



# We Believe

CELEBRATING 1700 YEARS  
OF THE NICENE CREED

First United Methodist Church Pastor's Bible Study

January 8–February 19, 2025

*with Dr. Geoffrey Lentz*

## COURSE SYLLABUS

### OBJECTIVE:

Students will grow in their faith in the Triune God by deepening their understanding of Christian Orthodoxy and Christian Unity through a study of the Nicene Creed.

### COURSE OVERVIEW:

This seven-week course will explore the theological, historical, and spiritual significance of the Nicene Creed, one of the most foundational statements of Christian faith. Each session will include a lecture, guided discussion, and reflection on how the creed shapes our belief and practice today.

### **Week 1, January 8: What Is a Creed?**

**Objective:** Understand the purpose of creeds in the life of the Church.

**Topics:**

- Creeds in Scripture: Deut. 6:4-5 (Shema), 1 Cor. 8:6, Phil. 2:5-11, Romans 10:9-13
- Early Christian creeds: The Interrogative Creed, The Old Roman Symbol, and The Apostles' Creed
- The historical context leading up to the Council of Nicea (AD 325)
- Why the Nicene Creed still matters: Unity, orthodoxy, and faith formation

**Reflection Question:** How does confessing a creed help us in our daily walk of faith?

### **Week 2, January 15: A Not So Holy Emperor Calls a Church Meeting**

**Objective:** Examine the historical background and key figures of the Council of Nicea.

**Topics:**

- Emperor Constantine: His role in Christianity's legalization and support
- The political and theological landscape of the 4th century
- Major players: Athanasius, Arius, and others
- The role of power and politics in shaping orthodoxy

**Reflection Question:** What challenges do we face today when faith intersects with politics?

**Week 3, January 22: One God, the Father Almighty**

**Objective:** Explore the theological significance of God as Creator and Father.

**Topics:**

- The opening words of the creed: What do we mean by “Father Almighty”?
- God as Creator: Genesis 1-2 and John 1:1-3
- Creation *Ex Nihilo*
- Christianity’s relationship with science and evolution
- The relationship between faith in God and care for creation

**Reflection Question:** How does our belief in God as Creator affect the way we live in the world?

**Week 4, January 29: Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord**

**Objective:** Understand the Christological focus of the Nicene Creed.

**Topics:**

- The identity of Jesus: Fully God, fully human
- Key controversies: The Arian debate and the affirmation of Jesus’ divinity; the Gnostic problem and the affirmation of the incarnation
- The significance of “begotten, not made”
- Soteriology: What did Jesus do that saved us?

**Reflection Question:** How does confessing Jesus as Lord shape our faith and practice?

**Week 5, February 5: The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life**

**Objective:** Reflect on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.

**Topics:**

- The development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit
- The Spirit’s role in creation, inspiration, and sanctification
- The Spirit’s ongoing work in the Church today

**Reflection Question:** How can we be more aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives?

**Week 6, February 12: One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church**

**Objective:** Discuss the marks of the Church and their relevance today.

**Topics:**

- What do we mean by “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic”?
- The unity of the Church amidst diversity
- The Church’s mission: Witness, worship, and service

**Reflection Question:** How can we live out the unity and holiness of the Church in our local context?

**Week 7, February 19: The Life of the World to Come**

**Objective:** Reflect on the hope and promise of the resurrection and eternal life.

**Topics:**

- The resurrection of the dead: 1 Corinthians 15
- The Christian hope: New creation and eternal life
- Living in light of eternity

**Reflection Question:** How does our belief in eternal life shape the way we live now?