

St. Peter's School Values – SPIRITUALITY

Defining Spirituality

The word 'spirituality' on its own can be taken to refer to the spiritual side of our life, used even by people who believe there is no God. By contrast, as a Church School, we are concerned with Christian spirituality. This is much more precise. It is all about our relationship with God the Father, whom we come to through Jesus his Son, united in the Holy Spirit.

The contemporary use of the word 'spirituality' is sometimes vague and difficult to define precisely because it is increasingly detached from religious traditions and specifically from its roots in Christianity. Yet, despite the fuzziness, it is possible to suggest that the word 'spirituality' refers to the deepest values and meanings by which people seek to live. In other words 'spirituality' implies some kind of vision of the human spirit and of what will assist it to achieve full potential. Christianity is the original source of the word. In Christian terms, spirituality refers to the way our fundamental values, life styles and spiritual practices reflect particular understandings of God, human identity, and the material world as the context of human transformation.

Extract from Introduction: What is Spirituality? – A Brief History of Spirituality' by Philip Sheldrake (2007) Blackwell Publishing, p.3

GOD – what do I believe?

God is spirit (John 4:24). Christian faith is Trinitarian, understanding God to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17, Matthew 28:19). He fills his people with his Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4, Ephesians 5:18). God has placed eternity into human hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) There is a spiritual dimension to the world we cannot see (Ephesians 6:12). Whether people acknowledge it or not, our own sense of spirituality exists because God exists.

- Is there a God?
- Who is God?
- How do I know what is God like?
- What do I believe?

PEOPLE – who am I?

People are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) He has created human beings with the unique capacity to relate to him (Psalm 8:4). Summoned into restored relationship with our heavenly Father he calls us his children (1 John 3:1). In Christ he shows us the extent of his love (Romans 5:8). Spirituality asks who we are in relationship with God and where we find our identity as human beings.

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- Am I loved?
- Where do I belong?

THE NATURAL WORLD – where do I fit in?

People are created as part of the whole earth and universe God created (Gen 1). Aside from people the natural world and heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1, Psalm 24:1). Unsurprisingly the natural world engenders a sense of awe and wonder with which our spirituality connects. Considering our place in the world expands our view beyond ourselves. Contemplating the suffering, pain, evil and brokenness of the world confronts us with the reality that all is not well (Genesis 6:5, Psalm 73:3, Romans 3:10-18)

- What inspires me about the natural world?
- How should we care for the environment?
- Where do I fit in with other people, plants and animals?
- What's wrong with the world?
- Why does God allow suffering?

LIFE – where do I find meaning and purpose?

God created life. He consistently says that real life is found with him (Deuteronomy 30:11). Jesus said that he had come to bring life and life in all its fullness (John 10:1). He is the one who has the words of eternal life (John 6:68). Through his death and resurrection Jesus we experience this new and eternal life; the purpose for which we were made (Ephesians 2). Filled with God's Holy Spirit we are called to live faithfully bearing his fruit (Galatians 5:21). When life is hard, Jesus tells us that he is present with us in the midst of suffering () His own resurrection offers us the hope of rising ourselves from death to share eternal life in heaven.

- What makes me happy?
- Where do I find meaning and purpose for my life?
- How do I respond to suffering and pain?
- What happens when we die?

VALUES – what shapes my character, lifestyle and decisions?

The Bible tells us about God and his ways. In it we discover his character and commands (eg the 10 commandments, Exodus 20) We read of people living faithfully and well; we read of people falling short of God. God consistently acts with love, faithfulness, mercy and justice; he summons us to respond to his love by loving one another. (Matthew 22:34-40) Jesus taught what it is to be faithful to God and gave an example to us. He gives his Holy Spirit to guide us and shape our lives to be like his. (Galatians 5:21) The New Testament provides examples of what is right and wrong (Ephesians 5) and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, obedient to him.

- What values shape my life?
- What's right and what's wrong?
- What shapes my character, lifestyle and decisions?
- What would make the world a better place?
- What does a life well lived, look like?

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE – how do I experience God?

The Old Testament is full of God speaking to people (Genesis 12:1) and acting on earth (Exodus 14:21). He is described as the God of named people (Exodus 3:16, Acts 7:32); he spoke to the prophets (Jeremiah 1:2); he hears and answers prayer (Psalm 34:4). Jesus taught his disciples to pray (Luke 11:1) and commissioned them to preach the Gospel and heal the sick (Luke 10). In the Book of Acts we read of the Early Church experiencing the power of God's Holy Spirit in answer to prayer (Acts 3 & 4).

- How do I pray?
- Do miracles happen?
- How do I experience God?
- How do I understand supernatural experiences?
- What practices bring me closer to God?