

TOUR of **LIFE**

Tour of Life
is dedicated to

Janet
God's gift, my partner

Congregations with whom I've served
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Henry, Illinois
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Mandeville, Louisiana
Heart of the Rockies Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Fort Collins, Colorado

Colleagues whose faith shapes my own
Joan Dennehy & Scott Hardin-Nieri

Orville L. Wright
My father, whose ministry planted the seeds of my ministry

TOUR of LIFE

A Baptism and
Confirmation
Journey

Jeff Wright

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INTRODUCTION

Faith Is Caught, Then Taught: The Thinking Behind Tour of Life

A Baptism and Confirmation Experience That Models a Life of Faith and Discipleship

*Go therefore and make
disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the
name of the Father
and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit, and
teaching them to obey
everything that I have
commanded you.*

Matthew 28:19–20a

We were seated around a table in the church’s kitchen—eight young candidates for baptism and I, their pastor—sharing soft drinks, a bag of potato chips, and conversation about what it means to follow Jesus. Halfway through the class, I looked at the youth and thought to myself, “There’s one of us even more bored than the rest: *Me.*” This wasn’t the impression of the Christian life that I wanted to leave in our youth.

Later, the incongruity struck me. In our baptism/confirmation classes we too often describe the adventure of discipleship—living with Jesus in the world—while seated around a table in the church. I want our youth to experience the challenge and joy of following Jesus in the world, where we fulfill our calling as disciples.

Tour of Life is built around the premise that the truths and practices of the Christian life are more enthusiastically embraced as they are “caught,” not simply taught. For example, on Easter morning in our church, children are invited to crawl under the communion table from behind—as if into the tomb—and to emerge out the front, as if the stone had been rolled away. Even our youngest are encouraged to participate, sharing in the joy of resurrection long before they can understand and articulate it.

By observing others and “practicing” life for themselves, children begin to walk, count, and pray long before they understand the significance of these behaviors. In the same way, believers of any age are more likely to grow in their faith by sharing life alongside more mature disciples than by reading a book about discipleship or attending a class. *Tour of Life* leads participants on a journey through the seasons of life. They are invited to experience God’s hand at work in everyday experiences. For more details about how this Tour is structured, see the “Overview of the Tour” or talk with your group’s Tour Guide.

First the Experience, Then the Faith

In the prologue to his gospel, John writes, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, . . . full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). Jesus’ disciples were led to the startling conclusion that the fullness of God was revealed in the words, works, and relationships of Jesus. This expansive claim lies at the heart of our faith as

Christians. “Emmanuel,” they said of Jesus, meaning “God with us.” Most religions teach that, by way of a list of things to believe and say and do, people may work their way through to God in heaven or to a comparable concept of salvation. Christianity announces the good news that God has made a way through to us here on earth. Christianity announces that God “lived among us” as a carpenter/teacher and experienced life as we know it in all of its ups and downs—full of grace and truth.

Our teachings about God and what it means to be human, then, are not only spiritual truths. They are also concrete, practical realities that God reveals across racial, ethnic, cultural, and historical boundaries. We encounter these realities in the midst of life’s joyful mysteries and terrible losses: the birth of a child, the touch of a loved one, the betrayal of a friend, the contradictions of the human heart, the costs and rewards of daily work, the challenges of living in community with others. These truths are written into the fabric of creation, which, when discovered and embraced, help us live life to its fullest.

After Jesus’ death and resurrection, the disciples didn’t set out to begin a new religion. They simply shared what they had experienced of God in Jesus. They set out to follow Jesus in their everyday lives: trusting in the things that Jesus had told them, doing the things that he had done, experiencing his continuing presence. They were called followers of “the Way” (Acts 9:2) because they practiced a way of living they had discovered in Jesus. They followed a way of forgiveness, generosity, justice, humility, compassion, and hope, empowered by their experience of the living Christ.

We declare to you what...we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...

1 John 1:1

The Experience of Resurrection

Although Jesus had tried to prepare his disciples for his death and resurrection, they responded with shock and disbelief when the risen Lord greeted them that first Easter morning. Their lives were transformed as each told the others of their experiences: “The tomb is empty.” “He has appeared to Simon.” “I have seen the Lord.” “We recognized him as he broke the bread.”

That tiny band of believers began to turn the world upside down—or right side up. They embraced resurrection as a concrete and universal reality in this life. Old hurts were healed. Broken relationships were mended. Physical illnesses were cured. People turned from their sins and lived lives of integrity, justice, and service. The walls dividing people and cultures were torn down, as tired ways of seeing and shaping the world gave way to new ways of being and doing. They discovered that death doesn’t have the last word in this life or the next. People were attracted to Christianity, not first of all because of its beliefs and rituals, but by the disciples’ behavior. *Jesus’ followers practiced resurrection*, living lives of love, compassion, and courage in the face of danger.

Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24:35

As the community grew, Christians turned to the Scriptures and prayer in order to reflect on their experiences. They gathered to give thanks to God, to celebrate what was happening in their lives, and to teach “the Way” to others. Writings and liturgies emerged to carry the memory of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and to help the community recognize God’s Spirit at work in the world. Rules were written and traditions emerged to shape the community’s life. Doctrines

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were commonly embraced to preserve revealed truths. The disciples organized a mission of preaching and service to witness to the experience of resurrection throughout the world. They became *church*.

But all this came later—comes later for each of us as we, the community of Jesus' followers, seek to make sense of our experience. First, we encounter the experience of God's love and power—then, we find our faith in God.

Church consultant Kennon Callahan¹ reminds Christians that John 3:16 does not begin, "For God so loved the *church*..." but rather, "For God so loved the *world*..." The church has been entrusted with an extraordinary message. It is good news about life in its concrete realities: its joys and sorrows; unexpected surprises and terrible losses; seeming dead ends and unexpected second chances; its strange and wonderful mysteries; and its incredible fierceness, beauty, and diversity. In the midst of it *all*—not just in the church, not just for Christians—God is revealing God's self and inviting persons into a relationship of trust marked by a life of discipleship.

Tour of Life invites participants to discover God's redeeming presence in the world. With the encouragement of a Tour Guide spurring them on, the group will explore a life of discipleship as it is empowered by God's Spirit, supported by the church, and lived daily—from birth to death to life anew, again and again. Together, tour participants will make the joyful discovery that God's kingdom is coming and God's will is being done just as we pray, "on earth as it is in heaven."

Jeff Wright
Epiphany 2010

¹Used by permission of Kennon L. Callahan, *The Future That Has Come* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

ITINERARY

Tour Destinations

New Birth: *Becoming a disciple of Jesus is like starting life over again.*

Disciples and mentors meet at a hospital birthing center, where they observe the newborns. Then they gather in the hospital's cafeteria or classroom where, in pairs, mentors and disciples introduce themselves and talk about the connections between our first birth, as children, and our new birth as people of faith. The tour guide may give an overview of the tour and talk about the longing in all of us, at times, to begin a new life.

School: *Disciples learn together with Jesus.*

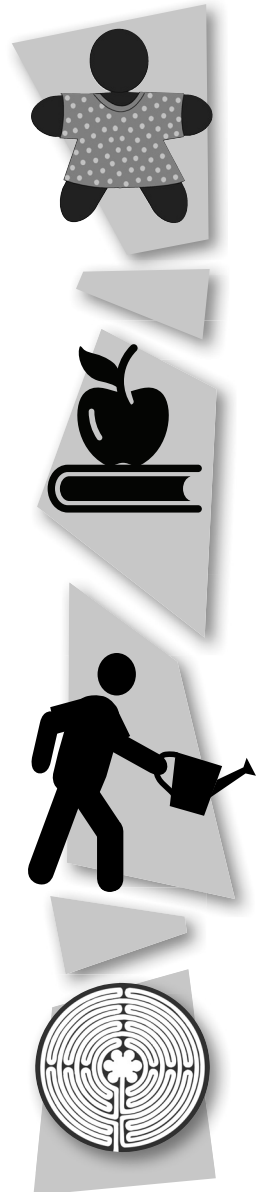
The group travels to a school's foreign language classroom. The classroom's teacher may be asked to welcome the group and say a few words in that language (then to translate!). The tour guide speaks about how new Christians essentially are learning a new language. Several words are discussed, especially as they relate to our everyday life: *sin, forgiveness, atonement, salvation, and sanctification*, among others. In pairs, mentors and disciples discuss their experiences of learning and what it means to become disciples (pupils) of Jesus.

Work: *Disciples get a job loving God and others.*

Participants share in a service project: raking the yard of an elderly person, preparing the meal at a local soup kitchen, working on a Habitat for Humanity building site. At the project location, disciples and mentors gather to discuss what they enjoy doing, what they do well, and how they are learning to do these things even better. Mentors are invited to talk about their vocations and how their work is a means of expressing their faith. The tour guide helps disciples see that our job as Christians is to put the dreams, strengths, and talents God has given us to work in our daily lives.

Walking in the Spirit: *Disciples experience God's presence everywhere.*

After an introduction, participants experience the ancient practice of praying through a labyrinth. Disciples and mentors share their experience of the labyrinth and talk about the rhythm of a Christian life: moving inward in relationship with God and moving outward in service to others. The tour guide introduces the Holy Spirit and both the gifts and the fruit of the Spirit. Resources of faith are discussed, such as prayer as conversation with God, and the Bible as revelation



and encouragement. The group explores what Jesus means when, in John 15, he says, “Abide in me.”

Meal Time: *Disciples are fed at the Lord’s table.*

The group returns to the church building, where a meal is served around the communion table. Participants are encouraged to connect the Lord’s table in worship to the family dinner table in our homes. Families give thanks to God for food and life around both tables, sharing the day’s events, listening to each other’s stories, remembering the past, and looking to the future. They are fed physically at both tables! Each time Christians gather around the Lord’s table, they are reminded that all of life is a banquet God spreads before them. God invites them, like Christ, to take life, bless it, break it, and share it with others.

Play: *Disciples enjoy God’s creation and their relationships.*

The group is invited to relax and play. Following a few games either outdoors or inside, the tour guide invites the group to observe the nature of play and the importance of rules that impart structure and meaning to play (and life). Sabbath and the Ten Commandments are God’s gifts to the community of faith, setting boundaries so that the community may rest, relax, enjoy, and share life to the fullest.

Death and Resurrection: *Disciples face death with courage and hope.*

The group travels to a funeral home, where the conversation turns to death and resurrection. The funeral director may be asked to speak briefly about death and grief. In pairs, mentors and disciples discuss their experiences of death and their understanding of resurrection. Participants are encouraged to identify ways in which God brings new life out of old in this life (forgiveness in relationships, second chances, the healing of broken bones, and reconciliation between nations). This new life extends to the eternal life that God gives as a gift. The tour guide may be prepared to talk about the two most important experiences of resurrection in the history of God’s people: the exodus (from a life of harsh slavery to a life of freedom, accountability, and justice), and Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.

Church: *Disciples gather to celebrate and prepare.*

Back in the church building, participants talk about their experiences of *church* (both positive and negative). In pairs, disciples and mentors explore the meaning and significance of the body of Christ and the need to regularly gather as believers. Christians gather to remember and share God’s love; to seek God’s presence and celebrate God’s action on behalf of the world; to learn together about God, life, community, and self; and to prepare to anticipate and share God’s presence in the world. The tour guide invites disciples and mentors to experience how the church’s rituals and practices nurture trust in God’s loving presence and the church’s mission in the world.



**Tour
Destinations
for
All Travelers**

NEW BIRTH

1

Becoming a Disciple of Jesus Is Like Starting Life Over Again

“No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (Jn. 3:3)

In the Bible, we read about Nicodemus, a Jewish leader, who came to Jesus in the dark of night to ask him about living for God. Jesus said that it’s like starting life all over. You must be born again, Jesus said—born from above by the Spirit of God (Jn. 3:3). Nicodemus didn’t understand what Jesus meant. “I’m a grown man,” he said to Jesus. “How can I enter my mother’s womb again?” Jesus must have smiled. He was using a figure of speech to help Nicodemus understand that giving one’s life to God means learning a new way to live.

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation.” 1 Peter 2:2

Think of a baby just born to its parents. An infant is completely dependent on others for everything it needs: food, clothing, shelter, warmth, touch, and love. A newborn doesn’t know how to walk. It doesn’t know how to talk. In ways just as concrete and practical, we need God and others to help us grow in a life of discipleship.

When we become Jesus’ disciples, he teaches us how to walk in ways that bring joy to us and the world around us. Jesus teaches us a new language: the language of faith, hope, and love. Jesus teaches us how to build healthy relationships, how to care for others, stand up for ourselves, speak the truth, and hold to what we know God wants for us and for the world.

First, the milk, the basics of faith, Paul writes in his first letter to the new Christians in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:2). Then comes the meat. *Deciding to trust and follow Jesus is like starting life over again.*

Trip Journal

New Birth

Becoming a disciple of Jesus is like starting life over again.

“No one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” (Jn. 3:3)

Group Discussion

What must it be like to be a baby?

What do babies need in order to thrive?

How is becoming a Christian like being born again?

Mentors and Disciples in Pairs

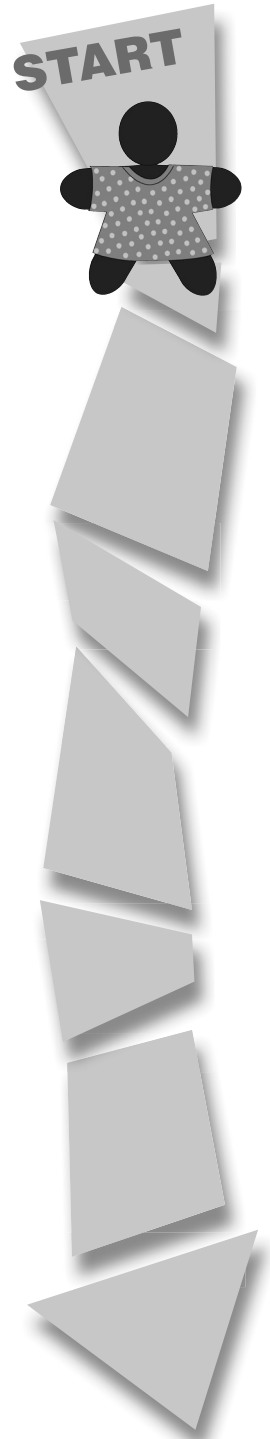
Beginning something new can be fun and scary at the same time. Write down your feelings as you waited for everyone to arrive and the tour to begin. Are you scared, happy, curious, or do you have any other feelings?

When you meet a new person, in what ways can you help start a relationship?

How can we begin a relationship with Jesus?

Read Colossians 3:12–17 aloud together.

Babies can't dress themselves. As newborn Christians, Jesus wants to “clothe” us with special qualities. Paul lists many of these qualities in his letter to the Christians in Colossae.



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How do these qualities of life compare and differ from the way you are living now? To the ways people around you behave? (Write your ideas here. Be prepared to share with the group one of the ideas you shared as disciple and mentor.)

If you could take a picture of one thing you saw or experienced at this stop along the tour, what would it be?

To Read on Your Own Later

When, like the apostle Peter, we profess that Jesus is the Christ, Son of the living God (Mt. 16:16), and decide to become one of his disciples, it's like beginning life all over again. The Greek word used in John 3:16 to describe our new birth can be translated "born again," "born from above," or "born anew." Which translation do you like best? Why?

