

## UCW Study Guides

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### Introduction

This resource kit is primarily for United Church Women's groups, but could be used by other study groups wishing to pursue the themes of faith and service. It looks at the four parts of the **UCW Purpose** and the UCW's **Mission** and **Vision Statements**. Each session stands on its own, but it is hoped that all five parts will be studied as a series. There are companion worship pieces for each session.

The approximate time required for each session will be between 45 and 60 minutes. If the worship segment is included, you can plan for another 20 minutes.

All five units could be used as a full-day workshop, with the worship incorporated in part or in its complete form. Parts of each worship section could be used to frame an opening and a closing worship that touches all parts of the study.

At the end of each worship service are suggested hymns. You may prefer to choose other hymns depending on your group and context. The suggested hymns may not be copied without permission of the owner of the copyright.

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### Tips for Leaders

It is important that as the leader you are relaxed. You are not expected to be the expert; questions for starting the discussion are provided. It is your task to be familiar with the material and to guide the group through the process that has been suggested.

It is helpful to tell the group what the format for the time together will be, and also to tell them when half of the time for discussion has elapsed. Another reminder, just before the last two or three minutes, is also helpful. People relax and take part with more ease when they know the direction, content, and the timeframe.

Forming small groups of 4–6 people is ideal, and they will be self-directing. Remind participants that all in the group are responsible for the timing. Provide opportunities for all to have a chance to speak.

Make sure the discussion questions are available to each participant. If this is not possible, one person in each small group needs to have a copy.

If there is to be further discussion or sharing in the larger group, someone should be named to share the learning of the group.

The timing will depend on the length of the session. Fifteen to 20 minutes should be allowed for each small group discussion; more time might be useful if time permits.

If you choose to have a sharing time with the larger group, you must allow for additional time—at least as long as the small group time.

Using the private meditation time would be an effective way to close the time of sharing in the plenary.

### **A Process for the Meditation Time**

About five minutes should be ample time for this private time.

- remind the group to sit in a comfortable position
- put all items away; keep lap empty
- breathe slowly and deeply for three or four breaths
- close your eyes if you wish
- when called back, take a moment to gently come back to the whole group

### UCW Purpose

*To unite women of the congregation for the total mission of the church and to provide a means through which we may express our loyalty and devotion to Jesus Christ in Christian witness, study, fellowship, and service.*

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## Session One: Witness

You are my witnesses...whom I have chosen. (Isaiah 43:10)

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Witness has always been a word associated with the Christian message. We remember the words of John the Baptizer: that he came to bear witness to the one who was to follow after him. After the resurrection experiences, the disciples were witnesses to the events they had seen. Throughout history, witnesses have been an important part of the Christian story.

As people who call ourselves Christian, we need to spend some time thinking about the meaning of that word for our lives today. In particular, as members of the UCW, it is important for us to consider the implications of that word as it is the first of the four guideposts that are named in our Purpose.

### **In small groups discuss the following questions**

1. What is your immediate response to the word "witness"?
2. In what ways do you consider yourself to be a Christian witness?
3. It has been said that my life is my witness. Discuss this idea. Is the way we live enough to tell our faith story?
4. Do you consider that you have been chosen to be a witness, or do you choose that role for yourself?

### **The Samaritan Woman** (a retelling of the story from John 4:1–42)

She came to the well at noon to avoid the other women. She had never heard their gossip, but knew by the way they fell silent when she approached that they had been talking about her. It was easier to bear the scorching heat of the noon-day sun, than to hear the whispers and see the averted eyes.

One day, she was surprised to see a man sitting there and had an even greater surprise when he spoke to her and asked for a drink. He was obviously a Jew. He should never have spoken to her in public. She was a Samaritan and a woman.

The conversation that followed was lively; a good debate. Rarely had this woman had such a conversation with anyone and to be having it with someone she recognized as a rabbi, was a stimulating experience.

He accepted the challenges she offered and met them with challenges of his own. The conversation began with exchanges around the topic of water. The man spoke of "living water" and never thirsting again. The subject then became less comfortable for her. The stranger told her he knew all about her lifestyle and her husbands. Even though he knew all about her, she felt no judgment in his manner. Sensing that he was a prophet, she changed the subject, and they talked about the correct place to worship, this mountain or that mountain. They spoke of God and the nature of God. The stranger spoke of God as a spirit

and said that worship must be done in spirit and in truth. When she stated that she knew the Messiah was coming, it was a shock when he answered by declaring himself to be the promised one.

She realized the truth of the statement and left her water pot and ran to the village to tell the others what she had learned. It was not easy to speak to the village elders who judged her and the women who spurned her. Yet, she felt compelled to do just that. The message she had would not keep.

The telling was not the end of it either. Her life had surely been changed, and she was now a different woman. We don't know what she did, but she must have continued to grow and learn and to share her story.

### **Think about the following questions**

5. What does this story say about any reluctance that we may have to witness to our family, friends, and neighbours?
6. In what way is your UCW a witness in the church and in the community?

### **Meditation**

Invite the participants to sit quietly and think about the following question.

- How am I a witness to the faith I profess when I call myself a Christian?

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## **Session One: Witness**

## **WORSHIP**

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### **Call to Worship**

Jesus came as a witness to the loving presence of the Creator. We come together to witness as a community to the presence of God with us in the world. We gather in faith to worship.

### **Prayer**

In the stillness of this hour, be with us as we contemplate the meaning of your presence in our lives. We give thanks that we are a part of that great cloud of witnesses at work in the world and we ask for guidance in all that we do. In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen.

### **Hymn**

### **Scripture: John 4:1–42**

This long passage could be read as a dialogue. If read earlier, it need not be repeated.

### **Meditation**

In his book *Gospel Characters: The Personalities Around Jesus* (W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1976), Arthur Leonard Griffith speaks of the Samaritan woman as a window through which others may see Jesus. For us to be that window to the larger world and to the God who created it, we need to look at the metaphor more closely.

Windows can be deliberately frosted to prevent others from seeing through them. This works fine in bathrooms. But if we are to be a window for others to see Christ, we need to be clear about what we understand of faith, God, and Jesus. Blurred, uncertain understanding will not be attractive for others either to see God or to want to hear our stories of faith.

We also need to be an open window. Talking about our faith, our struggles to understand, our uncertainty, and our belief in the constancy of God is an invitation for others to find a glimpse of God in us.

A window that is dirty or clouded will not give a clear picture. The window of our lives must show God's presence in our lives and God's light must be able to shine through. Selfishness, bitterness, anger, envy, and many other kinds of negative thoughts cloud our vision and therefore the vision of others.

Windows can be broken or cracked. This, too, will distort the view. We need to seek healing and wholeness in our own lives and so help others to find the peace that only Christ can bring.

Many of our churches have stained-glass windows. They are beautiful from the inside, but unless they are back lit at night, they reveal little to the passing world. So it is with the windows of our lives. They must be filled with the light of love for others to see and then they can join us and follow the way Christ showed to the world.

Like the woman from Samaria, we need to strive to understand our calling and then run to others to share the Good News with them. If we are a like a window, clear, clean, and open, others will see the Christ in us, and we will see the Christ in them.

## **Hymn**

### **Closing Prayer**

Loving God, as we leave this time of contemplation and worship, we ask for your guidance. Open our hearts and minds to know the blessing of your presence. Be with us as we become windows for those we meet, to show by our lives the joy and hope that we know as followers of The Way. Amen.

### **Suggested Hymns**

"Here I Am Lord" (*Voices United* 509)

"Lord, Speak to Me" (*Voices United* 589)

"I Have Called You by Your Name" (*More Voices* 161)

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## Session Two: Study

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

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The Right Rev. Wilbur Howard once said that the Bible is the book we dust and we trust. Hopefully, it is more than that to the women of the UCW. This collection of books, which we call the Bible, is the core story of God's relationship with humanity.

As women, mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and teachers, we have a great responsibility to our children and youth. It is our task and privilege to teach the next generation our faith history and to encourage them to make the way of God's truth, their way of life.

But can we teach what we do not know? If we are to teach the great truths of the faith, we must know them ourselves. That means knowing the Bible, its great themes of love, forgiveness, compassion, and hope. It means knowing something of the history of our Christian faith and our own denomination. It also means sharing that story with others.

The women of the UCW have always been some of the best informed members of the church, and it is a tradition we honour and will continue. Study has been an important part of our Purpose. Bible study, mission study, and the task of being informed about society are important, because our prayers and actions issue from our concern and our understanding of the issues.

### **In small groups discuss the following experiences and questions**

Share in your group any experiences you have had of Bible study. It is as important to share negative experiences as it is to share positive ones.

Many adults take continuing education courses of various kinds. Why do you think most adult church attendees do not take part in Bible study? Has your group undertaken any study with an emphasis on women?

### **Huldah the Prophet** (a retelling of the story based on 2 Kings 22:12–20)

This story takes place after the return of the Jews from captivity in Babylon. They were rebuilding their community: houses, shops, the city walls, and most importantly, the temple. While clearing away some rubble, the workers found a scroll. The king believed it would help lead the people to a renewal of faith in God. The priests and the men accompanying them took the scroll to a woman to have it read and explained.

That woman was Huldah, and she and her husband were the keepers of the wardrobe. But she was much more than a seamstress or a laundry woman. The Bible also calls her a

prophet and when she speaks to the king, she uses the four words that are the sign of a prophet: "Thus says the Lord."

Who was this wise and God-fearing woman? She lived in the Second Quarter of Jerusalem, the section in front of the temple. Jewish tradition teaches that Huldah taught publicly in the temple school. She was known in all the kingdom, and there was no hesitation in turning to her when someone was needed to read the scroll. The king and his aides had faith in her spiritual and intellectual powers to determine that the scroll was genuine and to reveal its purpose and meaning.

Huldah prophesied that the Lord would bring evil upon the land because the people had forsaken God and were worshipping images and idols. The king respected her wisdom, and reforms were begun. The wisdom and faith of this woman were of benefit to all; her knowledge and faith touched everyone in the kingdom. She could respond when called upon to teach because she had studied the law and she relied upon God. Her example is a sign that God can use anyone to do the work of the community of the faithful.

### **Small group discussion time**

Does the story of Huldah provide an example for women today? In what ways? Why not? How can the UCW encourage the study of the Bible in our meetings, churches, and homes? Do you feel that the study of history and social issues can be separated from the study of the Bible and our faith history? Is one more important than the other?

### **Private Meditation**

In this quiet time, think about Huldah and what her life might have been like after this event. Think of times in your own life that have changed you or changed your thinking. What is calling you to change in your life at this time?

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## **Session Two: Study**

## **WORSHIP**

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### **Call to Worship**

We gather as a community of the Word. We come to glimpse God in our words, our songs, our being together. Let us worship God.

### **Prayer**

O God of ages, the Word is a lamp and a light to our lives. Open the Word to us, and let us hear the Spirit speaking, calling, and encouraging us in this time together.

### **Hymn**

### **Scripture: Psalm 119:1–8, 10–16**

### **Meditation**

Keith was a student working toward a degree in science. There were several required subjects in his field and four elective courses as well. For the required subjects, he worked hard and attained an honours grade. He treated the electives very differently. They were courses from the humanities designed to broaden his knowledge, widen his vision, and enlarge his world. He needed only 50 percent to pass in each exam. A pass was required—a

pass was what he aimed to get. If he got 52 percent he felt he had wasted time and energy. He had no vision of how these courses could enrich his life.

Many of us may be a little like Keith. We spend great effort on the things we designate as being important. We gain mastery of those areas that enhance our careers. We spend time and effort on our favourite sport, hobby, or pastime. We aim for straight As. And of itself this is not a bad thing.

But at times, do we rate our study of the Bible as an elective? Are one hour on Sunday and our UCW meetings the full extent of the time we spend developing and nourishing our knowledge of God? Do we seek a deeper spiritual journey? Is 50 percent enough?

In the Hebrew scriptures, Wisdom is referred to in the feminine form, and the Greek word for wisdom is Sophia. Wisdom literature describes Sophia as the breath of the power of God, the image of God's goodness, a reflection of the eternal light. In ancient cultures, Wisdom is practical. It is associated with moral values, with guidance, and with everyday knowledge of how to live.

Can we picture this kind of learning as a wise woman? A woman who has lived, loved, suffered, and struggled? A woman who has made God part of her life and her daily routines? Can you see this Wisdom as a woman walking the path of life beside you, to encourage and to lead and guide? Can you see yourself as a wise woman, as Wisdom?

The psalmist tells us that fear, or in modern language the love of God, is the beginning of Wisdom. We are on that path already. Study is part of our Purpose. Perhaps it is time to get to know our sister Sophia again and to make room for Wisdom in our lives. We should welcome the experience of opening the Word and finding our stories in the stories of those ancient followers of God and of the Way.

## **Hymn**

### **Closing Prayer**

Wise and wonderful God, we give thanks that you have given us hearts to love you and minds to know you. Help us to use our intellect and our creative minds to know you more intimately and to share that sense of your presence with those we meet.  
Amen.

### **Suggested Hymns**

"God, Who Has Caused to Be Written" (*Voices United* 498)

"Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom" (*More Voices* 10)



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## Session Three: Fellowship

We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)

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The Greek word used in the New Testament for fellowship may be translated as kindness. It is the word that can also mean communion. Communion, in a general non-liturgical sense, is the sharing of common life or interest. Is that not what we do as Christians when we gather? We share our common interest and understanding of our world and we share our faith with each other. The desire to be followers of Christ calls us into community, into fellowship with others.

### **In small groups discuss the following questions**

1. What is your happiest memory of a time of fellowship in your faith community?
2. Have you ever felt excluded from that community? If you are willing, share that experience and your feelings.
3. How can we be open to other people being part of our group? How can we be inclusive?
4. Can you name something that those who do not belong might see as a barrier to becoming part of the group?

### **The Home of Mary** (based on Acts 12:11–17)

Mary, the mother of John Mark, was a Christian who opened her home to the disciples. Some biblical scholars believe that it was in her home that the Last Supper took place. Her home may also have been the place where Jesus met with the disciples after the resurrection. The night that Peter was released from prison, he went straight to her home to share his story, knowing that he would find believers there.

No doubt John Mark grew up in a home where each day he saw Christian love and faith at work. Mary made her home a centre of the new faith in Jerusalem. John Mark would have learned about the faith, not only from his mother, but from the faithful people who came to her home, including Jesus and the disciples.

Mary must have been a great influence for good on her young son. She was a woman of faith and courage, able to let her son go with Barnabas on his missionary journeys. Even though they were cousins, it must have been hard for her to watch him go to face a life of danger and hardship.

The community, or fellowship, that she had nurtured by opening her home to the new faith gave her a group to support her and encourage her. The community that she supported would now be able to give her comfort and strength.

It is in fellowship that we find nurture, growth, and support. Community challenges us and calls us to be open to change and growth. Communion is the gathering of people who share a common interest, purpose, or goal. The UCW is a place of communion, community, and fellowship.

**In small groups discuss the following questions**

5. Imagine you are a part of the group that gathers in Mary's home. What draws you to come to this place? What do you find here that you don't find anywhere else?
6. Do any of these ideas have implication for your own home as a centre of Christian fellowship?
7. We don't gather in homes the way our foremothers did. Why do you think this has become the norm for our times? Have we lost anything? What have we gained?
8. What does the idea of welcoming others into the fellowship and being open mean for your UCW group?

**Private Meditation**

We have seen that "fellowship" and "community" are much the same in meaning. As these words apply to a personal relationship with God, reflect on ways that you might draw closer to God.

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**Session Three: Fellowship**

**WORSHIP**

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**Call to Worship**

In this circle of friends we gather to worship God. Gather us in, God, and may we each feel your presence in this community where love surrounds us.

**Prayer**

Warm and welcoming God, be with us as we gather to learn of your will for those who follow the Way of Jesus. He lived among friends, and we gather as friends to support and uphold each other. May this time strengthen our friendship and build a fellowship of faith in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

**Hymn**

**Scripture**

Acts 2:40-42

**Meditation**

In Acts 2:42, Luke tells us these early Christians devoted themselves to fellowship. It was a priority and one of the objectives for gathering together. But what is fellowship?

We often speak of fellowship as that which happens when we gather for coffee after the worship service on Sunday morning. And that is one understanding of the word. We talk and share with each other; we laugh and hug; and we make plans for getting together during the week. Those activities fulfill the dictionary definition of "fellowship," which is companionship, company, the sharing of interests, activities, feelings, or experiences. These are good, affirming, life-enriching experiences.

But the biblical understanding of fellowship is deeper. The Greek word is *Koinos* in the root form. It has connotations of sharing all things and holding things in common. As we are thinking about our spiritual lives, this can be taken to mean our ideals, goals, interests, and our beliefs. Fellowship is about people relating in very personal ways: listening with complete attention, hearing the undertones, and sharing the journey with the person in whatever way is suitable. Fellowship means we belong to each other in a relationship because we share together the enabling grace of Jesus Christ. Another word for this is communion—not just the bread and wine, but the communion of belonging in a wonderful and unique relationship

This is our fellowship with the body of Christ, with other believers. It includes gathering together as a whole body, in smaller groups, and one-on-one. As we do, we share our concerns, joys, and blessings for the purpose of encouragement and comfort. And we offer praise, prayer, and physical help according to the needs and the ability.

At an even deeper level, we share each other's faith journey, telling our stories of the times when we meet God in our daily lives and the deep sense of peace that comes from that presence. We might also share the times when God seems far away and we are lost and lonely.

The goal is to build up and enrich each other in the things of Christ, so that we may grow deeper in our faith and in our walk with the risen Christ. We need others for that to happen. As the early church was first devoted to the apostles' teaching, they were also devoted to caring for one another and to sharing with one another what they were learning and what Christ meant to them.

Fellowship can be pictured as having two directions. One is vertical—our fellowship and communion with God. The other is horizontal—reaching out to those around us.

There is a story about a radio show that came on early in the morning. It reported that an Idaho shepherd had written "Will you, on your broadcast, strike the note A? I'm a sheep herder way out here on a ranch, far away from a piano. The only comfort I have is my old violin. It's all out of tune. Would you strike A so that I might get in tune?" The announcer honoured the request. Later he received a "thank you" note from the distant shepherd saying, "Now I'm in tune."

One of the purposes and responsibilities of personal and public worship, our fellowship with God and each other, is to enable all of us to keep in tune with each other in fellowship and also with the Great Shepherd.

## **Hymn**

### **Closing Prayer**

Loving God, you call us into fellowship and communion. As we hear that call may we respond and stay in tune with you and with each other, growing ever deeper into the way of Jesus and the way of communities of love and compassion. Amen.

### **Suggested Hymns**

"Blest Be the Tie That Binds" (*Voices United* 602)

"Draw the Circle Wide" (*More Voices* 145)

"Deep in Our Hearts: (*More Voices* 154)

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## Session Four: Service

I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. (Revelation 2:19)

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Serving dinners, making coffee, decorating church parlours, visiting, listening... the list of ways in which the UCW members offer their service to others is almost endless. We have taken to heart the commandment "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12) that Jesus gave his followers. We follow the service part of our Purpose devotedly.

Examples of service are offered in many places in scripture. We think of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples and we know he fed the hungry and healed the sick. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus says that he is among us as one who serves.

### **In small groups discuss the following questions**

1. List some ways your UCW offers service to the church and the community. Can you come to a consensus and put these good works in order of importance?
2. Are there some service ideas that you have not tried? Talk about some new ways of being of service.

### **The Home of Mary** (based on Acts 12:11–17)

**Dorcas, a Woman who Sewed** (Acts 9:36–42) and  
**Martha, a Woman who Offered Hospitality** (Luke 10:38–41)

These passages present two quite different images of service to others.

In the first passage about Dorcas, we see the image of a woman who serves the needs of others in her community. She may not even have known some of the people she helped. Dorcas gave of her wealth and her talent. She could have just given money, but she chose to get involved with those in need in her community. She made clothing and distributed it among the poor. She was loved by the widows and orphans of Joppa. They came and wept at her home when they learned of her death. There was great rejoicing when she was restored to them. We can only speculate on her life after this event, but it seems safe to assume that she would continue to help others as she had always done.

The story of Martha is quite different. Martha is entertaining friends in her home. She is working very hard to present a dinner that will be remembered by them. We can all identify with the feeling of being overworked as we try to serve others. Jesus chastises Martha when she demands that Mary help her. Jesus tells Martha not to worry so much over the food, the dishes, the linen, and the way the meal is offered. Martha was only doing what she did as a loving welcome for her guests. Was Jesus saying that acting as a caregiver and hostess was not appropriate? At the time of this story, the choice Mary made, to listen to him teach, was

not a role for women. The proper role was the one Martha carried out. Perhaps Jesus was saying that a woman's right to choose was important. Martha had an option to choose a simpler meal and then she, too, could sit with Mary and learn from Jesus. Martha must have been taught by Jesus at other times, for she was the one who discussed resurrection theology with Jesus on another occasion. But in this story she might have made a different choice.

**In small groups discuss the following questions**

3. For some, the word "service" carries images of servitude. Discuss what you think is the difference between servitude and servanthood?
4. Are you aware of ways that women have been kept in a servant role and have not been able to act as equal partners in the community of God?
5. How has this been changing?
6. Are there still places where the role of women is not one of equal partnership?
7. How can we affirm and uplift the role and place of women while honouring and supporting the role that men play in the church?

**Private meditation**

Think of a situation where you have felt stressed because there was too much to do. Can this Martha story help you clarify what is important? How can you find ways to spend more time growing in your faith and growing closer to God in your daily life?

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**Session Four: Service**

**WORSHIP**

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**Call to Worship**

Let us worship God in love, offering our lives in service to God and to each other.

**Prayer**

Loving God, bless all who are present in this time of worship. Bless the hands that are used in the gentle care of others. Bless the hearts filled with love and compassion. Uphold, strengthen, and encourage us as we work together for the honouring of self, each other, and you.

**Hymn**

**Scripture**

Matthew 25:35–40

**Meditation**

It has been said that service is the rent we pay for our space on earth. The space we occupy in this land is one of rare privilege. In many places people are oppressed by evil governments, and families are torn apart by war. In many places, the land is ravaged by flood or thrown asunder by earthquakes or turned to dust by searing heat and howling wind.

By comparison we [in Canada] live in safety and security. We live in a comfort that many in the world can only dream or imagine. If service truly is the rent we pay, we have a great deal to give to balance the ledger.

For some people, the whole concept of service is not part of the way they live. The philosophy of me, me, me is prevalent in the world. The struggle for success in terms of the world's values leaves little room for caring about the needs of others.

Jesus showed us a very different model for living. He came to us as king of kings and lord of lords. But he was a lord in a stable and a king on a donkey. He was a lord without a home and a king who washed the feet of his friends.

He was a king and a servant who redefined each of those labels. As a king, he was humble and gentle in his dealings with those he met. His followers came willingly, not through any form of coercion. The power he held was an enabling power not a controlling power.

As a servant, he chose and defined his role and his actions. His disciples, the authorities, both religious and secular, tried to control him, but he steadfastly continued in the path he had chosen, even though it led to his death.

Jesus often drew apart from the crowds—for prayer, meditation, and communion with God. He needed and he took the time to gather his strength before he stepped back into the role of healer and teacher, king and servant. There were times when others attended to his needs, and they offered their loving service to him. The Bible notes that many women followed him and cared for him out of their own needs and abilities.

For each of us, there will be times of giving and sharing with others. For each of us as well, there will be times for drawing apart and replenishing our inner strengths. There will also be times when we need to receive the ministrations of others for our own well-being and nurture.

So it is with us. We need to give to others, but we also need to take care of our own spiritual life in order to follow our calling. We need to take time to evaluate our place and role, to redefine it as necessary, just as Jesus redefined the role of king and servant. The model is before us, and the gift of self is ours to share. We have heard the call to "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12) and we respond in loving compassion.

## **Hymn**

### **Closing Prayer**

God of all good gifts, we bring our talents, our time, and our treasure and we offer them in service to others. Be with us as we take up the challenge to be your servant people in new and affirming ways. Lead us into the future with hope and joy as we serve as your hands and feet in this world, for we go in the sure knowledge that we are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **Suggested Hymns**

"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (*Voices United* 593)

"We Are Pilgrims" (*Voices United* 595)

"Go, Make a Diff'ence" (*More Voices* 209)

## A Study for UCW Groups

on

### The Mission and Vision Statements of the UCW

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#### **Leader's Suggestions**

This study is based on the Mission and Vision Statements of the UCW. Each of the units looks at a section of the statements. The section you are studying should be available for all participants to read.

Explain the process that will be used and the timeframe for the session. Remind everyone that this is a time to explore, to question, and to discern. There are no right or wrong responses. Each participant should have an opportunity to speak, and all feelings and expressions are to be accepted and held in respect.

There are a variety of ways this study can be used.

- Each section could be used separately with time for discussion and feedback. This could be done in a meeting of about 30–45 minutes. This option would provide programme material for five meetings.
- All sections could be studied at one meeting with a subgroup of participants looking at each section, then reporting back to the whole group. This option would require at least one hour to allow for group work, reporting, and plenary discussion.
- For a one-meeting use with less time, the optional exercise and some of the questions could be omitted.
- Another model would be to use a workshop format that would require 2–3 hours. In a larger group, there could be smaller groups formed of 5–6 people. Each group would discuss the same section, report back to the whole group, and then move to the next section.

The use of the worship is optional. It can be adapted to suit the needs of the group. Remember to credit the author if material is reproduced:

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## **WORSHIP**

### **Call to Worship** (*read responsively*)

We hear your call to be loving partners with you in the world.

### **We answer in faith and we respond in hope.**

We hear your call to share our faith with others we meet.

### **We answer in faith and we respond in hope.**

We hear your call to live creatively with all of creation.

### **We answer in faith and we respond in hope.**

We gather in this time to listen as you continue to call us to be your hands and feet as we seek to fulfill our mission and our vision.

### **We turn to you, to learn your way and follow your path.**

### **Prayer**

Loving creator, you call us from the pages of long ago to follow you.

You call us from our busy lives to hear your voice in our noisy world.

And you call us to step into the future in partnership with you and with all creation.

Be with us as we gather in this time of worship. Amen.

### **Hymn**

"In Loving Partnership We Come" (*Voices United 603*)

### **The UCW**

*(Read in unison the Mission and/or Vision Statements, depending on what has been selected for the time of learning together.)*

As women of the UCW, this is our Mission and our Vision. These statements name who we are and what we try to do in God's name. We offer our best in our local churches, our communities, and in partnership with God's people around the world.

Our history is one of Witness, Study, Fellowship, and Service, done in God's name with love and joy. What we do varies from group to group. How we do our tasks varies with our abilities, our time, our energy, and our gifts. But we gather to share in the hope that comes from our faith in God, and in Jesus.

**UCW Prayer** (*selected by leader to fit local context/projects*)

### **Mission Statement** (*read aloud*)

Our Mission is to love God; to foster Christian faithfulness, spirituality, commitment, and devotion; and to promote love and respect by living generously and giving joyfully to all God's people; and to affirm and strengthen ourselves creatively.

This statement of the mission of the UCW is a call to be God's messengers in our world. It asks us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, reflecting the way he lived among the people of his time and place. Much has changed since then, but the call to follow him continues to echo in our lives today.

There are many ways for the UCW to live out its mission and still follow the call of the teacher, healer, and leader whom we read about in our scriptures.



Together, we will explore some scripture that calls and challenges us, think about women who can be models for our living, and look at ways we can and do live out our mission in our work as women of the UCW.

### **PART ONE**

Our mission is to love God, to foster Christian faithfulness, spirituality, commitment, and devotion.

1. What do the words "faithfulness," "spirituality," "commitment," and "devotion" mean to you?
2. Is there a difference in the meaning of these words if the word "Christian" is added? Talk about the difference and how it touches our lives.
3. Read the story of Mary and Martha from Luke 10:38–42.
4. Together, think about how this story illustrates the living out of the mission statement.
5. Are there also places in the story that might show a lack of these qualities?
6. How can the UCW foster these gifts of service, both as individuals and as a group?

### **Optional Activity**

Together, think of a practical way that your group can actively engage in following this part

### **PART TWO**

Our mission is to promote love and respect by living generously and giving joyfully to all God's people.

1. Can you suggest what is meant by the words "to promote love and respect"?
2. How does "living generously" and "giving joyfully" contribute to promoting love and respect? How are we to live? What are we to give?
3. How do we try to do that as individuals? As UCW members?
4. Read John 12:1–8.
5. Mary gave generously and with love. Do you think she was joyful in her giving? How would that emotion enrich the story?
6. How did Mary's act promote love and respect in your understanding?
7. How can we, as individuals and as UCW groups, live out this part of the mission statement?

### **Optional Activity**

Together, think of a practical way that your group can actively engage in following this part of the mission statement within your church, your community, and the wider world.

### **PART THREE**

Our mission is to affirm and strengthen ourselves creatively.

1. In what ways does your membership in the UCW help you to follow this way of living?
2. Do we affirm and strengthen each other in our work? What can we do in more loving, caring ways?
3. In John 10:10, Jesus says that we are to have life and to have it abundantly.
4. How does this image of life reflect the mission goal to affirm and strengthen ourselves creatively?
5. What activities that we do as UCW members enrich our lives in this way? What activities detract from this goal?
6. How do we find the balance in our lives between our busyness and our need to affirm and strengthen ourselves as Christ's followers? Try and answer this both as individuals and as UCW members.

### **Optional Activity**

Together, think of a practical way that your group can actively engage in following this part of the mission statement within your church, your community, and the wider world.

### **OUR VISION**

*As United Church Women we believe:*

- *that as Christian women of faith, we nurture spirituality by reaching out with commitment and devotion to all God's people;*
- *in promoting truth, justice, peace, caring, and sharing with respect for all in the community and wider world;*
- *in loving God and others by living generously and giving joyfully; and,*
- *in affirming and strengthening ourselves creatively in study and witness through music, laughter, and solitude.*

The Mission Statement and the Vision Statement reflect the same values, goals, and pattern of living in their words.

There are, however, words in the Vision Statement that do not appear in the Mission Statement.

Have these two statements of who we are and how we hope to live in front of you so that you can look at each of them together.

1. Name places where words or ideas appear in the one statement that are not directly included in the other statement.
2. How do these different words add to or change the calling to UCW to follow God's way?
3. Are there any ideas that you do not see as part of your vision for UCW? Consider local, presbyterial, or Conference and national as they apply to you.
4. How does you UCW work toward a common vision?
5. What concepts might you add if you were writing a vision statement for your local UCW?