



CENTRE FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Tapestry

 Summer 2026

EDUCATING LEADERS FOR JUSTICE, COMPASSION AND TRANSFORMATION

Lessons from the Journey: Reflections from a CCS Graduate

Graduate of CCS, Mark Laird wrote a letter to his past self (circa 2011)... someone who never would have imagined themselves in their current role.

Dear Mark,

Congratulations on your first appointment as a student minister. I know you are nervous, but don't worry, they are a wonderful group of people, and they and CCS are both going to have your back over the next 4 years. Your life in ministry is just starting my friend...and let me tell you it is going to be interesting.

Remember that review of learnings that you just completed where you said that you wanted to work on your skills in leading meetings, and work on your administrative skills in ministry...be careful what you wish for my friend. CCS is going to give you the skills you need...not just in any one area, but CCS will give you the skills that are needed to reflect, and act upon gaps in your ministry wherever they are. I can tell you that the review of learnings process works! Intentionally reflecting on your affirmations and encouragements from yourself and your peers will not just build you up as an individual allowing you to notice gaps in your learning and actively pursue them to add more affirmations, but it will also teach you how to give and receive feedback something that when supervising a staff of 11 becomes of vital importance.

Another thing that you are going to learn that will be imperative in your ministry is that not all the assignments at CCS are just about what the assignments are about (if you know what I mean). Yes for your student led session on bible study you need to learn about bible study and be able to demonstrate an understanding of different methods and models of leading a bible study...but the assignment is also about learning about group dynamics in preparing and leading a workshop, how to plan something, how to work to a deadline, and prepare for a time limited event...trust me if you are given 10 minutes at a congregational or regional meeting to make a presentation it is really, really helpful if you stick to that 10 minutes.

Remember that one of the most important lessons at CCS: is that service happens everywhere, and ministry often appears in forms we never expected. Service itself is ministry.

There are going to be opportunities that come along in your ministry that are going to feel overwhelming. You are going to learn to say yes when there is a need, to say no when you have need to, and to be open to the spirit to explore new and exciting roles in the church.



CCS Grad Mark Laird

Sitting where you are right now Mark...you aren't going to be able to see where you can go, or what forms your ministry can become. You are a very trusting person, so trust me when I tell you that CCS will give you the tools you need for adaptive leadership in a changing church and world, and CCS will teach you that ministry can come in many forms... including the admin work of filling in forms and the creation of policy.

Trust yourself, because CCS has equipped you to be who you need to be for this great United Church of ours,

Blessings,

Rev. Mark Laird
Executive Minister DM
Antler River Watershed/Horseshoe Falls/Western Ontario
Waterways Regional Councils

Do you know where you are going?

- **Rev. Marlene Britton, Principal for Leadership and Development**



**From left: Marlene Britton, Debra Lennox, Janet Ross
Bottom left: Marcie Gibson and Linda Ervin at the Ministry as
Storytelling learning circle from April 2026.**

The title song from Mahogany, made popular by Diana Ross, comes to mind as CCS continues the work of helping people discover what their vocational paths might be. The journeys of Mark and Cassandra are very different. There is a decade and a half between the time the two were students at CCS. They are from different denominations and are serving in different areas of ministry. Yet what they learned at CCS proved invaluable as their vocations unfolded.

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tools you need for
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The journey continues at CCS as new students join the family, and the whole process helps people learn new things about themselves and how they can “be” in this world. This is where your help continues to be critical. Delivering the quality of education that we provide is an expensive undertaking. Students often need financial support, and this is provided through bursaries. I encourage you to make a donation to our bursary funds, which will ensure that students are able to continue their journeys of becoming and knowing.

As you consider what your donation might be, I leave you with these final words. During the Spring 2026 Right Relations Learning Circle, students were asked to reflect on their readings and the learnings that emerged from their discussions, and to write prayers in response. Here is one of the prayers formulated by a group, an example of the continuing work:

***Mothering Love,
We are aching,
Empty hands,
Frozen hearts
Cast aside,
Gnashing our teeth.***

***Make known the injustices
of your oppressed
Set our hearts aflame
With your World-changing-Love
Renew the soft singing sound of memory
Set in us a tenderness to community***

***For you are the healer of nations,
You carry us against the rib, the breath, the hurt as
ceremony.***

***The Source of all life-giving waters
Your Spirit is with us through broken dreams,
broken relationship and broken trust.***

May your Presence bring peace. May it be so.



**CCS Students and staff from the Right Relations learning circle in
April 2026**

From Learning to Living: Cassandra's Journey in Diaconal Ministry



CCS Grad Cassandra Golondrina at St. Thomas Anglican Church

As Disciples, We are Called to love and serve all of creation, inside and outside buildings, within parish boundaries and beyond.

These are the words of Cassandra Golondrina, an ordained deacon in the Anglican Church, who is serving as an honorary deacon's assistant at the St. Thomas Anglican Church, in the area of Winnipeg known as Weston.

They call this work, "Christiaction", a commitment to live a Christlike life as actively, consciously, and thoughtfully as they can, guided by five Pillars of Ministry; Welcome, Dynamic Worship, Good Works, Table Fellowship, and Servant Based Leadership.

The work seeks to create a platform for living like Christ, sharing in spirit, and communicating his message of inclusive love. This is done by connecting with neighbours in various ways, actively working to be relevant in the community. Says Cassandra, "We have moved from almost closing in 2019, being 100% volunteer run, to doubling in size and we've multiplied our impact exponentially."

Loaves and fishes. An Impact Study revealed that St. Thomas is an integral part of Winnipeg's social economy, contributing almost \$2.1 million worth of social impact annually, generating \$43.92 worth of social impact for every dollar spent – more than 10 times the national average observed in more than 100 congregations.

This is done with more than 10,000 volunteer hours, worth more than a quarter of a million dollars in direct community impact.

The Kreative Take-out Meal program has approximately 130 families registered for an average of 300-350 meals, 95 grocery boxes, and 40+ take-home art/activity bags weekly. Emergency hampers, a clothing/intimates closet, and a children/youth bi-weekly art drop-in program are also available.

Cassandra goes on to say, "My ministry, like many here, was fostered and is rooted at St. Thomas. It's evolved from 'Come and Follow Me, you'll be Okay' to a 'show others the way - shine your Christ-Light - out loud, brightly.' I felt called to: Lead by example and word, to walk humbly with our neighbours, provide love and care, and connect them to resources. To invite people into a relationship with Jesus, encourage them to identify and share their God-given gifts and talents and help tie this to their ministry.

"The way the lessons are lived out, diversity and uniqueness are honoured and celebrated, so welcoming. Providing practical tools, experience and examples in my toolbox for my life and ministry."

Cassandra values her time at the Centre for Christian Studies where she completed the Anglican Certificate in Diaconal Ministry. While the courses were very valuable, it was the community and program staff that really left an impact.

CCS is honoured to have played a role in Cassandra's journey and pray continued blessings on her path.

Discovering Purpose Together

Did you know? A group of 15 people gathered at Five Oaks in Southern Ontario to participate in the Learning on Purpose Circle. The circle was facilitated by 2 program staff and one volunteer, and provided an opportunity for participants to learn about diaconal ministry, leadership styles, introduction to the Bible, introduction to liberation theology, and to explore their own learning styles.

This endeavour is another one that needs your financial support – Here are the options through which you can donate.



*Your support makes it possible
for people to learn, grow, and
answer their call to diaconal
leadership in communities
throughout Canada.*



Donate today

Yes, I want to support hope-filled learning, leadership, and diaconal education.

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