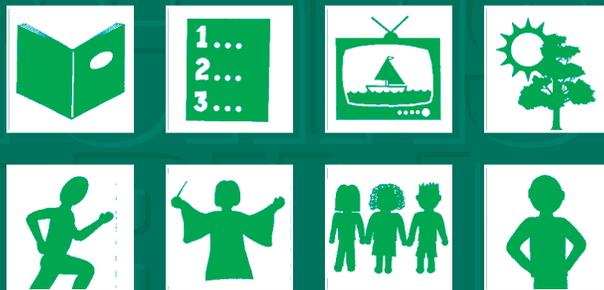


An Interactive Study Guide to *Living Faith*



Carolyn Boyer

The Presbyterian Church in Canada

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Writer: Carolyn Boyer
Editor: Dorothy Henderson
Editorial Assistance: Keith Knight
Production Assistance: Matthew Donnelly
Design: Tim Faller Design Inc.
Symbol Artwork: Jacquie Bartlett
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The Presbyterian Church in Canada
50 Wynford Drive
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About the Author

Carolyn Boyer is a member and elder of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Barrie, Ontario. She is a stained glass artist, teacher, and freelance writer, a mother of three daughters and grandmother of six.

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Preface

Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief (Foi Vivante) was adopted as “an acceptable statement of faith” and “as useful in worship and study” by the 110th General Assembly in 1984. It became a subordinate standard of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1998 (124th General Assembly). This study guide is intended for use in a variety of contexts: church membership classes, session meetings, retreats, discipleship classes, mission education groups, youth/young adult groups, etc. While there are frequent references to group activities, an individual will also find much to stimulate personal reflection.

Research has confirmed what teachers have long recognized: human beings have individual learning preferences. Some of us learn best using the spoken or written word, while others prefer to learn using pictures and images. For some, moving to sounds, rhythms, and songs enables learning. While some prefer quiet solitude, others learn best through personal interaction. This study guide seeks to honour the variety of ways people learn by offering suggestions for discussion and activities that will be of interest to a broad constituency. A fuller discussion of learning preferences can be found in the Introduction.

Following the Pre-Session, the chapter titles of the study guide match the chapter headings of *Living Faith*. All chapters in the guide are similar in length while the length of the chapters of *Living Faith* varies greatly. There is a unity of style throughout the study guide, but the amount of material covered requires a variety of approaches in the development of each chapter.

In each chapter of this study guide you will find:

- Suggestions for symbols/objects to use for a Meditation Centre
- Short quotations from the Bible and other sources to stimulate reflection and conversation
- Commentary and reflections
- Discussion questions and response activities

Some of the activities make reference to the use of art prints. A public library is a good source to obtain collections of prints. *The Gaze of Love: Meditations on Art and Spiritual Transformation* by Sister Wendy Beckett (Harper Collins, 1993) is a particularly useful resource.

The Meditation Centre serves as a visual reminder of the spiritual nature of this study. Place the symbols/objects suggested in each chapter on a cloth-covered table or box in a central location. Assign art prints a prominent place.

Throughout the guide, reference is made to both the *Scriptural References* and *Notes* that follow the body of the *Living Faith* text. Both are useful in understanding how *Living Faith* is grounded in scripture and uses other sources.

Introduction — Becoming an excellent teacher

It is a privilege to teach people as they discover the basics, the nuances and mysteries in our reformed Christian faith as expressed in *Living Faith*.

You will likely use this book with adults and teens. Therefore, it is important to think about educational theory. Why? Because it will make your sessions more vibrant, more interesting, more engaging. Understanding educational theory will make you a better teacher. Your goal as teacher? To lead others in the journey of deepening their faith and commitment to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

So let's get started.

The educational theory of Howard Gardner

There are many educational theories that help us understand how teens and adults learn. One of the most helpful has been that of Howard Gardner. Gardner uses the term “multiple intelligence” to refer to the number of different ways that we prefer to learn.

According to Gardner's research, we each have a preferred approach to how we learn. For instance, you may say to me, “Dorothy, you need to learn how to use a new program on the computer. How do you prefer to learn it?” My strong preference would be to get out the manual, read through it and figure out what to do. You, on the other hand, may prefer to take a class, experiment with the program and ask the instructor what to do when things go wrong.

What are the “intelligences” Gardner describes?

Gardner outlines eight intelligences. I prefer, when working with teen or adult groups, to think of them as two clusters.

- Cluster 1: Verbal/Linguistic intelligence
- Logical/Mathematical intelligence
- Visual/Spatial intelligence
- Body/Kinaesthetic intelligence
- Musical/Rhythmic intelligence
- Naturalistic/Environmental intelligence
- Cluster 2: Interpersonal intelligence
- Intrapersonal intelligence

Some examples of famous people

The concept of multiple intelligences will make more sense if I give you some examples of famous people who had highly honed primary skills.

- Verbal/Linguistic: Margaret Atwood, Pierre Berton
- Logical/Mathematical: Albert Einstein, Stephen Hawking
- Visual/Spatial: Tom Thompson, Emily Carr
- Body/Kinaesthetic: Wayne Gretzky, Vince Carter
- Musical/Rhythmic: Oscar Peterson, Alanis Morissette
- Naturalistic/Environmental: David Suzuki, Chief Dan George

All of us have a preferred way to learn...and more

Each of us can identify our preferred way of learning. As well, we can also probably identify secondary ways of learning. I know, for instance, that I have a strong preference for verbal/linguistic learning. Give me a book, a crossword puzzle, a discussion group...I'm happy. But, if those were not available, I would also be quite content to use my musical/rhythmic intelligence or my visual/spatial intelligence. I am not quite as comfortable using the other three intelligences. (See the notes on "Interpersonal" and "Intrapersonal" intelligence, p. 8.)

Why is it important for teachers to know this?

It's important for teachers to understand that you have a large collection of preferred intelligences in your class. In fact, if you had a group of 15 or 20 teens or adults in a group and you gave them six different choices of activity based on the six intelligences in Cluster 1, they will more or less divide themselves up evenly. I know this to be true because I have done it dozens of times in workshops.

This raises several questions:

1. Why do I need to discover a person's preference?
2. How will I find out the learning preferences of my group?
3. When I find out, how will it affect what I do in my class?

Why do I need to find out a person's preference?

- The main reason — and it's a good one: your learners will be happier, more engaged, and learn more when you structure their class around their preferred learning styles. Happy learners make happy teachers, too.
- People behave better when you use their preferred learning style. It's easy to see "misbehaviour" in a children's class: they "act out," are disruptive, talk when they are not supposed to be. It's harder to spot misbehaviour in a teen or adult class, but it is still there. Teens are inclined to chat about things irrelevant to the topic at hand. Adults are inclined to "drift off" and "vote with their feet," just not come back to the next session.
- It is important to discover others' learning preferences because they may be different from yours. As a leader, I, for instance, have a strong preference for verbal/linguistic activities. But, if I only choose word searches, reading, and discussion, I will structure my lesson so that it only appeals to a fraction of the learners in my class. There is a natural inclination for a teacher to plan activities that he/she enjoys, but we need to expand our methods so all are included.

How will I find out the learning preferences of my group?

It's quite easy. You can use one of two methods. The first is easier. The second is more fun.

Method 1

Photocopy the following chart adapted from Barbara Bruce's book, *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults* (Abingdon Press, 2000). The first time you meet, ask people to quickly fill it out and put their name on the sheet, explaining that it will help you structure the class so you can be a better teacher.

Most Favoured Ways of Learning

Please check your most favoured ways of learning. Check only the items that you most often use when you choose to learn something.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking with friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying alone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing something out | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying to music |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a logical plan | <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing a picture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a map of the learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Singing while I work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing a song | <input type="checkbox"/> Hearing a nature lecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a rhythm | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacing while thinking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walking in the neighbourhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Telling it in my own words |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing it down | <input type="checkbox"/> Studying the stars |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing a video | <input type="checkbox"/> Creating a sequence of events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Touching/moving objects | <input type="checkbox"/> Experiencing it |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing pictures | <input type="checkbox"/> Asking “what if?” questions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching something to someone | <input type="checkbox"/> Touching objects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doodling | <input type="checkbox"/> Journaling my thoughts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching a thunderstorm | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning the statistical reasoning |

When people have completed their questionnaire, you can ask them to self-rate and draw their own conclusions as to what their preferred style might be. Or, you may gather their sheets and tabulate yourself, telling them that this will help you provide an interesting class for them.

Answers to “Most Favoured Ways of Learning”

Although the activities in the chart may be placed in several of the eight categories, here are the most likely places for them to fall.



Verbal/Linguistic: Listening/Writing it out/Writing it down/Reading/Telling it in my own words. (Verbal/Linguistic intelligence is one of the more widely used — reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Perhaps we attain a stronger preference for this intelligence because so much of our early school years focus on verbal/linguistics. Verbal/Linguistic people love to settle down with a good book on a snowy evening.)



Logical/Mathematical: Creating a logical plan/Creating a sequence of events/Asking “what if” questions/Learning the statistical reasoning. (Logical/Mathematical skills are expressed in things like problem solving, time lines, creating meaning and order, linear and sequential thinking, mathematical formulas. Logical/mathematical people love to make a “Saturday morning list!”)



Visual/Spatial: Creating a map of the learning intelligences/Seeing a video/Seeing pictures/Doodling/Drawing a picture. Visual/Spatial intelligence is engaged when we see or imagine. (Visual/Spatial people love to go to the movies or a tour of the art gallery. They tend to “forget” if homework is orally assigned but not written down because they need to see it to remember.)



Body/Kinaesthetic: Touching objects/Pacing while thinking/Experiencing it. (Body/Kinaesthetic intelligence incorporates physical movement as it relates to learning and makes good use of the five senses. These are the men in your congregation who say, “Don’t ask me to go to a Bible Study, but give me a hammer and nails...” or the women who say, “I’m not much for meetings, but I’m happy to make the coffee for coffee hour.”)



Musical/Rhythmic: Writing a song/Creating a rhythm/Studying to music/Singing while I work. (Musical/Rhythmic intelligence uses sounds, rhythms, beats, music, and tempo. These are people who are in the choir or may come to a Bible study if it is based on Handel’s *Messiah*. These are teens who are delighted to make up a rap and sing it for the congregation.)



Naturalistic/Environmental: Walking in your neighbourhood/Watching a thunderstorm/Hearing a nature lecture/Studying the stars. (People with strong naturalistic/environmental intelligence are in close touch with their environment — they notice the full moon, they notice the changes in their neighbourhood, they are in tune with the changing seasons and may become politically involved to protect sensitive land areas or water. Many of Canada’s First Nations people have a finely tuned naturalistic/environmental intelligence.)



Interpersonal: Teaching something to someone/talking with friends. (Interpersonal intelligence uses synergy and interactive energy in learning. It is important not to equate this with “extroversion.” Some people who are introverts still have a strong desire to learn with others.)



Intrapersonal: Studying alone/Journaling my thoughts. (People with a highly developed intrapersonal intelligence prefer reflection and quiet time to help learning sink in and make meaning of it. They are the people who say, “I need a little time to think this through.”)

In running multiple intelligence workshops, it has been my experience that people invariably tell me that they move back and forth between Interpersonal and Intrapersonal, depending on what they are learning. That is certainly true for me. For instance, if I were to use my linguistic intelligence and begin to learn about the history of the town where I live, I would want to do that alone (*intrapersonally*) but if I were to explore the nuances of contemporary Canadian literature, I would want to do that with a group (*interpersonally*).

Method 2

Back on page 6, I said that there was a second way to discover the learning preferences of your group members. You can do it the experiential way. First, study the information about multiple intelligences on the preceding pages. At your first session, set up two or three activity centres. After some time to introduce the content of *Living Faith*, give people a choice about where they would like to go. They will naturally gravitate to centres where they feel comfortable and which express their preferred learning style. Simply make note of where people go and you will have a sense of what type of learning activities to plan for the next session.

Multiple Intelligence Symbols

In order to make your task easier, we have designed a set of symbols that will describe what intelligence is being featured in each activity. Choose a variety for an interesting session.

Note that some activities incorporate several intelligences and this makes them a strong teaching tool. Drama, for instance, involves Verbal/Linguistic, Visual/Spatial, Body/Kinaesthetic, and Interpersonal; if you add Musical/Rhythmic, you will have strongly engaged over 50 per cent of your group in one activity alone.

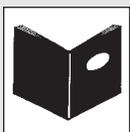
If the multiple intelligence theory is new to you — be brave and try it. You will be a better teacher and, together with your learners, you will enjoy the wonderful learning journey of becoming closer to God, through Jesus.

May God’s wise Spirit guide you.

— Dorothy Henderson

Symbols key

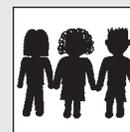
In the Exploring section of each chapter you will see one or more of the following symbols under the title of each activity. These symbols indicate what intelligences are best suited for that particular activity. A description of the intelligences can be found on page 8.



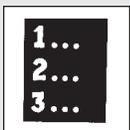
Verbal/
Linguistic



Body/
Kinaesthetic



Interpersonal



Logical/
Mathematical



Musical/
Rhythmic



Intrapersonal



Visual/
Spatial



Naturalistic/
Environmental

Pre-Session

This session may be used for personal reflection by the leader or at the first planning session if several leaders are involved. It may also be used as an introductory study session with a group.

By the rivers of Babylon —
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our harps.
For there our captors
asked for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
How could we sing the LORD’s song
in a foreign land?
(Ps 137: 1-4)

With the Hebrew poet who composed the 137th psalm, many people of faith today wonder how they are to “sing the LORD’s song” in a world marked by rapid change, numerous paradigm shifts, threats of terrorism, cloning, global warming, new diseases, religious pluralism — the list could go on.

Living Faith expresses words of faith for our time and context. It is like a creed but it doesn’t quite have the status of many well known ecumenical creeds. The word “creed” comes from the Latin word *credo*, meaning “I believe.” The first Christians professed the simple creed, “Jesus is Lord.” With the death of witnesses to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, many questions arose regarding God, Jesus, and the Christian life. These questions led to several centuries of intense debate, meetings of church councils, and the writing of many creeds, including the Nicene Creed and the Apostles’ Creed. (Despite its name, the Apostles’ Creed was actually a statement of faith developed over several centuries in Rome to teach new Christians the basic beliefs of the church. The text we use today can be traced back to the late 7th century.)

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a member of a family of churches that share common roots in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century as it developed through the leadership of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, John Calvin in Geneva, and John Knox in Scotland. One distinctive feature of these churches is a belief that it is important for Christians to profess their faith reflecting their time and context. These creeds include the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646). Creeds written in the 20th century include the Barmen Declaration (1934), written in Germany out of concern about the rise of Nazi ideology, and the Confession of 1967, written by Presbyterians in the United States in a time of racial conflict and political unrest.

When The Presbyterian Church in Canada was formed in 1875 it adopted *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) as its “subordinate standard.” In keeping with the reformed practice of writing creeds, it also adopted *A Statement of Faith Concerning Church and Nation* as a subordinate standard in 1955. Written in the early 1980’s, *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief (Foi Vivante)* was adopted as a third subordinate standard in 1998.

The Committee on Church Doctrine presented an excellent study document on the nature and function of subordinate standards to the 129th General Assembly (2003). It includes an overview of the development of creeds and explores the question of creedal subscription.

For Discussion

- Our current context is different from the early church. Terms used to describe the early years of the 21st century include *post-modern* and *post-Christian*. The opening paragraph of this preface lists some of the “marks” of our time and context. In two minutes, list as many scientific, cultural, and spiritual/religious “marks” of our time and context as you can.
- If the church was to embark on the preparation of an additional creedal statement today, what issues/topics would you expect to be included in a new “contemporary statement of faith?”
- Creeds help define the ethos of a church. Presbyterians describe creeds as “subordinate standards.” As such, they have some measure of authority in the church. On the other hand, being written by human beings, creeds are subject to review, revision, and replacement. Do you think that you have to personally believe every affirmation in a creed used in worship?

Before You Begin Chapter 1

Do a quick overview of *Living Faith*:

- Read the introduction on page 3. Why was it written?
- Review the outline on page 4. Take note of the 10 headings and various subheadings. What observations would you make?
- Turn to page 30. Read the explanation of the scriptural references and scan the next 6 pages. What does this appendix tell you about *Living Faith*?
- Scan the Notes section on pages 36-39. What do you observe regarding the sources used for *Living Faith*? (Many of these sources are readily available in church or public libraries and on line. They can be useful while using this study guide.)

God

Meditation Centre: Bible, candle, books of creeds, art print, stones, shells

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *The questions around the nature of God are inescapable for human beings as we wonder about the origin of life and ponder its meaning. The Christian doctrine of God is grounded in God's self-revelation through the experiences of people who believed that God entered into covenant with them. From this people Jesus of Nazareth came to announce God's reign of love and justice. The Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) and the New Testament (Greek Scriptures) reveal the nature of God and God's intentions for the world.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders? (Ex 15:11)

Lord, we are ill at ease in a world we cannot regulate
with a God who resists our probing definitions.

Your name comes readily to our lips:
three letters in a book,
but no adequate definition of you.

I AM WHO I AM —
that is your Name,
and in its mystery
the too familiar and the trivial
lie deservedly in ruins.

In understanding nothing
we come nearest to comprehending you.
— from *Prayers for Contemporary Worship*¹

There is but one only living and true God...
— *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 2.1

Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex 3:13-14)

3. Reflecting on the character of God

This first chapter of *Living Faith* (sections 1.1-1.6) describes important things about God. Read each section and the associated biblical reference. On a wall, post the characteristics about God and read the corresponding Bible verses.

1.1 There is one true God (Deuteronomy 6:4)

1.2 God comes to us in self-revelation and salvation history (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

1.3 The church and Scriptures witness about God (2 Peter 1:16-18)

1.4 The creeds witness about God (1 John 4:1-6)

1.5 God is triune — one God yet three persons (Ephesians 4:1-6)

1.6 God is the source of life (Psalm 95:1-11)

The appendix of *Living Faith* (p. 30) contains additional scriptural references related to each section. You might wish to read additional texts the authors considered relevant when developing this opening section on God.

Referring to the Notes on page 36 of *Living Faith*, what sources were used in this section?

Exploring Chapter 1: God

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with other members of the group at the end of the session.

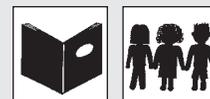
Read Psalms 8 and 104



While lacking the knowledge of contemporary scientific cosmology (an understanding of how the universe operates), the poets who wrote the Psalms expressed wonder at the mystery of creation.

- Imagine the physical setting in which the Psalms might have been written.
- How do the psalmists relate the natural world to God?
- Sing (or read) # 5 (Psalm 8) and # 70 (Psalm 104) in *The Book of Praise*

Reflect with scripture



Select one or more sections from Chapter 1 (e.g. 1.1, 1.2, etc...). Read a few scriptural references (p. 30, *Living Faith*) related to your chosen selection(s). Which ones “speak” to you and why? Share your thoughts with another person and/or in a group.

Describe God



- As a child, how did you describe God? How do you describe God today? Share your thoughts.
- Sing or read *Bring many names* (#310, *The Book of Praise*).
- In what ways have you experienced the different images of God described by Brian Wren?

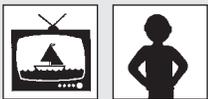
How do you visualize the mystery of God?



“No one knows what God looks like,” said a Sunday school teacher to her grades 1-2 children. “Well, they will when I finish my picture,” replied 6-year-old Jasmine, crayons in hand.

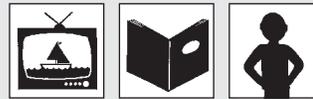
- Draw the image of God you “saw” at age 5 or 10. What would you draw now?
- Choose one of the six sections of Chapter 1. Draw, sketch or paint an image that represents the section. Know that what you create today may be different tomorrow or next year.

Select art that conveys the mystery of God



View art/prints in a gallery or in public library art books. Look for Vincent Van Gogh’s *The Starry Night*, Lawren Harris’ *Mountains, Moraine Lake*, M.C. Escher’s *Day and Night*, or paintings of your choice. Look quietly and prayerfully for a minimum of 10 minutes at each piece. What do you see (behold) about God in these paintings?

Be still



Teresa of Avila wrote, “Settle yourself in solitude and you will come upon [God] in yourself.” In Psalm 46 we read, “Be still and know that I am God!” Sit apart from others: Go into another room, corner, pew, etc. Be still and silent with your eyes closed for five minutes. Ask someone to signal the end of five minutes by playing a tape or CD. When you hear the quiet music, open your eyes and journal (write) the thoughts and reflections that entered your stillness. Share your experience with another and/or in the group.

Whole Group Activity

Bring this section to a close by reading Chapter 1 in unison. Close with a blessing.

Chapter 2

God, Creator and Ruler

Meditation Centre: Candle, Bible, rock, circle, universe map or globe, photos of people, symbols of sin (death, destruction, harmful objects, newspaper headlines/ pictures depicting hate, fear, evil acts)

Whole Group Activity

1. **Leader:** *In our last session we discovered some of the general characteristics of God. Today we focus on two aspects of God — God as Creator and God as Ruler.*

2. **Ask group members to read the following passages:**

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. (Isa 40:28)

Karl Barth, a German theologian, states that the reality of creation is and can only be known with clarity and certainty in the person of Jesus Christ... Jesus Christ is the Word by which the knowledge of creation is mediated to us because He is the Word by which God has fulfilled creation and continually maintains and rules it (Dogmatics 111/1).

The Omnipotence of God

We have called You Names.

*We have cut you down
to our size.*

*We cannot bear not knowing
who you are.*

*We cannot stand not knowing
what You will do next.*

*We, the managers of grace
in the administration of life.*

*How blessed we are
that You are more
than what we make of You
that You do not fit
that You are so inconvenient
so lacking in good form
so impertinent to call.*

O Fire in the ice

O Stillness in the stream

O Flowers filling out the sky

O Love beneath the ground

O Life within the tomb.

— Mary Jo Leddy, *Radical Gratitude*²

...I do not believe that sin is the enemy we often make it out to be...When we see how we have turned away from God, and then and only then do we have what we need to begin turning back. Sin is our only hope, the fire alarm that wakes us up to the possibility of true repentance.

— Barbara Brown Taylor, *Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Translation*³

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers — all things have been created through him and for him. (Col 1:15-16)

3. Reflecting on God, Creator and Ruler

Leader: *Words create images in our minds. What pictures/images do you see after reading each of the five sections of God, Creator and Ruler? Put your thoughts on paper using words or quick sketches. Use scripture references (pp.30-31, Living Faith), commentaries, and interpretive references for more study.*

2.1 God Creates and Rules

Leader: *The doctrine of creation is a conviction of faith, not a scientific conclusion. Genesis accounts of creation are attempts to describe with human language what is clearly beyond human experience. As a child what did you understand about God as Creator? What do children close to you understand about God as Creator? Have you asked them? Has the meaning of ruler changed in your lifetime? How do you understand God as ruler?*

2.2 Our Creation

What difference does it make to know that human beings are created in God's image? In a book of daily meditations based on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings, Charles Ringma writes, "Our self-identity comes from being loved by a personal God who declares us valuable and significant."⁴ Recall and list on newsprint examples of how Jesus demonstrated his understanding that people are created in God's image.

2.3 Our Calling

"Every human being is created to respond to God. Finding fulfillment and meaning in life is our work. Our calling is to love God and choose to be servants thus voluntarily giving up the right to be in charge. Being a servant is not the same as choosing to serve which includes being in charge and deciding whom and when we will serve."⁵ Discuss Foster's statement. Describe different images of *servant*. Are you a servant? How do you experience your calling? Share your experience with another or in a small group.

2.4 Our Care for the World

God has entrusted us to care for the earth which sustains all life. List your concerns regarding our care of the earth. What are stewards of God's good earth doing in your community? What could you do as a church family to inform and demonstrate responsible action in your neighbourhood? Say or sing *We cannot own the sunlit sky* (#717, *The Book of Praise*). Read Psalm 65:9-13.

2.5 Sin Separates us from God

Re-read Barbara Brown Taylor's quote (top of this page). Do you agree or disagree? Discuss. Read 2.5, *Living Faith*, a few times. Do the statements reflect your understanding of sin? Would you change or add other ideas and different words? Write down your thoughts. Which images of sin are most accurate for you? Describe to another how your understanding of sin has changed from your childhood to the present.

2.5.8 Thanks be to God!

Theologian Frederick Buechner explains God's grace (unconditional acceptance) in the following way: "Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here's the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you..."⁶ When has grace happened in your life? Share these memories with another. What signs of grace do you discern in the world today? Sing *Amazing grace* (#670, *The Book of Praise*) in a language of your choice.

Exploring Chapter 2: God, Creator and Ruler

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

Movement/Drama



Re-read *The Omnipotence of God* by Mary Jo Leddy (p. 15). With a partner or in a small group decide what movements/gestures fit the words and meaning of the poem. Use simple props if available. Select music to accompany your movements. Be easy, relaxed, flowing: enjoy moving in prayer.

Music



1. God as creator and ruler is the topic for hymns 301-339 (*The Book of Praise*). Browse through this section, searching for the words (lyrics) that fit section 2 of *Living Faith* statements.
2. Sing *God of the sparrow* (#307, *The Book of Praise*). Add your own verses. *God of the sparrow* by Jaroslav J. Vajda (Morehouse Publishing, 1999) is a beautifully illustrated book for adults and children. It is available for order through the Book Room of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, (800) 619-7301.

Make an Acrostic



An acrostic is a poem formed by writing the letters of a word in a vertical line.

Real God,
Under your wings we take flight.
Listening for your voice, let
Everyone
Reflect upon your ways.

Read sections 2.1 – 2.5.8. Make two acrostics based on the words CREATOR and RULER.

Whole Group Activity

Share with the whole group if you broke into smaller groups. Close with a blessing.

God in Christ

Meditation Centre: Christ candle, art prints portraying Jesus in varied styles and settings, lamb (photo or plush toy), chalice, bread, Bible

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *For the last two sessions we were exploring the nature of God. Today, we think about how God became a person and lived on earth. Today, we reflect on God in Christ.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

And the word became flesh and lived among us.... (Jn 1:14a)

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,

Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

— John 1:14, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*⁷

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16:15-16).

Christ, you know I love you.

Did you see I waved?

I believe in you and God

So tell me that I’m saved.

— the character Simon Zealotes in *Jesus Christ Superstar*⁸

Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Jesus crosses all cultural boundaries by allowing us all to relate to him. He is Australian as well.

— Sally Findlay⁹

God, for Christians, is defined by Jesus Christ.... God’s presence is focused in Jesus Christ who is the Word, God in his self-expression, embodied in a human life.

— John H. Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine*¹⁰

3. Reflecting on *God in Christ*

3.1 Jesus Christ and Israel.

The Hebrew covenant (the Old Testament) records God’s presence in history and declares God’s promise of the One to come. Read a scripture from each of the 3.1 sections in the Appendix, p. 31, *Living Faith*.

3.2 Jesus Christ: Truly God.

The promise of the old covenant was fulfilled in the new covenant. Identify and list phrases or concepts in 3.2 that need investigation and discussion. It might be helpful to read the scripture references related to this section on p. 31, *Living Faith*.

3.3 Jesus Christ: Truly Human.

We wonder! When did Jesus learn to walk? Was he frightened by dark shadows at night? Which friend did he fancy in his teens? Did he ever drink too much wine? What did he and his cousin John talk about as teens? Who were his adult role models? Did he always want to go to temple? What did he dream? When was he aware of his divinity? Discuss these questions.

3.4 Jesus is Saviour.

The word *salvation* derived from the Latin *salvus*, which means *heal* and *whole*. Jesus heals and makes whole. Saving includes liberating, delivering, and freeing from bondage. Describe being lost and rescued, healed and made whole, in the 21st century. What contemporary words could be used to describe Jesus as saviour in a culture unfamiliar with the biblical images of shepherd, lamb, ransom, and slave?

3.5 Jesus is Lord.

The earliest Christian affirmation of faith was “Jesus Christ is Lord.” The title *Lord* means “one having authority.” What do you believe Jesus has authority over? In our time the word “lord” has negative connotations because it reflects a hierarchy associated with feudal society. Some prefer to describe Jesus as “friend.” What words do you use to describe Jesus?

3.6 Salvation in Christ.

Salvation comes through God’s grace alone received through faith in Christ. “Are You Saved or Are You Presbyterian?” is the question discussed in the first chapter of *Being Presbyterian in the Bible Belt: A Theological survival guide for Youth, Parents and other confused Presbyterians* by Ted Foote and Alex Thornburg (Geneva Press, 2000). The authors discuss this question and conclude that we were saved 2000 years ago, we are saved daily, and we will be saved in the future. Grace is an undeserved free gift. It is central to the reformed understanding of salvation. Identify experiences of grace (an undeserved free gift) in your life. Share one story of grace with a partner or a group.

Exploring Chapter 3: God in Christ

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

Music



Have a “God in Christ” hymn sing with selected hymns. Hymns #340-379 in *The Book of Praise* were assigned the heading God in Christ. Select two pre-1900 hymns and two 20th century hymns. Read the texts in unison and share any observations.

Praise

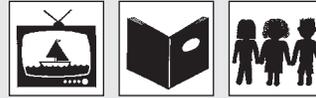


Listen to Simon Zealotes' song "Jesus did you see me wave?" in a recording of *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The words of the song motivated Ernest T. Campbell, a Presbyterian preacher/writer in the USA, to write a Palm Sunday sermon entitled *Jesus, Did You See Me Wave? Locked in a Room with Open Doors* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1974). Campbell expressed concern about the view that the first Palm Sunday crowd was a fickle, rowdy mob, intent on holidays more than Holy Days. He maintained that the enthusiastic crowd described in the gospels was attractive and beautiful because they acted freely and impulsively to rejoice in God. Such moments of uninhibited exuberant joy are rare in many churches. Campbell wondered if substituting mere words for the real thing has dulled our faith or kept us stiff and formal. He ended his sermon with these words:

Jesus, did you see me wave? Perhaps we can hear him answer softly, I've seen you study. I've seen you worship. I've seen you give. I've seen you serve. But I've never seen you wave. Is something holding you back?¹¹

What would *waving* look like today? Where and how would *waving* happen? How could your church more effectively celebrate the joy of the presence of the living Jesus? After considering these questions, celebrate by waving your arms!

What Does Jesus Look Like?



Choose one of the following:

- Refer to the art prints assembled in the Meditation Centre and others assembled for this activity. (Note: Look in curriculum resources for pictures and posters, magazines, and books containing art prints, stained glass windows, wall hangings, etc.). Include pictures of Jesus from different cultures. Look at the varied images and reflect in silence for a few minutes. Discuss your impressions with a partner or in a small group.
- View stained glass window images, paintings, and wall hangings in your worship space and building that represent Jesus. What is the artist "saying" about who Jesus is? Consider the impact that visual images of Jesus have on children, teens, and adults. Would you change any of the images in your church space? Why?

Whole Group Activity

Share with the whole group if you broke into smaller groups. Close with a blessing.

Chapter 4

God the Holy Spirit

Meditation Centre: Candle, lantern, small fan blowing cloth, Bible, dry bones (dried turkey or chicken bones), an art print. (If practical, an open window might add to the ambience of the meeting space.)

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *We continue to explore the many aspects of God's nature. Today, we will consider, explore and experience God's Holy Spirit.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1, 4)

The Spirit gives us courage
To pray without ceasing,
To witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
To unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
To hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
And to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
— *The Book of Confessions*, 10.4 (lines 66-71)¹²

The apostles were enjoined to wait on the coming of the Spirit. We would gain more power and courage and peace if we learned to wait. In the business of life we need to learn to be still... Amidst life's surging activity there must be time to receive.
— William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*¹³

God grabbed me. God's Spirit took me up and sat me down in the middle of an open plain strewn with bones. He led me around and among them — a lot of bones! ... "Watch this. I'm bringing the breath of life to you and you'll come to life."
— Ezekiel 37: 1-3 & 6, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*¹⁴

3. Reflecting on God the Holy Spirit

If you have not already done so, read chapter 4 in unison.

Leader: *The dominant theme in the book of Acts is the power of the Holy Spirit made known in and through the members of the early church. The church came into being when the Spirit's power enabled people to speak of God's wonders in different languages with the result that many became believers and followed the way of Jesus.*

It is difficult to define the Holy Spirit. It is like trying to define wind or sound. The third person of the Trinity is known through experience. Recall a time when you experienced the Holy Spirit. Share your experience with a partner or a group.

Exploring Chapter 4: God the Holy Spirit

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

Identify the “work” of the Holy Spirit



Sing the hymn *Spirit, Spirit of gentleness* (#399, *The Book of Praise*). On newsprint list the verbs (action words) in the hymn associated with the work and activity of the Holy Spirit. How many did you identify? Re-read chapter 4 and add more verbs to the list. Which activities of the Holy Spirit have you personally experienced? Share and discuss.

Visualize and create an abstract image



The Holy Spirit is wind and breath (Hebrew: *ruach*). It is life force and source of empowerment. Read the following hymn text by Brian Wren and create an abstract image of the Holy Spirit.

Great soaring Spirit,
Sweeping in uncharted flight
Across the bounds of time and space,
You fill the outflung galaxies
And move through earth’s long centuries
With aching, mending, dancing grace.
— Brian Wren, *What Language Shall I Borrow*¹⁵

- Use poster paints, markers, chalk, and/or crayons on white paper for a two-dimensional drawing. Use clay, small pieces of wood, or recycled materials for a three-dimensional piece.
- Enjoy the process of creating a visual representation of the Holy Spirit.

Fruits of the Spirit stained glass art



Read section 4.3.3 in *Living Faith* and compare it with Galatians 5:22-23. List the fruits of the spirit on newsprint. Use your imagination to consider how you would depict the fruits using colour and shape.

Make individual 8 1/2” by 14” or group 30”x36” “windows.”

- Cut coloured construction paper to represent the various fruits of the Spirit
- Glue the shapes onto black paper leaving spaces between the shapes to represent leaded lines

Considering “truth”



Read 4.3-4.3.2 in *Living Faith* in unison, followed by this Kenyan prayer:

From the cowardice that dares not face new truth,
From the laziness that is contented with half-truth,
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,
Good Lord, deliver me. Amen.

— #397, *The Book of Praise*

- What does “new truth” and a “half truth” mean to you?
- Where do you see “arrogance that thinks it knows all truth?”
- When have you felt “disturbed and judged” by the Holy Spirit in relation to truth?

Say, sing, move



The Spirit knows, the Spirit calls, by Love’s divine ordaining,
the friends we need, to serve and lead, their powers and gifts unchaining.
The Spirit knows, the Spirit calls, from women, men and children,
the friends we need, to serve and lead. Rejoice and make them welcome!

— #588, *The Book of Praise*, verse 4

- Say this verse in unison, then line by line around a circle.
- Make up simple actions to portray each phrase.
- Use colourful, flowing scarves or paper streamers to represent the Spirit.
- Select those to represent women, men and children.
- Say and then sing this verse portraying the images in this verse.

Whole Group Activity

Share with the group one thing about the Holy Spirit that surprised you.
Pray together for the Holy Spirit to come into your midst, enliven and excite your congregation. Close with a blessing.

The Bible

Meditation Centre: Various versions and types of Bibles (family, child’s, Greek, etc), a candle, a world map or globe

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *The Bible is full of wonderful things — poetry, history, love songs, parables. Today we will discover some of the many aspects of the collection of books we call the Holy Bible.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. (Ps 119:105, KJV)

By your words I can see where I am going;
they throw a beam of light on my dark path.
I’ve committed myself and I’ll never turn back
from living by your righteous order.
Everything’s falling apart on me, GOD;
put me together again with your Word.

— Psalm 119:105-112, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*¹⁶

The study of the Bible is the soul of theology.

— Pope Leo XIII, Nov. 18, 1893, as quoted by Peter Gomes, *The Good Book*¹⁷

[Philip] asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” [The man] replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:30-31)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:14-17)

The Bible is not a book “that fell out of heaven” and it was not written in English.

— Robert McAfee Brown, *The Bible Speaks to You*¹⁸

Since discerning what God, in the Bible, means for us to hear and do is a matter of life and death, we must approach the interpretation of scripture as we do our own salvation, working it out in fear and trembling.

— Peter Gomes, *The Good Book*¹⁹

3. Reflecting on *The Bible*

- What place did the Bible have in your home as a child, if any?
- Who taught or helped you understand the Bible?
- Were you taught to recite Bible passages or verses from memory?
- Have your views about the Bible changed? In what ways?

Read Chapter 5 in *Living Faith* and consider the following:

- Are there words or statements that need definition and/or clarification?
- Select three phrases that you strongly affirm.
- Select a phrase that raises a question or some feelings of scepticism.

Reading on the canon

Read aloud the following description, which are asked of a candidate for ministry at an ordination or induction ceremony. As it is read, ask someone to post the words “canon,” “Old Testament,” “Septuagint,” “Apocrypha,” “New Testament” on the wall as they occur in the reading.

The scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the written Word of God, testifying to Christ the living Word, are the canon of all doctrine, by which Christ rules our faith and life....

— Section 409, *Book of Forms*

A *canon* is a list of writings that achieve a standard that authorizes their use as sacred scripture. In 90 A.D. a group of Jewish scholars met in the city of Jamnia in Asia Minor to confirm the scriptures that would be considered authoritative in Judaism. They identified the 39 “books” that Christians frequently label the *Old Testament*. By the end of the 1st century most Christians could not read Hebrew: They read the Greek version of the Old Testament called the *Septuagint*. It included the 39 books approved at Jamnia plus other writings that were rejected by the Jewish scholars because they were of recent origin and/or written in Greek. These other writings have for centuries been known as the *Apocrypha* and appear in some versions of the Bible. Presbyterians do not accept the Apocrypha as authoritative. The formation of the *New Testament* involved much debate and bitter disagreements over several centuries. There is evidence that shortly after the Jewish scholars met in Jamnia, Christians began considering what writings they should consider authoritative. Some scriptures read in worship in the 2nd century (e.g. *Shepherd of Hermas*) were not among the 27 “books” of the New Testament ratified as *canonical* at a major church council in Carthage in 397 A.D. During the Protestant Reformation individual reformers questioned the value of particular books of the Bible. The canon, however, remained intact.

Exploring Chapter 5: The Bible

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

Consider and discuss



- To what was Paul referring when he wrote, “All scripture is inspired by God...”?
- If you were one of the church leaders responsible for determining what writings were to be in the canon, what criteria would you use? (Identify at least four.)
- Do you think the canon should be re-opened? What writings would you add?
- Are there any books of the Bible you would omit? On what grounds?

Exploring Chapter 5: The Bible *(continued)*

The Bible as library



Prior to the session, write down all the books of the Bible on a sheet of paper. Photocopy, cut apart the books and place a set in an envelope for each participant. Invite learners to do two things:

1. Put the books in order in two groups — Old Testament and New Testament. (Provide Bibles if needed.)
2. Ask the participants to arrange the books according to their type of literature. Provide them with these categories to choose from: Law, Narrative (history), Wisdom Literature, Major Prophets, Apocalyptic, Minor Prophets, Letters (see sidebar for key).

Basic types of literature in the Bible

Apocalyptic — Daniel, Revelation

Law — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Letters — Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude

Major Prophets — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel

Minor Prophets — Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Narrative (history) in Old Testament — Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

Narrative (history) in New Testament — Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts of the Apostles

Wisdom Literature — Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs

Three temptations



Peter Gomes, a preacher/theologian at Harvard, cautions readers of the Bible to be mindful of three temptations:

- Bibliolatry: the worship of the Bible, ascribing to it the glory due to God
- Literalism: the worship of the text, in which the letter is given inappropriate superiority over the Spirit
- Culturalism: the worship of a prevailing culture, to the norms of which the Bible is forced to conform.²⁰

Cite examples of bibliolatry, literalism, and culturalism that you have experienced or observed.

Discovering the Bible videos



Borrow, from Church Offices' video resource library ([800] 619-7301, x234) the video series *Discovering the Bible*. These are four half-hour programs that engagingly tell how the Bible came to be. If group time does not allow time to see all four, arrange a special longer meeting time, or lend the videos to group members.

Understanding the Bible



Hermeneutics is “the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation and the theories of interpretation, esp. scripture or literary texts.”²¹ Although tempting, it is often unhelpful to use a single biblical text to solve a problem or prove a point. In many cases, texts of opposing points of view can be found. The Bible has been quoted to support slavery, segregation, racism, militarism, violence against women, and homophobia. It is necessary to look beyond the written words to discern God’s word in the stories, poetry and sayings of the Bible. Bible dictionaries and commentaries provide help in understanding the context and meaning of the scriptures. Often, one passage assists in the interpretation of another.

Consider the following:

- What issues of disagreement in the church have been or will be determined as the church makes use of hermeneutics?
- In what ways do the words of 5.1 - 5.4 in *Living Faith* help to clarify your understanding of the Bible?

Whole Group Activity

Invite each group member to pick up a Bible and, holding it, tell the others one new thing they learned about the Bible in this session. Close with a blessing.

Faith

Meditation Centre: A gift-wrapped box, an item representative of childhood (e.g. stuffed toy), Bible, candle, a flower bulb, an apple

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *To some people, “faith” may seem like an elusive thing. How do you describe faith? What does faith look like? How do people become “people of faith?” Today our session focuses on faith and how it can become real to all of us.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)

In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed an apple tree,
in cocoons a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there’s a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.
— #674, *The Book of Praise*, verse 1

“Faith is elliptical,” our minister told us. By “elliptical” he meant that the spiritual path was not a straight line, that at times we moved away from the God we searched for as surely we moved back again toward Him....

— Dan Wakefield, *Returning: A Spiritual Journey*²²

“For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” (Mt 17:20)

“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mk 9:24).

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (Jn 20:29)

3. Reflecting on Faith

“Faith takes form in our earliest relationships with those who provide care for us in infancy. Faith grows through our experience of trust and fidelity or of mistrust and betrayal with those closest to us.”²³ These ideas of H. Richard Niebuhr are important to consider when thinking about our own faith development and about the children, teens and adults in our communities and church families.

- As a child whom did you trust? Why?
- Talk about your earliest memories of trust and betrayal (e.g. Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, etc.)
- Did you believe that Jesus loved you? What did that mean to you?
- Discuss how your faith changed in your teens...as an adult

Read chapter 6 in *Living Faith* and discuss

- Which statements surprise you?
- Which statements do you affirm strongly?
- Which statements apply to you personally?

Search the scriptures

Look up two passages of scripture from each of the eight sections of chapter 6 in *Living Faith*, pp. 32-33. Talk about the ways these passages support the statements about faith.

Sing hymns about Faith

Choose one familiar and one new hymn about faith (# 670-690, *The Book of Praise*)

How do the chosen hymns illustrate the varied aspects of faith? Sing or read the hymns.

Exploring Chapter 6: Faith

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

Plan a trust walk: an act of faith



Needed: blindfolds, partners, a timer to signal the end of the walk. (3 -5 min), Silence.

- One person will lead a blindfolded partner on a meandering path throughout a space. Walk in silence.
- If other pairs participate at the same time, leading partners must avoid collisions.
- After both people have had their turns, discuss the experience (e.g. Did one experience more anxiety than the other?)
- Compare this walk with your personal journey of faith.
- Sing *Lead on, eternal Sovereign* (#743, *The Book of Praise*).

Make a signs-of-faith collage



When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth? (Luke 18:8)

Use newspaper and magazine words and pictures to create a mixture of overlapping images that demonstrate expressions of faith in our times.

Needed: poster board in circle, newspapers, magazines, glue sticks, scissors. Place an image of Jesus in the middle before starting.

Exploring Chapter 6: Faith *(continued)*

Role play Matthew 15: 21-28



- Read the story aloud.
- Choose people to play the roles of Jesus, disciples, the Gentile woman, village folk.
- Include props: table, cushions, utensils, bread, crumbs, costumes (fabric with rope ties).
- Include sound effects: e.g. a door knock, people talking angrily.
- In preparing your parts, take note that Jesus was tired, needing rest. The disciples are protective because they thought Jesus' mission was to the Jewish people, not Gentiles and this persistent seeker is a demanding Gentile woman. This offended both their sense of Jewishness and their customs around gender roles.
- After the role-play, talk about your feelings and reactions. What was surprising and/or uncomfortable? What did you learn?
- Change roles and repeat the role-play again.

Create a rainbow book entitled *Faith is*



- Each page is a different color of the rainbow.
- Each page has a different answer to the statement *Faith is*. e.g. Faith is... remembering how special I am when I feel worthless, ...committing family problems to God, etc.
- Materials needed: markers or calligraphy pens, multi-coloured paper, cardboard covers.
- Display in a church library or on a special table.

Whole Group Activity

Stand in a prayer circle. Invite people to contribute words or phrases about faith. Conclude the prayer with thankfulness to God for making faith real, for helping us in our search for faith.

Chapter 7

God's Church

Meditation Centre: Christ candle, picture of Christ with people (see 7.1.1, *Living Faith*), globe, photos of church members and congregational events, Bible, rocks, a brick, salt, vine

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *There is a children's song in our hymn book that starts, "I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together." It is easy for us to fall into the trap of thinking of "the church" as a building. Today we will explore aspects of the church and discover that it is much, much more than bricks, stone and wood.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

Come to him [Jesus], a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:4-5)

The church is not a building;
the church is not a steeple;
the church is not a resting place;
the church is a people.

— #475, *The Book of Praise*, verse 1

Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. (Acts 9:31)

The church as an institution continues its life on the basis of its traditions and structures. Where the church functions as a community — based on mutual care and responsibility — its life is sustained through mutual relationships, with each member playing a part. There is great dynamism, as well as great vulnerability, in the church being this way. That's why we tend to opt for the church as an institution rather than that of a community.

— Charles Ringma, *Seize the Day with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*²⁴

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

— The Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed, 381 A.D.

The institutional church in the next 20 years will continue more and more to look like the pink Cadillac with huge tail fins.

— Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*²⁵

A new church is being born. It may not be the church we expect or want. The church of the future may not include our favourite liturgy or hymn, our central theological principle, or even our denomination! God's promises always arrive with surprises in them. The form of the new world and new church is not in our hands. What is in our hands is the chance to respond to God's call.

— Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church*²⁶

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:12-13)

3. Reflecting on God's Church

- What images does the word 'church' bring to mind?
- Describe the church of your childhood, teen years, young adulthood, and adult years.
- Name three significant changes you've seen in church life in your lifetime.
- How would you explain church to one with no church knowledge and memory?
- Did the quotes read by the group members help in your understanding of church? Explain.

Scan chapter 7 in *Living Faith*

- What statements do you affirm? Question?
- What would you change or add?

Reformed belief about the church

Living Faith affirms that the church began and continues to be by the grace of God. It did not come into existence through human efforts or organization. The church exists as the **Word of God is rightly preached, the sacraments are rightly administered, and the church's life is rightly ordered** according to the Word of God. The church of Reformation roots is continuously being reformed (changed, corrected, improved) by the Word of God.

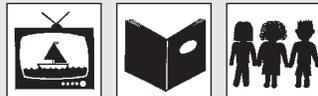
List signs or activities that signify that the church is changing.

Exploring Chapter 7: God's Church

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

Consider Church Buildings



View paintings, sketches, and photographs of church buildings (e.g. *The Indian Church* by Emily Carr, 1930). What do buildings say about God's church? Discuss your impressions of this church surrounded by giant trees.

Listen, reflect, and respond to each section



7.1 The Church

“The church is Christ together with his people...”

- Which words in this section describe your church community?
- How does your congregation respond to the “constant need of reform?”

7.2 Ministry

“All Christians are called to participate in the ministry of Christ...”

- Name the gifts you use in your ministry as the church.

7.3 Worship

“The church lives to praise God...”

- How does your church express praise?

7.4 Preaching

“...to preach the good news...”

- What do you identify as the marks of a good sermon?

7.5 Sacraments

“[The sacraments] are visible expressions of the gospel...”

- What aspects of the gospel do you experience through the sacraments?

7.6 Baptism

“Baptism assures us that we belong to God...”

- How does your church community experience being God’s family together?

7.7 Holy Communion

“The Lord’s Supper is a joyful mystery...”

- In communion we remember, give thanks, forgive, celebrate, belong, are fed, forgiven, and united with other Christians. How is joy expressed in the celebration of communion?
- Pray/sing the hymn *We are one in the Spirit* (#471, *The Book of Praise*) or another selection from the Church section (p.471-491).

Role Play Conversations



With a partner find a quiet place. Select from the following scenarios or create your own role-play:

1. **Joan** is mowing the church lawn. One of a small group of teens asks Joan if they can sit in the church for a while to think about a friend who has just died of aids. The church is locked.
 2. An older **man** comes back to worship after an absence of 20 years. He remembers the solemnity of past services. Jane, a **young mother** of two children, 3 and 5, is sitting next to him. She senses his apprehension and loneliness. The Lord’s Supper is being celebrated and children are always included in this family meal. After the service the man asks Jane why children are allowed to take communion.
 3. Leo is a **church member**. His neighbour, **72 year old Alex**, tells Leo that wars are caused by religious beliefs so he won’t have anything to do with church. Alex wonders why Leo goes to church.
- Assume your roles for about five minutes.
 - After the conversation, talk about your reactions: How did you feel as your character (e.g. anxious, defensive, uncomfortable etc.)? Would you say something different next time?
 - Switch roles and repeat the role play.

Whole Group Activity

Gather briefly with others. Share insights from small group activities. Invite everyone to thank each other for “being the church” to them. End with a blessing.

Our Life in Christ

Meditation Centre: Christ candle, Bible, bread, vine, family/ church family photos

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *When people decide to follow Jesus, there is a new life. How does one's life change? What does Jesus ask of his followers? This is what we will explore today — our life in Christ.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (2 Cor 5: 17)

Christ is not only the bringer of peace,
He is also the great disturber.

He does not only bring reconciliation, He also divides.

Where men and women respond to His call of discipleship, there is commotion and separation. Family ties may be broken, old allegiances changed, and friendships terminated, for nothing can stand in the way of the call of the Master.

That call is never the heralding trumpet to some narrow religious and bigoted cause.

It is the royal call to be God's servants of righteousness in our world.

— Charles Ringma, *Seize the Day with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*²⁷

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.” (Jn 15:12-13)

How can we live and love as [Jesus] did, except through the mysterious gift and power which he gives through his Spirit, so that we become his face, his hands, his heart and body?

— Jean Vanier, *The Broken Body: Journey to Wholeness*²⁸

Christ above us, Christ beneath us,

Christ beside us, Christ within us.

— from *Listening to the Heartbeat of God*²⁹

3. Reflecting on *Our Life in Christ*

Read chapter 8 in *Living Faith*. These statements affirm that we live minute by minute as those who have decided to follow Jesus in a world loved by God. We are the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus sent to be transforming agents of love. Read each section selecting activities that help deepen understanding for you and your faith community.

8.1 Discipleship

Discipleship is an ongoing journey and struggle rather than rest and arrival. Read 8.1-8.1.6, *Living Faith*.

- Think about your journey with Jesus. Did it begin as a child, teen or adult?
- Using paper and pencils/markers create a timeline of your journey marking significant faith experiences (e.g. first communion, a death, conversion, important events, etc.)
- How have prayer, Bible study and worship supported your life in Christ?

8.2 The Christian Family

- List a few changes in family life that have occurred in society in your lifetime.
- Record on newsprint.
- Read 8.2-8.2.6 in *Living Faith*. With which statements in 8.2 do you agree or disagree? Do any of the statements raise unresolved issues for you?
- Read Bonhoeffer's thoughts in the Charles Ringma quote above. Discuss the impact of Christian faith on family life. What happens, for instance, if only one member of a family becomes a Christian?
- Discuss 8.2.6, *Living Faith*. In what ways is the household of God *family* to all its members?
- Select and sing a hymn in *The Book of Praise* (# 471-491) that is about church as family.

8.3 Love

No word is more expressive of our life in Christ than **love**.

God is love. (1 Jn 4:16).

God so loved the world... (Jn 3:16).

...those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 Jn 4:21)

...and the greatest of these is love (1 Cor 13:13)

Read 8.3, *Living Faith*, responsively or silently. Do all or one of the following:

- List the definitions of love in 8.3. Draw an image (symbol or line drawing sketch) for each.
- Pantomime *what love looks like* in each section. Use props: scarves, boxes, whatever is handy.
- Note the statements that prompt surprise, wonder, doubt, affirmation. Share your thoughts. Listen closely to each other, asking for clarification before expressing your own thoughts.

8.4 Justice

...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:8)

- Read Justice 8.4, *Living Faith*, responsively or silently.
- Note the statements that cause you to pause and reflect.
- List what *doing justice* means in 8.4. In what ways does your church *do justice*?
- Do you agree with the statement, "Politics and religion don't mix"? What would Jesus say about that statement?
- Display examples of justice issues from newspapers and newsmagazines on poster board. How would justice be served in the issues selected?
- Sing a hymn from the 'justice' section (#708-727) in *The Book of Praise*.

8.5 World peace

The choice is no longer between violence and nonviolence. It's nonviolence or nonexistence.

— Martin Luther King Jr., the night before he was killed³⁰

Read 8.5, *Living Faith*, in unison and three of the scripture references found on page 34,

Living Faith.

- Discuss how perceptions of world peace have changed since 1900.
- In the context of world events, what does it mean to love our enemies?
- Where do you see signs of peace-making today?
- Plan a church event designed to promote peace-making.

Exploring Chapter 8: Our Life in Christ

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

Create visual images of chapter 8



This activity can be a solitary or group effort.

- Choose a medium: paper, play dough, clay, fabric, collected items (buttons, wood, shells, glass, stones, newspaper/magazines pictures/print etc.)
- Enjoy the process of creating. The symbols may express discipleship, family, love, justice, peace.
- Display with the heading *Life in Christ*.

Interpreting the signs of the times



“Toto, I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”
— Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. (Mt 16:3).

These days have been described as postmodern, pre-Christian, post-Christian. These terms emphasize that we live in rapidly changing times. List five significant social, cultural, scientific, or technological changes that have occurred within the last 10 years.

- Do these changes present a challenge to your life as a Christian?
- What was Jesus’ attitude towards change?
- How do you think he would respond to the changes you have identified and listed?

Whole Group Activity

Gather briefly with others. Share insights from small group activities. Invite everyone to thank each other for “being the church” to them. End with a blessing.

Chapter 9

The Church Reaches Out

Meditation Centre: Street map, world globe, candle, Bible, Koran, menorah, pictures of people around the world

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *It has been said that the Christian church exists for one reason and one reason only: mission. Many worship services end with a message like this: “This is the moment for which we have come when our worship ends and our service begins. You have been equipped by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Go and do Christ’s work in the world.” It is this going out and reaching out that we will explore in today’s session.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

(Isa 58: 6-7)

Our mission is to challenge the false gods of our times:

- Egocentrism
- Exploitation of the earth
- Materialism
- Race, class, gender privilege
- Militarism
- Media’s sale of news as commodity
- Exploitative economy

Glory E. Dharmaraj, *Concepts of Mission*³¹

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Jesus Christ. (Gal 3:28)

Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve...; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. (Josh 24:15)

All of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. (2 Cor 5:18-19)

Many of us love religion all too much and God all too little. We love ourselves too much and the world too little.

— Pastor Erwin McManus, as quoted in Leonard Sweet's *Post-Modern Pilgrims*³²

I'll call nobodies and make them somebodies;
I'll call the unloved and make them beloved.
In the place where they yelled out, You're nobody!
They're calling you God's living children

— Romans 9:25-26, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*³³

A Christian's concern...is also for natural life and the world. Good government, justice, values that ennoble the human person, the environment and the world's resources are not secular concerns. They are deeply spiritual, for without a sustainable world and cultural values based on freedom and justice, the message of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ would fall into a vacuum.

— Charles Ringma, *Seize the Day with Dietrich Bonhoeffer*³⁴

3. Reflecting on *The Church Reaches Out*

- How has the church's understanding of *mission* changed in the past 50 years?
- The word *mission* is no longer the sole property of religious groups. In what other contexts do you hear or see the word *mission*?
- List the definitions of mission found in Chapter 9, *Living Faith*

Exploring Chapter 9: The Church Reaches Out

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

9.2 Our Mission and Other Faiths



- Read 9.2 in *Living Faith*. What statements do you affirm, wonder about, and/or question?
- Read two or three scripture references (p.35, *Living Faith*) from each section.
- Print and read the The Presbyterian Church in Canada mission statement found on the PCC web site: www.presbycan.ca/documents/missionstatement.html. Compare this statement with Chapter 9, *Living Faith*.
- Remember times when you've discussed ideas or shared religious experiences with those of another faith. What happened? How did you feel? Was there mutual understanding and respect? Do you continue to share religious experiences together?
- Create a dialogue based on the assertion that *as beggars telling others where food is to be found we point to life in Christ*. Decide on the setting and ages of participants. Take note of the need to avoid arrogance and maintain a spirit of humility.

Music



Find the 'mission' section of *The Book of Praise* (#753-778). Select hymns that express the ideas of chapter 9 of *Living Faith*. Learn and sing one hymn that is new to you.

9.3 Our Mission and Unbelief



- Read 9.3. What do you say to one who tells you there is no God?
- How do you respond to family and friends who profess unbelief? Share your experiences.
- Search and clip newspapers and magazines for headlines and photos reflecting 9.3.
- Glue these onto a large cardboard circle representing the world. Give your creation a title.

9.1 Our Mission



After Jesus read his mission statement in the synagogue one Sabbath day, he was no longer welcome in his own hometown of Nazareth.

God's Spirit is on me;

God has chosen me to preach the message of good news to the poor,

Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,

To set the burdened and battered free, to announce, "This is God's year to act!"³⁵

How do you *proclaim the good news*? Write your thoughts, discuss, or role play.

- A stranger is sitting in front of you in worship. There's no one else in her pew. You notice that she wipes her eyes often during the service. As she rises to leave, your eyes connect.
- A man sitting silently on a blanket outside a bank holds a sign, PLEASE HELP! He looks at you as you exit the bank after using the ATM machine.
- You often talk to 7-year-old Sam, when he plays in front of your house. A neighbour collecting money to help the family tells you that Sam's dad died after a five-year struggle with cancer. You see Sam slowly walking his bike as you walk to the mailbox.
- A church friend is angry about the new hymn book. He is threatening to leave his church family of 55 years. "Too many changes everywhere," he says. "I can't stand it!"
- It is a known fact that some women in your community are victims of abuse and isolation. There is no women's shelter or rape crisis centre. One church member, on behalf of an unhappy neighbour, writes a letter to the session asking if the church could please do something to support the women and children of the area.
- A family of two women and three children come to your church seeking a welcome and membership. The women have grown up in church families and seek a similar experience for their own family.
- A young man with HIV attends worship. His family has disowned him and he needs friends. He's heard about Jesus and wants to learn more. "Can I attend Bible classes here?" he asks.

Whole Group Activity

If you have been using this guide over a number of weeks, pause and decide what you would like to do as a celebration for your next and last session. End with a blessing.

Our Hope in God

Meditation Centre: Signs of hope and new life (burning candle, cross, egg, cocoon), headlines, photos, art prints, magazine pictures of public apology, rescue, reconciliation, renewal

Whole Group Activity

1. Leader: *Our final session in the Living Faith study centres on our hope in God. We began this study thinking of the nature of God and end it expressing our hope in God.*

2. Ask group members to read the following passages:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. (Isa 65:17)

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?
But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom 8: 24-25)

For Christians, hope is ultimately hope in Christ. The hope that he really is what for centuries we have been claiming he is. The hope that despite the fact that sin and death still rule the world, he somehow conquered them. The hope that in him and through him, all of us stand a chance of somehow conquering them too. The hope that at some unforeseeable time and in some unimaginable way he will return with healing in his wings.

— Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*³⁶

Question 95: What is the nature of our Christian hope?

We hope for a better world here and now in which justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. We also hope for heaven, when death will be no more, and crying and pain will have passed away.

— from *The New Presbyterian Catechism*, Acts and Proceedings of the 127th General Assembly, 2001

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint; therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

— Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*³⁷

3. Reflecting on *Our Hope in God*

“Expectation and desire combined” is one dictionary’s definition of hope.³⁸

- Describe your understanding of hope as a child. Include things hoped for, expectations fulfilled... or not.
- What signs of hope do you see in your community? In the world?
- Have the hopes of your generation been realized? Explain.
- What do you hope for now?

Chapter 10: Our Hope in God

- Read pp. 28-29 in *Living Faith* aloud or silently.
- Note words or phrases that cause you to pause and think. What words or ideas require further consideration? Find the biblical basis for the statements in the appendix on p.35 in *Living Faith*. Use a concordance or commentaries for greater understanding.
- In section 10.2 note the biblical images of life in the age to come. What images would you add? How would you describe this life to a child or adult with no biblical memory?
- Read the above quotations. Which ones help with your understanding of hope? Discuss.

Exploring Chapter 10: Our Hope in God

(may be done in smaller groups)

Choose from the following activities designed to appeal to various learning styles. Those with similar interests may group together. Share your thoughts with the other members of the group at the end of the session.

Write a cinquain about hope



A cinquain is a five-line non-rhyming poem that describes a person, place or thing.

Line 1: one word — noun

Line 2: two words — describes the noun in line 1

Line 3: three words — action words/verb phrases

Line 4: four words — feelings about the noun in line 1

Line 5: one word — synonym (a word with the same meaning) for the noun in line 1

Use a thesaurus to find synonyms for hope. Illustrate your cinquain poem with symbols and/or pictures. Display poems on a bulletin board or in a church newsletter.

Hymns of Hope



1. Learn the hymn *Abba, Abba, hear us, we cry* (#785, *The Book of Praise*). Read the text in unison. Listen to the tune. Sing!
2. Browse through the section *Our Hope in God* in *The Book of Praise* (#782-797).
 - Select one familiar and one unfamiliar hymn. Read these texts as poems of faith in unison.
 - Find other hymns that express your understanding of hope. Where, when and with whom would these hymns be best suited for use in your community of faith?

Exploring Chapter 10: Our Hope in God *(continued)*

Art



The object of art is not to reflect the visible but to make visible.
— Paul Klee, as quoted in Karen Stone's *Image and Spirit*³⁹

- View paintings/sculpture in an art gallery or in art books.
- Which pieces hold signs of hope for you? Why? Discuss.

Create a visual image of hope



- Use a medium of choice: paints, pencils, markers, clay, fabric, paper.
- Express your ideas of hope by gluing, painting, drawing, shaping, and sewing.
- What does hope look like to you? What colours? What shapes?
- Enjoy the process of creating a visual image.

Films



- Have a movie evening with a spiritual focus. Edward McNutly, a Presbyterian pastor in the PCUSA, offers a collection of 31 devotions linking movies with the spiritual life of moviegoers. Scripture passages, questions for reflection, hymns and prayers are included in his book, *Praying the Movies...Daily Meditations from Classic Films* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001).
- Discuss how beliefs expressed in *Living Faith* are reflected in the movie viewed.
- Share popcorn and ideas.

Whole Group Activity

Enjoy, together, a celebration of your time together learning about *Living Faith*. Either verbally or on chart paper, jot down things you learn. How can you share this with the rest of the congregation? End with a blessing.

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