

YEAR LEVEL	11&12
TITLE	Response to the Spirit
STRAND	PRAYER & DISCERNMENT
SUGGESTED DURATION	40 hours (1 semester)
ENDURING QUESTIONS	What is prayer? How can I nurture my spirituality?



Unit Focus

In this unit students will appreciate the different ways that God is revealed and understand that different traditions of Christian spirituality and forms of prayer and meditation are a means of exploring, responding to, and touching the presence of God in human experience.

Achievement Standards

By the end of Year 12:

Students examine prayer as growing in faithful relationship, listening, trusting and celebrating the living God.

Unit Outcomes

By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. Describe and analyse a range of the ultimate questions of life.
2. Engage in dialogue around a number of secular and diverse religious responses to these ultimate questions.
3. Explore a variety of forms of spirituality as expressions of the human quest to encounter the mystery of God who is both within and beyond oneself.
4. Describe and analyse various styles of Christian spirituality.
5. Describe and practise various styles of Christian prayer.

Key Understandings for Students

- The human person is, by nature, reflective and longs to find meaning and purpose.
- Discernment means learning to recognize the presence of God in all situations and trusting that God will see us through.
- The Holy Spirit is an integral person of the Holy Trinity who awakens faith in us and who can support us in our discernment and animate our thoughts and actions.
- Spirituality embraces the ways in which people look for and perceive meaning, purpose, and values, as well as other personal aspects like beauty, appreciation of nature, fulfilment, happiness, and community.
- It includes abiding dispositions toward life and patterns of behaviour that are influenced by spiritual beliefs.

- Spirituality may, but not always, involve belief in God in the context of religious practice. While for some, spirituality is primarily the reflective and active expression of their religious beliefs, it should not be limited to a necessary association with organised religion.
- There are a rich variety of styles of spirituality within Christianity.
- Prayer is central to the Christian way of life. The many different forms of prayer invite us to experience the direct action of God. Through prayer we celebrate life and creation. It involves a choice to take time to develop a reflective relationship with God.
- Prayer is about: listening for God's presence, responding to that presence, encountering God in new ways, developing a relationship of trust with God that brings greater meaning into our lives. (Ducket, 1992).
- The God of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is a personal God. God knows people and enters into personal relationship with them.
- A retreat experience allows the space and freedom for spirituality to be experienced holistically and may contribute to a person's spirituality. It is a way of making time and space for individuals to reflect on the reality of their life experience and story and even for God to speak.

Student Context

Post Compulsory students are young adults who reflect a growing maturity and sophistication. They are also concerned with preparation for examinations, meeting entry requirements of post-secondary courses and for entry to the workforce itself. At the same time they are becoming more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and begin to articulate more definitely their goals. Thus, they are open to new and different ways of balancing their lives and particularly look for strategies for coping with the pressures they are experiencing. An encounter with the notion of spirituality and the opportunity to spend time away from the normal pressures of daily school life is appealing to most Post Compulsory students.

The AGZ Report (2019) completed by Rasmussen, Singleton, Halafoff and Bouma found that, while most Gen Z teens have little to do with organised religion in their personal lives, a significant proportion are interested in different ways of being spiritual. The Report identified six spirituality types of Australian teens: this-worldly; indifferent; spiritual but not religious; seekers; nominally religious and religiously committed. While only a minority follow a faith with strong conviction, as a whole they are not anti-religious. (The full report is available at https://sociology.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2019/10/AGZ_Report_FINAL_single_pages.pdf)

Thus it is of great importance that opportunities be provided in the religious education curriculum for Post Compulsory Level students to have opportunities to develop and express a personal and communal spirituality within the context of a pluralising and secularising society and the riches of the Catholic tradition.

Theological Background for Teachers

The human person is, by nature, reflective and longs to find meaning and purpose. People search for a spiritual dimension to life and are prepared to spend time to discover and develop this aspect of their lives.

All forms of spirituality have a common thread, "the quest of the human spirit for something that is above us, that is bigger, deeper, 'more than' the ordinary surface reality of life." All spiritualities share the fundamental characteristics of being: (i) holistic, (ii) intrinsically human, (iii) transcendent and (iv) hermeneutic (ie about meaning making) (<https://www.bne.catholic.edu.au/formationandleadership/spirituality/Pages/Spirituality.aspx>).

"Spirituality is a certain awakening to life that relates us more deeply to life. The imagination is opened to new possibility. Life can be seen and heard in a new way. There is recognition that there are deeper currents operating in life. There are dimensions of life yet to be explored, all of which offer greater depth, connection, centredness and wholeness." (David Ranson)

Spirituality has begun to be recognized as a construct distinct from religion for many people. For others, however there is still a reluctance to use the word spiritual or spirituality due to its connotation with religion. Spirituality has traditionally tended to be associated with religion ... To Walton (in Laurence 2003), religion however has to do

with a framework for beliefs, traditions, doctrine, conduct and rituals, whereas spirituality is broader and encompasses an individual's relations to self, others and to the environment, as well as feelings of inner peace, strength, interconnectedness and meaning to life. (SA Department of Education & Children's Services 2006)

In light of the above definition we should present the opportunity for students to encounter a variety of recognised expressions of traditional and contemporary Christian spirituality.

Discernment requires an openness to the way God chooses to sustain us in whatever circumstance we find ourselves. Discernment invites us to be open to God's spirit as we consider our feelings and thoughts in order to make decisions and take action that will contribute good to our lives and the world around us. Prayer and deep thought are integral in the discernment process when we are faced with some of our choices in life. (Source of Life Core Document)

Prayer is central to the Christian way of life. The many different forms of prayer invite us to experience the direct action of God. Through prayer we celebrate life and creation. We enhance our sense of belonging when we pray together.

Prayer is the turning of one's heart and mind to God. It involves a choice to take time to develop a reflective relationship with God.

Prayer is about listening for God's presence, responding to that presence, encountering God in new ways, developing a relationship of trust with God that brings greater meaning into our lives. (Duckett, 1992)

The God of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is a personal God. God knows people and enters into personal relationship with them. At different times in the development of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, different images of God were experienced as a result of this relationship.

Recognising that the activities associated with a retreat experience may contribute to student spirituality, we should give space and freedom for spirituality to be experienced holistically, to be brought to consciousness and to be the focus of reflection.

The Catholic school utilises various means, curricular and extra-curricular, to help the growth of the individual toward maturity in faith. In conjunction with these various means, the school retreat has much to offer in the process of bringing about the integration of faith and life that leads to wholeness.

Spirituality involves the various dimensions of human existence and experience, or the inner dimension of the person where reality is experienced. It relates to the authentic quest for ultimate value.

There are many different spiritualities which may or may not be based on a firm belief in "God". For some, spirituality may be intimately connected with a particular Christian or non-Christian tradition. For others, it may be the basis for a search for the true meaning of life for that person.

"We cannot just say that young people are the future of our world. They are its present; even now, they are helping to enrich it. Young people are no longer children. They are at a time of life when they begin to assume a number of responsibilities, sharing alongside adults in the growth of the family, society and the Church. Yet the times are changing, leading us to ask: What are today's young people really like? What is going on in their lives?" (Christus Vivit, 2019 n.64)

Students should be introduced to particular spirituality traditions of the Christian church (for example, Augustinian, Benedictine, Franciscan, Ignatian, Julian of Norwich, Theresa of Avila, Hildegard of Bingen), as well as other spiritualities (including Gandhi, Dalai Lama and Aboriginal spiritualities)

Scripture

Prov 8:22-31

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

Lk 11:1-13

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'When you pray, say:
Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Give us each day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.
And do not bring us to the time of trial.'

And he said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, "Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him." And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.'

Lk 5:16

But Jesus would withdraw to deserted places and pray.

Romans 12: 2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Major Assessment Task

Research Journal

Read and research four articles / chapters concerning spirituality.

You are required to present a research journal with your detailed response to each chapter / article. The response should include the following points:

1. highlight the central points and outline the authors main contentions
2. incorporate insights from your own study / research of spirituality or from class discussion
3. extend and / or critique elements of the author's discussion.
4. personally reflect on the significance of the reading for the spirituality of young people in the twenty-first century

Length: 700-900 words

Teacher Note

At the outset it may be useful to consider ways to link this course to retreats that the students may have experienced, particularly in Year 12. Remind students of the rationale for the conduct of the retreat (eg time away to reflect at individual and communal levels on where life is at and where it may lead) and the importance the school obviously places on it in terms of time, resources, etc.

Teachers should be mindful of the classroom climate required to facilitate students' reflections and conversations about spirituality, prayer and discernment. When praying in particular, your class will need an appropriate space and ambience.

When considering "ultimate questions (of life)", it is essential that teachers have reflected on them personally beforehand and developed appropriate responses to them (as well as understanding relevant Christian responses to each).

Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

Focusing Activity

Present students with a quote about the meaning of life eg Bil Keane "Yesterday is history, Tomorrow is a mystery, Today is a gift of God, Which is why we call it the present."

Ask "What does this quote mean to you? What is your understanding of 'mystery'? In what ways is life a mystery?" Students begin a Reflective Journal and respond to the above questions (or similar).

Outcome 1. Describe and analyse a range of the ultimate questions of life.

- Think Pair Share: "What people really desire in life" and "What people fear most in life". Collate student responses to their collection of the basic desires and fears which underlie most human actions. In small groups students write a list of questions arising from these basic desires and fears, and which may be regarded as ultimate questions about life. Students display their questions on a graffiti wall – "The Wall of Life".
- Individually students write down their responses to these questions. Discuss as a class. Students might categorise these questions, eg according to what stage of their lives they relate to, in a PMI or a table. Students identify possible responses other people might have in answer to these questions by interviewing parents, grandparents, teachers, etc. How do others' responses differ? Does this relate to their age and stage in life (ie transitions)? Does this relate to their life experiences (if known)? What tentative conclusions can

students reach about “the meaning of life”? What has been reinforced / what has changed? What is unknown?

Teacher Note: The Question of Evil & Suffering

The question of why there is evil and suffering in the world if God is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving usually arises as one of the ultimate questions which people, especially young people find challenging; it leads many to believe that God does not exist. In response it is important to remember that the ultimate questions are complex and mysterious; there are numerous ways to respond to them and none of them are definitive. In the case of the existence of evil and suffering possible responses (presented together) include:

- much evil and suffering derives from humans not God
- Christians believe God gave humans free will and that God continues to respect humans freedom to choose (well or badly)
- creation is not perfect. If it were humans (and creatures) could live forever and not experience ill health or death
- natural disasters are more difficult to explain but are just that (natural). Past civilisations sometimes believed that they were punishment for sinful living; this does not fit with our concept of a merciful and loving God
- sometimes suffering and evil lead to instances of greater good
- some (eg Irenaeus) suggest that evil exists to encourage spiritual growth
- Thomas Aquinas theorised that the afterlife is the greater good that justifies suffering in the present
- responses to the problem of evil are also called *theodicies*.

Outcome 2. Engage in dialogue around a number of secular and diverse religious responses to these ultimate questions.

- Students research how different religions respond to the ultimate questions – and compare their findings.
- Students research how different cultures (eg indigenous, Jewish) deal with significant events, eg colonisation, the Holocaust, pandemics.
- Select a contemporary song or image to explore one of the ultimate questions with students. Ask students to respond in their journals: what is the ultimate question? what does the song or image say about it? what does society say about it? what does religion (eg Christianity) say about it?
- Ask each student to find their own image or song that presents a response to a life question. Ask them (in their journals) to explain why they chose it, what they think it says and their reaction to it. Students may then create their own lyric or image.
- Look at media snapshots, eg ads, blogs, influencers. What do they say about life and how it should be lived? What messages do they emphasise? What do they suggest are important life goals? What resonates with you? What challenges you?
- Look at your school's graduate outcomes. What do they emphasise? What do they omit?
- Explore the concept of the “Australian dream”? What is it? How should this “dream” be realised at different stages in life? What values are considered typically or uniquely “Australian”?
- In pairs choose a philosopher from the list provided and complete an analysis of their approach to one or more of the ultimate questions of life. Your response should include the following (you may use sub-headings):
 - Brief description of the philosopher's life and world. (50+ words)
 - Their philosophical ideas (250+ words)
 - Choose one ultimate question (eg what constitutes a good life?) that they addressed & explain this question in your own words.
 - What did they have to say about this ultimate question?

- A Christian response: Explain how the Catholic Church would respond to the same “ultimate question of life” in today’s world (100+ words)
- Does it differ from or reinforce the philosopher’s teachings? Explain. Use a quote from scripture and/or a Church document to support your response.
- What is your own personal response to this ultimate question? Explain (100+ words)

The information should be presented in a powerpoint (Pecha Kucha) or other negotiated medium. Reference correctly.

Suggested philosophers:

The Buddha, Confucius, Socrates, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen, Thomas Aquinas, Julian of Norwich, Nicholas Machiavelli, St Thomas More, Rene Descartes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx, Mahatma Gandhi, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Jean Paul Sartre, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone de Beauvoir, Simone Weil, Thomas Merton, Michel Foucault, Peter Singer, Alain de Botton.

- Find stories of people who have experienced significant hardship (eg through drought, flood, bushfire, the loss of a loved one). How do people ‘get through’ these times? In small groups, invite class members to share and discuss a time of personal suffering. Develop a list of techniques that might help others cope with suffering.
- Research the life of Nick Vujicic (various youtube clips, eg https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJnJ_fTYofQ or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6P2nPI6CTlc>). How has his disability and his experiences of prejudice affected his life and how has he coped? Find stories of other people who have found purpose in life.

Outcome 3. Explore a variety of forms of spirituality as expressions of the human quest to encounter the mystery of God who is both within and beyond oneself.

- In journals, students reflect on questions such as: Where do you find the sacred in your life? What do you want to experience in life? How do you want to grow? How do you want to contribute to the planet?
- Write a report which includes:
 - a description of characteristics of the spirituality of a non-Christian religious tradition (eg Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism)
 - its founder / origins
 - how it developed from the context of its time/culture
 - practical examples used in this spiritual tradition (e.g. rituals, prayers)
 - relevance of this spiritual tradition today (e.g. numbers, growth)
- Write an article for a teenager’s magazine. Possible topics could be:
 - What are the characteristics of an Australian spirituality?
 - Is the S word (Spirituality) a dirty word?
 - A critique of New Age spirituality.
 - If spirituality is the answer, what is the question?
- Students research a range of definitions of the word “spirituality” to include in their journals. They choose one they think is best or write their own definition explaining their choice.

Outcome 4. Describe and analyse various styles of Christian spirituality.

- Research a particular person and respond to the following:
 - What seems to be the main preoccupation/s of this person?
 - What seems to give them energy?
- What seem to be their special abilities and how do they use them?
- What difference does a religious perspective make to a person’s spirituality? Introduce the concept of different spiritualities by inviting guest speakers to talk about a spiritual tradition to which they belong.
- Investigate a particular Christian spiritual tradition or a person who belongs to a spiritual tradition e.g. Augustinian, Benedictine, Franciscan, Ignatian, Theresa of Avila, Dalai Lama, Aboriginal spiritualities: Pastor

Doug Nicholls, Miriam Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann. Represent influences and key features in a creative form e.g poster, PowerPoint presentation.

- Compile a class database on the different Christian spiritualities and people that have been explored. List key aspects and arrive at the common elements of (i) spirituality and (ii) Christian spirituality. What contemporary expressions can people give to spirituality? How does spirituality support people today to search for meaning in their lives?
- Compile a collection of prayers or quotes from key spiritual writers on a particular topic or theme (eg creation, faith, mercy, love). Write an introduction which outlines:
 - our reasons for choosing these particular prayers/quotes
 - different aspects of the topic or theme
 - similarities and differences between the works chosen and your own personal stance
- Assist students to reflect on their own spirituality by modelling a process that allows time for reflection on their inner lives through, for example, prayer experiences, quiet time, listening, painting, drawing, reading, poetry, responding to music, journal writing, and generally being conscious of the sacred within and around. Students could be encouraged to explore these activities as a class and take roles each time. It is envisaged that these activities would be carried out regularly thus allowing an opportunity for nurturing and developing their spiritual dimension.

Outcome 5. Describe and practise various styles of Christian prayer.

- Work through the textbook “Catholic Studies” Chapter 12 with students.
 - How does the textbook define prayer?
 - What are the suggested ways to prepare to pray?
 - List the various prayer forms (individual and communal) described in the chapter. Ask students which appeals to them?
- Look at where, how and why Jesus prayed eg Luke 5:16, 6:12-13, 22:39-42, Mark 6:30-32, Matthew 14:13. Consider locations (eg in the desert, on a mountain), methods (eg alone) and contexts (eg before a major event, to recharge and refocus, out of grief, out of distress). Ask students what can they learn for themselves from Jesus’ approach to prayer.
- Ask students to respond to selected Scripture passages in terms of what they say to them about God and about developing a relationship with God.
- Pray through music. Choose a range of musical forms and styles to play to the class eg. music from indigenous cultures (eg. Gurrumul). Respond to the following questions:
 - What feelings does this music arouse?
 - What memories does this music stir?
 - What questions does this music raise or seek to answer?
 - What seems to be the message?
 - What ideas and values can be identified?
- Students create an audio-visual / multi-media presentation. Examples:
 - Make sense of a psalm of their own choice using visuals and music for a liturgy
 - Make a video which might take the form of interviews / a feature story / on the spot reports on a particular form of prayer
 - Design a page of links to websites on prayer or spirituality for use among junior students.
 - Make a video which presents insights into a particular prayer style.
- With an intention to enhance relationships with self, others, creation and God, students investigate means for bringing others to prayer such as visual images, appropriate music, settings and environments. Students record their reflections in their journals.
- In consultation with their teacher, students work as part of a group to develop and implement a series of four staged experiences which give form to a prayer / liturgy / retreat and which could be run for your class or another, junior class, across several classes. Choose a particular spirituality upon which to base your plan eg. Ignatian, Franciscan.
- Students complete their journals by annotating their memories and experiences of retreat throughout their school life (especially in Year 12). Include comments covering those aspects of the retreats that worked for them and those that did not ~ provide reasons each time.

Liturgical Connections

There are numerous opportunities for prayer, reflection, meditation and discernment throughout this unit which could be set within a liturgy or ritual.

Resources

Community Resources

Parish priest / local clergy
Local retreat centres
Local religious (particularly if they have led retreats for others)
Retreat directors / spiritual directors
Brochures advertising different types of reflection days and retreats.

Teacher Resources

Elliott, P. et al. (2006). *Catholic Studies for Senior Secondary Students*. Melbourne: James Goold House Publications (especially Chapter 12)

Literature

Leunig, M. (1998) *Common Prayer*. Australia Harper Collins
Leunig, M. (1998) *The Prayer Tree*. Australia Harper Collins

Music

Music for meditation
Reflective music
Taize albums
Fr Rob Galea frgministry.com
Geoffrey Gurumul Yunupingu: Gurumul (2008), Rrakala (2011), The Gospel Album (2015), Djarimirri (2018)

Appendices