

# CHOOSE

## Who Are We?

Like most peoples, the people of Israel wondered who we humans are, where we come from, and where we are going.

In the first book of the bible, called Genesis, the people of Israel express their faith that we come from God. The word *Genesis* means *origins*.

At our beginning Genesis pictures God as Spirit or wind, moving over the deep like a mother bird hovering over a nest.

**“In the beginning when God made the heaven and the earth, the earth was formless and empty and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep” (Genesis 1.1-2).**

The word *ruah* in Hebrew means both *spirit* and *wind*. Like wind, the Spirit is invisible, powerful, and free to move anywhere. Genesis pictures the Spirit of God moving like an invisible wind over the deep of chaos, stirring nothingness into being.

Then in the Genesis story God begins to speak. Creator God speaks each day for six days, calling light, sky, sea and dry land, plants, sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, animals, and lastly humans into being. Each day God declares these new creatures good. On the seventh day God rests from all the work of creation.



Ansgar Holmberg

Scientists today tell a creation story that begins with a big bang rather than the Spirit stirring the deep. Our cosmos unfolds over 13.8 billion years rather than six days. Our genes hold the memory of this whole, slow unfolding of life, in which we humans become conscious beings who ask, “Who are we?”

In both the biblical story and the scientific story, we live in a long, evolving history of God’s creative and sustaining love. The sacrament of confirmation seals us with the gift of the holy, creative Spirit of God.

Close your eyes, and feel your pulse beat. Breathe in deeply. Breathe out. Remember a time when you felt glad to live, move, and have being—glad to be alive. Describe it to a partner.



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In the beginning  
God created  
the heavens and  
the earth.  
The earth was  
a formless void,  
and darkness  
covered the face  
of the deep.  
The Spirit of God  
hovered  
over the waters.  
Genesis 1.1-2





# Life Is a Love Plan

The Lord God shaped a human from the earth and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.

Genesis 2.7

At birth each of us breathes, cries, and takes a first cross-eyed stare at the world.

The doctor cuts the umbilical cord, and from that moment we are on our own. No one will be just like us. Each of us is special. Each of us will be free to choose and act, to shape our lives, to go for the gold, to make a difference.

Life is more than an *I* plan. If, as infants, no one surrounds us with love and care, we will die. Parents or someone who chooses us specially must feed us, rock us, change and bathe us, call us by name, and sing us to sleep if we are to flourish. We learn to recognize the faces of those who keep coming to care for us. We smile at their smiles and respond to the name they call us.

As parents, families, friends coax us to creep, crawl, walk, talk, tell stories, laugh, choose, think, we unfold day by day and year by year fully into ourselves. We live because of those who care for us. In our ability to love others, human beings share the Spirit's power to give life. Life is not an *I* plan. It is a *we* plan, a *love* plan.

Each of us is born not only into the love of those who care for us but also

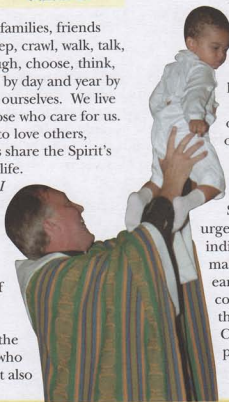
into their faith. When parents ask the Church to baptize a child, they promise to share with this child the faith they share with the Christian community.

Just as families coax us to walk and talk, the Christian community with our parents awakens us to our existence in God. At baptism the community welcomes us as new members and professes its faith in God, the Source of all that is, the Son who becomes one of us, and the Spirit who gives us life in every breath.

At our baptism a priest or deacon calls us by name and baptizes us, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the

Holy Spirit." We become children of God.

As children of God we share the life of Father, Son, and Spirit—the life of three persons in one love. The Spirit is the love between Father and Son. The Spirit acts in us to urge us beyond our individual selves into making community on earth like the community of love that is God. Christian life is a *we* plan, a *love* plan.



Who are the people who have called me forth to

walk? \_\_\_\_\_

talk? \_\_\_\_\_

ride a bike? \_\_\_\_\_

play? \_\_\_\_\_

participate in the life of my parish? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Who gives me my reasons for wanting to belong actively to my parish community?

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What if I imagine my life as six days of creation? What happens on day one, day two...? . . . ?

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_

6 \_\_\_\_\_



# We Can Choose

**God makes us freely out of love and makes us free and able to love in return. We are**

made in God's image. We can remember and think, speak and laugh, choose and plan, befriend and support. But we are also free.

We can forget God. We can harm others and ourselves.

We can live off the air and water of Earth without sustaining it. We can live off the families who love us without returning their love.

Genesis 3 tells a story about how the first man and woman discover they are free. The man and woman live in a garden God has made for them to cultivate.

God tells them not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden.

A sly serpent suggests to the woman that she sample the fruit on the tree. "The rule is to prevent you from becoming like God, knowing good and evil," says the serpent. The fruit looks delicious. Becoming wise like God seems a good thing, so the woman and man eat the fruit.

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired

to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3.6



As a boy William Schultz got an amazing new dog. To welcome him home from school, the dog stood on its hind legs and danced in delight.

Schultz took the dog's paws in his hands and danced with him, but he noticed the dog didn't like to stay upright too long. It hurt its hind legs.

The next day Schultz couldn't resist keeping the dog upright until it yelped. Day after day he kept the dog on its hind legs until finally it lay still and covered when he got home, hoping he would not hurt it.

William Schultz became executive director of Amnesty International, a human rights organization founded to protect prisoners from cruel and harsh punishments in prison. "It is impossible to separate good people from evil people," he says. "The capacity for cruelty is in all of us. Why was I cruel to the dog for no reason?"

Human beings can choose. Each of us is free to be responsible and free to be foolish, free to hurt and free to heal, free to create and free to destroy.

Give your own examples of using your freedom to be cruel to an animal or mean to a person.

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Give your own examples of using your freedom to act with love toward an animal or toward another person.

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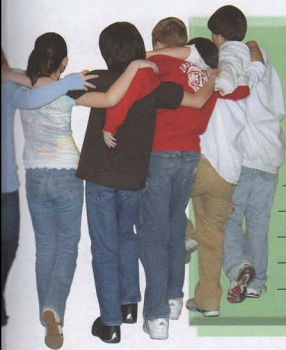
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# Free to harm or to love

## Choices

Describe choices you have made this week in each category. Write these choices on the arrows. Where do the choices take you?


EATING 

EXERCISE 

STUDY 

FRIENDS 

Family 

FUN 



**Why** make fun of a classmate's clothes? Why drop a friend who doesn't dress like the cool kids we want to hang with? Why phone a classmate to make fun of him or her? **We are free to harm one another.**



**Why** talk to a classmate others don't bother with? Why organize a food drive? Why stand by a friend when others make fun of him or her? **We are free to love one another. We have a capacity for compassion, for putting ourselves in others' places.**



**Why** recycle? Why eat simply? Why learn about needs in our world? **We have a capacity to participate in God's work. We have a capacity to give life.**

**I**n confirmation the bishop extends his hands and prays that each Christian receive the gifts of the Spirit. The bishop marks each person on the forehead with holy oil to seal him or her with the Holy Spirit. This seal marks Christians as persons committed to use their freedom to love God, their neighbors, and themselves as Jesus taught.

In the ten commandments God calls the people of Israel to be a covenant community that worships God and respects one another. Jesus teaches both these commandments and his own. Read Jesus' teachings below.

**Love the Lord** your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Mark 12.29-31

**If I, your Lord** and master, have washed your feet, so you ought to wash one another's feet. John 13.14

**Love one another** as I have loved you. John 13.34

**Do unto others** as you would have them do unto you. Matthew 7.12

**What you do for** the least of my brethren, you do for me. Matthew 25.45

**Forgive** seventy times seven. Matthew 18.23

**Love your enemies;** do good to those who hate you. Luke 6.27

Do	Don't
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

What does Jesus teach us about how to live in relationship with one another and with God? Write on the lines verbs that state do's and don'ts.

# SCRIPTURE

We human beings experience many pushes and pulls within ourselves. We have to wrestle with our choices.

We seek what is good, but we can't always see beyond what appears good. We want to act responsibly but often don't.

The bible contains stories that help us understand the pushes and pulls inside us. From our ancestor Jacob we learn that we must wrestle with God and struggle with ourselves to become the persons we want to be.

Jacob is a younger twin with no right to inherit his father's land or receive his blessing. But Jacob is shrewd. He gets his twin, Esau, to sell his birthright for a meal of lentil stew. Later with his mother's help Jacob tricks his nearly blind father into blessing him instead of Esau. Jacob's name means *he supplants, he tricks*.

Jacob goes north to find a wife. He sees a

young woman named Rachel, bringing her father's sheep to a well. To marry her, Jacob works for Rachel's father seven years. But the trickster gets tricked. Rachel's father gives Jacob her older sister Leah to marry and demands that Jacob work seven more years to marry Rachel.

Jacob has twelve sons and a daughter with his wives Leah and Rachel and their serving women, Bilhah and Zilpah.

To support his large family, Jacob tricks his father-in-law. As wages, Jacob asks for the spotted and striped goats and the black sheep. Then he carefully breeds the flocks so his animals multiply and grow strong.

When God urges Jacob in a dream to return to his home in the south with all his flocks, he sets out. His father-in-law chases Jacob and accuses him of stealing his daughters and flocks. Jacob insists he has worked 20 years for all he has. They work out a peaceful covenant.

Jacob must still face his brother. Messengers bring news that Esau is coming with 400 men. Jacob prays and reminds God, "You said, 'Return to your country.' ...Deliver me from the hand of my brother." Jacob sends droves of sheep ahead as

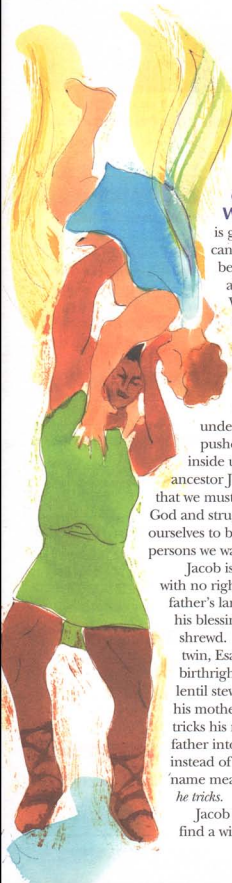
gifts to his brother and has his family cross the river to camp for the night. Then:

## Wrestling with God

Jacob was left alone. A man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (Genesis 32.24-30).

- ♦ Who is Jacob wrestling with?
- ♦ What is the significance of Jacob receiving a new name?
- ♦ What does this story about Jacob tell you about yourself?



# SPIRITUALITY

O God,  
you have  
searched me  
and known me.

You know when I sit  
and when I stand.

Where can I go  
from your spirit?

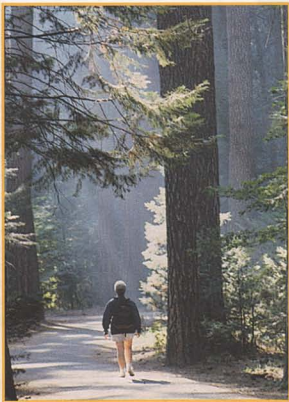
If I take the  
wings of morning  
and settle at the  
farthest reaches

of the sea,  
even there  
your hand  
will lead me,  
and your right  
hand hold me  
fast.

You knit me  
together in my  
mother's womb.

I praise you that  
I am so  
awesomely  
and wonderfully  
made.

Psalm 139



## God Saves and Blesses Us

In our holy history God acts to save and bless people.

God saves Noah from the great flood.

God hears the Hebrew slaves crying out in Egypt to be free and helps them escape on a dry path through the sea. God gathers the defeated and exiled Israelites, scattered like dry bones in a field, and leads them home through the wilderness to be a people again.

Jesus' name means *he saves*. In his ministry Jesus heals the sick and frees people from evil influences. He makes people whole to show God's love for them. He gives himself totally in love for us, even to dying on the cross. Jesus' resurrection shows us his love is stronger than evil or death.



God fills the world with grandeur and blesses humankind with the capacity for awe and praise. In Psalm 8 a poet reflects:

**When I look at the heavens, O God, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? O God, how excellent is your name in all the earth.**

The book of Proverbs in the bible describes God as Wisdom, who is with God from the beginning and makes a home in the world. All creation is Wisdom's table where we can eat our fill and drink wine without cost. Like Wisdom Jesus blesses us with abundant life. Jesus is the living bread that comes down from heaven. He is the choice wine at a wedding feast for all people.

**W**e human beings are awesomely made. We can recognize when God saves and blesses us. The Spirit of God is with us not just when we are good but in every joy, sorrow, doubt, conflict, success, failure, and friendship. Spirituality is the name for exploring our experience of God. Psalm 139 tells us that no matter where we go, God is already there. Like air, the Spirit of God invisibly surrounds us. We live, move, and have our being in the unseen, life-giving embrace of the Spirit of God.

The Spirit is the name we give to the here-and-now presence of God in us and in all that is. Spirituality is learning how the Spirit stirs in us—in our prayers, in our hopes, in our fears, in the peaks and pits of our lives.

◆ **When have you experienced God's presence with you? What is a way God blesses you?**

# SACRAMENTS

## We Share the Faith of a Community

Through him,  
with him,  
in him  
in the unity  
of the Holy Spirit  
all glory and



What photos do you treasure and show often to others? What have you learned about who you are from going to family reunions?

eucharist when we gather, break bread, and share a cup of wine as Jesus asked. Jesus is really present with us in these signs of bread and wine that become his body and blood.

At Mass the community gathers around two tables. At the table of the word, we nourish our memory of God's goodness to us and Jesus' vision for us in the gospels. Around the table of the eucharist, we share the body and blood of Christ. We pray with Jesus in the Eucharistic Prayer and give ourselves to God in love as he did.

Like family reunions, the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, gather Christians together to

remember and celebrate our faith in Jesus Christ, the faith that gives us our identity. In the stories, signs, rituals, and prayers of the sacraments, Jesus continues to act in our lives today.

Young people who are preparing for confirmation have shared the faith of a community since their baptisms. Members of the Christian community have believed for centuries and generations before us and will continue to believe when we doubt and question.

The Catholic community shares an active social life. The community hangs out together most regularly at Sunday

In every Eucharistic Prayer, the celebrant retells and reenacts the story of the night before Jesus died. Jesus blessed and broke bread and gave it to his disciples as the sign of his body which he gave for us. The priest retells and reenacts how Jesus did the same with a cup of wine and gave it to his friends as a sign of his lifeblood poured out for us. When we share the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim our faith in Jesus' self-giving death and life-giving resurrection.

We gather, tell Jesus' story, eat the bread, and drink the wine because Jesus commanded, "Do this to remember me." We do this often in order to recognize and become who we are—the body of Christ in our world.



honor is yours  
almighty Father  
forever and ever.  
Amen.



# SERVICE

**P**entecost is the Church's birthday. The Spirit sets the tongues of Jesus' followers afire with the good news that God has raised Jesus from the dead. They proclaim in many languages that Jesus is Lord. Peter gives a fiery sermon that stirs 3,000 people to change their attitudes, be baptized, and join the company of Jesus' followers (Acts 2.14-42).

All of us who believe in Jesus believe on the word of witnesses like Peter. The story of the Spirit's coming and Peter's first sermon comes from the sequel Luke added to his gospel—the *Acts of the Apostles*.

**A**postles are missionaries, witnesses to all the wonders God worked through Jesus and to the greatest wonder of all—his resurrection from the dead. Peter and 11 others who followed Jesus from the beginning and witnessed his resurrection are the first apostles. Many believe their word and hand it on. Down the centuries the Spirit has set afire the tongues of countless witnesses and missionaries who have brought the good news to us in our time.



## The Spirit Sets Us Afire

**A**fter Jesus was lifted into heaven, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus; Simon, the Zealot party member, and Judas son of James went into Jerusalem to the upstairs room where they were staying. Together they devoted themselves to prayer. There were some women in their company and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his kin.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly from the sky came a noise like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the

whole house where they were sitting. Tongues, as of fire, appeared among them and rested on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign languages, as the Spirit prompted them.

Staying in Jerusalem at the time were devout Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard the sound, they gathered in a large crowd. They were bewildered because each one heard the believers speaking to them in their own language. Amazed and astonished, they asked "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"

Acts 1.12-14; Acts 2.1-8



◆ On whose word do you believe in Jesus?

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◆ How do you show you believe in Jesus?

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# CONFIRMATION

LOVE  
LISTENING  
SINGING  
EXPLAINING

Circle gifts you recognize in yourself. Ask two people in your group what each thinks is your greatest gift.

CHEERING ON  
CHEERING UP  
KINDNESS  
PATIENCE  
DARING  
MAKING MUSIC  
PLANNING  
VISITING  
FRIENDLINESS  
INSIGHT  
UNDERSTANDING  
CREATIVITY  
ENERGY  
STRENGTH  
ENDURANCE  
SPEED  
IMAGINATION  
VISION  
SENSITIVITY  
SELF-CONTROL  
DISCIPLINE  
WORK ETHIC  
HOPE  
CONFIDENCE  
DEPENDABILITY  
CARING  
HEALING  
CHARM  
SPEAKING  
GOOD LOOKS  
CRITICAL THINKING  
LEADERSHIP  
FOLLOWERSHIP  
COMMUNITY BUILDING  
FOLLOW THROUGH  
ANCER  
DISSATISFACTION  
GRATITUDE  
FAITH



If I speak in the tongues of mortals or angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if I have faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2, 7

## What Gifts Do I Bring to the Community?



There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; varieties of services, but the same Lord; varieties of activities, but it is the same God who inspires them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7



◆ How is the Spirit prompting you to use your gifts for the common good?

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◆ What makes love the greatest of the Spirit's gifts?

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