

ASPEN






## Why ASPEN and why now...

**We have seen and experienced the emergence of a particular charism, a gift around pioneering mission over the last 30 years or so. The gift that has emerged in our midst from the Holy Spirit is precious. We sense it is time to birth a community to support those people in a spread out ecumenical ecclesial community in a way that builds on what we have already done and takes it into the next season. We think this may be the best way to look after the gift, and as far as we can discern, we have been called by God to do so at this time.**

**It is somewhere for pioneers to belong, to be part of community with a brotherhood or sisterhood of solidarity and purpose that encourages and celebrates who they are without a need for justification or explanation and encourages the pioneering practice they are called to.**

**It is part of the body of Christ. Its way of being is spread out, but it is ecclesial by nature (not ecclesiastical). As the contours of church of various denominations change significantly in the coming decades prophetic communities will be helpful, necessary, hopeful.**



**We want to see this ministry and charism deepen and continue in the life of the church. Sodalities and orders have a charism, purpose, a community, rhythm of life, and a way of discerning and encouraging new vocations that grows a movement. Networks and movements do this to a significant degree and we have seen how generative that has been in the last twenty years. But a sodality or order affords more realistic possibility of longevity or a future that keeps the gift moving forwards.**

**It has become clear over time that diocesan, denominational, or modal church struggles to do this well. She likes the idea of newness and knows she needs to change but the forces of gravity inwards are strong. The traditions exist to maintain what already is and where she does support newness, it tends to be along the same lines. Her priorities lie elsewhere.**

**We hope it will create the conditions for emergence. We expect it to be generative and will be surprised if new possibilities don't arise through its life, and the colliding of its members. Those may be part of the order, they may simply be new practice, projects, enterprises, research, design, publishing, partnerships, communities, groups, unions, enterprises that become part of a library of gifts.**

# PURPOSE



Our shared purpose is to connect and accompany changemakers, pioneers, fringe dwellers, and midwives of the new to join in God's unfolding movement to heal and renew all things.

# CHARISM

The charism is framed through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ the pioneer with four aspects:

**Newness** - we see possibilities and participate in the renewal of all things.

**Context** - we love discovering afresh the gospel in culture, at the edges.

**Freedom** - free in Christ be you!

**Diversity** - we celebrate being a fellowship of the unlike.

We seek to be, live, and model a life on Jesus Christ who is our best pattern and example, and to love and serve in the spirit of Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.



## **NEWNESS**

**We welcome God's incoming future, seeking to participate in the world's healing, the renewal of all things. We see and imagine new possibilities and we make things happen out of what we see. We are dreamers who do. Where things have become stuck in business as usual, we evoke grief and bring disruption. We create amazement and energise hope that another world is possible.**



## CONTEXT

**We love context, culture, place and the adventure that explores God's dream for the world. We are especially drawn to the edges, to the places where people and creation are broken, poor, weak, vulnerable, and lost. We love it that God's shalom can be joined in with or opened up in that particular place and how the good news of Jesus Christ can be shared and discovered there.**

**The gospel is always culturally robed so the sharing requires a letting go of our own ways, a listening and discerning to discover afresh the gospel in a new culture. We love discovering and learning from how others do it from the inside of their context, culture and place. We enjoy the richness of that conversation and exchange.**



## **FREEDOM**

**There is freedom in Christ. We are most free when we align our heart and mind with the overflow of God's love for the world. This freedom is about being yourself, about how to follow Christ, about what resources you draw on. You are unique, made in God's image. Your life's work is to become more fully who you are, to open up that gift. God calls you to be you, not what anyone else thinks you should be or do.**



## **DIVERSITY**

**Diversity is a gift we are committed to embracing in our life together. It challenges us to grow into the fullness of Christ, whose body is strengthened and revitalised by the mutual exchange of the unique gifts each member brings. In this way, diversity is a blessing that enriches our community and allows us to celebrate being a fellowship of the unlike.**

# RHYTHM

*The rhythm is light touch. This is intentional so as not to create too much that we can't fulfil, recognising people have busy lives. We don't want to detract energy from the local but hope the rhythm is partly or largely worked out in the local. It is up to us all to take responsibility and keep the self-organising aspect to it in how we live it out in our context.*

*The rhythm consists of:*

*Review - lean in to purpose, charisma, and values.*

*Connect - you are not alone, meet others in the community.*

*Pray - we pray, it doesn't matter how or when.*

*Learn - we are curious and hungry to explore new thinking and practice.*



## REVIEW

**The purpose, charism and values are important to the life of the community. We invite every member to use them for review. That review would work well as an annual cycle. The suggestion is that you meet with a fellow member, or as a small group and use it to discern what you might want to lean into or develop in the year ahead. A check in point mid-way through the year could be good to consider as well. But you are free to be creative and that is simply a guide. We agreed that it would be good to develop a tool, i.e. a series of questions that people could use if they want to.**

# CONNECT

**These are the ways of connecting we have imagined though of course that is not exhaustive**

## **a. Annual gathering**

There will be at least an annual gathering that members are invited to. It is currently porous, i.e. the Assembly where others are invited. Within that gathering there will be a members' meeting where any business of the community is discussed and decisions made.

## **b. Murmuration small group**

In a murmuration the dynamic movement happens because each bird has a set of relations to 6 or 7 neighbours. As long as a bird moves with them it works. Each member is encouraged to identify 6 or 7 (the number is not important - it could be more or less) other pioneers/changemakers and to be intentional about connecting with them. Be free to do that how you like - in a group, by visiting individually, or whatever. We encourage a couple of things. The first is that in a murmuration each time it moves it will be a different set of relations. So that set of connections can be for a year and then a new one the next and so forth or at least some mix of the two. Secondly, with our value of ubuntu at the centre of belonging, we invite you to make sure some of those connections embody difference.

## **c. Gather**

There are many possibilities for gatherings. There are various regional groups, networks and communities of practice already. And we hope through self organising new ones may emerge. There is no central plan for this. But we will try and highlight what we know exists as it emerges.

## **d. Directory**

We would like to create a directory of those happy to share their profile. We imagine this would include contact details, context, experience, gifts/skills/interests, geography and so on. That way it would be possible to connect with others with shared interests or nearby.



# PRAY

**We pray. It doesn't matter how or when - there's no set prayer book. But a life of joining God's mission is fuelled by prayer. We draw on the riches of others to inspire our prayer - the world church, our own traditions, religious communities... And we write and create our own to express our particular longings. We depend on God. We grieve for what is broken. We hope for what can be.**

## **a. Personal rhythm of prayer**

We develop our own rhythm in light of the charism. In many cases that will also be shaped by the local context and the community of disciples of which we are part.

## **b. Monthly online offering**

Many members may already be in a network where they gather with others for prayer. But others are more isolated. We will create an online gathering once a month which is simply for those who would like to meet together. We anticipate each one being led by different members and/or their communities. It can be a sharing of contextual approaches. It can also be a place that is generative of prayers for the life of the community.

## **c. Retreat**

We encourage members to have rest built into their lives, including an annual retreat where possible. We don't have the resource to organise it but can point out retreats or pilgrimages we know of.

## **d. Accompaniment**

Soul friendship, spiritual accompaniment, spiritual direction are a good practice. We invite community members to explore one of these. We hope through the library of gifts to be able to help make connections for those interested.

## **e. Table**

Our eucharistic practice is table fellowship. Jesus was as much guest as host and usually ate with outsiders/sinners. We follow his pattern.

# LEARN

**We value the wisdom and learning from others - about God, about the world, about mission. We ask questions, we are curious and hungry to explore both new thinking and practice. We don't seek ready made answers off the shelf but reflect on our own experience drawing on this wisdom. We immerse ourselves in the scriptures to better understand and live our lives in the way of Christ.**

**We learn through reading, through conversation, through study, through doing, through community and through others.**

## **a. Inspiration**

We anticipate there being webinars, conversations, conferences, book launches and so on that will be inspiring. We may facilitate some but expect that they are likely to be offered by the organisations or networks of members so we will find a way to highlight those. Similarly where members publish or record podcasts we love to hear and shine a light on those.

## **b. Practice**

We learn through others' practice, visiting their context, hearing their stories, sitting at their feet.

## **c. Training/formation**

We won't initially be offering training but various members are part of organisations and networks that do. We will point to recommended training we are aware of.

## **d. Reflective practice**

Reflective practice is a purposeful, truth-telling process that deepens self-awareness, enhances learning, and improves action. By exploring emotions, assumptions, and values, it fosters personal, communal, and systemic understanding. Using structured models and critical questioning, it cultivates honesty, empathy, and transformation, helping individuals navigate complexity and contribute meaningfully to change and transformation. Ultimately, it enables pioneers to navigate the complexity of life with clarity, engage in truth-telling, and contribute more effectively to the change they seek, both personally and collectively, as well as systemically. To give one example, some people may like to self organise into action learning sets. This is one way of doing reflective practice.

# VALUES

These are the values we have discerned especially for how we are when we are together.

**Ubuntu** - *I am because we are.*

**Generosity** - *believing the best about others' intentions.*

**Attentiveness** - *attentive to the presence of God.*

**Creativity** - *imagining, wondering what if, being playful, entertaining possibilities.*



## UBUNTU

**We aspire to be a community shaped by the African value of Ubuntu: I am because we are. In Ubuntu true belonging, hospitality and meaningful participation are inseparable. We are not whole without one another. Each person brings a unique presence, voice, and gift that the community needs in order to flourish. Belonging is not passive; it is made real through mutual participation, which may ebb and flow with time. Everyone is invited to show up in the fullness of themselves, to offer and receive hospitality, to participate in and shape the shared life of the community. Here, no one stands alone, and no contribution is too small. We recognise that we are diminished when others are excluded. Essentially we are because we all are.**

*1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 27*

*v. 27 "All of you together are Christ's body, and you together are a part of it."*



# Evidence of Ubuntu



*We'll know we are a community shaped through the value of Ubuntu when:*

- \* We welcome both friend and stranger warmly, helping everyone feel at home
- \* We listen deeply and honour each other's diverse stories, perspectives and experiences.
- \* We treat one another and the planet with care, tenderness, and dignity.
- \* We laugh, lament, eat, drink, remember, and celebrate together round the table.
- \* Diverse gifts are recognised, celebrated, and encouraged, even when they appear small, unformed or imperfect.
- \* Leadership and decision-making are collaborative, transparent, and inclusive.
- \* A wide range of people create, participate, lead, rest, and contribute to gatherings as they feel able.

*We'll know we are not a community shaped by the value of Ubuntu when:*

- \* People feel ignored, rejected, or invisible.
- \* Difference is met with fear, judgment or resistance.
- \* Hospitality is selective or superficial; gatherings are dominated by the culture and experiences of a dominant group.
- \* Meal tables are places of competition, reinforcement of division, and superficial exchange of knowledge.
- \* We do not treat one another and the planet with care, tenderness and dignity.
- \* Participation feels passive or exclusive; opportunities to participate are restricted to a small number of people.
- \* A narrow range of gifts are valued and the quality of performance is valued more highly than intention and courage.
- \* Leadership, decision-making and participation are considered the preserve of a few powerful insiders.



## GENEROSITY

**We practice a generosity of spirit that shows up as kindness, compassion, and curiosity toward one another — and even our enemies. We choose to be open, non-judgmental, and to believe the best about others' intentions.**

*Colossians 3:12–13*

***“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”***





## Evidence of Generosity

*We'll know we have a generous culture, when:*

- \* We practice active listening; giving one another our full attention, listening without interrupting, rushing to fix, or assuming the worst.
- \* We assume good intent. Rather than jumping to conclusions, we ask questions and seek to understand, especially in conflict.
- \* We practice curiosity over criticism. Instead of judging, we ask "Help me understand..." or "What's your experience?"
- \* We address grievances directly and graciously, with a posture of reconciliation rather than resentment or gossip.
- \* Our conversations are marked by kind words and encouragement that build up, bless, and honour others, even behind their backs.

*We'll recognise we don't have a generous culture if:*

- \* We are quick to judge or assume.
- \* We jump to negative conclusions about others' motives without seeking clarification or context.
- \* We participate in gossiping or backbiting rather than address concerns with individuals direct.
- \* We are cynical or closed-minded; dismissing fresh voices or ideas.
- \* We are defensive in conflict, where disagreements escalate quickly, with blame-shifting, deflection, or refusal to listen.



## ATTENTIVENESS

**We are a community that embodies a posture of attentiveness. We seek to be attentive to the presence of God in our midst in all our ways of gathering and connecting as a community. The Spirit of God is the unseen presence in the midst of our relationality animating the community and calling the community into God's future for us. This requires us to be deeply attentive to one another, to listen as much (if not more) than we speak, and to seek to express the voice of the Spirit within the community. Attentiveness invites us into a perspective that can see all our conversations and engagements as a practice of discerning what the Spirit is saying to the church and responding to what is revealed to us.**

*John 15:4; 16:15*

***"Remain in me and I in you...apart from me you can do nothing."***

***"The Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."***





## Evidence of Attentive

*We'll know we have a culture that is attentive to the Holy Spirit, when:*

- \* We create space in our gatherings and activities for silence, scripture, prayer.
- \* We operate with rhythms that balance purposeful, rational, strategic work with rest, recreation and space for God to speak.
- \* We honour the voice of others as the possibility of hearing the Spirit.
- \* We invite storytelling as a context in which the work of the Spirit can be discerned.
- \* We are not afraid to hear the strange voice of the prophet in our midst.

*We'll know we have do not have a culture that is attentive to the Holy Spirit, when:*

- \* Our gatherings and activities are dominated by the clock and the agenda.
- \* We are competing for our own voices to be heard, and our point to be made.
- \* Our conversation lacks the testimony of practice.
- \* We have lost the experience of surprise.
- \* Scripture and silence have been squeezed out.



## CREATIVITY

**Creativity generates or produces something new. It's not the preserve of the gifted few: it's a muscle that grows with practice and anyone can grow their creativity muscle. Creativity thrives in environments of encouragement, openness, curiosity, around others who celebrate it. There are two stages to creativity - the idea and the work. The idea involves imagination, wondering what if, playing in one's mind, exploring, combining things, entertaining possibilities. The work is giving an idea legs, making it tangible in the world. Pioneers play with their context, the resources of tradition and culture to make newness in the world that helps people at the edges discover God's kingdom is among them.**

*Genesis 1: 1, 26, 31*

**'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us."**

**"On the sixth day God looked over all that he had made, and saw that it was very good."**





## Evidence of Creativity

*We'll know we have a creative culture, when:*

- \* We feel inspired, our imagination is sparked and we start to play with new ideas.
- \* We feel the excitement of fresh revelation as we are surprised and see new possibilities for our own contexts.
- \* We hear the incoming future and experience hope.
- \* We create and participate in ways that involve the whole person and engage the whole brain.
- \* Gatherings are diverse and reflect the personality of the creator, curator or team of co-creators.

*We'll know we don't have a creative culture, when:*

- \* We feel bored or think 'I have seen this before'.
- \* What we are hearing sounds like the same old predictable tune; we feel stifled - there's no air in the room.
- \* We find ourselves longing for something soulful and wondering 'Is that too much to ask?'
- \* Gatherings reflect a narrow range of ways of engaging, a homogenous culture, are generic or derivative.

# BELONGING

There are three ways to belong which range from weak to strong belonging.

**Members - participating circle.**

*Strong sense of belonging - committed to the purpose and charism and to live out the rhythm and be voting members.*

**Friends - exploring circle.**

*Sense of belonging - identify with the purpose and charism, attend events, signed up to receive comms, perhaps exploring/discerning whether to be members, no signed up commitment.*

**Kindreds - appreciating circle**

*Weak belonging, interested, open access to charism and purpose and rhythm to be inspired by it, draw on ideas and events from time to time. Appreciate the community from more of a distance.*



## **DISCERNMENT PROCESS**

If you are interested in joining as a member or friend  
email: [aspen@churchmissionsociety.org](mailto:aspen@churchmissionsociety.org)

The background of the page features a close-up photograph of several autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and light green, attached to a dark brown branch. The leaves are semi-transparent, allowing the text to be visible through them. The overall aesthetic is natural and organic.

## **ORGANISING**

**Initially Aspen will be incubated within CMS. This will be for a short period while an appropriate structure/container (CIO or whatever) is decided and planned, and a constitution or other such governing document developed. That document will include the purpose, charism, values and rhythm above. It will then be self governed and an ecumenical ecclesial community, i.e. spun out of CMS.**

**There will be a facilitating group of guardians which will be agreed at the first Aspen members meeting. That group of guardians main role is to guard the charism of the community. They will will take on the role of developing the structure, discernment process and so forth to help Aspen in the first phase of its community life.**



## **A word about the name...**

**We playfully explored names and Aspen emerged as a front runner. It is a pioneer species of tree which is to say it is the first to grow in desolate spaces. It is resilient. Like all poplar trees its leaves shimmer which is taken by first nations cultures to symbolise going between heaven and earth. It has a strong relational underground network through its roots. The largest living organism on earth is apparently an Aspen forest in Arizona.**

**It's also one word, and sounds nice to say!**