

Discovering God's Vision in a Complex World

We are invited to incorporate everything we hear, learn, remember, and feel into conversation with God to seek God's vision and direction for our lives and communities.

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This is the fourth article in a series of resources developed in response to the Guiding Question: Are we moving toward Jesus, the peaceful One? Church members are invited to consider these resources as we journey toward World Conference 2023.

Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.

—Psalm 46:10

Listen to the Voice that echoes across the eons of time and yet speaks anew in this moment. Listen to the Voice, for it cannot be stilled, and it calls you once again to the great and marvelous work of building the peaceable kingdom, even Zion, on behalf of the One whose name you claim.

—Doctrine and Covenants 162:1b

Listen to God

As a global faith community, where do we turn when confronted with complex, challenging, and potentially divisive issues? We are not strangers to hard conversations about topics that matter in our lives and the world. We are still learning how to listen deeply to God and one another as the source of our response. We are also still becoming a community that “trusts in the Lord with all our hearts and does not rely on our own insight” (Proverbs 3:5 adapted).

The ancient Christian practice of discernment opens possibilities into God’s future. It offers a way of stability and faithfulness that lives with integrity in the ambiguity and uncertainty of the world. As Community of Christ engages the topic of nonviolence, discernment provides ways of listening to God and one another, increasing our understanding and leading to a faithful communal response.

The essence of discernment is seeking God in the circumstances, relationships, and decisions of our lives. We start with seeking God because discernment is first about growing closer to God as disciples of Jesus. It is not about finding the right answer. It is adjusting our way of living to align more consistently with God’s vision of shalom for all creation. Discernment is the way disciples listen for the still-speaking voice of God in our own lives and times.

The topic of nonviolence is complex. As we learn about nonviolence from multiple perspectives, we also discover our own feelings, memories, and experiences that shape how we come to this conversation. This is more than a philosophical debate. Nonviolence is an issue that gets to our most basic human tendencies to protect the ones we love, seek justice, and preserve life. The practice of discernment invites us to incorporate everything we are hearing, learning, remembering, and feeling into conversation with God to seek God’s vision and

direction for our lives and communities.

It takes time to expand our awareness to more fully recognize all the intricate ways the Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit speaks through everything. There is always something for us to hear.

Continuing Revelation

Continuing Revelation, an Enduring Principle, upholds that God is always present—working in us and speaking to us. Trusting God’s continued presence supports the church in times of change, fluidity, and complexity. We remember God is not done with us and works in all relationships, situations, and aspects of our lives. At the same time, Continuing Revelation is inherently disruptive to our tendency to avoid change. Luke Timothy Johnson describes the consistently self-revealing nature of God:

In the response called faith, the human person asserts that God is not only “real,” but that God is what is most real. God is not a vague idea, left over when everything is counted, but is active and alive and intrudes into human existence... Because God intrudes into the comfortable space we cling to for our self-definition and calls us out to a wider truth, divine revelation continues in our world. God acts now. ...the Word of God is continually spoken and requires hearing... There is never a moment before death when faith can say, “Enough, it is finished,” for the Word of God to each individual is not fully spoken until that death. God’s Word unfolds with every breath we breathe.

—Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*, Pages 24-25

Pause and breathe the breath of God’s word unfolding in you.

Centuries of wisdom tell us that although God is consistently self-revealing, there are natural barriers to hearing, feeling, and seeing the Holy Spirit. We must work at being open. Early and often in discernment it is important to embrace a posture of availability to God called Spiritual Freedom or Holy Indifference. The purpose is to become so fully committed to God’s vision that we are willing to become indifferent to our own limited agendas, views, attachments, and assumptions. This stance of humility makes us more open to receive divine revelation.

Letting go means we must be honest about what is shaping our identity and ways of seeing the world. We need to consider what might obstruct us from recognizing God within and around us, and through people who are different from us. Politics, economics, social status, gender, sexuality, culture, and much more shape how we see the world.

We do not always realize what is influencing our daily interactions and decisions. Discernment helps us intentionally gaze through the lens of God’s love

and vision. This is not to dismiss all other aspects of life as though they do not exist, but to reorder them. We experience transformation as we grow in awareness of what God continues to reveal within and around us.

Six Lenses

President Stephen M. Veazey introduced a practice for discernment: the Six Lenses for Discovering God’s Will. Each lens helps us look through an important facet of our faith to gain a more complete sense of God’s vision. They work interdependently and cannot be separated so we do not miss a crucial insight of God’s call to us.

The Six Lenses are Knowledge and Reason, Scripture, Personal and Community Experience, Continuing Revelation, Tradition, and Common Consent. Looking through each lens provides a vital, life-giving discipline of searching for God in ways that stretch and challenge us. Rather than being driven by our own ideas, agendas, and preferences, we are asked to test what we discover in the wisdom of the larger community and tradition, and to continue to seek a wider truth.

To faithfully discern, we must avoid a standpoint of self-assurance: relying completely on what one thinks and feels or a standpoint of certitude, which means relying on one’s current interpretation that is believed to be “absolute, unchanging, and true” (Patricia O’Connell Killen and John DeBeer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, pages 5-10). Discernment invites us into a standpoint of exploration that includes curiosity, mutuality, openness, and humility. As an example, the first three articles in this series used the lenses of scripture, history, and reason to consider nonviolence. They each provided a perspective that we bring into discernment.

Engaging the Six Lenses, we listen to God in different ways so we can hear, see, and feel the Holy Spirit. Often, we get frustrated or feel stuck because we sense there is more but cannot see the way ahead. Using the lenses can be a liberating practice by expanding the ways we look for meaning. We covenant with one another to listen deeply even when we disagree. The Holy Spirit, ignited as a creative force to open new ways of thinking and being together, works within our tensions and insights.

As you apply the lenses to nonviolence, perhaps you discover your perspective has been most significantly shaped by personal and community experience. By stretching yourself to gain a deeper understanding of scripture or tradition, perhaps you find a new way of understanding nonviolence. Or maybe the church’s response on nonviolence seems clear when you think about the statistics of violence in the world, but then you hear stories from other church members that highlight the complexity of nonviolence in other cultures.

Amid the complexity and urgency in our world, discernment is a reliable practice for connecting with divine wisdom and guidance. It is a practice that

acknowledges God is at work in every moment, decision, relationship, and all aspects of life. As we continue to engage challenging and important topics together, may we grow in wonder and humility at God who continues to speak even now, in you, and in us.



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DISCERNING COMMUNITY OF CHRIST’S RESPONSE TO NONVIOLENCE

1. Take a few moments to settle into a time of prayer. Breathe deeply. Take as much time as you need to quiet within and become more open to God’s presence.
2. Frame the question for discernment in prayer: “God, what role does nonviolence play in the pursuit of ‘peace on and for the Earth’ (Doctrine and Covenants 165:1d) and in the life and mission of the church?”
3. Pray for greater freedom and availability to seek God’s vision. Become aware of what has been shaping your perspective on nonviolence. In humility, ask God to help you release or hold more lightly anything that may be getting in the way of deeper understanding and openness to God and others. Write down what you are invited to release.
4. Search your personal and communal memories for ways the church has responded to this issue or has been shaped by this issue in the past. What does God want you to see in this history? When did it feel like the church was moving closer to Jesus, the peaceful One, and when did it feel like the church was moving further away?
5. Consider what sources may help you understand this issue more deeply. Engage the Six Lenses. Invite others to join you in conversation about what they see as they look through each lens.
6. Bring everything you are discovering into a time of prayer. Notice where your attention is drawn. Notice what is emerging as a way forward. If you have any thoughts about your response to the issue of nonviolence at this point, write them down, and continue to hold them lightly in prayer.
7. Seek confirmation from the Holy Spirit about what you sense emerging.
8. Continue in conversation and discernment as you prepare for the next World Conference. Bring your growing sense of response with you into our global community or find ways to share your story and perspective from a distance. As you sense opportunities to respond that are in alignment with our best understanding of God’s vision for all creation, act!



**HOLY SPIRIT
GOD
JESUS CHRIST**

**KNOWLEDGE
AND REASON**

SCRIPTURE

**CONTINUING
REVELATION**

**COMMON
CONSENT**

TRADITION

**PERSONAL AND
COMMUNITY
EXPERIENCE**

Embody Christ's Peace

Spiritual Practices

Spiritual Practices

Embody Christ's Peace



OUR MISSION

Invite People to Christ

We are called to share the peace of Jesus Christ with those who are waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel.