

Carol's Response to Receiving the Companion of the Centre for Christian Studies Award, Winnipeg MB APRIL 18, 2026

Thank you Marlene, for your fine words. I appreciated sitting with you yesterday to chat and connect. CCS is blessed to have you as principal.

And what a joy to be with you, the staff and students of CCS these days...so encouraging, hope-filled and fun. The moment I stepped into the room circled with chairs it felt like home. It makes me want to take the program all over again!

Companion is from the Latin 'com' meaning with, and 'panis' bread, literally meaning "*one who eats bread with another*". Such a nourishing image.

Astonishing as it is to be given this award, it is a great honour to me. To be included in the circle of companions through the years, most recently Ann Naylor and you, Marlene the year before, each recipient with their gifts and contributions to the well being of this world, is truly amazing. It reminds me of the story of Anne of Green Gables, the feisty girl from PEI, when she wins the Avery scholarship she says, "It proves to the world that you have some sense!"

For me, the award drives home the reality of community, the company of people who have mentored, taught, inspired, challenged, listened and loved me into being, including many of you in this space. I believe the same is true for all of us here...we can name a host of people and communities who have influenced and supported our life journeys. Just imagine them all gathered in this place today!

CCS you are a faith-filled, inclusive, boundary pushing Centre for academic excellence, and hands on applied learning, rooted in the essence of the Christian message - to facilitate learning and leadership development, to work for justice in community and world, to serve and nourish life with care and compassion. I brought a wee duck with me to represent Diakonia of the United Church of Canada. It can sit here with the towel and basin - symbols of diaconal ministry, and of Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples. How fine it is that Marlene is also the president of the World Federation of Diakonia! We truly belong to a world community.

Thank you Jan Van Aertselaer, for having the idea and gathering a team to support this nomination: Heather MacDougall, Susan Sorensen, and letter writers Charlotte

Caron, Catherine Barnsley, Ruth Blaser, Brenda MacLaughlan...long time colleagues, friends and mentors. And a particular thank you for letters of support from two members of my home congregation of West River United Church in Cornwall, PEI...Kevin Sanderson and Verna Lynne Weekes who are both tireless givers of their leadership and love for our community. Honestly, reading all your letters filled my heart to overflowing.

Thank you to all of you gathered here from near and far...friends, family...my son Stefan, and companion Roddie. Thank you CCS and Winnipeg. Your hospitality abounds.

Thank you Scott for being the bearer of good news on January 2...and for the invitation to speak about "What I've learned from ministry and want to pass on to current CCS graduates and students". I need to reframe this slightly because I believe we're all in the practice of ministry and life...learning as we go along. We are in an apprenticeship to life, however that expresses itself in our lives and work.

So in that context I have 5 items to share... 'What I know so far in this apprenticeship to life'. Not in any particular order, but a circle of items. I'd love to be offering these in a diaconal way - in a small group setting to ponder and respond and share your wisdom, but alas, this is the way it is today!!

1. The first is **Cultivate/practise a sense of wonder, awe, amazement** - that involves pushing your edges: being curious about life and all species: whether that's the ecosystems of tree roots, or ant colonies, birds, Quantum healing, pausing to think about where you feel most connected to and nourished by earth, and to receive the gifts of earth. For we are the earth...we breathe, we hear, we see, we feel the earth every moment of our lives. The long wide view of life I believe, gives perspective to navigate the present. Trust the Spirit of life at work in you, in the community of Earth. I believe we especially need to be grounded in these times of upheaval, destruction and uncertainty.

2. **Companioning** - I believe we and the church community alike "are here (as the song says), to help each other walk the mile and bear the load". The church is a network of relationships - people praying for one another, serving together,

learning together, grieving, celebrating, in circles of trust and sharing - because embracing the realities of life brings us to the core of life where love and compassion, healing, joy and wisdom reside.

Words of Carolyn McDade come to mind..

*Come drink deep of living waters, without cup bend close to the ground.
Wade with bare feet into troubled waters where love of life abounds,
Come drink deep.*

3. Be curious and interested - Ask open-ended questions - as you mingle with people in a congregation or other places of ministry or wherever the community gathers - grocery store, garage - we can ask What's going on in your world? What's on your mind and heart today? What brought you here today? Let people know, even in small ways, that they matter. And the corollary to asking questions is to **practice deep listening**...and respond from that place of caring...for this is what truly sustains us, to truly be heard and accepted as we are.

4. I can't leave this next one out because several people mentioned it..**Use the Action/Reflection model of learning** to navigate life: It's applicable to every experience known to humanity - to process life experiences and draw out the learnings: it's great for working with groups and individuals. You students know that in spades! I use it often...for decision making; to process my dreams; problem solving, relationship challenges, things I'm puzzling over. It holds a mirror up to oneself, clarifies the experience and provides guidance for next steps to take.

5. And lastly....**Take care of yourself and those you love.** Body, mind and spirit need attention and, as part of that, learn to embrace what scares you, troubles you...get to the nub of it, find out what's at the root of your fear or worry...and approach that with tenderness and honesty and without judgement.

Practice encouraging self talk, as Rilke the poet said, "be patient, towards all that is unsolved within you". Stay with yourself, practice being an observer of yourself...notice what's going on inside,and embrace whatever comes with tenderness and kindness.

These are 5 things I know so far...

And through it all, my companion is singing...in every situation, in every day no matter what I'm doing or feeling...it's how I accompany myself in life. And on that note, I want to close with a song that I'll teach you now. Carolyn McDade wrote it decades ago and it has travelled with her and with groups of women across this continent who sing her music. We'll learn one verse and the chorus.

Come sing a song with me, Come sing a song with me, Come sing a song with me
That I might know your mind.

And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find.

And I'll bring a song of love, And a rose in the wintertime..

THANK YOU BELOVED PEOPLE

END NOTES:

1. I would encourage you to look up the podcast *The Wonder Cabinet*. There you will find lots of inspiring conversations to support your thriving.
2. I want to name a couple of books I've been reading this winter, both by the author, Francis Weller, entitled *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, an eloquent and approachable writing of the dimensions of grief. And *In the Absence of the Ordinary..Soul Work For Times of Uncertainty*. The latter book is a companion in these dark and challenging times.