

# Religion in Life

Stages One to Five



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Stages 1 to 5



The United Church of Canada



L'Église Unie du Canada

## Religion in Life: Stages 1 to 5

Written by Bethe Benjamin-Cameron for the Congregational, Educational, and Community Ministries Unit



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## Overview

The Religion in Life Award is provided to assist in the spiritual growth of young people and is the responsibility of the leaders in the participant's own faith community. It is given to Scouts and Guides who engage in an intentional process of exploring their faith, incorporating faith practices into their personal lives, and sharing their faith in appropriate ways with others.

The United Church of Canada is pleased to support the faith formation and spiritual growth of young people by providing resources to assist faith community leaders in preparing youth to receive the Religion in Life Award. For each stage of the award, program objectives and easy-to-use resources have been developed.

This resource provides at least two 30- to 60-minute sessions (depending on age group) for the three program objectives for each award stage. Sessions could be combined as time allows. Each of the program objectives is included in one of the sessions.



# Stage 1: Yellow

TYPICALLY CUBS AND BROWNIES

## Program Objectives

### Exploring Faith

- to enrich the participants' understanding of the life and work of Jesus
- to discover biblical stories of Jesus sharing meals with others

### Growing Faith

- to consider the sacred aspects of eating together
- to connect the meals Jesus shared, the meals shared in our own lives, and the sacrament of communion
- to learn about hunger in your community

### Sharing Faith

- to offer hospitality to others
- to practise gratitude at mealtime
- to develop an action plan to feed the hungry in your community

## Program Resources

Establish an opening and closing ritual. Invite the group to write prayers that could be used in this time. Have a candle and a Bible on a table to invite God's light and word into your sessions.

### Exploring Faith

#### Session One

#### To enrich the participants' understanding of the life and work of Jesus

Gather the group together and open with this prayer or one of your own:

God of love, be with us in our time together. Help us to understand more about Jesus. Show us how to be more like Jesus and to share your love with others. Amen.

Invite the children to think about Jesus. On a flipchart, write down as many names or adjectives as they can think of for Jesus.

Read or tell the story of the call of Levi (Luke 5:27–32). Invite the children to draw the outline of a house. Along the walls and roof have them write or draw four words that describe Jesus. Have them draw a door on the house. Ask them to write or draw the kinds of people Jesus helped, worked with, or met. Invite them to draw a window and write or draw the ways we can be like Jesus.

Share the drawings if time permits.

Close by singing:

"Jesus, Friend of Little Children" (*Voices United* 340)

"Tell Me the Stories of Jesus" (VU 357)



## Session Two

### To discover biblical stories of Jesus sharing meals with others

Gather the group together and open with this prayer or one of your own:

God, thank you for this time together to think about sharing meals and food. Our bodies need to be fed. So do our spirits. Both like to be fed in the company of others! Help us to savour this time together and enjoy it like a good meal. Amen.

Read John 6:5–14. Discuss the story. As you read, give each child a piece of paper that is either cut in a fish shape or has the outline of a fish drawn on it.

Have the children think of meals we share with family and friends. Ask how they are similar to the meals Jesus shared with the people in the story (e.g., it was a picnic, they ate bread, they sat down together, they said grace). Ask whether they have ever eaten with more than 100 people. Ask whether they have ever had a meal of just bread and fish.

Stand in a circle and toss a ball to one person. Ask, "What would you do to feed 5,000 people?" After answering, the child throws the ball to the next person. Ask everyone to give their own answer and repeat the answer of the person before them. Keep the ball going until each person has had a chance to answer.

In closing, share fish-shaped crackers and juice. Place tablecloths on the floor, offer grace, and share the food.

Grace suggestion:

Thank you, God, for all the meals we've shared with family and friends. Bless this meal. Amen.

## Growing Faith

### Session One

#### To consider the sacred aspects of eating together

#### To connect the meals Jesus shared, the meals shared in our own lives, and the sacrament of communion

When the children arrive, have large blankets or tablecloths on the floor. Invite the children to remove their shoes and sit on the blankets.

Tell the story of Matthew 26:17–28.

Have an agape meal or "love feast."

*Agape* is a Greek word translated in the New Testament as "love" or "charity." The terms "agape meal" or "love feast" were given to an early Christian tradition of sharing an evening communal meal held in connection with communion—an act of remembrance of the Last Supper.

An agape meal or love feast is a meal of thanksgiving and love. It is a communal meal open to all. When this tradition began, rich, poor, friend, family, and stranger would all join together in a community meal shared equally.

Have a meal of grapes, cheese, and bread (foods that were available in Jesus' time). While sitting on the blankets, distribute the food and invite the children to serve one another.

Say a simple grace:

God of love, thank you for this meal. May it nourish us and enable us to share your love. Amen.

As the children share the meal, ask them to share other suggestions for showing love for others.

Remind the children that Jesus gave us a new commandment: that we love one another as he has loved us (John 15:12 or 13:34). Whenever we eat or share a meal together, it's a time to remember Jesus and his commandment and to reflect on how we can live it out.

If time permits, have the group use construction paper to create placemats that express their thoughts, feelings, and understanding of agape meals. Provide clear adhesive plastic to cover the placemats.

For more information about the agape meal, visit [www.amistad-vacaville.org/agape\\_meal.htm](http://www.amistad-vacaville.org/agape_meal.htm).

## Session Two

### To learn about hunger in your community

Review John 6:5–14 with the children. Have props or pictures of bread, fish, a small child, and a large crowd. Invite the group to work together using the props and pictures to tell the story. Ask from where the boy would have gotten the fish and bread. Ask them to consider where the bread and fish came from in Jesus' time.

Invite someone from a local food bank or community agency to talk with the children about the needs and services provided for people in the community.

Check out "Enough" from *A New Day* on the United Church website ([www.united-church.ca/files/sales/ucph/1551344395\\_activity.pdf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/sales/ucph/1551344395_activity.pdf)).<sup>1</sup> Here is an excerpt:

#### Peacing It Together with Today

Canadian activist, Severn Cullis-Suzuki, started to help change the world when she was young. At age 9, she started an environmental group with her friends. At age 13, she made a speech to the first United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Her speech helped shape the *United Nations Earth Charter*. At age 14, she became the published author of *Tell the World: A Young Environmentalist Speaks Out*. Ten years later (with a university degree in evolutionary biology and ecology), Severn is giving speeches all over the world. Her message is clear: Reconnect with the Earth! Find out what you're really eating!

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<sup>1</sup> From "Enough" by Carolyn Pogue from *A New Day: Peacemaking Stories and Activities*, United Church Publishing House, 2005, page 14. Used with permission.

### **The Fridge Quiz**

Share Severn's message with participants: Find out what you're really eating! To discover how advances in science, technology, and rapid transportation are not always used to our best advantage, invite the children to explore what lurks in the kitchen! If there is a refrigerator or other food storage in (or near) your meeting place, invite the children to check the labels on every item of food or drink.

Suggest that they also do their families a favour: Clean out the refrigerator at home and, before putting everything back, check the labels.

Encourage the children to answer the questions below and to share their findings with the group. (If the plan is to share food sources at home, the sharing can take place at a later session.)

1. Where was the food grown?
2. From where was the food shipped?
3. Can all the words on the label be pronounced/understood?
4. Are the fresh products from your own community? Your own country?
5. Which of the products are organic, and which may have been sprayed with pesticides?
6. Is there a possibility of growing food in your yard or house? (Do you already have a garden/allotment?)
7. Discuss your findings with your family members. What surprised you? What surprised them?

## **Sharing Faith**

### **Session One**

**To offer hospitality to others**

**To practise gratitude at mealtime**

Share the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19). Wonder together about what it means to practise hospitality. How did Zacchaeus show hospitality to Jesus? How did Jesus show hospitality to Zacchaeus? Have a large sheet of newsprint ready on which the children can create a graffiti board sharing their thoughts and feelings on hospitality.

Share some table graces with the children. Several can be found on [www.united-church.ca/allages/families/gracesprayers](http://www.united-church.ca/allages/families/gracesprayers), [www.scoutscan.com/spiritual/graces.html](http://www.scoutscan.com/spiritual/graces.html), and [www.gbgm-umc.org/AldersgateUMCMI/graces.html](http://www.gbgm-umc.org/AldersgateUMCMI/graces.html).

The following grace is from *In the Name of Love: A Communion Resource for Congregations* (The United Church of Canada, 2006):<sup>2</sup>

For the food, we thank you. For our family, we thank you. For Jesus, we love you!  
Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> By Bethel Benjamin-Cameron from *In the Name of Love: A Communion Resource for Congregations*, The United Church of Canada, 2006, page 20. Used with permission.

Share the graces with the group and then give each person a file card and invite her or him to write a grace.

Prepare a snack for an upcoming Cub/Brownie meeting:

- Discuss what everyone will make/bring.
- Choose a grace to offer.
- Keep it a surprise from the other Cubs/Brownies until the next meeting.

As an alternative, prepare a special snack for parents when they come to pick up their children.

## **Session Two**

### **To develop an action plan to feed the hungry in your community**

Have magazines available and give each child a paper plate. Have them look through the magazines and cut out words and images that express and reflect the things in their lives they are grateful for.

Have the children share their plates. Invite them to think about how they can share their gratitude and be of service to God by helping others.

Discuss how they can feed the hungry in their community. Write down all the ideas on a large sheet of newsprint. Give each Cub/Brownie a sticker and invite them to place their sticker by the idea they would most like to carry out. Determine the idea with the most stickers and make a plan to carry it out.

Collect packaged food and deliver it to a food bank, or serve a meal at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.

Close in prayer:

God of all, thank you for this special time to be with you. Help us to remember the love, hospitality, and compassion that Jesus showed us. In gratitude for all we have, we promise to offer love, hospitality, and compassion to others. Amen.

## Stage 2: Green

TYPICALLY SCOUTS AND GUIDES

Establish an opening and closing ritual. Invite the group to write prayers that could be used in this time. Have a candle and a Bible on a table to invite God's light and word into your sessions.

### Program Objectives

#### Exploring Faith

- to help the participants become more aware of the world around us and of God as its Creator
- to discover biblical stories of creation and passages praising God for creation
- to reflect on the differences between scientific theories and faith stories of the beginnings of the universe and to acknowledge the value of both

#### Growing Faith

- to study the impact of water in the world and in our faith tradition
- to learn about the practice of baptism in The United Church of Canada
- to consider the role of people in caring for the environment and ways of practising good stewardship
- to hear creation stories from another tradition

#### Sharing Faith

- to practise gratitude for the gift of creation and the many gifts of the earth
- to develop an action plan for environmental care and stewardship

### Program Resources

#### Exploring Faith

##### Session One

**To help the participants become more aware of the world around us and of God as its Creator**

**To discover biblical stories of creation and passages praising God for creation**

Arrange a touch table of objects from nature (e.g., pine cones, sunflower seeds, acorns, seashells, lavender, thyme, stones, or whatever is available to you).

Invite the participants to explore the objects. Have them consider what the objects are, where they have come from, what they have been, and what they will become.

Wonder together about the ways creation is an action word and creation is ongoing and continuous. Ask participants to think about a time they have spent in nature surrounded by creation. Share thoughts, feelings, and stories.

Explore the two biblical stories of creation found in Genesis 1 and 2. Which story do the youth prefer, and why?

Delve into Psalm 104. If available, consider using David Haas's version from *Prayers Before an Awesome God: The Psalms for Teenagers* (St. Mary's Press, 1998).

### **A Word about Psalms**

Psalms were written to express relationship with God. There are psalms of praise, lament, and thanksgiving. Psalms are offered to express joy, excitement, hope, peace, sadness, and even rage. A psalm can express any human condition.

The psalms of our Bible are ancient prayers. Today's psalm can be said, sung, or prayed.

Write a psalm of praise for today's world, honouring creation and praising God for the experience of creating in our lives. Share the psalms with your minister. Possibly they could be included in a worship service celebrating or lifting up creation.

Offer a psalm as a closing prayer to your session.

### **Session Two**

**To reflect on the differences between scientific theories and faith stories of the beginnings of the universe and to acknowledge the value of both**

Invite participants to retell the two creation stories from Genesis as best they can from memory.

A ninth-century Celtic teacher by the name of John Scotus Eriugena, reflecting on the creation story in Genesis, said that it's not a chronological account of the making of the earth but a meditation of the ever-present mystery of creation. In the Celtic tradition, creation is central. The Celts celebrate creation at every turn. God is celebrated as life within life. Celtic spiritualists believe creations are the indwelling of God.

Explore the biblical creation story and the scientific explanation. Draw a line down the middle of a flipchart page and jot notes for both, side by side. Highlight words or ideas that are expressed in both lists. Circle ideas that seem to contrast with the other side.

Remind participants that both sides are expressions and explanations given by people who have gone before us to explain how we got here, using all the knowledge and wisdom available to them at the time.

If time permits, engage in a cosmic walk (for more info, visit [www.threeeyesofuniverse.org/public/cosmicwalks/TheCosmicWalk.html](http://www.threeeyesofuniverse.org/public/cosmicwalks/TheCosmicWalk.html)).

Think of one of the objects on the touch table from last week or choose something else that comes to mind. Prepare a story to explain its creation (how it came into being). Be creative! After all, creativity and creation go hand in hand!

### **Creature Creators and Co-creators**

Anything created by God has the power to create ("Be fruitful and multiply..."). Ask the participants: If you could create a creature, what would it be? What would it look like? What would it do? Give each person some playdough or clay and invite them to sculpt their creation now. Remind them that creating is meditation and prayer.

Share creatures or creation stories and invite each youth to offer one word to describe their thoughts on this session. Write the words down and offer a prayer. The prayer might incorporate all the words, or it might simply list the words and let God arrange the prayer.

## **Growing Faith**

### **Session One**

#### **To study the impact of water in the world and in our faith tradition**

The United Church website has many water-related resources. Check out [www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/waterfocus](http://www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/waterfocus) for great ideas.

Consider using the activities in the *Living Water* rotations ([www.united-church.ca/allages/children/learning/rotation](http://www.united-church.ca/allages/children/learning/rotation)).

Invite a government official or representative to talk with the participants about water availability, treatment, and usage in your community.

### **Closing**

Have a large bowl filled with water. Invite the participants to come forward, put their hand in the water, and dab some water on their forehead or the back of their hand. Invite them to feel the waters of creation washing over them. Have them touch the mystery of God by looking at this transparent liquid, which is a profound gift of God.

### **Session Two**

#### **To learn about the practice of baptism in The United Church of Canada**

Invite a minister or other church leader to your group to discuss worship services. Ask the guest to explain the order of worship and explain what baptism is and how we celebrate it in our faith tradition.

Invite the youth to attend a baptism service if possible. Use *In the Name of Love: Baptism Activities for Children* (The United Church of Canada, 2006) to help participants understand more about baptism. Use one of the congregational ideas, or brainstorm your own way to participate in and celebrate baptism by taking an active role in the service or preparing a gift for people being baptized.

### **Session Three**

#### **To consider the role of people in caring for the environment and ways of practising good stewardship**

Have copies of "A New Creed" for the group to read (see *Voices United*, page 918, or [www.united-church.ca/beliefs/creed](http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/creed)). If possible, consider the *We Are Not Alone, We Live in God's World* edition illustrated by Gary Crawford (United Church Publishing House, 1996). Discuss the images. Ask the youth to choose their favourite image and explain why they chose it.

Ask the group what stewardship themes they see in "A New Creed." Ask them what it says about creation.

Take the youth on a hike in nature. Ask them to try to discover a part of nature for each letter of the alphabet (leave out x, y, and z, or allow creative licence!). Make a list on paper. Refrain from gathering samples.

Recite the Guide/Scout Law and ask how we can fulfill this in our daily living. Write a group prayer starting with the words "God show us" and adding the things the young people would like God's guidance on as they live out the Guide/Scout Law.

Invite participants to explore the United Church website ([www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca)). Ask each youth to explore how the United Church is working toward better use of the earth's resources.

## **Session Four**

### **To hear creation stories from another tradition**

Invite an Aboriginal person (or someone from another cultural or faith tradition) to tell a creation story from his or her tradition and discuss the beliefs behind it as well as practices of relating to and caring for creation.

Before the session, invite the group members to think of some questions they would like to ask this guest. They could also create a thank-you card for the person. Invite the guest to share his or her story and then allow time for questions, both prepared and spontaneous.

Alternatively, read a creation story from another tradition. Consider the similarities and differences between stories from other traditions and those from the Christian tradition. What do the stories teach us about the Creator and about the relationship between humans and the Creator?

## **Sharing Faith**

### **Session One**

#### **To practise gratitude for the gift of creation and the many gifts of the earth**

Read or paraphrase 1 Corinthians 12 and consider the different kinds of gifts God gives to people. Discuss some of the different ways Christians try to show their gratitude to God.

Participate in planning and leading a service of celebration and thanksgiving in your own Scouting/Guiding section/unit, in this group, or for the congregation.

Invite the youth to prepare a service or take part in a worship service to celebrate or offer thanksgiving.

Alternatively, invite the youth to prepare a chant, song, skit, or story to offer at a meeting, showing how we offer gratitude for the gifts of creation.

Explore a hymn praising creation from *Voices United* or *More Voices*. Consider how the hymn offers praise and thanksgiving.



## Session Two

### To develop an action plan for environmental care and stewardship

Learn about an endangered species in Canada.

Engage in an Adopt-a-Highway program.

List the ways your organization is helping creation.

Brainstorm other things you could be doing to help the environment and write them on a flipchart. Have each person put a sticker by the two issues they consider are most important and require action now. Tally the stickers and act on the number one item.

Make a banner celebrating creation and the need to preserve it for your church.

## Stage 3: Blue

TYPICALLY VENTURERS AND PATHFINDERS

Establish an opening and closing ritual. Invite the group to write prayers that could be used in this time. Have a candle and a Bible on a table to invite God's light and word into your sessions.

### Program Objectives

#### Exploring Faith

- to explore various genres of the Bible
- to become aware of what is contained in the two "Testaments"
- to learn about the origins of the Bible and how the canon was developed

#### Growing Faith

- to view the Bible as truthful in a non-literal way
- to understand the cycle of covenant-making and covenant-breaking that occurs in the relationship between God and people
- to acknowledge our own cycle of covenant-making and covenant-breaking with God

#### Sharing Faith

- to relate biblical teachings to current contexts and realities
- to practise gratitude for the gift of the Bible
- to develop an action plan for personal and communal engagement with the Bible

### Program Resources

#### Exploring Faith

##### Session One

##### To explore various genres of the Bible

Provide examples of the different types of writing found in the Bible. Some to consider include:

parable	Luke 10:25–37
biography	Ruth 1:1–18
drama	Song of Solomon 2:8–17
historical	Acts 7:54–60
letter	Philemon 1:1–11
hymn	Psalms 100
prophetic	Amos 7:1–9
saga	Genesis 3:1–13
wisdom	Proverbs 15:17

Which genres resonate with the participants?

Ask participants to choose a story and express it using different genres (e.g., rewrite a hymn as a parable, or a letter as a saga). How does the message change? Or does it?

## **Session Two**

**To become aware of what is contained in the two “Testaments”**

**To learn about the origins of the Bible and how the canon was developed**

The “canon” of the Bible refers to the definitive list of the books that were historically determined to be from divine revelation. The Bible is the book of the church, and hundreds of years have been spent discerning what should be included in it and studying its meaning for human life. Our Bible is made up of two Testaments: the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, which contains 39 books; and the New Testament, or Christian Bible, which contains 27 books. Here are two of the criteria used to determine whether a book belonged in the canon:

- It describes a special relationship with God.
- It is used in worship services by a community of believers guided by the Holy Spirit.

The first books admitted into the canon without much debate were the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) and the four gospels.

The Old Testament includes stories about the Hebrew God Yahweh and a history of the early Israelites. The New Testament writings are the work of early Christians and reflect their beliefs about Jesus. The stories were passed down from generation to generation orally until the end of the first millennium.

Ask the group to brainstorm some contemporary writers who describe a special relationship with God and who help them worship God. They might consider songwriters and musicians, political figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. or Mahatma Gandhi, authors, poets, and so on. You might want to provide them with some writings and music to spark their imagination. If they could add something to the canon, what would it be?

## **Growing Faith**

### **Session One**

**To view the Bible as truthful in a non-literal way**

Read and compare the two versions of the Beatitudes as contained in Matthew 5:1–12 and Luke 6:17–26. Discuss how these presentations affect ways of living.

Frederick Buechner has a metaphor for scripture; he views it as a window. He states that people shouldn't worship the window but should look through it to get a glimpse of the Divine on the other side.

Consider what The United Church of Canada says about the Bible:<sup>3</sup>

The Bible is central to The United Church of Canada. As a source of wisdom, personal prayer, and devotion, we believe the Bible can bring us closer to God. It remains one of our best ways of experiencing God's continuing work of creation and liberation in the world, while offering us forgiveness, healing, and new life in Jesus.

We often refer to a passage as "the Word of God." By this, we mean the writer was inspired by God.

Yet we also know that the various books that make up the Bible are the stories of two ancient communities—ancient Israel and the early Christian movement—trying to be faithful to God under difficult circumstances and that some of what was experienced and written then doesn't fit with our world today. We don't condone slavery, for example, or stone those who commit adultery.

Nevertheless, in its stories and teachings, the Bible has a mysterious power to inform our lives.

From "A Song of Faith":<sup>4</sup>

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word  
passed on from generation to generation  
to guide and inspire,  
that we might wrestle a holy revelation for our time and place  
from the human experiences  
and cultural assumptions of another era.  
God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

The Spirit breathes revelatory power into scripture,  
bestowing upon it a unique and normative place  
in the life of the community.  
The Spirit judges us critically when we abuse scripture  
by interpreting it narrow-mindedly,  
using it as a tool of oppression, exclusion, or hatred.

The wholeness of scripture testifies  
to the oneness and faithfulness of God.  
The multiplicity of scripture testifies to its depth:  
two testaments, four gospels,  
contrasting points of view held in tension—  
all a faithful witness to the One and Triune God,  
the Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love.

Invite discussion among the participants on their own experiences with the Bible and their thoughts on what The United Church of Canada says about the Bible. How does what we say seem similar or different from the beliefs of other Christian communities and other faith traditions?

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<sup>3</sup> From [www.united-church.ca/beliefs/overview](http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/overview).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.united-church.ca/files/beliefs/statements/sof.rtf](http://www.united-church.ca/files/beliefs/statements/sof.rtf).

## Session Two

**To understand the cycle of covenant-making and covenant-breaking that occurs in the relationship between God and people**

**To acknowledge our own cycle of covenant-making and covenant-breaking with God**

Read some stories of covenants God made with people and discuss God's continuous desire to be in relationship. What does God promise in these covenants? What is the responsibility of people in their covenantal relationship with God? What happened to cause the covenant to be established?

- covenant with Noah (Genesis 8:20—9:1)
- covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:1–3, 6–7; 13:14–17; 15; 17:1–14; 22:15–18)
- covenant with Moses (Exodus 19—24)
- covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:8–16)
- the "New Covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31–34 and Luke 22:14–23)

Have the young people make a large paper heart and tear or cut it in half. On one side they write promises they failed to live up to in their lives. On the other side they write ways they can reconcile those promises or ways they can avoid breaking promises in the future.

## Sharing Faith

### Session One

**To relate biblical teachings to current contexts and realities**

**To practise gratitude for the gift of the Bible**

Ask participants to choose three events from the newspaper, cut out articles and clippings, and search the Web for background on the events. How might God be at work in these events? How could we be the hands and feet of God in these events?

Create a group collage of the events, using pictures from magazines to tell the story.

Look at an article and highlight single words that, when read together, make a statement about the situation and God's involvement.

Create a body prayer and offer it in leadership during worship or at a meeting. Invite each participant to come up with an action for her or his thoughts on gratitude for the Bible; for example, place hands on heart or put hands together to symbolize a book. Have the group stand in a circle. The first person does an action and the group mimes it. Then the next person performs an action and the group mimes it. Once everyone has had a chance to introduce an action, in silence (starting with the first person's action) the group performs all the actions. This becomes a moving prayer of thanks.

### Session Two

**To develop an action plan for personal and communal engagement with the Bible**

Engage in praying with scripture, a practice known as *Lectio Divina*:

Choose a text of the scriptures that you wish to pray. Sit comfortably and allow yourself to become silent. You may choose a breathing exercise or centring prayer.

Choose a text and read it slowly and gently. Listen for that small, still voice that says this is the word for you today. In Lectio Divina, God is teaching us to listen. When you have a word or phrase that speaks to you, take the word or phrase deep inside. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Do not be afraid of distractions. Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself that, when they rise up during Lectio Divina, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering to invite you into dialogue with God. Speak to God using words, ideas, images, feelings. When you feel ready, rest and simply be in silence as the experience washes over you and settles into your spirit.

Sometimes you stay with one word; sometimes you return to the text to seek new words or phrases. The important thing is to be in the presence of God by praying the scriptures.

Engage in an African Bible Reflection (see [www.united-church.ca/adultlearning/studygroups/praying](http://www.united-church.ca/adultlearning/studygroups/praying)).

### Other Spiritual Practices

Find a quiet place to be present to God. Have some clay or playdough nearby. Choose a passage of scripture. Read it slowly. Have group members sit in silence for a few moments, savouring any words that jumped out at or stuck with them. Ask them to take a piece of clay and roll it in their fingers, moulding it into whatever comes to mind. It might be a symbol or object representing what you were reading and their response to it. It might be something that manifested itself deep inside them, and the clay has given it voice to be expressed.

Mandalas are an ancient meditation tool. The word *mandala* comes from ancient Sanskrit and means "circle" or "wholeness." Mandalas symbolize wholeness. Mandalas can be a spiritual snapshot of where our spirit is in the present moment. They can help us connect with our spirit and articulate through colour and drawing how we are feeling right now. When we contemplate and relax, this allows our inner self to be expressed outwardly.<sup>5</sup>

Visit [www.antelopehope.ca](http://www.antelopehope.ca) for mandalas you can print and colour. Or have participants simply draw a large circle on a sheet of paper and create their own mandalas.

Choose a scripture passage and read it slowly. Sit for a moment in silence and read it again. This time, ask participants to imagine they are in the story. In this moment, who would they be? Who do they identify with? For instance, in the parable of the lost coin, do they feel like the woman, her friends, or Jesus telling the story?

Determine a favourite Bible story and develop a lesson plan for it. Present this lesson to another group, such as a Cub pack or a children's Sunday school class.

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<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is from [www.antelopehope.ca/mandalas.htm](http://www.antelopehope.ca/mandalas.htm). Used by permission.

## Stages 4 and 5: Red and Purple

TYPICALLY VENTURERS/ROVERS, SENIOR BRANCHES, AND ADULT LEADERS

### Program Objectives

#### Exploring Faith

- to learn about the Trinity: God the Creator, God the Christ and Redeemer, and God the Spirit and Sustainer
- to become aware of the structure of The United Church of Canada

#### Growing Faith

- to gain some basic knowledge about other monotheistic faiths (e.g., Judaism and Islam) and determine the commonalities and differences between them and Christianity
- to understand something of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world
- to study the United Church's involvement in some sociopolitical issues

#### Sharing Faith

- to reflect on one's own faith and how it affects behaviour and thinking about life's complex issues
- to appreciate the significance of church membership
- to develop an action plan for engagement with a political or social issue

### Program Resources

Establish an opening and closing ritual. Invite the group to write prayers that could be used in this time. Have a candle and a Bible on a table to invite God's light and word into your sessions.

#### Exploring Faith

##### Session One

**To learn about the Trinity: God the Creator, God the Christ and Redeemer, and God the Spirit and Sustainer**

Using clay or playdough, have participants create symbols for God the Creator, God the Christ and Redeemer, and God the Spirit and Sustainer. As they finish each image, they will make a new image from the same clay. What names, images, and feelings rise up when they think of these three entities?

Consider the United Church's "A Statement of Faith" (1940) and compare it with "A Song of Faith" (2006) (you can find both statements at [www.united-church.ca/beliefs/statements](http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/statements)). How have images of God, Christ, and Spirit changed or remained the same?

Have copies of these statements of faith from the United Church website. Explore their declarations using open-space exercises. Ask questions relating to the faith statements, and invite the participants to move from one side of the room to the other to indicate their agreement with them.

## **Session Two**

### **To become aware of the structure of The United Church of Canada**

Learn more about the church structure at [www.united-church.ca/organization/governance/structure](http://www.united-church.ca/organization/governance/structure).

Invite someone from your presbytery or Conference to come to a gathering to talk about the church structure. Make sure participants are made aware of the way they can participate in church life at levels beyond the congregational.

Invite participants to describe the organization of the congregational, presbytery, Conference, and national levels of The United Church of Canada without using words. They could draw symbols or use their bodies to symbolize the various structures and organization.

Learn about some work the United Church is doing around the world through ministry partnerships.

## **Growing Faith**

### **Session One**

#### **To gain some basic knowledge about other monotheistic faiths (e.g., Judaism and Islam) and determine the commonalities and differences between them and Christianity**

Invite a guest speaker from a Jewish or Muslim community in your area. Before the presentation, have the group members consider questions they might have for the guest. What would they most want the guest to know about their own church?

Alternatively, check out [www.united-church.ca/partners/interfaith](http://www.united-church.ca/partners/interfaith) for more information about the church's work with various faith communities.

Using a flipchart, on the left side of the page list aspects participants feel these faith communities have in common. On the right side of the page, list aspects they do not have in common. Invite participants to discuss their discoveries. Are there more similarities or differences?

Suggest that understanding and accepting diversity are the keys to peaceful partnerships.

### **Session Two**

#### **To understand something of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world**

#### **To study the United Church's involvement in some socio-political issues**

Research and report on how the United Church is dealing with two current socio-political issues.

Read John 14, 15, and 16 and identify areas in which the work of the Holy Spirit is apparent in the world (with special reference to the research above).

Caring for one another was central to Jesus' teachings and actions. He was engaged in feeding the hungry, satisfying the thirsty, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting those in prison, and he encouraged his followers to do the same.



The United Church of Canada believes we have a responsibility to strengthen one another to work, through God's grace, for a better world. In order to fulfill this responsibility, we cooperate with other churches, faith traditions, and people of goodwill to eliminate poverty and protect those who are most vulnerable. For more information, see [www.united-church.ca/justice](http://www.united-church.ca/justice).

For detailed information on the faith convictions of The United Church of Canada, see

- Articles of Faith in the *Basis of Union*, the founding document of our church (1925) ([www.united-church.ca/history/overview/basisofunion](http://www.united-church.ca/history/overview/basisofunion))
- "A New Creed," a brief and well-loved statement of our relationships with God and with one another (1968, with later revisions) ([www.united-church.ca/beliefs/creed](http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/creed))
- "A Song of Faith," a contemporary statement of our faith (2006) ([www.united-church.ca/beliefs/statements/songfaith](http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/statements/songfaith))

## Sharing Faith

### Session One

**To reflect on one's own faith and how it affects behaviour and thinking about life's complex issues**

Consider what the United Church's "New Creed" means by the phrase "to seek justice and resist evil."

Invite the group into a time of guided meditation.

Have participants sit comfortably on straight-backed chairs or on thick cushions on the floor. They should loosen any tight clothing. Dim the lights, light a candle, and put on soft music—whatever will help create a sacred, centred space for them in the next few moments. Pausing between each phrase, slowly and deliberately say the following:

Breathe deeply. Savour each breath.

Breathe in calmness. Breathe out confusion.

Breathe in clarity. Breathe out chaos.

Breathe in newness. Breathe out staleness.

Breathe in openness. Breathe out judgment.

Breathe in possibility. Breathe out obstacles.

Keep your back straight and relax your shoulders. Check to make sure your body is comfortable. Try to relax your whole body. You may choose to close your eyes. Empty your mind as you explore in this meditative quiet time.

Bring your awareness to your breath. Notice how it flows in and out. Bring your full awareness to how the breath feels as it moves in and out of your body. When you feel your awareness wander, gently bring it back to the breath, focusing on how it moves in and out of your body.

When you feel comfortable and are able to keep your awareness on your breath, follow your breath as it enters your body. Follow it into your lungs and be aware of it as it enters your body. Focus on your belly rising and falling as the life-giving air flows through you. Become aware of your whole body as the air nourishes it with each new breath.

Try to maintain your awareness of the body. If the mind wanders, simply bring it back to focusing on sitting and breathing.

Think about the phrase “to seek justice and resist evil.” What does that phrase mean to you?

Take one word at a time. When and where in your life are you a seeker? Where are the places in your life that there is justice? Where are the places in your life that you resist? Where are the places in your life that you resist evil? How have you lived it out? What more can you do in your life to seek justice and resist evil, in your church, in your community, in our world?

Hear the four words “seek justice and resist evil.” Which one rises up or jumps out at you? Hold that word deep inside you. Feel the word in that quiet, still place deep inside where God resides. Sit with your word for a moment and just let it wash over you. Be still deep inside and listen to what God is saying to you about this word.

When you feel ready, take three deep cleansing breaths. Stretch your arms over your head if you are able and bring your awareness back to the room you are sitting in.

Discuss what the participants experienced and discerned about the phrase.

## Session Two

**To appreciate the significance of church membership**

**To develop an action plan for engagement with a political or social issue**

Consider some of the needs of your community and choose one on which to take action. Report on the experience to another group—either a Scouts/Guides group or a church group. To enhance your report, create a PowerPoint presentation of images that could be shown in a service of worship during the offering time. Create a poster or display that could be placed in the narthex of your church.

Research what it means to be a member of The United Church of Canada. Use *The (Un)Official Handbook of The United Church of Canada* to learn more about the church from a humorous perspective (see [www.united-church.ca/sales/ucph/9781551341590](http://www.united-church.ca/sales/ucph/9781551341590)). Describe the organization of the congregational, presbytery, Conference, and national levels of The United Church of Canada, and describe some work the United Church is now doing through ministry partnerships.

Play “Who Wants to Be a United Church Member?”

1. Which are the three founding United Church denominations?  
Congregationalist  
Amish

Methodist

Druid

Presbyterian

2. What is the United Church motto?

They will know we are Christian by our love

That all may be one

Jesus is the light of the world

3. What is the elected leader of the United Church called?

First Minister

Moderator

Pope

Commander

*Bonus point:* Who is the current leader?

4. How many United Church Conferences are there?

7

10

13

18

5. Which book contains statements of faith and regulations for governance and conduct in the United Church?

The Bible

*The Manual*


*Robert's Rules of Order*

The Torah

*Bonus point:* What colour cover does the latest version have?



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