

CULTIVATE:

Developing a Lifestyle of Sharing Your Faith Story

Small Group Discussion Guide



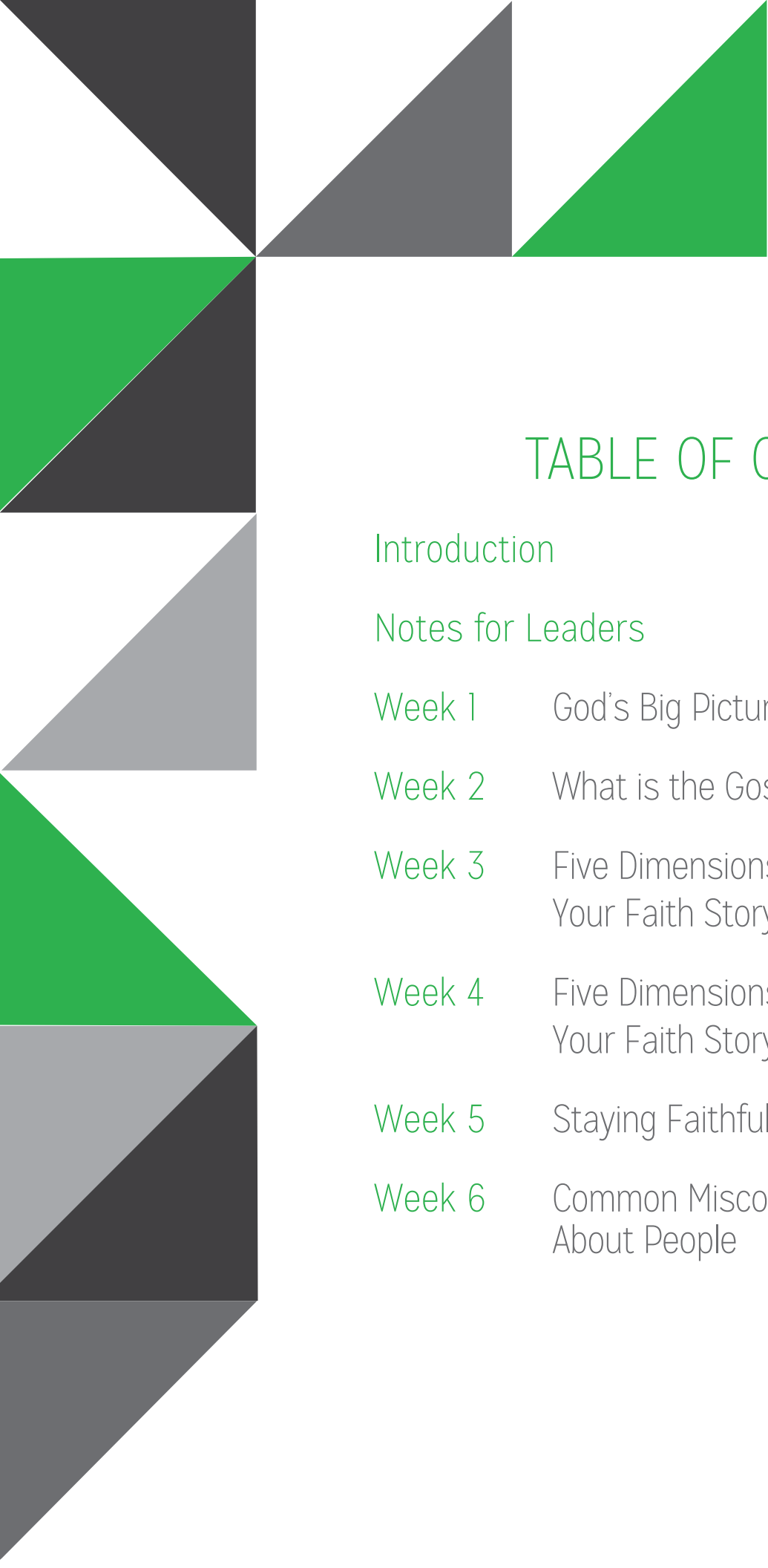


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Introduction:

At The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, everything we do is guided by our Purpose Statement, which is: To build a Christian community where non-religious and nominally religious people are becoming deeply committed Christians.

And if you attend one of our Coffees with the Pastors membership gatherings, you’ll learn that we have 5 expectations of our members, which are:

- ⊕ 1. Worship each weekend, in person when possible.
- ⊕ 2. Grow in your faith outside of worship, through study or a small group.
- ⊕ 3. Serve by using your gifts and talents both inside and outside the walls of the church.
- ⊕ 4. Give in proportion to your income, with the tithe as your goal.
- ⊕ 5. Share your faith with others, through word and deed.

The fifth expectation was added in 2014. Some folks, even long-time members in some cases, told us they were not sure they could meet that expectation. We wondered why dedicated, faithful congregants would hesitate to share their faith story with non-religious and nominally religious people, when that is so clearly important to our shared Purpose. When we asked, quite a few Resurrection members told us, “I don’t know how to do it” or “I’m afraid of rejection” or “I’m not an evangelist.”

Far too many of us have been on the receiving end of guilt based, gloom-and-doom efforts to evangelize. The bad taste these approaches create has sometimes led us to just give up on trying to share our own faith stories. Let’s reclaim the definition of evangelism as communicating the good news of Christ’s life, death and resurrection – that in the words of the Gospel of John: “The Word became flesh and made his home among us.”

The aim of Cultivate is to reduce our feelings of fear and insecurity and to encourage a lifestyle of sharing our faith, of communicating the Gospel, in winsome, generous and loving ways. We want you to feel confident in your own story and equipped to share it with others. Chris Folmsbee, our Director of Discipleship, will walk you and your group through six video lessons designed to prepare you for inspired, meaningful, and relational conversations about faith with others.

Notes for Discussion Leaders:

Be sure to watch the video of each session **prior** to leading the discussion. Use the templates provided for each week to record your own notes and observations. The videos range from 13 - 20 minutes in length.

Prepare your answers to the discussion questions in advance, as well. If you have thought the questions through on your own, you will be able to lead a stronger discussion.

Encourage everyone in the group to share in the discussion. Some people will be more naturally reticent, while others will be eager to share. Try to strike a balance within the group.

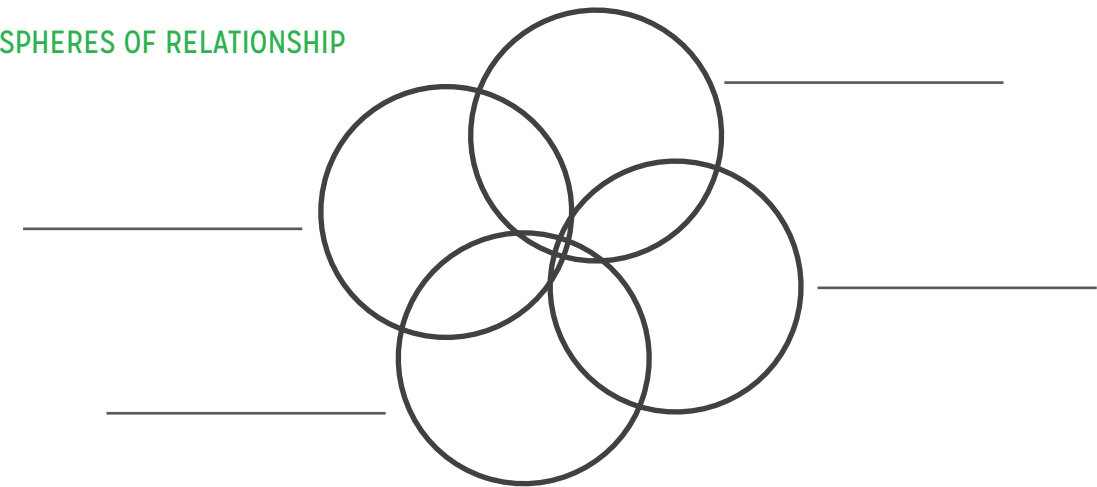
Week 1 _____

God's Big Picture & Mission

7 EPISODES OF GOD'S STORY

Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3	Episode 4	Episode 5	Episode 6	Episode 7
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SPHERES OF RELATIONSHIP



Through Jesus Christ we have _____.
Developing a lifestyle of sharing our faith stories requires _____.

ANSWERS

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Episode 1 - Creation | • Union with God | • Restoration |
| • Episode 2 - Separation | • Peace with Self | • Genuine relationships |
| • Episode 3 - Promise | • Intimacy with Others | |
| • Episode 4 - Present | • Beautiful world for them to enjoy | |
| • Episode 5 - Atonement | | |
| • Episode 6 - Mission | | |
| • Episode 7 - Restoration | | |

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Why is it important that we understand the “why” behind sharing our faith before we delve into the “what” and “how?”
- 2. What are some examples of the redemptive thread that runs throughout the 7 Episodes of God’s Big Picture? Refer to your Bibles for at least one example from each episode and note the scriptures here:

<u>Episode</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Scripture</u>
• Creation: • Separation: • Promise: • Present: • Atonement: • Mission: • Restoration:		

Take a few minutes to read the scriptures out loud.

- 3. Think about a time when you were separated from, and then reunited with, a loved one, either geographically or emotionally. What were your feelings while you were separated? When you were reunited? What does it look like for relationships to be “whole,” as Chris describes?

APPLICATION FOR THE COMING WEEK: Think about the people you are in relationship with – at work, through your hobbies, through your children’s activities, etc. Are any of them non-religious or nominally religious? Is God calling you to share your faith with some of them? Begin to pray for these people and for your relationships with them. If you are having trouble identifying someone, pray for God to reveal His will to you.

CLOSING PRAYER: Lord God, thank you that your sweeping story of redemption and restoration includes all people – that it includes us. Give us a greater sense of the size, the power and the simplicity of your great story. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Week 2

What is the Gospel?

GOSPEL DEFINED

The _____ that in Jesus there is _____.

WILL WAY WORK

God’s Will = _____.
God’s Way = _____.
God’s Work = _____.

THE 8 MARKS OF A ROBUST GOSPEL*

- 1. The Gospel is _____.
- 2. The Gospel is _____.
- 3. The Gospel is _____.
- 4. The Gospel is _____.
- 5. The Gospel is guided by the _____.
- 6. The Gospel is about the full _____ of Christ.
- 7. The Gospel produces people who _____ to let Jesus be the King of their life.
- 8. The Gospel is _____.

The Gospel provides a pattern for _____ and freedom from _____.
It also provides _____ and _____.
The Gospel demands _____.

ANSWERS

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good news• Salvation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wholeness• Jesus Christ• Church | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Big• Personal• Victorious• Hopeful• Holy Spirit• Life• Choose• Historical | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Life• Oppression• Community• Peace• Everything |
|---|---|--|--|

**Scot McKnight, Christianity Today article, March 2008, Vol. 52, No. 3, Pg. 36*

DISCUSSION:

1. The word “robust” comes from the Latin word *robustus*, meaning “oaken” or “strong.” In what ways do these words make you think of the Gospel?
2. Which of the 8 Marks of the Gospel particularly resonated with you as you watched the video? Why is that?
3. How did you first learn of the Gospel?
4. Who are some of the people you’ve been praying for? How do you know them? Do you think they have been exposed to the characteristics of the Gospel as Chris describes them?
5. Think about these same people. Are they aware that you are Christian? If so, how do you think they are aware of it? By your words? By your actions?

APPLICATION FOR THE COMING WEEK:

- Continue to pray for the people in your life who are missing the presence of the Gospel in their lives.
- Identify 2-3 scripture passages that are especially meaningful to you. Perhaps you have a “life verse” – a particular verse or verses that you rely on for encouragement or comfort, or perhaps there is a particular person or story from the Bible that speaks to you.
- Write down these especially meaningful verses, passages, or stories. We’ll be revisiting them in the coming weeks, and you’ll be sharing these scriptures in Week 5.

NOTES ON MEANINGFUL SCRIPTURE VERSES OR STORIES:

CLOSING PRAYER:

King Jesus, you came into our broken, hurting world, not to fine tune a few things around the edges, but to transform and restore the world. You invite us to share in this vitally big, powerful work. Guide us as we learn how to be more effective at it. In your name we pray, Amen.

Week 3

5 Dimensions of Sharing Your Faith Story

Dimension 1: Cultivate

HOW TO DEVELOP MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS:

- Open your _____ - Don’t see people in comparison
- Open your _____ - Learn how to listen intentionally
- Open your _____ - Meet visible needs of the people around you
- Open your _____ - Looking at different ways to do things
- Open your _____ - Walk with people through hard times

Dimension 2: Plant

SIX NEEDS WE CAN MEET:

1. _____ - Showing people approval
2. _____ - Inspire people to do goodness
3. _____ - Reaching out and touching someone
4. _____ - Showing people dignity
5. _____ - Showing people you care
6. _____ - Saying thank you to people

ANSWERS

- | | |
|----------|-----------------|
| • Eyes | • Acceptance |
| • Ears | • Encouragement |
| • Hands | • Affection |
| • Minds | • Respect |
| • Hearts | • Comfort |
| | • Appreciation |

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Reflect upon the relationships you have with the people you've been praying for. Are your eyes, ears, hands, minds and hearts open to them? Why or why not? Take a few moments to frankly consider which aspects of your relationships you might improve. Discuss your findings with the group.
- 2. Which areas of Chris' teaching here particularly struck you? Share those with the group, along with why the comments echoed with you or challenged you.
- 3. Identify an instance when someone went out of their way to comfort you. How did that make you feel?
- 4. Think about your past week. Did you have the opportunity to meet any of the 6 Needs for people? Did you step into those opportunities? If so, share one of your experiences with the group. If not, what prevented you?

APPLICATION FOR THE COMING WEEK:

- Consider the passages of scripture that you've identified as particularly meaningful to you. Why are they important to you? Which elements of Dimensions 1 and 2 can you find in these scriptures? Jot down your notes here:

- Over the next several days, resolve to be intentional about meeting the needs of the people you encounter. It may look something like a heartfelt thank-you or a pat on the back (literally and/or figuratively). What happens to you, and the person on the receiving end, when you live into this intention? **Notes:**

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord God, we have needs, and so do all of the relatives, friends, neighbors and work associates we care about and are praying for. Help us to see those needs, not as obstacles or barriers, but as pathways you can use to connect us to one another, and to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Week 4

5 Dimensions of Sharing Your Faith Story

Dimension 3: Animate

A way to animate your faith story is to _____ and _____ it.
It's important that as we proclaim and perform the gospel that we do it in _____ and _____.

MATRIX:

No Audience, No Message	Audience, No Message
Message, No audience	Message, Audience

Dimension 4: Communicate

4 POWERFUL THINGS ABOUT YOUR FAITH STORY:

- 1. It's _____.
- 2. Be _____.
- 3. It's _____.
- 4. It's _____.

ANSWERS

- Proclaim
- Perform
- Truth
- Love
- Personal
- Practical
- Powerful
- Portable

STORYBOARD YOUR LIFE:

My childhood and life growing up...	A significant event that shaped my life...
An important decision I've made in my faith journey...	The most important people in my life and why...
Areas God is changing me now...	What I hope to see in my future...

Dimension 5: Guide

3 CHALLENGES:

- 1. _____ - Start somewhere even if it's a small step
- 2. _____ - Christian community is important
- 3. _____ - Being faithful to God

ANSWERS

- Engage
- Connect
- Outward Facing

DISCUSSION:

Leader: Make additional copies of the Life Storyboard template for each member of your group. Ask each member to write words, phrases or sentences to fill in each area of the board. Allow several minutes for this activity. People may work at different paces, so if some are still writing while most have stopped, ask them to pause.

- 1. Break in to smaller groups of 2 or 3. Review an important decision each of you has made in your faith journey. Next, discuss areas that God is changing in you now.
- 2. Were you surprised by what you wrote? What were your feelings as you wrote your story down?

APPLICATION FOR THE COMING WEEK:

- Spend more time on your storyboard. It's likely that there have been multiple events in your life that have shaped your faith, along with many important decisions made along your journey. Your story is multi-faceted. Use the additional copies of the Life Storyboards as needed.
- Devote some time to writing out your faith story, putting the key points from your storyboard into a rough narrative. Add as many details as you think are relevant during this initial exercise. When you are finished, set the narrative aside for at least a few hours. Now, read it out loud. How long does it take you to read your story? Ask yourself honestly if there is information that is truly extraneous or even distracting, and remove those details.
- Consider one of the people you've been praying for, their history, and what is going on in their life at the moment. Which aspects of your faith story will be the most meaningful to them?
- Next, consider another of those who have been on your mind. It's likely that the aspects you just identified might not make the same impact on this second person. How might you streamline or customize your story to be meaningful to multiple people?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, open our eyes and our hearts so that we can see more clearly all of the ways your mercy and grace are woven through our stories. Give us wisdom to know when sharing our stories can open the way for your mercy and grace to touch the lives of people we care about. In your name we pray, Amen.

Week 5
Staying Faithful and Focused

3x3x3 DEFINITION:

_____ for three people three times a _____
for three _____.

12 Ways to Stay Faithful and Focused:

1. Be _____.
2. Give people a chance to _____ before they _____.
3. It's important to know that everyone is on a _____.
4. Be _____.
5. Share from _____.
6. Dialogue don't _____.
7. Seek _____ together
8. Have a prophetic _____
9. _____ sharing your faith story.
10. _____ on your faith story.
11. Story is the _____ for human interaction.
12. We need to understand _____ and _____.

ANSWERS:

- | | | | |
|-----------|------------------|---------------|----------------|
| • Pray | • Intentional | • Personal | • Prioritize |
| • Day | • Belong | • Experience | • Reflect |
| • Minutes | • Believe | • Debate | • Currency |
| | • Journey | • God | • Anticipation |
| | • Conversational | • Imagination | • Expectation |

DISCUSSION:

1. What kinds of additions or changes did people make to their storyboards? What kind of “edits” did people make after they read their stories aloud?
2. Find the scripture verses or stories from the Bible that you identified in earlier weeks. Consider them in relation to your faith storyboard. What links do you see between the two? What experiences in your faith story led you to be inspired by, or attracted to, these particular scriptures?

- 3. Share and discuss the connections you discovered. How might you use this information during a faith conversation with a non-religious or nominally religious person?
- 4. Which of the 12 Ways to Stay Faithful and Focused described by Chris will be the easiest for you to adopt? Which will be the most challenging? Reflect upon your answers and share them with the group.

APPLICATION FOR THE COMING WEEK

- Resolve to pray for 3 people, 3 times a day for 3 minutes. Write down their names here:

- Remember the “most challenging” of the 12 Ways you just identified? Commit to exploring that way during the week. Here’s an example. Perhaps you find it difficult to stay in dialogue – faith discussions turn in to debates with you. Force yourself to be aware of this, and resolve to humble yourself to stay in dialogue. Come ready to discuss your experiences next week.
- Return to your written narrative with the 3 people you are praying for in mind. Spend some time sorting out which aspects of your faith story might particularly resonate with each of these people.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord God, three times a day for three minutes – give us focus and discipline to remember to do this. Work through our prayers to change us, and to change the lives of the three people whose names we have written down. Thank you for the awesome privilege of being a part of your life-changing work in our world. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

Week 6

Addressing Common Misconceptions

10 COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT NON-RELIGIOUS PEOPLE

Non-religious people.....

1. are _____.
2. know their _____.
3. made a _____ to be non-religious.
4. must be _____ to admit their need in Jesus.
5. are not _____ enough to accept the faith.
6. should _____ Christians.
7. have _____ of Jesus.
8. just don’t have enough _____.
9. don’t know what it means to do _____.
10. would _____ if the church went away.

ANSWERS:

- | | | | |
|-------------|---------------|---------|--------|
| • Miserable | • Forced | • Heard | • Care |
| • Options | • Intelligent | • Faith | |
| • Choice | • Trust | • Good | |

DISCUSSION:

1. Do you agree or disagree with the misconceptions Chris identifies?
2. Let’s turn the tables a bit. What are ten common misconceptions that non-religious people have about religious people? Brainstorm with your group and write them here:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

- 
- How will understanding these common misperceptions – from both sides – help you to share your faith story?
 - Break into pairs or into smaller groups to take turns sharing your narrative. After you've listened and shared with each other, provide loving and helpful feedback. For example, one person might be clouding their story with details that are distracting instead of illuminating; another person might be skipping over something significant. Coach each other to increase everyone's confidence and conviction.

CLOSING THE STUDY:

Together, read this poem from Teresa of Avila (1515 – 1582)

Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord Jesus Christ, in your wisdom (so much greater than ours) you trusted our hands, our feet, and our voices to share your good news with others. Grow us into a body of believers who can carry out your mission. May no one be missing in your eternal kingdom because we were afraid or indifferent. In your name we pray, Amen.

