

Experiencing God

In this unit students learn about ways in which people have experienced God through time. In Part 1 they explore biblical images of God and are invited to represent their own images of God. In Part 2 students focus on prayer as a way of experiencing God. In Part 3 students are introduced to the Genesis account of humans beings made in the image of God.

DOCTRINAL FOCUS

In planning to teach this unit the following references from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church are recommended:

#229 Faith in God leads us to turn to him alone as our first origin and our ultimate goal, and neither to prefer anything to him nor to substitute anything for him.
(See *Compendium* #533 *What is the greatest human desire?*)

#2590 'Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God' (St John Damascene, *De fide orth.* 3, 24: PG 94, 1089C).
(See *Compendium* #534 *What is prayer?*)

#2591 God tirelessly calls each person to this mysterious encounter with himself. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man.
(See *Compendium* #535 *Why is there a universal call to prayer?*)

#1147 God speaks to man through the visible creation. The material cosmos is so presented to man's intelligence that he can read there traces of its Creator. Light and darkness, wind and fire, water and earth, the tree and its fruit speak of God and symbolise both his greatness and his nearness.
(See *Compendium* #53 *Why was the world created?* and #50 *What does it mean to say that God is almighty?*)

#2598 The drama of prayer is fully revealed to us in the Word who became flesh and dwells among us.
(See *Compendium* #85 *Why did the Son of God become man?*)

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION FOR TEACHERS

God is like a potter ... God is like a shepherd ... God is like a father ... God is like a mother ... God as creator ... God as judge ... Human beings have used metaphor for thousands of years to describe their experience of God. What is your image of God? How has your image of God changed over time? What images of God do you find difficult to relate to?

In Jesus Christ's life we see the perfect image of God. The gospels describe a man of justice, compassion, integrity and unconditional love; a person who prayed often. How is your life an expression of God's image? What are the struggles and the joys of living in this image?

One way of understanding prayer is as an awareness of God in your life. When have you been especially aware of God in your life? What sense or image of God did you have in this experience? What are the times and places in which you feel close to God? What forms of prayer are significant for you?

LINKS WITH STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Students are surrounded by numerous images and symbols in the physical world. Within this context they have the natural capacity to recognise the many expressions of God's presence. A student's understanding and image of God is dependent upon significant familial and peer relationships. *What prayer opportunities will enable students to deepen their relationship with God, and deepen their understanding of God's presence in the world?*

EXPLANATION OF SCRIPTURE

Ezek 34: 11–16

In verses 1–10 God denounces the bad rulers who have shepherded Israel, and announces his plan to shepherd the sheep himself and to appoint a new David over them. God will reverse the evil done by the bad human shepherds. He is the awesome God.

Gen 1: 26–27 Creation of Humans

This is the sixth day and two important things happened. Firstly, the earth is to bring forth animals, cattle, creeping things, and undomesticated beasts. The second event, the creation of the human being, is the climax. The divine intent is to 'let us make a human'. The origin of human beings is not simply from the waters on the earth like the plants, fishes, birds and animals; it is 'in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves'. The human is an image of the deity, not by being static but by action, who will rule over all things previously created. Verse 27 reminds us that 'male and female he created them'.

Job 12: 1–9 Learning About God Through Creation

Here we have one of the many gems from the book of Job – a book that tries to come to terms with the problem of suffering. These verses come from one of Job's longest speeches. He is strongly protesting that his conscience is clear. He is challenging the theology of his day that sees suffering as a punishment for sin. He rightly knows that good people suffer too. So these verses are part of a rather sarcastic confrontation Job has with his friends and with his society. He claims that true wisdom can be found by reflecting on creation, indeed by communicating with created things – 'all creatures great and small, the good Lord made them all'. He points out that his friends' theology is wrong. Job maintains they could learn more about life and God from wisely contemplating creation.

Ps 104: 1–2a, 16–24, 27–28

The entire book of Psalms is a collection of 150 psalms. They are the prayers of the people and range across the centuries of composition of the Hebrew Scriptures. So some are very old (oral tradition – from 2000 BC on) and others relatively new – from after the exile (fifth to third century BC). Psalm 104 is a beautiful hymn in praise of God the creator who provides and maintains the habitable world. There is much in Psalm 104 that parallels the first two chapters of Genesis – those great stories of creation. In addition there is presented here the refreshing idea of God continually renewing creation. Clearly this was the writer's worldview. The idea of ongoing recreation of the world is reminiscent of the first breath God breathed into humanity to

instil the life force (Gen 2: 7). But the wonderful suggestion of the psalm is that it keeps recurring. Life is constantly renewed – quite an ecological perspective that we can support and not hinder.

POSSIBILITIES FOR PRAYER AND WORSHIP

- Prayer Celebration: Decorate the prayer place using coloured cloth, children's class collage of their images of God, candle, Bible. Sing a suitable song that explores the imagery of God, e.g. 'God Is' by Monica Brown. Invite the students to close their eyes and reflect on their own image of God.
- Other helpful prayer resources for this unit are: 'Prayer of Trust' (Br Michael Herry, *Sing Spirit, Sing Life*, Marist Brothers Music) and 'Visualisation 1' in *To God on a Magic Carpet* (Sr Anthony, Spectrum Publications).
- Prepare a visual display using 'shepherd' images. Pray Psalm 23 with reflective music. You may wish to sing an antiphon, based on the psalm, with percussion provided by the children.
- In the prayer place prepare a display of clay and clay pots, or an image of a potter. Lead the class in a guided visualisation of the story of Jer 18: 1–6. Invite the students to respond with their own prayers. (This same pattern may be followed for Lk 15: 11–24 and Isa 49: 15.)
- Pray the circle prayer in *KWL*, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 1, p. 9.
- Invite the students to contribute a photo or drawing of someone who loves them. Arrange these in the prayer place. Pray the prayer in *KWL*, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 1, p. 15. Sing together 'There is Someone' (Bernadette Farrell, *Share the Light*, OCP Publications).
- Use for reflective prayer 'Made In God's Image' from *Prayers At Your Fingertips*, p. 36 (Barbara Bretherton, St Paul's).
- Make a special highlight of the Scriptures during this unit. Arrange seeds and growing plants near the place of the word. Pray the prayer in *KWL*, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 14, p. 151. Students mime the Parable of the Sower while Mk 4: 3–9, 13–20 is read aloud. Conclude by praying the prayer again.
- Explore ways of prayer, specifically the 'Our Father', using *KWL*, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 17, 'Time With God'.
- Display an icon of Jesus Christ in the prayer place. Allow the students to spend some quiet time praying with the icon. Teach them to pray the Jesus prayer while gazing at the icon, i.e. silently saying the name of Jesus with the rhythm of their breathing.

Related Chapters – *KWL*, 2nd edition, Book 2: Chapter 1 Part 1, Images of God; Chapter 2, Families; Chapter 14, Sowing the Seeds; Chapter 17, Time With God.

Faith concepts: presence, prayer, image, relationship, creation.

Understandings:

People can feel close to God in different ways, in different places and at different times.

Prayer is a special time when people feel close to God.

Prayer is an opportunity for giving thanks and talking to God about our needs.

People need to nurture and care for their relationship with God.

Creation shows God’s beauty and goodness.

People are made in the image and likeness of God.

God loves the whole of creation.

Unit specific learning:

<p>Students will learn about <i>Knowledge and Understanding</i></p>	<p>Students will learn to <i>Reasoning & Responding</i></p>	<p>Students will undertake to <i>Personal & Communal Engagement</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer as a time of feeling close to God. • Images of God and what they express about how people experience God, e.g. shepherd, potter, mother, father. • Ways in which creation expresses God’s goodness and beauty. • Different ways to pray: vocal prayer, formal prayer, song, praying with Scripture, using symbol. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express their perceptions, feelings and ideas about God. • Make a connection between their own experience of God and the people in their lives. • Wonder about the beauty of creation. • Reflect on their experiences of prayer in light of new learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise a prayer session. • Engage in a variety of classroom prayer experiences.

Part 1: Images of God

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>Since the beginning of time people have always wrestled with the questions ‘What is God like?’ and ‘Who is God?’ Throughout history people have named and described God in a myriad of ways. However, every name and description of God is always incomplete. Names and images certainly tell us something about God, but there is no one name or image that can possibly tell everything about God. God is always much more than any description, name or image.</p> <p>The different <i>metaphors</i> used by people to name and describe God show how they have come to know God in their own lives and experience. For a person of faith, their image of God is vital in their efforts to develop in genuinely human ways. A person’s self image will also influence their ability to describe, name and know God. A person who feels that they are unloved and worthless may find it very difficult to accept or believe in a God who loves unconditionally, who protects and cares for all of creation.</p>	<p>I Wonder</p> <p>On flashcards write the words that respond to the question ‘I wonder what God is like?’ Place in a Grab Bag. Ask children, one at a time, to select a word from the Grab Bag. As a class they are to create the sentence and read it out. This will promote class discussion and wonderings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I wonder if one of these words is how you think of God? – I wonder if you were surprised by one of the words? – I wonder if you would add another word to the bag? <p>Students draw or use playdough to make their own images of God. Play reflective music to promote a quiet and reflective work time.</p> <p>Students share their images of God.</p>	<p>Assessment for Learning</p> <p>This activity will indicate students’ already forming understanding and images of God.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>In the Bible we find many names and images to describe what God is like. The Old Testament describes God as fire (Ex 3: 1–8), rain (Hos 14: 6), like a mother eagle (Deut 32: 11), like a lion (Ps 29), father (Deut 32: 6, 18 & Ps 103: 13), a potter (Jer 18: 1–6), a shepherd (Ps 23), a powerful warrior (Ex 15: 3) and as mother (Isa 49: 15–16, 66: 11 & Ps 131: 2). God is also described as being like water (Ps 42: 1–2) and light (Ps 27: 1). This list is not exhaustive, but representative of the human search for understanding the mystery of God.</p> <p>Through this unit content students come to know more about God through the images of God presented. They will also see that people use different images to relate to the mystery of God. It is important that students begin to realise that coming to know God is a lifelong journey into the Divine Mystery. There is always more to discover about the mystery of God and our relationship with God.</p>	<p>Telling the Story Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 1, Part 1, p. 4.</p> <p>Using an image of a shepherd, students reflect on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is a shepherd? – What does a shepherd do? – How is God like a shepherd to you? <p>Responding Learn and sing a song about God as shepherd.</p> <p>Telling the Story Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 1, Part 1, p. 5.</p> <p>Lead the class in a guided visualisation of the story of the Potter in Jer 18: 1–6.</p>	

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<p>God as Shepherd In biblical times the duty of the shepherd was to keep the flock intact and protect it from predators, such as wolves. The shepherd generally had a small flock of sheep, so he was able to know and care for each one. It was the shepherd's duty to travel with the sheep from pasture to pasture each day so that they were sufficiently fed. The image of God as shepherd is one of God guiding, protecting and nourishing us</p> <p>God as Potter The Old Testament image of God as potter is recorded in Gen 2: 7 and Jer 18: 1–6. The craft of a potter was a highly skilled one. The pottery was shaped by hand on a wheel turned by hand or foot. The potter determined the shape of the pot. Pots were the necessary vessels used in the daily life of the people. If it didn't turn out, the potter started again, to rework it into another vessel. The image of God as potter reminds us that we are like clay in God's hand, being created into the image God has for us.</p>	<p>I Wonder Students reflect on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is a potter? – What does a potter do? – Have you ever seen the work of a potter? – What is special about a potter's work? – How is God like a potter to you? 	

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<p>God as Father</p> <p>The image of God as Father is the image that Jesus Christ gave us. He called God 'Abba'. Abba means 'father' in most Semitic languages. The word is found three times in the New Testament (Mk 14: 36; Rom 8: 15; Gal 4: 6), and in each case is followed by its Greek equivalent, which is translated 'father'. It is a term expressing warm affection and the child's confidence in the father's love. It has no perfect equivalent in the English language. Most modern Israelis (along with other Semitic-speaking peoples) call their fathers Abba as one would use 'Dad' or 'Daddy' in English. Unfortunately this translation also falls far short of the original meaning. The image of the Father is one of God unconditionally loving and protecting his children.</p> <p>God as Mother</p> <p>In the Bible the image of God as a mother describes the unchanging love God has for us. God asks: 'Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you' (Is 49: 15). The image of God as a mother reveals the intensity and intimacy of the relationship between God and humanity.</p>	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with playdough or clay to experience the role of a potter as a creator. <p>Acknowledge the uniqueness of each student's work.</p> <p>In the prayer place display students' creations.</p> <p>Discuss with students that God is like a potter, God created us, and each one of us is unique.</p> <p>Provide students with images of mothers, fathers, carers, families. Students select an image and discuss with a partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do you see in the pictures? – What are they doing? – What might they be saying to each other? – What is their relationship to each other? – What feelings are being shown? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 2, pp. 6–7. Invite students to share their own experiences of their relationships with mother, father, carer, family. 	

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	<p>Wondering Invite students to wonder with you: I wonder if there is someone in your life who loves and cares for you no matter what happens? I wonder if you know anyone in your life whose love and care reminds you of God? I wonder what God is like?</p> <p>Suggested Home Activity Students ask their families about their images of God.</p>	

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	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students complete a flow chart reflecting their favourite image of God, and make connections to relationships in their lives. <div data-bbox="824 486 1350 707" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <pre> graph LR A[God is like ...] --> B[My mum] B --> C[Because she protects me.] </pre> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students visually present their own images of God. <p>Students compare these images with the images created at the beginning of the unit. Discuss the differences.</p>	<p>Assessment of Learning</p> <p>This activity will demonstrate students' understanding of selected images of God, and what they convey about how people experience God.</p> <p>Assessment as Learning</p> <p>This activity will enable students to reflect on their images of God, and how these might have changed from the beginning of the unit.</p>
	<p>Praying the Word</p> <p>Students prepare and participate in a prayer liturgy based on images of God.</p>	

Part 2: God, Prayer and Me

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
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<p>In the Bible people named and described God in many different ways. These <i>metaphors</i> emerged from the people trying to express their understanding of God. When God became human in Jesus Christ we were given the perfect expression of God. Through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ people began to gain a deeper understanding of who God was. Only Jesus directly called God 'Father' and 'Abba' (like a daddy) to show his own relationship with God as God's Son.</p>	<p>I Wonder Students sit in Talking Circles and explore the statement 'A special time when I feel close to God is ...'</p> <p>Students take turns listening to each other's responses to this statement.</p>	<p>Assessment for Learning These tasks indicate students' prior understanding, perceptions and experiences of prayer.</p>
<p>Throughout his life Jesus Christ taught his disciples to nurture their relationship with God through prayer. As disciples we are invited to reflect on our lives and our relationship with God. We are encouraged to spend time with God in prayer so that we can allow God's Word to grow in our lives.</p>	<p>Responding Students choose one or two tasks from the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a Y-chart students identify what it sounds like, looks like, smells like, at times when they feel close to God. 	

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<p>It is important that the students at this level are given ample opportunity to explore the nature of prayer. Jesus spent time praying to God and listening for God in the silence. We are encouraged to do the same.</p> <p>Prayer is our response to the invitation from God to enter into <i>relationship</i>. It expresses the human yearning and desire for communion (union) with God. Prayer may be personal or communal. It may take vocal, reflective or contemplative form.</p> <p>Vocal Prayer involves praying aloud in word or song. It usually takes the form of thanksgiving, petition (asking), praise or sorrow (trusting God's mercy).</p> <p>Sacred Space Creating a 'sacred space' for prayer enables the body and mind to enter into a sacred place where <i>relationship</i> with God is the natural focus.</p>	<p>Share these responses with the class. Display responses around the classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a class complete a brainstorm using the following: 'What is prayer?' Use a mind map to represent students' responses. • Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 17, pp. 166 and 169. • Students roleplay Jesus teaching the disciples about prayer. • Students share times and experiences when they have prayed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What prayers do they say? – Do they pray alone or with someone? – Where do they pray? <p>Telling the Story Explore and describe the four types of vocal prayer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – prayers of thanks – prayers of petition – prayers of praise – prayers of sorrow <p>Immerse students in these forms of prayer</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students select one prayer type and compose a prayer. • Students work in small groups to create their communal prayer and sacred space. <p>Students include songs, visual focus, a scripture reading, a prayer they have written. The prayer sessions can then be prayed with the class in various locations in the school.</p>	<p>Assessment of Learning This activity will demonstrate students' ability to write or draw a prayer or to physically compose a prayer through movement.</p> <p>Assessment of Learning This activity will demonstrate students' ability to work cooperatively to plan communal prayer.</p>
	<p>Praying the Word Throughout the unit students lead the prayer they have planned in cooperative groups.</p> <p>Suggested Home Activity Students can create a prayer mat, decorate a candle or make a prayer cloth to take home, and place in a prayer space at home.</p>	

Part 3: Creation

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
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Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>Creation Among all God's creation, human beings hold a special place. Gen 1: 26–27 reveals to us that God created man and woman in God's own image. As such, humanity shares in a unique way in the life and holiness of God. As icons of God, human beings are called to reflect God's image and recognise God's goodness in others.</p>	<p>Telling the Story Learn and sing a song about the story of creation, e.g. 'In the Beginning' (Chinn, A). Provide students with a copy of the words to discuss.</p> <p>Choreograph movements to match the chosen song.</p>	
<p>The Genesis story reveals not only that we are a special part of creation, but also that we have a distinct role in creation. We are in <i>relationship</i> with all of creation and, as such, have a <i>responsibility</i> for it. Indeed, we experience the presence of God in our own lives through our relationship with all of creation.</p>	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play the song. Represent their own images of creation through paint, playdough, concrete materials. 	<p>Assessment for Learning This activity will indicate students' prior knowledge and perceptions of creation.</p>
	<p>Telling the Story Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edition, Book 2, Chapter 1, pp. 12–13.</p>	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The focus for this unit content is that all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. It is important to explore this concept with students as it lays the foundations for future learning about the Church's social teachings based on the dignity of the human person. At this stage do not explore the moral and ethical implications of the Genesis story. It is more important that students be given ample opportunity to engage with wondering about their own <i>goodness</i> as being made in God's image, and the goodness of others.</p>	<p>Wondering Invite students to wonder with you: I wonder how I am an image of God?</p> <p>Students write or draw their response, e.g. When I smile at my friend when she feels sad, I am showing God's comfort.</p>	
	<p>Responding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students explore Gen 1: 26–27 through various means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – concrete materials – feltboard characters – roleplay – playdough • Go for a walk around the school grounds or to a nearby park. • Discuss with students God's love of the whole of creation. Ask 'What do you love about God's creation?' • Make an advertisement promoting the beauty of God's creation. Design flyers and display them around the school and parish. Some flyers could be sent home with the newsletter 	

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
	Praying the Word Students participate in a prayer liturgy focusing on God's gift of creation.	

RESOURCES

To Know, Worship and Love, 2nd Edition

Book 2: Chapter 1 Part 1, Images of God; Chapter 2, Families; Chapter 14, Sowing the Seeds; Chapter 17, Time With God.

CDs

Compilations 1984, 'My Shepherd Is The Lord', *Young People's Glory and Praise*, North American Liturgy Resources.
Farrell, B 2000, *Share the Light*, OCP Publications.
Herry, M 1996, *Sing Spirit, Sing Life*, Spectrum Publications.
Mangan, M 2004, 'You are my Shepherd, Psalm 23' in *Forever I Will Sing*, Litmus Productions.

Teacher Resources

Bretherton, B 1999, *Prayers at Your Fingertips: Everyday Personal and Communal Prayers for Classroom, Staffroom, Chapel and Home*, Social Science Press, NSW.
Chinn, A 2005, *In the beginning: Based on Genesis 1-2:4*, Butterfly Music, Bowral.

Websites

The Geocities and Sermon4kids websites have templates of the Good Shepherd.
www.geocities.com/.../coloring/lostsheep.html
www.sermons4kids.com/lost_sheep_colorpg.htm

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STANDARDS

This unit may be used to assess some of the Level 2 standards.

Students interpret biblical stories and stories in Church Tradition by making a response and expressing their own ideas, feelings and perceptions. Students create prayers and responses of praise, thanks, forgiveness and petition with personal expression and insight.