

Lesson 46: What does it mean to enrich the life-work of communities?

Third Sunday of Easter

April 26, 2020

General Concept: To enrich the life-work of communities means to participate in the endeavors of the community towards the attainment of an improved quality of life.

Biblical References: 1 Peter 1:22-23, Luke 24:13-35, Deuteronomy 15: 7-11

Age Level Concepts

- To enrich the life-work of communities means to participate in the endeavors of the community towards the attainment of an improved quality of life.
- The local church considers the community as the concrete platform where Christ's mission is actualized.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Share the experiences and stories of the local church in its endeavors to participate in the life of the community as far back as they can trace
- Identify the marks of the local church's influence and impact on the community
- Commit to continue the legacy of the local church in the life and work of the community

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) is a much loved and familiar one, but it remains only a delightful story if we don't ask how it also speaks the word of God to us today. There are at least five ways in which this text can help us as we try to be the faithful church.

First of all, the text reminds us that Scripture helps us understand and gives us the big picture of the Christ Event. That's what Jesus did when he interpreted the events of his suffering, death, and resurrection in light of the larger story of Scripture. He didn't share secret mysteries from the 3 days spent in the tomb; he didn't speak of heavenly visions. Jesus went back to Israel's Scriptures. The reports that Jesus was alive were curious but meaningless claims until they were located within Israel's larger story.

This text invites us to put the story of Jesus and the individual pieces of our own stories into the larger story of how God has always worked with and for God's people to bring them salvation. Christians are a storied people, and the Bible is our memory book. It reminds us of who we are and from where we have come. As our Statement of Faith says, the Bible "is a faithful and inspired witness to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and in history to illumine, guide, correct and edify believers in their faith and witness." Just as in the Emmaus road, the disciples could not see Jesus until they understood him in the larger context of the Scriptures, so also we will not see Jesus clearly nor can we understand what it means to be his disciples without returning again and again to the larger story in our Scriptures and of our people.

We know it's not always easy to seriously study the Scriptures. We interpret texts differently; we disagree about the implications of what we read. We come to the text with different expectations, lenses, and life experiences. The answer, however, is not to throw up our hands in despair. The only way forward is to go back to Scripture again and again and again.

Although we don't physically have Jesus walking beside us to make everything clear, we do have the Holy Spirit to guide us and teach us. We also have each other, the body of Christ, to help us see things more clearly. All this requires patient listening and persistent questioning. It requires a radical openness to hearing something unexpected and new. It means not jumping quickly to proof texts to shore up our own beliefs but diligently considering the whole witness of Scripture. This text from Luke 24 invites us, urges us, to soak ourselves in the Word of God and to place ourselves and all the confusing individual perceptions into the grand story of what God is doing with and for the salvation of the world.

Moreover, the story also tells us that fellowship in community and shared practice lead us to new insight. Listening to Jesus interpret the Scriptures was absolutely crucial for the disciples to come to understanding, but it wasn't enough. Their eyes were opened only when Jesus sat at table and broke bread with them. We do not gain a grasp of Scripture's significance solely through lectures on the text; we come to understand it as we participate in the shared life of the community, enacted in meals shared at the table. To say that our eyes can't really be open to the truth of scripture unless we are practicing it in community is a profound claim. We see and understand Jesus not only in libraries and lecture halls, in pulpits and pews, but in the community that re-embodies his practices; we see as we participate in the story together with each other. The task of interpreting and studying Luke 24 will not be complete until we talk about it over lunch together, practice hospitality, invite the stranger to join us, pray together, share communion.

Seeing Jesus and following him faithfully requires developing habits and practices that embody and remember who Jesus was. As the church practices forgiving others as God in Christ has forgiven us, as we generously share our wealth and possessions with others as Jesus gave himself to us, as we share bread with people whom society has forgotten or ignored, we re-enact the practices we have learned from Jesus. We remember in our bodies who Jesus was and we see him more clearly. When those two disciples sat at a table with Jesus, seeing and doing what they had done with him before, their eyes were opened. So, may our eyes be opened when we, too, participate in the shared life of the body of Christ.

Furthermore, the story also tells us that revelation is a gift. In a society, which puts such high value on critical thinking and the individual mind, it's tempting to think that the disciples finally caught on because they put all the facts together and came up with a logical solution. But that is not what's going on in this text. The disciples were blind, and the Anointed One, who was sent to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, opened their eyes to see, just as he had done numerous times throughout his earthly ministry. Certainly, interpretation of Scripture and shared practice was part of their coming to see, but ultimately insight and understanding are always a gift from God. The cure for the disciples' blindness was not information but revelation.

Sometimes we're tempted to think that if we just follow all the right steps and work hard enough, we'll figure things out. We'll get the biblical scholars to do some sound exegesis, have

round table discussions, send out questionnaires, write up our findings and come up with a neatly packaged solution. These are important, but our text is reminding us that there is something more involved. There is wildness to God's ways that cannot always be predicted. Clarity of vision is sometimes obscured by mystery, and light breaks in when we least expect it. Two plus two sometimes equals five when God is in charge. All this is to say that our desire to see Jesus more clearly and to understand his will more fully need to be tempered with humility and an extravagant openness to being surprised. We need to do all the work we can but, in the end, we rely on God, through the Holy Spirit, to illumine our minds and transform our hearts.

Moreover, the story also reminds us that the resurrection of Jesus makes discipleship possible. We would not do justice to this text if we do not acknowledge the most important point of all, namely, the good news of Jesus' resurrection. The story is as much about the transformation of the disciples as about Jesus. And yet, there would be no discipleship if it were not for the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. When that shocking, glorious truth finally sank in, it turned the disciples inside out and upside down. The resurrection of Jesus is ultimately what changed them from fearful, wimpy followers into bold and joyful witnesses. As disciples of Jesus today we stand on the other side of the resurrection. To see and to know Jesus as the resurrected Lord is to confess that sin and evil and death are not the end of the story, are not the last word, neither for Jesus nor for his disciples nor for the church today. And that makes all the difference in the world. One cannot walk the long, sometimes difficult and confusing road of discipleship without the resurrection.

Discipleship faith is resurrection faith. It is one thing to pick up the cross and follow a suffering Messiah who stays dead; it is quite another matter to follow a Messiah whom God raised from the dead. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we can live in hope even when life seems dark. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we know that God can make the unexpected happen. Because of Jesus' resurrection we can experience new life now, even when the old creation still groans in travails waiting for the final redemption. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we too will one day be raised to eternal life. Because of Jesus' resurrection we need no longer be afraid – really, if God is stronger than the power of evil and death itself, what is there to be afraid of. Disciples are people transformed by the power of the resurrection of Jesus.

Finally, the story also tells us that the disciples are witnesses who share the good news. Our story ends with Cleopas and his companion rushing back to tell the others about their encounter with the risen Jesus. They cannot keep the good news to themselves. While they are talking, Jesus appears among them and commissions his disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations. He says, "You are witnesses of these things." Witness is not just something they are to do, but is who they are. We see this coming to fruition in the Book of Acts, where the once fearful disciples bear testimony boldly before governors and kings. When Peter and John stand before the authorities in Acts 4, they refuse to be silenced and announce, "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:21).

The church today is also called to bear witness about what we have seen and heard. As Christians we are called to bear witness – in our places of work, over lunch with a friend, at our kids' playground, in the public square. We are called to testify – not to grow the church or make ourselves look religious or any such thing -- but for only one purpose: to tell the truth about

what we have seen and heard. Like Cleopas and his companion, the church today is called to bear witness in word and deed to the good news of the risen Christ.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Faith in the Service of the People" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 306

Refrain: Faith in the service of the people, faith in the service of the poor

This is our response to the call of God, faith in the service of the poor.

Peasants of the field have the vision of land that is rich and free.

They till the land from dawn to setting sun, yet they remain to be poor.

Workers of the cities have the vision of decent jobs, decent pay,

They have to work hard like machinery, yet they remain to be poor.

Squatters of the cities have the vision of decent homes to stay

They build their shanties on the sides of streets just to be torn down in dismay.

Opening Prayer

It is indeed a blessing to know that we are part not just of Your body but of a bigger community as well. Our life becomes more meaningful when we see ourselves living with people with whom we can share Your word and our stories. Make this day more meaningful Lord as we continue to know ourselves through the eyes of others and understand your message through the stories of others. In Jesus' name, this is our prayer. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Deuteronomy 15: 7-11
 - To whom does this account being addressed?
 - What could have been the situation of the people referred to in the text?
 - What are the laws provided for the members of the community to follow?
 - How should the life of the community be enriched?
 - What message/s does the text tries to tell us readers today?

- Read Luke 24:13-35
 - What particular event in the community that the characters are talking about?
 - What do you think is the impact of Jesus' resurrection story to the community?
 - How do you think would Jesus' story enrich the life- work of the community where the believers are located?

Lessons Learned

TIMELINE. Make a timeline of your local church (from its beginning to the present) and ask the learners to share stories as to the participation of the local church in the life, work and growth of the community.

Example:

1948-1978

1980-1990

1991-2001

2002-2018

DISCUSSION. As the learners trace back the stories and experiences of the local church in terms of its participation and impact in the life of the community over the years, identify the marks of such influence and impact on the community.

Applying the Lessons Learned

Ask the following:

- How would you compare the participation of the local church in the life of the community before from that of today?
- Do you think that your local church has done Christ's mission in the community?
- What level of influence and impact would you like your local church to carry on for the next years to come?

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "Faith in the Service of the People" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 306
Faith in the service of the people, faith in the service of the poor
This is our response to the call of God, faith in the service of the poor.

Women of the land have the vision of people with dignity
They work and struggle caring for their young, hope for a nation that
is free.

People of the church have the vision of kingdom of God on earth
A kingdom of justice and righteousness, a kingdom of joy and love.

Closing Prayer

We continue to pray for your guidance and wisdom O Lord as we continue to seek our place in our community. We pray that we may live out your mission not just as individual members but as a collective body of people who has faith in You. May we truly shine our light so that people may see You and may we truly articulate our faith by serving others. Help us Lord, we pray. Amen

Lesson 47: How can a local church enrich the life-work of communities?

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 3, 2020

General Concept: The local church must partake in the life-work of the communities through organizing, leading, and mobilizing the people.

Biblical References: Acts 2:42-47, John 10:1-10, Deuteronomy 1: 9-18

Age Level Concepts

- The local church must partake in the life-work of the communities by uniting and organizing the people.
- The local church must help lead the people and not separate itself from the life and work of the community.
- The local church must help mobilize the people to work together to find solutions to their problems.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Read about models of community leadership in the Bible
- Tell stories about their local church leading, organizing and mobilizing the people into action in response to certain issues and concerns
- Thank God for the blessing of partaking in the life-work of God's people

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

Jesus Christ our Lord said, *"I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly* (John 10:10). Abundant life is more than just economic. In John's Gospel, a life that is satisfying, abundant, and lived to the fullest is a life that is lived in Christ. To have abundant life is not just having a new house, a new car, new clothes, having the latest electronic gadgets, or what have you. While these things could perhaps make life more comfortable for us, abundant life is more than just material. To have abundant life is to have life in Christ, or to put it in another way, to live the life of Christ.

Life in Christ is a life that does not steal, kill, and destroy. A life that steals, kills and destroys is the life of thieves, as Jesus Christ our Lord clearly stated. Such is a selfish or self-centered, greedy kind of life. Jesus called the Temple in Jerusalem a "hideout of thieves!" (Lk.19:46). For many of those who were serving in the Temple at that time were using religious laws to exact temple revenues from the common people for their own selfish gain.

Moreover, abundant life or life in Christ is also a life that is willing to be given up for others in obedience to God. It is not enough for us to realize that our life in Christ is indeed abundant. It is also necessary for us to seriously ask ourselves, abundant for whom?

If our life is abundant only for our own selves, then such is not the kind of life that Christ lived. Such is the life of the Rich Fool who tried to accumulate as much wealth as he could for himself (Lk. 12:16-21). The life of Christ was abundantly given for others to live more abundantly, especially for those who had less in life. Thus, Jesus Christ our Lord said, *"I am willing to give up my life, in order that I may receive it back again. This is what my Father commanded me to do"* (John 10:17-18).

Jesus Christ our Lord lived at the time when Palestine was a colony of the Roman Empire. The life he lived was obviously a threat to the powers-that-be. In fact, it was the high priest, Caiaphas, who advised the Jewish authorities that it is better that one man should die for all the people (John 18:14).

But to those who were driven to the periphery of society – the sick, the sinners and outcasts – who were recipients of his ministry, Jesus' life was a source of hope and salvation. To those considered non-existent, it was a source of life. Indeed, abundant life is motivated by genuine love for people, even for those who are unlovable. Jesus lifted up the poor and placed them at the very center of God's Kingdom. *"Blessed are you poor,"* he said, *"For yours is the Kingdom of God"* (Luke 6:20).

Jesus used the Parable of the Shepherd to illustrate what it means to be a servant of God. In ancient Israel, shepherds are hired to look after sheep not their own. Shepherds are among the poorest of the poor in society. Many of them are only after the money they would get in looking after the sheep. That's why they would run away if wild animals would come. They would not protect the sheep. They would not dare to look for those that are lost. They would not guide the sheep in greener pastures beside still waters, so to speak. Indeed, these kinds of shepherds are only hired men.

However, there are also those who would go beyond being merely hired men. They would really come to know the sheep and would consider them their own. They would protect them from danger. They would feed the sheep and would care for them when they are sick. They would guide them and look for them when they are lost. They are even willing to give their lives for the sake of the sheep. They are good shepherds.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Lord, Give Us a Leader" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 288

The world is in need of a leader who cares
For people who suffer and people in need.
A leader who listens to cries of the poor
A leader who lives by Your Word.

Refrain:

Lord, give us a leader who shows us the way
Who helps us to hope for a better day
A leader who seeks not for silver or gold
A leader who lives by Your Word.

Lord give us a leader like Moses of old
Who longs for His people true freedom and food
A leader who seeks not first place come what may
A leader who lives by Your Word.

Opening Prayer

Come to us Lord in this hour of our worship and study. As we seek deeper understanding of Your Word, may we be blessed by the experiences and stories of people whom you have called and whose lives helped others to see You as their God. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Deuteronomy 1: 9-18
 - Who are involved in the story?
 - How was the life of the community being organized?
 - What were the tasks of those chosen to lead?
 - How did the leaders partake in the life of the community?

- Read Acts 2:42-47, John 10:1-10
 - How does Jesus see himself in relation to the life of the people?
 - What are the contrasting images/roles that the parable tries to make the readers be aware of?
 - What are the contrasting intentions and consequences in the lives of the people when they listen and follow to either kind of leaders?
 - What kind of life did the early Christians show to the community?
 - How did they manifest their beliefs and concern towards members of the faith- community?
 - What were the effects of such way of life to the believers and non-believers as well?

Lessons Learned

SHARING OF STORIES. Ask the learners to remember experiences and retell stories in relation to:

- The local church taking the lead with the community in doing actions responsive to the needs of the people.
- The local church taking the initiative to organize the people in response to certain concerns and issues of the community.
- The local church taking the initiative to mobilize the people into action in response to certain needs and issues of the community.

DISCUSSION. Ask the learners the following:

- *If you have done* leading, organizing and mobilizing the people in the community, what were its effects to the life of the people in the community?
- How do you feel with what you have done as a local church?
- *If you have not done* any of these roles in the community, how would you describe the local church's relationship with the community?
- How would you describe the level of participation of your local church to the life of the community?

- How do you feel knowing your local church's impact in the life of the community?

Applying the Lessons Learned

DECLARATION OF BELIEF. Ask the learners to finish the statement based on what they personally believed in.

"I believe the local church should participate in the life and work of the community and take important roles because _____."

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "We Are One In Community" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 273

We are one in community, empowered by the spirit
 Now working in you and me, different gifts bestowed
 We must work in one accord, for we serve one Lord alone
 So we shall break the walls dividing, break all pride and prejudice
 To share the love of Jesus, and greet each one Shalom!

Closing Prayer

We see the need of our local church to be immersed in the life of the community because we believe that you have called us to become vessels of your love and promise of peace and abundance. Make us always aware of the fact that we are part of the community and should not look at ourselves as set apart and therefore separate ourselves from the concerns and problems of the community. May we be truly your light and salt to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Lesson 48: What is a collective response?

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 10, 2020

General Concept: A collective response is a shared and united action to an expressed need.

Biblical References: 1 Peter 2:9-10, John 14:12-14, James 1:22; 2:17

Age Level Concepts

- When others need help, we respond collectively in mutual concern.
- We are united in our response to the needs of the people.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Share experiences of the Church responding collectively to the needs of others and the outcome of these responses
- Discuss the impact of people uniting in responding to certain needs
- Challenge all members to work together in responding to challenges confronting the Church and society

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

It was James, the brother of Jesus who said that followers of Jesus are to be doers of the word. “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22, NIV). A person’s faith is to be evident in practical good works. A faith that does not do so is no faith at all – for faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Jesus himself said that his followers would be doers of the works that he did. John 14:12-14 answers the question, “What are Jesus’ followers to do in the interim period between his first coming and his coming again?”

First of all, Jesus’ followers will do the works that Jesus did while he was on the earth. “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also” (John 14:12a). What works did Jesus do? He healed people. He touched people. He included people who were on the outside. He loved all people, even those who were despised – Samaritans and tax collectors. He demonstrated compassion and mercy. He taught people the truth about God. He fed people. He prayed for people. He encouraged people. He challenged people to live as God’s children.

Sometimes he even rebuked hypocrisy. He spoke out against the exploitation of the poor, the fatherless, the widows and the distressed. He did all of these works and more and he did so as one of us. He became like us. He fully incarnated himself; he fully took upon himself the clothing of humanity.

As Jesus’ followers, are we doing the works that Jesus did? Are we living out the life of Christ in our daily lives? What keeps us from being Christ’s body on earth? The problem is, we want to go to heaven! Maybe not literally quite yet, but we want to be somewhere other than where we are now. We want to enter the pure life of the spirit to be with Jesus. We want to be caught up from the earth, far out of sight, far from pain, far from the hum of the ordinary and the drudgery of today. And yet Jesus has us here, right now, earthbound to take up space on the earth, to do the works that he did.

What changes could occur if we took Jesus’ words seriously? How many sick and bedraggled people could find comfort? How many stomachs could be filled? How many troubled minds could find peace? How many poor could be clothed? How many prisoners of all kinds (emotional, those in sin’s bondage) could be set free? How many hopeless could find hope? How many outcasts could know that somebody cares for them? It’s non-negotiable – Jesus’ followers will do the works that He did while He was on the earth.

But moreover, followers of Jesus will also do even greater works than Jesus did. “Greater works than these he will do, because I go to my Father” (14:12b). How could this be? First, Jesus did not mean that his followers would do greater works in the sense of quality. Only God can do what God can do. Nevertheless, Jesus while on earth was self-limited and his works were confined to a very small geographical area of the world. Jesus was looking forward to the day when he would be with the Father, “because I go to my Father.” At that time the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, would indwell the disciples. Then, they would go out across the world doing the works of Jesus. In that sense, Jesus’ followers do “greater works” in quantity than he

did.

Right now, the Holy Spirit is empowering believers to carry out his works around the world! Today, believers across the world - Jesus' followers are doing the works of Jesus. They are living out the presence of Christ in our world. Followers of Jesus will do the works that he did while on earth and they will do even "greater works" than Jesus.

Furthermore, Jesus' followers will pray and receive direction and power for doing the works of Jesus.

Why does Jesus mention prayer in this setting (John 14:13-14)? Through prayer we gain the mind of Christ. Through prayer God opens up our hearts to the possibilities before us. Through prayer God awakens us to the seriousness of our task. Through prayer we find the motivation to do what he has called us to do.

Jesus says, "Whatever you ask in my name, that I will do." It seems as if this is an unqualified promise that we can ask God for anything and we will receive it from God. Name it and claim it. Is that what God is saying?

(1) First, our asking is to be done in his name. "And whatever you ask in my name..." (14:13). "If you ask anything in my name..." (14:14). The test of whether or not our prayers are right is this: "Am I asking this prayer in Jesus' name?" Obviously there are conditions to our asking. We simply cannot ask for anything selfishly and expect God to give it to us as if God existed to serve us from heaven's divine goodie machine. Instead of selfish praying, prayers prayed in the name of Jesus are prayers for God's kingdom purposes to be fulfilled in us and in his world.

(2) Second, God is pleased to answer our prayers that glorify him. "And whatever you ask in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (14:13). We can have confidence in our praying when we are asking God to empower us to do the works of Jesus. God is always pleased to answer prayers that involve us doing the works of Jesus because "the father is glorified in the Son." Prayer unlocks the potential of doing greater works for God.

God is often at work in the ordinary events of life. God is not just interested in us doing church work. There is a great need for people to lead in worship, teach the Bible, and a hundred other things that happen at church. These are vital; however, don't limit God's working to the life of the church. God is at work in our neighbor's life. God's Holy Spirit operates without limits. He's speaking to people. Our job as Christians is to be there and help guide them in their search.

Having emphasized the fact that God's work is not limited to the church, we also say that our church needs our involvement. What builds fellowship in a church is not food. Biblical fellowship (*koinonia*) occurs when believers partner together in the cause of Christ. Our church is a great place to serve because we have a vision to reach out to our community responding collectively to needs and a vision to reach out to the world with the good news of Christ. Aside from that, God wants us to be an active participant in a church body where we can fulfill his purpose for your life.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds" Hymnal of Faith Journey, 268

Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love

The sharing of a common life is like to that above.

Before our God we come and pour our ardent prayers

Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.

Opening Prayer

We come to You Lord bringing with us our concerns and cares. Your abiding presence helps lighten our burdens and your assuring words help us look at life with hope and peace. We seek You Lord today through the words that we are going to partake and share. May your wisdom be the gift we receive today.

Amen

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read 1 Peter 2:9-10
 - Give your own understanding of the words:
 - A chosen race
 - Royal priesthood
 - Holy nation
 - God's own people
 - How would you contrast "were not a people" and "now as God's people"?
 - What are the tasks of being "God's people"?
 - How should God's people live and respond to God?
- Read John 14:12-14
 - How should believers in Jesus live out their faith in him?
 - How would you describe the quality of life of the believers as implied in the text?

Lessons Learned

GAME. Tell the learners that they are going to stretch their muscles for a while.

Ask for a volunteer from among the learners. Give the instructions for the game.

1. Ask the volunteer to come forward and lie on the floor placing both arms across his/her chest.
2. Ask the rest of the learners to lift the body of the volunteer by using only their point-fingers.
3. Instruct them to lift the body together at the count of three. The facilitator will give the count.

4. As the body is lifted, the facilitator will count up to 5 before they slowly bring the body down.

Ask the following:

- Was it hard to lift the body? Why?
- What are the difficulties you have encountered that causes failure to lift the body?
- What are the factors you have noticed that enables you to lift the body?

SHARING OF STORIES.

- Tell the learners to recall instances or experiences wherein they made an action collectively in response to a particular need in the community.
- What were the impact or outcome of such collective action or work to the community?
- How did you feel when your local church made a collective action in response to a certain need of the community?

Applying the Lessons Learned

The facilitator may say, “As God’s people, chosen and recipient of God’s mercy we need to see ourselves as one body – Christ’s body in the world. Therefore, being part of a bigger community- the society, we need to collectively listen to the needs and concerns of the people and act collectively in response to the expressed needs of the community where we are located. We cannot close our eyes and separate ourselves to what is happening around us. For we are called as God’s people, empowered to do Christ’s works and even commanded to do greater than what Jesus has exemplified.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn “Blest Be the Tie that Binds” Hymnal of Faith Journey, 268
(3rd and 4th stanza)

We share each other’s woes, each other burdens bear
And often for each other flows, a sympathizing tear.

When we are called to part, it gives us inward pain
But we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again.

Closing Prayer

The only power a body of people can have is to do things in unity and collectively. There is no greater gift you have given your church Lord than the gift of being one in spirit, one in work and one in hope. Touch us Lord to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of those who are considered least, lost and last in our community. And may our collective response be worthy to be called as faithful obedience in doing your mission. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen

Lesson 49: How do we deepen the impact of our collective response to societal issues and concerns?

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 17, 2020

General Concept: We deepen the impact of our collective response when we appropriately address the needs and concerns in society.

Biblical References: Acts 17:22-31, John 14:15-21, Isaiah 58: 3b-7

Age Level Concept/s

- The impact is significant when we appropriately and collectively address the needs and concerns in society

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Discuss the needs and concerns of society and how the Church has responded
- Assess the appropriateness of our response and its impact in the lives and faith of the members and of the community as well
- Commit to actively involved in the endeavors of the Church to respond to the challenges of the present time

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) song chart, offering plate or basket, pictures depicting the situations of people

Biblical Background

The setting of our text from the Gospel of John (14:15-21) was the night before Jesus Christ our Lord would die, when the darkness of the world was closing in. Jesus had gathered his closest friends to share a final meal. Rising from the table, he took a towel, wrapped it around him, and washed his disciples' feet. Then, after telling his disciples that one of them would betray him, he says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you....By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

We have in this section of John, in a nutshell, Jesus' own definition of what it means to be his disciple. In our Gospel lesson we hear Jesus say, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." We need to remember what Jesus said earlier that evening about his commandments: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you...This I command you, that you love one another." We need to remember that, in the gospel of John, Jesus only gives his disciples one commandment: "Love one another. Love one another as I have loved you."

And so, that's the commandment Jesus is talking about. Love one another. All of Jesus' other teachings about how to live are a fleshing out of this commandment, and showing his disciples then and now how the commandment to love is worked out in our day to day living.

John wrote his gospel long after Jesus was gone. The gospel is written looking backwards, in the midst of a community for whom Jesus was only a memory. Most of the people in John's community had never met Jesus. Most—if not all—of the disciples were dead. The Temple in

Jerusalem had been destroyed—which a lot of folk thought was a sign that the end-time would come soon.

But the end-time didn't come. Life went on, and that was, in some ways, the hardest part of all. Even when all the signs seemed right, Jesus hadn't come back. This community of believers felt pushed to the very edge of despair and defeat.

So, John pulled together many of the things Jesus said into this one section of the Gospel we know now as “The Farewell Discourse.” Here at the table, we hear Jesus say some of the same things over and over, in different ways, to make sure the disciples get it. The central word is love. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” “Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.” “I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.” The word used here for love—agape—describes the kind of love that Jesus showed us: self-giving love that seeks the good of the other, generous, sacrificial love.

The disciples must have wondered, “But how can we do that?” They knew they had a hard time loving each other even while Jesus was with them. Jesus has been telling them that he is going to leave them. How could they love in the way Jesus loves-- if he's gone?

That night, the disciples haven't yet seen the depths of Jesus' love for them—a love that would lead to the cross and the tomb, that would tear him away from them. That night, they couldn't have guessed that they would lose him twice: that after his death, he would return in the glory of resurrection, and then be taken from their sight in the ascension. That night, they were still basking in his physical presence as he began the long farewell talk that we hear continued in text.

Knowing that they have come to depend on his presence, Jesus wants to reassure his disciples. Before he goes away, he tells them, "I will not leave you orphaned." That seems an odd phrase to use with these adults, consider that the word John's gospel uses for "orphan" means "torn away from."

Of course, they would have each other. Jesus had told them to love each other—but we wonder just how comforting that was. Each of the disciples must have known in his heart how hard it is to love the way Jesus loves. If we could just love God and love one another as Jesus loves, there wouldn't be any need for any other commandments or laws or rules. But that commandment to love is a tall order.

Given the realities of our lives and the realities of the people we live and work with—how do we find it possible to obey this commandment to love? In this world we live in, given all the people we encounter who are different from us, and who don't value the same things we do, how do we love as Jesus loves?

God knows—it isn't easy. The truth that Jesus wants us to live by—the truth of love—is a love that the rest of the world can't understand or make sense of. It's a love that makes us different.

We don't always live up to this truth. We sometimes fall short of the kind of love that Jesus wants us to show in our lives. Throughout history, we see examples of how Christians have failed to live up to the love to which Jesus calls us.

Love is at the heart of what Jesus commands us to do. That's what the Holy Spirit works to make possible in each of our lives. Love not just for our families, not just for our friends, not just for people that we like. No, love even for our enemies. That's the kind of love that God is calling us toward.

This kind of love to which Jesus calls us is hard. We can't do it alone. It's humanly impossible. But Jesus promises that we won't be alone. "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."

The Greek word translated as "advocate" — "*paracletos*", or *Paraclete* — means "one called alongside, to help." An advocate is someone who is looking out for you; someone who is on your side; someone who encourages you and supports you; someone who speaks up for you and is willing to hang in there with you through thick and thin. It's hard to love one another, in the way Jesus loves. It's hard to be generous and brave and compassionate—especially when you're afraid or you feel like nobody hears you or you feel alone or abandoned or left out.

But the good news is that God is with us and has come to us in Christ to show us what God wants for us: health and healing, love and belonging and community, justice and peace, and a life of abundance. God came in Christ to show us how far God is willing to go to show us how much God loves us. God raised Jesus from the dead to show us that goodness is stronger than evil and love is stronger than death.

God keeps coming to us in the Holy Spirit to encourage us and guide us and care for us and walk with us, to be our Advocate. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come to us with truth, with gifts, and the power to be faithful disciples. The Spirit will be with us, helping us, giving us the power to love.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "Magagawa Natin"

Magagawa natin ang lahat ng bagay, lahat ng bagay dito sa mundo

Isang bagay hindi magagawa, hindi magagawang nag-iisa

Malulutas natin ang mga problema kung tayo'y magkakaisa

Ang suliranin dagling mapaparam at may bagong buhay.

Opening Prayer

You have given us days in our lives so that we may experience Your presence and grace. Though sometimes we choose to spend our days away from You and do

what only pleases us but we are hopeful that You continually call and seek us. Let this day be the time for us to seek you and let this be an opportunity for us to continually know you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Acts 17:22-31
 - Who is being addressed to by this speech of Paul?
 - What particular issues or concerns was being discussed in Paul's discourse?
 - What could have been the impact of Paul's discourse to those who heard him especially his adversaries?
- Read John 14: 15-21
 - Who are the intended hearers or recipients of this message?
 - What has happened that time that leads to this declaration?
 - What issues or concerns that were being addressed by this message?
 - What could have been the impact of message to the intended hearers?

Lessons Learned

PICTURE STUDY. Divide the learners into three or four depending on its number.

Give out pictures or caricatures cut out from magazines or papers that depicts the situations and conditions of people.

- Tell them to distinguish the particular need/ issue or concern that the picture depicted.
- Ask how they feel about what they see.
- Tell them to suggest a particular action or way to address the particular need they identified.
- Ask the groups to share their picture and their responses.

NEEDS/ACTIONS ASSESSMENT

With the same groups, ask them to fill out the table:

Needs/issues Identified	Actions Taken	Outcome/ Impact	Was the action taken appropriate or inappropriate
Ex: mining	Wrote petition letters to concerned agencies Forum/ dialogues	People are made aware of the consequences of mining and opposes the coming in of other companies.	Appropriate because the mining operation was stopped.
Access to medicine	Talked with the Baranggay Captain	The local government	appropriate because it is a

	about it	made a request to proper agencies for help	primary task of the government to provide services including access to health care.

Ask the groups to present their table of assessment.

Applying the Lessons Learned

After presenting the tables, synthesize the needs and actions identified by the group and so with their assessment.

Ask the groups to reflect on their work and share what commitment they can give to deepen the impact of the local church's response to the needs of the community.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "It's I who Build Community"

It's I, it's I, it's I who build community

It's I, it's I, it's I who build community

It's I, it's I, it's I who build community

It's I who build community.

Roll over the ocean, roll over the sea

Roll over the ocean and the deep blue sea. (2x)

- It's You
- It's Us

Closing Prayer

Give us wisdom Lord to enable to discern the appropriate response to the needs and concerns of people not only inside our faith community but the community outside our own where we also belong. Teach us Lord to listen and see the true plight of our neighbors. Give us always the courage to commit ourselves to get involved in any endeavors our local church may take. This is our prayer of commitment in Jesus' name, Amen.

Lesson 50: How can we, as a Church, achieve our goals?

Ascension Sunday

Seventh Sunday of Easter

May 24, 2020

General Concept: The Church can achieve its goals through concerted efforts, strong faith in God, and deep commitment to the work.

Biblical References: Acts 1:6-14, Psalm 68:3-10, 1 Peter 5:6-11

Age Level Concepts

- The Church can achieve its goals through the concerted efforts of everyone.
- We have strong faith in God to be in solidarity with the Church in achieving its goals.
- We can reach our goals through determination and commitment in doing the work of the Church.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Suggest ideas on how to achieve the Church's goals
- Point out the factors that need to be considered in achieving our goals
- Give the significance of having faith in God's guidance in the efforts to achieve the Church's goals
- Affirm that God is in solidarity with the Church in achieving its goals
- Resolve to commit as a community of faith all that we have to achieve our goals

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

As Christian believers, we are called upon to be witnesses for Christ. This is what we are meant to be; it is our reason for being. But what does it mean to be witnesses? The number one characteristic of a witness is to be able to speak the truth at first hand. If we are witnesses in a court of law, for instance, we are allowed to say only that which we ourselves have personally seen and heard. Similarly, if we are witnesses for Christ, then we should know Christ at first hand. If we are to spread the Gospel, then we have to really know ourselves what the Gospel is all about.

In order for us to have first-hand knowledge of the Gospel, there are at least two things that we should do. First, we should appropriate Christ for ourselves. We should always ask ourselves, "What does Christ mean for me and what must I do about him?" We should believe in Christ, not only because someone else told us to believe in him, but rather because we ourselves have thought about him.

Onetime, Jesus asked his disciples a very important question. He wanted to know what people knew about him. And so, he asked his disciples, "What do people say about me?" And they told him that some were saying that he was John the Baptist, while others were also saying that he was Elijah or a prophet who had come to life. But then Jesus asked his disciples, "How about you? Who do you say I am?" (Matthew 16:13-15).

It is not enough to tell what others think about Jesus. We have to think it out ourselves, if we are to be genuine witnesses for Christ. But more important than the need to think about Jesus is the need to really know and meet Jesus ourselves. Perhaps, one of our greatest

mistakes is when we think of Jesus as a mere figure in a book, or as someone who lived and died and gone, and whose story we love to tell. But Jesus is alive, and we can meet him in the same manner that we can meet a friend. And it is only when we really know Jesus in this sense that we can be absolutely and completely sure of him.

But then we may ask, why do we not meet him more often than we do? Most likely the reason is that we do not give ourselves a chance to meet him, or better still, we do not give him a chance to meet us. There should be a time we set aside each day to think and to speak to Jesus and to wait for his presence in prayer. It doesn't need to be long. It can be anytime of the day and anywhere. When we do that, we will really meet Christ. And then we can be genuine witnesses for him, because we can say beyond all shadow of doubt that we know him.

Now, we may ask, where can we be witnesses for Christ? Jesus commanded his disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea, and in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This means that they would take Jerusalem as a center, and then draw a series of ever widening concentric circles until the widest circle of all take in the whole wide world.

First of all, they have to start in Jerusalem. This means they have to start at home. They say that charity begins at home. Certainly, our Christian witness should begin at home. One time, Jesus cured a person who was violently mad. When the person was cured, naturally his heart overflowed with gratitude to Jesus. And he asked Jesus to let him come with him and to follow Jesus all the time. But Jesus answered, *"Go back home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how kind he has been to you?"* (Mk.5:19).

There is no better place for us to practice being a Christian than at home. Sometimes, we misuse our homes altogether. We sometimes think of our homes as a place where we can be ourselves. And this means that we have the right to be as bad-tempered and irritable and selfish as we like in our homes. And that we can treat our loved ones with discourtesy and lack of consideration that we would never dream of showing to strangers or to people we do not know very well.

We can and must and ought to begin to demonstrate Christianity in our own homes. In our homes, we can find all the chances to be as unselfish and kind, to be as compassionate and forgiving, as thoughtful and considerate as a Christian ought to be.

Moreover, Jesus also told his disciples to go on to Judea; that is to say they have to be witnesses for Christ in their own country. Sometimes, we always have the tendency to praise other countries, except our own. We always have the tendency to point out how much better other countries are when compared to our own. There might be some truth in it. But nevertheless, it is our primary responsibility to make our country a truly Christian country.

But how can we do that? Well, we can do it by taking our Christianity with us into every aspect of life. Perhaps, one of the gravest mistakes we can make is to divide life into sacred and secular, and think that we serve God only in church, and that we can forget and leave God behind us when we go out into the world. Every moment of life is lived in God's presence, and therefore every moment of life should be an act of worship. When we go out to work, we can go a long way in making our country a truly Christian country if we insist on taking our

Christian principles with us into every aspect of life, keeping in mind always that every moment of our life is seen by our living God.

Furthermore, Jesus also commanded his disciples to go on to Samaria. This is really surprising, because the Jews were bitter enemies of the Samaritans, and the Samaritans in turn really hated the Jews. The “Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9). But the Gospel of Christ must be brought even to people who are regarded as enemies.

Of course, the truth is that a real Christian should not regard any person as an enemy. Perhaps, one of the greatest “ifs” of history is the question of what might have happened if the Western people had sent abroad missionaries of the Gospel instead of armies of war. To make it more contemporary, what might have happened if the Americans have sent missionaries, who really care for people in Afghanistan or in Iraq, rather than abusive armies? What might have happened, if our government had sent courageous missionaries of Christ’s Gospel of love to Mindanao, rather than soldiers who are trained to kill?

There is only one real way to destroy our enemies, and that is, to make them our friends. And we can only do that when we persuade them to accept also the same Gospel of Christ which alone can make us one.

Finally, Jesus also commanded his disciples to go out to the ends of the earth. He commanded them to be witnesses throughout the whole world. Apostle Paul had dreamed of that day when “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil.2:10-11). It is God’s purpose that everyone should know and love Christ, as well as, know and love those whom Christ loved. And so, there is laid upon us the duty of going out to the ends of the earth to tell the story of Jesus and his love.

Indeed, we should never be contented until the last person in the world knows the story of Jesus and his love. And so, by the life we live, we must do all we can to participate in God’s work “to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world as God’s Kingdom” – a kingdom of caring, joy, and love. To be genuine witnesses for Christ is never easy, but it’s the only way we can make our nation a truly Christian nation in Southeast Asia.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn “We Shall Overcome” Children Praise God, 214

We shall overcome, we shall overcome

We shall overcome someday,

Oh deep in my heart, I do believe

We shall overcome someday.

We’ll walk hand in hand, we’ll walk hand in hand

We’ll walk hand in hand someday

Oh deep in my heart, I do believe

We'll walk hand in hand someday.

The Lord will see us through, the Lord will see us through
The Lord will see us through someday,
Oh deep in my heart, I do believe
We shall overcome someday.

Opening Prayer

You made ways Lord to let us know that You are with us not just in our joys and triumphs but more so in our hurts and sorrows. We are able to overcome obstacles and challenges that come our way because our faith in your promise made us strong. We ask Your abiding Presence today as we continue to equip ourselves with Your words. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Psalm 68:3-10
 - What was the song all about?
 - How did the people experience God being in solidarity with them?
 - How did the people acknowledge God's power and grace?

- Read Acts 1:6-14
 - What event did the disciples witness?
 - How would you describe the experience shared by the witnesses that day?
 - What was the impact or effect of the experience to the life and faith of the people who witnessed it?

- Read 1 Peter 5:6-11
 - Who are the intended receiver of Peter's letter?
 - How are the believers supposed to resist evil?
 - How would the people experience God's solidarity in their lives?

Lessons Learned

GROUPINGS. Divide the learners into three groups. Tell the groups to discuss the following:

Group 1: Suggest ways to achieve the goals of the church

Group 2: Identify the factors that need to be considered in order to achieve the goals of the church

Group 3: What is the importance of faith in God in pursuing and achieving the goals of the church?

Applying the Lessons Learned

Let the learners recite/ read the goals of the church.

UCCP Goals:

- To strengthen the faith community
- To enrich the life-work of communities where local churches are located
- To deepen the impact of its collective response to societal issues and concerns

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn “My Boat of Life Sails on An angry Sea”
Hymnal of Faith Journey, 52

My boat of life sails on an angry sea
The weather changes with each passing day
Sometimes it brings such happiness and joy
Sometimes there’s nothing but great anxiety
There was a time when things were simply bad
The obstacles I faced were like a storm,
The sail was ripped, my rudder broke in two,
It didn’t look like I’d make it safely home.

But in a raging wind I heard a voice
It said, “Don’t be afraid, your faith is strong.
I am your pilot, you won’t lose your way.
You know I’ll help you when everything goes wrong.”
So now the wind can come, the wind can go
I am no longer frightened by the sea
When waters roar and dark clouds fill the sky
I say, “It’s alright, the Lord will be with me.”

Closing Prayer

With true faith and commitment to the work of the church and unity in understanding of our tasks can our goals be achieved, O Lord. We pray that with these goals, our life as a community of believers will become a living witness to others of your love, justice and peace. We do not fear whatever comes our way because we believe that we are only doing Christ’s work in the world. We offer Lord our strength, time and gifts. May you find it worthy of your praise. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Lesson 51: **How can the Church strongly uphold its Vision, Mission and Goals?**

Day of Pentecost

May 31, 2020

General Concept: The Church united affirms and celebrates the living out and fulfillment of the Vision, Mission and Goals.

Biblical References: Acts 2:1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13, Joel 2:21-28

Age Level Concept/s

- The Church united affirms and celebrates the living out and fulfillment of our Vision, Mission and Goals.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, the learners should be able to

- Express affirmation of the Vision, Mission, and Goals of the Church
- Make projections of what the Church and society would be like when we fulfill and live out our Vision, Mission and Goals

Materials: The Holy Bible (preferably the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) song chart, offering plate or basket

Biblical Background

The story of the Pentecost event as recorded in the Book of Acts (Acts 2) was about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon God's people in a way and with a power that was never seen before. Christ promised the disciples before his ascension that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. But like many of what Christ told them, the disciples did not fully understand what he meant.

Now, ten days after Christ's ascension the disciples gathered together for the Festival of Weeks, called *Pentecost* in Greek, which celebrated the harvest. At about 9:00 o'clock that morning, there was a sudden whooshing sound like a great wind that filled the house where they were sitting. Next, there appeared to them what Luke, the writer of the Book of Acts, would call "*like tongues of fire, distributed and resting on them*" (Acts 2:3).

And then, the people began to speak in tongues in a unique way. In the New Testament, speaking in tongues means speaking in unknown "languages" just as it does today. But at Pentecost, these "tongues" are real languages from all over the known world at that time, so that people from every corner of the world can hear the mighty works of God being proclaimed in their own language.

Now, in what way the coming of the Holy Spirit would empower us?

First and foremost, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us would make us experience unity.

This does not mean we would suddenly all think alike or do everything the same way. Rather, it means that we would love one another and accept these differences rather than letting them divide us.

If we were totally immersed in the Holy Spirit, we would no longer be divided by issues of language or theology, of economics or politics. If we were united in the Holy Spirit, it would be impossible anymore to speak of rich or poor in the Christian community as well as in the larger society. There would simply be Christian communities filled with people blind to differences in language, in theology, in income or social status.

Secondly, the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us would also make us experience power.

Apostle Peter, infamous for his threefold denial of Christ, boldly proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus

Christ, no longer afraid of the consequences. The result was the power to convert 3,000 people with one sermon and the faith to spread the Gospel throughout the world. For it is actually the Holy Spirit, not us, that really converts and transforms people's lives.

A third result of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon us is the fulfillment of a vision. Quoting from Prophet Joel, who prophesied of the day in which God's Spirit would come upon the people, Apostle Peter said that the day has come when the sons and daughters would prophesy, the young would see visions and the old would dream dreams (Acts 2:17). The fulfillment of a vision is perhaps the most remarkable result of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Day of Pentecost was so great. But within days or weeks after, we already hear stories of confusion, conflict and strife. Ananias and Sapphira, for instance, sold some land and claimed to have given all of it to the Christian community in order to gain prestige in the eyes of their fellow believers (cf. Acts 5). However, in reality they held some of the money back, which was their right, anyway. Their sin however was in lying. They lied against the Holy Spirit.

Then, we also read that a dispute arose between the Christians who spoke Greek and those who spoke Hebrew (Aramaic). The Greek-speaking Christians felt that favoritism was shown to the widows of the Hebrew-speaking Christians in the daily distribution of food (cf. Acts 6). Thus, there came division and strife over ethnic and language differences.

We can go on cataloguing these disputes in the Early Christian Community, for there were lots of them. This is not however necessary for the point is simply that the Early Christians seem to have failed to live up to the great possibilities revealed to us at Pentecost.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that nothing substantial happened at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came upon the Christian community with power and in a manner that was never seen before. True, there was division between Gentile and Jewish Christians, like many Christians today. But only the Spirit of God could lead these two kinds of people to worship together in spite of differences.

There were and there are conflicts and divisions in the church as well as in society, but only the Holy Spirit could open our eyes to see this reality as sinful. The Christian community often fails to have a vision that transcends the mundane self-centeredness of this world, but only the Holy Spirit could have kept the church from surrendering to the world and from disappearing many years ago.

We should not let our disappointments blind us to the many signs of God's presence in the Christian community and in the world around us. We are the church, and we are justified by grace and not by works of the law. What happened at Pentecost is a sign of what God has done, is doing and will do in and through us to bring about unity, power, and vision in our hopelessly alienated and fragmented world. It is the Pentecost experience that provides us a sense of direction that would help us overcome every crossroad in our common journey to genuine peace and freedom.

Now, there is still one part of the story that we left out when we were re-telling the story of the Pentecost. While it is true that 3,000 people from every known part of the world joined the

Christian community on that day, it is also true that some made a mockery of the faith, claiming that the disciples were drunk on cheap wine.

Sometimes, it is easy to make a mockery and to misunderstand the church's claim to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Many would dismiss the church as nothing but a bunch of hypocrites. It is easy to dismiss a vision as an illusion.

Some would tell us, for instance, that part of the reason why mainline Protestant churches today are declining in membership is that we have been too active in social issues affecting people's lives. They would say that for our own institutional survival and growth, we should do away with our vision of God's Reign and not to challenge the way things are.

However, if we were to be a true and genuine church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we cannot give up our vision of God's Reign. We cannot give up our struggle to help bring about a society that is just, peaceful, humane and free. Thus, it is our hope and prayer that God's Holy Spirit will continue to descend upon us so that we may be empowered to be more effective instruments of our country's unity and transformation in the midst of today's alienation and fragmentation.

Suggested Lesson Outline

Greeting Time

Announcements and/or Birthday Greetings

Opening Hymn "A United and Uniting Church" Hymnal of Faith journey, 244

Refrain:

A united and uniting church, that they may all be one
Reformed and transforming in mission and in faith
Onward UCCP, building God's Kingdom of peace.

Come, let us all remember, a heritage of faithfulness
Of ardent men and women, devoted to Christ's way,
Covenanting as one together, with God's spirit sole enabler.

Come let's reclaim together the vision of the pioneers,
To serve beyond all burdens, reach out to one and all
In obedience to God's divine will, we seek for the reign of God.

Come, dreamers, visionaries, examples of true witnesses
Leaving the trace of footprints for people to tread on
With a burning faith and commitment, proclaiming the message of love.

Opening Prayer

We praise and worship You Lord in all the days of our life. Jesus' life and teachings have been our guide and inspiration throughout our journey as your

people. So we gather today to acknowledge You as our one God and declare that we need You to journey with us. This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Learning Time

Discovering the Biblical Truth

- Read Acts 2:1-21
 - How would you describe the event that happened in the apostles' life?
 - What were the effects and impact of such experience to the lives of the believers and other witnesses?
 - How did the believers respond to such an experience?
 - What affirmations of faith can we draw out from the story of the early believers?
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
 - How would you describe the kind of life Paul urged the Christian believers to achieve?
 - How can believers identify the manifestations of the Spirit?
 - How should believers uphold the manifestations and work of the Spirit?

Lessons Learned

GROUPINGS. Divide the learners into three groups. Tell the groups to do the following:

Group 1 – Write the UCCP Vision on a manila paper

- Like the early Christian believers, how can we uphold our vision as a church today?

Group 2- Write the UCCP Mission on a manila paper

- Like the early Christian believers, how can we uphold the mission of the church today?

Group 3- Write the UCCP Goals on manila paper

- Like the early Christian believers, how can we uphold the goals of the church today?

Ask the groups to share their responses to the question given to them.

Applying the Lessons Learned

Ask someone to pray for the church's continuing participation in the work of establishing the reign of God through its Vision, Mission and Goals.

Closing Worship

Offertory

Closing Hymn "A United and Uniting Church" Hymnal of Faith journey, 244

Refrain:

A united and uniting church, that they may all be one
Reformed and transforming in mission and in faith
Onward UCCP, building God's Kingdom of peace.

Come, let us all remember, a heritage of faithfulness
Of ardent men and women, devoted to Christ's way,

Covenanting as one together, with God's spirit sole enabler.

Come let's reclaim together the vision of the pioneers,
To serve beyond all burdens, reach out to one and all
In obedience to God's divine will, we seek for the reign of God.

Closing Prayer : Ask the Pastor to give the closing prayer.