

The Work of Christ

An Ecumenical Christian Community

The Work of Christ Community
4828 South Hagadorn Road
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In 1974 a group of people formed an ecumenical Christian community called the Work of Christ. We have written this booklet to answer the questions most frequently asked about our community and about our life together.

The Holy Spirit and a New Society

Before He returned to heaven, Jesus Christ made a promise to His followers. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This promise was fulfilled shortly after He returned to Heaven: *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting...and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).*

The lives of Christ's disciples were transformed when they received the Holy Spirit. God gave them a new life and formed them into a new society. God's people became a visible and united family of believers. They lived a common life: a life devoted to Jesus Christ. Because of their love for one another, the first Christians were able to convince others of the reality of the new life they had found in Jesus Christ. *All who believed were together and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).*

Contemporary Society

We have seen many societal changes in recent decades. Unfortunately, much of this change is in opposition to the way of life the Bible teaches Christians to live. Crimes, dishonesty, abortion, broken marriages, drug abuse, the breakdown of

neighborhoods, sexual promiscuity, and materialism have increased at an alarming rate. There is no way to measure the emotional, psychological, and spiritual damage that is being done. Many people lack purpose and have few lasting, supportive relationships—they especially lack relationships that will help them love Jesus Christ and live fully for Him.

Our modern society has placed tremendous pressure on the churches. Fewer and fewer Christians are able to stand firmly in the face of these challenges. Many simply adopt the values of the secular society in which they live. Vision for and experience of a full Christian life lived in the context of a tangible, loving community of God's people has, for the most part, been lost by today's Christians.

Building Christian Community

The Lord is actively working among Christians to restore among them the life He came to give. He is looking for men and women to be His disciples, to proclaim His Gospel, and to build His kingdom. Through the Holy Spirit, men and women can have a personal experience of God. They can receive power to dedicate themselves to Him and to live a life that glorifies Him. Only through the Holy Spirit can Christians respond fully to the commandment of Jesus Christ: *that you love one another as I have loved you* (John 13:34). One result of this renewing work of the Holy Spirit is the building of Christian community. *You are God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people* (1 Peter 2:9-10).

What is Christian community?

Christian community is created when people who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ agree to live for Him and serve Him together. In Christian community, God's people share their whole lives with one another in an environment of love and mutual support: a new society—a new family—in

which men, women, and children live for Jesus Christ and experience the abundant life that He came to give. People in community share their talents, their resources, and their day-to-day lives. They make a stable, long-term commitment (a commitment that is often life-long) to love and serve one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. They agree to work together in the mission God has given them to do. Single people, couples, and families find in Christian community an environment that helps them to grow in Jesus Christ and to live faithfully for Him.



The Work of Christ has a prayer meeting most Sunday afternoons where people expressively worship the Lord and hear His word.

What Christian relationships ought to be.

The Bible contains many instructions about how Christians ought to relate to one another. By looking at passages that contain the phrase “one another” we can begin to see what “normal” Christianity was intended to be.

- Serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)

- Bear one another's burdens. (Galatians 6:2)
- Speak the truth to one another in love. (Ephesians 4:15)
- Teach one another. (Colossians 3:16)
- Forgive one another. (Ephesians 4:32)
- Admonish one another. (Romans 15:14)
- Comfort and build up one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Exhort one another. (Hebrews 3:13)
- Stir up one another to love and good works. (Hebrews 10:24)
- Confess your trespasses to and pray for one another. (James 5:16)
- Be hospitable with one another. (1 Peter 4:9)
- Minister to one another the spiritual gifts you have received (1 Peter 4:10)

While these instructions are given to all Christians, very few Christians today have a tangible experience of this kind of personal, committed, and Christ-centered relationships. By living in community, members of the Work of Christ are not trying to do something extraordinary; they are simply trying to live "normal Christianity:" a Biblical way of life.

How did the Work of Christ get started?

In the late 1960's, a movement known as the Charismatic Renewal began to sweep through Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches. The Charismatic Renewal helped millions of Christians have a more personal and vibrant experience of the Holy Spirit. They began to exercise the spiritual gifts and found new freedom to praise and worship Jesus Christ.

One of the earliest charismatic prayer meetings took place in East Lansing, Michigan. Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians, many of them students at Michigan State University, would gather every Wednesday evening to worship God and share the love He was putting in their hearts for one another. This love continued to grow and so did a compelling sense of purpose and mission.

In June of 1974, 87 people made an agreement, a covenant commitment, with one another and with the Lord to live fully for God as members of the Work of Christ Community.

Should all Christians to live in community?

The New Testament describes the Christian life in ways that are clearly corporate and communal. Christians are called to relate to one another as “brothers and sisters.” They are to be knit together as “members of one body.” They are “members of the household and family of God.” In this sense, all Christians are called to live in community.

Relatively few Christians, however, will actually live in a community like the Work of Christ. By its existence, however, the Work of Christ hopes to be a witness to the communal dimension of the Christian faith, a dimension that is weak or missing in the lives of many believers. We hope that our life together encourages individuals and groups of Christians to examine the New Testament call to a corporate life and take tangible steps to grow in it.

What is the purpose of the Work of Christ?

Our purpose as a community is as follows:

1. To help people commit their lives fully to Jesus Christ and become mature Christians.
2. To help people experience the presence and power of the Holy Spirit so they may live and serve in a spiritually effective way.
3. To foster love and worship of God and a life that is lived for His glory.
4. To form loving, personal relationships which support an ongoing Christian life.
5. To develop a way of life where the Gospel can be lived out fully.
6. To do the work of evangelization - to help other people come to know Jesus Christ.

7. To proclaim and defend the Gospel.
8. To foster Christian unity through collaboration and cooperation among Christians from different traditions.



Women and girls in the community have a “Festival of Tables” each year where they can express their creativity and enjoy one another.

The Work of Christ is a member of the Sword of the Spirit. What is The Sword of the Spirit?

The Sword of the Spirit is an association of communities similar to the Work of Christ. These communities are self-governing, but they have agreed to do some things the same way and to do some things together. When people make a commitment to a local community, they are also making a commitment to the larger community of communities. The Sword of the Spirit is divided into a number of regions: the North American Region, the Ibero-Americana Region (Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula); the European Region, the Asian Region, and the South Pacific Region.

Is the Work of Christ a church?

The work of Christ community is not a church. Members of the Work of Christ belong to several different Christian churches. They remain active in their local parish or congregation. They live a common life in community that is complementary to and supportive of church membership.

Why form community alongside, but still separate from, church life?

Christian communities are formed with those people who hear the Lord's call and are willing to embrace it freely. In our case, people who had a vision and desire for a deeper life together were scattered among several different Christian traditions. Because of this, the Work of Christ has always been an ecumenical community. Members of the Work of Christ love the churches of which they are members. They want to serve their church and work for renewal within it. They also see a need for tangible Christian community and are willing to build that life with members of other churches.

Why is the Work of Christ Ecumenical?

The word "ecumenical" is a Greek word meaning the whole of creation or the whole family. It is a word that implies all of the Christian people, regardless of the church communion to which they belong. We believe the Lord has called the Work of Christ to be a special witness to ecumenical cooperation. Division and bad relating among Christians has been common for most of the last 2000 years. The issues that divide us are important, but so is the fact that we are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Members of the Work of Christ work to give witness to the unity that we already share in Jesus Christ. We actively follow the guidelines given by our respective churches for how we can and should cooperate as brothers and sisters in Christ—while we wait and pray for greater Christian unity. We seek to live our Christian life in a way that will further the uni-

ty of God's people, seeking to find a convergent way of expressing our Christian life in harmony with our church identity. It is encouraging that many leaders of our respective churches have been involved in an ongoing ecumenical dialogue and have made progress towards greater unity and understanding.



University Christian Outreach (UCO) men gather for a pancake breakfast. The Work of Christ has an active university outreach, and many college students are members of the community.

The Work of Christ is a “lay community.” What does that mean?

Christians use the term “laity” to distinguish church members from the ordained clergy: priests, ministers, those in monastic life, and (in some traditions) missionaries. Ordained clergy do participate actively in some Sword of the Spirit communities, but the focus of our communities is on living a day-to-day Christian way of life, a way of life that is helpful and supportive regardless of one's vocation: male or female, married or single, lay or clerical. All Christians, not just clergy, are called to live fully for Jesus Christ and His kingdom.

The Work of Christ is a “covenant community.” What does that mean?

The Work of Christ has a written document called a covenant that expresses what sort of people we hope to be in relation to the Lord and to one another. Members make a solemn promise to live out this covenant to the best of their ability. The covenant, written with the input of community members and approved by formal consensus, is an expression of what God has called us to be. The covenant can be changed (and has been several times) by a two-thirds vote of the community. A copy of the Work of Christ covenant can be found at the end of this booklet.

A covenant commitment creates a special relationship among people and between these people and God. There are many examples of covenant in the Old Testament. One good example can be found in Nehemiah 9 and 10. Those who returned from captivity to Jerusalem agreed together and before God to live the way that He had commanded them to. *We make a sure covenant and write it; our leaders, our Levites, and our priests seal it.* (Nehemiah 9:38) Similarly, members of the Work of Christ make a renewal covenant, not so much to do something new and different, but to live the Christian way of life together as one people.

The Work of Christ is “charismatic.” What does that mean?

You may notice some different things about our prayer meetings and gatherings: people raise their hands, pray out loud, pray in a language that you (and they) do not understand, and every so often someone will read a Bible passage or say something he or she believes comes from the Lord. All of these things have been part of Christian worship since the Church was established, but they had, for the most part, fallen into disuse. In recent decades, the Charismatic Renewal has changed this for millions of Christians. Through this renewal, people

have come to a more tangible experience of the person, the power, the guiding, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (For a partial list of the gifts of the Holy Spirit see 1 Corinthians 12:7-9.)

This experience is similar to what happened to the early Christian believers, as we read in Acts 2:1-13: *All the believers were gathered in one place...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.* The Apostle Peter explained what was happening by quoting an Old Testament prophet: *This is what I will do, says the Lord. I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and your daughters will proclaim my message; your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. On My servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit and they will proclaim My message.* (Acts 2:17-18)

In the Work of Christ, we actively embrace the work and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our worship. This is what we mean when we say that the Work of Christ is charismatic.



At the Work of Christ Summer Camp children enjoying the evening campfire. The interaction between adults and children makes summer camp especially enjoyable.

Does everyone in the Work of Christ live together?

While some Christian communities choose to live and work together, this has not been our choice. What is essential for Christian community is a family-like bond of love in Christ and a common way of life that expresses our love for God and for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Living in close proximity to one another, however, does help to build a stronger community life. For this reason, many community members have decided to live near one another in one of several neighborhood clusters. Some people in the Work of Christ live together in residential Christian households. A household can be a group of single men or a group of single women who live together, or it could be a family that invites singles to live with them and share in family life. In addition, there is in the Work of Christ, a household of celibate men. They are part of an international, ecumenical brotherhood known as the Servants of the Word. These brothers have freely chosen to live single for the Lord and live much more communally than do most community members.

Who can join the Work of Christ?

Membership in the Work of Christ is open to all people who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ, have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, are serious about living the Gospel way of life, and want to do that with others in the context of the Work of Christ Community.

How do people join the Work of Christ?

People who want to explore Christian community can join the “Christian Formation Program” offered by the Work of Christ. This program lasts about one year and includes participation in a monthly home group where teaching on Christian living is presented, bi-weekly gatherings of the community, and bi-monthly Lord’s Day meals. Those who want to take the next steps of entering fully into the Work of Christ make an “affiliate

commitment” followed by an “underway commitment.” The affiliate and underway stages last several years and provide a time for personal growth in the Christian life, hearing and applying the teaching of the community, participation in a small group, personal experience of community life, and for discernment of a call to this particular community. Those who complete this time of learning, experiencing, and discernment are invited to make a full “public commitment” to live as a covenanted member of the Work of Christ. The public commitment is open-ended in that members agree to remain part of the community unless the Lord clearly leads them elsewhere. People who do not wish to make a public commitment may become “associate members,” a more limited form of community membership.

How are leaders chosen in the Work of Christ?

A body of leaders called “coordinators” governs the Work of Christ. A “senior coordinator” serves as chairman and leads the body of coordinators in their work.

New coordinators are proposed by the body of coordinators and are confirmed by a two-thirds vote of the membership following a time of training and temporary service in the role. The senior coordinator is elected by the membership to serve a five-year term.

In addition to the coordinators, there are many other people involved in guiding community life such as senior woman leaders, leaders of men’s and women’s groups, heads of service groups and ministries, and elected members of an advisory council.

Are there other communities similar to the Work of Christ?

Yes. There are thousands of Christian communities in the U.S. and around the world. Some are very similar to the Work of Christ and some are very different. The Work of Christ be-

longs to a “community of communities” known as the Sword of the Spirit. There are about 100 Sword of the Spirit communities around the world. Communities in the Sword of the Spirit have a similar approach to community life, share a body of teaching, have a number of regional activities, and work together in Christian outreach and community building.



Children at play during a community meeting. Children are an essential part of Christian community and share fully in its life.

How do children fit into the community?

Christian community is a wonderful environment for children. Children experience a network of relationships with peers, older and younger children, and many, many adults. They grow up in a society of love and support that helps them develop personally and as Christians.

Elementary children enjoy a special program during community meetings, but what they really look forward to is summer camp. The Work of Christ rents a facility each year and takes the third through sixth grade children camping. Over

two hundred people are involved as campers and staff. Summer camp is a lot of work, but it is also a time when everyone - the children and the adults - experience a special closeness to Jesus Christ and to one another.

Middle-school children get together twice each month for teaching and sharing. They have regular social activities and an annual weekend retreat. The North American region of the Sword of the Spirit organizes a weeklong get away for the middle-school students over the summer.

The high-school group alternates between a teen prayer meeting one week and small sharing groups the next. They also have regular social events and service projects. Several times each year, Work of Christ teens get together with teens from other communities for conferences and retreats. They also participate in mission trips organized by the Sword of the Spirit. Mission trips allow teens to serve the Lord in Mexico, Central America, Europe, and closer to home as well. The aim of the youth program is to give young people multiple opportunities to experience Christ, to help them live a radical Christian life, and to foster lasting Christian friendships. The high-school group is really a Christian community for young people.

Children in the Work of Christ are considered fully a part of community life until, as young adults, they decide to join the community or to follow the Lord's guidance elsewhere.

Are college students part of the community?

Many college-age people are active in the Work of Christ's University Christian Outreach (UCO). In many ways UCO is very similar to the Work of Christ, but structured and oriented to college life. UCO has prayer meetings, small groups, residential households, Christian teaching, social activities, retreats, and many service opportunities. UCO members are encouraged to share in the life of the broader community. Many UCO members are also affiliate or underway members of the Work of Christ.

What kinds of things do members of the Work of Christ do together?

The common activities of the community include:

1. The community meets for “gatherings” several times each month. Gatherings of the community include worship and praise, Biblical teaching, a time for sharing about what God has done in members’ lives, and fellowship.
2. Community members meet in small men’s and women’s groups about twice each month. In these small-group meetings, members pray together, talk freely about problems they are facing, and support one another in living our common way of life.
3. Families and singles also gather in small groups on a Saturday evening every other month to celebrate the “Lord’s Day.” The Lord’s Day celebration includes prayers to set Sunday aside as a special day to worship God and is followed by a festive meal. Celebrating the Lord’s Day is a common weekly pattern for most families and singles in the Work of Christ.
4. Many members are active on “service teams” which are designed to meet the ongoing needs of community life: music, public address, taping, children’s programs, and many more. They are also involved in other small groups that meet for intercessory prayer, study, sports, dealing with common problems, and just to enjoy each other’s company.
5. The Work of Christ sponsors several outreach programs that bring people (especially young people) to Jesus Christ and help them grow in the Christian life. Many community members are active in leading and serving these ministries.
6. Members also receive instruction at community courses, discuss family life and child rearing at the several “parent forums” held each year, and get together for socializing at community nights out, community entertainment, and community parties.

Community activities are listed in the Work of Christ Newsletter which is published every two weeks. Most events are open to guests. If you would like to receive the newsletter, just call our office and ask. Activities are also listed on the Work of Christ web site: www.workofchrist.com.

How does the Work of Christ get its income?

The Work of Christ is supported through the generous gifts of its members. Most members work outside the community in regular jobs. They provide for themselves and their families with their income, but they are also committed to the financial support of their church and the community and to help with the special needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ. The amount of money given to the community is a personal decision made by each community member.

Does the Work of Christ have a statement of faith?

Because the Work of Christ consists of people from several different Christian traditions, we do not have a single, comprehensive statement of faith. Members of the Work of Christ adhere to the primary Christian beliefs as they have been held by the mainstream of Christianity through the centuries. Members accept the truths stated in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds and are encouraged to turn to their church in matters of doctrine. Teaching given in the Work of Christ is ecumenical and focuses on our commonly held Christian truths and on practical Christian living.

Why do people join the Work of Christ? What do they expect to get out of it?

People join Christian community for many different reasons. Some have a strong desire to live out a more committed Christian life. Others are attracted by the charismatic spiritual life. Some are looking for the family-like relationships found in the community. Others want to grow as Christians or see the

Work of Christ as a good place to love and serve the Lord. The decision to join Christian community is a personal response to the work of the Lord in the life of an individual.

Members receive teaching that is Biblical and practical, teaching that will help them with their day-to-day lives. They receive tangible support to grow in the Christian walk and in Christian maturity. They become part of a loving network of people. They can expect the gifts God has given them to be employed to help build the kingdom of God and to reach others for Jesus Christ.



Preschool children have a weekly learn and play group at the community center called Little Lambs.

Thank you for taking the time to read our booklet. We hope it has provided a clearer understanding of what the Lord is doing with us in the Work of Christ. If you would like to know more about our life together, please call or write:

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For information about Christian communities around the world, the Sword of the Spirit, and University Christian Outreach visit www.swordofthespirit.net. For more information about the Work of Christ, visit www.workofchrist.com.

The Covenant of the Work of Christ

And one of the scribes...asked Him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength,' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:28-31).

Preface

All Christians, through faith and baptism, have entered into the New Covenant established by Jesus Christ through His sacrifice on the cross. In these days, the Lord has called us to dedicate ourselves to living the New Covenant in a clear, specific, and particular way. As He has with His people in the past, the Lord has called us into a renewal covenant (e.g. Joshua 24:14-17; 2 Chronicles 15:12; Nehemiah 9-10). He has formed us into a people for Himself with a particular call and mission. This is expressed in a covenant relationship with one another and in the name He has given us, The Work of Christ Community.

As we enter into this covenant relationship as a people, we remain committed to our churches, and we agree to support one another in that commitment. In addition, while this covenant is intended to be a stable commitment, we understand that it does not necessarily mean for everyone a lifelong commitment to this community. We can foresee that changing circumstances and other forms of guidance in a person's life may indicate that it is no longer the Lord's will for that person to continue active involvement in The Work of Christ Community; although, such a decision would be made only with serious prayer and counsel.

It is with deep joy and gratitude, realizing the overwhelming goodness of God in giving us this opportunity that we enter into the life of this people that God has called together. We ac-

cept the particular covenant relationship God has established with us and among us as a community, and we express this acceptance publicly as individuals and as a people.

The Covenant

In order to respond to what God is doing among us, in order to be that people He is calling us to be, we give our whole lives, past, present, and future, to Him. We will follow His Son, Jesus, and live more and more in the Holy Spirit. We will strive to love and serve Him through lives of daily prayer and service; to praise and worship Him always; to seek His face; to know and serve the truth of His Word in the joy, peace, and love of the Holy Spirit; to believe what He speaks to us and to be obedient to the truth of His Word and the guidance of His Spirit; to offer hospitality to those whom He sends us; to widen our hearts to receive those He adds to our number; and to carry out the mission He is entrusting to us. Above all, we seek to be a people who always grow, by His grace, in the fervor of that first love He has given us, He who is our all. We consecrate our lives to Him not simply as individuals but as members of a people, members of The Work of Christ Community.

We desire to be united in love and to share a common heart, mind, and purpose with our brothers and sisters in The Work of Christ Community. God has called us to be an ecumenical, charismatic, Christian community in which He gives us the strength, order, and grace to love Him totally and to joyfully lay down our lives for one another. As an ecumenical community, we are committed to the support and encouragement of spiritual renewal among all Christian people.

In order for us to be truly a community, a people of one mind and heart in our response to the Lord, we agree to serve and care for our brothers and sisters in The Work of Christ Community, and we understand and accept those things which make our life as one body possible. We agree to follow God through lives of service, praise, worship, Scripture, and daily personal prayer. We pledge to obey the truth of God's word;

and we pledge, with the help of pastoral care, community teaching, and sound Christian wisdom, to apply that truth to our lives. We expect that our personal guidance will be tested and confirmed by the common discernment of the community and its leadership. We agree to speak the truth to one another in love and live our lives in the light.

We agree to support the order, structure, and patterns of our common life. We embrace community pastoral care which God has given to guide and unite us as a people. We agree to faithfully attend the gatherings and meetings of the community, so that we may fully participate in God's work with us as a people. We will honor the Lord with a tithe of all our income and we will support the life of the body by sharing our financial and material resources. All this enables us to be a community, members of the same body, brothers and sisters working together in the mission He is entrusting to us as a people.

By virtue of our membership in The Work of Christ Community, we are also members of the Sword of the Spirit, an international community of communities. We commit ourselves to love and support our brothers and sisters in the Sword of the Spirit throughout the world, and to serve with them in a common mission.

We yield our lives to God completely, and we will follow Him as a people wherever He may lead. With faith in the Lord and abundant joy in our hearts, relying upon His power and grace to sustain us, we enter into this covenant with God as individuals and as a body.