



## **"JOIN THE CHURCH" LEARNING CIRCLE: CONFIRMATION, MEMBERSHIP, & BELIEVER'S BAPTISM**

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Southwood United Church, Calgary AB

Epiphanytide & Lent 2022

Bi-weekly Sundays\*, February 6 – April 10, 2022, 8:30–10:00 AM

*\*The last two sessions will be held on back-to-back weeks*

### **Important Registration Notes**

Registration is online via [southwoodchurch.ca/circles](https://southwoodchurch.ca/circles). For Confirmation, Baptism, and Reaffirmation of Faith candidates, the deadline to register is February 3, 2022. For those transferring their membership from another congregation or church, the deadline to register is March 17, 2022. This Learning Circle is open to all those ages 13 and up. If you have any trouble accessing the online registration system, please contact the church office at (403) 253-2979 or email [office@southwoodchurch.ca](mailto:office@southwoodchurch.ca).

### **Special Notes**

Confirmands and candidates for Baptism need to attend all 6 sessions. Those transferring are welcome to attend all 6 but are only required to attend the last 2 (if they are transferring from another congregation of The United Church of Canada) or the last 3 (if they are transferring from outside The United Church of Canada). Prospective transferees who are unable to obtain a certificate or letter of good standing from their previous congregation or church must attend all 6 sessions and will be considered candidates for Reaffirmation of Faith (please contact Rev. Sam for more details if this is your situation).

## Learning Circle Description

Were you baptized as an infant or child and now feel like you're ready to make your faith your own? Is it time to make a public profession of your faith? In our tradition, **Confirmation** is the rite through which those baptized as infants or children are admitted into full Church membership. Similarly, do you consider yourself a Christian, but have not yet been baptized? Are you ready to make that commitment before God and your fellow believers? **Believer's Baptism** is a sacrament administered to teens or adults who have not previously been baptized. Through it, they're also admitted into full Church membership. Or, alternatively, did you at one time become a full member of another congregation or church and now feel like Southwood is your spiritual home? **Transfer of Membership** is how we receive and affirm our covenant relationship together as Christians in a local context.

If you're 13+ and answered "yes" to any of the questions above, this Learning Circle is for you! You're invited to officially "join the church" through one of these rites of passage. Together, we'll explore our heritage of faith, share our personal stories of what it means to us to follow Jesus, and learn about the privileges and responsibilities involved in becoming a member of Christ's Church in a local congregation.

## Learning Objectives

Upon successful completion of this Learning Circle, participants will:

1. Become eligible as candidates for Confirmation, Baptism, Reaffirmation of Christian Faith, or transfer of membership;
2. Be able to articulate the basic beliefs and practices of the Christian faith;
3. Be able to describe their personal faith journeys and to express what it means to them to be followers of Jesus Christ;
4. Have a greater familiarity with The United Church of Canada, its history, theology, and mission, and its place within the larger Christian Church;
5. Understand the roles, responsibilities, and privileges of full members of Southwood United Church;
6. Upon approval by the Church Council, be invited to participate in a celebration service where they will be confirmed, baptized, and/or received as full members of the Church.

## Requirements and Time Investment (approximate)

	<i>Conf./Bap./Reaff.</i>	<i>Transferees (non-UCC)</i>	<i>Transferees (UCC)</i>
Sessions	9 hrs	4.5 hrs	3 hrs
Reading	12 hrs	4.5 hrs	---
Homework	6 hrs	3 hrs	2 hrs
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27 hrs</b>	<b>12 hrs</b>	<b>5 hrs</b>

## Homework & Assignments

### 1. Journal Entries *(Confirmation, Baptism, & Reaffirmation candidates only)*

Participants are asked to write a short "journal entry" (200–500 words or so) following each of the learning sessions, in which they reflect upon their own learning and faith formation from the material and discussion. Potential prompting questions could be (but are certainly not limited to): What did I learn? How is God speaking to me? What stuck out the most? With what did I agree/disagree? What do I want to know more about?

During sessions, participants will be invited (but not required) to share highlights or wrestlings from their journal entries with the group.

Please email your journal entries to Sam & Riley by the following dates:

Session 1 entry - February 16, 2022

Session 2 entry - March 2, 2022

Session 3 entry - March 16, 2022

Session 4 entry - March 30, 2022

Session 5/6 entry - April 13, 2022

### 2. Reading Mark's Gospel *(Confirmation, Baptism, & Reaffirmation candidates only)*

Participants are asked to read through the Gospel of Mark over the course of the Learning Circle as a personal and communal spiritual practice. This will mean reading approximately 10 verses a day, or a chapter-and-a-half a week.

A reading schedule / guide will be provided following the first session

### 3. Transfer Certificates *(Transferees only)*

Transferees need to submit a Certificate of Transfer or Letter of Good Standing from their previous congregation or church. Rev. Sam can assist you in obtaining this document, if necessary (please reach out via email).

**Please email a copy of your certificate/letter to Sam or drop it off in-person at the church office no later than March 30, 2022.**

### 4. Profession of Faith *(All participants)*

Prior to the final session, all participants are asked to create personal professions of the stories of their Christian faith. These could take a variety of forms: written statements/stories, visual art pieces, poems, videos ... or other creative mediums! We'll celebrate whatever format/medium feels right to you.

***The profession of faith should seek to answer the following questions: What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Who is Jesus to me?***

During Session 6, participants will be asked to share/present/explain their profession of faith with the group. Aim for 5 minutes. Candidates for Confirmation, Baptism, and Reaffirmation of Faith will also be invited to share their professions of faith with the congregation (details will be discussed).

**Please come ready to share your profession of faith on April 10, 2022**

## Evaluation

Candidates for Confirmation, Baptism, or Reaffirmation of Faith will be (graciously) evaluated by the Lead Pastor as to the genuineness of their faith in Christ and their readiness to become full members of the Church. This is not a formal evaluation, but a relational one. In order for candidates to be confirmed/baptized/reaffirmed, the Lead Pastor must be satisfied, upon their completion of the Learning Circle, of their ability and desire to make the relevant vows in good faith.

"In order to become a full member, a person must have enough knowledge about the Christian faith and the United Church to make their commitment with understanding" (*The Manual* (2022), §B.3.3.2).

Evaluation of those seeking to transfer their membership to Southwood United Church is based simply upon their submission of a Certificate of Transfer or Letter of Good Standing and their participation in the required sessions.

### **Important Policies**

It is the responsibility of the Church Council to approve people as full members of the congregation (see *The Manual*, §B.3.3.1). Prior to the scheduled celebration service, the Lead Pastor will make recommendations to the Council regarding each candidate and request motions of approval to move forward.

### **Learning Circle Outline**

Each session will begin with a welcome, check-in, and invitation to share, and will conclude with space for discussion, questions, ponderings, and prayer. All the readings mentioned below are listed in the Bibliography and will be made available directly to participants via email and/or a shared Google Drive folder.

#### **Sunday, February 6 (via Zoom)**

Pre-reading: None.

1. Christianity 101
  - a. Basic tenets of the faith
  - b. History/theology/ecumenism
  - c. The Bible

#### **Sunday, February 20 (via Zoom)**

Pre-reading: *Celebrate God's Presence (CGP)*, pp. 218–220; McGrath, *"I Believe"*, pp. 9–24.

1. The Apostles' Creed
  - a. Background
  - b. The Trinity
  - c. Line-by-line discussion
2. Holding space for faith and doubt
  - a. Prescriptive vs. constructive faith
  - b. The necessity of doubt and the sin of certainty

## Sunday, March 6 (Zoom/in-person, TBC)

Pre-reading: McKnight, pp. 1–19; *Church Membership*, pp. 31–34 (NB: this book uses male-exclusive language and needs updating!); McNiel, pp. 143–157.

If you get a chance: Wright, pp. 1–12; Short, pp. 49–52.

1. "Christian Initiation"
  - a. The meaning of Baptism
  - b. The vows we make
2. After initiation ... then what?
  - a. Life together
  - b. The sacrament of Holy Communion
  - c. Spiritual practices
  - d. Mission and ministry

## Sunday, March 20 (Zoom/in-person, TBC)

**\* *Transferees from outside The United Church of Canada join in at this session* \***

Pre-reading: *Our Words of Faith*, pp. 5–20; *The Manual* (2022), pp. 9–33; "A Timeline of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit Justice in The United Church of Canada"; *CGP*, pp. 1–8.

If you get a chance: Short, pp. 74–83; explore the content and links that are posted at <https://united-church.ca/social-action/justice-initiatives>.

1. The United Church of Canada
  - a. Our roots and formation
  - b. Our faith statements
  - c. Our structure and polity
  - d. Mission and vision (2021)
2. United Church Distinctives
  - a. Social justice and the Christian faith
    - i. Indigenous reconciliation
    - ii. LGBTQ+ inclusion
    - iii. Racial justice
  - b. Worship, liturgy, and prayer
  - c. Orders and streams of ministry

**Sunday, April 3 (Zoom/in-person, TBC)**

**\* *Transferees from within The United Church of Canada join in at this session* \***

Pre-reading: None.

1. Southwood United Church
  - a. Our history and place
  - b. Our mission statement
  - c. Our 5 church practices
2. Living as Members
  - a. Serving in the church
  - b. Praying for the church
  - c. Giving to the church
  - d. Mission and Service

**Sunday, April 10 (Zoom/in-person, TBC)**

Pre-reading: None.

1. Professing Our Faith
  - a. Sharing of presentations/projects
  - b. Walk-through and discussion of the Confirmation/Baptism/Reaffirmation/Reception liturgies

**Sunday, April 17 (Easter Sunday) - Celebration Service (TBC)**

**Bibliography**

**Required Reading**

Bourgeois, Michael, Connie denBok, Catherine Faith MacLean, and John H. Young. *Our Words of Faith: Cherished, Honoured, and Living*, 5–20. Toronto: The United Church of Canada / L'Église Unie du Canada, 2010.

Committee on Christian Faith (UCC), The. "Confirmation." In *Church Membership: Doctrine and Practice in The United Church of Canada*, 31–34. Toronto: The Board of Evangelism and Social Service; The Board of Christian Education, 1963.

McGrath, Alister. "Introduction." In *"I Believe": Exploring the Apostles' Creed*, 9–24. Downers Grove: IVP, 1997.

McKnight, Scot. "Our Baptism: First Six Words." In *It Takes a Church to Baptize*, 1–19. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018.

McNiel, Catherine. "He Has Shown Us What Is Good." In *When the Universe Cracks: Living as God's People in Times of Crisis*, 143–157. Edited by Angie Ward. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2021.

———. "A Timeline of LGBTQIA+ and Two-Spirit Justice in The United Church of Canada." Toronto: The United Church of Canada / L'Église Unie du Canada, 2019.

United Church of Canada, The. *The Manual: 2022*, 9–33. Toronto: UCPH, 2022.

Verveda, Karen J., ed. "Historic Creeds and The Lord's Prayer." In *Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for The United Church of Canada*, 218–229. Toronto: UCPH, 2000.

———. "Introduction." In *Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for The United Church of Canada*, 1–8. Toronto: UCPH, 2000.

### Recommended Reading

Short, Peter. "Dear George." In *Outside Eden*, 74–83. Toronto: Observer Publications, 2006.

———. "Gin and Grape Juice." In *Outside Eden*, 49–52. Toronto: Observer Publications, 2006.

Wright, N. T. "What Am I Here For?" In *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*, 1–26. New York: HarperOne, 2010.

### Additional Resources

(May be discussed/distributed during sessions).