

Catholics in practice

This is what we do



We share a common life

As we saw in the previous leaflet, being a Catholic means far more than subscribing to a set of principles. It is a way of life. Our beliefs are not something that are relegated to Sundays or to special occasions of worship. They permeate our lifestyle in many ways, large and small, formally and informally. One might liken it to a family. While a family comes together for special occasions like birthdays and weddings, the bonding that essentially defines family life goes far beyond these isolated occasions. The experience of belonging is expressed through the little, often mundane, practicalities of sharing day-to-day life.

Similarly, the nature of the Catholic community is best seen as an experience of belonging; a sharing of everyday life that arises from our experience of being bonded in the love of God. This sharing is expressed in many ways. In a basic physical sense, it usually means living with or at least in close proximity to other Catholics. This might occur naturally through family relationships, friendship and neighbourhood networks, or by deliberate choice such as people who live in religious communities and other Catholic households. In a wider framework, 'parishes' provide a geographical centre for Catholics to worship and meet together locally. Similarly, a geographical group of parishes forms a 'diocese'. Through these local networks, Catholics 'live together' as a faith community.

But a Catholic way of life demands much more than physical closeness. It calls for a sharing of hearts and minds. Indeed, our very existence as a faith community is inseparable from our belief that, through the indwelling of the Spirit, we embody the living presence of Jesus Christ. In fact, we call ourselves 'the body of Christ'. In Christ there is no division but perfect unity. Thus in

Approaching the Topic

'So what do you do...?' is a phrase you often hear when strangers meet each other for the first time. A fair enough question. After all, while hearing that someone teaches, works for the local council, or rears children doesn't tell us the whole story about a person, it does give us some kind of glimpse into his/her interests, background and lifestyle. Authentic beliefs always seek translation into action. In this leaflet, we examine the 'doing' side of being Catholic. We will sketch a broad picture of the Catholic lifestyle. As we proceed, you may like to think about how these elements of Catholic life resonates with or differs from your own approach to life.



everyday life, we strive to be unified in lots of little practical ways:

- Praying together;
- Encouraging each other in faith;
- Caring for each others' material needs;
- Socialising and celebrating together;
- Bearing with one another in times of struggle and conflict;
- Resolving our differences with love and patience;
- Sharing our gifts, skills and possessions
- Cooperating together in Church initiatives.

In a tennis club, people come together because each member is interested in tennis. One might easily draw the conclusion that the Church consists of people who come together because they each have a belief in Jesus. While this is true, it is a limited view of the Catholic Church, in the same way that one might define a family as a collection of individuals who believe in family values. It's not just the belief that makes a family, but the bond. For

Catholics, the communal dimension of faith permeates their whole approach to God. Our union is far more than an affiliation of likeminded individuals. Our relationship with one another is not incidental but **essential** to our experience of the risen Christ. As Catholics, we believe that we cannot fully enter a relationship with Jesus without entering into a relationship with his body, the community who profess to share in his life.

The Christian tradition of addressing one another as 'brothers and sisters' is therefore a key to understanding the Catholic faith. This phrase is not a fancy way of saying 'ladies and gentlemen'! It implies a relationship somewhat akin to the bonding that exists among those related by blood.

Indeed, this is why you will often find a 'non-practicing' Catholic still identifying closely with the Catholic Church and vice versa. While the Catholic Church calls all its baptized members to actively participate, it also feels a connection with those who do not. A Catholic who is 'distanced' from the Church is still regarded to be part of our community in a similar way that an estranged relative is still part of the family.

We worship and celebrate together

Every family has special rituals and festive occasions that mark the various landmarks and rites of passage through life. So, too, does the Catholic community. An obvious

The things we do...together!

Tuesday nights

Each Tuesday night, I meet with a group of Catholic friends to talk about the joys and the hassles of our week, and to pray together. We have been meeting now for five years and I can see how much I have grown as a person as a result. My little Tuesday night community is like a family to me. They support me and challenge me on my journey through life. (Jo)

Mother Superior

Grace before meals has always been a family ritual for us. It's only a little thing, but I believe it helps to keep us focused on God. It also has its amusing side. The baby of the family is a four-year-old who currently insists on praying for every person, plant and animal under the sun before we are allowed to start eating. We call her our 'mother superior'. (Carol)

Life moments with a touch of prayer

I have been to many book launches during my time, but I have only ever been to one 'book blessing'. Sure enough the author was a Catholic and the book was about Catholics! (A publisher)

I live with a bunch of uni students—most of them Catholics. At our house-warming party, we decided to throw in a home blessing as well. It was all very simple and low key, but that moment of focusing on God's presence in our house added something unique to the night. (Gen)

The Scripture Story

Here is one scriptural account of life in the early Church.

'They were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, the common life of sharing, the breaking of bread and the prayers. A holy fear came upon all the people for many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. Now all the believers lived together and shared all their belongings. They would sell their property and all they had, and distribute the proceeds to others according to their need. Each day they met together in the Temple area; they broke bread in their homes, they shared their food with great joy and simplicity of heart; they praised God and won the people's favour. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.' (Acts 2.42-27)



one is Sunday Mass. This is held each week to celebrate the day of Christ's resurrection. One could liken it in some ways to a family meal. It is a regular source of nourishment for our life together. It is also a special sign of our unity as the body of Christ. (see leaflet 10 on the Sunday Mass).

Catholics have many other rituals for celebrating life and commemorating events connected with birth, death, marriage, forgiveness and healing. Some of these rituals—called 'sacramental' celebrations—are, like the Sunday Mass, given a special significance for reasons which we will explore elsewhere in this programme. You may even have been to one, such as a Catholic wedding or baptism.

However, all of the Church's formal gatherings of worship have to be seen in context of or day-to-day life of prayer and celebration as a community. Many Catholic households, for instance, will meet for a regular time of daily prayer: family prayer, grace before meals, neighbourhood prayer groups, simple household rituals and blessings. Indeed, since the basic arena where we meet God is in our lives in everyday human experience, Catholics are encouraged to approach all their life activities with a sense of prayer and an awareness of their identity as a people of faith. Prayer illuminates our relationship with one another within a much bigger context: our relationship with God. So, whether we are gathering for social reasons, over work matters

or for overtly religious activities, Catholics are called always to gather 'in the name of the Lord'.

We reach out to others

A healthy family is one that reaches out beyond itself, to its neighbours and friends. Such is the nature of love that it always extends out towards others. Similarly, the life of mutual support that exists between members of the Catholic community must naturally extend to those in the wider human community.

This can happen on a personal level wherever Catholics exhibit hospitality and friendship to their non-Catholic friends. It also happens in a more structured way through Catholic organisations which, within the limits of their resources, extend their services to include the general population. Catholic hospitals, schools, counselling services, AIDS clinics, missionary and relief agencies, and organisations that care for the poor and homeless, such as St Vincent de Paul, continue to attest to this spirit of service which has undoubtedly left its mark on human history.

As well as a compassionate face, there is a confrontative edge to the way the Catholic Church reaches out to wider society. Wherever people are found to be oppressed by circumstances such as war, unjust social conditions or political persecution, the Church accepts a

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Parish practicalities

Some guys in the parish got together and organised a support group for unemployed parishioners who are suffering the effects of the recession. While it doesn't guarantee jobs, it is a marvellous way to restore self-esteem, ease financial strain and keep your hopes and motivation high. (Larry)

The Catholic feeling' runs deep

I have never been one to get excited about celebrities, so when the Pope came to Australia in 1986 I felt rather detached from the whole event. Attending the papal youth rally, however, I was surprised to feel a stirring of excitement within my heart and a curious sense of solidarity with the thousands of enthusiastic Catholics around me. To see the sports ground alive with young people rejoicing in the presence of a man who stood for their deeper beliefs was a unique experience for me. I realised anew just how much I belonged with these people, and that my faith was much more a part of me than I had ever imagined. (Pete)

A genuine concern

Once a month, our family helps out at a soup kitchen run by the local church. It breaks my heart to see some of the young men whose eyes are full of pain and despair. I wonder whose sons they are. I imagine what they could be doing with life under different circumstances. While our efforts are but a small drop of relief in the ocean of human suffering, they have the added effect of challenging us to bring a spirit of simplicity and generosity to our own lifestyle. (Andrea)

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Anyone for breakfast?

Growing up in a family that was deeply involved in a Catholic youth movement, our home became a constant centre of hospitality. To find a new person at the breakfast table in the morning was rarely a surprise! Despite the occasions when I wished for some privacy, overall I think it gave me a great appreciation of the Church as a community. To realise that strangers could walk into our house and feel at home said a lot for the bond of faith we shared. (Cam)

Was it something I said?

At work, I have been jokingly dubbed the 'religious' one, which surprises me because religion rarely comes up as a topic of conversation in the office. I think it has something to do with the strong stand I take on certain ethical issues that arise at times as part of our work agenda. I think the Brothers who taught me as a kid did a pretty good job of instilling in me the value of integrity and the guts it takes to stick to your principles. (Frank)

Normal but different

Jon is the only non-Catholic on our touch football team, which is made up mostly of St Patrick's ex-students. One day, some of us were relaxing at the pub after a game, and Jon commented to me that he didn't realise Catholics were so 'normal' until he started playing with us. A spirited discussion followed. Some people think that Catholicism is only about doing 'holy' things at set times. But whether you're at the pub or on the footy field, being Catholic is about living every moment to the fullest. (Pat)

responsibility to work for peace and justice. Explicitly or implicitly, a Christian influence is often at work in broader movements of social and political change.

We spread the Good News

A consistent theme that runs through all Catholic activity is the desire to pass on the message that sustains us: that is, in Jesus Christ, God liberates us and offers us a new vision for our lives; a vision that begins now on earth, but which will be fulfilled in an eternal life to come. There are countless ways in which Catholics share this Good News. The most fundamental way, which underpins every other activity, is simply by living the message we profess; by allowing our witness as a community to speak for itself. This witness occurs in many ways in our everyday relationships; for instance: in the values we live by in the workplace, in our hospitality to our neighbours, in sharing our beliefs with our friends in conversation.

Many Catholics are also involved in more structured methods that explore and speak this Good News message: parish programmes, schools, bible and theology institutes, Church publications, media communications and other opportunities for public statements which express the Catholic outlook on life.



Your Story

Think

What do you DO? During the coming week, observe the habits and rituals that form a regular pattern in your life. Recall, too, the special annual events that occur in your life. What does your lifestyle say about the values and people that are important to you?

Think of some things that Catholics do which 'make sense' to you. Note too Catholic behaviour which puzzles you. Make an effort this week to ask a Catholic friend some of your questions. Alternatively, you could ring the Catholic Adult Education Centre in your locality or contact us at the Catholic Enquiry Centre.

A Prayer

God of all creation, help me to use my time and talents wisely, thankfully and lovingly, for this world and all that is in it is your gift. Amen.

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