

# Lenten Study 2019

## Exploring Faith



## Workshop #1

### What is Faith?

## Soulful Small Group Practices

(Adapted from Parker Palmer)

***Presume welcome and extend welcome.*** We all lead busy lives, which is why our time together is precious. Know that you are welcome, that you belong, and extend this welcome by your words and actions toward others in the group.

***Assume good intention.*** Each of us has come to this place because we care about our community, its past, its present and its future. Let us join with one another in that common intention.

***Come to this work with 100% of yourself.*** This means three things: to attend as faithfully as possible, to be as present as possible to the other members of the group, and to bring all of who you are – your joys and successes, your fears and failings.

***Speak for Self.*** A helpful practice is to use “I” statements. Share from your own unique story. No individual speaks for an entire group, or a whole profession. This is a space to set aside competition and to celebrate the different ways God works in each of our lives.

***Share the air.*** Pay attention to how much of the group time you take. Every voice is important and no single voice ought to dominate. Make sure everyone has spoken once on a topic before you speak a second time.

***Listen to Silence.*** Silence is rare gift in our busy world. Allow silence to be another member of the group.

***If the going gets rough, turn to wonder.*** If you find yourself feeling uncomfortable with the perspective shared by another, try not to allow judgment to set in. Instead, become intrigued. Ask for more information, and be open to the experience of others. Differences offer us an opportunity to learn from one another.

***Observe confidentiality.*** This is especially important in creating safety and building trust. Faith is a deeply personal topic, and we hold one another’s stories as sacred.

***No fixing.*** Offer advice or reflection when invited to do so, but otherwise avoid the temptation to fix, set-straight, or counsel another group member.

***Pray for one another in meetings and between meetings.*** Lift each other’s lives and stories to God in prayer as you leave your time together and through the week until you meet again. This is one of the greatest gifts we can give to one another.

***Believe that it is possible to emerge from our time refreshed, surprised and less burdened than when you came.*** Expect that our time together can provide for renewal, refreshment and helpful perspectives as we explore our faith together.

## Workshop #1

### What is faith? How do we express it?

Why have you decided to be a part of this conversation?

What are your hopes about it? Your fears or inhibitions?

### **Review Small Group Practices** (5-10 Minutes)

*Each person can take turns reading them aloud. Does everyone agree to work with these practices? Any to add?*

What does the word “faith” mean to you?

### **Scripture references**

Hebrews 11:1-3, 7-8, 10-11, 13-16

1-3 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

This is what the ancients were commended for.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command,

so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

7-8 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.

By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went,

even though he did not know where he was going.

10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age,

was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised;

they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance,

admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.

14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.

15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.

16 Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

Matthew 21:21-22

And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

2 Corinthians 5:7 -- For we walk by faith, not by sight.

**Discussion Questions -- to do in pairs**

How does the working definition of faith in Hebrews 11 (confidence in hope and assurance of things unseen) land with you? What does it mean to have this kind of faith?

Have there been times in your life when you have had to keep confidence in your hopes and assurance in the things that were not yet visible?

In answering that last question, what do you notice about your core values and beliefs?

**Four aspects of faith** (from Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity*, 2004)

Belief (assensus)

What are some of your beliefs? (e.g., there is a God, Jesus was both human and divine, the world is round, people are essentially good)

Loyalty (fidelitas)

Where do you place your loyalty? (e.g., God, your family, the nation, Love)

Which of these things is most sustaining over time? Why?

Trust (fiducia)

In what do you place your ultimate trust? (e.g., medical science, human kindness, God)

Why?

Worldview (visio)

What are some things that shape your worldview? (e.g., your faith community, your class, race, education, understanding of how the universe is structured, your ideas about humanity)

## Sample Faith Statements -- historical and contemporary

### **The Magnificat** (Luke 1:46-55)

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.

### **Apostles Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth;  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He 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,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*The earliest known historical evidence of the creed's existence as it is currently titled (Symbolum Apostolicum) is a letter of the Council of Milan (390 A.D.) to Pope Siricius*

## **American Baptist Identity Statement**

American Baptists worship the triune God of the Bible, who is eternally one God in three persons.

This one, true God is most clearly revealed to us in the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

American Baptists proclaim the Good News of the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, knowing that salvation (forgiveness of sins, release from guilt and condemnation, reconciliation with God) and eternal life are granted in grace to all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

This Gospel is the central message of the Bible.

American Baptists believe that the Bible, composed of the Old and New Testaments, is the divinely inspired Word of God, the final written authority and trustworthy for faith and practice.

It is to be interpreted responsibly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit within the community of faith. The primary purpose of the Bible is to point to Jesus Christ, the living Lord of the Church.

Although Baptists have produced numerous confessions to express our common understandings of Christian faith, we hold the Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, as our final authority.

We accept no humanly devised confession or creed as binding.

American Baptists affirm that God is sovereign over all and that this sovereignty is expressed and realized through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we affirm the Lordship of Christ over the world and the church.

We joyously confess that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord.

We are called in loyalty to Jesus Christ to proclaim the power of the Holy Spirit, the Good News of God's reconciling grace, and to declare the saving power of the Gospel to every human being and to every human institution.

We celebrate Christ's charge to "make disciples of all nations" and to bear witness to God's redeeming reign in human affairs.

American Baptists are summoned to this mission in common with all Christians.

With the whole body of Christ, we also believe that God has been revealed in Jesus Christ as in no other,

and that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

We anticipate the day when every creature and all creation, on earth and beyond, will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11).

God has given this particular community of believers called Baptists a distinctive history and experience. As we share in common with Christians everywhere, so Baptists everywhere celebrate a common heritage.

An Expression of Christian Faith Representative of American Baptists  
adopted by the General Board, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., November 2005

## **United Church of Christ Statement of Faith**

We believe in God, the Eternal Spirit,

    who is made known to us in Jesus our brother, and to whose deeds we testify:

God calls the worlds into being, creates humankind in the divine image,  
    and sets before us the ways of life and death.

God seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

God judges all humanity and all nations by that will of righteousness  
    declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Lord,

    God has come to us and shared our common lot,  
    conquering sin and death and reconciling the whole creation to its Creator.

God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ,  
    binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,  
    to be servants in the service of the whole human family,  
    to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil,  
    to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,  
    to join him in his passion and victory.

God promises to all who trust in the gospel  
    forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace,  
    courage in the struggle for justice and peace,  
    the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing,  
    and eternal life in that kingdom which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto God. Amen.

*The original version of the UCC Statement of Faith was adopted in 1959 by General Synod.*

*This version was prepared in 1976 by Robert V. Moss, Jr., President of the UCC from 1969–1976.*



## **United Methodist Social Creed**

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts,

and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork

and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities;

to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves

and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing;

in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption;

and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations,

and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs

and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world.

**Amen.**

*From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2016. Copyright 2016 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.*

## **Aidan Molloy, Confirmation Statement of Faith, United Parish 2018**

I am Aidan Molloy, and I have been coming to the United Parish since I was born. It is here that I have grown up and learned countless things.

First off I believe that God loves us no matter what and he has, is and will always be there for all of us no matter how far we wander. And it is through Prayer that I believe we can personally talk with God, like a conversation about whatever is on our mind..

Second, I believe that God not only sent Jesus down to earth for the purpose of relieving our sin, and to teach us, but also to give us a more relatable form. As he walked on the same soil, breathed the same air, and felt the same rain as all of us, making him more relatable. In addition the knowledge he gave us gives us infinite more knowledge on what we are, what we are supposed to do, and our purpose, something that we continue to ponder today.

But for who exactly are sinners that Jesus gave his life for? I believe that that is ALL of us, no one is exempt, as we are Human and we are bound to fail and we will all make mistakes. So in other words I believe that sinner is another word for Human. But this is not bad as I believe anyone can be forgiven if they seek it.

AS for what we are all doing here. I believe that church serves to give us a shared community where we can learn from each other and gain a deeper understanding of our faith, and worship our creator as a whole. Continuing to that point though, I do not believe that there is a single correct way to worship God, assuming the ten commandments are followed and not at the expense of others. It all depends on what appeals to you whether that is catholicism, or another religion. In addition I also believe the church is the operational arm, so to speak, of God and the Bible, and it helps to spread God's love for the world, throughout the world through public service, and outreach.

Finally the church helps to guide you spiritually and give us a better sense of how we should live and how we can help and be a better person in this world.

Part of this faith journey inevitably involves not knowing what you think or are not sure about, and I have been no exception.

One of the questions that has been particularly prevalent, is how does the story of creation in the Bible relate to our supposed Evolution from ape and so on. Could it be the Bible was a little off or is the theory of evolution wrong? I don't know.

In addition I have also pondered the age old question of why is there disease and suffering in this world our home. Is it because we are for the most part left to our own decisions, whether we follow God's way or not, or is it a true battle between good and evil. I don't know but I will continue to look for these answers, but if I will ever find them to satisfy myself, I again don't know.

Finally In the end, through this amazing process I feel like I have learned a lot both about what I think and what it means to be who we all are and I know I will continue to ponder these thoughts, refine them, and come up with new throughout my life's journey.

## Nicholas Loden, Confirmation Statement of Faith, United Parish 2018

My name is Nicholas Loden and I am choosing not to be confirmed. Coming from a mother who was christian, and a father who was an avid atheist, my beliefs have always been in conflict. Evidently I was made to go to church every day. At first I didn't like it at all, I was always bored and I had nothing to do. But once I got older, I started to recognize the importance of the lessons that Christianity teaches.

My view of Religion as a whole is that of how no Religion is right or wrong, more of a way to live. At the root of all religions I see one goal that all of them have: be a good person. What differentiates one religion from another is how they go about being a good person. Too often people take the rules that their religion has put for them, and enforce those rules on other people. That is when religion is taken too far, yet it isn't the religion's fault, it's the people trying to use the religion's fault. Religion also has the potential to do immense good for anyone, from something as little as giving someone peace of mind, to saving someone's life.

One of the aspects of UP that I love the most is how accepting we are of atheists. They are welcome to our Sermon, and even if they don't believe the exact stories that Christians believe in, they can come together with everyone else there and look objectively at the lesson and agree on what it teaches.

I may not believe exactly in what Christianity is saying or what people do in the name of Christianity, but I do agree that that doesn't make Christianity any less important in our everyday lives.

What's going on in these statements?

What are the values?

What's their purpose?

How could you imagine they are helpful or useful?

What resonated with you? Why?

### **Concluding time**

Write a paragraph, doodle, sing or write a melody or draw an image based on your concluding thoughts from today's session.

### **Take-home Questions**

Why would you choose to make an expression of your faith at this moment in your life?

How could it be useful or helpful?

Would you want it to be in words, music, visual art or something else?

Are there any questions that you particularly want to dig into over the course of this study?

### **Closing Prayer**