

Ripon United Methodist Disciples of Christ

“take hold of the life that really is life” 1 Tim. 6:19

I. Spiritual growth

A. Food for the Spirit

Individual Christians need to get a healthy diet of:

- Prayer
- Bible Study God’s word for individuals and the world. When we find food for our hungers, answers for our questions, we find God knows us better than we thought.
- Fellowship and worship with other Christians. Praise keeps the blessings and problems of the world in perspective.
- Service:
 - Charity Reducing the pain of the consequences of war, poverty, disability.
 - Justice Fighting the causes of war, poverty, disability.

The more healthy spiritual food I take in, the stronger is my faith and the more love I can give out. The more faith I have in my heavenly parent, the less I rely on material things, the opinion of others, or personal achievement (all things that can be lost) for my self-concept. The more healthy spiritual food I take in, the easier it is to recognize God’s answers when I seek God’s will in crucial decisions. Just as a body gets weak and flabby and eventually dies without physical food, a spirit gets weak and flabby and eventually dies without spiritual food.

B. Seek knowledge

Decide what I believe and why about Jesus, God, Holy Spirit, church, doctrinal and social issues, prayer. Find answers to the questions of my heart: heaven, Satan, doubt, atonement, suffering, other religions. Find tools for daily life tasks such as child raising, handling stress, emotions, and difficult people. I don’t expect to know all, but the more confidence I have in what I do know, the less I fear what I don’t know. The more confidence I have in my beliefs, the more tools I have for dealing with the crises of life.

Decide what doctrinal and social positions are true by beginning with scripture, and using tradition, experience and reason to interpret and apply it.

Learn the difference between grace and law. (see Q&A sheet)

C. Grow together in small groups

Christian faith is a team activity. Solitary Christians lose faith. Small groups gather for a common task, like music or quilting or food pantry or youth fellowship or bible study or many other purposes, but also make holy friendships, caring relationships. “Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another.” Heb. 10: 24-5

II. Right living

A. Compassion

- prepare for chances to help
- use conversation that builds rather than breaks:
 - compliments and praise, refusal to gossip
- laugh with those who laugh, weep with those who weep
- pray for and nourish those who suffer

B. Relationship to the world

1. Base decisions on what God wants for the world, country, state and town, not only on what makes life better for me and mine. We can't avoid politics any more than we can avoid economics. Politics is the way groups of people relate to each. We can choose to use Godly values in making our choices.
2. Fight the culture wars fairly
3. Promote a cause about which you care deeply with a firm and respectful presentation.
4. Challenge laws that are doing more harm than good.

C. Personal morality

1. Do:
 - eat right, exercise, teach, carefully manage money, enjoy healthy sexuality, give some of self away, protect self from danger. Recycle. Vote. Obey the law.
2. Don't play with:
 - Chemical fun or escape
 - Unhealthy sexuality
 - An emotional or sexual affair which competes with a marriage
 - Gambling for thrill and greed
3. Learn and do high morality rather than conventional morality, Christian values rather than cultural values, uncommon sense rather than common sense.

D. Judgment

When discernment is necessary, find the reasons for the behavior of the other before judging whether it was wise or not. Ask. Check your perception with the facts before making a decision.

E. Money

Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can.

1. Simple living Prioritize. Know the difference between needs and wants. Some things I need to survive, some things I like which make life more interesting. Meet survival needs first.
2. Give
 - Tithe 10% to God's work or
 - Percentage giving. Give a percentage of my time and money away, to family first, then if I can afford more than the basics, to church/community, then if I can afford more, to world.

III. Reconciliation (II Cor 5: 16-21)

A. Healthy conflict

Loving correction, speaking the truth in love.
(use Mennonite sheet)

B. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is more than acceptance, it adds truthfulness. We accept doing or receiving the wrong.

1. We accept the wrong we have done to God and accept the forgiveness of God. We are treated as right and accepted as loving, valuable persons, but not because we have made ourselves right. When we decide we have been wronged by God, we honestly admit that belief.

2. With others, we accept the wrong we have done and accept forgiveness, not because we have undone the wrong. We are truthful about wrong that has been done to us, and forgive, not because they have made it right.

3. We honestly admit how we hurt ourselves, give up our need justify our actions to ourselves. This way we can learn from our mistakes and not repeat them.

C. Dealing with Difference

1. Go out of my way to befriend those whose lifestyle, religion, racial/ethnic background, gender, class, sexual preference, or age is different than mine. God has something to teach me through them.

2. Set my boundaries between diversity and perversity. What is wrong about others' behavior and what is just different? This takes:

- learning about others. Read, travel, ask.
- relating to others heart to heart

It is not fair to judge another if we know about them, but don't know them and care for them.

-knowing the difference between gospel and culture.

Gospel is good news for all. It is the timeless, universal, cross-cultural, core truths of the Biblical account of God in Christ. Culture is the social situation of the way those truths are presented. What is right behavior in one situation may not be right behavior in another situation, but the love of God that motivates is timeless. Sort out the timeless from the timely in the Bible. Forgiveness, salvation through Christ, peace, and sacrifice for the poor are all parts of the timeless and universal gospel. Music taste, worship style, management of a specific conflict, temperament and dress are all culturally conditioned timely truths.

Do we allow kids to run and use loud voices in church? It depends on the situation and purpose. Do we accept all kinds of dress in church or school or do some kinds of dress hurt others? Are all TV shows, video games, songs and movies ok to enjoy or are some destructive? Is there unhealthy as well as healthy recreation? Are all doctrinal theories ok to investigate or are some to be dismissed without discussion?

A property manager needs to decide what to allow and what to prohibit in order to protect the property and safety of the people in it. He or she is given that responsibility by the

owner of the property. So too, a Christian steward has the God given task to protect the souls of people in his or her family, church, community, country and world. Therefore, we have to decide what can be allowed and what needs to be prohibited. We don't need to protect God, we need to protect without confining each other.

Setting boundaries needs to be a group, rather than individual activity. Individual perspective is too limited to understand the difference between gospel and culture. It takes working together with others who have cross-cultural experience.

D. Peace

Christians do the things that bring peace to the world. Refuse to enjoy or participate in personal violence. Understand Biblical bases for pacificism and just war reactions in choosing a position. Pray for enemies as well as partners. Demand the truth about all facts before giving consent to war as a last resort. When soldiers are deployed, support them by paying taxes, doing personal communication, prayer and thanks, whether you agree with the military action or not.

E. Evangelism

Be ready to speak about my reasons for confidence in God when the topic comes up, or needs to come up. Invite people to make a personal commitment to Christ. Support missionaries with money, time, goods, encouragement and mission trips.

F. Community life

Build up the beneficial businesses, schools, medical care, organized activities, and government services through service clubs, volunteer programs, fund raising, administrative boards.

G. Make good church

Organize ministry, teach and lead worship so that others can make friends of God, others, world and selves as disciples of Jesus Christ. Together we can make a difference for God in ways we cannot do alone. Do unto others as they would have you do unto them (notice this is not the golden rule). Encourage people to go deeper in faith. Tradition and innovation are both good tools.

A connection to God in Christ has given "life that really is life". God loved first, and we want to love in return. We decided to follow Christ. Disciples of Christ start with the basics, getting the right spiritual food first. We then go further along the Christian walk to the places God directs. Each disciple may not go to all these places. However, the further we go the more joyful life we find.