

Draft Only

This information is currently in draft form as it is subject to further consultation with representatives of religious groups.

Christianity

Teacher's notes and background information

A Christian is a person who believes in and follows Jesus Christ. The Christian Bible is the major source of knowledge about God. It is made up of two parts, the Old Testament, (similar to the Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament. In the Old Testament God reveals himself in the creation of the world and his relationships with people, especially the Hebrew people, and the New Testament is mainly about Jesus, his followers and the early church.

Christians believe God's love for humanity is so great that he sent his only son Jesus Christ to take the consequence for the wrongdoing (sins) of all people. By sacrificing his life on a cross, Jesus provided an opportunity for individuals to have sins forgiven and to enter into a relationship with God. This new relationship is established by being truly sorry for sin and by believing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians look forward to life after death based on this new relationship with God. They follow the example of Christ's relationship with God the Father and show their thankfulness for what Jesus has done by trying to live as God wants them to and with the help of his spirit (the Holy Spirit).

Christianity is one of the largest of the world religions and the fastest growing. It is a rich and diverse faith that is found in all parts of the world. Explorers and missionaries spread Christianity to all parts of the world particularly in the last thousand years. Missionary work continues to be a feature of Christianity today often coupled with humanitarian aid.

Christianity is often seen as a 'living faith' that builds upon 2000 years of tradition. The earliest members of the Christian faith were Jews, as was Jesus himself. Christian practices have continued to diversify in the many different countries and communities around the world with regional and local variations incorporated into a variety of different denominations.

Most Christians are part of a Christian community (church) and attend church services. These services can have many different forms depending on the denomination and culture. Church services are usually held on a Sunday. A church service may contain prayers, worship (singing), Bible readings, a sermon (talk) and communion (remembering Christ's life, death and resurrection; through sharing bread and wine).

Lent, Easter and Christmas are times of special significance to Christians. Lent is a period of preparation for Easter. Easter is the time of year when Christians remember that Jesus died for them and was resurrected from the dead. At Christmas Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and what this means to their faith.

With only 25% of Australians attending church regularly Australia can be considered a post-Christian society with about 70% of the population nominating a Christian denomination.¹ Of the other 30% only about 5% nominate another religion, of the remaining 25% no indication of religious beliefs were recorded in the 2001 ABS census.

The early white settlers in Australia were influenced by Christian principles and practices that underpinned British society at the time. This influence was extended in the colonies by significant community and religious leaders such as John West, John Bebe Polding, Rev Richard and Mary Johnson, Samuel Marsden, John Dunmore Lang, Mary McKillop among many. Many of these people provided essential services to the community such as schools, health care and social services including caring for orphans, the poor and the aged. These practical applications of Christian beliefs influenced all levels of government and the judiciary, particularly the Christian belief that all people are equal before God.

Resources

- Belief in Action*, DET 2002, *Places of worship* page 74
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Going by the book: An overview of holy books* page 80
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Symbols of religions* page 84
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Fairway to Life: Aaron Baddeley* page 18
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Flying doctors and outback nurses* page 22
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *No more convicts: John West* page 24
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *John Bebe Polding: Education and the Catholic church* page 28
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Burnside: a new home* page 34
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *The Reverend Richard and Mary Johnson* page 36
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Thank God for the Salvos* page 38
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Women's and immigrant's rights: Caroline Chisholm* page 46
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Crime, punishment and redemption: Samuel Marsden* page 48
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *John Dunmore Lang: committed social reformer* page 52
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Amazing Grace: John Newton* page 60
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Christmas: diverse celebrations* page 62
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Serving with integrity: Honest Jim McGowen* page 64
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Big steps toward a better society: William Ullathorne* page 66
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Exploring by faith: John McDougall Stuart* page 72
Belief in Action, DET 2002, *Candidate for sainthood: Mary McKillop* page 76

¹ calculated from ABS data 2001 B10 Religious affiliation by sex