

At the heart of Christian faith stands the person of Jesus Christ. Born of the virgin Mary and raised in Nazareth of Galilee, Jesus proclaimed the nearness of the Reign of God. He chose disciples to share in his mission, and travelled the countryside, calling people to a conversion of heart, mind and practice. In parable and miracle God's presence and saving power was made manifest in him. Brought to trial in Jerusalem by the ruling authorities, he was put to death by crucifixion as he gave himself out of love for others. Risen from the dead, he revealed himself to his disciples and entrusted to them the continuation of his mission under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who would come upon them.

From this moment the Church has professed its faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Saviour promised in the Scriptures, source of salvation and new life in God. In his ministry, death and resurrection, the new age of God's Reign was begun in human history, and a new possibility of relationship with God and among humans was enacted.

In Jesus Christ, Christians recognize the eternal Son and Word of God who, though divine, took our human nature and came to dwell among us. He shared our life and death, and was raised to glory, victorious over the powers of sin and death. As the Christmas liturgy proclaims, "In him we see the love of God made visible, and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see."



God is the creator of the world and the maker of all that is. There is only one God. As human beings we occupy a special place in God's creation for we are made in God's image and likeness. Like all creatures, our existence is made possible and sustained by God, for everything that exists comes from God and is in God's care and providence. Coming from God, creation itself is good and wonderful. Jesus Christ is the Word through whom God creates all that exists, and the 'firstborn of all creation' (Col 1:15). God not only creates the world, but sends the Son and breathes the Spirit into the world. God does not remain in transcendent isolation, but continues to relate with and give life to all created realities.

Christianity therefore professes faith in the triune God, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three divine persons, equal in nature and dignity, and bound together in one communion of love. This mystery is at the centre of Christian belief and is known to us in faith through God's self-communication in the person and mission of Jesus Christ. It comes from the Christian experience of God who redeems us in Christ and draws us into the divine life through the Holy Spirit. Christians speak of their experience of God in these terms because this is the way God has been revealed to us, and to speak in other ways would not be true to this experience.

Created in the image and likeness of the triune God, human persons are social, interpersonal beings. We are called to create human communities which participate in and witness to the communion of self-giving love that is God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Although each generation experiences the brokenness that sin brings and the attraction to evil, Christian faith sees in the crucified and risen Lord the true destiny of the human race and finds the grace to become one with God again.

CHURCH – Body of Christ, Community of Disciples, Witness to Unity and Justice

The Church was born from the mission of Jesus Christ entrusted to the apostles in his death and resurrection. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the early Christian community was empowered to continue that mission. Since then, the Church consists of the gathering of all those chosen through baptism in the mysterious ways of God's love. It proclaims Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, as Lord and Saviour of all, and lives as the Body of Christ, where Christ is the head and we his members. The Church flows from the inner life of the triune God, and in all it says, does and is, returns constantly to that source. It turns to Mary, the Mother of God, and the saints as examples of faith and self-giving love, and seeks their intercession that it may remain true to Christ's call.

In the world, under the guidance of the Spirit, the Church strives to bring others to know the love of God as revealed in Christ and to experience the life and hope that God offers. Committed to the work of Jesus, the Church is spread throughout the world, gathered in local



communities around their bishops and united in a common faith under the leadership of the successor of the apostle Peter, the bishop of Rome. In the name of Jesus Christ, the bishops as pastors and servants of the Word, teach and interpret the gospel message with authority.

To be a member of the Church is to belong to a community of disciples, for Jesus has called us to follow him. In lives patterned on his, we respond to the Good News that he brought and in turn become messengers of that news ourselves. In this community Jesus is personally present through his Spirit, speaking to us in his Word, challenging us in our own sinfulness, and feeding us with his body and blood. In imitation of Jesus' own self-giving and loving service, his disciples seek to serve the poor and disadvantaged, and by the strength of God's grace, to challenge the powers of sin and evil in the world by working for justice, peace and reconciliation.

SCRIPTURE – Word of God, alive and active, foundational story of Christianity

The Scriptures are those writings recognized by the Church as inspired by God and containing the truth necessary for our salvation. Consisting of the Hebrew Bible, inter-testamental literature, the gospels, and early Christian writings, they have been collected in two great libraries known commonly as the Old and New Testaments. They witness to the foundational events of God's saving relationship with the world, and tell that story in various literary forms: poetry, prose, law, history, epic, letter and gospel.

Written by different human authors and in varied circumstances, the Bible points to God who chose a people, set them free from slavery in Egypt and brought them to the promised land of Israel. In covenantal love, God does not forsake his chosen people despite their infidelity and sends his messengers, the prophets, to call the people to fidelity. Even in exile God does not abandon them. The New Testament finds the fulfilment of this story in the person of Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection, and reflects the faith of the early Church in its different communities as they come to know and profess Jesus as Lord.



The Church receives these sacred writings as a living word, which summons us still to repentance and gives us hope. It always reads the Scriptures in the light of Tradition and its own experience of God. Studied and interpreted, they not only inform and teach, but also sustain the prayer life of the Church. Their true and primary place lies in the assembly of the faithful when they are proclaimed as God's living word to us in the liturgy and worship of the Church.

SACRAMENTS – Effective signs of Christ's saving presence, communal celebrations of Christian identity

The Church constantly draws life from Christ at work in its midst. Enlivened by the Holy Spirit, the community of disciples continues the saving mission of Christ to the world. A sacrament makes present the grace of God it signifies. This means that of its very nature the Church and all that it does in Christ is sacramental, for it makes Christ present and effective in the world.

The sacraments come from Christ and enact the Church's common life in Christ. They celebrate in symbol and ritual the Christian identity of those who come to Christ in faith. The sacraments not only point to God's life and remind us of what God has done, but through the action of the Holy Spirit they also become a source of that life, bringing about the very action of Christ they represent. Celebrations of Christ's saving presence, the sacraments express all that the Church says and does in faith, and they renew these efforts in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Central to the life of the Church is the celebration of the Eucharist. Here, in obedience to Christ's command, Christians join together in Jesus' self-offering to the Father through the Spirit, and are fed with his Body and Blood that they in turn might be his Body in the world.

The seven sacraments have their origin in the ministry of Jesus Christ. They make visible the mystery of Christ present in the heart of the Church, so that in the celebration of each sacrament the Church as well as the individual draws closer to its saviour and founder. Thus in baptism, the one who is baptised is plunged into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, and the initiating community gains a new member, and is itself renewed in this mystery. In this way the sacraments build up the Christian community and celebrate different aspects of its identity in Christ as it is healed, sustained, forgiven and called to service.

CHRISTIAN LIFE – The flourishing of human persons,
the common good of societies,
shared responsibility in relation to creation

Religious communities which are founded on the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures find in them both the imperative and the guidance to discern ways of *being* and *acting* in the world which faithfully respond to the creative love of God. Catholic communities also find guidance for living and acting in the traditions of social and moral teaching that have arisen over centuries of gospel-inspired practice.

At the heart of the quest for *human flourishing* is the fundamental moral understanding of the *dignity of human persons*. Created in the image of God, persons experience themselves as free agents of thought and action, among other human agents and in the non-human environment. The subject of inalienable rights to life, liberty, social engagement and self-expression, the person bears responsibility towards self and others for the full realisation of human potential. As creatures, human persons also experience limits, frustrations and failures in achieving the goals that attract them. So the quest for the realisation of human potential involves the experience of human sinfulness and invites a continual participation in the gracious creativity of God.

The Scriptures and the social teaching of the Church call people and governments to work for *peace, justice and the promotion of the common good of society*. Inherently social, human persons develop best in peaceful and just societies, where family life, labour, commerce, the arts, political associations, and other societal structures, all enable the self-expression of each one, and offer ways to serve the good of others.

As with God's creative activity, so human interest and responsibility extends beyond the human community to include relationships

with animals, environments, the earth and its atmosphere. As that part of creation endowed with self-consciousness and freedom of decision and action, human persons exercise a particular *responsibility in relation to creation*, its life-systems, environments and resources.

Christians wait in hope for God's redeeming love to gather all created things into the resurrection of Jesus, to share his glory beyond sickness, sin and death. This waiting is *expressed in both prayer and action*, in a collaboration with the Spirit of God leading to acts of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration.



Christians live in communion with God and with one another. God is present in our world and our deepest self through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and when we pray we turn to that loving presence to deepen our communion with God, and to allow God to work all the more in us. In prayer we are drawn into the divine life of Father, Son and Spirit, whose mystery lies at the heart of our being and of all reality. Prayer is an encounter with this divine mystery.



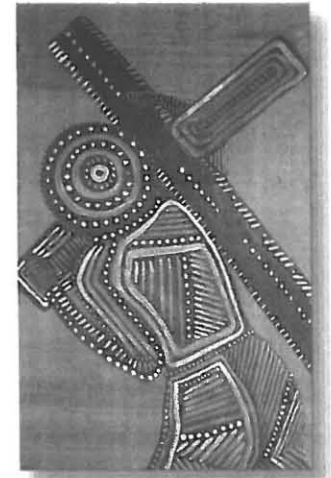
The ways of prayer are many and reflect the varied circumstances and dimensions of our relationship with God. They range from a simple, wordless prayer of presence before God, to meditation on the Scriptures, to the liturgies and sacramental rites of the church when the community gathers to express all that it is as the Body of Christ

and finds itself renewed in God's love for the mission it bears. In this communion with God there are moments of praise, wonder, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, sorrow, and searching.

Prayer has been described as a conversation with God, and includes a prior awareness in which we listen to the stirrings of our desire by the voice of God, who continues to speak to us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught his disciples to pray and gave us the Lord's Prayer as a model for our own prayer. He taught us to ask and to search, and so Christians pray in response with confidence and trust in his words. Personal prayer requires the skills of stillness and awareness, and the life of prayer calls for sustained attention and regular commitment of time.

Religion is a social and communal way of life, which springs out of the human heart in the search for meaning and the need to respond to the divine. It draws on authoritative teachings, stories, rituals, ethical norms, laws and spiritual experience to create a community, which in turn confers identity and purpose on its members.

Australia is a country with its own indigenous people who live in age-old spiritual closeness to the land and its dreaming. Justice for its own people demands careful attention to their culture and place in our society. Australian society also brings together many people from around the world. Each community has its own spirituality, customs and ways of life, often set within a particular religious tradition. In particular, Christianity has a deep spiritual bond with Judaism, its history and sacred scriptures, as the people from whom Christ was born. While Christianity is the most represented religious tradition in Australia, other faiths also make their own contribution to Australian society and are to be respected and understood. In dialogue with these religions Christians do not lose sight of the uniqueness of Christ, but seek to understand and promote all that reflects God's saving will.



Within Christianity itself there is a variety of traditions. Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his followers, "so that they might be one as we are one." (*Jn 17:11*) This sets a challenge to divided Christians as disciples of Jesus to work for unity. It requires a

commitment to Christian unity and a willingness to walk the path of discipleship on the basis of our common baptism in Christ.

In a global world where many religions and ways of life are in contact with each other, Christians must give an account of themselves if they are to give proper witness to Christ and so fulfil the mission he has entrusted to them. The need for Christian witness and discernment is ever more pressing as the various forms of mass media increase communication and promote multiple and divergent views.