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# *Our Faith*

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN BELIEFS WITH THE UNITING CHURCH



**Discussion Guide  
for Video Series**

**Craig Mitchell**

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## ***Our Faith***

Christian faith is a shared faith. To follow Jesus Christ is to be part of a community who share a common life, a common story and a common journey in faith. We live, learn, worship and serve alongside others, young and old, from varied backgrounds and cultures. Imagine a bushland where plants of many types and sizes flourish together. To quote educator John Roberto, the church is a faith-forming ecosystem.

***Our Faith*** is a six part video and discussion series exploring core beliefs of the Christian faith through Creeds, Scripture, and the perspective of the Uniting Church in Australia.

This series is designed for people who are new to Christian faith or new to the church. It is intended for people exploring faith and for those preparing for baptism and confirmation as young people or adults. Baptism is an ecumenical Christian sacrament, so this series addresses beliefs that are central to the faith of all Christian churches. We will also examine the Scriptures and the Creeds.

The series may also help introduce people to some faith perspectives of the Uniting Church (UCA). At the joining of three denominations in 1977, certain unifying beliefs were expressed in the church's *Basis of Union*. The series also references this guiding statement.

To be a disciple is about more than beliefs or ideas. It has been said that being Christian involves belonging, believing and behaving. This series is an invitation to go deeper in what it means to be a disciple who expresses faith in action and seeks to grow deeper in their relationship with God.

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# Overview



## ***Believing in God***

We name God as Creator, Father, and Trinity. But how do we know who God is? What shapes our belief in God? What do the church's core statements of belief say about who God is?



## ***Believing in Jesus Christ***

To be Christian is to follow Jesus Christ. Why is Jesus central for Christian beliefs and Christian living? How do his life, death and resurrection shape our lives today?



## ***Believing in the Holy Spirit***

God is Spirit. The Holy Spirit is active in Creation, among the Hebrew people, in the life of Jesus Christ, and in the early church. How is the Holy Spirit present in our lives today?



## ***Receiving the Scriptures***

We receive the Scriptures as unique, prophetic and apostolic testimony of God's presence and action in history. How do the Scriptures guide our lives as the people of God today? How do we study and pray with them?



## ***Living as God's Church***

The church is a people, a body, a building. The church is salt and light, a household, a priesthood. The church is a vine and branches, a message, an ambassador. What does it mean for us to live as God's church, a resurrection people?



## ***Serving God's Mission***

The God who calls also sends. God's purposes for Creation are bigger than us, and bigger than the church. To follow Jesus is to serve God's larger purpose. How is our service of God shaped by the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ?

# How to use this series

## Video Series

This Discussion Guide is based on a series of six 7 to 8 minute videos produced by the Uniting Church in Australia's national Assembly. The videos are available for free use and download. They are designed for use in groups where their content can be discussed. We do not recommend that they be screened in a setting where discussion is not possible.

The videos are designed to open up topics, to uncover them rather than cover them. They are a springboard for enquiry.

## Group Sessions

The six group sessions in this booklet are designed to accompany the videos. Each session lasts for 75-90 minutes depending on the activities that you choose. Times for each activity are estimates only.

Feel free to adapt the sessions to your purposes. The sessions are designed for older youth (16 years) to adult. They are intended for use with people who have already had at least some connection with faith or the church. This is not a resource for enquirers. Some familiarity with the Bible and Christian language is assumed.

Each session includes these sections:

**Gathering** - take a few minutes to pause and gather with prayer.

**Group-building** - deeper knowing leads to deeper sharing.

**God's Story** - what can we learn from the Bible, the Creeds and Christian beliefs?

**Our Story** - what can we learn from the life and faith of the church today?

**My Story** - what does this have to do with my life, my faith, my discipleship?

**Closing Reflection** - a final reflective prayer activity

**Action** - how might we practice our beliefs?

**Journalling** - an invitation for further reflection at home during the week

**Resources** - additional materials for leaders and participants

## VIDEO CONTRIBUTORS

### Speakers

Rev Dave Williamson  
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Rev Dr Geoff Thompson  
Rev Dr Paul Dongwon Goh  
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Used with permission

### IMAGE CREDITS

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Other images as credited in the video series.

The sessions involve a combination of teaching and exploration. People are less likely to explore their questions if they feel that they are expected to know the right answers. This series is based on inquiry more than instruction. Please encourage open discussion and be accepting of wherever people are on their faith journey. This is also a time to offer explanations of Christian beliefs. The session plans leave it open for you to offer this guidance as needed. The group leader will need to have a good understanding of Christian beliefs and the Uniting Church's *Basis of Union*.

Each session is interactive, with discussion and activities. The session outline indicates where to watch the video. You will need to read through each session outline carefully in order to prepare.

Each session offers the option of personal journalling following the section. We encourage you to offer participants this option.

## **Baptism & Confirmation**

These sessions may be used as preparation for baptism and confirmation for youth and adults. The sessions will only comprise part of the formation that is needed. The series does not go into detail regarding the sacraments and church membership. You will need to provide this education.

In the Uniting Church, confirmation is seen as a reaffirmation of baptism. It is not a graduation to adult faith. Rather it recognises our beginning in faith. People may continue to reaffirm their baptism throughout their lives.

Both baptism and confirmation of baptism are seen as celebrations of God's grace rather than our achievements. God does not love us because our understanding of doctrine is correct, nor is our faith fully formed when we are baptised. In adult baptism as in confirmation, we declare God's grace in Jesus Christ and people respond. We invite people to declare their faith as people who are 'one the way' like ourselves. As the church, we confirm that we have seen the Spirit at work in their lives, and ask them to join us a pilgrims who are still growing in our own faith.

Preparation for baptism and confirmation is best done slowly and in the company of mentors. By spending time in the company of the people of God, we are formed in faith. Discipleship is about *being* as well as *doing*. You are invited to see this series as part of a larger communal journey of faith formation.



# 1. Believing in God

## SESSION THEMES

- God as Creator, as Father, other metaphors for God, God as Trinity
- Revelation - how do we come to know God?
- Belief and faith - how are beliefs formed?

## YOU WILL NEED

Session Handouts 1.1 to 1.5, fine coloured felt pens, Bibles, photos of Creation and/or the stars (search at <https://pexels.com>), newsprint or a whiteboard, a small mirror.

In several sessions we will be referring to *The Apostles' Creed*, *The Nicene Creed* and the Uniting Church's *Basis of Union*. The Creeds are included as Handout 1.1.

We will be using quotations from the *Basis of Union*, but if you want to give people a complete copy, you can download it here - <https://resources.uca.org.au/images/stories/Regulations/2012/Basis1992.pdf>

This session includes reference to the Preamble to the Constitution of the Uniting Church. This is Handout 1.4.

## 1. GATHERING (3 minutes)

Place the photos of Creation in the centre of the group.

Read Psalm 8, inviting people around the group to read a verse each, with a pause between each verse.

Invite people to look at their palms as you pray:

*God who made human hands  
and shimmering stars,  
oceans deep and mountain peaks,  
all that crawls and swims and flies*



*You are mystery to us,  
vaster than galaxies  
yet seeking relationship -  
to be at home among us.*

*You invite us to know  
whose we are and  
to whom we belong  
to live in lifelong communion  
with you.*

*We are in awe of you  
left speechless by your works  
and we worship you.  
Amen.*

## 2. GROUP-BUILDING ACTIVITY (10 minutes)

These six sessions are an invitation to explore Christian faith together. This is an opportunity to see faith as involving head, heart and hands. While we will explore beliefs, we will also reflect on how we live as disciples in relation to our beliefs. No doubt your beliefs have changed as you have grown and matured, just as your experience of God has matured. These sessions are an invitation to learn from our Christian tradition, including the Bible and the Creeds, and also to learn from one another.

May we agree to be open to listen to one another, to have the courage to share our questions and doubts, to live with and even learn from our differences, and in all this to listen to God's Spirit leading us to deeper faith. We believe that faith is nurtured and sustained in community, and that Christ is present among us.

In each session we will be exploring

**God's Story** - what can we learn from the Scriptures and the Creeds of the church?

**Our Story** - what can we learn from the life and faith of the church?

**My Story** - what are we discovering in our own faith and lives as Christians?

In each session we will also be watching a 7 to 8 minute video exploring an area of Christian faith from a Uniting Church perspective. [You can, if you wish, invite people to watch these at home prior to the session.]

### **Discuss**

*Where is a particular outdoor place in which you have had a deep sense of God's presence?*

*Describe the place and your experience.*

### **3. MY STORY (15-20 minutes)**

Distribute Handout 1.2 - *My Faith Journey*.

Today's session is about what we believe about God and how we come to know God. What a huge topic! We could never cover it all so instead let's uncover some of it. Let's begin with an opportunity to get to know one another better.

You're invited to reflect on how you have grown in faith and come to know God.

*What are some of the ways in which your faith has been nurtured?*

*Who has been important in that process?*

*What groups or activities were significant?*

*What places have been special in your journey?*

*What parts of the Bible have been significant?*

Take 5 to 7 minutes to write or draw in the squares on Handout 1.2 using the felt pens. And if there's something that doesn't fit one of those four areas, put it down anyway.

*In small groups of 2 or 3 people, share some of your story.*

Leaders will need to monitor the time so that it doesn't go too long and each person has an opportunity to speak. If people have many things on their sheets of paper, you could invite them to speak about one thing from each quadrant. Allow 10-15 minutes for this.

### **4. GOD'S STORY (20-25 minutes)**

**VIDEO** - Watch the video "Believing in God" (Duration 6 mins 49 seconds)

Each time you watch one of the videos, encourage people to take notes if they wish.

The video covers some big themes!

- How do we come to know who God is?
- What do Christians believe about the nature of God?
- What does it mean to call God "Father?" Is this the only way to speak of God?
- What does it mean to name God as Trinity?

As a group, brainstorm two lists on newsprint or whiteboard:

1. *What are the ways that we come to know who God is?*
2. *What do you know of the characteristics or attributes of God?*

Spend some time talking about questions raised for you by the video.

### **The Creeds**

Look at Handout 1.1 together. Handout 1.2 is provided as a reference that you may choose to distribute for later reading.

*What names are given to God in the Creeds?*

## Discuss

*What names, images or metaphors for God have been important in your faith journey?*

Leaders may wish to write or draw these on a whiteboard.

## 5. OUR STORY (15 minutes)

In 2009, the Uniting Church's national Assembly adopted a revised Preamble to the church's Constitution. The Constitution had been approved for the establishment of the Uniting Church in 1997. The changes included the recognition of Australia's First Peoples, and acknowledgement of God's presence among the First Peoples and the land prior to European colonisation. The Preamble also acknowledges the injustices of colonisation. The words of the revised Preamble came from long and considered discussion with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. An important part of the Preamble is the declaration that God who created our world is always present throughout our world.

Distribute Handout 1.3. Invite people to read sections 1, 2 and 3.

## Discuss

*How does the Preamble challenge or affirm your understandings of who God is and where God has been active in the world?*

*How does this kind of belief in God challenge or affirm the way that we live today?*

*How do you see our beliefs in God as Creator, Father and Trinity in life of the church?*

*For example*

- in our worship
- in our personal prayers
- in our tending of God's Creation

*In what ways does your congregation or faith community help to shape your belief, your faith, your discipleship?*

## 6. CLOSING (3 minutes)

Place the photos from the start of the session back in the centre of the group.

Song - *God of Creation*- Handout 1.5.

These song lyrics were written to the melody for *Morning Has Broken*. You can read them or sing them as a reflection about God as Trinity. A video of the song is here: <https://vimeo.com/461406456>  
The song is published in *Deeper Water* by Craig Mitchell, Mediacom Education, 2021.

Choose a Trinitarian prayer to say together. Here is one option.

*Bless us, God the Father,  
you that have created us.*

*Bless us, God the Son,  
you that have set us free.*

*Bless us, God the Holy Spirit,  
you that make us holy.*

*O blessed Trinity,  
keep us in body, soul and spirit,  
to life eternal.*

Weimarischer Gesangbuch, 1873.

## 7. ACTION

This week you are invited to consider how our daily lives as disciples contribute to the tending of God's Creation. How does our response to God as Creator include living responsibly on the planet?

Here is an activity for you to do at home.

There is an online calculator to help your household consider what kind of impact your lifestyle has on the environment. Have a go and it and see what you discover.

<https://www.wwf.org.au/get-involved/change-the-way-you-live/ecological-footprint-calculator>

AND/OR

Take notice during worship services of what names or images for God are used and when. Talk with your minister about this.

Report back to the group next week about your activities.



## 8. JOURNALLING AT HOME

Each week you will be invited to find time during the week to write in a journal. Over time, this will grow as a record of your faith journey.'

This week, reflect back on the session and make a note of things like

- new insights
- things you want to affirm
- questions to keep thinking about
- choices you might make
- discipleship habits or practices to develop
- connections with other people
- things you want to say to God or that God might be saying to you

## 9. REFERENCES

Leith, John (ed), *Creeds of the Churches*, John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1982.

Lochman, Jan Milic, *The Faith We Confess*, Fortres Press: Philadelphia, 1984.

*Walking Together* is a set of learning resources designed to help Uniting Church members explore the Covenant between the UCA and Aboriginal and Islander peoples. <https://assembly.uca.org.au/walkingtogether>

The videos feature Rev Denise Champion speaking about the revised Preamble to the Constitution. Check out Video #2 and Video #5 here - <https://vimeo.com/showcase/3459179>

Dave Williamson refers to a poem by Christopher Fry, *A Sleep of Prisoners* <https://gratefulness.org/resource/a-sleep-of-prisoners/>



## ***The Apostles' Creed***

I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ,  
God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge  
the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

## ***The Nicene Creed***

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit  
and the Virgin Mary  
and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified  
under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the  
Father  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshipped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic  
and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

## ***My Faith Journey***

<p>People who nurtured my faith</p>	<p>Experiences which nurtured my faith</p>
<p>Stories which shaped my faith</p>	<p>Places where my faith was nurtured</p>

## The Creeds

Both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed speak of God as **Father**, God as **Creator** or **Maker** of heaven and earth, and also of God as **Trinity**.

The origin of the Apostles' Creed is unknown, but it is very similar to a creed from the theologian Hippolytus in 215 AD, and other creeds from the these first few centuries of the Christian church. By the third century, its form was fairly standard in western Europe. The Nicene Creed was approved by a council of churches in Nicea in 325 AD.

For hundreds of years both statements have been seen across mainstream Christian churches as foundational statements of faith. We may struggle with some of their ancient language today, but they have been core affirmations of Christian faith across time and place.

Have a look at the first section of each Creed. What they say about God as Father and Creator seems in one sense basic and straightforward.

But of course, in our society, many more people believe in "something out there" than attend church. Belief in a god or gods, or a sense of the sacred, is more widespread than belief in the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Creeds name a God who is known - as the sole author of Creation, as a parent of all humankind, and as Three-in-One.

So, the rather general question "What do we know or believe about God?" is first answered with "God can be known and God wants to be known!" Here we find two remarkable affirmations of Christian faith - that there is a God, Creator, beyond our comprehension, and that this God seeks intimate relationship with Creation, as a parent with his or her children.

The mystery of God, indeed, the mystery of existence, is the mystery of communion of God with all, all with God. The heart of Christian life is the encounter with a personal god who makes possible both our union with God and communion with each other.

The mystery of God is revealed to be a matter of invitation and incorporation into divine life through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit; at the same time it is also invitation and incorporation into new relationship with each other, as we are gathered together by the Spirit into the body of Christ.

Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

## *The Preamble*

The Preamble to the Uniting Church's Constitution says

As the Church believes God guided it into union so it believes that God is calling it to continually seek a renewal of its life as a community of First Peoples and of Second Peoples from many lands, and as part of that to

### RECOGNISE THAT

1. When the churches that formed the Uniting Church arrived in Australia as part of the process of colonisation they entered a land that had been created and sustained by the Triune God they knew in Jesus Christ.

2. Through this land God had nurtured and sustained the First Peoples of this country, the Aboriginal and Islander peoples, who continue to understand themselves to be the traditional owners and custodians (meaning 'sovereign' in the languages of the First Peoples) of these lands and waters since time immemorial.

3. The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.

4. Some members of the uniting churches approached the First Peoples with good intentions, standing with them in the name of justice; considering their well being, culture and language as the churches proclaimed the reconciling purpose of the Triune God found in the good news about Jesus Christ.

5. Many in the uniting churches, however, shared the values and relationships of the emerging colonial society including paternalism and racism towards the First Peoples. They were complicit in the injustice

that resulted in many of the First Peoples being dispossessed from their land, their language, their culture and spirituality, becoming strangers in their own land.

6. The uniting churches were largely silent as the dominant culture of Australia constructed and propagated a distorted version of history that denied this land was occupied, utilised, cultivated and harvested by these First Peoples who also had complex systems of trade and inter-relationships. As a result of this denial, relationships were broken and the very integrity of the Gospel proclaimed by the churches was diminished.

7. From the beginning of colonisation the First Peoples challenged their dispossession and the denial of their proper place in this land. In time this was taken up in the community, in the courts, in the parliaments, in the way history was recorded and told, and in the Uniting Church in Australia.

8. In 1985 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia formed the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

9. In 1988 the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress invited the other members of the Church to join in a solemn act of covenanting before God.

10. After much struggle and debate, in 1994 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia discovered God's call, accepted this invitation and entered into an ever deepening covenantal relationship with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. This was so that all may see a destiny together, praying and working together for a fuller expression of our reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

AND THUS the Church celebrates this Covenantal relationship as a foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation.

## God of Creation

Tune: "Morning Has Broken"

God of Creation  
Gentle life-giver  
Present at birth, and  
all through our days  
Author of sunrise  
Song in the night sky  
Here in this place, we  
offer our praise

Jesus, Companion  
teacher and healer  
friend of the grieving,  
suffering, the poor  
Stand with your people  
whisper among us  
promise of mercy  
goodness for all

Spirit of Comfort  
blow through Creation  
stir up new life, breathe  
peace through our world  
Healer of hearts, and  
hope for tomorrow  
weave all our sorrows  
into new dawn

Here we give thanks for  
life in its fullness  
blessings received  
your gifts to us all  
Make us a people  
filled with compassion  
selflessly giving  
serving your world

# 2. Believing in Jesus Christ

## SESSION THEMES

- Who is Jesus for us? - in history, in worship, in Scripture, in our witness
- Jesus' Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection
- The call to discipleship

## YOU WILL NEED

Bibles, pens and paper, a recording of a song which speaks about Jesus, and a well-known song of praise about Jesus.

In several sessions we will be referring to *The Apostles' Creed*, *The Nicene Creed* and the Uniting Church's *Basis of Union*. The Creeds are included as Handout 1.1.

We will be using quotations from the Basis of Union, but if you want to give people a complete copy, you can download it here - <https://resources.uca.org.au/images/stories/Regulations/2012/Basis1992.pdf>

### 1. GATHERING (6 minutes)

Open in prayer.

Play all or part of a song that speaks about Jesus.

#### Discuss

*What are your favourite worship songs that speak of Jesus Christ?*

### 2. GROUP-BUILDING ACTIVITY (10 minutes)

**VIDEO** - Watch the *Lumo* series video of the introduction to the Gospel of John (6 mins 24 secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWAAAsMFso0&list=PLcJVluhI8isKTlrKVXNbNdeehNM079ktG>



#### Discuss

*What stands out to you from this presentation of the beginning of John's Gospel?*

### 3. GOD'S STORY (20 minutes)

Let's imagine that we are historians seeking to piece together a picture of Jesus of Nazareth from various sources, ancient and modern. Each person or pair will have a different source to look at. Spend 5-7 minutes looking at the text and then 15 minutes discussing your answers to the questions as a whole group.

- The Apostles' Creed
- The Nicene Creed
- Bible: Luke 4:14-30
- Bible: John 6:16-21, 35-39
- The Basis of Union, Paragraph 3

*What words or phrases stand out to you?*

*What does the text say to you about Jesus ?*

*What does the text say about God?*

*What does the text say about Jesus' mission?*

### 4. OUR STORY (20 minutes)

**VIDEO** - Watch the video "Believing in Jesus Christ" (Duration 7 min 33 seconds)

Discuss the understandings of Jesus that Geoff Thompson mentions:

- the *creedal* Jesus
- the *affectionate* Jesus
- the *historical* Jesus
- the *biblical* Jesus

*How do you react to these different views or lenses through which we might see Jesus?*

*How do these relate to your own experience and understanding of Jesus Christ?*

*The Basis of Union speaks about Jesus Christ as "the risen, crucified One". Talk about this phrase and what it might say to us about Jesus' crucifixion and his resurrection.*

## 5. MY STORY (10-15 minutes)

Speaking of *The Apostle's Creed*, theologian Ben Myers says

"At the centre of the Christian faith is not an idea or a theory or even a vision of life but the name of a person, Jesus Christ. Our faith centres on personal attachment to him." (*The Apostles' Creed*, Lexham Press, 2018.)

Distribute Handout 2.1.

Invite people to spend 7-10 minutes reflecting on who Jesus Christ is for them at this point in their lives - Jesus' life, his death, his rising, his presence, and his example for us today.

Ask people to write their reflections on the handout.

Next, invite people to write their thoughts or feelings as a personal prayer to Christ. This can include writing questions that they have - these are worth working through. Use the back of the sheet if more space is needed.

Come back together as a group. Ask people, if they are willing, to share something of what they have written with the whole group.

### Discuss

*Are there particular questions that you would like to explore further with the group?*

## 7. CLOSING (3 minutes)

Read The Apostles Creed together aloud.

Close by singing or listening to a song of praise about Jesus Christ.

## 6. ACTION

This week you are invited to be aware of what it means to live with Jesus as your example each day. What might help you to remember this each morning and during the day?

AND/OR

Interview 2 or 3 members of your congregation or faith community with the questions on Handout 2.1. Report back to the group at your next meeting on what you discovered.

## 8. JOURNALLING AT HOME

Take time to journal about your experience of living with Jesus as your example.

Is there a difference between simply copying or imitating Jesus, and allowing his life within us to become the example?

## 9. REFERENCES

*A Contemporary Creed* - <https://enizonta.blogspot.com/2016/01/a-confession-of-churchs-faith.html>

This is Rev Dr Geoff Thompson's expression of a creed which speaks more about the life of Jesus than do the ancient creeds.

Article - Considering 12 Sides of Jesus  
<https://sojo.net/articles/considering-12-sides-jesus>

Here are some depictions of Jesus in art from different cultural perspectives: <https://trendspost.com/depictions-of-jesus-around-the-world/>

<https://thejesusquestion.org/2011/12/25/nativity-paintings-from-around-the-world/>



## Who is Jesus Christ in my life?

"At the centre of the Christian faith is not an idea or a theory or even a vision of life but the name of a person, Jesus Christ. Our faith centres on personal attachment to him."

Ben Myers, *The Apostles' Creed*, Lexham Press, 2018.

What is it about Jesus that  
inspires your faith?

What impact does Christ have  
on how you live?

How is your worship of or  
devotion towards Jesus Christ  
most deeply expressed?

What gives you  
a sense of being  
connected to Christ?

**Prayer**

# 3. Believing in the Holy Spirit

## SESSION THEMES

- The Holy Spirit in the Bible and with Jesus
- The Spirit in the Church
- The experience of the Spirit in our lives today

## YOU WILL NEED

A computer with internet access to show the movie listed below, a whiteboard or newsprint and pen, the Gospel of John quotes from Handout 3.1 cut into separate strips (at least one for each person) **Spirit Image** cards from the handout cut into separate cards,

We will be using quotations from the *Basis of Union*, but if you want to give people a complete copy, you can download it here - <https://resources.uca.org.au/images/stories/Regulations/2012/Basis1992.pdf>

### 1. GATHERING (3 minutes)

Play part of this movie of the wind blowing through the trees for about a minute.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lWULd19LvaY>

After a minute, invite people to close their eyes as the movie continues. As it plays, ask them to imagine themselves in a windy place that they enjoy.

While people's eyes remain closed, say this prayer.

*Breath of God,  
breeze into our hearts  
and minds as we meet  
Stir our spirits,  
fan our flickering faith into flame  
Fill us, free us.  
Send us, be with us  
As Pentecost people  
empowered by Your Spirit. Amen.*



### 2. GROUP-BUILDING ACTIVITY (5-7 minutes)

*What windy places came to mind as you watched and listened to the movie?*

*When and where do you find the wind to be exhilarating?*

### 3. GOD'S STORY (20-25 minutes)

*What are some of the images and metaphors for the Holy Spirit in the Bible?*

(Depending on the group, you may need to mention some of these symbols - wind, breath, dove, fire, water. Some actions signify the Spirit - eg. anointing with oil. Some other words are often associated with the Spirit. eg. power.)

*Which of these images do you find compelling?*

**VIDEO** - Watch the video "Believing in the Holy Spirit". (Duration 8 mins 12 seconds)

*What grabs your attention in this video?*

*The speakers in the video speak of the Spirit's presence*

- at the dawn of Creation
- with the Hebrew people
- at Jesus' conception
- at Jesus baptism

- in Jesus' ministry
- on the day of Pentecost
- in the early church
- in the church today
- as a bringer of God's new Creation

What do the speakers say that the Spirit does throughout these times? Together, make a note of some of the words or phrases from the video that stood out to you.

What questions did the video raise for you? Discuss your questions.

If you have additional time, look over the Creeds to see what they say about the Holy Spirit.

#### 4. OUR STORY (15 minutes)

"The Spirit fulfils the Creator's original plan by bringing forth a universal community whose boundaries are as wide as the world. The Spirit broods over the chaos of human nature, lovingly piecing the fragments back together so that together we form an image of the Creator. (Ben Myers, *The Apostles' Creed*. Lexham Press. 2018.)

In the video, Tim Hein refers to the places where the Holy Spirit is active and present. The *Basis of Union* speaks of the Spirit being active among God's people - the church.

In groups of three, look over the *Basis of Union* and highlight or underline where the Spirit is mentioned. Assign different paragraphs for people to examine. Note paragraphs 13 and 18 in particular.

#### Discuss

What is said about the activity of the Holy Spirit?

How do you see this activity of the Spirit in your congregation?

How do you see this activity in the wider church or other Christian communities?

In what ways is the presence of the Holy Spirit emphasised in your congregation?

#### 5. MY STORY (15-20 minutes)

"Paul notes that the presence of the Spirit is marked by heightened individuality as well as a deeper communal belonging... We become more truly ourselves as the Spirit broods over us and as our lives are knit together with other lives and stories." (Ben Myers, *The Apostles' Creed*. Lexham Press. 2018.)

Place the **Spirit Image** cards in the centre of the group. (You may wish to use a subset of the 20 cards.)

Invite each person to choose two cards that speak to them personally about the presence and power of the Spirit in their life.

Either in the whole group or in small groups of three, invite people to share about the experience of the Spirit in their lives. .

#### 6. CLOSING (3 minutes)

Give each person one of the passages from John 14 to 16 from Handout 3.1. Invite them to contemplate the text in silence.

Ask them to reflect in silence: *How might a greater awareness of the Spirit's presence in your life make a difference in this coming week?*

Pray for one another.

#### 7. ACTION

Take one of the Spirit Image cards home with you. Start each day by contemplating it. Ask God to help you be open to the Spirit's presence and leading this day.

#### 8. JOURNALLING AT HOME

Invite people to write some journal reflections on their experience of the Spirit during the week

- in their own life
- in the lives of others
- in God's Creation

## Handout - John 14 to 16

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“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. John 14: 15-17

---

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. John 14: 18-20

---

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. John 14: 25-27

---

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning. John 15: 26-27

---

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. I that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 16: 12-15

Spirit Image Cards



Photo by enka80 from Unsplash!

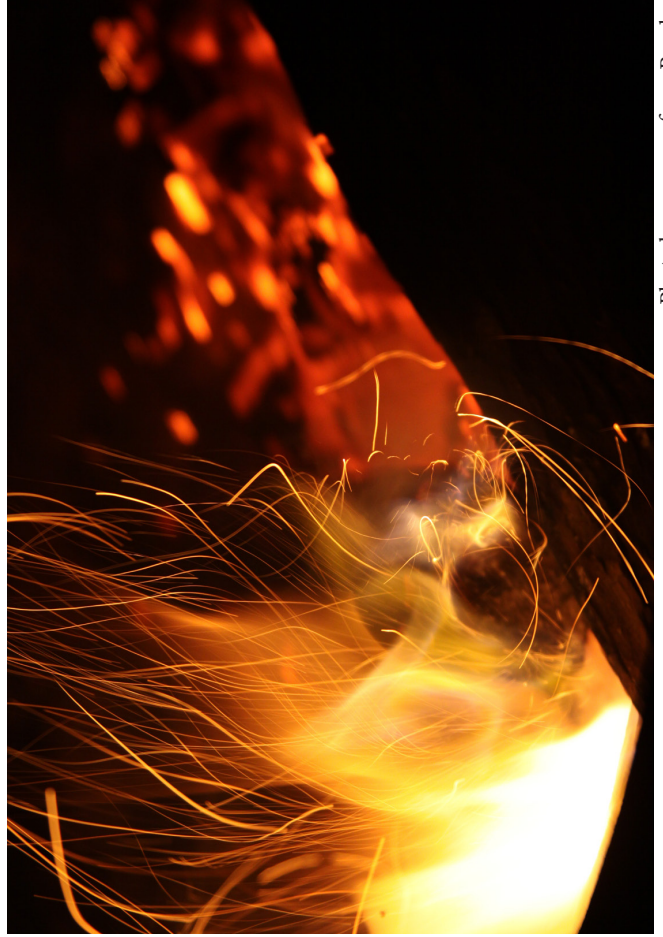


Photo by sannane from Pexels



Photo by Craig Mitchell



Photo by akedynamic from Pexels



Photo by Jenny Smith on Unsplash



Photo by Craig Mitchell

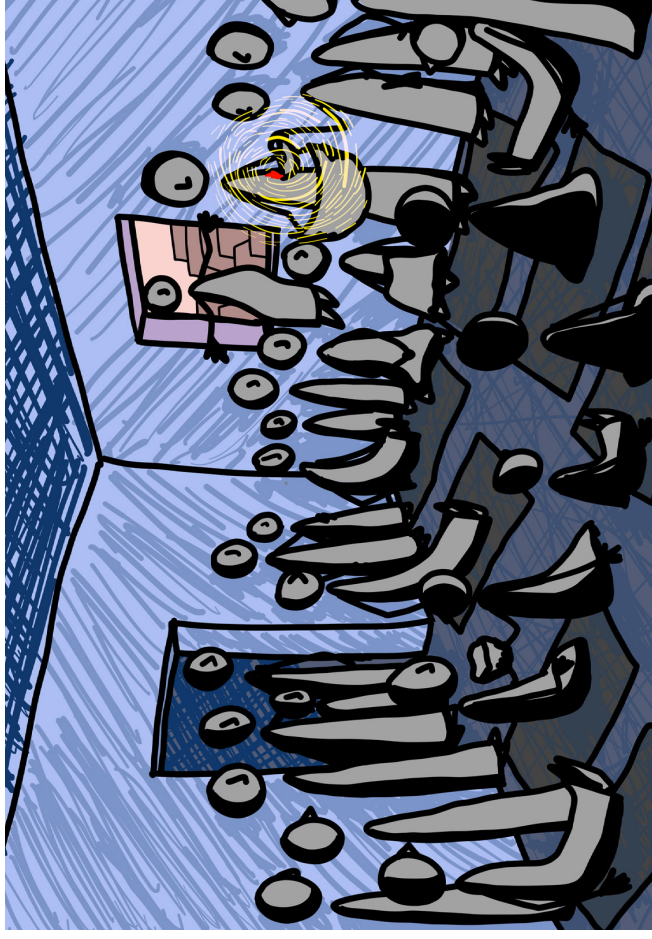


Illustration by Chris Booth





Photo by Craig Mitchell



Photo by Craig Mitchell



“Baptism of Christ” by Dave Zelenka. 2005. commons.wikimedia.org



Photo from Hubble Telescope, NASA on Unsplash

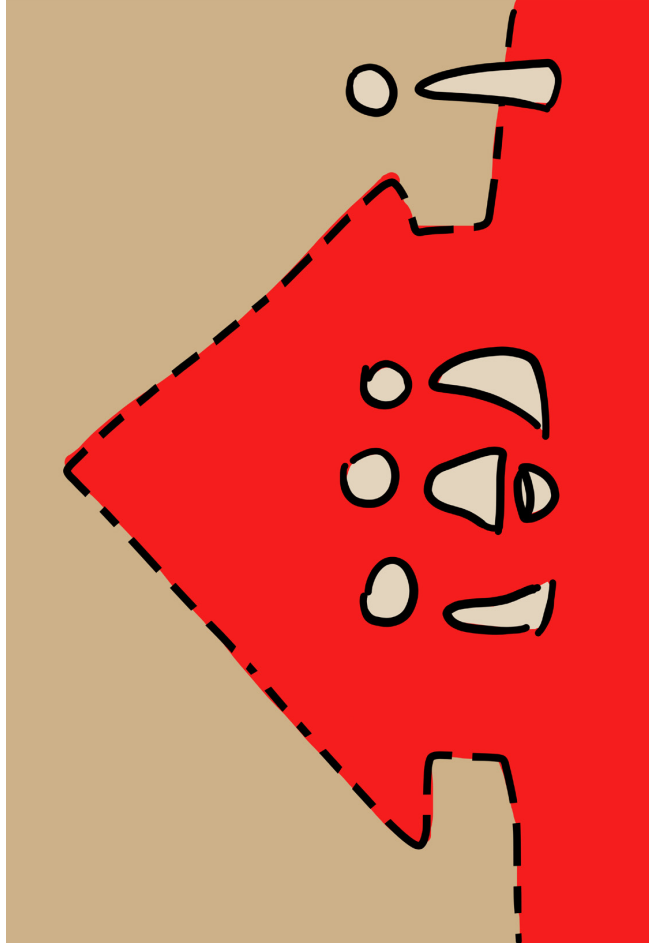


Illustration by Chris Booth



Photo from BELLS, QLD





The scene of Pentecost on the stained glass in church St. Etheldred: Shutterstock



Photot by Rosie Fraser on Unsplash



Photo by Nycholas Benaia on Unsplash



Photo from UCA Assembly

# 4. Receiving the Scriptures

## SESSION THEMES

- The Scriptures as the creation and salvation story of God with the world
- Scriptures as a library - history, culture, genre, context, authorship
- Interpretation - hearing and learning from the Scriptures
- How our lives and faith are shaped by the Scriptures

## YOU WILL NEED

Bibles, copies of the Handouts, one or more dice, a recording of some ambient instrumental music (eg. 'Reflection' by David Macgregor [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuuM-9\\_tibg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuuM-9_tibg)). Print and cut out the **Bible Game** cards - Handouts 4.2 and 4.3. You will need one set for each small group of 3-4 people. You will also need one **Basis of Union** card per person.

If possible bring a collection of different Bibles - different translations, children's Bibles, different languages, old and new Bibles.

### 1. GATHERING (3 minutes)

Give each person a Bible and ask them to turn to the Psalms. Invite them each to find a Psalm that speaks to them at this time.

Play the instrumental music as a loop while people each read a few verses from their chosen Psalms in turn, with a brief silence between each reading.

Lead a brief prayer to open your time together.

### 2. GROUP-BUILDING ACTIVITY (5-7 minutes)

Share your responses to some of these questions.

*When did you first start hearing from the Bible or reading it yourself?*



*What is one biblical text that is important for you?*

*What is a question that you have about the Bible?*

### 3. GOD'S STORY (20-25 minutes)

**VIDEO** - Watch the video "Receiving the Scriptures". (Duration 8 mins 12 seconds)

*What views about the Bible seemed important to you in the video?*

*Which ones would you like to discuss further?*

Imagine the Hebrew people of old, sitting around campfires outside their tents, or around a meal table in their homes, telling stories of their experiences of God, and how their ancestors had worshipped Yahweh and tried to follow Yahweh's commands.

Imagine households in Israel and Judah where parents faithfully told the Hebrew scriptures to their children as part of their weekly rituals.

Imagine the synagogues in Jesus' time, where local priests and visiting teachers spoke from the scrolls about a coming Messiah in the line of David.

"Our identity is dependent on having a story that tells us who we are: our understanding of life's meaning and purpose is dependent on having a story that tells us what the world is like and where we are going. To be a community of faith, we must be a people with a story; a common memory and vision... The church is a story-formed community." John Westerhoff, *A Pilgrim People*, Seabury Press,

## Discuss

What might it mean to be a “story-formed people”?

How might a lifelong attention to the Scriptures shape who we are and how we act?

## 4. OUR STORY (15 minutes)

“The Word of God and the Bible are not the same thing. The Word is the living Christ. The Bible is a collection of ancient witnesses.. The biblical witnesses speak to us of Jesus Christ, the living Word of God.” (Andrew Dutney, *Where Did the Joy Come From?*, Uniting Church Press, 2001.)

The Uniting Church’s *Basis of Union* says some important things about the Bible.

Distribute copies of the **Basis of Union** cards from the Handout 4.1, giving each person one card.

Invite people to read their quote individually and underline the word “word” and other words related to the Bible.

Still working individually, ask them to read and reflect on what the paragraph is saying about the “Word.” Allow a few minutes.

Invite people to join in pairs with someone who has a different quote and to discuss with one another what they discovered.

In the whole group, discuss each of the quotes. What do they say to us about Jesus Christ? the Bible? the Church?

## 5. MY STORY (15-20 minutes)

We’re going to explore together how the Bible might be part of our lives as Christians. Break into groups of 3 to 4 people. Place the **Bible Game** cards face down in the centre of the group. Give each group a dice (OK, it’s really a die..).

People take it in turns to roll the dice. If you roll an even number, you turn over a card, read it aloud. Share your response to the question or your thoughts about the suggested action.

If you roll an odd number, you turn over a card, and then give it to *another* person to read it aloud and respond.

Afterwards, talk together about what people have learned from the game.

## 6. CLOSING (3 minutes)

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34. Invite people to imagine God’s words, God’s intentions, God’s purposes, being written on, or soaked into, their minds, hearts, spirits. Allow some silence.

Read Romans 12: 1-2. Invite people to reflect on what changes God might be bringing to their hearts and minds.

Spend some time in silent prayer. Close with a spoken prayer.

## 7. ACTION

Turn the **Bible Game** cards face up in the centre of the group. Invite each person to take two cards with them to reflect on during the week and perhaps incorporate into their spiritual habits.

AND/OR See what you can learn this week about the Lectionary.

## 8. JOURNALLING AT HOME

Invite people to write in their journals about the two Bible cards that they take home. *Make a record of how you seek to put these into action. What is your experience as you do this?*

## 9. RESOURCES

*How to Read the Bible: 12 Simple Guidelines*, UCA Assembly, 2009. <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/354>

*Docbyte 15: Reading the Scriptures*, UCA Assembly. <https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/330>

Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Intervarsity Press, 2016.

# Basis of Union Cards

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>4. CHRIST RULES AND RENEWS THE CHURCH</b></p> <p>The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>10. REFORMATION WITNESSES</b></p> <p>The Uniting Church continues to learn of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, and in the power of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, from the witness of the Reformers as expressed in various ways in the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the Savoy Declaration (1658). In like manner the Uniting Church will listen</p> <p>to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793). It will commit its ministers and instructors to study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>5. THE BIBLICAL WITNESSES</b></p> <p>The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, its message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses. The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church. The Uniting Church lays upon its members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures, commits its and the Lord's Supper as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>11. SCHOLARLY INTERPRETERS</b></p> <p>The Uniting Church acknowledges that God has never left the Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God's living Word. In particular the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith. The Uniting Church lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which it will learn to sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought. Within that fellowship the Uniting Church also stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help it to understand its own nature and mission.</p>

# Bible Game Cards

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DEVOTION</b></p> <p>Devotional reading is not a particular method for reading the Bible. It means having a pattern or regular discipline of Bible reading for spiritual nourishment.</p> <p>Talk about your Bible reading habits. When and where do you read the Bible? How might your habits develop?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CONTEMPLATION</b></p> <p>A Bible reading approach like <i>Lectio Divina</i> involves contemplating the text - looking, listening and waiting for a part of the passage to rise to your attention, and then focusing on those words.</p> <p>Have you ever done something like this?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INVESTIGATION</b></p> <p>Learning about the books of the Bible includes exploring the time and culture of its writings, its authors and audiences.</p> <p>What kinds of resources - print, multimedia, WWW and people might help you with this?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>CONVERSATION</b></p> <p>For the Bible to be a living document, it must inhabit our community life, including our conversations. With whom do you talk about the Scriptures?</p> <p>Are you part of a Bible discussion group or online chat about the Bible?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INTERPRETATION</b></p> <p>To hear the Word for our times is to engage in interpretation of biblical texts - understanding their world and our world in conversation with each other.</p> <p>Talk about a current 'hot topic' that requires us to work at how we interpret the Bible together.</p> <p>What does interpretation involve?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>APPLICATION</b></p> <p>How do we live in the light of our understanding of what God is saying to us through the Scriptures. Sometimes this seems simple, and other times not at all.</p> <p>A particular teaching might influence our attitudes, beliefs, thinking or actions.</p> <p>What is an example of how you 'live out' a particular Bible passage?</p>

# Bible Game Cards

<p><b>TRANSFORMATION</b></p> <p>A mark of our growing maturity as disciples is how our faith understandings and experiences change over time. The Word is a living Word. God's revelation continues. Someone said we are always becoming Christian (or more Christ-like).</p> <p>What does it mean for you to be open to new insights from Scripture?</p>	<p><b>IMAGINATION</b></p> <p>One of St Ignatius' approaches to prayer was to invite people to imagine themselves to be present in a biblical story - to see, hear, touch, even smell and taste with imagination.</p> <p>To do this prayerfully is to be open to God speaking here and now. Have you ever engaged in this kind of prayer with Scripture?</p>
<p><b>CELEBRATION</b></p> <p>The Scriptures offer a constant invitation to praise and worship of God, and to celebration of God's goodness to all Creation. Often the Psalms turn our hearts and minds to celebrating God's goodness.</p> <p>What biblical texts help you to praise God?</p>	<p><b>MEMORISATION</b></p> <p>People who memorise parts of Scripture find that the words come back to them in times of need, either their own or when others need encouragement.</p> <p>The word is not only written on paper, but in our hearts and minds.</p> <p>What texts do you know by heart? Have you tried memorising texts?</p>
<p><b>EXAMINATION</b></p> <p>One spiritual discipline involving Scripture is self-examination - reading a text and asking yourself how you have been faithful to its teaching. What kind of correction or guidance does the passage offer?</p> <p>This can lead to confession, forgiveness, and turning to new attitudes and actions. Have you ever tried this approach?</p>	<p><b>RECOLLECTION</b></p> <p>When we memorise Scripture, we can intentionally bring it to mind. Set a timer on your watch or phone. Bring the text to mind throughout your day and pause to allow it to speak to you. Pause before a meal and recite it. Bring it to mind when you walk through a door.</p>

# 5. Living as God's Church

## SESSION THEMES

- Church as a people - a community of reconciliation and friendship
- Church as the body of Christ - disciples of Jesus, gifted and called
- Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic

## YOU WILL NEED

A copy of the **People Photos** cards and the **Images of the Church** cards, the Basis of Union **Wordle** word image, the **Basis of Union Quotes** cut into separate strips, Handout **My Experience of Church**, coloured felt pens

### 1. GATHERING (5 minutes)

Place the **People Photos** in the centre of the group. Invite people to contemplate the people whom they see in the photos. Ask them to reflect silently on these questions. Ask each question aloud and then allow a brief time for reflection.

*Take a minute to let your gaze pass across all of the images. What impressions are you left with?*

*Now look more slowly at each image. What questions come to mind about this person - who they are, their background, their life?*

*Now let one particular image draw your attention. Allow yourself to appreciate this person as one of God's children.*

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13; Romans 12:3-5; Ephesians 4:1-6.

Open the session with prayer.



### 2. GROUP-BUILDING ACTIVITY (5-7 minutes)

Invite people to close their eyes and to reflect on their earliest memories of being part of a church community (for some, it will be your current church community). Invite them to recall the places, the people, their thoughts and feelings. Allow a brief silence.

Next, invite them to reflect on their experience of church in the present - the places, the people, their thoughts and feelings. Allow a brief silence.

While people's eyes remain closed, invite them to reflect on what is similar and different about the two experiences.

Ask people to open their eyes. Invite people to make brief responses to these questions:

*What was similar about the two experiences?*

*What did you value about both?*

*What was different about the two experiences?*

### 3. GOD'S STORY (25 minutes)

Paul Minear's book *Images of the New Testament Church*, written in 1960, listed about 100 images of the church mentioned in the Scriptures. (Westminster John Knox Press, republished 2004.)

The **Images of the Church** photo cards represent some of these images as well as some common images from early church history.

Places the images in the centre of the group.

- a. Invite someone to choose an image.
- b. Discuss as a group: What do you see? What does the image say to you about the church?
- c. Does the image remind you of any passages in the Bible? If so, find them and read them.
- d. What do you find helpful about this image?
- e. Is there anything that you find unhelpful or limiting about this image?

Repeat the above with several images as time allows, with group members taking turns to choose images.

[Images represented - a boat, a body, a household/ gathering/fellowship/assembly, salt, light, a building, a letter, unleavened bread, bride and bridegroom, a priesthood, a vine and branches, an ambassador.]

You may wish to list the above words on a whiteboard or screen during the discussion.

**VIDEO** - Watch the video "Living as God's Church" (Duration 6mins 54 seconds).

Invite people to take notes during the video if they wish.

### Discuss

*What words or images from the video left an impression on you?*

*What images or metaphors for the church were mentioned? Add them to your list above.*

*How might people's ideas about church be seen in how they actually live as the church? Take a few images or examples and discuss them.*

*What is one challenge that you hear in the video for us as God's church today?*

### 4. OUR STORY (15 minutes)

The Nicene Creed says, "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church."

**The church is one.** Despite all the contrary evidence, God's gift to the church is unity in Christ. Unity is both a goal and a gift.

**The church is holy.** The church is not perfect, but its identity is in Jesus Christ who makes us holy. Holiness is both a gift and a goal.

**The church is catholic,** which means universal. The church is for all people in all time. Being universal is both a gift and a goal.

**The church is apostolic,** a people sent by God into all the world with good news. Being apostles is both a gift and a goal.

A gift and a goal. The Uniting Church's *Basis of Union* says that the church is of God's making in Jesus Christ, and also that we are always a people on the way to a promised end. God creates us, rescues us, calls us, sends us, and makes us whole. That's a beginning, a new beginning, a journey and a destination.

The Uniting Church's *Basis of Union* says a lot about being the church. Have a look at Handout 5.5, the **Basis of Union Wordle** - the larger the word in the image, the more frequently it appears in the *Basis of Union*. The largest word is Church!

*Looking at the other words in the Wordle, what is suggested about what "church" means in the Basis of Union?*

Working either individually or in pairs for the following exercise. Hand out the **Basis of Union Quotes** pages, Handouts 5.1 and 5.2. Assign one or more quote to each person or pair.

*Highlight the word "church" in the quotes.*

*What other words or phrases about the church appear in the quotes?*

*What do the quotes say about what it means to be the church?*

Discuss your findings.



## 5. MY STORY (25 minutes)

We've talked a lot about ideas of "church". What is your experience of church?

Distribute **My Experience of Church** Handout 5.4 and the coloured pens. Invite people to spend 10 to 12 minutes by themselves reflecting on their current experience of being part of the church.

Then join in groups of three for people to share about their responses.

## 6. CLOSING (4 minutes)

Listen to Andrew Dutney's song "Jesus Wasn't Very Picky". (4 minutes)

<https://andrewdutney.bandcamp.com/album/jesus-wasnt-very-picky>

## 7. ACTION (10 minutes)

Kate Compston wrote a song called "I Dream of a Church" - <https://www.hopepublishing.com/find-hymns-hw/hw5017.aspx>

*What are some of your dreams for your local church?*

*What are some of your dreams for the Uniting Church in Australia?*

*How might you share these dreams with your local church?*

This week, interview someone in your church about their dreams or visions.

## 8. JOURNALLING AT HOME

Read Acts 2:42-47

*What do you see here about what it means to be the people of God?*

*In what ways does this picture of the early church encourage you, inspire you or challenge you?*

*What questions does Acts 2 raise for you about what it means to be the church today?*

## 9. RESOURCES

Handout 5.3 - *The Uniting Church: Who Are We?*

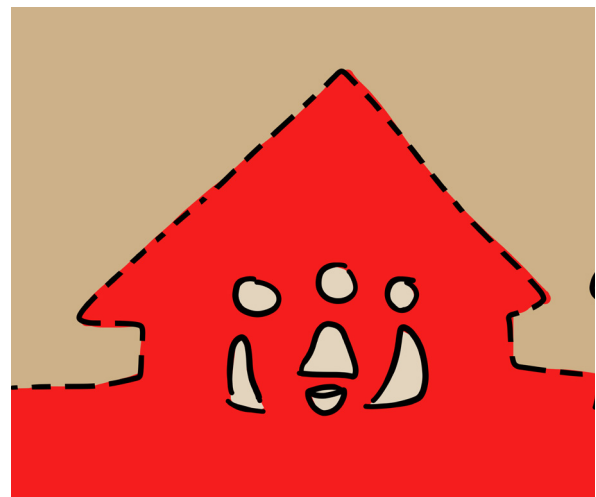
Geoff Thompson, *In His Own Strange Way*, Mediacom, 2018.

Paul Minear, *Images of the New Testament Church*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

UCA Assembly website - <https://uniting.church/calledbygod/>

Video - "Define Church" from Chuck Knows Church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBTQ1HDWeSM&t=61s>



## ***The Basis of Union***

### **Paragraph 1**

The Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic, and seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church, hereby enter into union under the name of the Uniting Church in Australia.

... they look for a continuing renewal in which God will use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people. To this end they declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church; they remain open to constant reform under his Word; and they seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Paragraph 2**

The Uniting Church in Australia lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

### **Paragraph 3**

The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

### **Paragraph 3**

The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring; the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way.

### **Paragraph 4**

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command people's attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.

### **Paragraph 13**

The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.

### **Paragraph 18**

The Uniting Church affirms that it belongs to the people of God on the way to the promised end. The Uniting Church prays that, through the gift of the Spirit, God will constantly correct that which is erroneous in its life, will bring it into deeper unity with other Churches, and will use its worship, witness and service to God's eternal glory through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

## **The Uniting Church: Who Are We?**

This summary was prepared in 2016 as an information resource for Uniting Church schools by Craig Mitchell, then Assembly National Director for Formation, Education and Discipleship. The statements summarise parts of the UCA Basis of Union, Constitution and other Assembly documents and resolutions. <http://growing-disciples.org.au/an-ethos-statement-for-uca-schools/>

### **1. Church Union**

The Uniting Church (UCA) was formed in 1977 by the union of the Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia, and the Presbyterian Church of Australasia. The Basis of Union is the foundational faith statement of this union.

### **2. Creator and Creation**

We believe that God created a world that is good. We take seriously our care and responsibility for God's world. We believe that God created people in God's image. We seek to treat all people with dignity and respect. We look forward to a renewed creation that God will bring.

### **3. Jesus**

We see and know God in Jesus Christ who shows us God's love and brings freedom, hope, peace and joy. We believe that Jesus' life, death and resurrection shows God's transforming love for all people and society.

### **4. Spirit**

We believe that God is Spirit who guides and gifts people. We believe that God's Spirit is present in our world. We value and celebrate people's gifts.

### **5. Bible**

We take seriously the task of interpreting the Bible and relying on biblical scholarship as we seek God's Word for us today.

### **6. Sacraments**

We baptise people of all ages and welcome people to Holy Communion (or Eucharist).

### **7. Gender**

We believe that God created women and men equal. We celebrate and encourage everyone's gifts and leadership.

### **8. Gifts & Ministries**

We welcome and encourage the gifts and abilities of all people of all ages, as we believe that all are 'priests'. We ordain Ministers of the Word and Deacons.

### **9. First Peoples**

We recognise the unique gift and place of Australia's indigenous people in this land. We seek reconciliation and work for justice with them.

### **10. Multicultural**

We are a multicultural church in a multicultural society. We celebrate, encourage and learn from the rich diversity of our cultures and languages.

### **11. Ecumenical**

We are part of the broad family of Christian churches across the world. We are reformed and evangelical in our heritage. We are committed to working with other churches for unity and for the good of all people.

### **12. Multi-faith**

We live in a multi-faith world and we respect people's religious beliefs. We seek peace and understanding among religions.

### **13. Welcoming and inclusive**

We seek to welcome all people regardless of age, race, abilities, gender identity and gender orientation.

### **14. Social justice**

We believe that God is concerned particularly for those who are poor, marginalised or oppressed. We seek fairness, justice and well-being for all people.

### **15. Scholarship**

We value literary, historical and scientific enquiry and the contribution that they make to an informed Christian faith.

### **16. Governance**

The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils – congregation, presbytery, synod and assembly. Each synod elects a Moderator and the national Assembly elects a President who provide spiritual and pastoral leadership for a specified term.

## My Experience of Church

Write or draw your reflections of your experience of your current faith community, positive or negative

Belonging to a community

**Serving others**

*Learning about the Bible & beliefs*

**Sharing in decision-making**

*Discovering and sharing my gifts*

Worshipping and praying



# PEOPLE PHOTOS CARDS



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Photo by Craig Mitchell

# PEOPLE PHOTOS CARDS



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# PEOPLE PHOTOS CARDS



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# IMAGES OF THE CHURCH



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Photo by Craig Mitchell

# IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

*You yourselves are our letters,  
written on our hearts, to be known  
and read by all; and you show  
that you are a letter of Christ,  
prepared by us, written not with ink  
but with the Spirit of the living God,  
not on tablets of stone  
but on tablets of human hearts.*

*2 Corinthians 3:2-3*



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# IMAGES OF THE CHURCH



Image by Ellie Elia



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# 6. Serving God's Mission

## SESSION THEMES

- Following/participating in the Way of Jesus: mission and discipleship, word and deed
- Church and the *missio Dei* (mission of God)
- Reconciliation and renewal of Creation
- Mission as contextual, local and global

## YOU WILL NEED

Paper and pens, a plate with a broken bread roll and a cup of grape juice or wine, Handout 6.1 cut into 4 cards, newsprint or a whiteboard, the handout ***The Five Marks of Mission***, Handout - ***Basis of Union Quote***, a map of your church's neighbourhood - say a 5 kilometre radius (or wider if your church is a 'regional' church) - print one from Google Maps (<https://maps.google.com>) and print at A3 if possible.

**Websites** - the UCA Assembly, your Synod and perhaps your presbytery have a wealth of information about the church's mission. Make this list available to your group members to explore in their own time.

**UnitingWorld** - <https://www.unitingworld.org.au/>

**Frontier Services** - <https://www.unitingworld.org.au/>

**UnitingJustice** - <https://unitingjustice.org.au/>

**UnitingCare Australia** - <https://unitingcare.org.au/>

**Uniting Disaster Recovery** - <https://assembly.uca.org.au/disaster-recovery>

**Circles of Interest: Assembly Resourcing Unit** - <https://uniting.church/circles/>

**The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress** - <https://uaicc.org.au/>



## 1. GATHERING (2 minutes)

Place the plate with bread and the cup in the centre.

*Here is a table  
a conversation of friends  
a connection of hearts  
a communion of spirit.*

*Here is a meal  
a nourishment of hope  
a filling of faith  
a fuelling of vision*

*Here is a promise  
a morsel of peace  
an entree of justice  
a foretaste of heaven*

*Here we gather  
with thirst and hunger  
for God's new community to come  
and God's creation to be renewed*

*Here we stand  
not waiting to be called  
for we have already been sent  
not waiting to be filled  
for we have already been empowered*

*God of sending,  
Remind us to bear your Good News to all.  
Amen.*

## 2. GROUP-BUILDING ACTIVITY (3-5 minutes)

Talk about a time when you received kindness, hospitality or welcome from strangers.

## 3. MY STORY (15 minutes)

Place cards with the words **MISSION, DISCIPLE, GOOD NEWS, WITNESS** (Handout 6.1) in the centre.

*Talk for 3-4 minutes about what these words mean to you. Concentrate on listening to one another rather than having a discussion.*

*Share your responses to one of these questions:*

*- What are some ways in which you seek to live out God's Good News in everyday life?*

*- What are some ways that being a disciple shapes how you live each day?*

## 4. GOD'S STORY (20-25 minutes)

**VIDEO** - Watch the video "Serving God's Mission". (Duration 7 mins 16 seconds)

As a group, make notes on newsprint or whiteboard of any key points that stood out for you. Spend some time discussing these points.

You may wish to include the following:

*What passages of Scripture came to mind when you listen to this video?*

*What are you learning about Jesus' mission and about being his followers?*

In his book *Transforming Mission*, David Bosch says "...mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God. ... Mission is thereby seen as a movement from God to the world; the church is viewed as an instrument for that mission".

*In what ways do we see the church as an instrument for God's mission?*

Handout 6.2 - **Basis of Union - Paragraph 3.**

*Underline statements that speak to you about the mission of God. Talk together about what they say.*

## 5. OUR STORY (15 minutes)

Distribute Handout 6.3 - **The Five Marks of Mission.**

In the video, Amelia mentions five marks of mission. Look together at the Handout. On newsprint or whiteboard, list ways in which you see the church sharing in God's mission in these ways:

- in your congregation
- in groups to which you belong
- in the wider church (both the Uniting Church and other churches)

### Neighbourhood Map

Use the Map of your church's neighbourhood to talk about how and where different forms of mission take place in your local community

If you have time, talk about your church's wider involvement in mission as well.

*Which of these five marks are most evident in your church's life and witness? Which are less evident?*

*Which of these marks of mission are you most passionate about?*

## 6. ACTION (5 minutes)

Invite people to take a 3-5 minutes by themselves to reflect on the six sessions that you've spent together. Ask them to reflect on the questions on Handout 6.4 and write their reflections.

In the whole group or in small groups of three, invite people to share briefly their responses to these questions.

## Discuss

*What might be different in your life as a result of our time together with God?*

If this series is being conducted as preparation for baptism or confirmation, you may choose to discuss the next steps.

## 7. CLOSING

Place the Neighbourhood Map in the centre and the words **MISSION, DISCIPLE, GOOD NEWS, WITNESS** around it. Place the bread and the cup nearby as well.

Reflect in silence on these questions.

*Where do people in our community have bodies that are broken?*

*Where are the people who feel their lifeblood seeping away?*

*What is God's Good News for them?*

*Where are those whose lives seem full and whole?*

*What is God's Good News for them?*

*Who will bear witness in word and deed to God's Good News?*

"Here am I, Lord. Send me."

Share in prayer for your community and for one another as sharers in God's mission.

## 8. JOURNALLING AT HOME

People are invited to reflect on their growth through the six sessions by writing a personal faith statement or Creed. This is not meant to be some final examination, nor a perfect doctrinal summary, but rather a marker of where someone is now in their lifelong journey of faith.

This might consist of "I believe..." statements or people might choose another form. They might also wish to express their faith in other forms such as art, poetry or music.

Depending on the group and its purpose, you can decide together whether these statements are kept personal, shared with the group, or shared more widely.

## 9. REFERENCES

David J Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American society of missiology series 16. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011.

Rev Dr Sam Wells - "Being With" in Mission  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2Zci7KBXms&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2Zci7KBXms&feature=emb_logo)



**MISSION**

**DISCIPLE**

**GOOD NEWS**

**WITNESS**



## ***The Basis of Union***

### **Paragraph 3**

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church preaches Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

In Jesus Christ "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV). In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin.

Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive God's love. Jesus himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain. In raising him to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to God on earth, reasserted claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love.

To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith. To this end God has sent forth the Spirit that people may trust God as their Father, and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. The whole work of salvation is effected by the sovereign grace of God alone.

The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity.

God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring; the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way.

## *Five Marks of Mission*

This description of the mission of God was formulated in the Anglican Church in the UK. It has since been used across a number of churches internationally, including parts of the Methodist Church overseas and by some people in the Uniting Church. This is one way of exploring the breadth of God's mission.

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

### ***TELL***

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

### ***TEND***

To respond to human need by loving service

### ***TEACH***

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

### ***TRANSFORM***

To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

### ***TREASURE***

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

## ***Reflecting on Our Journey Together***

***What have I discovered about God?***

***What have I discovered about being a disciple?***

***What have I discovered about the church?***