

Christian Formation Course



Handbook

2020

*All those who,
through Baptism,
have been initiated into the community of the Church
have the right and duty
to participate in its life and mission
as a response to the Spirit in their lives.*

[See Diocesan Pastoral Plan, 1.00: Our Mission as Church] cf. LG #31

CONTACT DETAILS

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FOREWORD

I was lucky enough to grow up in a family where questioning and dinner table debate were perfectly acceptable, even on matters of religion. I was doubly fortunate that I was educated, too, by priests who really knew their stuff and could explain their faith compellingly. The Catholic Church, as far as I knew, welcomed intelligence, probing and the desire to understand.

When I came to study, I was delighted to find that the great Fathers of the Church had shared my view. The mighty Augustine himself, though he wrote a lot about 'mysteries', never saw a divine mystery as something you couldn't make sense of. He explained 'mystery' as something you could go on thinking about forever without exhausting its meaning, something that would make more and more sense the more deeply you examined it. My study of Theology, along with Biblical Studies and Church History, was liberating, exciting and just darn fascinating. I think that most people find it so.

I would like as many Catholics as possible to share in the enrichment that comes from getting to understand more fully what we believe and why. Why did Jesus suffer? How has our Mass been understood down the centuries? Where do we stand on evolution? Do our sexual ethics make any sense in the modern world? Why are the fundamentalists wrong to take all of the Bible literally? People ask these things, and the answer is not, 'It's a mystery'. Neither is the answer, 'Well, I think....' Opinions in religion are only as good as the real knowledge and understanding that underpins them. Study corrects uninformed opinions as well as opening up minds to deeper understanding. Both are valuable services to the believer who wants to be able to believe in believing.

The *Christian Formation Course* has been a very great contributor to Catholic life in this diocese. It is based on adult learning methods that involve the participants in on-going dialogue and engagement with the material and the staff. It is my hope that many, many people will take this course. I further hope that it will be just the beginning of their living more informed and engaged Christ lives.



Most Reverend William Wright
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle



27 September 2016

DIOCESAN CONTEXT

Vision

We would see Jesus (Jn 12:21)
Becoming fully alive in Christ Jesus. (cf. Jn 10:10)

Mission

To allow participants to explore their life's journey and understandings about Jesus through a program of education within the Catholic Tradition, inspiring them to live more deliberately as his disciples.

Values

Life is sacred

- each voice is a significant voice;
- God is in a loving relationship with each person;
- the Spirit is alive in each person for the good of all.

Faith grows

- human beings ache for God and seek God
- faith is a trusting journey into mystery
- doubt and questioning are vital for growth in faith
- human authenticity is a head-heart-hand reality
- good news is liberating; knowledge is freedom
- human experience, reflected upon, is revelatory of God

Sacred tradition is there to be claimed

- tradition is a living ongoing partnership between the Spirit of God and the community of faith.

Education is a holy enterprise

- all are teachers and all are learners
- adults come to the course richly-resourced in human experience
- adults have a right to know about and claim their faith heritage
- presenters love what they share and share what they love
- neither distance, lack of money or formal education are barriers to inclusion in the course.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The *Christian Formation Course* (CFC) is a face-to-face learning experience that allows participants to explore their life's journey and their faith within the Catholic Tradition. This one-year course introduces participants to scripture, theology, church history, sacramental life and liturgy.

- The Course runs across twelve (12) months and comprises eight (8) units
- All who complete the Course are awarded a diocesan **Certificate in Christian Formation**

COURSE OUTCOMES

By engaging in the course it is hoped participants will:

- explore their relationship with Jesus and feel the pull of discipleship
- grow in their capacity to reflect on life's journey in the light of Christian faith
- become more confident in articulating their faith
- realise that Christian faith is nurtured in community
- experience together the power of God's revelation in the sources of Christian Tradition
- engage in forms of learning which affirm and deepen their baptismal call
- be affirmed in their gifts for participating in the life of the faith community
- grow in awareness of what it means to be a responsive member of the faith community

COURSE PRACTICALITIES

1. COURSE STRUCTURE

The *Christian Formation Course* (CFC) has a multifaceted structure, engaging a variety of formation opportunities across a twelve month period.

- Eight (8) units over four (4) school terms
- TWO (2) units per school term
- Five (5) consecutive weekly sessions per unit

Each session is of 3 hours' duration.

2. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Prerequisites

No prerequisite formation or qualification is required for this course.

Attendance

The CFC is a face-to-face mode of learning.

With only 5 sessions per unit, consistent attendance is necessary.

Formal attendance records are maintained for the award of diocesan CFC certificate. Participants may miss only one session per unit for the receiving of a certificate.

Absences

As far as possible, absences need to be communicated in advance, either to the unit presenter or the Course Coordinator.

Participants wishing to receive a certificate will need to discuss with the presenter the task required in lieu of attendance.

Participation

The CFC invites a dual commitment from participants: to their individual learning and to the learning project of the group. Significant learning takes place within the group through exploring personal experience within the context of course work.

Learning activities

Course work

Participants are required to contribute to all activities including prayer; listening; reading; reflecting; sharing experiences, insights and questions; and attending to input.

Reading

Personal reading between sessions is an important part of the learning process. Pertinent readings are provided for each unit.

Participants are also encouraged to use supplementary texts and library resources. Ideally, participants would devote 3-5 hours per week to reading.

Assigned tasks

Participants will be required to demonstrate what they have learned by completing the assigned task/s for each unit.

Assignments will reflect:

- an understanding of the unit content
- an effort to critique the material provided
- an appreciation of the unit's significance for Christian living
- a willingness to integrate new learnings into life

Should an assignment not meet the requirements of the unit, the participant will be invited to discuss it with the presenter.

3. SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

A final day of *Retreat and Review* will conclude the Course.

Participants are encouraged to take further opportunities throughout the year to foster spiritual and contemplative being (eg retreats, spiritual direction).

4. CERTIFICATION

Participants who complete eight (8) units and satisfy requirements will receive a diocesan ***Certificate in Christian Formation*** and a transcript of units studied.

At the end of each unit the presenter will notify any participants who have not met attendance and/or assignment requirements.

As the course progresses, those who are unable to complete all the requirements, or who choose not to complete the full requirements, need to consult with the Course Coordinator. They will receive a ***Statement of Participation***.

5. LIBRARY RESOURCES

Library and resource facilities are currently under review.

Dilley Library

Is an excellent theological library resource. Contact the course administration for information on the library collection and access.

Reference texts

A wide range of relevant texts and publications will be available for reading and borrowing throughout the course and will be accessible from course venue.

6. CHRISTIAN FORMATION COURSE STAFF

Course Coordinator: Maureen Salmon rsj

Presenters:

Teresa Brierley
Steve Britt
Tracey Edstein
Patricia Egan rsj
Louise Gannon rsj

Bernadette Gibson
Gerard Mowbray
Michael O'Connor
Jennifer Rumbel
Benita Tait

Administration: Jenny Harris

Whilst the **Course Coordinator** will be responsible for the overall co-ordination of the program, the presenters share the responsibility for implementing it.

Each **Presenter** will be responsible for the implementation of his/her unit and will be the first reference point for the participants in his/her classes. Issues of concern within a unit should be raised with the Presenter.

The Course Coordinator will become involved in issues only if required.

7. ENROLMENT PROCEDURE

An enrolment form is available from Course Administration via *Contact Details* on page 2 of this handbook.

A letter of acceptance will be issued upon finalisation of enrolment.

8. FEES

2020 : \$480.00 course fee (\$60.00 per unit)

Payment flexibility

- payable in full of \$480
- by term at \$120/term
- by unit at \$60/unit
- weekly at \$15 per session

Payment methods

- Online (preferred) - secure card payment at <https://www.mn.catholic.org.au/about/parish-payments/> (Select 'Diocesan payment'; Skip 'Select Your Parish'; Payment Note 'CFC2020')
- Cheque to 'Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle'
- Cash to Catholic Development Fund, Mon to Fri, 9am - 4:30pm

The diocese believes that everyone should have the opportunity for faith formation, therefore, fees are negotiable in the event of financial difficulty. Participants can contact Course Administration for fee assistance.

9. VENUES AND DATES

Three-hour unit sessions are held weekly during school terms at a venue, date and time to be determined.

At conclusion of the course a day of Retreat and Review will be held.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Certificate in Christian Formation

Unit 1: Living with God: *Journey of Faith*

Unit 2: Speaking of God: *Revelation of God*

Unit 3: Hearing the Word of God: *Revelation in the Old Testament*

Unit 3: Hearing the Word of God: *Revelation in the New Testament*

Unit 5: The Church from Age to Age: *Messenger of Revelation*

Unit 6: Living the Word of God: *People of God*

Unit 7: Sacramental Life of the Church: *Signs and symbols of Revelation*

Unit 8: Liturgical Life of the Church: *Celebrating Revelation*

COURSE OUTLINE

UNIT 1 LIVING WITH GOD: JOURNEY OF FAITH

Duration: Five sessions [15 hours]

Rationale: God is with us addressing us in our lives. This unit focuses on the theoretical and practical issues of ourselves as communicating persons on the journey of faith; exploring the self, the other, and the process itself

Outcomes: It is hoped that participants will have:

- a sound grasp of the process of communication
- become aware of themselves as communicating persons and the factors which contribute to their own effective communication
- have practised skills for effective communication
- skills and strategies for dealing with blocks in communication
- become more self-reflective in all forms of communication
- have had opportunities to open to God-within who comes to us disguised as our life
- a sense of where they are on their faith journey

Content: This course will focus on:

1. Human relating and basic communication;
2. Significant life experiences, both personal and societal; Reflection on such experiences in the light of faith
3. Participants' experience of encountering God in life
4. Participants making sense of their own faith journey (stages of development – emerging from their experience)

UNIT 2 SPEAKING OF GOD: REVELATION OF GOD

Duration: Five sessions [15 hours]

Rationale: This unit stands firmly on *Dei Verbum*, Vatican 11's Constitution on Divine Revelation and on an awareness that Christian faith is profoundly respectful of the revelation of God through human experience which is most manifest in Jesus, the Christ.

Outcomes: It is hoped that participants will be:

- affirming of God's self-revelation through human experience
- aware that reflection on human living in the light of faith undergirds the Christian belief in God's word in both Scripture and Tradition
- responsive to God's self-revelation in their lives

- Content:** This course will cover the following content:
1. The essence of revelation: God reveals God's self in the created world, and by the natural light of human reason; Faith as human response to revelation
 2. The Word of God revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and in the living tradition of the Church
 3. Sacred Scripture: Inspiration and Interpretation
 4. Catholic understanding of revelation viz- à-viz Fundamentalism

UNIT 3 HEARING THE WORD OF GOD: REVELATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Duration: Five sessions [15 hours]

Rationale: This unit is a general introduction to reading Scripture in the light of *Dei Verbum* and the Church's Tradition. It approaches the Hebrew Scriptures as the story of the Hebrews' relationship with the God who claimed them as God's own people; God's word in dialogue with human experience; a story lived and celebrated before ever it was written down; a story born of a specific time and culture with implications for life now. It is the story that we as Christians have made our own and brought to completion in Jesus of Nazareth.

Outcomes: It is hoped that the unit will nurture in the participants:

- an awareness of biblical origins, culture and literary forms
- a desire to read scripture in the spirit of *Dei Verbum*
- a dynamic relationship with God – gradually revealed in the Hebrew scriptures
- an appreciation of the Hebrew Scriptures as foundational to Christian prayer

Content: This course will cover the following content:

1. The nature of God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures
2. The cycle of biblical themes: creation, call, covenant, exodus, exile
3. The call of the prophet
4. Biblical prayer

UNIT 4 HEARING THE WORD OF GOD: REVELATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Duration: Five sessions [15 hours]

Rationale: This unit offers an overview of the Christian Scriptures in the light of *Dei Verbum*. Although written for the early church communities as they pondered the ongoing significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, they are

also 'our' story foundational for our contemporary journey in faith.

Outcomes: It is hoped that the unit will nurture in the participants:

- an informed approach to reading the scriptures – their context and purpose
- an awareness of the continuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith
- a deeper desire to engage in God's coming reign
- a helpful interweaving of scripture, prayer and daily living

Content: This course will cover the following content:

1. The context, content, scope and purpose of the New Testament
2. Encountering Christ: through the lens of one gospel
3. Paul's relationship with his faith communities
4. Praying and living the scriptures: helpful practices and guides

UNIT 5 - THE CHURCH FROM AGE TO AGE: MESSENGER OF REVELATION

Duration: Five Sessions [15 hours]

Rationale: This unit seeks to further the process of personal and group reflection on life in the light of the gospel and Christian tradition by focusing on the Church's Story from the earliest times until the present day. The personal story of participants is the background against which the larger story is viewed with the intention of discovering the continuing relevance of Christian faith in a changing world.

Outcomes: By the end of the Unit it is hoped that participants will have:

- a basic knowledge of the story of the Church
- an understanding of some key events and themes
- an appreciation of the changing nature and developing nature of the Church
- an ability to assess critically past and current events in the life of the Church
- an empathy with the Church as it continues in its struggle to be faithful to the intentions of Jesus and the praxis of the early Church

Content: The Church from Age to Age:

1. The Beginning: Finding an identity; The Imperial Church :Pomp and Power
2. Through the Dark Ages to the Age of Faith; Middle Ages : Monasticism and Mysticism
3. Reformation and beyond: New beginnings and old prejudices

4. The Modern Age: Infallibility and Infamy; Saints and Sinners

UNIT 6 LIVING THE WORD OF GOD: *PEOPLE OF GOD*

Duration: Five sessions [15 hours]

Rationale: This unit seeks to develop the vision of the Church as presented in the documents of Vatican II: the Church as *Communio* presented in *Lumen Gentium*, engaged in dialogue with the post-modern world, deeply rooted in Tradition and reaching out in mission to the world

Outcomes: It is hoped that by the end of the unit participants will:

- be conversant with the vision of the Church in “Lumen Gentium”
- be able to articulate their understanding of the Church’s Mission
- have clarified their understanding of the role and nature of the structures of the Church
- have developed an understanding of the local Church and its intercommunion with the universal Church
- have developed an appreciation of the priesthood of all the faithful

Content: This course will cover the following content:

1. Context of the Contemporary Church – the centrality of Vatican II; Mission of the Church
2. Church as Organisation ; Hierarchical structure
3. Role of the Laity: their gifts and ministries
4. The local Church of Maitland Newcastle

UNIT 7 SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH: *SIGNS AND SYMBOLS OF REVELATION*

Duration: Five sessions [15 hours]

Rationale: The notion of sacrament is core to the identity of the Catholic Church. This unit explores a wide understanding of sacramentality including consideration of Jesus and Church as sacrament — the foundation a rich appreciation of the sacramental life of the Church.

Outcomes: By the conclusion of this unit participants will have had an opportunity to:

- deepen their relationship with the God of Jesus Christ
- reflect on and deepen their understanding of sacrament through consideration of historical developments and current theology
- appreciate the centrality of sacrament to Catholic identity and spirituality
- become familiar with sacramental rites
- deepen their appreciation of the use of symbols in prayer and liturgy
- reflect theologically on lived experiences of Sacraments

- apply renewed understandings to practice in parish life

Content: This course will cover the following content:

1. The sacramental, revelatory nature of human life
2. Foundations for Sacramental theology in the Paschal Mystery: Jesus Christ's life, death, resurrection and sending of the Spirit
3. Sacraments within the liturgical life of Sacred Tradition
4. Key understandings regarding the sacramental nature of liturgy

UNIT 8 **LITURGICAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH: CELEBRATING REVELATION**

Duration: Five sessions [15 hours]

Rationale: Eucharist stands at the centre of the Church's liturgical life and is the source and summit of Christian life. (CSL a. 5, LG a. 11) This unit will focus on the structure of the celebration of eucharist as the lens through which to explore our understanding of Catholic liturgy and its place in the life and mission of the Church. In many ways this unit pulls together all that has been covered in the *Christian Formation Course*.

Outcomes: By the end of this unit participants will have had an opportunity to:

- deepen their relationship with the God of Jesus Christ
- pray and work with some the Eucharistic texts
- develop their understanding of the structure and elements of the Mass as the model of all Catholic liturgy
- consider the meaning and use of key symbols and rituals in the celebration of eucharist
- develop your knowledge and understanding of parts of the Missal and its General Instruction
- consider the nature and role of liturgy within the spiritual life and the life and mission of the Catholic Church
- apply their theological understanding to practical liturgical issues/questions
- appreciate the limitations of what has been explored and the consequent need to keep developing their understanding

Content: This course will cover the following content:

1. The Introductory Rite of Mass
2. The Liturgy of the Word
3. The Liturgy of the Eucharist
4. The Concluding Rite