

Becoming a community of Missional Communities

A resource for Bible reading and reflection in the Presbytery of Wabash Valley

In a world in which change is constant, how is the Presbytery of Wabash Valley to be faithful to what God calls us to be and do? That is the question that has motivated a presbytery commitment to missional transformation in 2010 and beyond.

It is very easy for us to think of the church as one voluntary organization among many in our society doing works of good, and we share many of the same characteristics. But we are different. We do not organize to suit our preferences, biases, or convictions. We have been called and sent by God to participate in God's mission for the sake of the world God loves.

This resource is for Council, committees, and teams of the Presbytery of Wabash Valley to pray, read Scripture together, and reflect on God's will for our life together as a *community of missional communities*¹.

INTRODUCTION: CALLED AND SENT

The church of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is called and sent to participate in God's redemptive mission in the world as sign, foretaste, and instrument of the Reign of God – “an exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world” (from the *Great Ends of the Church*).

Sign of the Reign of God: As a community of communities of praise and thanksgiving,

- Grounding our life together in the study of the Bible.
- Relying solely upon God's grace and mercy.
- Participating in God's transforming power.
- Proclaiming God's dynamic vision for all creation.

Foretaste of the Reign of God: As a community of communities of love and compassion,

- Sharing in the communion of the Holy Spirit.
- Celebrating unity in diversity.
- Living as stewards of God's gifts.
- Displaying hospitality filled with mutual love and compassion.

Instrument of the Reign of God: As a community of communities of peace and justice,

¹ Note: The image of “community of communities” represents the PWV as a community made up of many particular communities (congregations, clusters, teams, and other church groupings, formal and informal).

- Proclaiming Christ's liberating power in word and deed.
- Presenting a biblical identity and faithful vision.
- Seeking God's healing and reconciliation for all humanity.
- Pursuing justice, peace, and the integrity of all creation.

JANUARY: John 20:19-23

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

OPTIONAL QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the situation of the disciples in this text? What is our situation today?
2. What is God doing in this text? What is God doing today among us?
3. How did Jesus send the disciples? How are we being sent today?

SIGN OF THE REIGN OF GOD

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:4-5).

As communities of praise and thanksgiving, deeply grounded and growing in God, we embrace our call to be a sign of God’s gracious and liberating reign.

Our identity is rooted in the biblical story of God’s mighty acts and wondrous works (cf. Ps. 145). Thus the study of the Bible forms the core of our lives (both communally and personally). We read the Bible so that the Bible will read us. Through our study, reflection, prayer, and discussion we are learning the language of faith, sorting out the influence of our complex heritage, and discovering how to express the gospel of Jesus Christ within our unique Hawaiian context.

Discovering from our Bible study that all of life has been created, redeemed, and called into God’s service, we offer praise and thanksgiving to God in the whole of our lives. By what we value and by the way we live, we declare and act like we belong to the reign of God. In a world that places the self on a pedestal, we focus single-heartedly on the one true God. Knowing that we cannot secure our own lives, we rely solely on God’s grace and mercy. By intentionally living according to God’s Word, we make God’s will and presence visible in the world.

As believing and worshiping communities we point beyond ourselves to the power and glory of the almighty God. As we devote ourselves “to the apostle’s teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers” (Acts 2:42), the promised wholeness of human life is both experienced and proclaimed. Having the eyes of our hearts enlightened by faith (cf. Eph. 1:18), we are changed, we are able to see the world with new eyes. Thus where others see only despair, we see hope; where others see only darkness, we see light; where others see only death, we see life.

Among other things, we are a sign of God’s reign by:

- Grounding our life together in the study of the Bible.
- Relying solely upon God’s grace and mercy.
- Participating in God’s transforming power.
- Proclaiming God’s dynamic vision for all creation.

Worshiping the one true God as the source and destiny of life, we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice—as a beacon of hope to the world. As communities formed by praise and thanksgiving, we give all that we are, all that we have, all that we do and say, for the sake of making the reign of God known to the world.

Key Biblical Texts Shaping Our Common Life and Shared Ministry As Sign of the Reign of God

FEBRUARY: Deuteronomy 7:6–9: God’s Own Possession

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh King of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

MARCH: Matthew 5:13–16: The Light of the World

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

APRIL: Romans 12:1–2: Living Sacrifices

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Go not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

MAY: 1 Peter 2:9–10

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion Each Meeting:

1. What does this scripture say to us about our identity and purpose as a faith community?
2. What does this scripture call us to do?
3. Imagine. What would this look like lived out as a community of faith communities in the Presbytery of Wabash Valley?

FORETASTE OF THE REIGN OF GOD

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12).

Open to the gifts and manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we are a Spirit-filled community of communities offering a foretaste of the reign of God. Through our life together people catch a preview of or experience the life of the Spirit. In a world shaped by alienation, hatred, and revenge, our life of harmony, love, and forgiveness is itself part of the “good news” of Jesus Christ. At the core of our life is the affirmation that in spite of our continual rebellion and rejection of God’s good gifts, we have been set free from sin and death by the grace of God made known in the cross. Empowered by the Spirit, we are communities of hospitality offering encouragement, support, companionship, and the sharing of resources. Filled with mutual love and compassion, we are an early taste of God’s vision for all humanity.

As a people made up of diverse races, languages, and cultures with differing perspectives and commitments, we are spending time – sharing, listening, learning, and appreciating our differences. As we come to know and respect one another, we are beginning to experience a particular kind of “togetherness” which is not of our own making. Living “in Christ” by the power of the Holy Spirit we are becoming “members one of another” (Rom. 12:5) who “build up each other” (1 Thess. 5:11), “love one another with mutual affection” (Rom. 12:10), “confess our sins to one another” (James 5:16), “forgive one another” (Col. 3:13), are “hospitable to one another” (1 Thess. 5:15), “do good to one another” (1 Thess. 5:15), are “servants of one another” (Gal. 5:13), and “live in harmony with one another” (Rom. 12:6). In our everyday behavior we are expressing God’s love and compassion as we “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

Just as our devotion to God is a sign to the world of God’s presence, so the quality of our life together—how we nurture, guide, serve, and love one another—is a foretaste of the reign of God. Thus the kingdom is both a shaping promise and a present and experienced reality. Having received “the first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:23), we are already experiencing the joy, freedom, righteousness, and holiness of God’s reign.

As a foretaste of God’s reign, our life together is characterized by

- Sharing in the communion of the Holy Spirit.
- Celebrating unity in diversity.
- Living as stewards of God’s gifts.
- Displaying hospitality filled with mutual love and compassion.

As a foretaste of the coming reign of God, our life together proclaims the wonders of God’s reign: “the power of God’s healing, the liberating experience of forgiveness, the reality of fraternal community, the joy of celebration, the boldness in witness, the blossoming of hope, and the fruitfulness in mission” (Mortimer Arias).

Key Biblical Texts Shaping Our Common Life and Shared Ministry

As Foretaste of the Reign of God

JUNE: Isaiah 11:1–6: The Spirit of the Lord

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the LORD shall grow out of his roots.

The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
 the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
 the spirit of counsel and might,
 the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
 His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
 or decide by what his ears hear;
 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
 and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
 he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
 and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
 and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
 the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
 the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
 and a little child shall lead them.

JULY: Romans 12:3–13: The Consecrated Life

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually, we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us; prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

AUGUST: Galatians 5:13–26: The Fruit of the Spirit

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissension’s, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing with one another, envying one another.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion Each Meeting:

1. What does this scripture intend for the nature and quality of the church’s life together?
2. What does this scripture call us to be about in our relationships with one another? For what purpose?
3. Imagine. What would this look like lived out as a community of faith communities in the Presbytery of Wabash Valley?

INSTRUMENT OF THE REIGN OF GOD

“God has shown you, O people, 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?”
(Micah 6:8)

As faithful servants with a gentle style, the churches and ministries live out the witness and mission of God’s reign in the midst of the concrete circumstances of life. Not only are we a holy people engaging in the study of God’s Word, not only are we communities of mutual love and compassion, but we are also active instruments of God’s transforming mission.

We embrace our role as a people through whom God’s will for justice and peace is done in the world. While we join with groups and individuals beyond the church to shape a more humane and just society, our motives differ. Our understandings and commitments are shaped by the biblical witness to God’s peace and God’s justice (cf. Ps. 145; Ps. 146). Through faith we are the body of Christ in the world and thus God’s primary agent of healing and reconciliation. It is by being a faithful sign and foretaste, that we are an instrument of God’s reign:

The question which has to be put to every local congregation is the question whether it is a credible sign of God’s reign of justice and mercy over the whole of life, whether it is an open fellowship whose concerns are as wide as the concerns of humanity, whether it cares for its neighbors in a way which reflects and springs out of God’s care for them, whether its common life is recognizable as a foretaste of the blessing which God intends for the whole human family.

Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign o*

As disciple communities, following Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we embrace the awesome yet marvelous responsibility for:

- Proclaiming Christ’s liberating power in word and deed.
- Presenting a biblical identity and faithful vision.
- Seeking God’s healing and reconciliation for all humanity.
- Pursuing justice, peace, and the integrity of all creation.

As we pray, learn, and grow together, we are living into a common understanding of the purpose of the church, even as we express it in diverse ways within particular settings. The Presbytery is the connecting tissue which binds our faith communities together in covenant as members of the body of Christ. As a people sent as Christ was sent, we participate in Christ’s mission: “through him God was pleased to reconcile to God’s self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). Offering ourselves as Christ did, for the sake of others, we actively live out our discipleship which often involves self-sacrifice, humility, and a willingness to face rejection. As communities of witness and mission we sing the servant song of hope and joy.

Key Biblical Texts Shaping Our Common Life and Shared Ministry

As Instrument of the Reign of God

SEPTEMBER: Isaiah 2:2–4: God’s Peace

In days to come the mountain of the LORD’s house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,

and shall be raised above the hills;
all the nations shall stream to it.

Many peoples shall come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between the nations,
and shall arbitrate for many peoples;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

OCTOBER: Luke 4:14–21: Jesus as God's Servant

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he 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."

NOVEMBER: Romans 12:14–21: Live Peaceably

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

DECEMBER: 2 Corinthians 5:17–21: Ambassadors for Christ

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.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion Each Meeting:

1. What does this Scripture intend for us to be and do as the church?
2. Where do you see this happening in the Presbytery of Wabash Valley?
3. Where would you like to see more of this in our Presbytery?