

## **SANDY-SAULTEAUX SPIRITUAL CENTRE THEOLOGICAL TRAINING ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025**

Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (SSSC) is a place where we honor the Creator's good Earth being our greatest Teacher and Provider. Within that vision, the SSSC holds space for multiple groups of people to experience and learn more of the ways of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being through the strength of Elders' wisdom that guides us to foster teachings of respect, healing, and connectedness to be shared for the benefit of all individuals and for restoring balance and wholeness among all peoples and all creation.

Many types of people from all across the Country connect with SSSC to participate and support its programming, which includes, but is not limited to family wellness, such as Return of the Buffalo; reconciliation through intercultural and land-based teachings and ceremonies; and spiritual leadership training through the Indigenous Ministry Program through the United Church of Canada (UCC). This program provides an educational pathway to ordained and diaconal minister with the UCC as well as presbytery-certified Indigenous ministry candidates in The Presbyterian Church of Canada (PCC). Due to the nature of this report, the focus will primarily on the Indigenous Ministry Training.

### **Elders' Vision**

Francis Sandy and Dr. Jessie Saulteaux were two elders from different parts of the Country who shared a dream to have Indigenous spiritual leaders serving in their communities as ministers and leaders that would understand and respect the spiritual, social, cultural, political and historic values that are important to each of them, respectively.

*Dr. Jessie Saulteaux* had a vision of a sky full of many stars, each representing an Indigenous Christian Leader trained to serve the Indigenous churches of the UCC.

*Francis Sandy* had a dream that all 22 United Churches in Ontario and Quebec would be served by Indigenous Ministers.

The both Theological schools, the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre in Manitoba and the Francis Sandy Theological School in Ontario operated from the 1980's until both schools amalgamated as one in 2011 and became the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre. To date and including our founding schools, there have been 2356 spiritual leaders that graduated from the course.

### **Indigenous Ministry Training Highlights for 2024-2025**

- The Keeper of the Circle (Principal/Director) Aliesha Desjarlais assisted in the role as Keeper of the Learning Circle from June 2024 to December 2024, when Rev. Maggie Dieter joined SSSC as KOLC in January 2025 and who works 0.6 FTE.
- Leadership Mondays were implemented in April 2025. Its purpose is to hold space for students to bring ministerial issues, concerns, and questions for peer support and to deliver learning opportunities in response to needs that arise i.e., Theological Reflection, ministry identity, conflict, and communication styles, etc.

### Active and Non-Active

- Active = 10
- Including: 1 = Ordination suitability; 2 = Ordination Affirmation; 3 = Ordination Promise; 3 = Exploring; and 1 PLAR student
- Inactive = 4

### Location of Students:

- Active Student: 4 = Ontario; 4 = Manitoba; 2 = Alberta
- Inactive Students: 4 = Manitoba

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**2024-2025 Academic Calendar:**

**1. BS2 Wisdom and Psalms**

- **Course Description:** From the Wisdom books (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations) a discussion of: the images of God and the Spirit; themes, metaphors, proverbs, poetry and art; and, human to human relationships and with creation. From the Wisdom tradition of Indigenous Elders a discussion of these same matters to encourage appreciation for and use of this cultural wisdom.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
  - Learn to ask questions and find answers that will help them understand the context of the Psalms and Wisdom Scriptures and the meanings of imagery and language used. Tools for understanding and interpreting historical and cultural forms will be introduced and used.
  - Know how to research and apply appropriate Indigenous stories and cultural information as a complement to and illustrative of their presentation of the Scriptures.
  - Be encouraged to think creatively and to observe carefully the various means and methods that Elders use in passing on cultural wisdom.
  - Think reflectively about the Wisdom Scriptures and Traditional Wisdom and where they agree, disagree, complement, contrast and intersect.

**2. HS4 Prophets and Prophecies**

- **Course Description:** This circle invites participants to reflect on prophetic imagination as inspiring and participating in the creation and recreation of the world toward greater justice and harmony amidst cycles and systems of power built on dominance and death. It asks participants to draw together resources from both Indigenous and Christian traditions to enliven a posture of prophetic ministry to (re)build communities that promote life and justice amidst cycles and systems that wield oppression, death, and a consciousness of empire that plunders and dominates.
- **Learning Outcomes**
  - Understand the context in which the prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures were compiled, recurring themes the prophets spoke to, and how these informed practices of storytelling and sacred tradition in the ancient near eastern context.
  - Recognize chronological timelines as they informed the experience of Biblical prophets and Indigenous prophets from different time periods.
  - Identify similarities and differences in how Indigenous and Christian traditions relate or diverge in the role of prophets and prophecy.
  - Discuss personal experience of prophets/prophecy and how it relates to communities and contexts today.
  - Demonstrate the ability to integrate concepts of the role of prophets, prophecy, and prophetic imagination through language, stories, ceremony, or cultural protocol.
  - Interpret and practice an appreciation for the importance of women's roles in prophetic imagination in the (re)creation of worlds of greater justice and harmony.

**3. HCD1 Introduction to Church History:**

- **Course Description:** This Learning Circle offered an overview of church history from the perspective of mission. It explored the missionary movements of the early church through until the present, with particular emphasis on missionary work of The United Church of Canada. The colonial impact of mission on Indigenous peoples was critically examined.

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- **Learning Outcomes:** at the conclusion of the learning circle, the student will be able to:
  - Identify how Christian mission work has evolved within the 2000-year history of the Christian Church.
  - Understand the colonial impact of Christian mission on Indigenous peoples
  - Understand the evolving forms of home and overseas mission within The United Church of Canada

**4. BS 1 Introduction to the Bible and Bible Study Methods**

- **Course Description:** This course provided an introduction to the Bible and Bible study by exploring the Bible's major themes and the story that it tells of Creator's relationship to humanity. The course looked at how the content of the Bible is shaped by the geographic, cultural, and social contexts out of which its different writings emerged. The Circle looked at various methods and approaches that can be used to study the Bible in ways that nurture faith in Creator and Creator's saving ways.
- **Learning Outcomes:** Through participating in this course students acquired:
  - An overview of stories of the Bible that tell how Creator creates the world & works to heal and renew it;
  - Knowledge of the geographical, historical, and social context out of which the Bible's different writings emerged;
  - Greater awareness of the Bible's major themes and teachings;
  - Familiarity with different ways of reading and studying the Bible;
  - Recognition of how certain aspects of the Bible must be resisted because they are theologically and ethically problematic for Christians as a whole, and especially for Indigenous peoples;
  - Greater awareness of how the Bible relates to Indigenous worldviews and ways;
  - Deeper appreciation for how the Bible can nurture healthy and life-giving Christian faith.

**5. CE5 Youth and Urban Ministry**

- **Course Description:** Explored spirituality, theology, and practices surrounding the faith formation of youth and people who live in urban settings. Students learned about different ways that urban and youth ministries and outreach look in urban settings, identify ways to partnership with urban ministries in their area and generate practices for walking alongside youth on the adventure of discipleship.
- **Learning Outcomes:** Gained deeper insights into:
  - How ministry in urban centres can be shaped in a time of change and disruption to be one of accompanying individuals of all ages in their faith journey, their spiritual development, and their personal growth in ways that encourage and support renewal of a cultural identity and positive self-esteem.
  - How organizations and ministries meet diverse needs of individuals
  - The gifts and challenges of working with urban settings, that foster mutuality, equity, and respect.
  - How church and community can walk together with people of all ages in a good way that creates conditions to break down systemic barriers and build opportunities that bring wholeness, self-identity, economic, social, mental, and spiritual wellbeing.
  - Indigenous spiritual ways of knowing that provide guidance, grounding and understanding of how Creator is present in the lives of Urban Youth to enhance their sense of belonging, wholeness, and wellness.
  - Empowering youth in their own advocacy efforts in community to have their needs met in the urban centres.

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**6. PM3 Communion, Baptism, Marriage, and Funerals**

- **Course Description:** This course looked at the history, theology, and practice of Christian worship services for communion, baptism, marriage, and funeral/celebration of life and to compare these with traditional Indigenous teachings and ceremonies and enhance knowledge, skills, and experience of Indigenous teachings and related traditional Indigenous ceremonies for rites and passages through life alongside Christian theology and worship services for communion, baptism, marriage, and funeral/celebration of life. Students will also learn how to record these events to meet requirements for church archives and vital statistics.
- **Learning Outcomes:**
  - Gained understanding of the history and theology of Christian religious practice through reading, research, preparation and delivery of services.;
  - Able to draw comparisons Christian practice to Indigenous understandings and practices with the teaching Elders in the Learning Circle.
  - Students will reflect their understandings and experience of course material in small and large group discussions as well as through interactive or dramatic presentations to the class.
  - Will have learned how to adapt resource to share learnings in their field placements.
  - Will have practiced theological reflection relating the benefits/challenges in sharing course learnings through their community ministry practice through their learning journals.

**7. PM 1 Worship and Preaching**

- **Course Description:** This course was designed to explore practical tools in crafting and delivering sermons; as well a look at oral traditions. The learning Circle participated (virtually) in the The 2025 Festival of Homiletics provided space for deep theological reflection. Its preachers/lecturers were inspirational. They demonstrated how to navigate 21st century realities. The 2025 theme was *Preaching to Heal the Divide*, apropos for a time such as this in our families, communities, and world.
- **Learning Outcomes:** Students will have
  - Explored biblical teachings, theology, image, deepen understanding of practice and role of worship and preaching and how it can be grounded in hope
  - Incorporated by individually or in pairs, designed a worship service, preside as well as delivered a sermon preach.
  - Begun to compile a list/folder and become familiar with worship and sermon resources for their own use.
  - Reflective journal entries from learnings and observations.

**8. CS 2 – Gospels**

- **Course Description:** This course was designed for students to gain experience and skill in reading and interpreting the bible and theological reflection on scripture.
- **Learning Outcomes:** The student gained
  - Insights into the world of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine (Jesus 'world);
  - A basic understanding of how the Gospels originated and how to read them as stories about Jesus;
  - Understanding of key differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John;
  - Understanding of and appreciation for the distinctive themes, emphases, Christology, and characteristic styles of each of the four Gospels;
  - Acquire a solid grasp of the overall content and structure of each Gospel;
  - Reflect on the ongoing significance and relevance of the life and teachings of Jesus for people today;
  - Gain experience in interpreting Scripture in community for purposes of helping and healing.

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During the period that we are gathered at the SSSC the Keeper of the Learning Circle has set regular time to check in on a one-on-one basis with each student. There is also opportunity to gather virtually, or by telephone in between Learning Circles.

Post Learning Circle, the Keeper of the Learning Circle reviews the Learning Circle participants' assignments and journal entries.

- In June of 2025, SSSC held a Friends and Family Gathering
- Completed the development of the Prior Learning Recognition Assessment (PLAR) Pathway and facilitated PLAR Pathways for 1 student and 1 guest who had an abundant amount of experience, skills, and strengths relating to ministry.
- Worked collaboratively with the Indigenous Office of Vocation supported local ministry personal to prepare to offer training and mentorship for individuals seeking to become Sacrament Elders.
- Participated in the UCC's Theological School review with SSSC colleagues and students.
- Connected with the Vancouver School of Theology to review our historic relationship.
- Participated in professional development day with colleagues and Family Way Lodge
- Participated in a UCC 100th Anniversary celebration
- Ongoing work and support with the Vision Keepers and the Students between Learning Circles.

**2025-2026 Academic Calendar:**

<b>October 2025</b> Five Oaks, ON	BS4 Daniel and Revelations AT8 Traditional Teachings
<b>January 2026</b>	HS2 Exodus, Judges, and Kings TH4 World Religions
<b>March 2026</b>	PC7 Mental Health First Aid BS3/PC6 Scriptures & Healing
<b>May 2026</b>	AT1 Traditional Medicine PC4 LGBTQ2S+ & Healthy Relationships

**Other Events at SSSC in 2026:**

- Monthly and seasonal circle teachings and ceremonies (sweat, pipe, fasting)
- Seeds to Stew: Three Sisters every quarter
- Return of the Buffalo monthly
- Community Connection events weekly to monthly
- Mamawe Ota Askihk Family Camp once per year
- Art & Spirit (TBD)