



Teaching Eastern Catholic Churches in the Classroom

Introduction

This section will assist schools and parishes in providing accurate, supportive information and learning activities for the development of the Religious Education program and general curriculum of the school community.

This section will enable and encourage teachers to:

1. teach all students about the various traditions within the Catholic Church
2. support students, their families and colleagues from Eastern Catholic Churches in their journey of faith
3. develop units of work in Religious Education which incorporate Eastern Catholic perspectives by cross referrencing KWL units with this resource.

Considerations for Teachers of Eastern Catholic Students

1. Having students from these Churches is an opportunity for growth and learning that will enrich the total class and the Religious Education program. Guiding and encouraging students to share their life experiences through the Religious Education program assists all students to gain a greater understanding of the diversity within the Catholic Church.
2. Integrating information and experiences related to the Eastern Catholic Churches enables students to identify with and learn more about their Catholic heritage.
3. Encouraging students of Eastern Catholic Churches to share the knowledge of their Church acknowledges and supports their involvement in the life of their respective parishes.
4. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of each student's historical, cultural, linguistic and religious background contributes to the development of the classroom program, as well as curriculum knowledge and activities in other KLAS.
5. Gathering information about the following areas affords opportunities for teachers to develop and include learning activities about the Eastern Catholic Churches in their programs:



- - - the historical background of the Churches
 - the cultural background of the people who belong to each Church
 - the liturgical seasons of each Church
 - significant feast days and holy days of obligation
 - the mysteries (sacraments)
 - liturgies
 - symbols and art
 - the Church in all its traditions

The following strategies and information may be of assistance

As Christians, we are called to recognise that our faith has been expressed in many and various ways since the beginnings of the Church, and has been shaped by the languages and cultural traditions of generations of Catholics from many parts of the world. This rich diversity has been part of the Catholic Church since its foundation in Australia. Therefore, we need to consider:

1. our views on the importance of including knowledge about the range of Catholic Churches that make up the one Catholic Church;
2. our experience of religious practice within our own cultures and within the cultures of others;
3. our knowledge and understanding of the Eastern Catholic communities in Australia;
4. our ability to give all students a sense of the entirety of the Catholic Church;
5. our knowledge of the students in our school, their place of worship and their significant priest;
6. options that can be used to develop units from the Guidelines for Religious Education, particularly in relation to:
 - the diversity of the Catholic Church
 - approaches to the unit
 - students' current knowledge
 - integration with Church seasons, sacramental celebrations
 - similarities and differences in the Churches
 - similarities to and differences from the Roman tradition



Strategies for Raising Awareness in the School Environment

- Display liturgical calendars on notice boards in prominent areas. These calendars are available by contacting priests at addresses listed on The Rites of the Catholic Church wall chart.
- Alert parents to special feast days and celebrations in the different Eastern Catholic Churches. Include these on school and parish calendars and newsletters.
- Place religious art and symbols from different Eastern Catholic Churches (e.g. icons) in prominent areas. An explanation of the significance of the art or symbol could be provided. The art and symbols could be changed according to the seasons, feasts and celebrations of the Churches.
- Photographs and significant items from feast days and celebrations (e.g. decorated candles, crosses made out of palms) together with explanations and descriptions could be displayed.
- Displays for special observances (e.g. Easter) could show both the similarities and differences among the Churches.
- Encourage students to bring newsletters from their Churches. These could be displayed in the classroom, school or church.
- Invite priests from the different Eastern Catholic Churches to visit the school.
- Display a copy of The Rites of the Catholic Church wall chart.

In identifying students belonging to the Eastern Catholic Churches

1. Ask the parents for a copy of the student's baptismal certificate. If it is written in a language other than English, ask for a translation. The words 'Catholic Church' will be printed on the certificate.
2. Ask the parents and student where they go to Church (name of Church or parish and suburb). The names and addresses of Eastern Catholic Churches are printed on The Rites of the Catholic Church wall chart.
3. Ask the parents and student the name of their priest. Eastern Catholic priests are usually referred to by their Christian name, e.g. Father Paul. Refer to the list of contact addresses for Eastern Catholic Churches in the Melbourne metropolitan area.
4. If you believe that a family may belong to an Eastern Catholic parish, please contact the parish priest for verification.
You may need to redevelop your current school enrolment form in order to record the Catholic Church to which a student may belong, and related information.
5. Eastern Catholic students are more likely to be those children born in, or who have parents born in:
 - Middle Eastern countries (e.g. Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Turkey);
 - Eastern European countries (e.g. Russia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Ukraine and the Republics of



Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina).

Strategies for Raising Awareness in the Classroom

- Encourage all students to talk about their experiences and expressions of faith in their various Churches. Use of religious items may be a stimulus for discussion.
- In class prayer services, prayers in different languages may be used, as well as a variety of symbols and rituals. Use of candles, incense and icons may assist in creating an appropriate environment and increase knowledge and understanding.
- First-hand experiences through excursions to various Catholic Churches (e.g. St Peter and Paul's Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral, St Patrick's Cathedral) will help students to identify similarities and differences in architecture, layout, furnishings, religious objects and symbols.
- Resources such as The Rites of the Catholic Church wall chart could be placed in all classrooms and used for research and gathering information.
- Appropriate terminology relating to the life and faith of the various Churches should be used wherever possible in the classroom (e.g. mysteries/sacraments, Divine Liturgy/Mass). Familiarisation with the terms included in the glossary will assist in this usage.

Ideas for Extending The Rites of the Catholic Church Wall Chart

The chart was designed as a basic introduction for teachers, students and parents. It needs to be accessible for use during planning, teaching and student research. In order to undertake the following activities, supplementary information and materials must be used with the chart.

1. General information

- Knowing the cultural backgrounds of your students may help to locate their Church on the chart. However, students from Middle Eastern backgrounds could belong to one of several Churches, e.g. Maronite, Melkite, Chaldean, Armenian or Coptic. This information could be added to student profile forms or school enrolment forms.
- Introduce students to the various Catholic traditions or Churches. Each of these Churches has its own liturgical seasons, feast days, fast days, saints, shrines and music.
- Within appropriate RE units, encourage students to research and present information about their own Church or other Churches listed on the chart.

2. Cultural origins of the Church and languages used in the liturgy

- Teach students to make the Sign of the Cross according to the Byzantine tradition.
- Teach students to make the Sign of Peace according to the Maronite tradition.



- Encourage students to say familiar prayers in their home or liturgical languages (e.g. The Our Father, Hail Mary).
- Organise a display of bibles, prayer books, holy cards, art, icons, thuribles, newsletters, work done at Saturday classes and photographs, according to each Church.
- Invite students to trace, on a map, the journey of the apostles and the foundation of Churches across cultures and countries. Set up a timeline. Mark locations according to languages used. Also, mark traditional and current names of countries, and names of the apostles, in the home language.
- Provide prayers for prayer services or liturgies in the various liturgical languages (assistance might be sought from the Eastern Catholic clergy).

3. Cultural background of adherents

- On a large map, show the countries where the Churches were originally established and identify where these Churches are found today.
- Using information on The Rites of the Catholic Church wall chart, draw up a world map to show the cultural backgrounds of adherents of each Church.

4. Liturgical seasons

- Research and share family customs involved in celebrating Lent/Easter, Advent/Christmas and Epiphany.
- Discuss the liturgical year according to the calendars of each Church. Calendars can be purchased annually from addresses on the chart.
- Students could work in groups to design a calendar showing personal, family and parish events.
- Develop a class and school liturgical calendar in order to identify and highlight the significant feast days for each Church across the year. The calendar could be used at home, in the classroom and in the church.
- Celebrate the beginning of Lent according to the calendar of each Church. Check Easter dates according to the Julian calendar for the Ukrainian and Russian Churches.
- Consider the needs of students who are fasting and/or abstaining at special times of the year when planning such things as barbecues/sausage sizzles, sports' days or strenuous activity days.
- Pin copies of the chart onto the church noticeboard and parent information board in the school. Highlight coming feast days and a description of their significance.
- Include a study of the Gregorian and Julian calendars in your applied maths programs. This could be widened to include calendars from other world religions, such as Islam and



Buddhism.

- Obtain copies of liturgies from Eastern Catholic Church priests and teach the outline of the different liturgies, pointing out similarities and differences. Familiarise staff with the history and scripts of these liturgies.

Religious Education curriculum

As Christians, we are called to recognise that our faith has been expressed in many and various ways since the beginnings of the Church and has been shaped by the languages and cultural traditions of generations of Catholics from many parts of the world. This rich diversity has been part of the Catholic Church since its foundation in Australia. Therefore, we need to ask:

- What are my views about the importance of including knowledge about the range of Catholic Churches that make up the one Catholic Church?
- What is my experience of religious practice within my own culture and within the cultures of others?
- What is my knowledge and understanding of the Eastern Catholic communities in Australia?
- How do I give all students a sense of the entirety of the Catholic Church? Which Churches will I draw on to include in my program? If I have Eastern Catholic students in my group, which of the Churches will I focus on?
- How well do I know the students in my group? What are their religious backgrounds? Do I have Eastern Catholic students in my class? Where do they worship and in what languages? Who is their significant priest?
- What can be explored in a unit in relation to the diversity of the Catholic Church? How will I approach the unit? How will I find out what the students already know? Will it be taught in isolation or would it be better to link it to a particular Church season or celebration, a sacramental celebration, a cultural awareness activity or theme? If this is linked to a Church season or celebration, do all of the Churches included follow the same liturgical calendar and cycle?
- Who are the parents, clergy and Catholic Education Office personnel I could speak with to broaden my understanding of the one Catholic Church?

Factors to be Considered when Planning RE Units

- There may be students in the class or school who belong to the Eastern Catholic Churches. These students have particular views and various experiences as Catholics in Australia. Their stories enrich our faith.
- Many Roman Catholic students come from homes where the language and lifestyle are not part of the mainstream Anglo-Celtic tradition. Their experiences of being Catholic also need to be recognised and celebrated as a living part of this community.



- Students belonging to minority Catholic communities may need extra support and assistance in order to talk about their experiences as Catholics in the Church in Australia.

Schools, parishes or other organisations are free to use this material, but please note its source as *Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS)*.

