

Tasting Tradition, Filling a Plate

A Stole Project
for the Confirmation Program
of Evangelical United Church of Christ

Name:

Date Completed:

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This book is written to help review a variety of concepts and definitions in preparation for the celebration of Confirmation. The project is designed to help you create your Confirmation Stole.

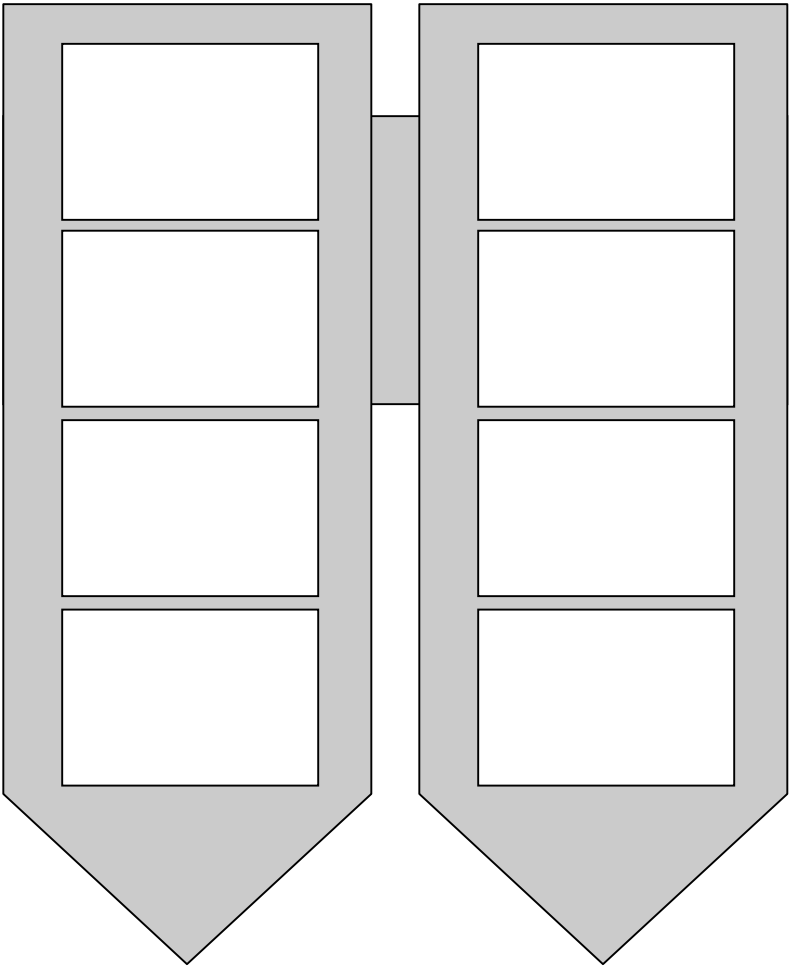
There are twelve separate topics that correspond with the squares on the Confirmation Stole. Using words and pictures, the squares are filled with the faith claims of each student. Before you design your squares, you are asked to carefully read the following eight descriptions, answering the questions as you go. As you complete the questions for each definition, your own ideas will emerge. At the end of each description is a blank square for you to draw or write a draft of that stole square. After you've designed each of the twelve squares, choose eight for your stole. You can put them with markers or paints onto the white and red stoles. Be creative!

This project is meant to be started as a group discussion. If you are not able to be with the Confirmation Class as it works through these questions, invite your parents to sit down and work through the questions with you. This project is also most helpful if spread over a series of days or sessions.

Questions which seek your faith response have no correct or incorrect answers. If you need more resources for some of the factual questions, begin with website for the United Church of Christ [www.ucc.org]. At this site you will find information about the history of the UCC, Luther and Calvin, and ideas about the church's mission.

Although the Stole is yours to wear on Confirmation Sunday and keep at home, please share this completed booklet with the pastor at least one week prior to Confirmation.

Your finished stole will have ‘pictures’ of what you believe...



The Reader - You

Normal is in the eyes of the beholder.

- Whoopi Goldberg

“Sitz im Leben” is the theologians’ phrase for the significance of understanding our context. A common English phrase with similar meaning is “where you sit determines what you see”.

‘Sitz im leben’ originally referred to the social setting of a particular story or biblical narrative. Herman Gunkel, a theologian who popularized this phrase in the early 20th century, was committed to both the historical context and the literary forms of the texts that he studied.

Valuing context influences the way we might choose to read Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, a letter written in the 1st century which saved and placed in the collection we call our “bible”. To understand Paul’s letter, we might choose to learn about Paul’s life as a Roman citizen in the 1st century (author). The particular situation in Corinth can also be very illustrative (context). Also important would be an understanding of the writing forms that were used in Paul’s day (literary form).

The ‘sitz im leben’ of the object being studied was Gunkel’s concern, but many scholars also wanted to explore the implications of the subject’s context. The situation for the person reading a text also influences the meaning that is derived. An early example of this endeavor is “The Woman’s Bible” written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1898. Weary of the biblical text being used to subordinate women, Stanton and her colleagues endeavored to offer a biblical commentary that reflected their perspective as women.

Liberation Theology emerged in the later half of the 20th century as South American theologians worked against oppressive power systems. In his book “Unexpected News:

Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes” (publisher, year), Robert McAfee Brown showed how an unexpected blessing of this enterprise was the re-discovery of bible stories as they spoke new messages in new contexts. Our bible stories were originally written in the context of oppressed communities for the oppressed, but most of our current North American theology reads the stories from a place of relative privilege. What we bring to the text has an undeniable influence on what we hear.

Understanding the powerful influences that our own setting brings to our understanding of life and faith, many contemporary theologians suggest that we begin our confession of faith with an acknowledgement of our own cultural context. The context of this writer, for instance, is one of relative privilege as a middle age, white, married, mother serving as pastor of a theologically progressive suburban congregation. Without the struggle for daily sustenance, the theological quest undoubtedly takes on a more esoteric tone.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **What is your own particular context?**
- **Are you more likely to identify with the underdog in a story or the leading lady?**
- **Do you have a firm idea of what you believe or are you still asking questions?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of
YOU

Jesus - the Christ

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else. - C. S. Lewis

A common phrase in Christian liturgy is “the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ”. Most of our writings, however, focus on one aspect; his life (teaching, healing, feeding), his death (passion and suffering), or his resurrection (mystical presence).

The Apostle’s Creed describes “Jesus Christ” in this paragraph:

*I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the
dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand
of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

Our earliest writings about Jesus now appear to be the writings of the Apostle Paul in the later half of the first century. These writings were in the form of letters of admonishment and encouragement to communities of faith in places such as Corinth, Thessalonica, and Ephesus. These communities in Greece were geographically distanced from Jesus’ ministry in and around Jerusalem and the letters were written about 40 years after his death.

Although Paul was the earliest writer in the Christian tradition, his experience was not of the historic Jesus but rather of the Christ of faith. Paul had no first hand knowledge of the person Jesus and no access to what we currently call the gospels. Undoubtedly there were stories in circulation about Jesus’ life and teachings, but Paul makes no reference

to these stories or to the historical person.

How Paul first encountered Christ is something of a mystery to which he makes vague reference. The writer of Acts describes it as something of a roadside epiphany but still without detail. Whatever the experience, Paul became the movement's sharpest critic and most ardent evangelist.

Throughout history we find rich examples of the Christ experience, but no time offers more illustrative examples than the age of the mystics, the middle ages. The writings of mystics like Meister Eckert (1260-1328), Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) provide not only an insight into the mystical Christ experience of the distant past, but also provide spiritual challenge and sustenance for today.

The renewal of interest in the ancient language of Sophia is an attempt to describe an experience of the Christ. Sophia is the Greek word for wisdom and is used by Paul in his early writings to describe his experience of Christ. Curiously, or not so, it is in this realm of the mystical that the pronouns we use for the divine become less rigid. Sophia, like the Hebrew word Ruah (breath), is a feminine noun which leads some to choose the pronoun "she" when speaking of this ongoing experience with God's presence.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **How might Christianity have been different if the Paul had been one of Jesus' disciples?**
- **What significance might the Middle Ages have had on the rise of mysticism?**
- **In what ways have you experience the presence of Christ in your life?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of
JESUS – THE CHRIST

Jesus – the Man

I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians.

Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.

- Mohandas Gandhi

Although the Apostle's Creed is the most familiar (and probably the oldest) of our creeds, it says absolutely nothing about Jesus' life and teachings. In fairness to the creed, we know remarkably little about Jesus' life.

Jesus was born into a world before mass media and birth certificates. There is no external record of his physical existence. The only remaining evidence of his life outside of the writings of believers is a brief (and disputed) reference in the writings of the first century Jewish historian, Josephus. The quest then for the 'historical Jesus' is a foray into the culture of his day and a painstaking endeavor to understand what lies behind the story.

The Jesus Seminar is a group of biblical scholars that began meeting in 1989. They have become "a lightning rod" for the debate about the historical Jesus. Their project is to examine historical evidence about Jesus, using the bible and any other bits of information they can gather. While this quest for the historical Jesus is not new, ancient writings rediscovered in the last century and made available in recent decades have greatly expanded this quest. The goal of the Jesus Seminar is to allow the research to move outside of closed scholastic circles and enable all Christians to understand the historic teaching and ministry of Jesus. Although they do discuss themes of death and resurrection, their primary focus is on discovering the life of Jesus.

As a Jewish woman and a New Testament scholar, Amy-Jill Levine's (Vanderbilt University) invites us to a greater understanding of Jesus by recognizing that the fabric upon which this story is written is Judaism. Based upon the witness of the gospels that were gathered into our canon

(Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), we know that Jesus was unapologetically Jewish. Although he was a prophet, there is no biblical indication that he was distancing himself from Judaism nor intentionally creating a new religious expression. He was presented in the temple on the eighth day after his birth, wore 'fringes' (prayer shawl) during his ministry, and apparently observed dietary traditions. His teachings are rooted in the stories of the Torah and the Prophets. To fully understand the imagery of the gospels one must embrace the more ancient tradition of the Torah.

Believing Jesus, as best we can understand him from the stories of his living, is a daunting challenge. His challenge to forgive seventy times seven, to turn the other cheek, and to give both coat and cloak away are almost incomprehensible. To find life in losing it, honor in humility, and wealth in divestment is at best counter intuitive. Summarizing the demanding nature of Jesus' teachings, the Center for Progressive Christianity (www.tpc.org) invites believers to: *Recognize that being followers of Jesus is costly, and entails selfless love, conscientious resistance to evil, and renunciation of privilege.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **In what ways could following Jesus to be costly?**
- **Do you find the life and teachings of Jesus to be helpful in your understanding of God?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of

JESUS – THE MAN

Jesus - The Passion

*About sacrifice and the offering of sacrifices,
sacrificial animals think quite differently from those who
look on: but they have never been allowed to have their say.
- Friedrich Nietzsche*

No single movie has ignited more passion in the past decade than “The Passion of Christ”. This movie was produced by its star, Mel Gibson, and was by all accounts a bloody retelling of the story of Jesus’ suffering and death as it is told in all four of our gospels. This is a story of unremittingly horror that has both haunted and empowered Christians from the beginning.

As we examine the earliest writings of their community, both those which were carefully saved and those discarded, an unmistakable pattern emerges. The writings range from fanciful tales of Jesus’ childhood (The Infancy Gospel of Thomas) to collections of the sayings of Jesus (Gospel of Thomas). The one consistency to those included (and those excluded) is the presence (or absence) of the passion narrative. Already by the time third century, a preference for Jesus’ stories inclusive of the passion narrative was evident. Books that included the tale of suffering and death (Gospel of John) were included; books that did not (Gospel of Thomas) were ultimately discarded.

The passion narrative was undoubtedly empowering for believers in the second century who faced their own passion stories. The suffering and death of Jesus took on a particular significance in this century of persecution and was imbued with its own theological definition. One of the most significant influences in the development of this aspect of tradition was a man known as Ignatius. In her book “Beyond Belief” Elaine Pagel’s writes about his personal tale of horror, his ensuing understanding of Jesus’ story, and his influence on Christianity. Understandably, the community which had understood Jesus’ passion as one of reluctant martyr shifted

to embracing the inevitable sacrifice and then finally to necessary atonement.

Even now the passion narrative is often central in the Christian experience. Most Christian communities observe “Good Friday” on the eve of Easter Sunday to read and remember the story of Jesus’ suffering and death. The interpretation and emphasis of the story, however, varies widely among Christian communities.

Sacrificial atonement is essentially the belief that one person’s sacrifice (Jesus’ suffering and death) is necessary to atone for the sins of others. For those believing in “the necessity and sufficiency of the death of Jesus” (Fred Niedner, Valpraiso University), Good Friday is an essential though somber day.

Other interpretations of this day include an understanding that the passion is an archetypal story showing the destructive power of human evil. In this interpretation, the focus of Good Friday becomes an acknowledge of those still suffering and a confession of our responsibility.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Are there ways in which you understand the death of Jesus to be necessary?**
- **How might Christianity have been different had not the second century been so violent?**
- **Do you find the story of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection to be helpful in your understanding of God?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of

JESUS – THE PASSION

GOD

The theory of intelligent design holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection.

- www.discovery.org/csc/

While it would be difficult to deny the presence of mystery and easy to ascribe the unanswered questions to a supreme being, the character of the being is not quickly defined. As a sign of humility, acknowledging all that is unknowable, our Jewish sisters and brothers cover their heads as they pray and refuse to write the word God. Their witness is compelling.

Two of the leaders in the early days of the Christian movement demonstrate the difficulty of trying to define the divine. Marcion and Tertullian were leaders in the second century, about a hundred years after Jesus' death but before there were such things as Bibles and Creeds. Marcion set forth his ideas in a book called Antithesis (Contradictions) in which he claimed that Christ was the messenger from the Supreme God of goodness. Marcion was deeply troubled by the evil of the world. He believed that the goodness of the Supreme God could not be responsible for things like tornadoes. Tertullian wrote many books against Marcion's ideas, claiming that there is only one God, a good God who created a good world.

The Apostles Creed, which emerged in the later part of the second century, predates the gathering of gospels and letters into the canon (what we call the Bible) and may be a response to the argument between Marcion and Tertullian. Tertullian's view prevailed and Marcion was relegated to the hall of heretics.

The creed begins: *I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.*

Although their arguments were quite philosophical and difficult to parse with our modern world, their bottom line was much the same as ours. As children of the 20th century living into the 21st, we have witnessed awesome movements in the very earth upon which we walk. We have seen the destructive force of a tsunami and the relentless battering of hurricanes. The challenge of how to understand the goodness of God in the face of unexplainable evil and suffering is called theodicy. It is a timeless riddle and one that becomes even more timely in the wake of recent tsunami and hurricane damage.

Another challenge in our understanding of God is balancing transcendence (the big God out there idea) with imminence (the presence of God within us and all of creation). While much of our Christian heritage has been dominated by language of God's transcendence, many people of faith have sought a more intimate and personal way to describe God's presence among us and in all of creation. St. Francis was renowned in the 15th century for his experiencing of God with in nature. Mother Therese, in the 20th century, described her experience of God in the most vulnerable of people in India.

The adherents to the Intelligent Design theory begin with a compelling thesis, ascribing the mystery to a benevolent being is comforting. But this too is a faith claim. So too the theory that follows the thesis is a faith claim and not one that all Christians choose to embrace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Is God all loving? All powerful?**
- **If we say that God is all powerful (omnipotent), how do we explain the devastation of tsunamis and hurricanes?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of
GOD

Salvation

*“What on earth are you doing?”
 said I to the monkey
 carrying a fish triumphantly to the tree.
 “Saving the fish from drowning,”
 replied the righteous monkey.*

- adapted Anthony de Mello

Christians love to talk about “salvation”, but we don’t often stop to define it. Salvation for some Christians is rooted in a belief in a dualistic after life. For others salvation has to do with God’s redemptive presence in this life. Biblically the word salvation is also used in diverse ways.

The Hebrew Word translated as “salvation” means deliverance, victory, or prosperity. One story about “salvation” is the story of Jonah. The story is about his salvation as well as the salvation of the people of Nineveh.

Read Jonah 2:1-3,10:

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, 2 saying, “I called to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. 3 You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.”

10 Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

Salvation for Jonah is simply deliverance from the fish, physical safety.

The Greek Word translated as “salvation” means safety. When Jesus is described as savior in the New Testament, different understandings of salvation emerge. Read the following two uses of the word salvation:

He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from

our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. [Luke 1:69-71]

Salvation in this example also refers to safety from physical harm.

But the word is used differently in this text:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ... and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him... [Hebrews]

In this text we begin to see a concept of “eternal salvation” which is used to reference a negative after life experience from which we must be saved.

The Apostle’s Creed doesn’t mention the word “salvation”, but the third stanza references some of these ideas:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Have you ever been asked if you’re “saved”?**
- **What does “salvation” for the Sudanese child in a refugee camp?**
- **What is salvation for Billy Graham?**
- **What does “salvation” mean for you?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of

SALVATION

Communion

If someone knows from experience that daily Communion increases fervor without lessening reverence, then let him go every day. But if someone finds that reverence is lessened and devotion not much increased, then let him sometimes abstain, so as to draw near afterwards with better dispositions.
- Saint Thomas Aquinas

There are distinctly different understandings not only of the words to use as we share the bread and wine, but also of its very symbolism and significance.

Typically Christians are in agreement that the bread shared (whether common loaf or wafers) represents the body of Christ and the cup shared (whether wine or grape juice) represents the blood of Christ.

Interestingly though, the one of the earliest stories we have of the ritual practice of communion is from a book called the Didache. The Didache is an ancient Christian manual from late in the first or early second century which is not included in our Bible. Chapter 9 of the Didache describes Eucharist (communion) as something that needs to be shared each time the community gathers for worship. The meaning of the bread and juice is described like this: *The juice reminds us that we are from the tree of David (as are we) and the bread reminds us that bread represents the wheat gathered, broken, and made into one loaf (as are we).* In the Didache there is no mention of Jesus' body or blood in the sharing of Eucharist/communion.

Even for those who interpret the bread as representative of the body of Christ and the cup as the representative of the blood, the differences are profound. We can trace some of this difference within our own United Church of Christ back to two of the most influential Reformers, Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564).

Luther and Calvin shared many beliefs. Both of these reformers were concerned about the way that the Church was functioning. Both of them agreed that obedience to an institution was not the path to God's favor. Both of them wanted to emphasize the importance of faith in God. Both of them emphasized the Bible as foundational for Christian faith.

Luther and Calvin also had many differences. Luther believed that only faith in Jesus Christ would save humans from eternal damnation, Calvin asserted that such matters were in God's hands alone. Luther's chief concern was the fate of the individual, whereas Calvin had much passion around communal formation and social concerns. Luther modified the liturgy of the Church, but largely embraced the liturgy and hymnody. Calvin emphasized a more simplified ritual life, modest worship spaces, and the singing of psalms (rather than hymns).

One of the ways in which the differences are embodied is in their understanding of Communion. For Luther the body and blood of Christ are present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine of communion. For Calvin, Christ is present in the community as it gathers to share in the bread and wine.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **How might Christianity have been different if the Didache's understanding of communion had prevailed?**
- **How might the persecutions of the second and third centuries have influenced the definitions of communion/eucharist?**
- **Which of these views about communion is most like your own?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of

COMMUNION

Baptism

Vaccination is the medical sacrament corresponding to baptism.

- Samuel Butler

While most Christians share baptism in remembrance of Jesus' baptism, our practices and our beliefs vary widely. At its simplest form, baptism is the placing of water on the head of the recipient with prayer. Beyond this, however, the differences begin.

An important point of difference is a belief in either "original sin" or "original blessing". Following the notions of Augustine (4th century), original sin is the understanding that all humans are inherently sinful and thereby separated from divine embrace from birth. For those holding this belief, baptism is (symbolically or literally) that which washes away the (original) sin and restores relationship with God.

Original blessing is newer language to express an even older idea that humans enter the world at one with the Creator. People adopting this theology are more likely to understand the ritual as celebrating the relationship between the recipient, the gathered community, and the presence of God.

For John baptizing Jesus in the Jordan River, baptism was about a shift in consciousness, a deliberate and public decision to change directions in life. For the early church baptizing whole families, the rite was one of initiation into a particular community of faith. Common in our grandparents generation was a belief that baptism kept babies safe from a wicked after life so the baptismal font was the very first outing many children made.

Depending on beliefs about the role and significance of baptism, the time in which this ritual is shared also varies. Some share baptism with infants, others ask that baptismal candidates be old enough to express their own faith

commitments.

The content of the prayers are most often dedicatory in nature, usually invoking Trinitarian language. The most common phrase is “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”. Some communities chose to use a more inclusive phrase such as “I baptize you with faith in the living God, Source, Servant and Guide.”

While usually celebrated in church settings, baptism can also be celebrated in lakes and rivers reminiscent of Jesus’ baptism by John in the Jordan River. The water is sometimes placed on the head of the recipient although in some traditions the recipient is fully immersed in the water.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Have you been baptized?**
- **If so, when and why? If not, why not?**
- **Should all Christians be baptized? Why or why not?**
- **What is your understanding of baptism?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of

BAPTISM

Bible

*The Bible is a book that has been read more
and examined less than any book that ever existed.*

- Thomas Paine

The book to which we ascribe the title “bible” is actually a collection of books which Christians divide into two sections called ‘testaments’. The first section is called the Old Testament. It is sometimes referred to as the Hebrew Scriptures because these texts predate Christianity and are the sacred texts for our Jewish brothers and sisters. The oldest of these writings are also shared with Islam. The three religions together are sometimes called the “children of Abraham” or the “people of the book”. The New Testament is the second section. In this collection, sometimes called the Christian Scriptures, there are four stories that tell the story of Jesus’ life and ministry as well as the story of his passion and resurrection. Later we find an assortment of letters and writings about Jesus and the early church.

One of the treasures of our stories is how they are echoes of one another and of the cultures from which they emerged. The story of Jesus ‘feeding the 5000’ (Matthew 14:15-21, Mark 6:30-33, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-14) is the familiar story of a few pieces of bread and fish when shared together are able to (miraculously) feed a multitude. These Jesus stories are also an echo of much older stories told about Elijah and Elisha, prophets that appear in the book of Kings. Jesus’ trips to the wilderness to pray echo Moses’ treks up the mountain.

Some echoes bear witness to traditions beyond our own. Many of the stories in the first chapters of Genesis were oral traditions long before they were written down. Some scholars believe that many of these stories were not written down until after the Hebrew people had spent years in exile in Babylon (5th century BCE). When our creation stories (Genesis 1 and 2) are read alongside the Babylonian stories,

we find striking similarities.

An interesting aspect of our context is how context determines the rules we chose to embrace for reading the bible. Native American traditions holds that although a sacred story might not have happened in the state way, the story can still be true. Western European culture, on the other hand, displays a preferential option for history as over-against fiction so that questioning the historicity of a particular story is often seen as devaluing it. Whether or not our scholarly tools are necessary or even welcome when we read the bible is dramatically affected by our cultural context.

Prior to Gutenberg's invention of the printing press (1447) this wasn't much of an issue, books were rare and reading for the privileged. Instruction in the Christian tradition was through memorizable creeds, memorable stories, and of course the arts. This was the era of stories told in stained glass, exquisite music, and highly ritualized liturgy. With the printing press, however, access to the biblical narrative opened. This resurgence of interest in the printed text laid the foundation, of course, for what we now call the Protestant Reformation. Reading proved to be freedom, in this case freedom from the confines of papal instruction and freedom for new ideas.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **What is your favorite bible story?**

- **The bible uses a wide array of literary devices. Can you think of an example of each in the bible:**

metaphor

point of view

personification

creative license

- **If the Bible is true, does that mean the events happened in history as they are described?**
- **If you can find a verse in the Bible that tells you to obey your parents, will you?**
- **If you can find a dozen Bible stories that tell you that men should be in charge of their families, will you believe them? Why or why not?**
- **If one Bible story talks about God's forgiveness and another about God's wrath (anger), which will you believe?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of

BIBLE

Church

Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.
- Gilbert K. Chesterton

From the time of the Reformation (16th century) the trunk of Christian has become increasingly thin and the branches more dense. At the outset of the 19th century in America, for instance, three Christian groups (Congregational, Episcopalian, and Presbyterian) held the dominant religious influence in America. In the wake of the Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening, dominance shifted to groups such as the Baptists, the Methodists, and more evangelical Presbyterians. The pluralism within Christianity has continued to expand.

One notable exception to this trend of division in Christianity was the spirit of ecumenism that followed the two world wars in the early 20th century. Many groups of Christians were struggling to demonstrate unity, modeling for the world the importance of cooperation. This led to a series of church unions in many denominations and ultimately formed the United Church of Christ (UCC) in 1957. This union joined together two denominations (the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches) representing four distinct faith traditions.

The Evangelical and Reformed Church was formed in 1934 by the merger two geographical disperse but ethnically similar groups:

The Reformed Church in America was founded by German immigrants in the 1700's and followed the teachings of John Calvin. They settled mostly in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio.

The Evangelical Synod of North America was founded by a later group of German immigrants that settled in Missouri

and the midwest in the 1800's. The "Evangelicals" were influenced by both Lutheran and Calvinist ideals and cherished unity above doctrine. They were known for remarkable works of charity such as Emmaus Homes, Evangelical Children's Home, and the Deaconess ministry.

The Congregational Christian Churches were also a union of two distinct religious groups that both shared a passion for local church autonomy:

The Congregationalist's trace their heritage to the Mayflower. They were the separatist Pilgrims (Plymouth Colony) and the Puritans (Massachusetts Bay Colony). The independence of each local congregation was central to their belief; education and justice were treasured values. Founders of such institutions as Yale and Harvard, the Congregationalist were also known for the abolitionist work and their ordination of women.

The Christian Churches emerged from an American phenomenon called the "Renewal Movement" in the late 1800's. Basically they spurned religious institutional structure and cherished the spontaneity of the spiritual experience. Some of these churches formed the Disciples of Christ denomination, some the Church of Christ denomination, and still others ultimately joined with the Congregationalists.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **Immigrants from which two countries were largely responsible for forming our predecessor denominations?**
- **Can you trace your ancestors through any of these four faith traditions?**
- **The Congregationalists were known for their justice work, the Evangelicals for their charity. What's the difference?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of
CHURCH

World

*Did St. Francis really preach to the birds? Whatever for?
If he really liked birds he would have done better to preach to
the cats.* - Rebecca West

External events had a profound influence on the shape and character of this historic if fledging denomination. Two of the most influential theologians of the 20th century were themselves children of the Evangelical tradition and both spoke eloquently the intersection of faith and culture.

H. Richard Niebuhr and Reinhold Niebuhr were brothers, sons of a (German) Evangelical pastor, and students of Eden Theological Seminary. Schooled in the shadow of the first World War and reaching maturity in the midst of the Great Depression, the rise of Nazism in their homeland had remarkable influences on their respective theologies and (at least legendarily) on their relationship. Prior to Hitler's rise, the brother's were both pacifists in support of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. H. Richard's definitive work, "Christ and Culture", was a careful description of his belief that the presence of Christ's church could have a redemptive influence on the practical realities of our world. But as Reinhold witnessed another generation of warring madness, he shed the pacifism of his youth and became an advocate for US engagement. What continued to be consistent in both brothers' ethic was a plaintive call to engage our faith in relationship with the world in which we live.

In 1957 Federal troops enforce racial integration in Little Rock, Arkansas, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, and the United Church of Christ was formed.

Soon after, Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" (1960), Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" (1963) and Joseph Heller's "Catch 22" (1961) were published. These pivotal books offered insights on racism, sexism and institutionalism (respectively).

By the end of the decade, Malcom X, President Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr. were all assassinated. Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, the war in Vietnam escalated, and the Memorial Arch was built in St. Louis.

The third section of our United Church of Christ Statement of Faith was written in 1959. This third stanza of the statement talks about the Holy Spirit and our relation to the world today.

*You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,
binding in covenant faithful people
of all ages, tongues, and races.*

*You call us into your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world
and resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.*

*You promise to all who trust you
forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,
courage in the struggle for justice and peace,
your presence in trial and rejoicing,
and eternal life in your realm which has no end.*

*Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you.
Amen.*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- **How have our local church and our denomination responded to these challenges?**
- **What are the challenges that our culture offers to us today?**
- **How can our church (local and denomination) respond?**

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of
WORLD

Mission

*The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning.
Where there is no mission there is no church.*

- Emil Brunner

Ok, you're a Christian. Now what? What are we as Christians supposed to "do" with our faith? By now it should be no surprise that there are as many answers to that question as there are people answering.

Matthew ended his Gospel with these words:

*"...Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit..."*

Do you believe that all people would benefit from becoming Christian? Why or why not?

Way back in the days of the Prophets, the people asked this question. The prophet Micah offers this wisdom:

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?*

Similar to Micah's teaching is the "greatest commandment" in Jesus' teaching. What is it?

The early Christian church, according to the book of Acts, understood their call to be one of community life:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Do you believe that faith should inform financial decisions?

The Center for Progressive Christianity (www.tcpc.org) offers this vision of mission:

Form ourselves into communities dedicated to equipping one another for the work we feel called to do: striving for peace and justice among all people, protecting and restoring the integrity of all God's creation, and bringing hope to those Jesus called the least of his sisters and brothers.

How can the church be most helpful for our world?

How will you live your faith in this world?

use words and/or pictures to show your understanding of
MISSION

Questions asked of New Members:

Respecting divine mystery beyond our human knowing,
revealed but not contained in the stories of our faith,
will you strive to walk humbly with God?

Celebrating the fullness of Jesus' witness
flowing from the baptismal waters at the river Jordan
and the stories of bread broken and shared,
do you confess the God made known
in the one we call Christ?

Believing Jesus about God and trusting his example,
will you accept the cost and joy of following him;
welcoming the unwelcome-able,
speaking the unspeakable,
touching the untouchable,
and suffering the insufferable?

Honoring the Spirit revealed in the paradoxical,
will you live the questions of our faith,
open to the continuing revelation
of our still speaking God?

Discerning strength in vulnerability,
do you acknowledge your interdependence
and mutual accountability with all of creation?

Claiming God's grace abundant in our common life,
will you covenant together to cherish inquiry,
embrace diversity, and honor vulnerability?

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