



Elders and Leaders

Uniting Church in Australia

Updated Saturday, March 21, 2009

A Workbook from ELM compiled by Amelia Koh-Butler

*Dedicated to KB
with thanks for being "my" elder*

COVENANT

We commit the coming day and our conversations to God.
We commit to make this learning community a safe place.
We commit to working together
in the love of Jesus Christ that binds and liberates,
in the full expectation of being inspired by God's Spirit.
We offer our hearts and minds to God!

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Biblical basis	5
3. Leadership and Organisation in the Uniting Church	6
a. The Role of Elders in the Basis of Union (Assembly Doctrine Working Group)	
b. Gifts and Ministry (Basis of Union)	9
c. Ministry of Elders (Regulations)	9
4. Roles and Responsibilities for Elders and Leaders in the UCA	
a. Elders and Leaders	
i. Worksheet – Taking stock	10
ii. Exploring the Roles - Mission, Pastoral Care and Spiritual Oversight	11
iii. Exploring the Roles - Nurturing people to grow in grace	12
iv. Exploring the Roles - Assisting in worship and Sacraments	13
b. Duties and Responsibilities of the Church Council	14
c. Power and Humility	16
d. Spiritual Oversight	17
i. Defining Spiritual Oversight	18
ii. Accountability	
iii. Spiritual Growth	
e. The Learning Spiral	
f. Pastoral Care	20
i. Pastoral Visitation	
ii. Models of Pastoral Care and Developing Pastoral Communities	
g. Education	22
i. “Becoming Disciples”	
ii. Bible Study	
iii. Preaching and Teaching	
iv. Age-specific education	
v. Developing Gifts and Skills	
5. Recognising Gifts and Developing Skills	23
a. Gifts and Graces	
i. What is my SHAPE?	
ii. Being aware of the gifts in others	
iii. Ministry Gifts Discovery Questionnaire	
iv. Passion and Interest Questionnaire	
b. Spiritual Disciplines	27
i. Bible Study	
ii. Developing Prayer	
iii. Personal and Corporate Worship	
iv. Retreats	
v. Mentoring and Spiritual Direction Opportunities	
c. Communication	28
i. Communication – Knowing what to say / Levels	
ii. Role Plays	
iii. Talking about my experience	
iv. Faith Sharing	

1. Introduction

Ministry in the Uniting Church is characterised by being:

- **Relational** – all ministry occurs within relationships. When we look into the face of another person and we expect to see Jesus looking back at us, we treat them with an appropriate level of respect and love. We must treat each person as the divine creation of God – to be treated with the utmost care. God’s creations are sometimes strong and sometimes fragile. When we are given the privilege and responsibility of participating in God’s work, we must try to see others the way God sees them. God loves each of these Creations so much that Jesus Christ would have lived and died for the sake of any one of them!
- **Accountable** – every leader in the Church must be able to account for his/her actions. There is no leader “above” the system. We must continually measure our actions against the highest standards of Christian Discipleship. We will sometimes fall short, but we will continue to work to improve. We will commit our time and energy to doing worthwhile work in a worthy way. As part of our discipline, we will always work on “being accountable”. We will do this by reporting honestly to fellow leaders and listening to their advice and criticism. Sometimes this will seem hard, but by making ourselves vulnerable we trust that God will refine us and make us fit for the task. We will remember that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. No person can set God’s agenda and often God will set for us Ministry and Mission tasks that we cannot understand. We will seek to serve with the utmost integrity and honesty.
- **Joyful** – Attitude is everything! We will strive for the goal with a positive attitude. We will try not to grumble about duty, but we will look for ways of being joyful and encouraging one another in service. We will opt for the words and actions that build up rather than tear down. In times of sorrow and distress, we will seek comfort rather than wallow in self-pity. By seeking the God of Light, we will be party to dispelling the darkness. We will be messengers of hope to all we come into contact with. When we have the greatest doubts, we will be called to exercise the greatest faith. We will seek to be true rather than to be sure.

These words may be high-sounding, but they represent truths that resonate in your soul or in your guts. How do we keep these high ideals before us, when some of the work we are called to do may be boring or difficult?

This booklet contains reminders to refocus us on God’s Call to us to be leaders and participants in God’s work. By sharing in training and story-telling we give expression to sharing our common faith. By attending to training and worship with other leaders we will attend to our relationships, our accountability and our attitude.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

(John 13:34b-35, NRSV)

Christian Leadership is...

Following Jesus Christ's example in serving others

“giving up your own needs for the sake of others;
being vulnerable; taking a risk that others will accept your leadership”

Being in a position of authority alongside of others

“earning respect out of which others will follow yet seeing it as serving others”

Acting on behalf of everyone

“Remember that there is ‘ One body, yet many members...’ we do this on their behalf”

Equipping them also...

“See the potential for developing skills & abilities
in others which may, in turn, lead to their taking on a role of leadership themselves”

“It is he who gave gifts: he appointed some
...apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers
...to prepare all God's people for Christian service,
in order to build up the body of Christ.”

(Ephesians 4:11-12)

List people you respect as models of Christian Leadership...

Consider: (you may need to do some ongoing research)

1. Why do you think of these people leaders?
2. Who else recognises their leadership?
3. What do they do?
4. What are they like?
5. How did they become leaders?
6. What do they do to work on their leadership skills?

2. Biblical basis... the ministry of elder

1. Exodus 18:13-19a (Jethro's advice to Moses)
2. Matthew 20: 20-28 (A mother's request)
3. Luke 10: 1-3 (The mission of the seventy)
4. John 13: 5-14 (Jesus washes the feet of the disciples)
5. Romans 12: 1-3 (New life in Christ)
6. 1 Corinthians 12: 12-15 & 27 (One body many parts)
7. Ephesians 4: 7 & 11-13 (Unity in the body of Christ)
8. James 5: 13-16 (The prayer of faith)
9. 1 Peter 4: 8-11 (Good stewards of God's grace)
10. 1 Peter 5: 1-4 (Tending the flock of God)

For each passage, reflect on the following questions:

- What does this passage demonstrate about relationships?
- What responsibilities are illustrated?
- Is there a one-line guideline that could summarise the relevancy of this passage for today's situation?
- How might this translate to action today?

3. Leadership and Organisation in the Uniting Church

The call to the Ministry of Elder is usually heard and affirmed within the life of a Congregation or Faith Community. Other calls to leadership may be experienced and affirmed in other situations. e.g. people may be called to serve in mission and ministry in a variety of settings, including: schools; aged care facilities; evangelistic activities and social service activities or advocacy roles. Many leaders are also called to serve in the life of various Committees and/or Councils of the Church, such as Presbyteries, Synods or Assemblies.

3.a The Role of Elders in the Basis of Union

Within the structure and understanding of ministry described in the *Basis of Union*, the office of elder is clearly identified as giving expression to a number of relationships that are central to the self-identity of the Uniting Church in Australia. The Doctrine Working Group has discussed these relationships on several occasions, largely as a consequence of its concern about the implications and effects of changes made to the polity and structure of the Church by the Eighth Assembly in 1997.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief analysis of the web of relationships within which the Church's understanding of eldership is developed in *the Basis of Union* and to comment on changes to the polity of the Church—in so far as these are related to the theology and exercise of eldership—that have resulted from the decisions of the 1997 Assembly. As such, this paper does not constitute a general discussion of the decisions of the Eighth Assembly, further comment upon which is not precluded.

1. Regardless of how those involved in other ministries are to be chosen, the *Basis of Union* insists that elders—along with ministers, deaconesses and lay preachers—are to be recognised under the guidance of the Holy Spirit “to preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the flock, to share in government and to serve those in need in the world.”¹ In other words, with all four offices the process of discernment for selection is oriented towards the defining activities of the church. No less than is the case for ministers, deaconesses and lay preachers, the office of elder is understood to be central to the church's identity.

Further, although the theological shorthand of the *Basis of Union* is not explicit at this point, it is to be understood that as is the case with ministers, the identity of elders is not to be perceived solely in functional terms; although some functions are taken as given, these do not exhaust the church's understanding of the ministry of elders. That some character is assumed in the *Basis of Union* is clearly implied by the acceptance of the ministries of those who held the office of elder, deacon or leader at the time of Union. At the very least this acceptance implies an acknowledgment of what was understood by the Presbyterian practice of ordaining elders, the Methodist Class Leader's essential role in the formation of members, and the dedication, within Congregationalism, of deacons “to the high and honourable office of the diaconate.”² Although the *Basis* does not perpetuate the

¹ The *Basis of Union*, paragraph 14.

² [Congregational Union of England and Wales], *A Manual for Ministers* (London: Independent Press, 1936), 147-148.

Presbyterian practice of ordaining elders, nor does it repudiate what that practice suggested about the ontology of lay leadership. In short, no less than for a Minister of the Word or Deacon, the identity of an elder is as much a matter of his or her being and identity as a faithful Christian as it is of functional responsibilities.

2. Having described the office of elder as existing in a general ministerial relationship with ministers, deaconesses and lay preachers, the *Basis of Union* then declares that particular elders are recognised “in the congregation”.³ The insistence of both *The Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering*, and the *Basis of Union* that the congregation, “gathered by God in one place...was and ever has been the characteristic expression of the life of the Church”⁴ is too easily passed over. To approach the recognition of elders from a different perspective, it is the prerogative of a congregation—by definition those who meet in one place to worship, witness and serve⁵—to choose (or “recognise”) those who are to exercise “rule and oversight”.⁶ Indeed, it is characteristic of a congregation that those fit for rule and oversight are to be found in its midst.
3. Lest elders be understood as free-lance rulers and overseers, their local ministry is described as being in relationship with each other and the minister within the conciliar framework of the Elders’ or Leaders’ Meeting—the Council of Elders, as it was known prior to 1997.

Not individually, but meeting together *as a council* sharply focussed on its clearly specified function, the *Basis of Union* describes minister and elders as responsible “for building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ’s mission in the world.”⁷ It could be argued that the conciliar exercise of ministry by elders and ministers is intended to be something of a model for the broader conciliar structure of the Uniting Church.

Further, not only are the elders to meet with each other, but they are to share with the minister. Ministry is both personal and corporate—a point made at some length in *The Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering*, which insists that within a congregation *episcopé* is to be both personal and corporate.⁸ In other words, whatever other relationships are developed within the congregation, those between minister and elders are at the heart of the congregation’s conciliar structure, and inseparable from its pastoral, liturgical and missional identity.

4. Finally, the *Basis of Union* describes a church in which elders have particular responsibilities and relationships beyond the local congregation. The Presbytery, Synod and Assembly are each to specifically include elders in their membership, with these being distinguished from ministers and “other Church members.”⁹ Clearly, the intention of the *Basis of Union* is that those who have been especially selected by their local congregations and formed for local ministry with their ministers in the Council of Elders have an important part to play within the government of the wider church.

³ *Ibid.*, paragraph 14 (b).

⁴ *The Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering*, 43.

⁵ See, for example, *The Basis of Union*, paragraph 15 (b).

⁶ *The Basis of Union*, paragraphs 15 (a) and 14 (b).

⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraph 15 (b).

⁸ *The Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering*, 40-41.

⁹ *The Basis of Union*, paragraphs 15 (c), (d) and (e).

Within the framework outlined above, the Doctrine Working Group notes with concern that the Eighth Assembly's decisions concerning eldership have profoundly changed the polity of the Church in several fundamental ways.

First, the current Regulations fail to acknowledge *Basis of Union's* insistence that the identity of elders goes beyond the mere listing of functional activities. As they address the ministry of elder, the Regulations now express a functional understanding of ministry that would be unacceptable if applied to the ministry of the Word or the diaconate.

Second, contrary to the insistence of the *Basis of Union* that the Congregation "is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church," the Assembly's 1999 document *A Guide for Congregations Implementing the New Church Structures* encouraged the formation of "Multi-Centred Congregations" with no consideration as to who would be responsible for electing elders in such an arrangement. Consequently, in many places the intrinsic link between the people worshipping in one place and the recognition and election of elders has been broken.

Third, the transfer of the responsibilities of the elders' council to the Church Council means that elders no longer have any formal authority ("for rule and oversight") in organisational matters.¹⁰ Although the regulations do not forbid elders to meet together, their meetings will have no formal decision-making responsibilities or powers unless the Church Council refers particular matters to them.

Consequently, without a meeting the corporate nature of the eldership is undermined. On the one hand, the understanding that elders have a necessary and particular relationship with the minister has been abandoned; on the other, the shared task of leadership and oversight at the local level has been compromised. The decisions of the 1997 Assembly fail to give adequate recognition to the understanding, well received within the Uniting Church, that it was the *Council of Elders* that was gifted.

Fifth, the Regulations now allow the possibility that elders will not be members of the Church Council, either through a decision [as is allowed by Regulation 3.1.12 (b)] not to include all elders on a Church Council, or through the permission of a Presbytery that the Church Council have no elders at all. The Church's polity has effectively been changed by allowing the possibility that someone involved in a ministry of the church need not be a member of a council, with the pastoral care and mutual responsibility that such membership entails. The notion of the free-floating, un-councilled elder is foreign to the theology of the *Basis of Union*. It is noted that no consideration appears to have been given to the roles of these people, nor to their actual responsibilities and the domain for their decision-making within the life of the congregation.

Finally, a practical consequence of the changes instituted by the eighth Assembly is that the Church now neither provides for nor expects that within congregations there will be a confidential council at which pastorally sensitive matters can be discussed, and from which oversight can be extended.

The Doctrine Working Group

Wagga, 16th July, 2001.

¹⁰ *The Basis of Union*, paragraph 14 (b)

3.b Gifts and Ministry

(Paragraph 13, Basis of Union)

The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. The one Spirit has endowed the members of his Church with a diversity of gifts

- there is no gift without its corresponding service
- all Ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ

The Uniting Church...

- will recognise and accept the ministries ... in the uniting Churches
 - will thereafter provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them
 - will order its life in response to God's call to enter more fully into mission.
-

3.c The Ministry of Elders (Regulation 3.1.10)

3.1.10 (a) The ministry of Elder is one of spiritual oversight, and may also be exercised in pastoral visitation, teaching, encouraging members of the Congregation to share in mission, and assisting the Minister in leadership of worship and administration of the sacraments and other areas in the life of the Congregation. Elders who serve on the Church Council have a particular responsibility to ensure that matters of spiritual oversight, pastoral care and the mission of the Church have priority in the work of the Church Council.

(b) Members who held life tenure as Elders at the inauguration of the Church and have not relinquished their life tenure shall continue to be recognised as Elders.

(c) Elders holding life tenure who have not relinquished their life tenure and who have maintained continuous membership of the Congregation in which they held membership at the inauguration of the Church shall be entitled to be members of the Church Council of that Congregation.

(d) Elders holding life tenure and whose membership has been transferred to another Congregation since the inauguration of the Church may stand for election as Elders and members of Church Council under the provisions of Regulations 3.1.12, 3.1.14 and 3.1.16. They shall not be entitled to serve as Elders or members of the Church Council in the other Congregation unless they are elected.

(e) A Congregation may choose to use the term "Leader" instead of "Elder" for those fulfilling the ministry of Elder.

4. a. Roles and Responsibilities for Elders and Leaders in the Uniting Church in Australia

WORKSHEET – Taking stock!

(Fill in and highlight areas that you are called to or involved in.)

The ministry of elder is one of Spiritual Oversight that may be exercised in giving leadership by *Sharing with the Minister/s* in

Pastoral Visitation

- Planned Visiting Program of Members – conversation times at home, work, cafes, etc...
- Visiting of families or gatherings with families
- Home Visits related to specific needs – illness, bereavement, celebration
- Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Retirement Residences, etc...

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?

Teaching (through all-age learning & growth in spirituality) In a congregation, this may be seen in the following ways...

- Arranging for the teaching of the faith to children
- Youth & young adults
- Family Ministry, activities for mixed aged groups
- Adult learning & growth in spirituality
- Confirmation [*Belonging* & other groups]
- Planned Preaching Program

?

?

Encouraging the congregation to share in mission

(through particular, clearly identified mission strategies)

- Focusing on a particular group or age range
- Social responsibility and justice activities
- Fellowship & Community Building
- Community functions

Assisting the Minister/s in

- Leading worship
- The administration of the sacraments

?

Other areas in the life of the congregation

4.a Exploring the Roles and Responsibilities

ELDERS OF OUR CONGREGATION

4.a.1. Share with the Minister in Mission, in the Pastoral Care and in Spiritual Oversight of the Congregation

<i>Sharing</i>	The tasks of Elders are not done alone – they are shared.... with the Minister and with each other
<i>with the Minister</i>	Minister & elders are a team. Not simply to help the Minister but to use the gifts each has, and where the Minister of the Word is team leader. No one has all the gifts needed for this ministry but between us working as a team, we may have gifts & abilities that are sufficient for the tasks of ministry and mission.
<i>in Mission</i>	In its widest sense, as in the mission statement of this congregation (and the purposes for which God calls this body of believers)
<i>and in the Pastoral Care</i>	The words are derived from the image of the shepherd with the sheep caring for the sick and needy; but also care that challenges and Inspires the strong and healthy (See 4.c)
<i>and Spiritual Oversight</i>	Participation (koinonia) in the one Spirit makes a group of individuals 'one body' or a community of Christ. Care of the congregation's spirit is a shared responsibility. The spirit of the Congregation derives from the presence of the Holy Spirit in its life. So the word 'spiritual' is about the people's faith, Christian life and prayer. But the Holy Spirit is also Spirit of redemption, the advocate, comforter, revealer of truth & justice/injustice; The Spirit brings peace, mediates forgiveness, is the 'Lord and giver of life', the spirit of life for the church and the world. So these too are elements of 'spiritual oversight'. The task of oversight in the church lies in maintaining the faithful witness of the congregation to Jesus Christ's redeeming work in individuals and in the world.
<i>Congregation</i>	Care for the congregation may be offered broadly to a community as well as to individuals. Any Christian community has an identity and life of its own and must be cared for as much as any individual. The congregation itself experiences grief and conflict, & temptation and sin. As a community it needs counselling and support, encouragement, forgiveness and challenge. Elders individually, and as a group, help the congregation develop its sense of identity and importance in the work of God.

DISCUSSION: Talk about some of the things Elders have been doing lately that have contributed to the mission, pastoral care and spiritual oversight of our congregation?

ELDERS OF OUR CONGREGATION**4.a. 2. Nurture the members and adherents in their growth in grace**

Xaris (Grace): kindness, mercy, goodwill;
 a special manifestation of the divine presence, activity, glory or power;
 a favour, expression, gift, blessing;
 thanks, gratitude.

Grace is seen in the way the first Christians enjoyed the favour of the whole people:

...praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47 NRSV)

Grace is used to refer to God's unmerited kindness in God's free gift of justification:

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. (Romans 5:15 NRSV)

(see also Romans 5:15-21)

2 Corinthians

In 2 Corinthians *grace* is used to denote free active love; the special gift that fitted and equipped Paul for his apostolic ministry; the special divine act and gift that, when received, make one a Christian; the continuing divine favour that enables the Christian life to persist; an outgoing concentration of attention and care upon another, regardless of any legal claim that the other may have upon the gracious person.

Colossians 4-16

In Colossians 4:6 it is a description of the way Christians should speak to people who ask about Christ.

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:6 NRSV)

DISCUSSION

1. What will the people be doing when their lives exhibit this 'grace'?
2. What can Elders do separately/together to 'nurture the people in their growth in grace'?
3. What do/can Elders do separately and together to nurture their own growth in grace?

ELDERS OF OUR CONGREGATION

4.a. 3. Assist the Minister/s in the conduct of worship and the administration of the sacraments

Responsibility

The Minister has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that worship takes place.

'The minister and the Elders together carry out that responsibility. Corporate worship is the central and most crucial ministry of the congregation. When worship is well done, in the sense that its conduct receives adequate thought, prayer and planning, then that congregation is very fortunate and its public witness strong.'

The Nature of Worship

'God's presence is made actual in his body, the Church, which exercised Christ's ministry through the priesthood of all believers. This means that in all priestly actions, when the grace of God is mediated to God's people and the response of the people is offered to God, the minister and the congregational representatives must be associated together. If the minister alone administers all the priestly duties then our Church's teaching is contradicted ... reference to the regulations makes clear the minister's role ... emphasis on the shared responsibility ... is not meant to demean the minister but to make visible our Church's commitment to the representative priestly ministry of the whole Church ... Whilst a minister should not conduct worship or celebrate the sacraments alone, the minister must preside at the sacraments and accept responsibility for the proper conduct of worship.'

Ian Tanner "A Handbook for Elders"

DISCUSSION:

1. What are the bonuses for
 - the congregation
 - the Elders
 - the Minister
 - visitors
 when Elders assist the Minister in the conduct of worship and in the administration of the sacraments?
2. What are the bonuses for the congregation when the liturgy is printed out and there are plenty of responses for the congregation to make?
3. Are there down sides to that way of conducting worship?
4. How can the downsides be minimised?

Adapted from notes of Rev Shirley Maddox

4 b DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL

Members of the Church Council ~give priority in its life to:

- building up the Congregation in faith and love;
- sustaining members in hope; and
- leading to a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.

Include the following:

- (i) Sharing with the Minister (and ministerial staff) in:
 - mission;
 - pastoral care; and
 - spiritual oversight
- (ii) Nurturing in their growth in grace (of members & adherents).
Encouraging members to share in mission
- (iii) Making decisions in accordance with the UCA Regulations:
 - baptism and confirmation;
 - membership, and the rolls of the Congregation.
- (iv) Assisting the Minister (and ministerial staff) in:
 - the conduct of worship; and
 - in the administration of the sacraments.
- (v) Determining the time and place of services.
- (vi) Carrying out its functions concerning applicants for the specified ministries.
- (vii) Managing:
 - financial affairs; and
 - general administration - reception, preparation and presentation of all necessary budgets, statements and reports.
- (viii) Managing and controlling property
- (ix) Preparing and presenting to a meeting of the Congregation an annual report on the life and work of the congregation:
 - its worship;
 - mission and service; and
 - making recommendations with regard to the program for the ensuing year.
- (x) Exercising oversight of the appointment of officers and leaders of Congregational organisations.
- (xi) Referral of matters to Presbytery

4.c Power and Humility

Many people responding to God's Call to take up Christian Leadership start by saying, "Who, me?" Many people who are trying to live out their understandings of humble service are surprised when asked to consider roles as leaders. It is important for Christian leaders to understand that they have usually been approached because they seem to live a life of Christian maturity. Others have usually observed and discerned that there are some gifts for leadership.

Understanding our gifts and how to use them well is an important aspect of developing as leaders. It is important to recognise that most leadership roles involve some power. Good leaders will not deny the existence of this power, but seek to understand it and treat it responsibly.

People in positions of authority have power. People with information have power. People who are articulate have power. People have certain types of power because of their education, gender, race or class. Others have power through their personalities or special gifts. Sometimes people have power when they probably shouldn't. Sometimes people do not recognise how to use the power they do have for good.

Sometimes this power comes with the office and sometimes it comes with the opportunities the office provides (e.g. being on the decision-making body).

In your Church community, who has the power to make the following decisions:

- ☒ To buy a new stove;
- ☒ To hold a stewardship campaign;
- ☒ To hold a Mission Expo;
- ☒ To start a Book group;
- ☒ To start a discipleship nurture group;
- ☒ To choose the worship music;
- ☒ To speak on behalf of the Church at your local Council;
- ☒ To invite a guest speaker (for a group or for a Service);
- ☒ To nominate preaching themes;
- ☒ To decide who can be married in the Church;
- ☒ To decide if someone may be baptised;
- ☒ To teach SRE (special Religious Education in Schools);
- ☒ To use a new youth curriculum?

Choose 3 of the examples and talk about "Who has power in this situation?"

Who has power in the following pairs?
How could each person use power?

- ☒ Doctor and Patient
- ☒ Coordinator and Volunteer
- ☒ Minister and Church Visitor
- ☒ Elder and Person being baptised
- ☒ Organist and Choir
- ☒ Music Leader and Preacher
- ☒ Treasurer and Contractor
- ☒ Church Secretary and Presbytery Officer
- ☒ Small Group Leader and Church Council Chairperson
- ☒ Flower Roster Coordinator and Owner of the Large Garden

Sometimes power relationships are very subtle. We may have power in some circumstances, but the situation may change quickly. Think about the following situations:

- ☒ A Married person and a Single person in conversation:
 - Talking about sex
 - Talking about hosting a small group
 - Talking about planned giving and disposable income
 - Talking about prayer and spiritual formation opportunities

In Micah 6:8 we hear,
“What does the Lord require of you but to act justly,
love mercy and walk humbly with your God.”

These are good guidelines for Christian leaders. Think about what guidelines we could create for ourselves to ensure that we use power well and nourish appropriate Christian humility.

☒ _____

☒ _____

☒ _____

☒ _____

☒ _____

☒ _____

4.d Spiritual Oversight

DISCUSSION

What does Spiritual Oversight mean to you?

Who does it?

What does it involve?

Defining Spiritual Oversight - asking the God questions...

Accountability - evaluating against your understanding of the gospel

Spiritual Growth

- of individuals
- the community of faith
- the wider community

Making a distinction between Spiritual and Cultural considerations:

- How do they overlap?
- How do we do theology around past and present?
- How is God's will revealed?
 1. What part does Tradition play?
 2. What Biblical stories underpin our thinking?

An Exercise for a Church Council on Spiritual Oversight...

1. What is the 'good news' according to your congregation?

i.e.

- What is important about Christian faith in your community?
- How would you communicate your version of the gospel story to someone?

2. Does this differ from your personal experience of the gospel? In what ways?

3. What are the key aspects of the gospel story that shape your personal values?

4. What are the key aspects of the gospel story that shape your congregation's values?

5. Which of the following have most shaped your personal *theologies of discipleship and ministry*? (Tick up to THREE as appropriate)

Scripture passages referring to the Law
Scripture passages referring to Jesus
Other Scripture passages
Apostles Creed / Nicene Creed
Basis of Union
Other Statements/ Affirmations of Faith
Personal Experience
Group Experience
Camps / Conferences
Influential of a Mentor or Teacher

6. Circle 3 different areas of responsibility in your Congregation:

Finances

Worship

Pastoral
Care of
Members

Service
Activity

Discipleship
Formation

Evangelism

Work with
Poor/Needy

Teaching

Other?

.....

5. What passages from Scripture help shape your thinking about these particular responsibilities?

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

7. What prayer practices do you use personally, as a congregation and as a Church Council?

8. Does the Church Council learn and practice different models of prayer?

7. How could you incorporate this thinking, praying and discernment in decision-making?

4.e The Learning Spiral – as a process of spiritual discernment

Transformation is central to Christianity. We come to God as we are, and are accepted, as we are, but then follows a long slow process of transformation as we together seek the mind of Christ and in the process become ourselves more like Christ.

The learning Spiral is a process of spiritual discernment designed to foster transformation. It is practiced in groups. It grows out of the understanding that there are different aspects to the nature of God (Father, Son and Spirit) which work together like partners in a dance, one sometimes taking the lead, at other times deferring, or as John's gospel would have it – a mutual indwelling. (See: The Learning Spiral, Theology.)

Spiritual discernment is a way of being consciously and deliberately open to the leading of God's Spirit as we make decisions together. As we search out directions for us as a community, as we struggle with difficult issues or as we try to identify the ministry or calling of each person. Spiritual discernment can also be practiced between trusted friends and is an intrinsic part of courses such as Companions in Christ.. It is a process that begins in our experience and honours the ability of a community to listen for the voice of God in each other's speaking. It helps us draw down from the tradition of which we are a part and honours those amongst us who have travelled further than we have along the way of Christ. It raises holiness and wisdom as our principle guides.

The Process



1. Naming the circumstance

Working together to accurately name the circumstance or situation under consideration.

2. Exploration

This is a time for asking questions for clarification so that there is common understanding or clarity about the matter under consideration.

3. Naming Concerns

This is a time for acknowledging feelings, emotions, impressions and pre-conceived ideas surrounding the topic. (This may have to be revisited during the process.)

4. Input

Are there gaps in understanding?
What sort of information would be needed

to help clarify the situation further?
Is there anything else you need to know?
Are there outside resources that could help?

5. Reflection

Look for wisdom from the Bible and from Christian tradition that connects with the matter at hand. (This helps us to a Christian interpretation of the matter under consideration.). NB. Use the same headings:

- (i) Naming the Circumstance;
- (ii) Exploration;
- (iii) Naming Concerns; and
- (iv) Input (commentaries, dictionaries etc)

to guide you through the Biblical material.

6. Imagining alternatives

What are some alternatives? What are some possibilities?

7. Prayer/Listening/Prayer/Listening

Listen prayerfully to one another as you offer thoughts on the listed alternatives and possibilities. Engage in times of silent or spoken prayer. Search out and be aware of who might be affected, and in what way, by the alternatives and possibilities you have listed. Fine tune.

8. Plan

What are you going to do?

9. Resting with the decision

Having made a decision don't act on it straight away but let it sit to see if the decision brings peace of mind and heart even if the action decided upon is difficult. Danny E Morris and Charles M Olsen, in their work: "Discerning God's Will Together: A Spiritual Practice for the Church; ask us to consider whether the decision brings "**feelings of consolation** – a sense of peace and movement toward God or "**feelings of desolation** - a sense of distress and movement away from God." This seems a good way of identifying a good decision, even if it is difficult.

10. Put your decision into effect11. Revisiting

Remember that at any time you may want to go back to a previous point in the process.

You may need further clarification, or more information or more prayer or listening etc.

12. Review

Like any other process, you may need to review the decision that has been put into effect.

The process begins again at Naming The Circumstance.

4.f Pastoral Care

i. Pastoral Visiting

Recall a recent pastoral visit you received either from an ordained minister, an elder or a member of the church.

1. What was the reason of the visit?

2. How did you feel about the visit?

Prior (if you knew):

During:

After:

3. What were the aspects of the visit that were helpful and valued by you?

4. What were the aspects of the visit that were less helpful?

5. On reflection, if you were giving feedback to the individual who visited you, what would you offer as comments?

1. What are the components that you believe make for an effective pastoral visit?

2. What are your expectations of a visit when you are the elder?

3. What expectations do you believe the members of your congregation have of the elder's visit?

4. What are the blocks that prevent elder's visits from happening?

5. How might these blocks/difficulties be overcome?

1. How satisfied are you with the way pastoral visiting is organised in your congregation?
2. What variations might be possible?
3. How resourced do you feel for offering pastoral care within an individual visit?
4. In what areas do you need more training?

Some Models of Pastoral Care and Developing Pastoral Communities

1. By clergy (Minister, Pastor, Priest) and elders or deacons.
2. By a trained caring team
3. Contact & Caring (Elders & Minister/Lay worker)
4. Caring through a Co-ordinated Network
5. Circles [Clusters] of Caring
6. Through Small Groups & some individual carers
7. Telecaring: Caring by Telephone
8. Through Special Events: Guess who? Dinners of 8
9. Hospitality Events: (Sunday afternoons)...new people
10. Your suggestions

4.g Education

“Becoming Disciples”

Bible Study

Preaching and Teaching

Age-specific education

5. Recognising Gifts and Developing Skills

5.a Gifts and Graces

When people understand their gifts and abilities and are permitted to use them, satisfaction, fulfillment, and effective ministry result.

Programs are created for people not vice versa. Ministries arise because God gives talents and resources to people, but people are not born merely to perpetuate programs. Therefore it is reasonable to believe that God's plan is to develop ministry around the gifts of a person and not to develop a person to fit a position or ministry. The Scriptures say that a man's gift will make room for him. A ministry will not force a person into a mold.

Paul encouraged Timothy to understand his gift and to use it. Consequently Timothy was effective because he ministered through the gifts God had given him.

Many Christians serve out of guilt, obligation, or fear. Or they do not serve at all. People cannot serve effectively if they feel guilty refusing or if they feel obligated or afraid they will jeopardize relationships with the people who asked them.

Further burnout, frustration, and apathy occur when people aren't serving in areas compatible with their gifts. Of course, the Word says, Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10, NIV). Still, when people understand their gifts and abilities and are permitted to use them, satisfaction, fulfillment, and effective ministry result.

How can we help people discover their places of ministry using their God-given gifts? There are numerous evaluation tools and questionnaires to help people discover their ministry gifts. Because the Scriptures are not explicit regarding the number of gifts, there is a variety of doctrinal positions concerning ministry gifts.

5.a.i What is my SHAPE?

A Process for Reflecting on and Identifying your possible ministry role or area

Discover and identify 5 elements to help determine who we are and how we can most effectively and passionately (with satisfaction and enjoyment) serve God's Kingdom in the world.

- **S – Spiritual Gifts**
- **H – Heart**
- **A – Abilities**
- **P – Personality**
- **E - Experiences**

Each person is different and is uniquely created, gifted and called into ministry by God. When we take on roles and responsibilities that involve skills and gifts that are not particularly ours, we can feel like a square peg in a round hole. This can be frustrating and even less rewarding, than when we find our niche.

This **process** can help you reflect on yourself and your calling within the wider community or congregation. When you have thought and prayed through these areas, you may like to talk to another person to gain their perspective and then talk with a mentor or the Minister. Together we (under God's leading & with encouragement) can uncover where you are called; the nurture & support necessary and training that may be helpful for this ministry.

The Process

What are some of the factors that reflect our SHAPE?

Spiritual Gifts – These are described in such Biblical passages as 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and Romans 12. They are specific gifts that the Spirit of God gives to individuals to be expressed in serving God's people. They include such things as teaching, preaching, serving, helping, healing, administration, prophecy, evangelism and so on. Generally it through trying different things, 'having a go' that we begin to discover what our specific gifts are. We are more effective in certain areas than others.

Heart – The heart, in Biblical understanding is the centre of our motivation, desires and interests. Another word might be passions – what makes us passionate? What do we give our 'heart' to? It is to these things that we are drawn and from which we derive greatest satisfaction. What are our natural interests, our passions?

Abilities – These are the natural talents you were born with. It may be writing, speaking, sports, art, studying, listening, cooking, gardening and so on and so on. The number of talents is endless and each of us has many – most of which we probably take for granted. Our problem is in identifying our talents, recognising them and then matching our talents to ministry opportunities. What do you do well?

Personality – Each of us has different personality characteristics. Some are more extroverted or introverted; some feel deeply, others think; some are organised and structured and others ‘go with the flow’; some are more intuitive, others more concrete. Personality has a large bearing on how we minister and is often the difference between two people with similar gifts and talents, but who use them quite differently.

Experiences – What are the various life experiences that have helped you become who you are and inform your ministry? You may like to consider: Educational experiences (what you have studied and learned), Vocational experiences (what types of work have you done and enjoyed doing?), Spiritual experiences (what have been the meaningful times of God in your life?), Ministry experiences (what ways have you served God previously?) and Painful experiences (what have you learned through experiences of pain, problems, hurts and trials?)

Try to create a picture of your SHAPE, who you are as a creature of God, ‘For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.’(Ephesians 2:10)

Think through these five areas. **S. H. A. P. E.**

On your own: Jot down the thoughts that come to mind – your initial reactions and more considered responses.

With others you trust: Get their perspective.

With a mentor or Minister: Share some ideas about a possible area / role where you may be called. Talk about steps to get there. God bless you in this process!

This process is based on material from Rick Warren’s ‘The Purpose Driven Church’ (Rick Warren).

5.a.ii *Being aware of the gifts in others*

(Encouraging others in using their gifts)

Write down 3-4 occasions when you participated in a project which you found

- Satisfying but stretching
- (maybe) Involved leadership in some way
- (maybe) involved a role others may not normally see you in.

In turns, first person

- Tell the story to the group,(3 mins. max)
(they listen without commenting or joking)
- Make a note or two of points in the story where you observe a sense of giftedness
- Very briefly tell what you heard (1 min. max)
(the person listens without comment or joking, etc. ie. Receives what is offered)
- The listeners (if they wish, in 1 min. max) offer
“Have you thought of using your gifts in this way....., or
“have you thought of another person
Who you could encourage in using their gift in etc.”
- Finish with “Thanks” and move on to next person.

Second person follows as before

5.a.iii Ministry Gifts Discovery Questionnaire

The first of the following questionnaires was developed by Ed Weising.

Read each question to decide the degree to which the statement is true or false in your life. Write the numeral that represents your answer next to the question.

1 *Never* 2 *Usually false* 3 *Partially true or false* 4 *Usually true* 5 *Always true*

1. This test is to evaluate your past and present experiences, not future hopes and dreams. I am known for my directness and frankness in speaking to people about their spiritual lives.
2. I am eager to pitch in and help when a menial task involving an individual or a group needs to be done.
3. I love to research topics with the purpose of presenting what I discover in writing or orally to a group.
4. I enjoy encouraging and comforting others who are going through trying times.
5. I am among the first to give to a worthy cause.
6. I enjoy coordinating the activities of others to reach a common goal.
7. I am a caregiver. I want to ease the pain of people in distress.
8. It hurts me deeply when I see Christians living sinful lives or not living up to their true potentials. I am not afraid to confront them about these things when I have an opportunity.
9. I am good with my hands and have excellent physical stamina.
10. It upsets me greatly when a speaker uses a Bible verse out of context.
11. People with problems seem drawn to me, and they often ask me to help them resolve their problems.
12. I try to be careful in managing my money so I can give more to the Lord's work.
13. I enjoy leading a group of people to do something for God.
14. I am concerned for the helpless (i.e. babies, young children, the retarded, the infirmed, the underprivileged, the sick).
15. When I speak to a group or sit in a church service, I am concerned that people have an opportunity to find Christ or to straighten out their lives.
16. I prefer to help wherever I am needed most in the church instead of accepting a regular ministry.
17. When people ask me an important question about spiritual things, I tend to give them an involved answer and not a simple one because I do not want them to misunderstand. If I don't have an answer, I promise to do research and get back to them.

18. When others share problems with me, I can visualize goals and the steps of action they need to take.
19. I can make quick decisions about helping others who are in need.
20. I can get others to work to get a job done for God.
21. I am very sensitive about how others feel.
22. I have a profound sense of right and wrong, and it hurts me deeply when I hear of people being treated unjustly or unfairly.
23. I prefer to busy myself behind the scenes at a social gathering.
24. I enjoy communicating God's truth to people, and I do so in a systematic, orderly way.
25. I tend to forget time when listening to others sharing their hurts.
26. I have no trouble tithing -- even giving beyond my tithe -- and I am concerned about Christians who don't tithe.
27. I tend to assume leadership, organize, and delegate responsibility if no assigned leader exists in a group.
28. I can identify with and comfort those who are suffering.
29. I am insightful about people. I seem to know when there is something wrong in another Christian's life or when a group needs to be corrected.
30. I often am called upon to help . I fix something or help with a task.
31. I do not enjoy small talk. I enjoy a good discussion on ideas or truths in God's Word.
32. When someone is hurting, I am able to say something that comforts him.
33. I am greatly moved when I hear about a missionary project or missionary in need, and I try to rally others to support the project.
34. I react inwardly when church business is not done in an orderly fashion.
35. I enjoy visiting those who are hospitalized or shut-in.

Total your responses to the following sets of questions. The sums will indicate which of the following gifts is likely to be yours.

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 = Prophecy | 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 = Serving |
| 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 = Teaching | 4, 11, 18, 25, 32 = Exhortation |
| 5, 12, 19, 26, 33 = Giving | 6, 13, 20, 27, 34 = Leadership |
| 7, 14, 21, 28, 35 = Mercy | |

Each gift area has a variety of ministry opportunities. For example, a person with a gift for serving could be a host/hostess, nursery attendant, member of a social committee, or greeter. Members of the Body, which is available free from the national Sunday School Department suggests ideas of areas of service for each gift.

5.a.iv Passion and Interest Questionnaire

1. List your passions and interests, in order of preference. What do you really enjoy doing?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
2. In the lines below, list four ways you have been involved in the church, beginning with the most recent.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
3. On a scale of 1 to 5 rate each of the areas (1 = little; 5 = great) as to your sense of satisfaction and personal enjoyment.
4. On the same scale rate each of the areas as to the level of results or accomplishment.
5. Rate each area as to the degree of affirmation and approval you received.
6. Of all the areas, where do you believe you were most effective?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
7. Based on your ministry gifts, personal satisfaction, results, and what others say affirming your effectiveness, how and where do you feel you can best serve in the church?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
9. Considering your time, talents, ministry opportunity, and what God is saying to you, how do you plan to serve in ministry?

God's plan for God's body is for each person to find a place of service and ministry. We are only as effective as the collective ministries of those involved. Each person who discovers their ministry gifts and uses them for God makes our church come alive.

5.b Spiritual Disciplines

Bible Study

Developing Prayer

Personal and Corporate Worship

Retreats

Mentoring and Spiritual Direction Opportunities

5.c.i Communication

Knowing What to Say “But what do I actually say?”

is the question that is often asked by those who want to care.
Four possible ways of responding to something that is shared.

1. Advice giving
 - I have the answer.
 - I can help you.
 - Do what I say.

2. Reassurance
 - Don't worry about it.
 - It's not as serious as you think.
 - Everything will be all right.

3. Understanding
 - Your feelings matter to me.
 - I want to help you if I can

4. Self-revelation
 - Yes I think I understand,
I'm human too and have had experiences like yours.

Which of these responses would we use?

Levels of Communication

Afternoon Tea Party chit chat

This type of talk is very safe...”How are you?” “How is your dog?” “I like your shirt.” There is no personal sharing. Each person remains safe behind their own defences. Any talk which would cause disagreement is avoided.

Reporting Facts about others.

We are content to tell others what someone else has said. We report the facts like the six o'clock news. We may share gossip and little narrations but we do not say how we feel about anything.

My Ideas and Judgments.

Real communication begins to unfold here. We are willing to step out of our solitary confinement and risk telling some of our ideas, and decisions. We are still cautious. If we sense that what we are saying is not being accepted we will retreat.

My Feelings and Emotions

At this level we begin to show how we feel about the facts, ideas and judgements. The climate is such that doubts, fears, and hostilities may be spoken about honestly. Thoughts that ‘come from the heart’ may be shared. People may hear the ‘words’ that are underneath the words that are said.

Communion-based on absolute openness and honesty with each other.

This is difficult to achieve because it involves risk – the risk of being rejected. At this level we can talk about joys, hopes and beliefs and sharing becomes mutual and the sense of closeness is truly satisfying.

All levels of communication have their value.

We need to be free to relate to others at whatever level is appropriate

5.c.ii Role Plays

1. Joy is the music convenor for the evening service. Her contribution has meant that the evening worship service, mainly consisting of young people and young adults, has come alive and each Sunday evening there is happy participation. This has gone on for 3 years and there are a number of younger young people offering for the orchestra. They are not always the best behaved and one thing Joy insists on is high standards. Joy is clearly determined to limit the number of participants in the orchestra and a select roster has been organised. Somehow the enthusiasm of folk for the evening service has started to wane.
2. Hazel is a Lay Assistant in the parish. Because she is on staff, some expect her to organise and to give leadership, mainly because she is 'paid to do it'. She is a gentle character who avoids confrontation, and if anyone should disagree with the way she works, Hazel stops communicating with that person. By this method, Hazel hopes the problem will just go away. Hazel has a lot of dreams for the parish. In fact she spends a lot of time putting these dreams on paper. Often Hazel annoys people by failing or forgetting to do her part in her dream...
3. Mary is an entrepreneur. She has great enthusiasm and bundles of energy. She has the gifts to talk lots of people into helping her. When things go well, they really go well. She loves to hear 'Well done, Mary'. She has a keen mind too and is invaluable on most committees as she often can see her way through the confronting problem. However there is a cynical side to Mary, who in her remarks is somewhat scathing of others who do not seem to know where they are going, and she feels that often there are many in the parish in that category...
4. Tom is very dependable. He has a PC and each Sunday very faithfully records people present at each of the three worship services. By early a.m. Monday, he has on the minister's desk and available to the visiting team, a list of people who have been absent for six weeks or more, along with a list of specific prayers requested and people needing visiting. However some time the appropriate follow-up work by the visiting team does not happen. Tom is weary in well-doing and is almost ready to throw in the towel....
5. Brian is a strong, determined man. An optimist, he loves seeing things happen around him. He is financially very well off and generously gives of his time, energy and finance to ensure that some of those things do happen. He tries hard to encourage others, but his dominant build, smooth talk and his sometimes stretching of the truth, makes others frightened of him. Sometimes people carry out a task more out of fear than love. Brian is very much a loner....
6. Mark is one of the past pillars of the church but the years are catching up on him. He is well versed in scripture and participates in one of the cell groups as well as being in worship service each Sunday morning. However the negative side of life has mainly taken over Mark and he finds it difficult to ever see anything through anything other than critical eyes.
7. Kim is a doctor from inland China. He is doing a year's placement at the nearby hospital. He arrival in Australia has meant his first major contact with a Christian community of people. He is regularly there at each Sunday morning's service and openly states 'My reason for being here is to learn the English language'.

8. John is a compassionate person who would do anything for his friends. He has been one of the instigators of the Church's Outreach Program through the Coffee Shop and Second Hand Clothing Store. He is only a spasmodic attendee at church and is viewed with suspicion by regulars. A while ago, John was hurt by the church but he never says anything about it.
9. Joe is a young person who has done just about everything. A number of people in the congregation appear to frown on him', mainly because of some of his habits like coming to church unshaven and barefooted. His clothes are usually crumpled and look less than clean. For some her is seen as a 'bit of a drunk'.
10. George is one of those quiet, shy types. He would not be considered a greatly 'talented' person but what he does, he does well. No one would see him as a leader by any stretch of the imagination, but he is always there, whether it be a working bee, worship services or stewardship programs. He enjoys a laugh, but words like creative, imaginative, outgoing would never apply to George.

Imagine you are the elder for one of these people. Where would you prefer to make contact with them? How would you go about having a pastoral conversation?

Listening Exercise – Person A

- First exercise: Tell your partner about a problem you have, it can be imaginary or real, keep on with the story no matter what
- Second exercise: Listen to your partner and interrupt and tell them what you think they should do
- Third exercise: Tell you partner about something that is exciting for you or something that you are pleased about
- Fourth exercise: Repeat your first conversation with your partner, talk about a problem

Listening Exercise – Person B

- First exercise: Keep silent when you partner shares with you. Do not show interest or have eye contact.
- Second exercise: Tell you partner about something that bothers you about the world
- Third exercise: Interrupt your partner and tell them about something better, bigger or more exciting that has happened for you
- Fourth exercise: Listen to your partner and respond with care and understanding

5.c.iii Talking about my experience

Talk in pairs....

When you think about the last few years... especially in relation to being a member of this church or a leader of Parish/Elders/Church Councils...

What have been some 'peaks' and 'troughs'?

I feel positive about...

I feel happy that...

I can celebrate...

I can recall & ponder some more about...

I can let go of ...

I felt not heard when...

I felt put down when...

I felt devastated about...

I can understand that...

I struggle with...

Things I can own....

Things I don't own...

Where are you now on the diagram of peaks and troughs?

Where are my feelings strongest?

Anything else?

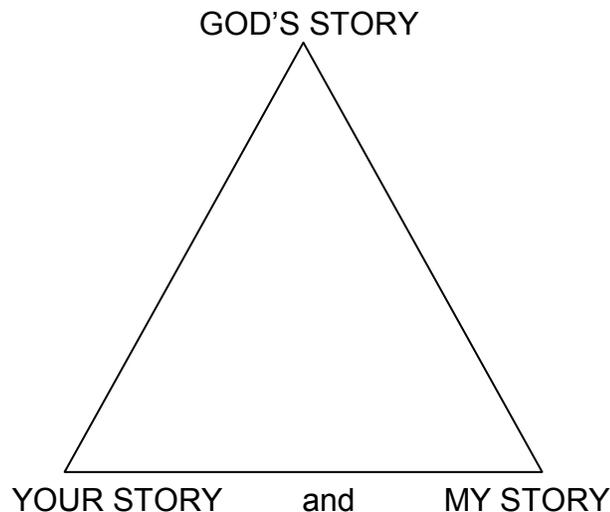
5.c.iv Faith Sharing and Soul Tending

A model for sharing our faith

When we talk about and listen to others share something meaningful of the Christian faith, there are three perspectives to understand what is happening.

1. My story (sharing of my faith) and hope
2. Your story (listening to the other's faith) and their hope
3. The Gospel story (listening to the biblical story) and hope

This may be easily remembered as a triangle.



Share briefly about your experience of becoming a Christian:

When did Jesus Christ become more than just a name to you.

Share briefly why you are still a Christian.

I am still a Christian because...

...what would you say?

THE GOSPEL STORY and HOPE

How would you explain the facts of the gospel story as simply as possible without using "churchy" jargon?

What are the main points?

SHARING OUR STORIES and THE GOSPEL STORY WITH OTHERS

What recent experience encourages you in your faith or in sharing your faith?

If you think of the places where you meet with others as a "mission field", what are possible talking points to build friendly contact with others?

REALLY LISTENING - What can we learn?
What can we learn from listening to others?
What do we establish in a conversation?

MOVING FROM EVERYDAY THINGS
TO THINKING ABOUT GOD'S CONCERN FOR OUR EVERYDAY LIFE

How do we know or why are we so sure that GOD IS CONCERNED about the ordinary everyday parts of our life?

*What is my experience of Jesus Christ that this community cannot live without?
(Thomas Bandy, 2004)*

Key Question:

One of the key reasons we have Elders, is to keep asking:

Of individuals:

How is your soul? And How can this Faith Community support and nourish your soul?

Of groups:

How does this activity connect with, express and nurture faith? And How can we make the spiritual values really clear?

Of the community:

How is the spiritual life of this community? And How can we keep spiritually focused?

The Basis of Union 1992 Edition

1. The way into union

The Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic, and seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church, hereby enter into union under the name of the Uniting Church in Australia. They pray that this act may be to the glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They give praise for God's gifts of grace to each of them in years past; they acknowledge that none of them has responded to God's love with a full obedience; they look for a continuing renewal in which God will use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people. To this end they declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church; they remain open to constant reform under his Word; and they seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this union these Churches commit their members to acknowledge one another in love and joy as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, to hear anew the commission of the Risen Lord to make disciples of all nations, and daily to seek to obey his will. In entering into this union the Churches concerned are mindful that the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which Christ died, and that it awaits with hope the day of the Lord Jesus Christ on which it will be clear that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of the Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever.

2. Of the whole Church

The Uniting Church in Australia lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Uniting Church recognises that it is related to other Churches in ways which give expression, however partially, to that unity in faith and mission. Recalling the Ecumenical Councils of the early centuries, the Uniting Church looks forward to a time when the faith will be further elucidated, and the Church's unity expressed, in similar Councils. It thankfully acknowledges that the uniting Churches were members of the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies, and will seek to maintain such membership. It remembers the special relationship which obtained between the several uniting Churches and other Churches of similar traditions, and will continue to learn from their witness and be strengthened by their fellowship. It is encouraged by the existence of United Churches in which these and other traditions have been incorporated, and wishes to learn from their experience. It believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end the Uniting Church commits itself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific. The Uniting Church declares its desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches.

3. Built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ. The Church preaches Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus Christ "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19 RSV). In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin.

Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive God's love. Jesus himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain. In raising him to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to God on earth, reasserted claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love. To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith. To this end God has sent forth the Spirit that people may trust God as their Father, and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. The whole work of salvation is effected by the sovereign grace of God alone.

The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself. The Church lives between the time of Christ's death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring; the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way.

Reflection: What aspects of Christology are emphasized here?
.....
.....

4. Christ rules and renews the Church

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

Reflection – How is the relationship understood:

...between Christ and the Church?
...between Christ and the rest of the Godhead (Trinity)?
...between Christ and the world?

Note: These paragraphs summarize the Uniting Church's emphasis on the discipline of Christology.

5. The biblical witnesses

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, its message is controlled by the Biblical witnesses. The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church. The Uniting Church lays upon its members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures, commits its ministers to preach from these and to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures.

6. Sacraments

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ has commanded his Church to proclaim the Gospel both in words and in the two visible acts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ himself acts in and through everything that the Church does in obedience to his commandment: it is Christ who by the gift of the Spirit confers the forgiveness, the fellowship, the new life and the freedom which the proclamation and actions promise; and it is Christ who awakens, purifies and advances in people the faith and hope in which alone such benefits can be accepted.

7. Baptism

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ incorporates people into his body by Baptism. In this way Christ enables them to participate in his own baptism, which was accomplished once on behalf of all in his death and burial, and which was made available to all when, risen and ascended, he poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Baptism into Christ's body initiates people into Christ's life and mission in the world, so that they are united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy, in one family of the Father of all in heaven and earth, and in the power of the one Spirit. The Uniting Church will baptize those who confess the Christian faith, and children who are presented for baptism and for whose instruction and nourishment in the faith the Church takes responsibility.

8. Holy communion

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the continuing presence of Christ with his people is signified and sealed by Christ in the Lord's Supper or the Holy Communion, constantly repeated in the life of the Church. In this sacrament of his broken body and outpoured blood the risen Lord feeds his baptized people on their way to the final inheritance of the Kingdom. Thus the people of God, through faith and the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, have communion with their Saviour, make their sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, proclaim the Lord's death, grow together into Christ, are strengthened for their participation in the mission of Christ in the world, and rejoice in the foretaste of the Kingdom which Christ will bring to consummation.

Reflection: How much emphasis is placed on Jesus Christ in the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy communion? Are you conscious of this emphasis when you participate in such services?

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9. Creeds

The Uniting Church enters into unity with the Church throughout the ages by its use of the confessions known as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Uniting Church receives these as authoritative statements of the Catholic Faith, framed in the language of their day and used by Christians in many days, to declare and to guard the right understanding of that faith. The Uniting Church commits its ministers and instructors to careful study of these creeds and to the discipline of interpreting their teaching in a later age. It commends to ministers and congregations their use for instruction in the faith, and their use in worship as acts of allegiance to the Holy Trinity.

How much emphasis do the Creeds place on the person and work of Jesus Christ? See Readings 2 & 3

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10. Reformation witnesses

The Uniting Church continues to learn of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, and in the power of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, from the witness of the Reformers as expressed in various ways in the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the Savoy Declaration (1658). In like manner the Uniting Church will listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his Forty-Four Sermons (1793). It will commit its ministers and instructors to study these statements, so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need for a constant appeal to Holy Scripture.

11. Scholarly interpreters

The Uniting Church acknowledges that God has never left the Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God's living Word. In particular the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith. The Uniting Church lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which it will learn to sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought. Within that fellowship the Uniting Church also stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help it to understand its own nature and mission. The Uniting Church thanks God for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr. It prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds.

12. Members

The Uniting Church recognises and accepts as members all who are recognised as members of the uniting Churches at the time of union. Thereafter membership is open to all who are baptized into the Holy Catholic Church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Uniting Church will seek ways in which the baptized may have confirmed to them the promises of God, and be led to deeper commitment to the faith and service into which they have been baptized. To this end the Uniting Church commits itself to undertake, with other Christians, to explore and develop the relation of baptism to confirmation and to participation in the Holy Communion.

13. Gifts and ministries

The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ. The Uniting Church, at the time of union, will recognise and accept the ministries of those who have been called to any task or responsibility in the uniting Churches. The Uniting Church will thereafter provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them, and will order its life in response to God's call to enter more fully into mission.

14. Ministers, Elders, Deaconesses and Lay Preachers

The Uniting Church, from inception, will seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit to recognise among its members women and men called of God to preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the flock, to share in government and to serve those in need in the world.

To this end:

(a) The Uniting Church recognises and accepts as ministers of the Word all who have held such office in any of the uniting Churches, and who, being in good standing in one of those Churches at the time of union, adhere to the Basis of Union. This adherence and acceptance may take place at the time of

union or at a later date. Since the Church lives by the power of the Word, it is assured that God, who has never failed to provide witness to that word, will, through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word. These will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church. Such members will be called Ministers and their setting apart will be known as Ordination.

The Presbytery will ordain by prayer and the laying on of hands in the presence of a worshipping congregation. In this act of ordination the Church praises the ascended Christ for conferring gifts upon men and women. It recognises Christ's call of the individual to be his minister; it prays for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to equip the minister for that service. By the participation in the act of ordination of those already ordained, the Church bears witness to God's faithfulness and declares the hope by which it lives. In company with other Christians the Uniting Church will seek for a renewed understanding of the way in which the congregation participates in ordination and of the significance of ordination in the life of the Church.

(b) The Uniting Church recognises and accepts as elders or leaders those who at the time of union hold the office of elder, deacon or leader appointed to exercise spiritual oversight, and who, being in good standing in any of the uniting Churches at the time of union, adhere to the Basis of Union. It will seek to recognise in the congregation those endowed by the Spirit with gifts fitting them for rule and oversight. Such members will be called Elders or Leaders.

(c) The Uniting Church recognises and accepts as deaconesses those who at the time of union are deaconesses in good standing in any of the uniting Churches and who adhere to the Basis of Union. It believes that the Holy Spirit will continue to call women to share in this way in the varied services and witness of the Church, and it will make provision for this. Such members will be called Deaconesses.

The Uniting Church recognises that at the time of union many seek a renewal of the diaconate in which women and men offer their time and talents, representatively and on behalf of God's people, in the service of humanity in the face of changing needs. The Uniting Church will so order its life that it remains open to the possibility that God may call men and women into such a renewed diaconate: in these circumstances it may decide to call them Deacons and Deaconesses, whether the service is within or beyond the life of the congregation.

(d) The Uniting Church recognises and accepts as lay preachers those who at the time of union are accredited lay preachers (local preachers) in any of the uniting Churches and who adhere to the Basis of Union. It will seek to recognise those endowed with the gift of the Spirit for this task, will provide for their training, and will gladly wait upon that fuller understanding of the obedience of Christians which should flow from their ministry. Such members will be called Lay Preachers.

In the above sub-paragraphs the phrase "adhere to the Basis of Union" is understood as willingness to live and work within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church as that way is described in this Basis. Such adherence allows for difference of opinion in matters which do not enter into the substance of the faith.

The Uniting Church recognises that the type and duration of ministries to which women and men are called vary from time to time and place to place, and that in particular it comes into being in a period of reconsideration of traditional forms of the ministry, and of renewed participation of all the people of God in the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the building up of the fellowship in mutual love, in commitment to Christ's mission, and in service of the world for which he died.

15. Government in the Church

The Uniting Church recognises that responsibility for government in the Church belongs to the people of God by virtue of the gifts and tasks which God has laid upon them. The Uniting Church therefore so organises its life that locally, regionally and nationally government will be entrusted to representatives, men and women, bearing the gifts and graces with which God has endowed them for the building up of the Church. The Uniting Church is governed by a series of inter-related councils, each of which has its tasks and responsibilities in relation both to the Church and the world.

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ alone is supreme in his Church, and that he may speak to it through any of its councils. It is the task of every council to wait upon God's Word, and to obey God's will in the matters allocated to its oversight. Each council will recognise the limits of its own authority and give heed to other councils of the Church, so that the whole body of believers may be united by mutual submission in the service of the Gospel.

To this end the Uniting Church makes provision in its constitution for the following:

(a) The Congregation is the embodiment in one place of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping, witnessing and serving as a fellowship of the Spirit in Christ. Its members meet regularly to hear God's Word, to celebrate the sacraments, to build one another up in love, to share in the wider responsibilities of the Church, and to serve the world. The congregation will recognise the need for a diversity of agencies for the better ordering of its life in such matters as education, administration and finance.

(b) The Elders' or Leaders' Meeting (the council within a congregation or group of congregations) consists of the minister and those who are called to share with the minister in oversight. It is responsible for building up the congregation in faith and love, sustaining its members in hope, and leading them into a fuller participation in Christ's mission in the world.

(c) The Presbytery (the district council) consists of such ministers, elders/leaders and other Church members as are appointed thereto, the majority of elders/leaders and Church members being appointed by Elders'/Leaders' Meetings and/or congregations, on a basis determined by the Synod. Its function is to perform all the acts of oversight necessary to the life and mission of the Church in the area for which it is responsible, except for those agencies which are directly responsible to the Synod or Assembly. It will in particular exercise oversight over the congregations within its bounds, encouraging them to strengthen one another's faith, to bear one another's burdens, and exhorting them to fulfil their high calling in Christ Jesus. It will promote those wider aspects of the work of the Church committed to it by the Synod or Assembly.

(d) The Synod (the regional council) consists of such ministers, elders/leaders and other Church members as are appointed thereto, the majority being appointed by Presbyteries, Elders'/Leaders' Meetings or congregations, on a basis determined by the Assembly. It has responsibility for the general oversight, direction and administration of the Church's worship, witness and service in the region allotted to it, with such powers and authorities as may from time to time be determined by the Assembly.

(e) The Assembly (the national council) consists of such ministers, elders/leaders and other Church members as are appointed thereto, the majority being appointed by the Presbyteries and Synods. It has determining responsibility for matters of doctrine, worship, government and discipline, including the promotion of the Church's mission, the establishment of standards of theological training and reception of ministers from other communions, and the taking of further measures towards the wider union of the Church. It makes the guiding decisions on the tasks and authority to be exercised by other councils. It is obligatory for it to seek the concurrence of other councils, and on occasion of the congregations of the Church, on matters of vital importance to the life of the Church.

The first Assembly, however, will consist of members of the uniting Churches, appointed in equal numbers by them in such manner as they may determine, and is vested with such powers as may be necessary to establish the Uniting Church according to the provisions of the Basis of Union.

Until such time as councils other than the Assembly can be established, the Uniting Church recognises and accepts the various agencies for the discharge of responsibility which are in existence in the uniting Churches. It invites any such continuing bodies immediately to enter a period of self-examination in which members are asked to consider afresh their common commitment to the Church's mission and their demonstration of its unity. The Uniting Church prays that God will enable them to order their lives for these purposes.

16. Particular functions

The Uniting Church recognises the responsibility and freedom which belong to councils to acknowledge gifts among members for the fulfilment of particular functions. The Uniting Church sees in pastoral care exercised personally on behalf of the Church an expression of the fact that God always deals personally with people, would have God's loving care known among people, and would have individual members take upon themselves the form of a servant.

17. Law in the church

The Uniting Church acknowledges that the demand of the Gospel, the response of the Church to the Gospel, and the discipline which it requires are partly expressed in the formulation by the Church of its law. The aim of such law is to confess God's will for the life of the Church; but since law is received by human beings and framed by them, it is always subject to revision in order that it may better serve the Gospel. The Uniting Church will keep its law under constant review so that its life may increasingly be directed to the service of God and humanity, and its worship to a true and faithful setting forth of, and response to, the Gospel of Christ. The law of the Church will speak of the free obedience of the children of God, and will look to the final reconciliation of humanity under God's sovereign grace.

18. The people of God on the way

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

We are a pilgrim people

We believe in one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 We proclaim Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen One,
 confessing him as Lord to the glory of God the Father.
 In the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, we acclaim Jesus as the Lord of the Church,
 the Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation.

We acknowledge that we live and work between the time of Christ's death and resurrection
 and the final consummation of all things which he will bring.
 We are a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal;
 on the way Christ feeds us with word and sacraments,
 and we have the gift of the Spirit in order that we may not lose the way.

We will live and work within the faith and unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church,
 bearing witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and his will.

We affirm that every member of the Church
 is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified.
 Together with all the people of God, we will serve the world for which Christ died.
 And we await with hope the day of the Lord Jesus.

Adapted from the [Basis of Union of the Uniting Church in Australia from Uniting in Worship](#)

A further statement drawn from the Basis of Union

We believe in God, sovereign in grace and love, maker of all things.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, the firstborn of a new creation.

We believe in God's eternal Spirit, pledge and foretaste of the future,
 given that we may not lose the way, who has endowed us with a diversity of gifts.

We are a pilgrim people on the way to the promised goal.

On this way, we are called to live and work within the faith and unity
 of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

In this unity, we offer our worship, witness and service
 and receive one another in love and joy.

We are being led to the free obedience of the children of God,
 and so we look with yearning and hope to the final reconciliation of humanity with God,
 and the renewal of all creation.

Alleluia. Amen. (Uniting in Worship II)

God is with us

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus,
the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

[The United Church of Canada, General Council 1968, alt. 1998](#)

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

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

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

'catholic' means
'universal'

Reading 10. The Nicene Creed

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

We believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made,
of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

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

'catholic' means
'universal'

Further reading:

A Guide for Elders

By Colin Ray, UCP, Melbourne 1994

The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul-Tending for Youth Ministry

By: [Kenda Dean](#) and Ron Foster *Upper Room / 1998 / Paperback*

How to Explain your Faith

By John Pritchard, SPCK, London 2006

A Primer for Christian Doctrine

By Jonathon Wilson, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2005