

Religious Education

Philosophy and Curriculum Framework
Users Guide





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Introduction

This user's guide is intended to act as a useful addition to the 2011 Anglican Schools Religious Education Philosophy and Curriculum Framework. Some elements are revisions to that document, such as the naming and adjustment of core strands. Other elements include the addition of a clear set of aims and outcomes for religious education and a curriculum design process. In addition there are new sections outlining important aspects of a distinctly Anglican Religious Education. These new sections will provide some guidance in the area of policy for teachers of religious education in Anglican Schools. Hopefully this will make it easier for educators to create and develop school programs, along with individual units and lessons.

The document is intended to act as a bridge to the release of a shared syllabus for Anglican Schools in the Diocese of Brisbane in mid-2016. It reflects the thinking and direction of the Anglican Schools Religious Education Development Committee and will be useful for those creating units between now and 2017 in shaping their work to the future syllabus.

Critical Ideas for Anglican Religious Education

Religious Education and Faith Formation

The Vision Statement for Anglican Schools in the Diocese of Brisbane clearly endorses the proposition that our schools are faith communities and that the Religious Education program is a dimension of that faith experience.

The Framework ***“assumes that each school’s Religious Education program is clearly related to its intentional faith formation. Quite simply, it is assumed that the school’s Religious Education program will be congruent with and supportive of the Anglican Ethos of the school.”***

Anglican religious educator and practical theologian John Westerhoff, talking about faith formation, reminds us that formation “implies ‘shaping’ and refers to intentional, relational, experiential activities within the life of a story formed faith community”(Westerhoff, 1994, p. 63). When thinking about this description we might ask the question: Can religious education or Christian education be equated with faith formation in an Anglican School? The answer is neither simply ‘yes’ nor ‘no’. By itself religious education is not faith formation, but set in the context of a faith community it contributes to the faith formation of the young person.

In Anglican Schools, religious education classes are considered to be a crucial component of a student’s Christian formation. This is because the content of these classes is not presented neutrally, but in a way that presents the Christian faith as positive, beneficial and privileged; however this is complimented by an approach that accepts a diversity of opinion and allows students the right to choose their own views. In short, Religious Education contributes to faith formation because it is impassioned, but not coercive.

What does this mean for Religious Education teachers?

Religious Education Contributes to Faith Formation

For religious education to contribute to faith formation in an Anglican School the following elements are essential.

- Those who teach should have a positive attitude towards the Christian faith and present its worldview in a positive and beneficial light, while being honest and open about the negative aspects of our religious history.
- The curriculum should not treat the Christian faith in a neutral manner or place it on an equal footing with other religions, but present it positively and accord it the most significant allocation of time and attention.
- Students should be encouraged to reflect on how the Christian faith can inform their exploration of ultimate questions and contribute positively to their life.
- At all times students should be treated with the utmost respect and given freedom to express their opinions, even when these may be in conflict with the Christian faith.
- The classroom should have an air of open enquiry. Students should be encouraged to think, reflect and challenge. Teachers should not feel the need to combatively defend the Christian faith.

The Uniqueness of an Anglican Approach

“An Anglican reading of the Bible involves ...an optimistic view of humanity, a sacramental view of the world and human experience, a sense of freedom, a careful balance between thought, emotion and action, an incarnational expression of service, a reaction against excessive masculinity and a cross-centred spirituality...”

Dr Stuart Piggin. Ninth Annual Conference for Anglican Schools’ New Hope for A New Millennium’

An Anglican approach to religious education might:

Be optimistic about humanity (God declared humanity 'very good' (Genesis 1).	therefore →	<i>In our religious education programs we will acknowledge that God is reflected in people.</i>
Be optimistic about creation (God declared it 'good' in Genesis 1).	therefore →	<i>In our religious education programs we will acknowledge that God's hand can be seen in creation.</i>
Accentuate the importance of humanity's freedom of will.	therefore →	<i>In our religious education programs we will acknowledge that God allows us all choice of belief and action.</i>
Emphasise balance.	therefore →	<i>In our religious education programs we will strive to present balanced perspectives.</i>
Emphasise participation in movements that bring about justice, truth and compassionate action and change	therefore →	<i>In our religious education programs we will acknowledge that God desires us to compassionately strive for justice.</i>
React against discrimination (based on class, sex, race, culture, religion, physical and/or mental disability).	therefore →	<i>In our religious education programs we will acknowledge that God values everyone with equal dignity.</i>
Focus itself on the death, resurrection and return of Jesus.	therefore →	<i>In our religious education programs we will acknowledge that 'Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again'.</i>

The idea of balance is fundamental to the Anglican approach to Christianity. Any analysis of the Anglican Church notes that the three major sources of revelation to Anglicans, scripture, tradition and reason, are the subject of different emphases by different groups within the church. It has been suggested that:

- an evangelical position, with ties to the Reformation, may choose to emphasise the Bible over Church tradition and human reason;
- a catholic perspective may choose to emphasise the Church tradition from which the Bible was formed;
- a liberal position may choose to emphasise human reason and contemporary issues through which both Church tradition and the Bible is read.

That the Anglican Church continues to thrive suggests something important about the balance that exists between these three influences. A *Via Media* (Middle Way) approach means that Anglican Religious Education will avoid adopting extreme positions and will favour a balanced approach. That approach should not lead to weak compromise, but forms of strong and comprehensive integration.

An Integrative Approach to Religious Education

The Philosophy and Curriculum Framework recognises that schools implement their religious education program in a variety of ways. These are referred to in the Framework as “organising foci”. One perspective of these different approaches would be to view them as existing on a spectrum, with an emphasis on academic rigour at one end and an emphasis on faith as a tool for life at the other. The idea that at their extremes these approaches are mutually exclusive, however, oversimplifies the reality of most religious education programs.

A more useful way of viewing these approaches can be drawn from the work of Garth Read and Michel Grimmet who use the categories ‘learning about religion’ and ‘learning from religion’. Their nomenclature emphasises and expresses the “interactional nature of the relationship between studying content and responding to it in a reflective manner”(Erricker, Lowndes, & Bellchamber, 2011, p. 24). Further to this they declare that “if religions are studied in such a way as to juxtapose the ‘content’ of religious life worlds of adherents with the ‘content’ of the students pupils life worlds, pupils become informed about religious beliefs and values and are able to use them as instruments for the critical evaluation of their own beliefs and values.”

In Read and Grimmet’s work learning about and from religion have the following meanings.

Learning about religion

“Learning about religion requires pupils to engage with religious beliefs, teachings sources and practices,” and “it focuses ones attention on acquisition of knowledge” (Erricker et al., 2011, p. 24). It focusses on the body of knowledge about particular religions.

Learning from religion

“Learning from religion is generally interpreted in agreed syllabuses to include pupils own responses to some of the issues that are explored within religious practice and belief and seeks to look for and recognise parallels in their own experience. It encourages students to consider what can be learnt from religious interpretations of life’s experiences, there by contributing to children’s own spiritual development and encouraging empathy and understanding about the religious beliefs and practices of others” (Erricker et al., 2011).

It is affirmed that a balance and relationship between these two dimensions is vital to the quality of religious education in any school and all educators should be encouraged to consider deeply how both approaches are expressed in their program. The primary source of religious teaching and learning in Anglican Schools is the Christian faith. Accordingly, greatest emphasis is to be place on learning about and learning from Christianity in our classes.

Therefore we encourage the use of the phrases:

Learning about Christianity and religion

Learning from Christianity and religion



Aims and Outcomes of Religious Education

While different schools might place emphasis on particular aspects, it is important that common aims and outcomes be shared between schools. These have the benefit of encouraging a greater sharing of resources and more focused professional development thus allowing consistency that supports the professional development of those teaching Religious Education in Anglican Schools. Across Anglican Schools it allows for a consistency that supports the development of religious educators at a more professional level. For this purpose the following are proposed as the broad aims that guide the teaching of Religious Education in Anglican Schools. Teachers should aim for a balance between Old and New Testament while recognising the importance of the Gospels to the Anglican tradition.

Aims of Anglican Schools Religious Education in the Diocese

Anglican Religious Education...

- Makes clear the beliefs and practices of an Anglican understanding of Christianity;
- Connects with and adds value to students' lives and experiences.
- Encourages the development of values and reasoning within an Anglican Christian framework.
- Develops students' critical and reflective thinking about faith and the 'big questions of life'.
- Encourages a broad understanding of significant religious belief and practice from around the world.

Strands

The core strands have been named and adjusted from the original six outlined in the revised Framework. Providing each strand with a name was considered essential for ease of sharing between schools and colleagues.

The strands are:

1. The Bible and Christian Belief

The Old and New Testaments are the foundational documents for the Christian faith. In this strand students will develop an understanding of the content, structure and context of the Bible and approaches to its interpretation. They will explore important beliefs emerging from the scriptures and reflect on their relevance and role in their own life. Teacher should aim for a balance between Old and New Testament while recognising the importance of the Gospels to the Anglican tradition.

2. Christian Traditions and Practice

Christian thought and practice is shaped by thousands of years of history and tradition. This strand will explore how Christians have shaped their lives around their beliefs throughout history and into the modern era. It has a particular focus on Anglican worship, sacraments and practice. Students will reflect on the way these traditions and practices are life-giving for them in the contemporary Australian context.

3. Christian Living

Christians are called to live their lives in a particular way, with a special emphasis on holiness, faithfulness, mercy, reconciliation and justice. The focus of this strand is how the Christian life can provide guidance on living in a way that loves God and neighbour, cares for creation and provides meaning in life. It engages with the important issues that affect young people and helps them explore life-giving actions.

4. World Religions

Religious belief is a central element in many people's lives across the planet. In Australia, the landscape of belief continues to change and diversify. This strand helps students to understand the beliefs and practices of religions other than Christianity that they might find in Australia and overseas. Students will be encouraged to reflect on the way that these religions act to help people live a life of purpose and meaning.

5. The Inner Life

The importance of the inner life to personal well-being is increasingly being recognised, despite what some see as a swing to secularity in the western world. This strand explores Christian thought and practice as it relates to the cultivation of a person's inner spirituality. Students will be encouraged to explore practical approaches to Christian spirituality, including the forms of worship, meditation, silence and stillness.

6. Thinking about Religion

People often ask philosophical and theological questions about religion and faith, seeking logical and rational answers. This strand considers these questions, seeking to explore the intellectual foundation of the Christian faith and the philosophy of religion.



Curriculum Design Process

The purpose of this document is to assist RE teachers in creating or developing a curriculum that encourages students to engage with Christianity in a manner that is compatible with the Anglican tradition. The Philosophy and Curriculum Framework document (2011) defines how the Anglican tradition is best expressed in Religious education classes in the Dioceses of Brisbane.

Religious Education curriculum needs to be attentive to two general principles (both of which are explained previously).

Firstly, a balance between learning about Christianity and religion and learning from Christianity and religion needs to be evident. These are referred to as the core components. These components should guide the planning of each unit though it is recognised that some units lend themselves more to one component than another. Over a two-three year period there should be a balance between the core components.

Secondly, each of the six core elements needs to be addressed specifically over a two-three year period.

The pedagogy of how these two general principles are addressed should be determined by the nature of the school community, student culture, teacher expertise and available resources. Curriculum planning documents should clearly reflect the core components and the core elements.

As an example of how this process might lead to curriculum design, consider the following.

How to plan your curriculum

The Big Picture

1. **Balance across year levels** - Review the units that you teach across two/three year blocks (eg. Senior School, Middle School, Upper Primary lower Primary). Check for the following:
 - a. Balance of Strands
Are all of the strands covered in a deliberate manner?
 - b. Balance between learning ABOUT and learning FROM Christianity and other religions.
Across the units (or even within units) is there a balance of learning ABOUT and learning FROM.
 - c. Identify Gaps
Look for what is NOT in your units that should be there.
2. **Start where students are at**
 - a. Identify where your students are at in regards to spiritual journey, Christian literacy and school community and culture. Don't assume a Christian culture or understanding.
 - b. Invite student feedback specifically on their interest and engagement in your school's curriculum.
 - c. Build topics that are relevant to your student's spiritual culture, using the strands as a guide.

Developing individual units

1. **Plan the core elements**
 - a. Strand:
 - b. Unit Goals:
 - c. Learning about Christianity and Religion:
 - d. Learning from Christianity and Religion:
2. **Identify the cultural connection**
 - a. Find an age-appropriate cultural concept that will provide relevance for the students that relates to the core elements (above). This may be a topic (bullying), movie (Matrix), or theme (supernatural) that is evident in youth culture.
3. **Develop resources**
 - a. Find age-appropriate resources (websites, movies, published material).
 - b. Use the resource for your purposes. Avoid having your unit dominated by any one resource (movies do not need to be shown in full to be affective).
 - c. Utilise technology – Religious Education can very effectively utilise school technology.
4. **Consider assessment**
 - a. Schools have varying policies regarding assessment in RE. Carefully consider your schools policy and the benefits or weaknesses of it. Assessment in Religious Education should not assess belief or acceptance of doctrine.
 - b. Vary assessment utilising numerous methods. Assessment in RE should be consistent with what student experience in other subjects to ensure student consider it as valid assessment.
 - c. Ensure moderation if you have numerous teachers.

Exemplar Unit.

An example of the approach in action...

Year 7 Religious Education: Does God Exist

Core Element: Thinking about religion

Unit Goals: That students should begin to intellectually explore the concept of God and faith.

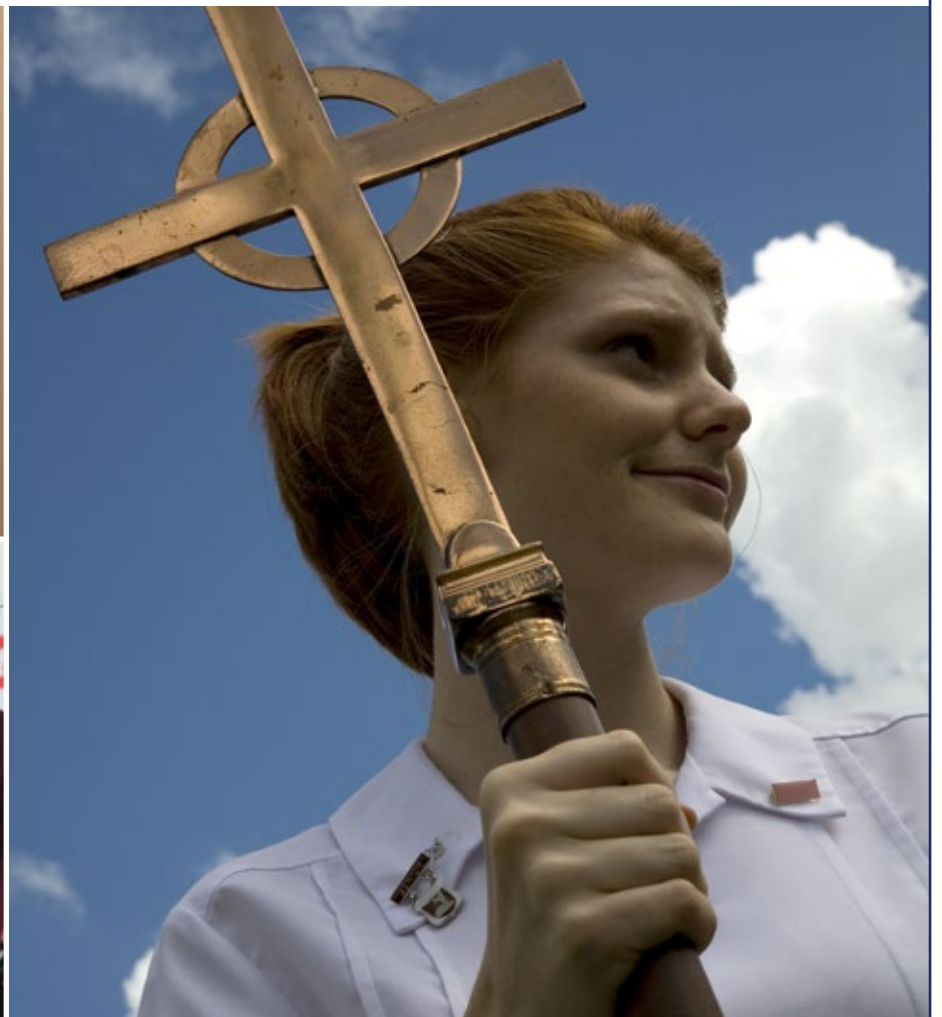
Learning about Christianity and Religion: This unit provides students with the opportunity to examine the philosophical arguments for and against the existence of God.

Learning from Christianity and Religion: This unit provides students with the opportunity to develop tools, experience and confidence in the intellectual exploration of the existence of God

Assignment: Students create their own PowerPoint examining the major arguments for and against the existence of God.

Topics:

1. *Overview of philosophy*
2. *Religious Experience and belief*
3. *To Believe or not Believe*
4. *Science and Religion*
5. *Arguments Against God*
6. *Arguments for God*





Assessment

There is a range of ways schools choose to approach the question of assessment in religious education. Some school neither assess nor report, while others do both. Assessment tasks for Religious Education may include:

PowerPoint presentations

Seminar presentations (group & individual)

Research Assignments

Documentary films

Short response exams

Podcasts

Argumentative Essays

Current Affairs segments

Reports

Response to stimulus exams/essays



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Primary Religious Education - A New Approach Clive Erricker, Judith Lowndes, Elaine

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