

WHO ARE WE?



God's Spirit Moves in Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. The Spirit of God hovered over the waters.

Genesis 1:1-2

In the sacrament of Confirmation a bishop seals the Christian with the gift of the Spirit of God, the same Spirit who in the beginning stirs nothingness into life. Like us, the people of ancient Israel wondered: Where do we come from? What are we to become? Who are we?

Genesis, the first book of Israel's sacred scriptures, begins with stories of human origins. The name *Genesis* means *origins*. It begins:

In the beginning when God made the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and empty and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God hovered over the water.

The word *ruah* in Hebrew means both *spirit* and *wind*. Like wind, the Spirit is invisible, powerful, and free to move anywhere. Genesis pictures the Spirit of God moving like invisible wind over the deep of chaos, stirring nothingness into being.

In Genesis, the Spirit of God sets creation in motion. Then Creator God speaks each day for six days, calling light, sky, sea and dry land, plants, sun, moon, stars, birds, animals, and lastly humans into being. Each day God declares these new creatures good. On the seventh day God rests.

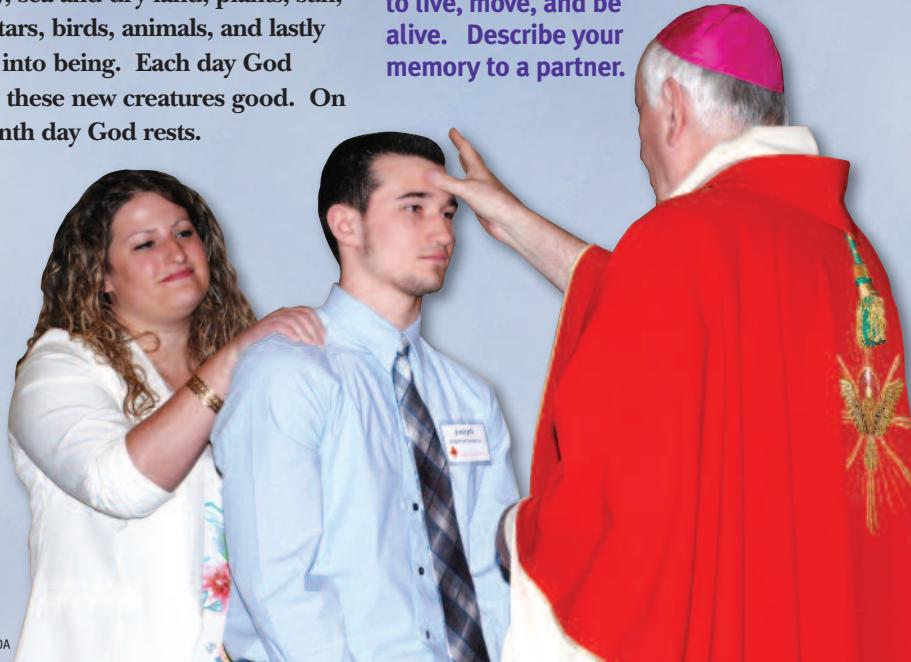
Scientists today tell a slower creation story that unfolds over 13.7 billion years rather than 6 days. It begins in a trillion-degree fireball, a flaring forth of energy so powerful the universe is still expanding.

As the fireball cools, it expands. Particles begin to last and form relationships in atoms—first hydrogen, then helium. Gravity constellates vast clouds of hydrogen into galaxies, where primal stars implode in supernovas that give birth to new stars like our sun.

The atoms in our bodies have been through these violent transformations. Our genes hold the memory of our evolving from the first bacteria, life becoming always more diverse and more complex. In us, life becomes conscious, spiritual.

In both the biblical and the scientific accounts we live in an evolving history of God's creative and sustaining love. We live, move, and have our being in the Spirit of God.

Close your eyes, and feel your pulse beat. Breathe in deeply. Breathe out. Remember a time when you felt glad to live, move, and be alive. Describe your memory to a partner.



Life Is a LOVE Plan

In God's own image, God created them; male and female God created them.

Genesis 1.27

At birth each of us breathes, cries, and takes a first cross-eyed stare at the world. The doctor cuts the umbilical cord. No one will be just like us. Each of us will be free to choose and act, to shape our lives, to go for the gold, to make a difference.

Advertising sells us life as an *I* plan. Each of us is a consumer who deserves a ipod, cell phone, laptop and Internet access, speakers, and new car to drive in the fast lane.

Life is more than an *I* plan. So interwoven are our lives that if, as infants, no one puts his or her arms around us and surrounds us with love and care, we will die. If we are to flourish, parents and caregivers must feed us, rock us, change and bathe us, call us by name.

As we learn to trust these first people in our world, we open ourselves to the whole world outside ourselves. Out of our first relationship, every other relationship unfolds, including our relationship with God.

As parents, families, friends encourage us to creep, crawl, walk, talk, tell stories, laugh, choose, think, we unfold day by day and year by year fully into ourselves. We live because of those who care for us. We walk upright because of ancestors long buried.

As children of God we share the life of God, the life of three persons in one love. The Spirit is the love between Father and Son. The

In our ability to love others, human beings share the Spirit's power to give life. Life is not an *I* plan. It is a *we* plan, a *love* plan.

Each of us is born not only into the love of those who care for us but also into their faith. When parents ask the Church to baptize a child, they promise to share with their child the faith they share with the Christian community.

Just as families cheer us on to walk and talk, the Christian community with our parents summons us to respond to God's life-giving love for us. At baptism the community welcomes us as new members and professes its faith in God who creates all that is out of nothing, in God who becomes one of us and loves us wholeheartedly, in God who gives us life in every breath.

At our baptism a priest or deacon calls us by name and baptizes us, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Spirit acts in us to urge us beyond our individual selves into making community on Earth like the community of love that is God.

We live Christian life in communion with God and community with one another, sharing the joys and hopes, the fears and sorrows, hunger and poverty of every other human being. Christian life is a *we* plan, a love plan.

● Who are the people who have called you forth to walk, talk, ride a bike, pray, or participate in the life of your parish?

● Who gives you reason to belong actively to your parish community?

● If you imagine your life as six days of creation, what happens on day one, day two, day three...?



We Can CHOOSE

We human beings experience many pushes and pulls within ourselves. We have to wrestle with our choices. We seek what is good, but we can't always see beyond what appears good. We want to act responsibly but often don't.

In Genesis 2:4-25 the bible tells a second creation story about how God shapes a human from the mud around a spring and breathes life into the human. The name of our species—*human*—comes from the Latin word for the soil of the earth—*humus*. This second creation story shows us we are both of Earth and of God. We are made to live in communion with God.

God makes us freely out of love. We are made in God's image, free and able to love in return. We can remember and think, choose and plan, befriend and support. But we can also forget God. We can harm others and ourselves. We can live off the air and water of Earth without sustaining it. We can live off the families who love us into being without returning their love. We are free.

Genesis 3 tells a story about how the first man and woman discover they are free. The man and woman live in a garden God has made for them to cultivate. God tells them not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden.

A sly serpent suggests to the woman that she sample the fruit on the tree. "The rule is to prevent you from becoming like God, knowing good and evil," says the serpent.

The fruit looks delicious. Becoming wise like God seems a good thing, so the woman and man eat the fruit.

As their punishment for breaking God's rule, they must leave the garden. They have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Israel's story expresses the truth that human beings are free. They must keep learning from experience what gives life and what destroys life.

Each of us is free to be responsible and free to be foolish, free to hurt and free to heal, free to bash and free to create. Freedom is the power to act or not to act, to perform deliberate acts of one's own for which each of us is responsible.

Our freedom makes us moral, able to choose and make judgments about what is good and what is evil, what builds relationships and what destroys them. Each of us is free to participate in building up community among human beings or withhold ourselves and watch life from the bleachers.

- When is a time you chose to get off the bleachers and onto the playing field?

- Give an example of a time you could have acted cruelly or destructively but chose to act in a life-giving way instead.



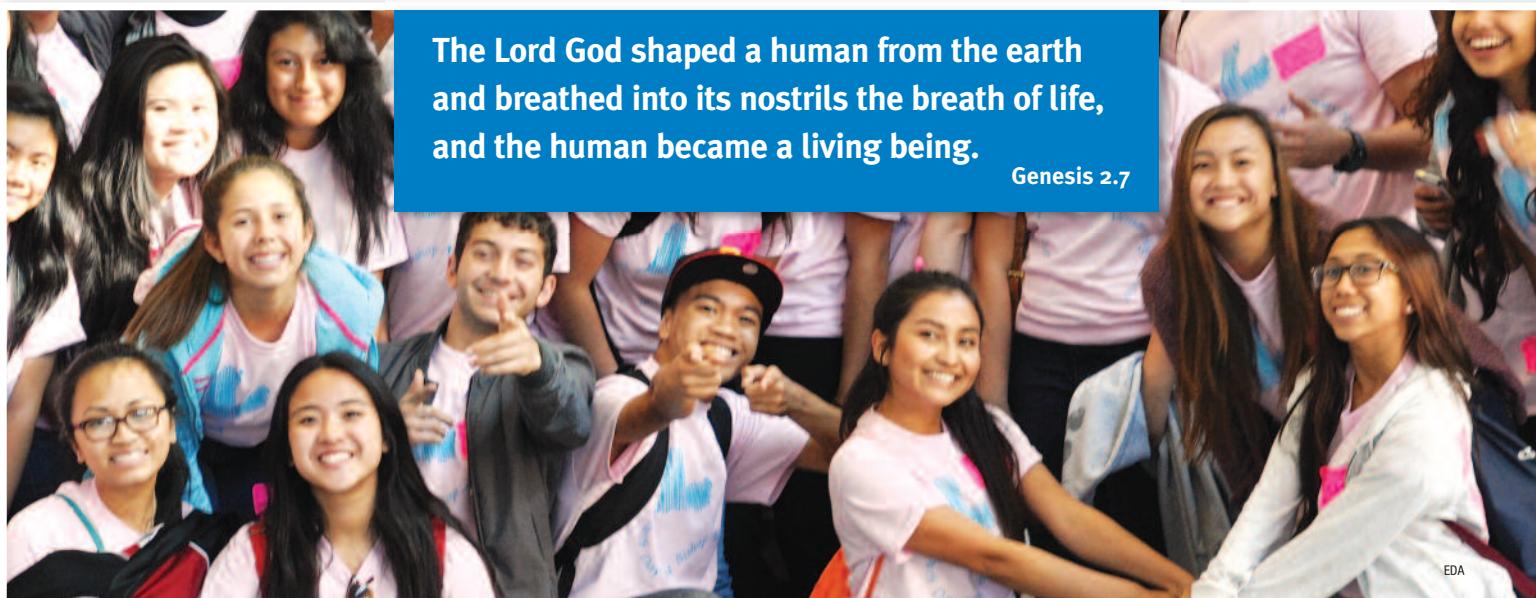
When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took its fruit and ate; she also gave some to the man, who was with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3:6



The Lord God shaped a human from the earth and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being.

Genesis 2:7



How Do I Use My Freedom?

Read the two dilemmas below in small groups; discuss what the characters should do. Choose a course of action and give reasons for your choice.

Nothing Serious

"Why won't Tony talk to me about last weekend?" Lisa asks Jack as they lean against his car after school. "You're his best friend. Was he with someone else?"

"Not really."

"What do you mean not really?"

"He didn't bring anyone to the party," Jack answers.

"But there were girls there. Right?" Lisa questions.

Jack nods.

"I heard this Rachel what's-her-name was sitting on his lap."

"She was sitting on everyone's lap."

"I'm never talking to Tony again. He said I couldn't go to this party because it is all guys and then surprise, girls are there."

"The girls are RT's friends from work. The party was at his house. They go to Lincoln Senior. Nothing serious."

"That's a guy attitude. Nothing serious." Lisa turns, and winds her arms around Jack's neck, and snuggles next to him.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing serious," says Lisa.

How should Jack use his freedom?

How should Lisa use hers?

You Can't Stop Me

"You can't tell me I can't go to the shore this weekend with Ben's family," said Molly.

"You are too young to be so seriously involved with a guy," said her mom.

"You were 15 when I was born, so what is too young?"

"I don't want you to be another single mom."

"He loves me."

"People who care about you want what's best for you. I don't want you to have the life I've had. I want you to go to college."

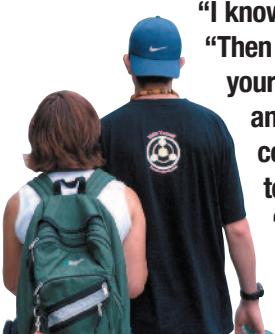
"I know how to take care of myself."

"Then be smart enough to stay home, work your job, do your homework, be a kid, and let these guys who should be in college find somebody their own age to date."

"You can't stop me."

"Yes, I can."

How should Molly use her freedom?



In confirmation the bishop extends his hands and prays that each Christian receive the gift of the Spirit. The bishop marks each person on the forehead with holy oil to seal him or her with the Holy Spirit. This seal marks Christians as persons committed to use their freedom to love God, their neighbors, and themselves as Jesus taught.

Read Jesus' teachings below.

LOVE THE LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Mark 12:29-31

IF I, YOUR LORD and master, have washed your feet, so you ought to wash one another's feet.

John 13:14

LOVE ONE ANOTHER as I have loved you.

John 13:34

DO TO OTHERS as you would have them do to you.

Matthew 7:12

WHATEVER YOU DID FOR one of these least brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me.

Matthew 25:40

FORGIVE seventy times seven.

Matthew 18:22

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES; do good to those who hate you.

Luke 6:27

Write down five rules you think most young people live by during high school.

1

2

3

4

5

**How Christian are these rules?
Compare them with Jesus' teaching.**