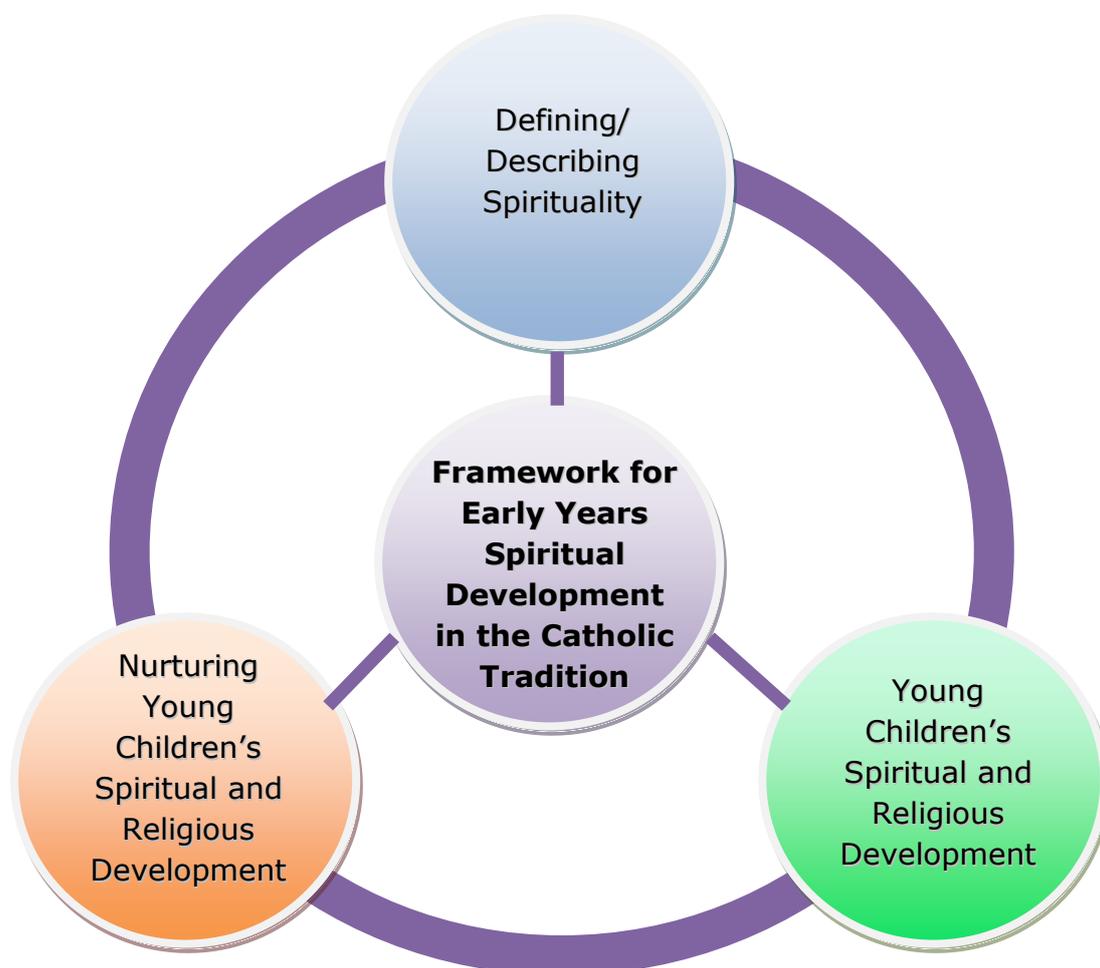


Framework for Early Years Spiritual Development in the Catholic Tradition



The spiritual is the natural dimension to life that includes: thinking and feelings about transcendence; ideas about a creator or creative force in the cosmos; human values; sense of meaning and purpose in life; love and care for self and others; sense of stewardship for the earth and its flora and fauna; the aesthetic. Spirituality is the way in which a spiritual/moral dimension enters into, or is implied in, the thinking and behaviour of individuals.

(Graham Rossiter, 2010, p. 7)



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Defining/describing spirituality

Young children's (from birth to eight) spirituality and their spiritual and religious development are of central relevance and importance to whom they are and whom they will become. All children are innately spiritual. Their identity, sense of belonging and sense of meaning, as well as their purpose in life are all inextricably intertwined with, and affected by, their spirituality and the ways through which that spirituality might be nurtured. It is acknowledged that if young children's spirituality is ignored, it will fade and be lost (Crompton, 1998; EAUDE, 2003).

Children's spiritual development is as a significant aspect of their wellbeing and 'wholeness', as are their personal, cognitive, physical, emotional and social developments. Both implicit and explicit nurturing of young children's spiritual development is of utmost importance. Such nurturing requires a holistic approach providing the language, ways and means that enable young children to respond to, and express, their spirituality as they interact with others and their world. Furthermore, both the implicit and explicit nurturing of young children's spirituality is fundamental to the development of their religiosity, or religious identity of all kinds. Religiosity as the lived expression of one's lived spirituality through a particular religious tradition, is "a measure of religious behaviour such as attendance at church /synagogue and so on, frequency of prayer, engagement in a local community of faith" (Rossiter, 2010, p. 7). This is an especially salient point for early childhood settings in the Catholic tradition, particularly when viewed through Bradford's (1999) perception of the relationship between what he calls "human spirituality" and "devotional spirituality":

<i>being loved</i>	becomes	<i>identity as a member of a religious community</i>
<i>feeling secure</i>	becomes	<i>nurtured in a religious tradition</i>
<i>responding in wonder</i>	becomes	<i>a framework for worship</i>
<i>being affirmed</i>	becomes	<i>empowerment for service</i>
<i>symbolic sharing</i>	becomes	<i>experience of community.</i> (p. 6)

The *Framework for Early Years Spiritual Development in the Catholic Tradition* focuses on the characteristics and attributes that comprise the very essence of young children's spirituality and suggests a pedagogy that acknowledges, responds to, and nurtures, those characteristics in each child. This Framework is intended as a reference document to inform, guide and shape policy, curriculum and practice regarding the development of young children's spirituality in the Catholic Child Care and Early Childhood Settings. In this capacity, the Framework complements the document, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Department of Employment Education and Workplace Relations, 2009) in the following ways:

- * The *Framework for Early Years Spiritual Development in the Catholic Tradition* recognises and acknowledges that young children's sense of *belonging* is integral to their spirituality;
- * The *Framework for Early Years Spiritual Development in the Catholic Tradition* acknowledges that young children's spirituality is at the heart of their *being*, that is, it is who they are now in the present time; and
- * The *Framework for Early Years Spiritual Development in the Catholic Tradition* acknowledges that the implicit and explicit nurturing of young children's spiritual development is essential to their *becoming*, as they learn to become relational, resilient and active members of their families and communities.

The early childhood setting in the Catholic Tradition committed to young children's spiritual development is underpinned, informed and shaped by the following **principles**:

- * Acknowledgement that all children are innately spiritual and that their spiritual development is intertwined with, and essential to, their wholeness and wellbeing;
- * Recognition that children's spirituality is manifested and enhanced with everyday experiences, that 'relational consciousness' is at the core of their spirituality, and that each child's personal spiritual signature comprises: their sense of being loved, feeling secure and culturally safe; of loving and caring for themselves, others, and their environment; their ability to go beyond themselves or transcendence; their sense of meaning and purpose in life; their imagination and creativity; sense of awe and wonder; and appreciation of the aesthetic;
- * Appreciation of the relationship between spiritual development and religious development and that the implicit, as well as explicit and intentional, nurturing of children's spirituality can lead to the development of their religiosity in all religious traditions;
- * Understanding that people, materials, time, space and content occupy a pivotal place and role in the implicit, as well as intentional and explicit, nurturing of children's spiritual development.

The early childhood setting in the Catholic Tradition committed to young children's spiritual development recognises and acknowledges the following **characteristics and capacities** as intrinsically intertwined in each child's personal spiritual signature:

- * Their **relationships** and **sense of connectedness**:
 - * with others shown in their empathy, compassion and love;
 - * with themselves as shown in their self-respect, self-efficacy and self-confidence;
 - * with the environment shown in their appreciation and care of their surroundings; and
 - * with, for some, God or an Ultimate.

The spiritual aspect of children's relationships is at a deep level wherein they can, through those relationships, find their place in the world and come to understand their own **identity** and sense of **belonging** to a group. Children's **sense of searching** or **spiritual questing** is an integral aspect of their identity, place and purpose, and is linked to their existential questions such as "Who am I? Where do I fit in? Why am I here?"

- * Their **sense of awareness** of people, events, experiences and surroundings exhibited through their complete attention to, or absorption in whatever they are doing or attending to. This can be observed in the ways children focus on the event or experience; it might be that they are in tune with the experience to such an extent that they are oblivious of other nearby extraneous or outside experiences; it is in the way they are *present* to the situation, activity, experience or person.
- * Their **sense of mystery** which includes children's response to, and appreciation of, the intangible, an event, experience, or natural phenomena expressed in their awe of, and wonder at, such events or experiences, or natural phenomena such as a summer storm, or even the aesthetic such as a particular works of art, pieces of music, and so on. Other aspects of their sense of mystery are children's wonderings at the big questions about life and meaning, truth and justice, reality and death. Children's mystery sensing can be exhibited in their imagination and creativity as they respond to such events, experiences or phenomena.

- * Their **sense of transcendence** which enables children to go beyond themselves to relate to, and connect with, other people, the environment, and with the Divine or Ultimate force.
- * Their **sense of value** which can be observed when children respond to events, stories, experiences observed in their delight or despair as they try to make sense or meaning of such events and experiences.
- * Their **sense of wisdom or knowing** wherein children might find remarkable insight in an experience, event or phenomena. (Eaude, 2009; Hart, 2003; Hay & Nye, 2006).

The early childhood setting in the Catholic Tradition committed to young children's spiritual development **nurtures each child's spiritual characteristics** implicitly and explicitly in ways that pay attention to the sensory, affective and cognitive domains.

- * Nurturing children's **relationships, sense of connectedness, identity** and **sense of belonging** by:
 - * creating a community of friends, a network of kind, compassionate and respectful relationships;
 - * giving children the opportunity to understand human feelings and emotions, the way they affect people and how an understanding of them can be helpful;
 - * assisting children to come to know themselves and what it means to "listen to their hearts"; as well as assisting them to become empathetic, compassionate and loving by showing them how to "listen *with* their hearts" (Hart, 2003);
 - * developing a climate within which all children can grow and flourish, respect others and be respected;
 - * accommodating difference, including cultural difference and respecting the integrity of individuals;
 - * encouraging children to manage conflict peacefully and modelling specific strategies by which they could achieve this;
 - * giving children opportunities to contribute, important things to do, and thanking when they have shared, helped, cooperated so that they experience their value as members of the classroom community;
 - * giving children a voice by asking children for their opinions, likes and dislikes; as well as giving children choices of activities in which the group might partake and opportunities to make decisions for the group. Such activities also nurture children's **sense of wisdom**;
 - * giving children time and explicit guidance to reflect and learn from reflection.
- * Nurturing children's **sense of transcendence** by:
 - * encouraging them to wonder about God and explore the many images of God provided in scripture;
 - * exploring images of the Divine from other religious traditions represented in the setting;
 - * giving time and space for children to be still, meditate and pray.

Nurturing children's **sense of awareness** by:

- * giving time for children to become conscious of, and express, their likes, dislikes, gifts, responses to a variety of stimuli including those activities in which they engage on a regular basis such as play, painting, sand play and so on; as well as understanding that this nurture of their consciousness assists them to discover their purpose and calling in life;
- * encouraging children to pay attention to their responses to a variety of stimuli including to music through painting, body sculpturing, or responding to a story or a character's actions/experiences in a story or scripture passage;
- * giving time and space to create specific discussions in which children are invited to express their own feelings and emotions, likes and dislikes, and provide responses to a variety of stimuli;
- * encouraging children to reflect on their disappointments and frustrations; developing their resilience and ability to grow from such experiences by asking such questions as "If you could teach someone about this, what would you tell him or her?" (Hart, 2003). Using children's literature as stimuli for such explorations and discussions;
- * encouraging children to explore and develop what animates themselves and others.

* Nurturing children's **sense of mystery** by:

- * creating an awareness and appreciation of the unknown nurtured when curiosity is encouraged;
- * noticing and appreciating the beauty and mystery of nature;
- * allowing children to question - not overemphasising facts;
- * stimulating their imagination with story, scripture, gestures and symbols;
- * giving time for children to wonder as they respond to a rich variety of: literature including scripture stories, concrete and abstract materials including religious symbols and artefacts, art works, sculpture and so on.

* Nurturing children's **sense of value** by:

- * giving children the opportunity to explore values and religious beliefs, particularly Christian beliefs and gospel values, as well as those representing children from other religious traditions, and the ways in which those beliefs and values affect people's lives;
- * supporting and developing children's religious beliefs in ways which are personal and relevant to them;
- * giving time for children to express their likes, dislikes, gifts, responses and the like to a variety of stimuli;
- * discussing with children the various values developed in children's literature and scripture stories, as well as identifying characters' values in their responses to various situations in the stories. (Baumgartner & Buchanan, 2010; Eade, 2009; Hart, 2003; Hyde, 2006; OFSTED, 2004, as cited in Ruddock & Cameron (Sean), 2010)

The early childhood setting in the Catholic Tradition committed to young children's spiritual development recognises the pivotal place **people, climate, pedagogy, materials, time, space and content** occupy in the nurture of each child's spiritual characteristics by:

- * recognising the significance of adults' own sensitivities to, and expressions of, the spiritual;
- * providing an environment that is open and sensitive to the cultural and spiritual in which all children feel safe, loved, affirmed and valued;
- * promoting a pedagogy that includes a ritual of care, as well as teaching styles, time and space that encourage, listen to, and respond to children's voices;
- * implementing a variety of approaches that provide children with the ways and specific language to recognise and voice their thoughts, ideas, concerns, questions, wonderings and so on including: capturing and making the most of the 'teachable moment'; integrating across all contexts for learning including play; providing specific times/sessions that intentionally and explicitly highlight such experiences and teach the specific language;
- * ensuring that curriculum includes relevant and appropriate content, resources, designated time and space that intentionally and explicitly develop and nurture children's language acquisition to express their thoughts, ideas, concerns, questions, wonderings and so on, concerning their spirituality;
- * enabling children to make connections between all aspects of learning to their lives. (Bradford, 1999; OFSTED, 2004, as cited in Ruddock & Cameron (Sean), 2010)

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