

Aaronic Ministries in a Changing World

*Developed by Ron Harmon Utilizing Ministry and Priesthood Materials
and Sharing in Community of Christ 4th Edition*

Priesthood ministry has the potential to be transformative. This potential is realized when tangible expressions of the love and peace of Christ (i.e. our five mission initiatives) are encountered in relationship with others and all creation. When persons *experience* divine love and peace through our invitational and loving presence in community, they experience the risen Christ today!

This is the essence of our identity and calling in Doctrine and Covenants 163:1

“Community of Christ,” your name, given as a divine blessing, is your identity and calling. If you will discern and embrace its full meaning, you will not only discover your future, you will become a blessing to the whole creation. Do not be afraid to go where it beckons you to go.

Our calling as Aaronic ministers is to reintroduce our neighborhoods, towns, and cities to a new encounter with Christ and the church *as instrument* of Christ’s love and peace in community. This encounter does not begin with doctrines and beliefs but a radical demonstration of Christ’s invitation, hospitality, love, and peace in ordinary conversations, relationships, and life struggles. We are the “Word made flesh” as we embody Christ’s love and peace in every aspect of our lives and ministry with others (See John 1:14 – The Message Bible)

Individuals called to the office of deacon, teacher, and priest are called to lead by modeling whole-life response to the transforming love and peace they have encountered in Christ. This involves risking relationships of depth and purpose within the faith community and extending that same invitation to neighbors, friends, and strangers.

This invitation is at the heart of the message and mission of Christ.

Without invitation into the relational space of transformation the gospel can’t be cultivated in the lives of individuals and communities. Aaronic ministers are instruments of God’s generous invitation expressed through ministries of service, reconciliation, and presence.

Doctrine and Covenants 163 calls us to generously share the invitation:

2b. Generously share the invitation, ministries, and sacraments through which people can encounter the Living Christ who heals and reconciles through redemptive relationships in sacred community. The restoring of persons to healthy or righteous relationships with God, others, themselves, and the earth is at the heart of the purpose of your journey as a people of faith.

3 a. You are called to create pathways in the world for peace in Christ to be relationally and culturally incarnate. The hope of Zion is realized when the vision of Christ is embodied in communities of generosity, justice, and peacefulness.

The ministry of Aaronic ministers is essential to mission! Through our response in Christ-like service, reconciliation, and presence the message and mission of Christ becomes real for those searching for meaning and connection.

Aaronic Priesthood Ministry Through the Lens of Mission ***A Closer Look***

Deacons engage in the inward spiritual journey that leads to spiritual awakening and a compelling desire to create environments and relationships that model Christ's extravagant hospitality, generosity, and care for the poor.

Expanded Description – Deacons are centered on a **ministry of service**, modeling Jesus as Comforter through acts of hospitality, stewardship, and compassionate care. Deacons are called to understand and respond to the needs of individuals and families within the congregation and to be attentive to issues of economic justice in the wider community. Their ministry includes preparing and caring for sacred space, supporting sacramental life through welcoming and practical service, nurturing generosity and life stewardship response, and working to meet the needs of the poor, sick, and vulnerable. Through this tangible, relational service, deacons help create inclusive, sacred communities that reflect Christ's peace and advance the church's mission of invitation, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking

Ministerial Gifts/Skills: prayer, reflection, study, empathy, conversation, deep listening, extravagant hospitality, invitation, generosity, knowledge of community human services, embodying and living Christ's peace in relationship with others

Questions for Reflection and Response: *(Consider exploring these with a ministerial companion.)*

1. Where is Christ awakening me right now—through prayer, reflection, study, or deep listening—and how is that awakening reshaping the way I *welcome* others with extravagant hospitality?
2. When I imagine Jesus as Comforter, what specific act of hospitality or compassionate care am I called to embody in my ministry—especially toward someone poor, sick, or vulnerable?
3. What am I noticing (or avoiding) about the needs of individuals and families in my congregation or small group—and how is the Spirit inviting me to be Christ's compassionate presence by offering support or identifying community-based services for specific support?
4. How am I cultivating whole-life stewardship response (time, talent, treasure, and testimony) in others by helping disciples connect with opportunities to generously give?
5. As I consider my office specific calling, what skills am I drawn to further develop and where can I find training to support my continued development?

Teachers engage in the inward spiritual journey that leads to spiritual awakening and a compelling desire to build and restore relationships that model the peace of Jesus Christ in community.

Expanded Description – Teachers are defined by a **ministry of reconciliation**, modeling Jesus as peacemaker in congregations and communities. Teachers are called to nurture the spiritual well-being of individuals and families by building healthy relationships, offering counsel, and promoting harmony, healing, and faithful discipleship. Their ministry emphasizes listening, encouragement, and guidance, helping people address personal and relational challenges while fostering unity and peace within the body of Christ. This unity and peace is cultivated by encouraging participation in the sacraments and helping individuals develop practical relationship building skills. Through this attentive and relational service, teachers support Christ’s mission by strengthening community, resolving conflict, and embodying God’s reconciling love in daily life.

Ministerial Gifts/Skills: prayer, reflection, study, empathy, conversation, deep listening, invitation, reconciliation, generosity, facilitated dialogue, community building, forgiveness, embodying and living Christ’s peace.

Questions for Reflection and Response: *(Consider exploring these with a ministerial companion.)*

1. Where do I sense Christ awakening me inwardly—through prayer, reflection, study, or listening—and how is that awakening cultivating my identity as a minister of reconciliation and peace in my faith community and neighborhood, town, or city?
2. As I attend to my own spiritual well-being, how is God forming in me a deeper attentiveness to the emotional, relational, and spiritual needs of individuals and families within the body of Christ?
3. What inner practices help me remain grounded in Christ’s peace when conflict arises, and how am I being invited to use listening, empathy, and facilitated dialogue to restore trust and harmony?
4. Where is God inviting me to practice forgiveness, generosity, and community-building in everyday relationships, so that my life consistently embodies God’s reconciling love and the peace of Jesus Christ?
5. As I consider my office specific calling, what skills am I drawn to further develop and where can I find training to support my continued development?

Priests engage in the inward spiritual journey that leads to spiritual awakening and a compelling desire to help others “incarnate” or tangibly express the love and peace of Christ in all aspects of personal, family, congregational, and community life.

Expanded Definition – Priests are centered on a **ministry of presence**, modeling Jesus as a spiritual friend to individuals, families, and the wider community. Priests are called to nurture relationships, offer pastoral care, advocate for the needs of households, congregations and other expressions of Christ-centered community, and support spiritual growth through prayer, scripture, and compassionate companionship. Their ministry emphasizes being present with people in everyday life, promoting healing, reconciliation, and community, and assisting with sacramental ministries as needed. Through this relational and attentive service, priests help embody Christ’s unconditional love and peace, strengthening congregations/small groups and connections in the community.

Ministerial Gifts/Skills: prayer, reflection, study, empathy, conversation, deep listening, sacramental invitation, generosity, embodying, living, and leading others into spiritual/missional practices as way of life.

Questions for Reflection and Response: *(Consider exploring these with a ministerial companion.)*

1. How is my inward spiritual journey—through prayer, reflection, listening, and study—awakening me to be more fully present with God and others, and how am I intentionally creating spaces throughout my day to slow down and be fully present with others?
2. In what ordinary moments of personal, family, congregational, small group, or community life is Christ inviting me to “incarnate” the gospel—making Christ’s love, peace, and compassion visible through my invitation, words, availability, and actions?
3. As I attend to my own relationship with God, how am I being shaped into a spiritual friend—one who offers pastoral care, empathetic listening, and faithful companionship without needing to fix or control outcomes?
4. How does my inner life with God prepare me to invite others into sacramental and spiritual practices that nurture healing, reconciliation, spiritual growth, and missional response—and how do I model those practices as a way of life?
5. As I consider my office specific calling, what skills am I drawn to further develop and where can I find training to support my continued development?

Our Context for Ministry

Have you sensed the yearning for meaning and connection in our world today? Across the globe there is a relational and spiritual unsettledness—an awakening that we need one another not just to survive, but to live fuller and more meaningful lives. Many sense there is something more, something beyond themselves, that holds possibility and hope for our shared future.

It is striking that in a high-tech, hyper-connected world, isolation and loneliness are more widespread than ever. While technology allows us to stay connected, it often falls short of the intimacy required for relationships of depth and meaning. As a result, there is a deep hunger for conversations and relationships marked by substance, purpose, and genuine presence.

People of all ages, many spiritually curious, are responding to this hunger by gathering in new ways—often outside traditional religious forms—to talk, listen, ask meaningful questions, dream, and explore how their lives might make a difference. Many cannot fully name what they are searching for, yet the emptiness they feel is real. In this moment lies unprecedented opportunity for the re-emergence of a living, incarnational faith. As John 1:14 proclaims, the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood. God is not distant or removed—God is here. This is the heart of Aaronic ministry: revealing God’s presence amid life’s difficult questions and struggles.

Questions for Reflection and Response: *(Consider exploring these with a ministerial companion.)*

- In a world that is highly connected but deeply lonely, where might our ministries unintentionally mirror the same surface-level connections people already experience—and what would it cost us to offer deeper presence instead?
- If “*the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood,*” what neighborhoods—relational, emotional, or social—are we reluctant to move into, and why? What fears or assumptions hold us back?
- Many people are finding meaning, community, and spiritual conversation outside traditional forms of religion. What does this reveal about unmet longings—and how might we need to adapt if we truly believe God is already present in those spaces?
- If Aaronic ministry reveals God’s presence *in* difficult questions rather than *answers* to them, how comfortable are we sitting with ambiguity, pain, and “not knowing” alongside others? Where do we rush to fix instead of accompanying?
- Incarnational ministry requires proximity, vulnerability, and time. What might we need to leave behind to fully embody God’s nearness rather than simply speak about it? And what might the world gain?
- If people encountered us before encountering church, theology, or programs, what would they learn about God’s presence simply by being with us?

Imagination Stretching Ideas of Aaronic Ministries in Congregations, Small Groups, and Neighborhoods

Below are tangible, imagination-stretching examples designed to stimulate ministry ideas first within congregations and small groups, and second within neighborhoods, towns, and cities—connected to today’s realities of polarization, poverty, loneliness, anxiety, and social fragmentation.

- A deacon quietly notices who consistently arrives late or leaves early and intentionally creates moments of connection—learning names, asking gentle questions, helping people feel seen rather than evaluated.
- A teacher notices rising tension during a discussion on the relationship between the gospel and politics and creates safe and courageous space for listening—not debate. Ground rules emphasize curiosity, story, and our relationships as bothers and sisters in Christ.
- A priest practices slowing down—lingering after gatherings, being approachable, noticing who needs quiet conversation rather than public attention.

- A deacon learns what local food pantries, rent-assistance programs, shelters, and clinics exist—and becomes a relational bridge, not just a referral list. “I’ll walk with you” replaces “Here’s a number.”
- A teacher helps convene community listening circles around local issues—school closures, racial tension, political division—where people speak from their lived experience thus humanizing difficult issues.
- A priest cultivates spiritual friendships beyond church walls—coffee conversations, walking companions, shared grief—helping people experience God as abiding presence without pressure to “join.”
- A deacon takes responsibility for making sacred space feel safe and relational, not perfect—soft lighting, accessible seating, children welcomed rather than tolerated. Hospitality becomes theology made visible.
- A teacher takes notice of individuals who don’t speak during class conversations on a challenging topic and follows up with them inquiring about their experience in the class.
- A priest walks with an individual supporting his life companion through serious illness, death, and transition—without trying to fix—offering the ministry of presence and companionship.
- In a neighborhood that has experienced significant transition, a deacon helps neighbors organize simple care networks—rides, shared meals, childcare swaps—addressing isolation through mutual support.
- A teacher intentionally builds relationships across lines—political, racial, generational—creating small conversation groups for the purpose of breaking down walls of division in a community.
- What examples of ministry can you imagine in your congregation, small group, neighborhood, town, or city?

Aaronic Ministers in Collaboration

The various priesthood offices in Community of Christ offer the wholistic ministry of Christ’s love and peace in our congregations, families, small groups, and communities. When we embrace our office specific gifts and callings and seek out others whose ministries complement our own, we see the full impact of the diversity of priesthood in action.

Through incarnational ministries of service, reconciliation, and presence, Aaronic ministers bring transformative ministry in collaboration with one another and with those who serve in Melchizedek priesthood offices. At the end of this handout, a chart is included that envisions collaboration between the various priesthood offices.

Below are a few general examples of how missional needs are met as various Aaronic ministries intersect in the pursuit of Christ's mission.

1. Responding to Crisis or Tragedy

Deacons offer deep listening and empathy to those affected, connecting them with human services. Deacons may also connect with bishops to explore broader resources available at the mission center or world church level to address the tragedy. Teachers are attentive to healing needs within the community, seeking out those who are struggling, helping them connect with others in the community to share mutual support. Priests provide an abiding presence that tangibly expresses Christ's comfort, helping individuals and families process grief and move forward in hope.

2. Community Outreach Dinner

Deacons organize a community dinner, extending extravagant hospitality and ensuring the event welcomes everyone, especially the poor and marginalized. Teachers facilitate conversations during the meal, guiding participants in dialogue and encouraging mutual respect among neighbors. Priests lead a closing blessing, inviting all to incarnate Christ's love and peace as they return to their daily lives.

3. Building Community Among Diverse Groups

Deacons invite and gather neighbors, creating inclusive and welcoming environments rooted in hospitality. Teachers facilitate respectful dialogue and community-building activities, promoting understanding and peace. Priests encourage participants to express Christ's love in practical ways, supporting collaborative projects that bridge differences.

4. A Family Navigating Conflict or Transition

A family is experiencing tension or conflict due to a major life change. The teacher meets with family members to facilitate reflection and conversation, helping them hear one another more clearly. The deacon addresses disruptions caused by the transition which may include financial stress or disrupted routines, seeking to stabilize the family's environment. The priest offers simple practices of prayer, blessing, or pastoral conversation, that help the family recognize God's companionship in uncertainty.

5. Addressing Neighborhood Poverty

Bishops help identify resources available to address poverty at the systemic and specific needs levels. Deacons mobilize generosity and connect those in need to human services, advocating for the poor. Teachers organize community forums to address structural issues and foster collective action. Priests inspire and guide congregational or small group efforts, supporting tangible expressions of Christ's compassion through outreach programs and systemic change.

6. **Creating Spaces of Peace Amid Social Tension**

Deacons establish peaceful and welcoming environments, embodying Christ's calm and hospitality. Teachers lead facilitated dialogue and reconciliation processes and practices, helping neighbors work through disagreements. Priests encourage personal and collective practices that incarnate Christ's peace, supporting ongoing transformation in the community.

7. **Environmental Audits for Congregations**

Deacons coordinate with bishops in identifying the scope of the audit, resources available, and logistics on the day of the audit. Teachers help facilitate small discussion groups after results are shared and potential actions are considered. Priests suggest how learnings from the congregational audit relate to our enduring principle Sacredness of Creation and can be implemented in the congregation and in the home.

A Note About Preaching and Teaching Ministry

Public preaching and teaching ministry can be an effective formational experience for disciples and spiritual explorers. As a starting place, ministry offered should always be in alignment with Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs. As an authorized minister of the church, you have a responsibility to stay current and reflect the church's identity, message, mission, and beliefs in your preaching and teaching ministry. The following three resources are highly recommended and available from Herald House:

1. Sharing in Community of Christ 4th Edition
2. Choose Generosity: Discovering Whole Life Stewardship
3. A Way of Life: Understanding Our Christian Faith by Anthony J. Chvala-Smith
4. Exploring Community of Christ Basic Beliefs: A Commentary by Anthony Chvala-Smith

Resources for Further Exploration

There are so many amazing resources available for study and discussion. Here are just a few related to Aaronic ministry and spiritual formation.

1. Life Together in Christ: Experiencing Transformation in Community by Ruth Haley Barton'
2. Conversation: Practicing Presence in an Age of Distraction by Diane M. Mills, PhD
3. Presence and Encounter: The Sacramental Possibilities of Everyday Life by David G. Benner PhD
4. Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships by Marshall B. Rosenberg PhD and Deepak Chopra
5. Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun
6. Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition by Christine D. Pohl
7. The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society by Henri Nouwen

Also see Covenant Expectations for Ministry at the end of this resource as a tool for reflection on one's continuing faithful response to priesthood ministry.

Two Scenarios for Exploration and Discussion

Scenario 1 - Forest Ridge Congregation's attendance has been slowly declining over the past 24 months, not because of overt conflict, but due to a quiet erosion of relational connection. Several long-time members are grieving personal losses, a young family has stopped attending after feeling unseen, newer participants attend infrequently, and a young family stopped attending due to a recent contentious business meeting. Worship continues faithfully, but interactions remain polite and surface-level. Members of the congregation sense fatigue and discouragement, yet no one can name a single problem to fix. The leadership team has tried changing the time of the Sunday worship experience and reinstating potlucks, but nothing seems to impact the situation.

In a recent priesthood meeting, the pastor appointed an Aaronic ministries team to explore the situation and develop recommendations. You are a member of that team. What are some approaches to this situation utilizing office specific Aaronic ministries?

Scenario 2 - In a neighborhood surrounding the congregation, many residents experience social isolation and economic stress. A growing number of people work multiple jobs, elderly neighbors live alone, and families new to the area lack supportive relationships. While community services exist, many residents distrust institutions or feel invisible within them. The church building is known in the neighborhood, but largely as a physical structure rather than a relational presence.

In a recent planning meeting, the pastor invited the congregation to consider the following question:

How are we being called to be Christ's love and peace in our neighborhood?

John, a newly ordained priest in the congregation, invited Cheryl and Tom—who serve as deacon and teacher—to join him in exploring ways to embody Christ's love and peace within the neighborhood surrounding the church.

Place yourself in this scenario and consider what Aaronic ministries or Aaronic sponsored community programs could address the challenges in this neighborhood.

SERVING TOGETHER TO FULFILL CHRIST'S MISSION

	DISCIPLES	DEACONS	TEACHERS	PRIESTS	ELDERS
Represent Christ primarily as ministers...	who express the nature and love of God by growing in Christ-like character, love, concern, generosity, and mission.	of presence who model Jesus as Comforter through ministries of hospitality, preparation, and addressing the physical needs of people, especially the poor.	of presence who model Jesus as Peacemaker through interpersonal (one-to-one) reconciliation and peacemaking.	of presence who model Jesus as Friend in households, families, congregations, and community.	of congregational community-building, leading others in the congregation in pursuing the Mission Initiatives.
Especially proclaim and promote...	Jesus Christ through covenant relationship with God and the faith community.	the cause of the peaceable kingdom by nurturing individuals, households, and families in the congregation and community.	the Worth of All Persons and create an environment that is ready to listen and slow to criticize with individuals and in congregations.	God's gift of unconditional love for each household and family member.	Christ-centered congregational community by modeling intentional witness and invitation and mentoring others in Christ's mission.
Particularly minister with...	individuals, households, families, and communities by nurturing right relationships with God, self, others, and all creation.	individuals, households, and families by assisting them in their life stewardship.	individuals to encourage peace and healing of relationships, and where needed, reconciliation through trained facilitators.	households and families to support their spiritual growth and discipleship response through prayer, knowledge of scripture, and nurturing relationships.	congregations to build sacred community and engage in Christ's mission.
Support sacramental ministries by...	engaging in sacramental living and preparing spiritually to participate in the sacraments.	preparing the sacred space to enhance the presence of the Spirit and by providing welcoming ministry for all to participate.	extending the hand of reconciliation to those with broken spirits and encouraging participation in the blessings of the sacraments.	preparing households and families by helping find pathways for healing. Preside if needed and perform some sacraments.	preparing congregations for sacramental encounters with God. Preside at sacramental services and perform most sacraments.
Promote community by...	engaging in activities that uphold the Worth of All Persons, caring for the congregation so it is welcoming, and inviting others to join in fellowship.	creating an environment of hospitality, reaching out in loving, joyful service, and welcoming everyone.	encouraging development and nurturing of a healing, redeeming, and prayerful environment.	advocating for members, households, and families throughout the congregation and community.	servicing as ministers of mission within and beyond the walls of the congregation.
Promote justice and peace-making by...	participating in partnership with the poor to overcome injustice and poverty.	working for economic justice through meeting the needs of the poor, the sick, the helpless, and the unloved.	personally living out and encouraging others to build relationships based on love and acceptance and referring individuals for reconciliation to appropriate professional services.	being involved and knowledgeable about community services that may assist those in need. Bring peace to households and families.	leading justice and peacemaking in and through congregations.
Create ministry partnerships with...	other disciples, priesthood, pastors, and mission center officers.	bishops, pastors, and congregational financial officers.	bishops, pastors, and evangelists.	bishops, elders, pastors, and congregational financial officers.	pastors, mission center officers, priests, seventies, high priests, and evangelists.

Covenant Principles for Faithful Priesthood Ministry

For all priesthood members and ordinands

Priesthood faithfulness begins with faithful discipleship. Faithful discipleship emerges from ongoing faith and spiritual formation. The constant call is to follow the Living Christ and to abide in increasing measure in God's love and vision for creation. Being comes before doing.

The following expectations will help me serve as a faithful priesthood member. In response to God's sacred call and priesthood authority granted by Community of Christ...

I covenant to...

- Engage in ongoing faith and spiritual practices to deepen my relationship with God and others through study and spiritual formation.
- Affirm and promote Christ's mission of invitation, compassionate ministries, and justice and peacemaking; help prepare others for Christ's mission; and partner with other priesthood in leading congregations in Christ's mission.
- Provide ministry consistent with the church's identity, mission, message, and beliefs as expressed in *Sharing in Community of Christ: Exploring Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs*, 3rd ed. (www.CofChrist.org/ourfaith/SharingCofChrist-3ed.pdf) and other current official documents.
- Model an ethical, moral, and holistic lifestyle.
- Model generosity as a regular contributor to World Church Mission Initiatives and local and mission center ministries, according to my true capacity.
- Protect the safety and well-being of children and youth, including, where applicable, being a Registered Children and Youth Worker.
- Actively participate in congregational life or similar church expressions when congregational life is not available.
- Participate annually in educational or spiritual formation experiences offered by my congregation, mission center, apostolic mission field, or World Church.
- Develop and implement a plan for ministry that uses my gifts to advance Christ's mission.