

## **Scripture in the Community of Christ**

We are pleased to present to the church the following paper titled "Scripture in the Community of Christ." This has been prepared by the Theology Task Force with input from the World Church Leadership Council. The statement is presented for reflection and study by the church, a process that could lead to further refinements as the result of our experience with it.

This foundational set of affirmations provides the context for the church's continuing quest to become more knowledgeable about our three books of scripture. The focus is on how we understand scripture and its role in the life of the church.

Study of and reflection on these affirmations will assist us all in our prayerful consideration and use of the scriptural witness. With this in mind, we have added some questions to aid in an exploration of these affirmations.

*The First Presidency, June 2003*

## **Scripture in the Community of Christ**

Scripture provides divine guidance and inspired insight for life when responsibly interpreted and faithfully applied. Scripture helps us believe in Jesus Christ. Its witness guides us to eternal life and enables us to grow spiritually, to transform our lives, and to participate actively in the life and ministry of the church.

1. We declare that Jesus Christ—who lived, was crucified, was raised from the dead, and comes again—is the Living Word of God. It is to Christ that scripture points. It is through Christ that we have life (John 5:39–40). It is Christ whom we must hear (Mark 9:7).
2. We find the Living Word in and through scripture. Scripture is the indispensable witness of the saving, transforming message that God has entrusted to the church. The church formed the canon of scripture so that it might always have a way to hear the good news, nurture its faith, measure its life, test its experience, and remember its identity.
3. Scripture is a library of books that speaks in many voices. These books were written in diverse times and places, and reflect the languages, cultures, and conditions under which they were written. God's revelation through scripture does not come to us apart from the humanity of the writers, but in and through that humanity. In the earthen vessels of scripture we have been given the treasure of divine love and grace (2 Corinthians 4:7).

4. Scripture's authority is derived from the model of Christ, who came to be a servant (Mark 10:45). Therefore, the authority of scripture is not the authority to oppress, control, or dominate. If Jesus came to serve, how much more should the books that point to him be treated as a servant of the saving purposes of God.
5. Scripture is vital and essential to the church, but not because it is inerrant (in the sense that every detail is historically or scientifically correct). Scripture makes no such claim for itself. Rather, generations of Christians have found scripture simply to be trustworthy in keeping them anchored in revelation, in promoting faith in Christ, and in nurturing the life of discipleship. For these purposes, scripture is unfailingly reliable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).
6. Faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship each have something to contribute to our understanding of scripture. In wrestling to hear and respond to the witness of scripture, the church must value the light that each of these sources may offer.
7. As the church tries to interpret scripture responsibly, it seeks the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide his disciples into new truth (John 16:12–15). By the Spirit, the ancient words of scripture can become revelatory, allowing us to grasp what may not have been seen or heard before.
8. Disciples are called to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the scriptures so that they may ever increase in love for God, neighbor, and self (Matthew 22:37–40; Mosiah 1:49), uphold the dignity and worth of all persons (Doctrine and Covenants 16:3c–d), and faithfully follow the Way of Jesus Christ.
9. With other Christians, we affirm the Bible as the foundational scripture for the church. In addition, the Community of Christ uses the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. We do not use these sacred writings to replace the witness of the Bible or improve upon it, but because they confirm its message that Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God (Preface of the Book of Mormon; Doctrine and Covenants 76: 3g). We have heard Christ speak in all three books of scripture, and bear witness that he is "alive forever and ever" (Revelation 1:18).
10. For our time we shall seek to live and interpret the witness of scripture by the Spirit, *with the community, for the sake of mission, in the name of the Prince of Peace.*

*Theology Task Force, May 3, 2003*

*With the concurrence of the World Church Leadership Council, May 12, 2003*

## Questions for Individual and Group Reflection and Discussion

1. Prayerfully read the affirmations in their entirety. What is your overall reaction to what you have read?
2. Consider the preamble. How do you define the phrases "responsibly interpreted" and "faithfully applied"? How can your approach to scripture become more in keeping with these two criteria?
3. How do the first and second affirmations help distinguish between the Living Word (Christ) and the written word (scripture)? How do these two tend to become confused in the life of the church? What problems does such confusion create?
4. How have you discovered Christ "in and through scripture" (affirmation 2)? How have you found God's "saving, transforming message" in the witness of the scriptures?
5. How has an understanding of scripture's cultural and historical context helped you responsibly interpret and faithfully apply specific texts to your life (affirmation 3)?
6. How does recognition of the role of the human writer affect how you view scripture in your own life and in the life of the church (affirmation 3)? What values do you find in both the unity and diversity of the scriptural witness?
7. How have you seen scripture used to oppress, control, and dominate (affirmation 4)? How can you better use and understand scripture as servant, after the model of Jesus? How would this require you to change the way you use scripture?
8. How is it possible to believe that scripture is "true," yet not inerrant? What does it mean for you to affirm that scripture is "trustworthy" and "unfailingly reliable" (affirmation 5)?
9. How do you use faith, experience, tradition, and scholarship in your reading, understanding, and application of scripture (affirmation 6)? Which do you tend to emphasize more than the others? Which might you benefit from giving more attention to?
10. How has the Holy Spirit blessed you in your understanding of scripture? How has the Spirit led you to new truth (affirmation 7)? How has scripture been revelatory to you?
11. How has scripture helped you more "faithfully follow the Way of Jesus Christ" (affirmation 8)? How has it helped you "increase in love for God, neighbor, and self"?
12. How has each of the three books of scripture functioned in your life and faith journey? In what sense do you understand the Bible to be foundational? What, then, is the role of the other two books of scripture (affirmation 9)?