

Annual Service of Celebration

The Centre for Christian Studies

April 18th, 2026

Welcome -- Karlene Kimber and Ian McLean

- Introduce selves,
- why we are gathered here today:
 - to recognize students who are graduating and to honour a person who has made a significant contribution to the Centre's ministry;
 - but also to acknowledge the contribution and commitment of all of us and all who have supported the students and staff in CCS' mission, vision, values
 - We gather to affirm our shared vision and our commitment to Spirit-led leadership, compassion, justice, and transformation as God's desire for our world.
 - In this we celebrate the life, learning and ministry of the Centre for Christian Studies
- acknowledge dignitaries, reps, ask if any reps not yet noted are present.
- we ask you to please silence your devices for the worship service, and refrain from taking photos until afterward.
- our celebration worship is influenced by United Church and Anglican traditions; participate as you are comfortable;
- restrooms are (through the door to speaker's right).
- As we seek right relationship together in all areas of our lives and ministries, we begin our worship with an land acknowledgement ...

Land Acknowledgment – Shaun Loney

We come together physically and virtually from many directions, from many places. Here in *this* physical, sacred space, we acknowledge this land is known as home, as ancestral territory of the Anishinaabeg, Ininew, Anishinninew, Dakota, and Dene Peoples, the Red River Métis Nation, and as Treaty One, the Peguis-Selkirk Treaty signed in 1871 with the British crown.

As Treaty people, we are all still learning how sharing of land needs to happen to be in right relationship with each other, with the land itself, with the creatures who also call it home, and even to be in right relationship with God, herself. We acknowledge the harms colonialism in general, and the church in particular, have brought to this land, its creatures, and relationships between all of us.

May we visit and live with respect and gratitude in these territories and homelands. May we learn and teach the ways of stewardship and sustainability. May we all work towards

right relations, peace, and friendship wherever we live, as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow.

Gathering of Diaconal Symbols and Lighting of Christ Candle and Rainbow Candle --

(Hymn: Where Two or Three Are Gathered in Your Name, More Voices 14)

- One at a time, Lauri, Jenni, Marlene, Andy, and Cassandra bring diaconal symbols (a basin, a towel, a candle, keys, a bible) to the front. The first person starts the singing, a capella, joined by the second, and then the third, etc. (Congregation can join in if and whenever they like.)

Opening Collect – Andy Pitter

Creator of the universe, the light of your glory shines in the darkness of our lives. Make us attentive to your presence, prompt to serve you, and ever eager to follow in the steps of the one who is our true light, Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving for Learning – Lauri Ladd and Jenni Krall

God of the circle and the spiral, God of insight and inspiration,

God of justice, compassion, and transformation,

God of learning in community,

You created us to love and serve.

Thanks be to you, God, for the gifts and talents you have blessed us with, including the ones that feel heavy.

Thank you for the support of family, friends, co-workers and neighbours who have encouraged our discernment and celebrate our growth.

Thank you for holistic and welcoming learning environments that embrace and celebrate our uniqueness

and work with us to create successful learning pathways.

God, we thank you for the creativity, wisdom, knowledge, and caring of co-learners: peers with honesty, insight, lived experience, and support;

teachers and mentors who encourage deep reflection and compassionate action.

Thanks be to you, God, for the opportunity to continue learning,

deepening our understanding of justice, listening to voices from the margins, putting faith into action,

that being blessed we might be a blessing.

Amen.

Join us in singing...

Hymn: I the Lord of Sea and Sky (Voices United 697)

Hebrew Scripture Reading: Isaiah 43:1-7 -- Janet Ross

But now thus says the Lord,

 who created you, O Jacob,

 who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

 I have called you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you,

 and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

 and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God,

 the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom,

 Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my sight

 and honored and I love you,

I give people in return for you,

 nations in exchange for your life.

Do not fear, for I am with you;

 I will bring your offspring from the east,

 and from the west I will gather you;

I will say to the north, "Give them up,"

 and to the south, "Do not withhold;

bring my sons from far away

 and my daughters from the end of the earth—

everyone who is called by my name,

 whom I created for my glory,

 whom I formed and made."

Poem: "Beginning with Beloved" by Jan Richardson – Angela Glasel

Begin here:

Beloved.

Is there any other word

needs saying,

any other blessing

could compare

with this name,
this knowing?

Beloved.

Comes like a mercy
to the ear that has never
heard it.

Comes like a river
to the body that has never
seen such grace.

Beloved.

Comes holy
to the heart
aching to be new.

Comes healing
to the soul
wanting to begin
again.

Beloved.

Keep saying it
and though it may
sound strange at first,
watch how it becomes
part of you,
how it becomes you,
as if you never
could have known yourself
anything else,
as if you could ever
have been other
than this:

Beloved.

Join us in singing More Voices 161. We will sing verses 1 and 2 now, and following the gospel we will sing verses 3 and 4.

Hymn: I Have Called You By Your Name (MV 161, vs 1 & 2)

Gospel Reading: Luke 10: 25-37 -- Cassandra Golondrina

An expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Hymn: I Have Called You By Your Name (MV 161, vs 3 & 4)

Companion Citation – Marlene Britton

Carol Stevenson Seller.

Carol is all about community, and meaningful community is usually formed wherever she lands. One of her acquired wisdoms is to "trust life". Her trust in individuals and in the group and in herself and in the Mystery beyond our full knowing, creates an atmosphere that invites others to deepen their spirituality and their connections with one another.

That's Carol the adult.

Young Carol grew up on a farm near the rural community of Gull Lake, Saskatchewan. Following high school, she obtained her Standard A Teaching Certificate became a teacher, and was very happy and committed in her teaching career.

She was always involved in the activities of the local United Church which included going to Camp Shagabec in Cypress Hills and offering leadership in CGIT and other teen groups.

During this time, Carol had been studying the New Curriculum resources, and she was keenly interested in what it offered. She wanted to be involved in training folks to use the resource. She chatted with her minister who suggested that she might contact

Covenant College, which she did. After considering this possibility for a year, and saving as much as she could, she went off on this new adventure in fulfillment of her call and it was a life-changing decision.

Carol attended Covenant College in Toronto graduating in 1965. She experienced a different type of community as this residential learning environment nourished and greatly influenced her faith development and enhanced her knowledge and skills as an educator.

She loved both the academic and applied content of learning and her field placements were at Fairlawn United and Humber Valley United, both in Toronto. She was the valedictorian at their graduation exercises that year.

Carol was commissioned in 1965 as a Deaconess/Diaconal Minister at the Annual Meeting of the Saskatchewan Conference held at Third Avenue United Church in Saskatoon.

Following graduation, she accepted a position in Christian Education and Development in a Larger Area Parish in Yorkton Presbytery, SK Conference, working with Christian Education leaders and Sunday School teachers, developing programs and drop-in centres for teens, church camping, as well as some worship leadership and pastoral care. Her gifts and skills working with young people were clear. Her way of working with them earned her the nickname, LSD: Little Swinging Deaconess.

During that time, she met Frederick Seller and they were married in June, 1968. She spent part of the next year taking a semester in Christian Mission at Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, UK. Living in a residence with people from 26 countries was an exciting opportunity to learn of other cultures, and to make life long friendships.

Upon returning to Canada, Carol and Frederick lived and served on the Gaspé Coast and at the Tatamagouche Centre (then known as ACTC) in Nova Scotia. During these years their two children, Stefan and Krista, were born. From there they moved to Carrot River, Saskatchewan, where they lived until they moved to Saskatoon to work together in team ministry at McClure United Church. Carol later worked in a different team ministry at Knox United Church, also in Saskatoon.

In Saskatchewan Carol was a vibrant part of the Diaconal community. She attended DUCC events, Women in Ministry gatherings, the Saskatchewan Christian Feminist Network, UCW events and other clusters to nurture the well-being of women of faith. In 1989 Carol founded People Focus with colleague and friend Catherine Barnsley. People Focus was a human resources/adult education company that offered consultancy services in organizational planning, team building, and group facilitation for various groups, businesses, and organizations, including the University of Saskatchewan and the United Church. Carol's emphasis was enabling groups and

individuals to explore vocational dilemmas and/or find new direction. Her facilitation skills created a place of safety and trust, encouraging participants to discover and name their own wisdom and heart.

At mid-life, Carol decided to engage in further training in Adult Education, and in Career and Life Transition Facilitation. In the early 1990's she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree through Athabasca University and a Diploma in Adult Education through St Francis Xavier University. She also studied with Richard Bolles, the well-known mentor of navigating career and work transitions who is best known for his bestseller — What Color is Your Parachute?

Carol's diaconal studies and experience as well as her continuing formal education have always informed both her paid and volunteer work. She draws on her adult education skills constantly.

For many years, Carol was involved in the Saskatchewan Christian Feminist Network, a group of women who gathered regularly to explore new thinking in theology. This included reading and discussing the writings of many feminist theologians, some of whom attended events planned by the network as resource people. It has been said of Carol, "Her feminism is strong and lived out in systemic analysis, work for justice for those who have little power, and in actions of outrageousness.

Her humour livens any party. She also instigated lots of uproarious laughter with her creative ideas for dramatizing learnings and insights.

Carol sings ... Often when cooking, gardening or driving Carol will break into song ... It's who she is.

She revealed to us that when she was at Covenant College she took the words of a song from the musical, My Fair Lady, and added words which asked the question, What is the place of music in CE? And went on to answer it as well!

Carol was involved in choirs and musical theatre in Saskatoon. She also became involved with a network of women who have accompanied Carolyn McDade and her music . Through community and music, they shared a passionate commitment to Earth as common ground which must be regarded as sacred and held in safekeeping for the generations to come.


Carol has participated in the Prairie group who named themselves Sacred Web Singers and in the Prince Edward Island group who named themselves the Gaia Singers. Several music albums have been created and Carol participated in the recordings of three of them - "We are the Land We Sing", "My Heart is Moved" and "Widening Embrace".



C is for Carol, that's good enough for me

C is for Carol she is the best you see.

C is for Carol she builds community.....

Oh, Carol, Carol, Carol starts with C 

Upon retirement Carol and Frederick decided to make Prince Edward Island (where Frederick grew up) their home. Carol soon became involved with church and other activities, offering leadership and inspiration in many ways, facilitating retreats and small group gatherings, often teaming with someone from the congregation.

Carol is fit: she is diligent about maintaining her physical, emotional and spiritual health, doing so through walking, dancing, singing, yoga, reading, gardening, cooking and baking and being intentional about spending time with family and friends.

Carol lovingly accompanied Frederick through his journey with dementia and his death in 2019, and she remains involved in an Alzheimer's Support Group where she offers leadership. Her willingness to share her own experience gives others permission to do the same, and that too builds community.

In 2025 Carol celebrated 60 years of Diaconal Ministry and upon being recognized by the Regional Council for her 60 years she wrote these words:

“In these challenging times, I believe we are called to be light, to receive this drama of life in all its twists and turns, knowing we are not alone, opening to new possibilities, always with a grateful heart for community, always caring for this beloved Earth to which we belong.”

Carol's life and work, her commitment to community, and to life-long learning have certainly honoured the values and teachings of the Centre for Christian Studies and the core principles and ideals of Diaconal Ministry. She is still learning and growing and deepening, while offering her wisdom and experience to others in generous, creative and loving ways.

Friends all. This is the Companion of the Centre 2026 – Carol Stevenson Seller.

Companion Response – Carol Stevenson-Seller

- Marlene, or whoever's close by, invites the congregation to join in singing “Song of Community”. The lyrics are on your insert.

Hymn: Song of Community (Carolyn McDade)

Presentation of Diaconal Diplomas and Certificates

- Marcie reads names (Jennifer Krall, Lauri Greenwood, Cassandra Golondrina, Andriel Pitter), Janet and Alcris present diploma or certificate, Marlene shakes hand, grads sit down at the front.

Graduates Citation – Marcie Gibson

Today, it is my great honour to share a short reflection on the graduates of CCS for 2026. We are One Centre, with many relationships and many opportunities. Today we have Four students, on four paths, with four stories, from four provinces, and yet sharing much in common.

Furthest east, we have Andy Pitter from Wolfville Nova Scotia, who is receiving a certificate in Social Justice.

From right here in Winnipeg, we have Cassandra Golondrina, who is graduating with a CCS Anglican Certificate in Diaconal Ministry.

From St Thomas in southwestern Ontario, we have Lauri Greenwood who is graduating with the CCS Diploma in Diaconal Ministries: Transformation and Action.

And from furthest west, we have Jenni Krall from Regina Saskatchewan, who is also graduating with the CCS Diploma in Diaconal Ministries: Transformation and Action.

Those of you joining for the banquet will hear more fulsome introductions of them individually, but here I want to speak of them as a graduating cohort. Doing so is both an honour and tricky. Their journeys with CCS have both woven together and been quite unique.

For each of them, this moment marks a particular accomplishment and completion with CCS, though they may decide to engage in Continuing Education. They stand alongside others in the past 140 years (give or take) who have pursued certificates and various iterations of Anglican and United Church diaconal formation with CCS. They will forever be part of the wider CCS diaspora community, and we welcome their continued engagement, support, championing, critical reflection, and friendship.

As an Integration Year Student Cohort of two, Jenni and Lauri actually didn't meet each other in person until a week ago! But where two or three are gathered, Christ is there. Lauri began her studies with CCS in 2021 during the height of the COVID pandemic, when all of her circles were online. She began her Integration Year in September 2024 in Drumheller, in connection with the 40th Anniversary DUCC Conference, and stretched her Integration Year over two years, while she accompanied her mom's palliative journey. Jenni entered CCS through the extensive Prior Learning Assessment Review process in 2024, and as it was just her and I for her September Integration I circle last fall, we did so at her church in Regina. Where two or three are gathered, Christ is there. Jenni and Lauri and I met throughout this past year online, in book studies, sharing learning goal updates, worship, and deepening understandings of United Church polity. Again, where two or three are gathered, Christ is there. Jenni and Lauri intentionally

built community – with each other, with other CCS students, with their local ministries, with diaconal networks, the wider church, and certainly over this past week at Woodsworth House.

Today, we present Jenni and Lauri with their CCS diaconal pins and towels. The tradition of diaconal pins – at CCS', its predecessor schools, and in other ecumenical expressions of diakonia is wide and deep. We give thanks to alumni Sharilynn Upsell for her research in lifting up this tradition. Jenni and Lauri, may you wear these as a reminder of those who have walked before you, Jesus who walks alongside you, and your call to invite others into the expansive diaconal journey.

The tradition of the towel as a symbol of diakonia stretches back centuries, alongside the basin and the pitcher of water. The towels that we present to you today are not only sign and symbol of Jesus' service of washing feet, but of the responsive and adaptable nature of diaconal ministry and the diakonia of all. Whether it is used to wipe the brow of someone in labour, or one lying on the side of the road, to wash and dry dishes so they are ready again for offering food to all who are hungry, used as a white flag of peace, an unwieldy bookmark, a covering to keep the flies from the Communion bread, or turned into a rabbit for joy with young children, we trust that you will carry these towels as sign, as symbol, as tool, as treasure in whatever ministry you are called to do, in whatever context you might find where God has called you. There, in all those places, you will bring your whole selves; your diakonia, your radiance, your knowledge, your wisdom, and your curiosity.

To all of you graduating, thank you for entrusting CCS with part of your learning journey. To all of those gathered, thank you for supporting these graduates to come to this moment.

May we continue to surround them with love and support as they mark this moment of accomplishment and change.

Amen.

Presentation of Diaconal Pin and Towel

– Alcris, Janet, and Marlene present towels and pins to Lauri and Jenni

Invitation to Offering – Marlene Britton

Offertory Hymn: What Can I Do? (MV 191)

- Vanessa improvises while offering is being collected and then shifts into the singing.

Blessing of Offering and of Graduates – Alcris Limongi

Holy One, pour out your Spirit on these gifts,
that they may help to educate and empower leaders.

- Invite the diaconal graduates and certificate recipients to gather in the aisle, and invite the gathered community to reach out a hand in blessing...

Holy One, pour out your Spirit on these learners and leaders,
that they may take what they have learned
into their varied ministries,
to be agents of change
and a blessing in your world.
In Christ's name, may it be so. **Amen.**

- Grads can return to their seats.

Prayers of the People – Carling Barry and Megumi Saunders

Let us pray...

Creator, we bring ourselves as offerings to you,
that we may hear and be guided by your word and direction.
Empower each of us through the bringer of Peace, your Son Jesus,
to see and change for better the common life of all people and creation.
Hear our prayers this day and everyday.

Accept our thanks for all the blessings you have given us,
and for the opportunities to use these blessings in service to others, in your love.

*As we pray together, you are invited to respond to "Hear our Prayer, O God" with "**and in your love, answer.**"*

Hear our Prayer, O God, **and in your love, answer.**

Creator, we long for connection in this broad and expansive community of learners. To be part of a web of relationships. To pass on values, love and a sense of closeness. To be part of an inner circle of safety. To spiral out to an open circle that welcomes others in.

Hear our Prayer, O God, **and in your love, answer.**

Creator, we seek wholeness in our communities. For honest, open communications that we may say what we need to say. To live and act in safety and without fear.

Hear our Prayer, O God, **and in your love, answer.**

Creator, defender of the helpless, you grieve with all who weep. May we also refuse to be comforted until the violence of the strong has been confounded, and the broken victims have been set free.

Hear our Prayer, O God, **and in your love, answer.**

Creator, we long for a gentle time of warmth and wholeness. For time and energy to nourish relationships. For honest sharing out of genuine love for all members of the church community.

Hear our Prayer, O God, **and in your love, answer.**

Creator, help us to stay close, to never let go of one another, in joy as well as in pain. To embrace, to feel the physical presence of one another, and to be truly present, one to another.

Hear our Prayer, O God, **and in your love, answer.**

Creator, we long to dance. To move into the centre of the circle. To touch and grow together in community into completeness.

Hear our Prayer, O God, **and in your love, answer.**

You have rooted and grounded us in your covenant love, and empowered us by your Spirit to speak the truth in love, and to walk in your way towards justice and wholeness. Strengthen your people, journeying together in partnership, to help one another to grow into the full stature of Christ, who is our light and our life. Amen.

- Lauri leads the singing of...

Song: One Foot in Front of the Other and Lead With Love (Melanie DeMore)

Benediction and Blessing – Ian McLean and Karlene Kimber

Christ has no body now but yours,

No hands, no feet on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with which Christ looks
compassion on this world.

Go into the world and make a difference.

And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and the love of God in Christ.

And the blessing of the Living God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit
be with us and among us this day and evermore.

Hymn: Go Make a Difference (MV 209)