

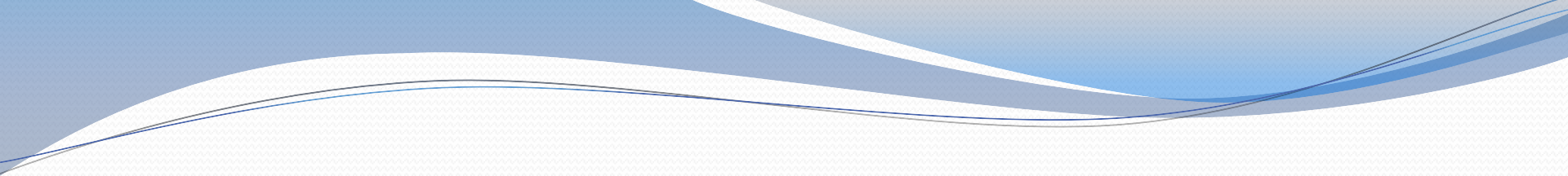
The Online Catechism

Stage One:

Foundational

Beliefs and Commitments



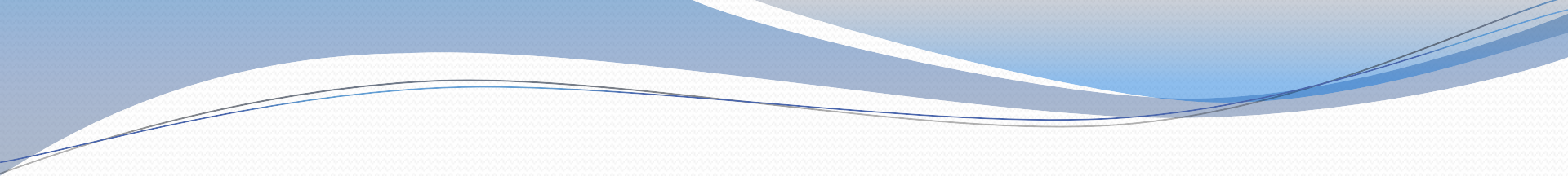


Welcome to Stage One of the Online Catechism. In this stage we examine ten foundational topics of Christian faith and life. The objective to provide *initial familiarity* with these foundational beliefs, practices, and commitments. Deeper engagement with each of these will come in later stages of the catechism.



Many of these topics come directly from the Bible, while others are the fruit of faithful thought by leaders through the history of the Church.

Each of the ten topics is followed by a set of questions, providing opportunity for some preliminary reflections in preparation for the following stages.



When you read each of the topics, read them slowly and thoughtfully, trying to absorb the ideas. You may find it helpful to take notes of points you want to remember, or questions you have along the way.

At some point you may wish to meet with your Pastor to discuss your insights and questions.

Plan for 15-20 minutes per item. You may find it helpful to take notes. Now let's begin!



1. The Philippians Creed

The word ‘creed’ comes from the Latin word *credo*—meaning ‘I believe’. Creeds are short, easy-to-remember summaries of what the Church believes—‘This is what we believe!’

- The centre of Christian faith is Jesus Christ. In Hebrew his name is Y’shua ben Yosef – Jesus son of Joseph. ‘Christ’ is not his last name! Rather, ‘Christ’ is a title adapted from Greek, meaning Messiah, or ‘the Anointed One’ – the one appointed by God to be humanity’s Saviour. Another title for Jesus is ‘Emmanuel’, which is Hebrew for ‘God with us’.
- Several texts in the New Testament are creed-like affirmations about Jesus, drawn from the life of the early Church. The most substantial of these is Philippians 2:6-11.

Philippians 2:6-11

Jesus, though being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness; and being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

continued...

Philippians 2:6-11 continued...

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Questions for review

- In this text...
 - Who is Jesus?
 - What did Jesus *do*?
 - What did Jesus *not* do?
 - What *attitudes* and *verbs* are used to describe Jesus?
 - As disciples, we are to imitate Jesus. How might we imitate his attitudes here?
 - What response is anticipated at the name of Jesus?

2. The Two Great Commandments

Jesus was once asked: “What is the most important command of all?” His answer was this:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind. And love your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10:27)



LOVE GOD↑
←LOVE OTHERS→

Jesus later upgraded the second part of his answer:

Love your neighbour as I have loved you.

Questions for review

- Suggest some ways to love God with...
 - All your heart and soul (in Greek, 'soul' and 'heart' give virtually the same idea, so Jesus was being redundant to emphasize his point)
 - All your strength
 - All your mind
- What might it mean to 'love yourself'?
- How did Jesus love his friends?
- Who are your neighbours? How can you love your neighbours as Jesus loved his friends?

3. The Ten Commandments:

Exodus 20 & Deuteronomy 5

Our relationship with God

1. Do not worship other gods
2. Do not make idols
3. Do not misuse God's name
4. Keep the Sabbath holy

Our relationship with People

5. Honour your father and mother
6. Do not murder
7. Do not commit adultery
8. Do not steal
9. Do not lie
10. Do not covet



Questions for review

- Idols and 'other gods' divert our belief, trust, and commitment away from God to false substitutes. Our society does not worship 'gods' or make literal idols as people did in Old Testament times (or as some people do in some parts of the world today), but we do make figurative gods and idols in our lives. Are there any idols or 'gods' in your life that divert your commitment to God?
- Which of the first four commandments do you find most difficult to keep, and why? How might you change this?
- Have you ever been harmed or affected by someone breaking one of the last six commandments? If so, how were you harmed or affected?
- Do you know of anyone who has been hurt or harmed by someone breaking any of these commandments? If so, how were they hurt or harmed?
- Which of the last six commandments do you find most difficult to keep, and why? How might you change this?

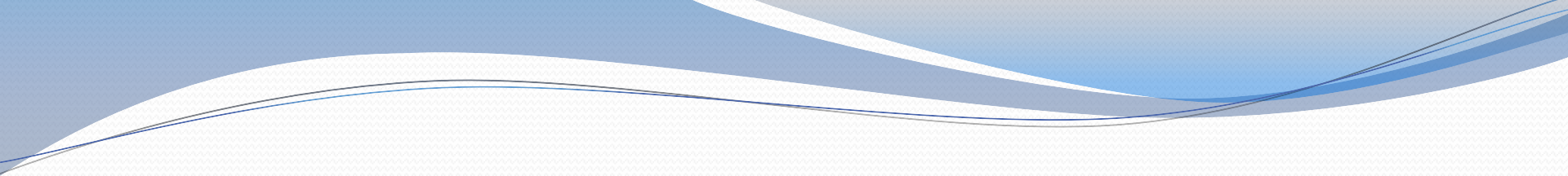
4. Loving Others:

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the languages of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship, but do not have love, I gain nothing.



continued...



Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails....

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is *love*.

Questions for review

- Love makes us look outward, with concern for others. According to this chapter,
 - Love is...
 - Love is not...
 - Love always...
- This list of qualities of love is not intended to be exhaustive. What other qualities could be added?
- One way to express the opening of this text could be: “You might have lots of virtues (good personal qualities), but if you do not have love, all your virtues are pointless!”
 - What are *your* strongest virtues?
 - What would your virtues look like if you more intentionally connected them to love?

5. The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

Our Father who is in the heavens,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Don't let us give in to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.

Adapted from The New Living Translation

Questions for review

- We think of 'heaven' as far away, as if God is distant. But in ancient times 'in the heavens' was understood to mean that God is everywhere, both in far spaces and very near, immediately around us.
- What do you think society would look like if God's kingdom were here in its fullness, and if God's will were truly done?
- Ask yourself this question: "Do I actually forgive others as God forgives me? Is there anyone who I need to forgive but I have not yet forgiven? If so, can I forgive them *now*?"
- For what temptations do you need God's help to overcome them?

6. The Gospel...

The Gospel is God's 'Good News' for humanity. Here is a definition of the Good News:

That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day...

(1 Cor. 15:3-5)

Discuss these two questions:

- What could it mean to 'die for our sins'?
- What could be the importance of Jesus having been 'raised on the third day'?



...in today's language

This is God's "Good News" – but to many people in our society today, this does not sound like Good News. In fact, for many people this Good News sounds meaningless.

How then can we express this Good News in language that sounds like Good News to people today, that includes these truths yet which also attracts people to the way of Jesus?

Here is one possibility:

*Through Jesus of Nazareth,
God is healing and transforming the world,
and you and I are called to be part of this—
as both recipients of, and co-workers for,
this transforming work of God.*

Questions for review

- How does Jesus' death and resurrection bring life to the world?
- In what ways is God healing and transforming the world today?
- In what ways can you be a co-worker with God and God's people for this healing and transformation?
- In what ways could you be a recipient of God's healing, reconciling, and transforming work?

7. The Apostles' Creed



- In the Early Church period (the first few centuries after Jesus' resurrection), memorizing and reciting the local Creed was a common requirement for baptism.
- The two most common creeds in use today are the *Nicene Creed* and the *Apostles' Creed*.
- The *Nicene Creed* was first written in Greek by a meeting of bishops from all over the Christian world, in the city of Nicaea (in present-day Turkey) in 325 AD. Then in 381 AD another meeting of bishops, this time in Constantinople, added some items to the original version, and it is this later version that is used around the world today.
- The *Apostles' Creed* derives from an older Roman creed, written in Latin, and probably took its current form around the same period of time as the Constantinople meeting. Despite its name, the Apostles Creed was not written by the Apostles!

The Apostles' Creed:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Questions for review

- There are many ideas and concepts in the Apostles' Creed that need explanation. Indeed, many books have been written to explain both the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. Our objective at this point is not to understand the Creed in detail (Stage 3 will offer us this opportunity). Rather, our objective for now is simply to familiarize ourselves with it.
- Go through the Apostles' Creed line by line. Are any of these ideas unclear or confusing to you? (For instance, many people wonder why the church is described as 'catholic', or what 'communion of saints' means, or what 'resurrection of the body' means.) If so, write down those ideas or terms that seem unclear or confusing. If you are discussing this in a group, members of your group may be able to clarify these for you. Or you may ask your pastor to clarify your questions.

Questions for review

- Over the centuries many people have commented that the Apostles' Creed mentions nothing about the life and ministry of Jesus prior to his crucifixion. If you were writing a Creed, are there any parts or teachings of scripture that are not mentioned in the Apostles' Creed that you think should be included?

8. The Baptismal Promises

In the Early Church period, baptism candidates were asked three questions about God—as the Father, as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. Thus arose the tradition of asking baptism candidates (or their parents/guardians and sponsors) questions of faith at the time of baptism. The following set of baptismal questions, and promises in response, is Anglican in origin, but many traditions use a very similar set of questions.



The Baptismal Promises:

Question Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?

Answer I renounce them.

Question Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?

Answer I renounce them.

Question Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?

Answer I renounce them.

The Baptismal Promises continued:

Question Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as
 your Savior?

Answer I do.

Question Do you put your whole trust in his grace and
 love?

Answer I do.

Question Do you promise to follow and obey him as
 your Lord?

Answer I do

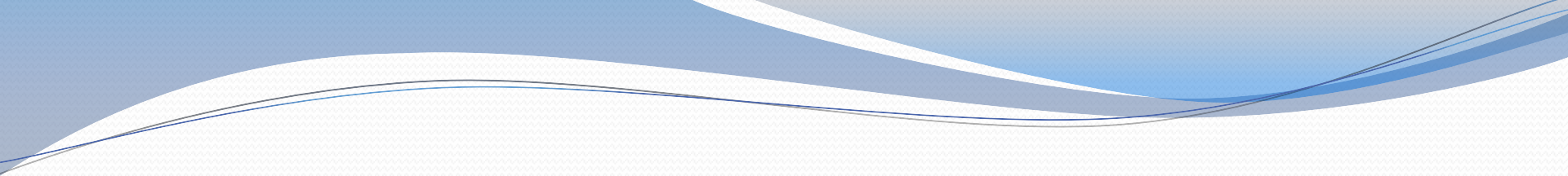
Questions for review

- The first three questions are all concerned with ‘renouncing’ wickedness, evil, and sin. Are you able to respond ‘I renounce them’? If yes, then go ahead and do so—either privately to yourself and to God, or to others in your group. What possible implications will this have for how you live? If you are not able to respond ‘I renounce them’, which of the three causes you hesitation; and what are the reasons for your hesitation?
- For the second set of three questions, are you able to respond “I do”? If yes, then *congratulations*, for you are a disciple, a follower of Jesus! If not, what is the reason(s) for your hesitation?

9. A Personal Rule of Life

Adapted from the Book of Common Prayer, p.555:

“From time to time, every Christian should frame for themselves a ‘rule of life’ in accordance with the principles of the Gospel, and in accordance with the faith of the Church. Such a ‘rule of life’ would include such elements as these:

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- The practice of private prayer, Bible reading, spiritual reading or study, and other spiritual disciplines.
 - The regularity of participation in public worship, and in prayer and study with others.
 - Bringing the teaching and example of Jesus into the activities and relationships of everyday life.
 - Speaking of Jesus to others, or sharing the Good News with others, as opportunities arise.
 - Personal service to both Church and Society.
 - The offering of money according to one's ability, in order to support the work of the Church at home and elsewhere."

Questions for review

- Which one or two of these six elements is most appealing to you? Why does this appeal to you?
- Which one or two of these six elements sounds most difficult or unappealing to you? How might you rise to the challenge of incorporating these elements more intentionally into your life?

10. Your congregation's vision or mission



*If your congregation has
a vision or mission statement,
find out what it is,
and commit it to memory.*

Questions for review

- To what extent is your congregation fulfilling its vision?
- In what ways is your congregation not yet fulfilling its vision?
- How might you contribute to your congregation more fully fulfilling its vision?

This concludes Stage One:

- Congratulations, you have completed the first stage of the Online Catechism! More importantly, you have hopefully grown as a person and as a follower of Jesus through your engagement with this material.
- You may wish to mark your completion of this stage in some significant way, such as making a public confession of your faith, or in some other way that feels spiritually meaningful for you.
- Now for Stage Two!...