

Meeting Five: Participants' Agenda

OPENING PRAYER

Gathering Prayer

Pause for a brief moment of quieting and then pray an adaptation of the first verses of A Prayer of Spiritual Longing.

All **Loving God and Father, we long for you.
We long for deeper meaning in our lives,
for a wider love than we now experience.
We yearn to know we belong
and are connected to you and all creation.**

Leader As we prepare to form small communities
for the *Longing for the Holy* process,
help us to consider without judgment
the expressed needs
of those who have signed up.

All **Help us to create an atmosphere of
anticipation and excitement
for those who have signed up
so they can look toward the opportunity as a way
to live more consciously and joyfully in your presence,
and to channel the longing at the core of their being
with deep, expanding hope.
This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.**

FAITH SHARING

Incarnation: Christ in Us

Lifting Our Hearts ...

... in Song

Play Track 5 of the CD:

"I Am for You."

... in the Quiet

*Pause for a moment of silence and enter more deeply into the
presence of God.*

... in the Word

Read aloud Colossians 1:24-29.

*Take a few minutes to ponder a word, a phrase, a question, or a feeling that rises up
in you. Reflect on this quietly; then share it aloud.*

(Even if no one wishes to reflect aloud, permit sufficient time for silent reflection.)

Encountering Wisdom for Life

The great “mysteries” of the Christian faith—the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Paschal Mystery (death and resurrection), Pentecost—are deep truths into which we are invited. They are truths that, as a consequence of our baptisms, we are charged to live out. Christmas is the celebration of the Incarnation, the “enfleshment,” God-with-us. The gift of the Incarnation is the gift of a powerful potential that we are asked to give flesh—our flesh—to.

We Are the Body of Christ. In us and through us God physically continues to walk the face of the earth—just as Jesus did. *We* are the Body of Christ today. *We* are God’s incarnational presence.

The Incarnation as Healing and Reconciliation. Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus using his touch to heal those who are blind and afflicted.

In addition to being a healing one, Jesus’ touch is reconciling. The Gospel of Luke especially shows us Jesus inviting all sorts of alienated people to learn of the transforming power of the merciful God. He invites into his reconciling community people of questionable reputation, sinners of all sorts, and outsiders who were despised and shunned (Luke 5:27-32; 7:36-50; 19:10). As Jesus’ presence was a healing and reconciling one, so must ours be.

We come to be healers by first being healed; reconcilers, by first being reconciled.

We are asked to give flesh to—to incarnate—God’s healing presence. We are asked to seek reconciliation with those from whom we are estranged. We are even asked to struggle to love and reconcile with those who are our enemies. We are not asked to condone the sinful or harmful actions enemies may have committed, but to come to honor their deepest identity as creatures whose source and final end are meant to be God.

Incarnation: Being with and for Each Other. In our seeking to extend healing and be reconciled, we return again and again to the source of our own healing. The community of faith, past and present, the Body of Christ, becomes a source of guidance. What this means is that the Body of Christ is not simply a source of our individual healing. Community is essential to Christianity and thus to a Christian spirituality.

Discipleship is first and foremost about radiating and manifesting the love of God as shown to us in Jesus. As disciples, we are to form our flesh, to be transformed from the inside by God’s healing and reconciliation, so that we can give a human face to divine love in our actions with others.

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Longing for the Holy: Planning Your Spiritual Journey Together

Sharing Our Faith

How might my participation in faith-sharing groups help me to be an agent of God's healing and reconciling power in my personal, everyday world?

FORMING YOUR PARISH SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

COMMUNICATION AND MATERIALS

NEXT STEPS

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayers of Petition

Response **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Concluding Prayer

Close with the following (final three verses of A Prayer of Spiritual Longing):

Leader Let us pray.

All **May we embody the Christ life
in this our moment and place in history.
May the communion of saints surround us
and companion us on our journey.
May your Holy Spirit empower us to be holy
for the good of the world
and for your honor and glory.
We ask this through the risen Christ,
our brother and friend. Amen.**