran Church and Peace Community Center. It's about service—serving others, giving yourself in acts of love toward others, like the Samaritan.
- e. Now let's explore one more angle on compassionate community. What is our motivation in serving? In serving others, we receive. In helping others, we are helped. But there's a potential pitfall, a danger, in serving others, in works of compassion. Spiritual writer Richard Foster writes about the difference between self-righteous service and true service. Go around and each person read one of the nine points below from Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*. Now choose one of these points that resonates with you or causes you to question or ponder. What does this particular point mean to you and why does it connect with you?
True service vs. self-righteous service:
 - i. Self-righteous service relies on human effort, whereas true service flows out of a relationship with God.
 - ii. Self-righteous service is impressed with the "big deal," whereas true service makes no distinction between large and small.
 - iii. Self-righteous service expects external rewards, whereas true service is content in hiddenness.
 - iv. Self-righteous service is concerned with results, whereas true service doesn't need to calculate them.
 - v. Self-righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve, whereas true service is indiscriminate in its ministry.
 - vi. Self-righteous service is affected by moods and whims, whereas true service ministers on the basis of need.
 - vii. Self-righteous service is temporary, whereas true service is ongoing.
 - viii. Self-righteous service is insensitive, whereas true service withholds as freely as it gives. (Be sensitive to what people really need, not merely what you think they need.)
 - ix. Self-righteous service fractures community, whereas true service builds community.
- f. Using mutual invitation, share about the following:
 - i. Tell a story about how you've experienced compassionate community at Peace Lutheran Church and Peace Community Center.
 - ii. What role have you played in compassionate community at Peace?
 - iii. What is one direction God may be leading us to grow at Peace in the direction of compassionate community?

5. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week's spiritual exercise: Each week you're invited to share about any spiritual exercises you tried this past week.
 - i. Were you able to keep your eyes open for examples of Spirit-filled community? Where do you sense the presence of God's Spirit? Were you able to be more personally aware of the presence of God's Spirit in your everyday life? How did this change your attitude and actions?
 - ii. If you tried a spiritual exercise from the list of options this past week, how was the spiritual exercise for you? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?

- b. This week's spiritual exercise:
- i. In this coming week, keep your eyes open for examples of compassionate community. What does it look like and feel like? How might you personally be more aware of the importance of compassion in your everyday life? How does this change your attitude and actions? How is God helping you grow as a compassionate person? Look for opportunities to share in compassionate community this week.
 - ii. If you desire, choose one of the spiritual exercises listed below and try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
 1. Start each day with the prayer, "Lord, show me someone I can serve today." Keep your eyes and heart open during each day for God to answer that prayer.
 2. Write a kind, encouraging letter. Take time to write a letter that tells someone how important they are to you. We rarely let other people know how much we appreciate them. This may seem like a small thing, but it can have a big effect. OR if you know someone who is struggling with something—a decision, a relationship, a disappointment—write a letter telling them you care and you're available to talk or listen.
 3. This week, serve for a time at a community meal or food bank or at the church. Consider the difference between true service and self-righteous service, and ask God to help you grow in true service.

6. Closing Thoughts

- a. God's vision for Peace is to be a community that is compassionate. For Jesus, the primary quality of life centered in God is compassion. In the Bible, compassion is the ability to feel the feelings of another person at a deeper level than your head and then act accordingly. Compassion is about an open heart, empathy, and action. Compassion means being nonjudgmental and welcoming of all people and reaching out in care to help those who are vulnerable, struggling, or suffering. Compassion leads to works of charity and justice. Compassion flows from God. Dr. King said, "Everybody can be great because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree. You don't have to make your subjects and verbs agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love."

7. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
- i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an "amen" as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today's small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a "popcorn" prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may "pop" in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION THREE: “Healthy”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
 - b. Opening prayer
8. A Beginning Point for Healthy Community
 - a. Using the process of mutual invitation, respond to this question: What comes to your mind when you hear the word “healthy” when it is applied to a community?
3. Learning and Sharing
 - a. Read **Jeremiah 30:17**. “For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the Lord.”
 - b. One way to think of healthy community is this: it is a community of individuals who are striving to be healthy, to live well. During the coming week, take a look at Appendix A: The Wholeness Wheel. The Wholeness Wheel is a tool we can use to understand whole-person health, or spiritual well-being. Each of us is on a journey of well-being. Spiritual well-being means keeping balance in many aspects of life—physical, emotional, social-interpersonal, intellectual, vocational, and financial well-being. If one area is neglected the whole will be out of balance. If you would like to explore this further in your life, choose one of the spiritual exercises relating to the Wholeness Wheel at the end of this session.
 - c. Read **Acts 2:41-47**. Here is a picture of early Christian community. “So those who welcomed Peter’s message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” The rest of the book of Acts describes the early church as it grows and changes in the face of lots of challenges.
 - d. Another way to think of healthy community for us is this: it is people striving together toward sustaining marks of health and wholeness as a church community. The Center for Congregational Health names seven biblical marks of a healthy faith community. Choose a different person to read each of these marks below.
 - i. *Constructive conflict resolution*: A healthy faith community is not one that never has conflict; it is one that resolves conflict constructively. When faced with internal conflict over the distribution of food in **Acts 6**, the apostles allowed the congregation to own the problem and participate in solving it. They avoided polarization (Greek Jews versus Hebraic Jews) and sought what was best for the congregation. They were able to remain in a constructive, problem-solving mode and find a collaborative solution.

- ii. *Adaptation to change:* A healthy faith community has the capacity to adapt. Beginning in **Acts 10**, the early church faces a potentially crippling crisis over identity and diversity. Followers of Jesus were no longer limited to Jews, and questions arose over who should rightfully be a member of the faith community. Facing this challenge, the early church adapted, emerging stronger and more welcoming for mission to the world.
- iii. *Authentic community:* A third mark of a healthy faith community is, simply, community. In today's American society, in many ways our relational connections have broken. We have lost our social capital. This is in stark contrast to the church where "they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (**Acts 2:46**). Many faith communities attempt to make difficult decisions, resolve conflict, overcome a financial crisis, grow and develop their ministry, and plan their future with minimal social capital within the congregation. The result is a decision-making process that erupts into conflict and produces not progress but frustration.
- iv. *Ministry that reaches out as well as in:* A healthy faith community ministers to those outside as well as inside the church. The **Acts 2** believers shared amongst themselves as needs arose. They sold their possessions and "had everything in common." Their strong ministry to believers was balanced by Peter's and John's healing and preaching outside the community of believers, like when they healed the beggar at the temple gate in chapter 3. They were also bold in proclaiming the gospel to those who did not believe. It is easy for churches to be caught in the trap of spending the vast majority of their resources, time and energy on those within the faith community, while neglecting their mission and service to those outside the walls of the church.
- v. *Good communication:* A healthy faith community encourages honest and civil discourse. Communication is between people, not about them. In **Acts 10-11**, when facing a critical juncture in the development of Christianity, the earliest Christians had to wrestle with whether Gentiles could be full members of the Christian community. They were able to have a very challenging conversation. It ended with Peter describing his experiences and the assembled apostles and believers declaring, "then God has given to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (**Acts 11:18**). The scriptures are full of many examples of God's people having honest, but difficult, conversations about important issues. On their best days, the honest discourse led to a realization of God's will and purposes and a desire to fulfill them together.
- vi. *A balance between clergy authority and lay leadership:* A healthy faith community supports participatory leadership. Clergy and lay leaders see themselves as ministry partners and work together to build fundamental capacities within the congregation. Clergy support, encourage, mentor, and coach developing leaders. In **Acts 6**, seven church members were elected to share leadership responsibility. Their empowerment helped the church to grow. In **1 Corinthians 12**, Paul emphasizes the importance of every gift within the church.

- vii. *Clarity of identity and mission:* A healthy faith community is bound together by a shared identity and mission. Faith communities are riddled with differences of opinion and belief about everything from politics to theology. They need something to bind them together that is bigger and more compelling than those things that could tear them apart. Getting clear about identity—understanding the congregation’s values, its shared history and culture, and its unique strengths and challenges—is one kind of binding agent. Another is identifying what inspires the congregation and pulls them forward into mission and ministry.
- e. Take a few moments to ponder which of these seven marks is strong for Peace Lutheran Church and which needs growth. Would you identify an additional mark not mentioned here for a healthy faith community? Share your thoughts with the larger group. What do you notice? What questions arise? Is this a helpful way to think about congregational health?
- f. Read **Jeremiah 29:7, 11**. “But seek the welfare (shalom) of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare (shalom) you will find your welfare... For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare (shalom) and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” *Shalom* in the Old Testament is a word for peace, harmony, health, wholeness.
- g. Another way to think of healthy community for Peace Lutheran Church is this: it is people striving toward sustaining marks of health and wholeness (shalom) for the Hilltop neighborhood. What marks of health and wholeness do you think make for a healthy neighborhood? Which marks are present in the Hilltop? Which have yet to be realized? What role does Peace Lutheran Church and Peace Community Center play in the journey toward greater health of the Hilltop neighborhood?
- h. Using mutual invitation, share about the following:
 - i. Tell a story about how you've experienced healthy community at Peace Lutheran Church and Peace Community Center.
 - ii. What role have you played in working for healthy community at Peace?
 - iii. What is one direction God may be leading us to grow at Peace in the direction of healthy community?

4. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week’s spiritual exercise: Each week you’re invited to share about any spiritual exercises you tried this past week.
 - i. Were you able to keep your eyes open for examples of compassionate community? Where do you see and experience it? Were you able to be more personally aware of the importance of compassion in your everyday life? How did this change your attitude and actions? How did you sense God nudging you to grow as a compassionate person? How did you share in compassionate community this week?
 - ii. If you tried a spiritual exercise from the list of options this past week, how was the spiritual exercise for you? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?

- b. This week's spiritual exercise:
- i. In this coming week, keep your eyes open for examples of healthy community. What does it look like and feel like? How might you personally be more aware of the importance of health in your everyday life? How does this change your attitude and actions? How is God nudging you to grow in health or help the community grow healthier? Look for opportunities to contribute toward a healthier community this week.
 - ii. If you desire, choose one of the spiritual exercises listed below and try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
 1. The Prayer Labyrinth. Look at Appendix B. In silence, pray the Wholeness Wheel Labyrinth every day this week as a way to reflect on God's presence in your life on your personal journey of well-being.
 2. Choose an aspect of wholeness from the Wholeness Wheel in Appendix A in which you feel God is inviting you to grow. This week, take one concrete step in the direction of greater well-being in that area. What will you choose to do? Is it something you would like to continue in the future?
 3. Spend some time thinking about the Peace Lutheran Church and Peace Community Center community or the Hilltop neighborhood. Identify one aspect of healthy community you feel is lacking and pray daily for greater health.

5. Closing Thoughts

- a. God's vision for Peace is to be a community that is healthy. The Hebrew word shalom suggests the kind of holistic health God intends for God's people: peace, harmony, welfare, well-being, community, and salvation. A healthy community has spiritual, physical, emotional, social, mental, and financial health and well-being grounded in God as individuals and together as a community. This means cultivating healthy relationships among members of the family, neighborhood, faith community, larger community, and world. It means environmental health and a healthy relationship with all of God's creation.

6. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
- i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an "amen" as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today's small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a "popcorn" prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may "pop" in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION FOUR: “Reconciled”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
 - b. Opening prayer
3. A Beginning Point for Reconciled Community
 - a. Using the process of mutual invitation, respond to this question: What comes to your mind when you hear the word “reconciled” when it is applied to community?
4. Learning and Sharing
 - a. Read aloud these Bible passages about reconciliation, then discuss as a group: Why is reconciliation so important to God? Who is being reconciled to whom?
 - i. Read **2 Corinthians 5:16-21**: “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who *reconciled* us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of *reconciliation*; that is, in Christ God was *reconciling* the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of *reconciliation* to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be *reconciled* to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”
 - ii. Read **Ephesians 2:13-16**: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups (note: Jews and Gentiles) into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might *reconcile* both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.”
 - iii. Read **Galatians 3:28**: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
 - b. Here are some ways to describe reconciliation: making friends again, mending broken relationships, building bridges across differences, fostering community, practicing confession and forgiveness. How would you describe reconciliation?
 - c. In the scripture passages above, reconciliation is described as having two dimensions, vertical and horizontal. Vertical: human beings and our relationship with God. Horizontal: human beings and our relationship with one another. Someone has spoken of the cross of Jesus as God bringing the vertical and horizontal dimensions of reconciliation together to heal the world.

- d. God is always reaching out to us seeking reconciliation. Our confession of our sin to God is one way we reach to God seeking reconciliation. Do you have an example to share of the power of confession of sin in your life?
- e. Reconciliation does not just take place between two individuals. For example, it can be within a group, family, community, nation, or the world. In his book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu describes reconciliation on the national level around issues of racism. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, walls of apartheid that had oppressed people of color for years were coming down. Rather than punish perpetrators of violence and injustice with further violence, leaders invited them into a process of truth telling and confession. The aim was to expose the atrocities committed in the past and achieve reconciliation with former oppressors so community would be restored.
- f. Each person take a moment and think about a situation in which you think reconciliation needs to happen. It could be personal or not.
 - i. What is the effect of a lack of reconciliation in this situation?
 - ii. What would reconciliation look like in this situation if it were to come about?
 - iii. What would be needed for reconciliation to happen?
 - iv. Is there something you can do to help work toward this reconciliation? What would that be?
- g. **Ephesians 4:15** encourages us to “speak the truth in love.” How can we have open, honest communication with others in love that builds up, not tears down?
- h. How is God calling you today to the “ministry of reconciliation?” What does or should the ministry of reconciliation look like in your daily life?
- i. Using mutual invitation, share about the following:
 - i. Tell a story about how you've experienced reconciled or reconciling community at Peace Lutheran Church and Peace Community Center.
 - ii. What role have you played in working for a reconciled community at Peace?
 - iii. What is one direction God may be leading us to grow at Peace in the direction of reconciled community?

5. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week’s spiritual exercise: Each week you’re invited to share about any spiritual exercises you tried this past week.
 - i. Were you able to keep your eyes open for examples of healthy community? Where do you see and experience it? Were you able to be more personally aware of the importance of health in your everyday life? How did this change your attitude and actions? How did you sense God nudging you to grow in health or help the community grow healthier? What opportunities did you find to contribute toward a healthier community this week?
 - ii. If you tried a spiritual exercise from the list of options this past week, how was the spiritual exercise for you? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?

- b. This week's spiritual exercise:
- i. In this coming week, keep your eyes open for examples of reconciled community. What does it look like and feel like? How might you personally be more aware of the importance of reconciliation in your everyday life? How does this change your attitude and actions? How is God nudging you to grow as a reconciled and reconciling person? Look for opportunities to work toward a reconciled community this week.
 - ii. If you desire, choose one of the spiritual exercises listed below and try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
 1. Is there someone in your life with whom your relationship has become strained or broken? Each day this week, pray for that person. Try to put yourself in their shoes. Practice empathy. Does praying for that person change how you think and act toward them?
 2. Choose an arena of reconciliation across a barrier that particularly seems to be calling out to you: racial, ethnic, gender, generational, sexual identity, religious, etc. Think and pray about one thing you might do to follow God's call to be part of the "ministry of reconciliation" in this area of concern. Commit to act in some way.
 3. Explore the power of confession and forgiveness in your life. Every day, pray a prayer confessing to God how you have spoken, acted, or thought in ways that hurt God, others, or God's creation during that day. Ask God for forgiveness and listen for God's grace-filled response of love and a fresh start. What would it mean if you were to pass on this kind of forgiveness to the people in your life?

6. Closing Thoughts

- a. God's vision for Peace is to be a community that is reconciled—to God and one another. As forgiven children of God, reconciled to God through Christ, we are called to be reconcilers in the world. God's grace comes to us in Christ to bring us into relationship with God, and God's grace is shared in our diverse community to bring us into relationship with others across all barriers-generation, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, politics, theology, sexual orientation, and anything else that divides. We're called to be bridge-builders and ministers of reconciliation and God's liberating message of forgiveness.

7. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
 - i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an "amen" as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today's small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a "popcorn" prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may "pop" in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH GROUP PARTICIPANT GUIDE

SESSION FIVE: “Just”

1. Welcome
2. Prayer
 - a. Take some moments of silence to center yourself before the opening prayer.
 - b. Opening prayer
3. A Beginning Point for Just Community
 - a. Using the process of mutual invitation, respond to this question: What comes to your mind when you hear the word “just” when it is applied to a community?
4. Learning and Sharing
 - a. Read aloud these Bible passages about justice, then discuss as a group: Why is justice so important to God? What do you think the prophets were referring to when they spoke about justice?
 - i. Read **Micah 6:8**. “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do *justice*, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”
 - ii. Read **Amos 5:2-24**. “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beast I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let *justice* roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”
 - iii. Read **Luke 4:16-21** (sometimes known as Jesus stating his mission statement at the beginning of his ministry – What are the elements of justice in this scripture passage?). “When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”
 - b. What is God’s justice? Read the following illustrations and discuss what each helps you understand about justice.
 - i. Dr. John Perkins visited Peace Lutheran Church earlier this year. Dr. Perkins only had a third grade formal education. He wasn’t always a follower of Jesus. He wandered into a church for the first time with his three year-old child. God got hold of him, and he became a pastor and civil rights activist. An African American man, he was beaten by white policemen in 1970 but emerged from a lot of struggle with a vision for justice and reconciliation. He chose love and forgiveness rather than hate and bitterness. Out of his experiences with poverty and racism has come a network of churches across the country dedicated to work for community development and racial reconciliation. Dr. Perkins says,

- “You’ve heard it said, ‘Give someone a fish—they’ll eat for a day. Teach someone to fish—they’ll eat for a lifetime.’ Not true. You also have to ask, ‘Who owns the pond?’” Or as George Johnson, Lutheran hunger advocate, says, “We must not only offer the fish and assistance in knowing how to fish themselves, but we must move over in the pond and give people a place to fish. Or as someone has added, we must stop polluting the pond where they fish and give them a fair price for their fish.” We must remove barriers around the pond.
- ii. Hunger advocates often speak of the “Hunger River” in order to help explain what it means to work for justice in the face of people chronically malnourished and dying of hunger in the world. If you’re standing by the side of a river and you see person after person going past you, drowning in the raging river, you could go in each time and try to pull each person out, or you could decide to go upriver, see why people are getting caught in the turbulent river in the first place, and do something to try to stop it. That’s justice. Justice looks at root causes.
 - c. The Hebrew word *mishpat* in the Old Testament is the word for justice. It means “fixing what is broken in society.” Injustice is what is broken in society.
 - d. Each person take a moment and think about an example of injustice.
 - i. What is the effect of a lack of justice here?
 - ii. What would justice look like in this example if it were to come about?
 - iii. What would be needed for justice to happen?
 - iv. Is there something you can do to help work toward this justice? What would that be?
 - e. Giving *charity* is a Christian calling. Another word for charity is relief—helping someone by providing an immediate need, like food, clothing, or shelter (giving a person a fish). God calls us to works of charity. But God also calls us beyond charity to *development*. Individual development involves teaching others (to fish) and providing resources so individuals have skills and knowledge to stand on their own feet and sustain themselves and their families. Community development involves people doing it themselves together (fishing together). God also calls us beyond development to *justice*. Justice looks at root causes of problems in society and seeks to address them through advocacy and changing policies and laws (that dictate who gets to use the pond) that prevent people from accessing basic things like jobs and housing and education. Justice addresses injustice in systems and institution and in the very fabric of a society. Justice aims for interdependent community in which all have gifts to share and receive.
 - f. Questions to ponder:
 - i. When might giving charity (relief or aid) be doing more harm than good?
 - ii. Why it is easier to do charity than justice?
 - iii. How have you been involved in any of the three kinds of ministry—charity, development, and justice—or where have you seen them at work?
 - g. The Peace Community Center was birthed by Peace Lutheran Church to work for community development in the Hilltop neighborhood through academic tutoring and mentoring of students, providing support on their journey to college or trade school and beyond so they may reach their God-given potential and serve the community.
 - i. How do you see Peace Community Center working for a “just” community?
 - ii. Peace Community Center seeks equity in education. Equity and equality are not necessarily the same. Peace Community Center actively engages in advocacy with decision makers toward eliminating the opportunity (or achievement) gap in education for low-income students and students of color underrepresented in college. How is seeking equity in education part of our calling to seek justice?

- iii. How does the Peace Community Center, as Peace Lutheran Church's first partner in outreach to the Hilltop neighborhood, help us work toward the other four aspects of God's vision—a community that is Spirit-filled? Compassionate? Healthy? Reconciled?
- h. Using mutual invitation, share about the following:
 - i. Tell a story about how you've experienced justice in community at Peace Lutheran Church and Peace Community Center.
 - ii. What role have you played in working for a just community at Peace?
 - iii. What is one direction God may be leading us to grow at Peace in the direction of a just community?

5. Spiritual Exercise

- a. Sharing about last week's spiritual exercise: Each week you're invited to share about any spiritual exercises you tried this past week.
 - i. Were you able to keep your eyes open for examples of reconciled community? Where do you see and experience it? Were you able to be more personally aware of the importance of reconciliation in your everyday life? How did this change your attitude and actions? How did you sense God nudging you to grow as a reconciled and reconciling person? What opportunities did you find to work toward a reconciled community this week?
 - ii. If you tried a spiritual exercise from the list of options this past week, how was the spiritual exercise for you? Was it natural or unnatural for you? Easy or difficult? What did you learn? How did you grow? Can you see incorporating this into the pattern of your life? Why or why not?
- b. This week's spiritual exercise:
 - i. In this coming week, keep your eyes open for examples of just community. What does it look like and feel like? How might you personally be more aware of the importance of justice in your everyday life? How does this change your attitude and actions? How is God helping you grow as a person committed to God's justice? Look for opportunities to work toward a just community.
 - ii. If you desire, choose one of the spiritual exercises listed below and try it this week. You may wish to try something in your comfort zone or something outside your comfort zone. The hope is that you may consider incorporating this exercise into the regular rhythm of your life.
 - 1. Read the reflection on justice by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Appendix 3. Choose an issue of injustice (e.g. hunger, poverty, lack of affordable housing, the opportunity gap in education, disproportionate incarceration of black men in the criminal justice system) and research the root causes. Don't make assumptions. Look deeper. Pray about what you and others might do to respond.
 - 2. Look for an injustice in which you are participating right now. If you open your eyes, you will begin to see areas at home, work, church, and community that support injustice. Ask yourself, "Am I doing something that oppresses anyone?" Are you unintentionally taking advantage of someone, abusing that person's kindness, or stifling their growth? Are your purchases perpetrating injustice (for example, supporting the employment of child laborers overseas or the stripping of land of its natural resources in unsustainable ways)? What step will you take to address this injustice?

3. Take a stand. Is there a justice issue you wish to get behind in the neighborhood, community, school, workplace, or government? Do your homework, then raise your voice in a tactful, non-accusatory, calm manner. The goal is not to hurt people but to see justice reign.
- iii. Think back on this small group study. How have these sessions helped you grow in faith or become more aware of God's presence in your life?
- iv. Into the future, think about the spiritual exercises we tried during this study. What practice(s) might you incorporate into the pattern of your life so you might keep growing in your relationship with God? Try "stepping out on faith" and in the future, reflect on your feelings and the results of your stepping out.

6. Closing Thoughts

- a. God's vision for Peace is to be a community that is just—marked by the quality of God's justice. God's justice is about dignity and fairness for all in this world, an equitable distribution of resources so all have their basic needs met. Seeking God's justice means fixing what is broken in institutions and societies, systems and groups that oppress others either intentionally or unintentionally. It means working so that all people might be able to reach their God-given potential and all families might be self-reliant. It does not foster dependent relationships but seeks interdependent community. It recognizes that all people have value and assets and gifts to share with others. It is about Christian community development in the Hilltop, seeking that our neighbors have affordable housing, living-wage jobs, decent health care, and good education. It is more than charity, which treats symptoms of problems with a handout. Justice addresses root causes of injustice and advocating on behalf of the vulnerable for systemic change.

7. Closing Prayer

- a. Choose one of the following options:
 - i. Offer a prayer in silence for the person sitting on your right, perhaps in light of what the person shared. Say an "amen" as a clue for the next person; continue around the group. Thank the person on your left for his/her prayers.
 - ii. One person offers a final brief word of prayer, bearing in mind today's small group experience.
 - iii. Offer a "popcorn" prayer. Identify someone to close the prayer. Facilitator opens by offering a petition; then in the silence following, individuals may "pop" in with a petition of their own. When petitions seem to be concluded, prayer is ended by closing person.
 - iv. Another type of prayer chosen by the group.

8. Encouragement for the Journey

- a. God's blessings as you continue the journey with God and as you seek to remember the Sabbath in your life! Keep in mind Jesus' words from **Matthew 28:20**: "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age," and the psalmist's words in **Psalms 121:7-8**: "The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore."

THE WHOLENESS WHEEL



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EXPLAINING THE WHOLENESS WHEEL

Martin Luther said, “This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way.” We can’t be “whole” in this life, but we can become acquainted with the wholeness to come by striving to live well in key aspects of our lives. The Wholeness Wheel is a tool we use to understand whole-person health.

Social/Interpersonal Well-being

We were created by God to be social beings, living in community and instructed to help and love each other. Make time to build and maintain social well-being through interaction, play and forgiveness. Take time to nurture your relationships with family, friends, congregation and co-workers.

Emotional Well-being

Being emotionally well means feeling the full range of human emotions and expressing them appropriately. Self-awareness is the first step. Recognizing and honoring your own feelings and those of others — stress, contentment, anger, love, sadness, joy, resentment — will help you live life abundantly.

Physical Well-being

While we are not all born perfectly healthy or able to live life without injury or illness, we can live well with tending and nurturing. Honor your body as a gift from God. Feed it healthy foods, keep it hydrated, build your physical endurance through regular exercise and respect your body’s need for rest.

Financial Well-being

In all aspects of well-being we are called to be stewards. Good financial stewards make decisions based on their values, which is evident in the way they save, spend and share. This understanding of stewardship embraces resilience, sustainability and generosity.

Vocational Well-being

We all have a calling – a vocation – to follow Christ’s example, living a life of meaning, purpose and service to our neighbor. Our vocations are our life’s work and passions – our everyday roles through which God calls us to help make this world a better place. Those who are well vocationally are faithful stewards of their talents and abilities, and find opportunities to build and use them.

Intellectual Well-being

A mind is a terrible thing to waste. Using our minds keeps them alert and active. Stay curious, ask questions, seek answers. Explore new responsibilities, experience new things and keep an open mind. And remember, knowing when and how to let your mind rest is as important as keeping it active.

Spiritual Well-being

Living a centered life focused on God affects each aspect of our well-being. Turn to God for strength as you seek to live well in Christ. Nurture your relationship with God through prayer, devotions, worship, nature, art and music. Explore who you are and know whose you are.

APPENDIX B:

THE WHOLENESS WHEEL LABYRINTH



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PRAYING THE WHOLENESS WHEEL LABYRINTH

Sit comfortably in a quiet place. Breathe deeply. Let go of tension in the shoulders, forehead, chest. If you wish, light a candle.

Place your finger at the entrance to the labyrinth. Invite Christ to walk with you.

Trace your finger slowly along the path. Prayerfully consider your stewardship in each dimension of well-being. Pause to wrestle with difficult steps and embrace easy ones.

Rest in the center. Reflect with an open heart and mind on where and how God is nudging — even inviting — you to steward your gifts for the sake of the whole body of Christ. Ask God for what you need.

Return slowly on the same path. Affirm the steps you'll take to share your gifts with your family, work or ministry setting, congregation, and greater community. Consider who will help you to be the gracious, whole-person steward God has called and gifted you to be.

Be Still: Open Your Heart to God's Suggestion.

The labyrinth is part of Be Still, a Portico wellness activity. As you pray the labyrinth, carry one of the following with you. Visit PorticoBenefits.org/BeStill to learn more.

- What am I most grateful for? How is God present in that?
- What is troubling me? How is God present in that?
- In which areas of my life am I strong? How is God present in that?
- In which areas of my life am I vulnerable? How is God present in that?
- What area of my life might God be nudging me to tend?

APPENDIX C: A REFLECTION ON JUSTICE

The Best of Our Family by Desmond Tutu, *Anglican Archbishop of Capetown, South Africa.*

The world seems so unfair. Everywhere there are contrasts between rich and poor, well and sick, happy and unhappy, good and bad, and we would plead with God that if he is in charge, as we fervently believe, perhaps he could make this a little more obvious? But it is this imbalance that seems to be so necessary to our lives. Would we really be happier if God had made a world in which everyone enjoyed perfect health? If everyone were rich? If we were perfectly happy all the time? **It sounds idyllic. There is, however, something wrong with the vision of God creating a perfect world. It would be fair to everyone, but would we not all be like self-satisfied zombies?**

What did God have in mind in creating such a seemingly contrary and pain-full world? I believe he has given us, his children, a wonderful and challenging ministry exemplified by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is our job to make our community, our society, our nation, our world, a place where fairness and justice flourish. It is our responsibility as part of God's creation to participate with God in that creation by rectifying the imbalances we see all around us. In **Matthew 25:35** we read: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

We are called to be actively involved in leveling up the playing field. And this ministry is not just to those near at hand. It is particularly to those as described in verse 45 who are "...the least of these...." Those who lack most, who are at the bottom of the heap, for whom there seems to be no justice at all; the poor, the widow, the children, the sick and the outcast. It was our Lord who favored them the most because their need was greatest. It is for us who have much, to ensure that all God's children have a fair share of God's gifts with which we have been blessed. It is a ministry of giving, not taking, of sharing and caring.

But justice is not a case of the "haves" giving to the "have nets." That is far too unworthy and shallow an interpretation of God's intent for us. We must recognize that all people are our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are all members of God's family. We would want the best for our family. We would want good education and health care for them and we would willingly help in any way possible for that to happen. If they are being victimized and oppressed we would move heaven and earth to speak out against such evil. If dictators do not respect their rights, we will not stand by and say it is not our business. It is our business to be where there is pain and suffering and to oppose injustice with all our strength. Our brothers and sisters are in trouble and we cannot enjoy peace of mind and make peace with God if we do nothing. It is our responsibility as part of being God's children to actively try to make God's Kingdom come on earth. To bring about that idyllic perfection he would wish, as an offering to him, the source of all perfection.

How imperative is this ideal to our relationship with God? **Amos 5:2-24** has the answer:

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beast I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

It is an imperative that we ignore at our peril.