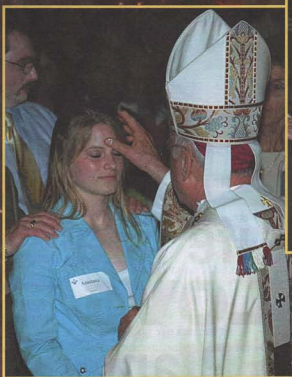


# WHO ARE WE?

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



**I**n the sacrament of Confirmation a bishop seals the Christian with the gift of the Spirit of God, the same Spirit who in the beginning stirs nothingness into life. Like us, the people of ancient Israel wondered: Where do we come from? What are we to become? Who are we?

Genesis, the first book of Israel's sacred scriptures, begins with stories of human origins. The name *Genesis* means *origins*. It begins:

**In the beginning when God made the heavens 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 water.**

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 invisible wind over the deep of chaos, stirring nothingness into being.

## God's Spirit Moves in Creation

**I**n Genesis, the Spirit of God sets creation in motion. Then Creator God speaks each day for six days, calling light, sky, sea and dry land, plants, sun, moon, stars, birds, animals, and lastly humans into being. Each day God declares these new creatures good. On the seventh day God rests.

Scientists today tell a slower creation story that unfolds over 13.8 billion years rather than 6 days. It begins in a trillion-degree fireball, a flaring forth of energy so powerful the universe is still expanding. As the fireball cools, it expands. Particles begin to last and form relationships in



atoms—first hydrogen, then helium. Gravity constellates vast clouds of hydrogen into galaxies, where primal stars implode in supernovas that give birth to new stars like our sun.

The atoms in our bodies have been through these violent transformations. Our genes hold the memory of our evolving from the first bacteria, life becoming always more diverse and more complex. In us, life becomes conscious, spiritual.

In both the biblical and the scientific accounts we live in an evolving history of God's creative and sustaining love. We live, move, and have our being in the 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 be alive. Describe your memory to a partner.**

**At birth each of us breathes, cries, and takes a first cross-eyed stare at the world.** The doctor cuts the umbilical cord. No one will be just like us. Each of us will be free to choose and act, to shape our lives, to go for the gold, to make a difference.

Advertising sells us life as an *I* plan. Each of us is a consumer who deserves a ipod, cell phone, PC with DVD and Internet access, surround sound, and new car to drive in the fast lane.

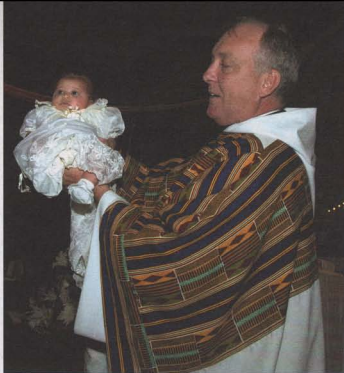
Life is more than an *I* plan. So interwoven are our lives that if, as infants, no one puts his or her arms around us and surrounds us with love and care, we will die. If we are to flourish, parents and caregivers must feed us, rock us, change and bathe us, call us by name.



As we learn to trust these first people in our world, we open ourselves to the whole world outside ourselves. Out of our first relationship, every other relationship unfolds, including our relationship with God.

As parents, families, friends encourage 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. We walk upright because of ancestors long buried.

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.



**In God's own image,  
God created them;  
male and female  
God created them.**

Genesis 1.27

**A**s children of God we share the life of God, 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.

We live Christian life in communion with God and community with one another, sharing the joys and hopes, the fears and sorrows, hunger and poverty of every other human being. Christian life is a *we* plan, a love plan.

- Who are the people who have called you forth to walk, talk, ride a bike, pray, or participate in the life of your parish?
- Who gives you reason to belong actively to your parish community?
- If you imagine your life as six days of creation, what happens on day one, day two, day three...?

## Life Is a LOVE Plan

**E**ach 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 their children the faith they share with the Christian community.

Just as families cheer us on to walk and talk, the Christian community with our parents summons us to respond to God's life-giving love for us. At baptism the community welcomes us as new members and professes its faith in God who creates all that is out of nothing, in God who becomes one of us and loves us wholeheartedly, in God 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 Can CHOOSE

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.

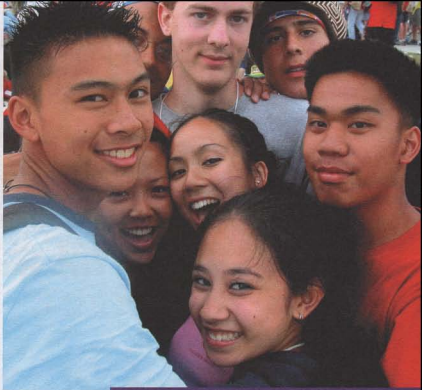
In Genesis 2:4-25 the bible tells a second creation story about how God shapes a human from the mud around a spring and breathes life into the human. The name of our species—*human*—comes from the Latin word for the soil of the earth—*humus*. This second creation story shows us we are both of Earth and of God. We are made to live in communion with God.

God makes us freely out of love. We are made in God's image, free and able to love in return. We can



When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate; she also gave some to the man, who was with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3:6



**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

remember and think, choose and plan, befriend and support. But we can also 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 into being without returning their love. We are free.

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.

As their punishment for breaking God's rule, they must leave the garden. They have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Israel's story expresses the truth that human beings are free. They must keep

learning from experience what gives life and what destroys life.

**E**ach of us is free to be responsible and free to be foolish, free to hurt and free to heal, free to bash and free to create. Freedom is the power to act or not to act, to perform deliberate acts of one's own for which each of us is responsible.

Our freedom makes us moral, able to choose and make judgments about what is good and what is evil, what builds relationships and what destroys them. Each of us is free to participate in building up community among human beings or withhold ourselves and watch life from the bleachers.

● **When is a time you chose to get off the bleachers and onto the playing field?**

● **Give an example of a time you could have acted cruelly or destructively but chose to act in a life-giving way instead.**



# How Do I USE My FREEDOM?

Read the two dilemmas below in small groups; discuss what the characters should do. Choose a course of action and give reasons for your choice.

## Nothing Serious

"Why won't Tony talk to me about last weekend?" Lisa asks Jack as they lean against his car after school. "You're his best friend. Was he with someone else?"

"Not really."

"What do you mean not really?"

"He didn't bring anyone to the party," Jack answers.

"But there were girls there. Right?" Lisa questions. Jack nods.

"I heard this Rachel what's-her-name was sitting on his lap."

"She was sitting on everyone's lap."

"I'm never talking to Tony again. He said I couldn't go to this party because it is all guys and then surprise, girls are there."

"The girls are RT's friends from work. The party was at his house. They go to Lincoln Senior. Nothing serious."

"That's a guy attitude. Nothing serious." Lisa turns, and winds her arms around Jack's neck, and snuggles next to him.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing serious," says Lisa.

How should Jack use his freedom? How should Lisa use hers?



In confirmation the bishop extends his hands and prays that each Christian receive the gift 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.

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 18.22

**LOVE YOUR ENEMIES;** do good to those who hate you. Luke 6.27

Write down five rules you think most young people live by during high school.

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

How Christian are these rules?  
Compare them with Jesus' teaching.

**Nilhil Obstat:** J. Michael Byron. **Imprimatur:** +Harry J. Flynn, Archbishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis, April 10, 2007.  
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## You Can't Stop Me

"You can't tell me I can't go to the shore this weekend with Ben's family," said Molly.

"You are too young to be so seriously involved with a guy," said her mom.

"You were 15 when I was born, so what is too young?"

"I don't want you to be another single mom."

"He loves me."

"People who care about you want what's best for you. I don't want you to have the life I've had. I want you to go to college."

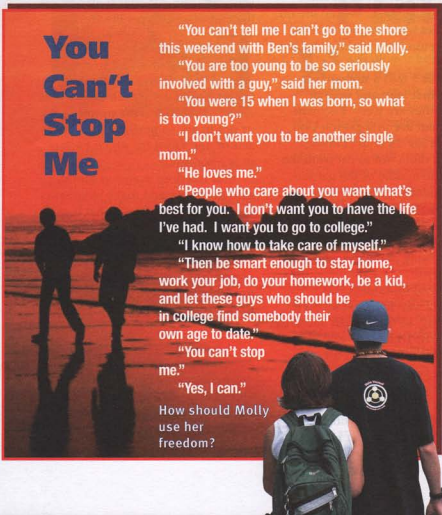
"I know how to take care of myself."

"Then be smart enough to stay home, work your job, do your homework, be a kid, and let these guys who should be in college find somebody their own age to date."

"You can't stop me."

"Yes, I can."

How should Molly use her freedom?



# SCRIPTURE



**In the sacrament of confirmation a bishop seals the Christian with the gift of the Spirit of God.** The Spirit who acts in us is the same Spirit who in the beginning stirs nothingness into life. This is the same Spirit who raises up leaders and speaks through prophets in Israel and who moves Jesus to begin his mission.

With new brainpower in the high school years comes increasing ability to name our experience. We put experiences and goals into words. What we can't put into words we may be unaware is happening. The work of finding words to describe our

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*.

**J**acob 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:

**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).

● **What does this story about Jacob tell you about yourself?**



## How the Spirit Acts

experiences—of naming our feelings, longings, gifts, and dreams—goes on throughout our lives.

The Old and New Testaments hold memories of how the Spirit has acted in the lives of our ancestors in faith. We inherit their stories to help us name the Spirit's activity in 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.

# SPIRITUALITY

**Psalm 139 tells us there is nowhere we can go that God is not. We can run neither to the ends**

of the earth nor deep within ourselves. The whole of creation and each of us ourselves are from God and in God.

The God of our Christian faith is not an old man who worked hard for six days long ago and far away and retired to a condo in sun country. We understand God is three persons in one divine nature. The three persons are always in relationship—the Father begetting the Son, the Son wholly reflecting the Father, the Spirit the living love between them. The Spirit is the name we give to the here and now presence of God in all that lives in us and in our world.

We are awesomely made so that we are able to be in touch with God and can respond to God's Spirit. We can find the Spirit present in every event of our lives—every joy, sorrow, doubt, conflict, success, friendship.

The world we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch reveals God's

creative, life-giving love.

Seeing the enormous size of redwoods moves us to awe. A grandparent takes our arm and we feel closeness. A friend sings a song from his heart about his father's death. These are experiences of Spirit.

## THE SPIRIT STIRS IN US

People we love die or move away and we miss them terribly because they have touched us—held our hands, kissed us goodbye every morning, hugged hello and congratulations. Yearning to be together again is an experience of Spirit. We know the Spirit in the questions our minds can't put to rest—Why evil? Why good? Why bother?

**L**ike air, Spirit invisibly surrounds us and gives us life within. We live, move, and have our being in the unseen, life-giving embrace of the Spirit of God. We experience the Spirit of God in our being alive and in the gift of others being alive.

Yet, we numb our feelings, and pay little attention to our joy, disgust, yearning, or any other feelings and experiences. Spirituality is learning that the Spirit stirs in each of 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?**

**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.**

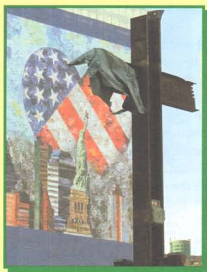
Psalm 139





# SACRAMENTS

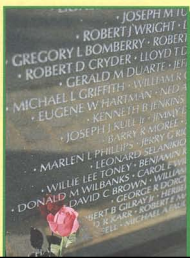
In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Americans created public sacraments of healing. People put up photos and names of loved ones on fences. A cross-shaped, ruined steel girder became a symbol of the suffering of those who lost their lives and of those who lost loved ones.



## How Do We Remember?

Visitors have made the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, a public sacrament of healing for families that lost loved ones in this war that many opposed. The wall names the 58,209 servicemen and women who died in Vietnam. It both honors those who gave their lives and makes visible the cost of war in human lives.

Caretakers find letters to the soldiers—love letters from wives, angry letters from those who miss them, letters telling how the kids are doing, letters from friends who want to talk. Visitors also bring flowers, flags, even medals. Often they take photos and do rubbings that they send to the families of soldiers to let them know they have visited the wall and honored their loved one.



For Catholics, the world is sacramental. All creation reveals God and makes God visible. An ancient redwood, a new baby can awaken us to awe at God's presence in creation. At such moments the tree or the child are signs or sacraments of God's continuous, creative presence within and around us.

Signs point beyond what we see to what we don't see. They open us to the transcendent mystery of God's creative, sustaining love in which we live.

Jesus is the sacrament of God. Jesus makes God visible. We see in Jesus how God acts as one of us. Jesus reveals every person's capacity to love, forgive, share, serve, heal, and reach out to outsiders as he did.

The Church celebrates seven sacraments to continue Jesus' loving, healing actions among us. In the sacraments we remember, celebrate, and express our faith in Jesus' actions. In these actions we find our identity as Christians.

Before he died, Jesus made bread broken and shared and wine poured out the signs of his love for us, the visible sacrament of his total self-giving on the cross and the new life of his resurrection.

The Church remembers Jesus and celebrates eucharist to become what we celebrate—a holy community in communion with God and one another. As a community, the Church is a sign that points to the unity to which the Creator calls us, Jesus leads us, the Holy Spirit inspires us, and human race reaches. The Church celebrates the sacraments to become what we celebrate—a believing, forgiving people, the body of Christ in our world.



Friends create a memorial at the site where a young man was murdered.

Make a public memorial that celebrates Jesus' significance for us today.

# SERVICE

## Symbols & Echoes

What does fire express in our daily lives? What is a warm-up exercise? A fireball? A person who feels all fired up? A person doing a slow burn?



• What does fire symbolize in these Old Testament stories?

Exodus 3.2-6  
Exodus 13.21-22  
1 Kings 18.37-39  
2 Kings 2.9-12

• What does wind symbolize in Genesis 1.2 and John 3.5-8?

• What do tongues symbolize in Genesis 11.1-9 and Acts 2.3-4?

**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 (about 120 persons).

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 1.12-15; Acts 2.1-8



# Wind

# & Fire





# CONFIRMATION

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

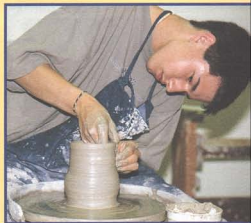
LISTENING  
SINGING  
EXPLAINING  
CHEERING ON  
CHEERING UP  
KINDNESS  
PATIENCE  
DARING  
MAKING MUSIC  
PLANNING  
VISITING  
FRIENDLINESS  
INSIGHT  
UNDERSTANDING  
DIRECTNESS  
CREATIVITY  
ENERGY  
STRENGTH  
CALM  
ENDURANCE  
SPEED  
IMAGINATION  
VISION  
SENSITIVITY  
SELF-CONTROL  
DISCIPLINE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



## 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



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



- How is the Spirit prompting me to use my gifts for the common good?
- What makes love the greatest of the Spirit's gifts?

