

# Loss, Death, Grief and Dying

LEARNING STRAND: SACRAMENT AND WORSHIP



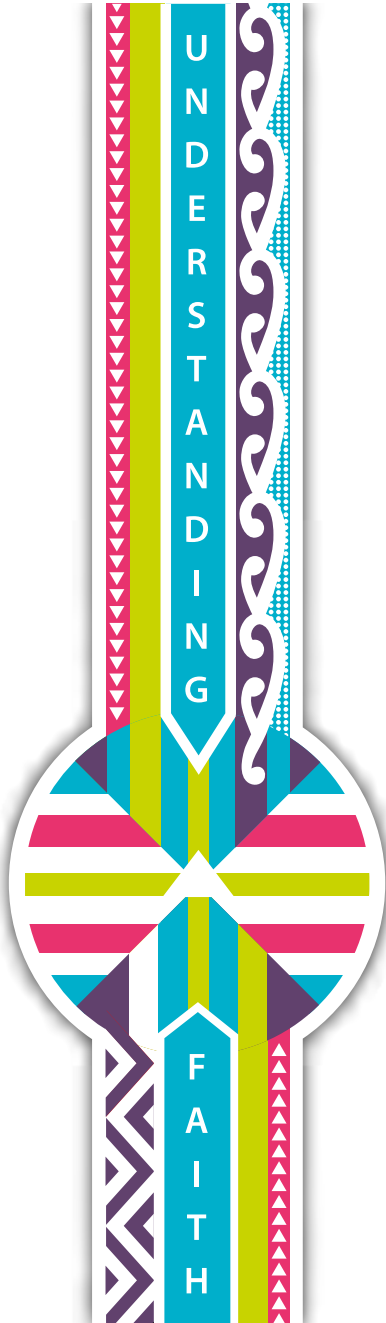
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RELIGIOUS  
EDUCATION  
PROGRAMME

FOR CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

12D



## THE LOGO

The logo is an attempt to express Faith as an inward and outward journey.

This faith journey takes us into our own hearts, into the heart of the world and into the heart of Christ who is God's love revealed.

In Christ, God transforms our lives. We can respond to his love for us by reaching out and loving one another.

The circle represents our world. White, the colour of light, represents God. Red is for the suffering of Christ. Red also represents the Holy Spirit. Yellow represents the risen Christ.

The direction of the lines is inwards except for the cross, which stretches outwards.

Our lives are embedded in and dependent upon our environment (green and blue) and our cultures (patterns and textures).

Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, is represented by the blue and white pattern.

The blue also represents the Pacific...

Annette Hanrahan RSCJ

# **Loss, Death, Grief and Dying**



**LEARNING STRAND: HUMAN EXPERIENCE**

**12D**

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**Māori terms are italicised in the text. The first time a Māori term appears in the text, its English meaning appears in brackets after it. A Māori glossary at the back of the book gives a more detailed explanation of these terms and provides a guide for their pronunciation.**

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# Part One:

## Jesus' Victory Over Death

### Focus:

- **Through his death and resurrection Hehu Karaiti (Jesus Christ) destroyed the power of sin and death, and brought new life to the world.**
- **Christians believe that we, like Jesus, will be raised from death to new life in Te Atua (God).**
- **Despite the losses and griefs we experience in this world, Christians recognise that through Christ's resurrection death no longer has ultimate power over us.**



### Jesus' Death and Resurrection

In the eyes of his contemporaries Jesus died a criminal – the gospels are clear that Jesus was arrested, tried, sentenced, executed and buried. Through the eyes of *whakapono* (faith), Christians believe that Jesus' death on the cross was a great act of *aroha* (love). By freely offering his life to his Father in heaven Jesus brought salvation to the world.

The Romans and Jewish leaders responsible for Jesus' execution expected his story to end with his burial. Yet for his first disciples and for the millions of Christians throughout the centuries Jesus' death was only the beginning.

Following his crucifixion on Good Friday Jesus was placed in a sealed tomb. On the morning of the first day of the week a group of women returned to the tomb to prepare Jesus' body for burial – work they did not complete earlier because it was the time of the Passover. When they found the tomb empty, an angel told the women that Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus himself then appeared, firstly to Mary Magdalene and the other women, later to many witnesses, including Peter and the Twelve.

Saint Paul affirms the truth and great significance of Jesus' resurrection and the appearances that followed it when he writes:

*For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)*

Each of the four gospels tells the story of Jesus' resurrection in its own distinctive way. However, the scriptural accounts of these events all insist that the risen Jesus is the same Lord who had died – his body shows the signs of his torture and crucifixion. Although his followers do not always recognise Jesus at first, the physical reality of his presence is stressed. The disciples not only see the risen Lord with their eyes – they speak with him, touch his flesh and share food with him.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the central mystery of the Christian faith not only because it confirms the truth of everything that Jesus said and did but because it established his power over sin and death. At the Easter Vigil the Church sings the Exsultet – the proclamation that Christ is risen from the dead and that sin and death have lost their power:

*This is the night when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death and rose triumphant from the grave.... The power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy; it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride. (Exsultet)*



**Illumination depicting the three Marys bringing an ointment to Christ's tomb, and discover that it is open, from the Codex De Predis, conserved at the Royal Library in Turin, Italy.**

### Task One

**Read the following gospel accounts of Jesus' appearances to his disciples after *Te Aranga* (the resurrection).**

**The appearance to Mary Magdalene**

**John 20:11-18**

**On the road to Emmaus Luke 24:13-32**

**In the upper room Luke 24:33-49**

**In the upper room John 20:19-29**

**By the Sea of Galilee John 21**

**Choose one of the accounts and explain:**

- a) **How it presents the risen Jesus as a physical reality.**
- b) **How it shows the risen Jesus to be different in some way**

## Jesus Frees Us from the Power of Death

Death is a universal reality that none of us can escape. Everyone dies and no one returns from the grave. Because of this, people naturally fear death and stand in awe of it.

The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, however, enables us to look beyond death with great hope. Jesus' resurrection points to our resurrection. His victory over death encourages us to look forward to "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1), where God "will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Each of us will enjoy our own Easter day. On the first resurrection morning, Christ broke the chains of death and rose from the tomb to a life that would have no end. For Christians, Easter is a time of special joy because it strengthens our conviction that, like Jesus before us, we shall rise to new life. Whatever the losses and griefs we suffer in this world, the events of Easter are a sign that death no longer holds us in its power.

### Something to Discuss

**What are some implications of Jesus' resurrection from the dead for his first followers and for Christians today?**

### Something to Think About

**Which of the above gospel accounts of the risen Jesus' appearances do you find most appealing? Why?**



## Part Two:

### The Experience of Loss

**Focus:**

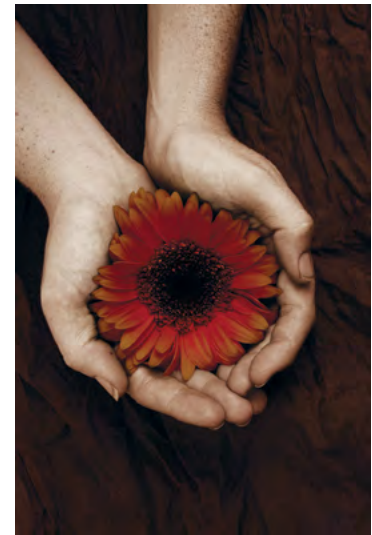
- All people experience loss, but some losses are more serious than others.
- The more closely attached someone is to an object or person they are parted from the greater their sense of loss.
- Loss is expressed through a range of emotions.

### Loss – A Universal Human Experience

Loss is experienced by all people regardless of age, race, gender, education, economic status, religion, or nationality, sometimes many times during their lives. It occurs whenever a person is separated from someone or something that is important to them.

All human beings become attached to people, places or things. It is normal for us to love our family, friends and pets, even our books, clothes and other possessions. To lose any of these can provoke a reaction of sorrow, the depth of which depends on how closely we are attached to the object or person from which we are parted. While some losses are trivial others are felt much more deeply.

Some people experience many painful losses in their lives while others have only a few serious losses to deal with. However, no one can altogether escape losing someone or something dear to them. The little losses we experience throughout our lives help us develop an understanding of grief and prepare us for those times when the pain of loss is more intense.



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## Types of Loss

Separation from a parent

Losing a pet

Shifting to a new house

Changing schools

Death of a family member

Being in hospital

Moving neighbourhoods or towns

Growing older

Injury or disability

Breakdown of a friendship

Failing a test or assessment activity

Divorce or separation

Unemployment through layoff or termination

Serious illness

Burglary or theft

Miscarriage

Sporting defeat

Criminal damage

Loss of a prized possession

Violence



### Task Two

- Which of these types of loss have you either experienced or been personally affected by?**
- Which of these types of loss are the most serious? Why?**
- What other types of loss can you think of?**



### Task Three

**Write your own definition of loss. Compare your definition with those written by other members of the class.**

### Something to Think About

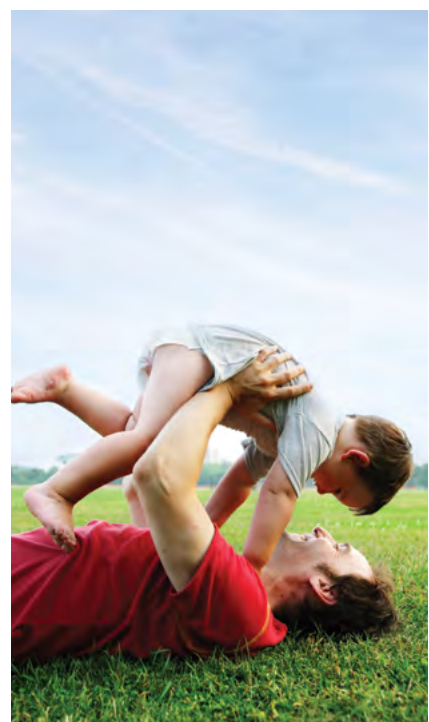
**How true is the following statement in terms of your own experience?**

*The more closely attached someone is to the object or person that they are parted from the greater their sense of loss.*

## Losses Typical of Different Phases of Life

Each human life, however brief, has a certain shape to it. During the course of a lifetime people go through a series of stages or phases, each building upon the previous ones. The following stages are typical of those who live a long life.

- **Infancy** begins with birth and extends to the age of two years.
- **Childhood** lasts from the age of two years through to the onset of puberty (nine to thirteen years) and includes the primary school years.
- **Adolescence**, which begins with puberty, is the period where the body becomes sexually mature and the person develops rapidly both socially and emotionally.
- **Young Adulthood** describes the years from about seventeen to twenty-five. It is a transitional period that leads out of adolescence into mature adult life.
- **Mature Adulthood** is the time of life when people are ready to face the challenges and commitments of adulthood, including marriage and family life. Mature adults can accept full responsibility for their own decisions and actions and are capable of nurturing and caring for others.
- **Mid-life** is a time where the body begins to slow down and people experience a decrease in energy – although this doesn't usually stop them from doing the things they enjoy. Physical changes such as menopause in women and the loss of hair in men are normal as people move into their forties.
- **Beyond Retirement** describes the period of older adulthood, especially the years past the age of sixty-five when many people are no longer in full-time paid employment. While increasing numbers of people live to an advanced age in good health, others struggle with the negative effects of aging.



### Task Four

**Construct a timeline on which you mark the different phases of human life.**

**For each phase add to the timeline examples of the sorts of losses that you think are typical of that phase. Name and / or illustrate these losses.**

### Alternative Card Activity

**Work in a small group. The cards in the set that your teacher will give you describe various losses that people are likely to experience during the course of their lives.**

**Place the cards face down in the centre of your group. Members should take turns to pick up a card and read out the loss described on it. Together, the group should decide on the phase of life that each loss is most likely to belong to.**

## Grief – A Response to Loss

When people experience a significant loss their response is one of grief. They may become overwhelmed by emotions such as shock, disbelief, fear, anger, emptiness, numbness or sadness.

Grieving is a normal process that people need to go through in order to heal. A positive attitude to life helps us, our family and our friends deal with the losses we face and grow through grief when it comes.

### Something to Discuss

**Discuss the following case studies in a pair or small group.**

- Identify at least three feelings displayed in each case study.**
- Select words or actions from each study which show how the characters felt.**
- Describe the sort of loss involved in each case.**
- Explain how Sandy (case one) and Michael (case two) might have grown through their experiences.**

## Two Case Studies

### Case Study One – Amy

It was a very stupid row really. Tony and I had always met on the corner next to his house, so that we could walk to school together. Three years of high school life had made us good friends and we liked the same kinds of sports, music, cars, and we had plenty to talk about on the ten minutes' walk.

Then a new girl arrived at school. She was quite pretty, with nice hair and eyes. Tony was all taken up with her. And she couldn't even play tennis! He followed her around at school, walked home with her, and began to take her out at weekends. During our morning walk to school, he talked about Amy this, and Amy that; on and on.

The end came one morning when I found him waiting at the corner as usual. As I drew near, he called out, "Sandy, I'm waiting for Amy today." I told him, pretty colourfully, that I wouldn't be seen dead with her, and went on to school on my own.

We don't meet at the corner any more. Tony has hardly spoken to me since. I feel really down about it, but I'd rather die than let him know.



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### Case Study Two – The Phone Call

The phone rang. Michael dashed out to answer it. He expected his best friend to be ringing about their outing that day. Karl usually rang at about this time. But it was a short call and Michael came back into the living room slowly.

"What's the matter?" asked his mother.

"It was Dad," replied Michael.

"What did he want?" asked his mother.

"He said he's not coming home for a while and to tell you that he thinks the two of you need a trial separation", Michael pulled distractedly at a loose thread on his shirt. "Good", said his mother. "I think I need some space too."

Michael turned around to face his mother. "I really thought you two could sort out your problems. Why can't you and Dad just..."

His mother turned away. Michael put his head down and tried hard to hold back his tears.



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**Task Five**

Choose a situation of loss which you have experienced at some time – for example, the loss of a pet, a friend who has shifted, the death of someone in your *whānau* (family) etc. Complete the following profile:

## A Profile of Loss



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Complete the following phrases:

1. The loss I experienced was .....

2. At the time I felt .....

3. Physical symptoms I experienced (for example, dry mouth, numbness etc.) were .....

4. I got through the situation by .....

5. I would have found it easier if .....

6. From the experience I have learnt .....

7. From this experience I was able to grow in the following ways: .....

**Something to Discuss**

Share what you have written about the loss in a pair or small group – but only as much as you feel comfortable. Compile a list of all the different emotions or feelings that group members have experienced in reaction to their various losses.

**Something to Do**

Design a poster or write a poem or present a mime or a piece of scripted drama that explores a response to a loss.

# Part Three:

## The Process of Grief

### Focus:

- **It is through the grief process that we respond to loss.**
- **Each person is unique and grieves in their own particular way.**
- **Although there are many different ways of reacting to loss, the grief process usually follows certain patterns and moves through various stages.**

## Grief is Normal and Natural

Grief, the process of coping with loss in our lives, affects everyone at some time. It is a normal and natural human experience – a healthy and healing response to sorrow, suffering, loss and death.

Grief includes a wide range of emotions and people may experience a variety of reactions when faced with a serious loss. Feelings can even be contradictory at times.

### Some Reactions Associated with Grief

**Anger**

**Anxiety**

**Change in worldview**

**Confusion**

**Depression**

**Despair**

**Drop in self-esteem**

**Fear of going mad**

**Feeling unable to cope**

**Guilt and remorse**

**Helplessness**

**Hopelessness**

**Loneliness**

**Questioning of values and beliefs**

**Relief**

**Shock and disbelief**

### Something to Think About

**Describe an experience that has brought grief to you or to someone you know. List at least five feelings or emotions which were part of the grief process.**

**You may wish to share about these reactions in a pair or small group.**



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## Grief – a Process Not a State

Grief is not something that is present one day and gone the next. It is a process that takes time to work through. How long grief lasts and how intensely it is felt depends on a number of factors – the person suffering the loss, the strength of the person's attachment to who or what they have lost, and the circumstances surrounding the loss. For example, it is not unusual for a person experiencing the end of a relationship through a break-up, divorce or death to take anything from eighteen months to two years or more to "work through" their grief. Some grieving can be a life-long.

## The Refusal to Grieve

The refusal to grieve and to accept feelings of loss can be a cause of suffering. Unexpressed grief can reveal itself in inappropriate ways, including violence directed at self or others.



## The Stages of Grief

There are many different ways of reacting to grief but these reactions generally follow a certain pattern. Usually, a person experiencing a loss goes through a state of shock, followed by a time of reaction and gradual recovery.

The stages of grief outlined below were originally identified by Granger Westberg.

### 1. Shock

A person's immediate response to a serious loss such as a death may be so overwhelming that their senses are numbed. The 'bottom' falls out of their world, and they may experience feelings of disbelief and denial.

### 2. Emotional Release

The person vents their grief by crying, sobbing, cursing, sighing etc. Uncontrollable urges to express grief can occur without warning, especially when there is a build up of emotions.

### 3. Depression and Isolation

At this stage the grieving person may be without hope and unable to identify positive things that are happening around them. They may wonder whether they will ever recover, will ever be normal again. While they may feel alienated from those around them people in grief need the sympathy and understanding of others.

### 4. Physical Symptoms of Distress

The distress of many survivors is expressed in physical side-effects. Normal sleeping and eating habits may alter. Grieving people often experience headaches, dizziness, nausea, or a lack of energy. Because their immune systems may not be working effectively, they are more likely to get sick.

### 5. Panic / Anxiety

Many people become panicky or anxious because they can only think of their loss. This can limit their ability to concentrate on activities, such as work. A person may worry about their own mental health and feel that they are "losing their mind". Feelings of not being in control are a normal aspect of grief.

### 6. A Sense of Guilt

Guilt is a feeling typically associated with grief. The grieving person wonders if the loss could have been prevented if things had been done differently. There is also regret about things they did or did not do at the time. Sometimes a person feels responsible for a particular situation that they had no control over – for example, feeling guilty because they couldn't prevent the murder of a loved one. This form of irrational guilt is sometimes called self-blame.

**7. Anger and Resentment**

When there is a significant loss, most people go through a stage where they are very critical of everything and everyone associated with their loss. Sometimes, people need someone or something to blame for a death that has occurred. They can be hostile or resentful toward relatives, doctors, police and others – even God. Although anger is healthy, it can be damaging if it becomes all-consuming or is expressed inappropriately.

**8. Inability to Return to Usual Activities**

Some people in grief believe that the past was perfect and that the future has little to offer them. They may retreat from the present in order to keep the memory of the dead person alive, and are reluctant or unable to return to their usual activities because facing ‘life’ again is too painful. For others, grief becomes familiar, even comfortable.

**9. Hope Returns**

How long grief will last for a survivor cannot be predicted. But with the gradual fading of the intense images of the past, there will be glimpses of hope amidst the grief. Eventually this hope will outweigh discouraging feelings.

**10. Readjustment to Reality**

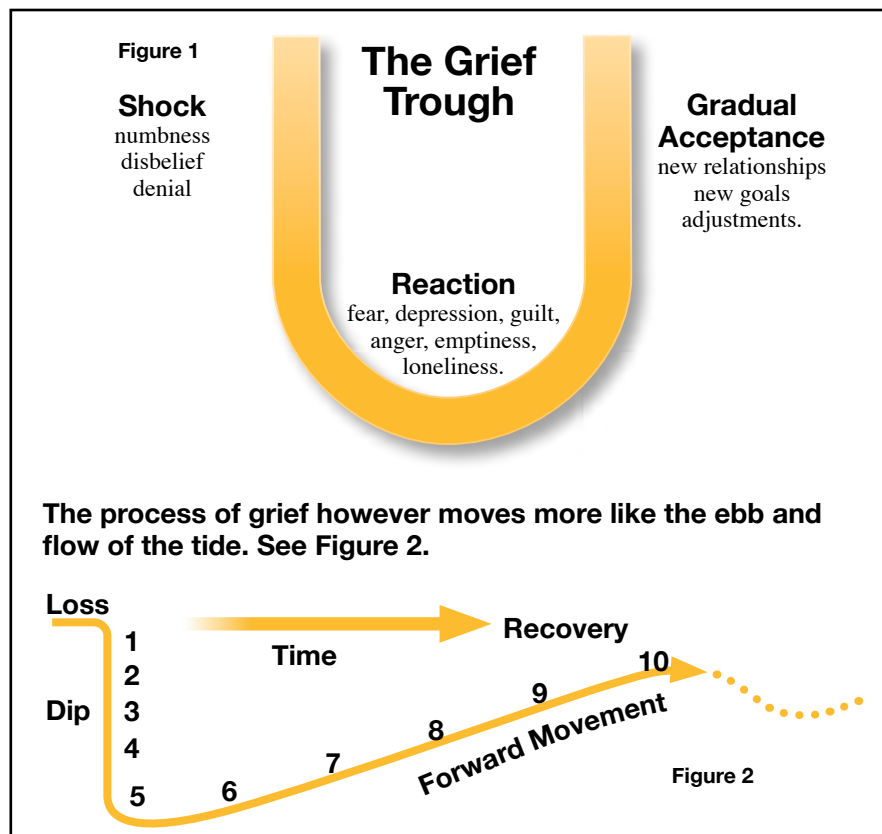
Healthy adjustment recognises the loss but is no longer dominated by it. The person is often changed as a result of the process of grieving.

**Each Person Grieves Differently**

Each person is unique and no two people grieve in exactly the same way. Some may go through the various stages of grief not asking for help while others may express their loss more openly. Most will want affection and reassurance. Although grieving is an individual process, most people cannot do it alone. It makes a significant difference when they are supported and encouraged.

Many grieving persons do not go through all the stages outlined above, and some stages are returned to periodically. However, knowledge of the stages of grief assists those experiencing loss and those close to them to understand what is going on.

The stages of grief can be pictured as a trough (figure 1) or like the ebb and flow of the tide (figure 2).



### Task Six

Study Westberg's ten stages of grief.

List an emotion or feeling or way of behaving that is typical of each of the ten stages.

### Something to Do

Working in a pair or small group, choose one stage of the grief process and prepare a chart or poster on it to present to the class. Include the following details:

- The *number* of the stage in the grief process
- The *title* of the stage
- A *short summary* of what the stage involves
- A *visual symbol* representing the stage

### Something to Think About

Where would each of Westberg's ten stages of grief fit in the Grief Trough? Group the stages under the following headings:

## The Grief Trough

*Shock*

*Reaction*

*Gradual Acceptance*



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## Part Four: Coping with Loss

### Focus:

- **When faced with a significant loss, it is important to accept and acknowledge strong feelings of grief in oneself and others.**
- **He tangata (people) are able to cope with grief by expressing and sharing their feelings.**
- **Scripture gives us an insight into loss and grief, especially in the accounts of Jesus' suffering and death.**
- **Prayer can be a great source of consolation in times of loss and grief.**

## Dealing with Strong Feelings

As we have seen, people experience a wide range of intense emotions when faced with a significant loss, especially a death. Strong feelings of grief can be difficult to cope with, but it is important to accept and acknowledge them in oneself and in others. At the same time, it is possible to help ourselves and others to cope with loss by expressing and sharing our feelings.

### Task Seven

- Read the case study below.**
- Identify the different sorts of loss involved in this situation.**
- List the different feelings that you think each of the people in the story might be experiencing.**



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### A Case Study: Neighbours

The family next door to you are packing to move out. Their mortgage has proved too much for them to meet, especially as the father of the family was made redundant shortly after beginning work with a new company.

There are two school-age boys and a girl of three at home. As yet they have no alternative accommodation, but an aunt has offered to take the three-year-old temporarily.

The mother of the family works part-time at a factory to which she walks three kilometres every day. The father has spent a lot of his time looking for work but, with no success, has begun to mope around in the house and hasn't even been helping with the packing!

Their car has been sold so that they can pay the credit card accounts.



### Card Activity

Work in a small group and appoint a group member to be a recorder / spokesperson for the group.

The cards in the set that your teacher gives your group describe various situations of loss.

#### Part One:

- a) Place the cards face down in the centre of the group.
- b) Group members should take turns picking up a card and reading out the loss described on it.
- c) Imagine yourself in the situation described on the card.
- d) Take turns to share briefly with the group any feelings that you experience as you imagine yourself in the situation of loss.
- e) When all have had a turn to share, a spokesperson for the group should report back to the whole class.

#### Part Two:

- a) Choose one of the situations of loss described on the cards.
- b) In your group come up with possible ways of coping with the loss.
- c) Record these and then report back to the class.

### Extension Activity

Find and interview a student in the class who chose a different situation and discuss their ways of coping with the loss. Compare these with your own methods.

## Losing Jesus

In both the Old and the New Testaments there are many situations where people have to deal with loss. In Luke's Gospel we see the reactions of Mary and Joseph when they become separated from their twelve-year-old son, Jesus:

*Now every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.*

*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour. (Luke 2:41-52)*



Jesus in the Temple by Giovanni Paolo Panini, 18th Century.

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### Task Eight

Imagine you are Mary or Joseph in the situation described in Luke 2:41-52. Jot down how you feel about having lost Jesus and then finding him in the Temple among the teachers.

#### Something to Do

Working in a small group present the situation described in Luke 2:41-52 either in the form of a role-play or as a newspaper article with a suitable headline.

#### Something to Think About

- a) Recall an experience of losing someone or something you were responsible for and try to remember your reactions.
- b) How were your reactions similar to those of Mary and Joseph? How were they different from theirs?

## Loss and New Life

On a number of occasions during his public ministry *Hehu* spoke about loss. He made it clear to his followers that they must be prepared to let go of their attachment to this life and follow him – even to the point of death – if they wished to share in the life of *Te Atua*.

*... whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:38-39)*

*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)*

*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:25-26)*

Through his words and actions Jesus taught that we “lose” ourselves whenever, out of a sense of love, we commit ourselves to follow God and serve others. Jesus’ willingness to die on the cross in order to heal humankind’s damaged relationship with *Te Atua* indicates that he was willing to lose everything to restore people to the fullness of God’s life and *aroha*. While on the cross Jesus’ physical pain was undoubtedly great. His cry that God had abandoned him suggests that Jesus’ grief and mental suffering were just as intense:

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”  
(Mark 15:34)*

### Task Nine

**Read the account of Jesus’ agony at Gethsemane in Mark 14:32-42.**

- What does Jesus say that indicates he is willing to lose everything to do God’s will?**
- What does Jesus do to cope with the grief he is experiencing?**

### Something to Discuss

**What are some of the ways in which we might “lose” ourselves if we are committed to following God and serving others out of love?**

## Prayer in Times of Loss

In times of loss prayer can be a great consolation, especially when it is shared with others. While prayer does not take away the suffering, it does help a person in grief work through it.

The Book of Psalms in the Bible – a collection of 150 religious songs, prayers, and poems used by the people of Israel in their worship and well known to Jesus – contains a number of lyrics which express trust in God in the face of loss. Perhaps the best known and most loved of these is Psalm 23.



**Christ Crucified and Mary Magdalene, by Pietro Antonio Magatti, oil on canvas, 1710-1720**

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## Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green  
pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.  
He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest  
valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff –  
they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.*



**The Golden Valley (oil on canvas), by Sir Alfred East (1849-1913)**

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### Something to Think About

**What lines from Psalm 23 do you think would bring comfort to people who are experiencing feelings of loss or grief?**

### Something to Do

**Design a card that will bring comfort to people experiencing loss or grief. Use text from Psalm 23 or another of the psalms. Otherwise, search the gospels and find appropriate words of Jesus. Combine the words with an appropriate image.**

### Extension Activity

**Compose a *karakia* (prayer) or poem of your own that would be suitable for a time of loss or grief.**

## Part Five: What is Death?

### Focus:

- ***He tangata* are naturally fearful of death and often find it difficult to talk about what happens when we die.**
- **The human body dies when the blood stops circulating and all brain functions cease irreversibly.**
- **Traditionally, Christians have described death in terms of the separation of body and soul.**
- **For the Christian, death opens the way to the possibility of experiencing the fullness of God's life and *aroha*.**
- **Christians look forward with *tūmanako* (hope) to the end of time when, through the power of Jesus' resurrection, *Te Atua* will raise our bodies to new life and reunite them with our souls.**

### Fear of Death

Throughout the world, death and all the rituals that surround it are steeped in taboos. Even in cultures that seem to have a healthy acceptance of death, restrictions are often applied to food, items of clothing and other objects – and even to people – that have been in contact with the dead.

In Aotearoa New Zealand today, many people find being in the presence of death frightening and unwelcome. Here, as elsewhere, there is a general reluctance to acknowledge what happens to people's bodies when they die.



### Something to Discuss

**What are some of the cultural taboos associated with death?**

### Something to Think About

**Why do you think so many people find being in the presence of death frightening and unwelcome?**

### Ways of Defining Death

There is no single way of defining death. It can be described in a variety of terms – medical, legal, cultural and religious.

**Medical knowledge** tells us that under normal circumstances, death begins when the heart stops beating and the blood stops pumping. Deprived of oxygen, the cells of the body start breaking down – firstly, the brain cells and finally, those of the skin. Because death is a process rather than a single event it can be difficult to determine the exact moment of a person's death. To do so it is necessary to identify a point from which there can be no return to life.

The term *brain death* describes the situation where a person's upper brain and brain stem have stopped functioning permanently. Someone who is brain dead has lost both the capacity to think and perceive, as well as the control of basic bodily functions such as heart beat and breathing. In the case of people who are brain dead these essential functions can be maintained by respirators and other technologies.

In New Zealand there is no **legal definition** of death. However, in a number of countries, including most Australian states, the law defines death as either the irreversible cessation of the circulation of blood in the body of the person or the irreversible cessation of all function of the brain of the person. A person needs to be certified as brain dead before their organs or tissues can be removed for transplantation.

In **past times** and in **other cultures** people have determined death by various means. Among classical Greek and Roman societies the signs of death were the absence of a heartbeat and breathing, and the onset of the decay of the flesh. In medieval times a candle was held to the mouth – a flicker of the candle was regarded as a sign of life.

It wasn't until 1740 that an anatomist Jacques-Benigne recommended that resuscitation should be attempted on seemingly lifeless patients. This was to be done by stimulating various parts of the body with the "juices of onions, garlic and horse-radish, with whips and nettles, and by hideous shrieks and excessive noises." Pins were also inserted under the toenails.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the publicity given to cases of supposed live burial placed growing pressure on doctors to come up with more reliable ways of determining death. The provision of special corpse houses where bodies could be monitored until decay was apparent and the popularity of safety coffins which allowed the "deceased" to breathe through a tube and alert those above ground if they happened to wake from a deep coma indicated the extent to which people feared a live burial. The invention of the stethoscope in 1819 removed the need for these extreme measures.

The invention of the artificial respirator in the nineteen-fifties meant that the cells of the body could be kept alive in the absence of a natural heartbeat. By 1968 when the first human heart transplant was performed, it was already clear that there needed to be a diagnosis for death that was not based on heartbeat. It was then that a committee based at the Harvard Medical School in the USA came up with the criteria for brain death.

The Church teaches that diagnosing death is the responsibility of medicine. Pope Pius XII in a statement dealing with the use of artificial respiration to keep unconscious patients alive said:

*"It remains for the doctor and especially the anaesthesiologist, to give a clear and precise definition of "death" and the "moment of death" of a patient who passes away in a state of unconsciousness." (Address to an International Congress of Anaesthesiologists – November 24, 1957)*

### Task Ten

**Give both a medical and a legal definition of death.**

### Something to Think About

**Which of the ways of determining death used in the past seems strangest to you? Which the most sensible?**

### Something to Discuss

**The following comments about death all come from young people. In a group discuss each of the statements and then put together a statement that reflects the group's opinion about death.**



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# Some Thoughts About Death

I wish someone could die, come back to life, and tell us what really does happen. *(Dave)*

When I die, there'll be another person there for me. That person is Jesus. *(Tui)*

I believe in *Te Atua* because when my little brother died, praying helped a lot. *(Meri)*

Bodies wear out, but I don't see how souls can. *(Lena)*

I think death is final – it's a terrifying thought, the thought of nothing. So life must be lived to the max! *(George)*

If you're buried, you rot away to earth. The earth feeds the plants and then something or someone will eat the plants, so your dead body has created an after-life. *(Troy)*

I often wonder if there is a heaven or a hell. *(Paul)*

I'd like someone in the next life to drop me a letter and tell me what's really going on up there. *(Kim)*

I am a Muslim, so I have to try and follow the rules of Islam as best I can; I believe in a life after death, an eternal heaven and hell, and in God whether He is the God of Christians, Jews or Hindus. *(Ali)*

After my death, I'll be 100% fully alive. *(Alma)*

## The Catholic Understanding of Death

The Catholic Church teaches that it is only by passing through death that it becomes possible for humans to experience the fullness of God's life and *aroha*. For each person there is only one earthly journey – which must end in death. For Catholics, death marks the climax of a person's life on earth, the end of their one opportunity to work out their eternal destiny. There is no possibility of reincarnation.

From a human point of view, death can be sad because leaving this earthly life and the people we love is so final. But for committed Christians, death becomes our most meaningful act. We look ahead to it and live our lives in the realisation of its coming, knowing that Christ by his death and *Te Aranga* has changed the nature of our death.

Catholics believe that when we die, the soul or spirit separates from the body and the human body decays. As followers of Christ, we live in the hope that our souls or spirits will experience the fullness of God's life and love. We also look forward to the end of time when, through the power of Jesus' resurrection, *Te Atua* will raise our bodies to new life and reunite them with our souls.

The Catholic understanding of what happens to Christians after death can be seen in prayers, such as the various Prefaces provided for the Mass for the Dead.



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## First Preface of Christian Death

*Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,  
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*In him, who rose from the dead,  
our hope of resurrection dawned.  
The sadness of death gives way  
to the bright promise of immortality.*

*Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended.  
When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death  
we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.*

*And so, with all the choirs of angels in heaven  
we proclaim your glory  
and join in their unending hymn of praise ...*

### Task Eleven

**Which of the following statements are accurate descriptions of what the Catholic Church teaches about death? Explain why those statements which are inaccurate descriptions of Catholic belief are incorrect.**

- a) **Death marks the end of a person's life on earth.**
- b) **For each person there is only one earthly journey which ends in death.**
- c) **Reincarnation gives people another opportunity to work out their destiny.**
- d) **People can experience the fullness of God's life and *aroha* without passing through death.**
- e) **For humans, death is sad because it seems so final.**
- f) **Christ's death and resurrection enable people to find meaning in their own deaths.**
- g) **At death the soul separates from the body.**
- h) **The term "soul" describes the physical aspects of the human person.**
- i) **At our deaths, *Te Atua* will raise our bodies to new life and reunite them with our souls.**
- j) **The Catholic understanding of death can be seen in the words of the liturgy that we pray at funerals.**



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### Something to Think About

**Which sentence or phrase from the First Preface of Christian Death do you find the most comforting or encouraging? Why?**

## Part Six:

### When Death is Near

#### Focus:

- **Talking about their approaching death often helps people who are dying come to terms with what is happening to them.**
- **An awareness of Kübler-Ross's five stages of dying can help people understand and comfort those who are terminally ill.**
- **By our attitudes and actions we can support people as they draw close to death.**
- **Through the sacraments of the Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum the Church continues Jesus' healing work among the sick and the dying.**
- **People who are seriously ill may experience Christ's presence in a special way through their suffering and prayer.**

## Talking About Dying with Father Kenney

Not all people are able to bring up the subject of their own death, but according to Father William Kenney, chaplain at a large hospital, "Most dying people can cope, or learn to cope, with their situations. Even the very young often come to a deep maturity of faith as their death approaches."

Often, it is the relatives and friends who seem to have the most difficulty accepting what's happening. "Usually dying patients want to talk," said Father Kenney. "But, all of us, unless we work at it, tend to shy away from talking about death."

Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926-2004) described five stages which she believed many terminally ill patients go through as they come to terms with their approaching death:

- denial
- anger
- bargaining
- depression
- acceptance

While a number of experts have challenged aspects of Kübler-Ross's theory, many people have found that being aware of the five stages helps them understand and comfort the dying.

#### Denial

"Every normal and formerly healthy, but now dying person goes through a period of saying 'Not me! It's not going to happen to me!'" said Father Kenney. "There's nothing abnormal about denial. The patient is asking for time to be left alone to think about it. Friends and family can help by being there in a supportive way but not by encouraging the denial."

#### Anger

"In the anger stage, the patient is saying, 'Why me?' The anger most often is directed toward God. Patients feel that God has somehow let them down. They are asking, 'If I have led a good life, why is God punishing me?'"

Father Kenney's work as chaplain involves him helping the patient to see that death is a natural process which everyone must face, not a punishment. He knows that a dying person's faith can be a great support if it's based on God's forgiveness and love.

### Linda – A Case Study

Sixteen year old Linda was dying of leukaemia, a fatal blood disease. Visits to the hospital for blood transfusions had become a way of life for her. Linda realised there was something seriously wrong with her, but couldn't learn anything from her parents. They put on happy faces and insisted that everything was going to be all right. While they thought they were protecting their daughter, they were actually making the situation more difficult for her. Their cheerful attitude seemed to say that they didn't care. One day Linda asked them: "Don't you think it's time we talked about my dying?"

**Something to Think About**  
**Suggest at least one reason why the apparent cheerfulness of Linda's parents made it more difficult for her to talk about her illness.**



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## Bargaining

"In the bargaining period, dying people try to make a deal with God," says Father Kenney. "They might say, 'If I can live, I'll devote my life to charitable work.' Or, 'Please let me live until Christmas.' At this stage, little can be done but to give patients continued loving support to help them face reality."

## Depression

"The period of depression is probably the hardest for the family," said Father Kenney. "The patient withdraws and rarely talks. Trying to cheer them up is likely to hurt rather than help. Get-well cards make no sense for the terminally ill, and the humorous cards can be more cruel than funny. In this period, the quiet understanding found in silence is perhaps the most meaningful way to communicate. As one doctor put it: 'Holding the patient's hand is sometimes the most effective medicine there is.'"

## Acceptance

"The final stage of acceptance is one in which the patient has achieved a mental and emotional state that says, 'OK, I'm going to die.' It's not depression and it's not happiness. It's simply a realistic facing of facts. It can be a healing time when the patient prepares for death spiritually and psychologically. It can also be a time to settle practical matters."

"When a young mother or father dies, the financial and emotional effects on the family are very different from when an older person dies. It is especially heart-breaking to see a mother with a growing family wondering how her children will be cared for," said Father Kenney. "But I have seen marriage partners at a time like this engage in a deep discussion, and it seems to me that this must be a very sacred time in their relationship."



## Dying Teenagers

"For the dying teenager, relationships with friends are terribly important throughout their illness. Friends can comfort and support in a way that no one else can, providing the support is appropriate."

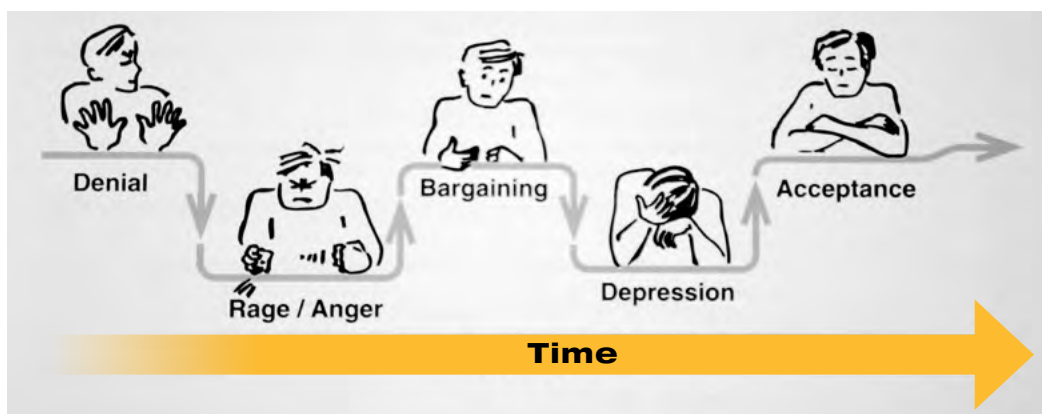
"What is appropriate support? It's facing the reality of the situation and being honest with yourself and your friend. It's not playing games by pretending the person is going to get well. It's allowing your friend to express feelings of anger, disappointment, worry, despair. It's having the strength and compassion to visit even though it's a painful experience for you. It's continuing to visit when the illness stretches to two or three years and the enthusiasm for visiting has worn off. It's being by their bedside even if there's nothing much to talk about anymore. It's communicating in silence. It's being a friend to the very end."

*Adapted from an unknown source.*

## Emotional Responses to Dying

The following diagram based on the work of Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross may be a helpful tool in understanding why a dying person behaves in the way they do. However, it is important to remember:

- People are individuals and their emotional reactions to dying will differ from one to another.
- Not every person will experience every emotion, nor in the same order.
- The pace at which the various emotional responses occur will not be predictable.



**Task Twelve**

- Name the stage of the dying process which, according to Father Kenney, seems to be the most difficult for the dying person's family. Give a reason for this.**
- Suggest appropriate help that friends and family can give to a person in the denial stage.**
- Which advice that Father Kenney gives about how to deal with a dying teenager do you think is most worthwhile? Why is the advice appropriate / useful?**

**Something to Do**

**Use the ideas that Father William Kenney presents in the article to prepare a pamphlet to help teenagers understand dying. Clearly describe / show with text and illustrations what happens at each of the following stages as terminally ill patients come to terms with their approaching death:**

- **denial**
- **anger**
- **bargaining**
- **depression**
- **acceptance**

**Why Do People Fear Dying?**

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When people are well and strong, thoughts about death seem unrealistic and can usually be easily pushed to the back of the mind. Yet weakness, sickness and terminal illnesses are natural and normal features of human existence which have to be faced if we are to have a healthy attitude

towards them. It is natural to feel confused and uncertain when dealing with someone who is close to death because when we do so we are drawn close to a great mystery.

The thought of dying can be frightening because we have no personal experience of what will happen when we come to die. Even though we may have visited very sick people in hospital or at home, we may find it impossible to imagine ourselves close to death. It is hard to know what to say to someone whom we know will never recover. Even though we may love the dying person very much, we may feel as if a barrier has come between us. However, it is important to remember that a dying person is still the person we have always known and loved – they need help, company, affection, just as much as they need their medication.

**Death in the First Person**

I am a student nurse. I'm dying. I write this to you who are, and will become, nurses, in the hope that by my sharing my feelings with you, you may be better able to help those who share my experience.

I'm out of the hospital now – perhaps for a month, for six months, perhaps for a year – but no one likes to talk much about such things. Are you all afraid?

As you look after me, you slip in and out of my room and give me medication. Is it because I am a student nurse myself, or just as a fellow human being, that I sense your fright? Your fears enhance mine. Why are you afraid? I'm the one who's dying!

I know you feel insecure, don't know what to say, don't know what to do. But please believe me, if you care you can't go wrong. Just admit that you care. That is really what we search for. We may ask for whys and wherefores, but we don't really expect answers. Don't run away ... wait ... all I want to know is that there will be someone to hold my hand when I need it. I am afraid. Death may get to be a routine to you, but it is new to me. You may not see me as unique, but I've never died before. To me, once is pretty unique!

You whisper about how young I am, but now that I am dying, am I really so young anymore? I have lots of things I wish we could talk about. It really would not take much more of your time.

If only we could be honest, both admit of our fears, touch one another. If you really care, would you lose so much of your valuable professionalism if you even cried with me? Then, it might not be so hard to die – in a hospital – with friends close by.

*Original Source Unknown*

### Something to Discuss

Work in a pair or small group and discuss the following questions:

- a) What do you think people fear most when they are dying?
- b) What advantages are there for a person to know they are dying?
- c) Might there be disadvantages? If so, what are they?
- d) It has been said that most dying people can learn to cope with their situation. What resources do you think a person might have within themselves to cope with their approaching death?

Return to large group and share the issues that came up. Keep a record of the class sharing.



### Something to Think About

If your closest friend had a terminal illness, would you avoid him or her? What would your friend most appreciate from you?

## Helping a Dying Person

People do not necessarily change very much just because they are very ill. We can help make things easier for them in a number of ways:

- By allowing the sick person plenty of time to talk.
- By being sensitive listeners who are prepared to be available when needed.
- By being honest and sincere, never raising false expectations but still full of hope.
- By offering realistic assurance, but never making promises that can't be fulfilled.
- By acting normally as we would with any friend.
- By sometimes giving a simple gift – such as a flower or a card – that will bring comfort and pleasure.
- By keeping them informed of any important or interesting news.
- By not tiring them by staying too long.
- By praying with them if asked.
- By offering a simple prayer that they can join in saying.
- By being open about our own faith and sharing it gently.

### Task Thirteen

- a) Which of the pieces of advice about making things easier for a sick or dying person or visiting a hospital do you find the most helpful?
- b) Which do you think you would find the easiest to put into practice?
- c) Which would be the most difficult for you to do?
- d) What other suggestion(s) would you add to the list?

### Advice when visiting a hospital

- As a rule, make visits short. Be alert to signs of fatigue and pain.
- Sit down. Get at eye level, touch, establish real contact. Listen.
- Be genuine in what you say. Avoid false cheeriness or empty words. A hug or a pat on the arm may say all that needs to be said.
- Avoid criticism of the care the patient is receiving. It can be upsetting.
- Let the patient guide you about their needs and wants. Don't impose your own ideas.
- Treat the patient as a person not an illness.
- Be sensitive. Be yourself.

## Jesus' Ministry to the Sick and Dying

Jesus showed a great concern for the sick and dying, many of whom encountered neglect or rejection because their illnesses were thought to be signs of sin. By reaching out in love to those on the edge of society, such as lepers, *Hehu* affirmed their human dignity. Those who met Jesus experienced spiritual, emotional and even physical healing.

Jesus made it clear to his followers that ministering to the sick and healing them were essential aspects of proclaiming *Te Rongopai* (the Good News) and a sure sign of the presence of *Te Rangatiratanga* (the reign of God).



Jesus Christ raising the daughter of Jairus. Illustration by JJ Tissot for his *Life of our Saviour Jesus Christ* 1897.

GETTY IMAGES

### Task Fourteen

Read the story of the healing of Jairus' daughter in Mark 5:22-23, 35-43.

- How did *Hehu* respond to Jairus' request for the healing of his sick daughter?
- List the ways in which Jesus showed compassion to Jairus' daughter.

### Extension Activity

Look up the following accounts of healing in the Gospels, and any others that you wish to:

- Matthew 15:21-28
- Matthew 15:29-31
- Mark 9:14-29
- Luke 5:12-16

Explain how in reaching out to these sick people Jesus restored their human dignity and showed them that he loved them.

## The Church as Healer

Today, the Church continues Jesus' ministry to the sick and dying through the sacraments of the Anointing of the Sick and of Eucharist as Viaticum – food for the journey. In these sacraments, Jesus comes to the dying person, and strengthens their faith and hope.

*Te Wairua Tapu* (Holy Spirit), the great comforter of the sick, gives grace, courage and strength. Sometimes a physical recovery may result. But even if this does not happen, the dying person becomes aware of the loving presence of Christ and the support of the community of family and friends. Sickness and death are experienced, not as punishments, but as opportunities to identify with the sufferings of Christ and grow closer to *Te Atua*. In accepting death, a person responds to God's invitation to come home to eternal happiness. By freely placing themselves in the hands of a loving and merciful God dying Christians show great trust. In this way, they follow the example of Christ and enter fully into his dying and his resurrection.

People who are seriously ill may experience Christ's presence in a special way through prayer. The patterns in their prayer will reflect the various aspects of the situation that they find themselves in. Often their prayer will move from protest to trust.

### Something to Do

Invite a priest or parish pastoral worker to speak about the Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum.

### Prayer Patterns of the Seriously Ill

**Prayer of Protest:** voicing painful questions and frustrations, groping for some meaning, expressing anger.

**Prayer of Silence:** unable to hear God in the present, the sick person starts to reflect on the past, re-evaluating his or her life and faith.

**Prayer of Memories:** reviewing, re-living, reflecting, regretting, reassessing, rekindling, reawakening memories.

**Prayer of Gratitude:** rediscovering God as giver rather than taker; quiet awe and thankfulness for God's providence and blessings.

**Prayer of Trust:** having put the past to rest, the ill person concentrates on the present, relying on God to take care of them now and after death.

Condensed from *Pastoral Companionship*, by Gerald C Calhoun, SJ.

## Part Seven: Some Attitudes Towards Death

### Focus:

- **Since the earliest times, the world's religions and cultures have regarded death as a mystery and have sought to explain what happens after it.**
- **Today, death is a reality that is avoided by many New Zealanders.**

### Does Life Continue After Death?

From ancient times death has been regarded as a great mystery. The human fascination with death and what follows it has led people throughout the ages to search for answers to certain basic questions:

- Is death the end of all human existence?
- What is it like to be dead?
- Are the dead aware of who they are?
- Do dead people retain a memory of life before death?
- How do the dead live without physical bodies?
- Can the dead communicate with those who are still alive?
- When we die do we meet people who have died before us?

Although human beings have known from the earliest times that death brings about the corruption and decay of the flesh, people have always shown respect and care for the human body in death, as in life.

As long as 100,000 years ago, Neanderthal tribes buried their dead in carefully prepared graves containing food, tools and weapons made of flint. The elaborate tombs constructed by the ancient Egyptians for the Pharaohs have been found to include jewellery, clothing, food and even horses, slaves and sometimes members of the deceased's family. Investigations of Neolithic burial sites dating to about 5,000 BC reveal bodies placed sometimes in a seated position, again with food and weapons nearby. These and other examples are an indication that ancient people expected that life, in some way, would continue after death.

Philosophers, poets, artists and authors of religious works have frequently speculated about death, wondering how the human self can survive without a body. Some speak of a 'soul' or a 'psyche' or 'spirit' which never dies and which can exist apart from a physical body.

The religions and cultures of the world, in various ways, respond to the reality of death and explain what they believe happens after it. While Catholics have their own beliefs, the views of others about death must always be treated with great respect.

### Something to Research

**Use the Internet, as well as resource material supplied by your teacher, or from your school or public library, to research the death and funeral customs of a religion or culture other than your own. Your project should include:**

- **A title**
- **An introduction, giving the religion or culture's general beliefs regarding death and the after-life**
- **Customs:**
  - **Before death i.e. during illness**
  - **At death**
  - **After death**
  - **Other**
- **Relevant illustrations.**



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**The Māori Tangihanga and Irish Wake will be covered later in the topic, but check with your teacher if you wish to research either of these topics now.**

## Some Attitudes Towards Death

Many New Zealanders try to avoid thinking about death and choose not to 'get involved' in the death of another if they can possibly help it. There are a number of reasons why such a natural and inevitable event as death has become a topic to be avoided in many New Zealand homes. These include:

**a) The decline in religious belief.**

In many traditionally Christian societies, especially in Europe and in countries such as Australia and New Zealand that were settled by Europeans, there has been a marked decline in religious practice over recent decades.

Christian beliefs that were once widely held – the reality of heaven, reunion with loved ones after death, Christ's Second Coming at the end of the world, and the resurrection of the body – are no longer accepted by many people. Many people are uncertain about what they believe concerning life after death. Although they may have a general interest in spiritual matters they are not actively committed to a particular religious community or Church.

**b) Less contact with the dead than in the past.** In the recent past, large families were the rule rather than the exception. Before the advances of modern medicine, there were few families that did not experience the death of children or of a parent. Our grandparents and great grandparents were very familiar with death. They lived regularly alongside the dying, and death, as well as birth, took place in the home. Despite New Zealand's high rate of fatal road accidents among those aged between 15 and 24, many young people reach adulthood without being closely involved in the death of someone they know well. Outward signs of mourning such as black clothes or armbands are rare.

**c) Increasing reliance on technology.** The widespread availability of hi-tech medical care means that ninety-percent of deaths occur in hospitals, away from the family home and familiar faces. Because of the stresses placed on the family by the 'dying process' many relatives hand over the care of a terminally ill loved-one to an institution and its "experts". In the past, this task of caring for a dying person was shared by the whole family. Today, for a variety of reasons this is not always possible. After death, some families prefer to view the body at the funeral director's rather than have the body remain at home. Cosmetics are often used to give the body of the deceased a life-like appearance – thus, hiding the reality of physical decay. Death is dehumanised – its reality is concealed by technology.

**d) The denial of death.** Death brings with it many strong feelings which need to be shared. Although the media exposes us to death and violence, many people are able to distance themselves from death as an actual human event. Death becomes an experience that belongs to films, fiction and to underprivileged people overseas. In the past, large families ensured that there were many people around at times of bereavement to comfort and to help. In today's smaller families death puts a greater stress on relationships among family members. People can be afraid to acknowledge that their family will have to deal with death one day.

### Something to Discuss

**Work in a pair or small group. List all the reasons that you can as to why New Zealanders today tend to avoid the reality of death.**

**Which of these reasons do you find most convincing? Why?**

### Something to Think About

**How might facing death be different for a person with no religious beliefs than for someone with a strong religious faith?**



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## Part Eight:

### What to do When Someone Dies

#### Focus:

- **Grief can make even simple decisions overwhelming for those responsible for making the arrangements following a death.**
- **Legal requirements must be met before a body can be buried or cremated.**
- **Funeral directors assist with arranging the various aspects of a funeral, taking into account the cultural background and spiritual beliefs of the deceased and the wishes of the family.**

### News of a Death

Whether someone receives a 2am phone call with news of an unexpected death or, at the end of a loved one's long illness is there to share their final moments, a person's first reaction to a death is likely to be shock.

Bewilderment and grief can make even simple decisions overwhelming for those responsible for making the funeral arrangements or carrying out the dead person's last wishes or executing the will. Informing family, friends and the parish priest that a loved one has died can be very emotionally demanding.



What to do first depends on the circumstances of the death. It may be easier to make a few phone calls to other relatives or friends and ask each of them to contact one or two specific people, so the burden of spreading the news of the death is spread more widely. It can be helpful to have company when making these calls and for the first hours following the death. When a person dies in a hospital or similar care facility, the staff may help with some arrangements, such as contacting the funeral directors.

#### Something to Discuss

**After a death people may find decision-making overwhelming.**

- a) What are some of the difficulties people might experience doing the following tasks?**
  - **Informing others of the death**
  - **Making the funeral arrangements**
  - **Carrying out the dead person's last wishes**
  - **Executing the will**
- b) What suggestions can you offer that might make these people's tasks easier?**

### Legal Requirements

While a person's death has a very strong impact on family and friends, it is also an event that concerns the wider community. Various laws and regulations govern what happens following a death.

Before a body can be buried or cremated New Zealand law requires:

- *either* that a doctor issues a certificate as to the cause of death
- *or* that a coroner gives permission for the burial or cremation to take place.

This is necessary to make sure that everyone who dies is identified and the cause of death is established. Such processes help ensure that crimes do not go undetected and protect the public good.

When someone dies in a hospital or similar care facility the doctor in attendance during a person's final illness is usually able to sign the medical certificate as to the cause of death without delay. Arrangements can then be made for burial or cremation.

If someone dies at home, and the doctor has treated the deceased in the last month and can confirm the cause of death, a medical certificate of death will be issued. If the death is sudden or accidental, the doctor will notify the police.

If a death has occurred in violent, unnatural or suspicious circumstances or the cause of death is unknown, then the doctor must report the death to the coroner. Anyone finding a dead body, or knowing of a violent or unnatural death, must report this to the police who will inform the coroner.

It is the coroner's job to examine the evidence surrounding a death and to establish where and how the death occurred. If the coroner decides that an inquest is unnecessary, they will inform the doctor who can then issue a medical certificate as to the cause of death.

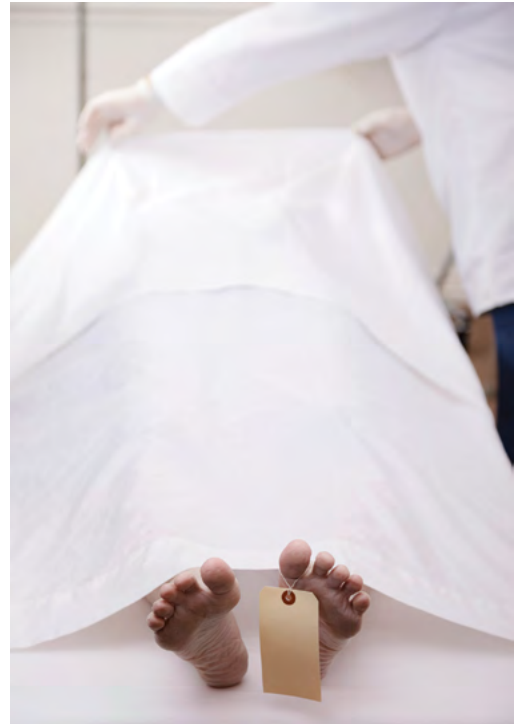
## Postmortems

Sometimes the coroner will order a postmortem or autopsy – a surgical examination of the body of the deceased person in order to establish how the person died. A postmortem will usually involve the pathologist examining the internal organs of the body, as well as any external injuries. The pathologist will repair any incisions made during the postmortem so that the body is left as presentable as is possible.

If the coroner orders a postmortem, they will advise the deceased person's immediate family that this is being done, telling them the reasons why the postmortem was ordered. Funeral arrangements can go ahead only after the postmortem is completed and the coroner has signed the burial order.

Usually the body will be released for burial or cremation within 24 hours, but in some cases there may be a longer delay – for example, if the death occurs over a weekend or public holiday. In situations where cultural or other values require that the body be released as soon as possible, the coroner may order the pathologist to conduct an urgent postmortem.

In the rare event of a body organ being retained for testing or examination, the aim is to return the body organ to the body for burial or cremation. Where this is not possible, the coroner will notify the person's immediate family.



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## Inquests

In the case of a sudden and unexplained death a coroner may order an investigation into its circumstances. The Coroners Act (1988) requires an inquest in the following cases:

- Apparent suicides
- Deaths in prisons and police custody
- Deaths "in care" – for example, in a psychiatric hospital, or a children's home

At the inquest, the coroner hears evidence to establish the identity of the deceased person, and when, where and how the person died. The coroner does not comment on whether any particular person is to blame for the death as questions of criminal or civil liability are not decided in the Coroner's Court.

A coroner may make recommendations which are brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities, so that the likelihood of similar deaths occurring in the future may be reduced.

### Task Fifteen

**Match up the beginning of each sentence in the left hand column of the table with its correct ending in the right hand column to form an accurate statement about the legal requirements that must be met following a death in New Zealand.**



<b>Column A</b>	<b>Column B</b>
<b>1. A coroner must give permission for a burial or cremation to take place</b>	<b>A. when a sudden or violent death occurs.</b>
<b>2. The law stating what must happen after a death</b>	<b>B. that a postmortem has been ordered.</b>
<b>3. When a person dies after a long illness</b>	<b>C. who is to blame for a death.</b>
<b>4. The police must be notified</b>	<b>D. are returned to the body for burial or cremation.</b>
<b>5. The coroner decides whether</b>	<b>E. if a doctor is unable to issue a certificate as to the cause of death.</b>
<b>6. It is the coroner's job to examine the evidence surrounding a death</b>	<b>F. so that the likelihood of similar deaths is reduced.</b>
<b>7. The dead person's family must be informed</b>	<b>G. within twenty-four hours.</b>
<b>8. Usually bodies are released for burial or cremation</b>	<b>H. when people die in prison or police custody.</b>
<b>9. Generally body parts that are removed during a postmortem for testing</b>	<b>I. is designed to prevent crime and protect the common good.</b>
<b>10. Inquests are required</b>	<b>J. and to establish how and when it took place.</b>
<b>11. Inquests do not decide</b>	<b>K. there is usually no delay in issuing a medical certificate as to cause of death.</b>
<b>12. A coroner may recommend changes to the way things are done</b>	<b>L. an inquest into a suspicious or violent death is necessary.</b>

## The Funeral Director

Whatever the circumstances of a person's death, one of the first things a family will do is contact a licensed funeral director. Funeral directors help arrange the various aspects of a funeral, taking into account the cultural background and spiritual beliefs of the deceased and the wishes of the family. They are also able to assist others to deal with the grief and stress associated with the death of a family member or friend.

Funeral directors can provide the following services, depending on the wishes of the family:

- Talk with other professionals on the family's behalf – doctor, hospital, coroner, the priest, cemetery or cremation officials
- Arrange an appropriate funeral service at a suitable time and venue
- Organise an organist, other music and video or audio recording of the service
- Organise placement of ashes or establishment of a memorial
- Place notices in the newspaper
- Provide a hearse, suitable premises and personnel
- Arrange for the purchase of a burial plot, or organise for a family grave to be re-opened
- Process official forms from the doctor or coroner
- File death registration forms
- Refer mourners to a grief counsellor or support group

Because the funeral director's role is an important one, it is best that people deal with a funeral director whom they trust and feel comfortable with. Friends and family often recommend a person whom they have used before.

## The Funeral

The funeral is the final opportunity for family and friends to publicly express their *aroha* and respect for the person who has died. It is the first step to working through one's grief, and can help people come to terms with their loss if it is arranged carefully and sensitively.

By its very nature, a funeral service is a sad time, but it can have its happy aspects too – people talking about the good times, the laughs, and the memories. All this can help the loved one's family and friends get through the necessary business of grieving.

Catholic funerals are very hopeful occasions because they look forward to the time when those who have died trusting in Christ will live forever with God.

### Task Sixteen

**Look through the above list of services that a funeral director can provide if a family wishes.**

**What are some of the things that a funeral director has arranged / done following the death of someone you know?**

### Something to Think About

**In the light of the experience of your family and friends, why is it important for people to deal with a funeral director whom they trust and feel comfortable with?**

### Something to Do

**Find out more about the role of *one* of the following people when someone dies:**

doctor  
pathologist

coroner  
funeral director

police  
priest or minister

**Arrange an interview if you can.**



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## Part Nine:

### Caring for Those who Grieve or Mourn

#### Focus:

- **Those who mourn the death of a loved one can become isolated if people around them don't offer appropriate support.**
- **It is important to keep hope alive, especially in situations of grief.**

## Comforting Those Who Mourn

During his Sermon on the Mount Jesus said:

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.* (Matthew 5:4)

People who grieve or mourn the loss of a loved one may feel anything but blessed. Often they become isolated from others because those around them don't know how to reach out and help them.

The following guidelines suggest ways in which we can show our care and love for those who mourn.

## Guidelines for Care-Givers

### Be available

Visit the home. Don't worry about what to say, just be there. Physical contact often helps more than words can. A hug can say it all.

### Talk freely

Don't be embarrassed about referring to the person who has died. Grieving people need to know that you cared about their loved one too. Real memories are precious.

### Often it's the practical things

These help most in the first few days while your friend is "in shock". Drop off food, do those odd things that are often overlooked. Clean the family car before the funeral. Your help will sometimes be appreciated most if you just do these sorts of things without being asked.

### Remember the parents

If the family has lost a teenage son or daughter they may be missing the company of young people. The dead person's friends don't visit anymore. There's not the music, the fun, the people around the place as before. These parents have lost not only a son or daughter, but also his or her friends. Keep the friendship with the parents going.

### Try to see things from your friend's point of view

You may not really know how it feels for a person in the depths of grief. But by being there listening, you're saying "I care". Let your friend talk as much as they like. What you say might not be heard – but your caring will be felt.

### Give time to people who are grieving

Don't expect them to be "normal" soon. They will never be the same. They need time to readjust, to find ways of coping.

### As time goes on

Give space to grieving people when they are less in shock, so they can look after themselves. People can't feel good about themselves when they are made to look helpless.

### Keep in touch

When a death first occurs, lots of people turn up to offer comfort and lend a helping hand. Later, after the funeral, when friends and family go their own ways, the bereaved may be at their loneliest and need support to face life again.



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### Something to Think About

Often those who grieve or mourn become isolated from those around them.

- Have you seen this happen to someone you know?
- What signs in the person indicated this?

### Task Seventeen

Jesus said: *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (Matthew 5:4).* List five ways you can bring comfort to someone who mourns.

## Keeping Hope Alive

People's greatest hope is for that which gives meaning to their lives. They also hope for immortality – life beyond death.

Hope can be found in the most difficult of life's circumstances, even in situations of extreme loss. Wherever there is grief and mourning it is important that hope be kept alive.

### Something to Think About

What is the message in the story below? How does it apply to your own life?

### Something to Discuss

Choose *three* of the following brief statements about hope that most appeal to you. Explain why you like them.

Hope doesn't despair.

Hope gives us a future.

Hope isn't wishing or fantasy.

Hope points to new possibilities.

Hope speaks of a life to come.

Hope commits to the unknown.

Hope builds on earlier experiences of hopes fulfilled.

Hope exists alongside fear or doubt.

Hope gives us the energy to persevere.

Hope tells us that God will meet our needs.

Hope gives meaning to people's lives.

Hope imagines.

There is an old Chinese proverb: *If I keep a green bough in my heart a singing bird will come.*

The green bough is hope and the singing bird is hope's fulfilment.

After the atomic bomb devastated the Japanese city of Hiroshima in August, 1945, the surviving residents despaired, convinced that life would never come to their region again.

In that terrible nuclear blast, life itself seemed to have died. But in the following March the unexpected appearance of cherry blossoms forming out of green boughs brought a wonderful feeling of relief and hope.

All of us, living and dying, need to cherish and keep alive a green bough in our hearts so that, one day, the singing bird – or cherry blossom – may come.



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### Task Eighteen

Write a statement of your own about *tūmanako* (hope).

### Extension Activity

Find prayers, poems, songs and images that encourage hope, especially in situations of mourning. If you have time, introduce and present these under the title "Keeping Hope Alive".

## Part Ten:

### Tangihanga – Māori Funeral Customs

#### Focus:

- **Tangihanga is the name given to the traditional funeral rites and customs of Māori.**
- **At a tangihanga the living come together to greet, respect and farewell the dead, and to support one another in their grief.**

### The Tangihanga

It is important to Māori that the dead be greeted, respected and farewelled. It is equally important that the living come together to support one another in their grief. Traditionally, these happen at *tangihanga* or *tangi* (ceremonies of farewell and mourning) that take place on *marae* (the traditional meeting places of Māori) over a period of three or more days.

### When Someone Dies

Māori believe that when a person dies their *tūpāpaku* (body) should not be left on its own at any stage. People will gather to take the *tūpāpaku* from the funeral director's premises to the *marae* or place where it will lie. Debate often occurs as to where the *tangihanga* is to be held. If several *marae* claim the right it is considered a point of honour to the deceased.

If a person dies away from their home area, their body is usually brought back by mourners to their ancestral land for burial. If the deceased was someone of high rank or *mana* (prestige), the *tūpāpaku* may "honour" other *marae* along the way by resting there on its journey home. *Tūpāpaku* will often stop at those *marae* to which the deceased is linked by *whakapapa* (genealogy).

### Preparing the Marae

Once a *marae* is chosen, preparations for the funeral begin. A *tangihanga* is a very important event in the life of a *marae*, and it needs to be well organised if the *mana* of the deceased, of their *whānau* (family), and of the *marae* itself is to be protected and built up.

A place is prepared for the body. In some tribal areas a separate, specially constructed *whare mate* (house of the dead) is used, while in others, the *tūpāpaku* rests in the *wharenui* (meeting house), or on its front porch. Often photographs of the deceased's relatives – including those of *tūpuna* (ancestors) – are displayed around the area where the body will lie. These are decorated with leaves.



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The *marae* also has to organise itself to cope with the guests who will arrive to farewell the deceased and support the *whānau*. These can number in the hundreds or even thousands, depending on the *mana* of the deceased. Two important things need to be taken care of – the preparation of food, and the arrangement of the *wharenui*. The men will cut firewood and butcher cows, pigs, or sheep to feed the *manuhiri* (visitors). The women take responsibility for laying out mattresses in the *wharenui* as many *manuhiri* will stay overnight.

### Welcoming the Tūpāpaku

When the body arrives at the gate of the *marae* the home people prepare to receive it. The women perform the *karanga* (call of welcome) and the procession begins to make its way onto the *marae*. Those accompanying the *tūpāpaku* return the calls of welcome with speeches to the deceased and to the spirits of those who have gone before. The coffin is taken to the place that has been prepared for it. The lid is taken off and the people are given time to express their sympathies and words of condolence to the deceased and to one another.

Close relatives, especially the women, gather around the *tūpāpaku* in its open coffin. Dressed in its best clothes and surrounded by family members – living and dead – the *tūpāpaku* will remain in the company of the living until its burial.

Throughout the *tangihanga*, women relatives raise the *tangi* (the wail of mourning) and *poroporoaki* (speeches of farewell) are made to the dead. People touch the *tūpāpaku* and talk to it in the belief that the *wairua* (spirit) of the deceased stays close by the body until the burial. The acceptance of the physical body in life requires a similar acceptance in death.

To some people, the constant shedding of tears seems excessive, but Māori believe that this free expression of emotion helps them ease the loss they have to bear.

## Welcoming the Manuhiri

As news of the death spreads, relatives and friends come to pay their respects to the dead and to support the *whānau*. Rituals of greeting are performed as each group of *manuhiri* slowly moves on to the *marae*. Those arriving for the *tangihanga* are met with the customary *karanga*, *mihi* (words of welcome), and *hongī* (pressing of noses). On some *marae* visitors will *hongī* with the deceased as a sign that there is life after death.

Many visitors will carry greenery – such as cuttings from the *pūriri* tree – or wear it around their heads as a sign of mourning. This they will place at the foot of the coffin so that they leave something of themselves behind with the *tūpāpaku*.

Once the formal exchange of speeches and greetings is over, visitors are then invited to partake of food in the *wharekai* (dining hall) as part of the ritual of *whakanoa* (freeing from *tapu*).

People may come and go as they wish during a *tangihanga* or may remain until after the burial. Before moving off, *manuhiri* will usually leave a *koha* (gift) on the *marae*. This usually takes the form of money and is a way of acknowledging the hospitality that has been offered.

## The Funeral Service



When a *tangihanga* lasts two or three days, it is usual for a prayer service to be held each evening and morning.

The funeral service is usually held in the late morning of the last day of the *tangihanga*. Sometimes this service will take place in a *whare karakia* (church) which is part of the *marae* complex. On other occasions it will be held elsewhere. Before the coffin is closed for the last time, the family kiss the deceased goodbye or make their final farewell in some other way. The funeral service, which is in Māori, consists of *karakia* (prayers), hymns, Scripture readings and a sermon. It is often conducted by several ministers. If the deceased and their family are Catholic it will be a Mass.

The coffin is then carried or driven to the *urupā* (cemetery). Early in the morning close male relatives will have dug the grave and local men now lower the coffin into it with ropes. The dead person's most intimate possessions are often buried with them. Prayers are said and a final hymn is sung. Mourners throw a handful of earth into the grave before it is filled in and wreaths are laid on top of the mound. As people leave the *urupā* to return to the *marae* they wash their hands with *wai* (water) to remove the *tapu* (restrictions) associated with death. By doing so, they make themselves *noa* (free from *tapu* restrictions) once more.

Usually a *hākari* (feast) follows the burial and the visitors then return to their homes. In some places, a ritual is carried out with the family in the deceased's house to lift the *tapu* (restriction) associated with death. The night after the burial, the family and others giving their support will often stay on the *marae*.

## The Takahi Whare

An important aspect of Māori funeral rites which takes place once the burial is over is the *takahi whare* (tramping of the house). This is a ceremony to clear away the *tapu* of death from the house where the deceased lived. The priest or minister, the bereaved family, relatives and friends return to the dead person's home and gather outside as a group to bless it. They then enter every room of the house to offer prayers and usually finish with a service in the family room. Sometimes members of the group will perform a *haka* (dance) in order to trample out any evil spirits that may be present in the house.

The clothing and other personal belongings of the deceased are usually washed by the family and given away or disposed of. This is to preserve the dignity of the dead by not exposing their personal items to the view of others.

The *takahi whare* usually ends with a *hākari*.



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### Something to Think About

**Have you ever been to a tangihanga? If so, what are your memories of it?**

### Task Nineteen

**Write your own summary of the main features of tangihanga. Include as many of the following terms as you can:**

<i>marae</i>	<i>tūpāpaku</i>	<i>whare mate</i>	<i>wharenuī</i>
<i>tūpuna</i>	<i>manuhiri</i>	<i>karanga</i>	<i>mihi</i>
<i>hongī</i>	<i>poroporoaki</i>	<i>pūriri</i>	<i>wairua</i>
<i>whakanoa</i>	<i>whare kai</i>	<i>whare karakia</i>	<i>urupā</i>
<i>wai</i>	<i>hākari</i>	<i>takahi whare</i>	<i>haka</i>

### Death and After – A Māori Perspective

**A resource is available on the FaithCentral website.**

### Something to Discuss

- **What aspects of tangihanga are most similar to other funerals you have been to?**
- **What aspects of tangihanga are most different from other funerals you have experienced?**
- **What things about tangihanga would most help the grieving process?**

### Something to Do

**Find out from your teacher about the traditional Irish wake. How is it similar to / different from the tangihanga?**

## Part Eleven: Catholic Funeral Rites

### Focus:

- **The Catholic funeral rites have three main parts – the vigil, the funeral liturgy and the rite of committal.**
- **In the funeral rites we entrust the dead to the care of *Te Atua* and ask God to comfort the living in their grief.**
- **The various signs and actions of the funeral rites speak of resurrection and of the new life that we receive through *Karaiti*.**

## Catholic Funeral Rites

“Funeral rites” is the general term used by the Catholic Church to describe the various liturgical celebrations that occur in the days following the death of a Christian. The funeral rites commend the dead to God’s care, remind Christ’s followers of their faith in the resurrection of the dead, and provide hope, support and consolation to the family and friends of the person who has died.

The funeral rites have three main celebrations – times when the family and community gather in prayer around the body of their loved one:

- The vigil
- The funeral liturgy
- The rite of committal

***In the face of death, the Church confidently proclaims that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus, the Son of God, by his death and resurrection, has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity.***  
**(General Introduction to the Order of Christian Funerals)**

***The vigil is the first gathering of family and friends with the faith community in the time immediately following the death of a loved one and is the first opportunity for the mourners to experience, within the context of the Christian community, the comfort of God’s word through reading of the scriptures and communal prayer.***  
**(Order of Christian Funerals, 56)**

## The Vigil

The vigil usually takes place on the evening before the funeral liturgy. It may be celebrated at the home of the deceased, in the church, or in a suitable room or chapel at the funeral director’s.

The Word of God is the central prayer of the vigil which usually includes Scripture readings, intercessions, the Our Father, and concluding prayers and blessings. Depending on where and when the vigil occurs, adaptations to this basic format are made.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, it has been and is still a custom among many Catholics to gather and pray the rosary on the evening before the funeral. This popular devotion can be included as part of the vigil.

## The Funeral Liturgy

During the funeral liturgy, which is at the heart of the funeral rites, the community gathers in the parish church with the family and friends of the dead person to take heart from *Te Kupu a Te Ariki* (the Word of God), and to give thanks and praise to God for Christ’s victory over sin and death. While it usually occurs as part of the Mass, the funeral liturgy may be celebrated separately from it.



***The Mass, the memorial of Christ’s death and resurrection, is the principal celebration of the Christian funeral.***  
**(Order of Christian Funerals, 128)**



The various signs and actions of the funeral liturgy or Mass all speak of resurrection and of the new life we receive through Christ:

- The **welcoming of the body** into the church – if it is not there already – calls to mind the welcome into the Church which first occurred at baptism.
- The large **Easter candle** is placed beside the coffin in front of the altar as a sign of Christ's presence and of his victory over sin and death.
- In some places a white cloth or **pall** is draped over the coffin representing the white garment that all Christians receive at their Baptism – it is a sign of Christian dignity.
- **Christian symbols**, such as a Bible and a cross, may also be placed on the coffin, once the white pall has been draped over it.
- The **sprinkling of the coffin** with water reminds people of baptism.
- The prayerful **presence of the Christian community** brings support and consolation, and gives witness to our hope in the resurrection.
- The **reading of the Word of God** reveals God's loving presence and provides strength and hope.
- The **celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist** looks forward to the eternal banquet of heaven.
- **Words of remembrance** are an opportunity for family or friends to give witness to the Christian life that the deceased had lived. These are not strictly part of the liturgy but are often permitted out of sympathy for the grieving.
- The **final commendation** – the last act of farewell – acknowledges the reality of separation and affirms that the community and the deceased share the same destiny, that is, resurrection on the last day.
- The **incensing of the coffin** honours the body, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and is a sign of the community's prayers for the deceased rising to God.

## Rite of Committal

The rite of committal takes place at the graveside or crematorium where the bodily remains of the dead person come to their final place of rest. It is also used for burials at sea.

The rite of committal includes a brief passage from Scripture, a prayer over the place of committal, intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, a concluding prayer and a prayer over the people.

A sign of leave-taking – usually the sprinkling with holy water – concludes the rite. Many people also choose to scatter earth over the coffin as a gesture of farewell.

This final time of prayer is important. It gives people the courage and energy to say their final good-byes to the bodily remains of their loved one and reminds them of the dead person's continuing spiritual presence.



*In committing the body to its resting place, the community expresses the hope that, with all those who have gone before marked with the sign of faith, the deceased awaits the glory of the resurrection. The rite of committal is an expression of the communion that exists between the Church on earth and the Church in heaven – the deceased passes with the farewell prayers of the community of believers into the welcoming company of those who need faith no longer but see God face to face. (Order of Christian Funerals, 206)*

### Something to Think About

**What are three things that the funeral rites of the Catholic Church set out to do?**

### Task Twenty

**Describe important features of each of the following funeral rites:**

- The vigil**
- The funeral liturgy or Mass**
- The rite of committal**

### Something to Do

**Produce a picture glossary, combining illustration and text, to communicate how the various signs and actions of the funeral liturgy speak of resurrection and new life in Christ.**

## Planning and Participation

Family members should be involved as much as possible in the planning of their loved one's funeral. They are encouraged to suggest Scripture readings and appropriate musical selections, as well as be actively involved as pallbearers, instrumental or vocal musicians, readers, gift bearers, extra-ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, greeters, and servers.

Another special role is filled when a family member or friend offers words of remembrance. This is an opportunity to publicly remember a loved one. Sometimes two people together, one speaking and the other supporting, can effectively witness to their love for each other and for the person who has died.

The entire congregation expresses their faith and hope by participating consciously, fully and actively in the worship at the funeral Mass or liturgy.

### Something to Discuss

**Work in a pair or small group. List all the different ways that family members and friends can contribute to a loved one's funeral Mass or liturgy.**

## Life Forever with Christ

Because Catholic funerals have as their central theme, life forever with Christ, the great variety of readings, hymns and prayers recommended for the various funeral rites reflect Christian hope in the resurrection of the dead, as well as the comfort that God offers in times of sorrow.

### Task Twenty-One

**The following Scripture references are for readings recommended by the Church for use during a funeral liturgy. Look them up in your Bible and choose two readings that you like – a Gospel and one other.**

**Describe the message of each reading and explain why the reading is appropriate for a Christian funeral.**

## Readings Suitable for a Funeral Liturgy

### Old Testament

#### Isaiah 25:6-9

*On this mountain, the Lord will provide. The Lord God will destroy death forever.*

#### Daniel 12:1-3

*Of those who lie sleeping in the dust of the earth many will awake.*

#### 2 Maccabees 12:43-45

*It is good and holy to think of the dead rising again.*



### New Testament

#### Acts 10:34-43

*God has appointed Jesus to judge everyone, alive and dead.*

#### Romans 5:5-11

*Hope does not disappoint; having been justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's anger through him.*

#### Romans 5:17-21

*Where sin increased, there grace abounded all the more.*

#### Romans 6:3-9

*Let us walk in newness of life.*

#### 2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-10

*We have an everlasting home in heaven.*

#### 1 John 3:1-2

*We shall see God as he really is.*

#### Revelation 21:1-5a, 6b-7

*There will be no more death.*

### Gospel

#### Mathew 25:31-46

*Come, you whom my Father has blessed.*

#### Luke 23:33, 39-43

*Today you will be with me in paradise.*

#### John 6:51-58

*All who eat this bread will live for ever; and I will raise them up on the last day.*

#### John 11:17-27

*I am the resurrection and the life.*

#### John 14:1-6

*There are many rooms in my Father's house.*

## Part Twelve:

### Death and After – A Catholic Perspective

#### Focus:

- **“Last Things” is a term that describes the final realities – death, judgement, heaven and hell.**
- **When we die we will be judged on how we have lived our lives.**
- **Our eternal destiny is heaven – the fullness of God’s life and *aroha* – but hell remains a possibility for those who freely refuse God’s mercy and choose to separate themselves from *Te Atua* forever.**
- **The Church encourages us to pray for those who are experiencing purification as a preparation for heaven.**
- **At the end of time, our bodies will be raised from the dead and those who have been judged faithful to Christ will live with him forever in glory.**

### The “Last Things”

Scripture and Christian tradition refer to what happens when our life on earth is over as the “last things”. These final realities are death, judgement, heaven and hell.

### Death

Our lives are measured in time and have a limited span. Scripture teaches that it is natural to die.

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die.... (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2)*

Christians believe that we come from *Te Atua* and that when our earthly life is over our destiny is to return to God. The meaning of our life and death is found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which Catholics celebrate in the Eucharist.

*Dying, you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory.*  
(Second Memorial Acclamation)

At the same time, the reality of death and the fact that our time on earth has a definite end give a sense of urgency to what we make of our lives.

While we live, the decisions we freely make, either to accept God’s love and life or to reject them, shape our growth and development as persons. Choices for good or evil determine our character and set our moral preferences. If we decide to live only for ourselves and to keep God’s loving presence out of our lives, God will not force our friendship.

### Judgement

The Catholic Church teaches that at the moment of our death, our period of trial is over. No longer pilgrims on the journey of life, Christ’s judgement comes upon us. This judgement will clearly indicate to each of us what we have made ourselves to be over the course of our lives.

*For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)*

Because individual or particular judgement occurs at the moment of death, the Church distinguishes between it and the final or last judgement which will take place at the end of time when, following the resurrection of the dead, Christ returns to claim his own.

### Heaven

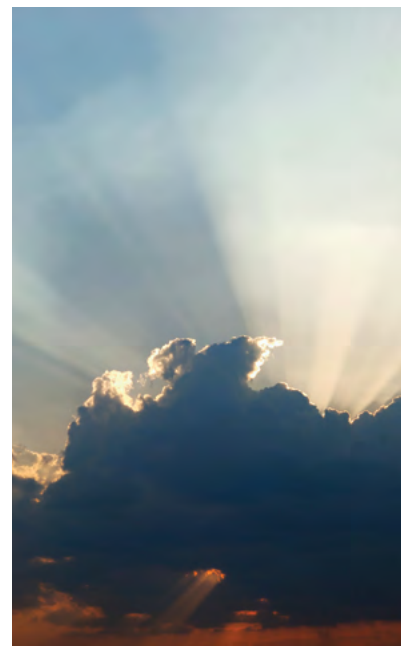
Those faithful followers of Christ who die in God’s grace and friendship and are ready to meet God “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12) will immediately experience heaven – the fullness of God’s life and love. In meeting God we will become like God:

*... we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.*  
(1 John 3:2)

Scripture and Church teachings use many images to suggest what heaven is like: it is a marriage feast, eternal life, light and peace. Saint Paul, however, tells us that it is impossible to describe the happiness of heaven:

*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, [that is] what God has prepared for those who love him....*  
1 Corinthians 2:9)

We are assured by the Church that in our heavenly state we will know all those we have known and loved in this world. In the company of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels and the saints, we will praise and worship God. We will be strangers to no one and rejoice in God’s works of creation.



## Purgatory

After death, because of the effects of sin, some may need to go through a cleansing or purification before they are ready for complete union with God. This experience, which has traditionally been called purgatory, is not so much a punishment but an opportunity to grow in love of God. What actual form the purification takes has never been defined by the Church, but any suffering that is experienced is mixed with joy because of the knowledge that it leads to heaven.

Catholics believe that the dead who are undergoing purification can be supported and assisted by prayer. It is a tradition that has its origins in the second book of Maccabees where prayers are offered for those who have died, that they might be cleansed of their sins:

*Therefore [Judas Maccabeus] made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.*  
(2 Maccabees 12:46)

All Souls Day, 2 November, is an opportunity to pray for those who have died and who are still experiencing purification for their sins before entering heaven.

## Hell

God continually offers his love and forgiveness to everyone, even in the final moments of life. While it is hard to imagine why anyone at the point of death would choose to refuse God's mercy and separate themselves from God forever by their own free choice, it remains a possibility. Hell is the state of those who die totally turned away from God, deprived of all love and happiness.

Throughout Scripture there are many warnings of eternal punishment. Jesus himself used forceful imagery to challenge people to turn to God and abandon their sinful ways:

*It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.* (Mark 9:47-48)

Some people become paralysed by fear at the thought of hell. Pope John Paul II reminds us that the reality of hell should not cause us to be overly anxious but to freely turn to Christ who is more powerful than any evil:

*Eternal damnation remains a real possibility, but we are not granted, without special divine revelation, the knowledge of whether or which human beings are effectively involved in it. The thought of hell and even less the improper use of biblical images must not create anxiety or despair, but is a necessary and healthy reminder of freedom within the proclamation that the risen Jesus has conquered Satan, giving us the Spirit of God who makes us cry "Abba, Father!"* (Pope John Paul II, General Audience, Wednesday 28 July, 1999)



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## The End of Time

Two key beliefs shape the Christian approach to life after death:

- Faith in Jesus' resurrection, and the expectation that we, like him, will rise again.
- Faith that Jesus will return at the end of time to judge the world.

Belief in the resurrection of the dead slowly developed in Judaism in the centuries before Jesus' birth. In Jesus' time the resurrection of the dead was an idea that was hotly debated among the learned members of Jewish society – the Pharisees accepted it but the Sadducees did not.

Following Jesus' own resurrection, his followers came to believe that they too would be raised to new life. Saint Paul was clear that this new life would not be just spiritual but physical as well:

*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.* (Romans 8:11)

Down through the centuries the Church has taught that we will rise from the dead just as Jesus rose from the dead. Like the risen Lord, we will rise not as disembodied souls, but as whole persons. Our resurrection, like Jesus' own will involve a transformation of our bodies not their resuscitation.

The early Christians expected that this resurrection of the dead would accompany Jesus' promised return at the end of the world. On this day of judgement all will appear before Christ to give an account of their deeds.

*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangels call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)*

In the meantime they thought that the dead simply slept, awaiting Jesus' return. The belief that people faced an individual judgement, and that their souls entered heaven, hell or purgatory immediately after death, began to develop only as it became clearer that Christ's Second Coming might be delayed.

The Scriptures describe Jesus' Second Coming in very colourful language. At the end of time our bodies will be raised from the dead and those who have been judged faithful to Christ will live with him in glory.

### Task Twenty-Two

**Each of the terms in the box below describes one of the experiences that lie beyond death: judgement, heaven, purgatory, hell.**

- Work out which terms belong with which of the four experiences.**
- Include the terms in a brief explanation of the experiences of judgement, heaven, purgatory and hell that they describe.**

Purification of sins

The company of Mary and the saints

Deprived of all love and happiness

Particular and general

An indication of what we have made of our lives

Seeing God face to face

An opportunity to grow in love of God

A decision to refuse God's mercy and love forever

The support and assistance of prayer

Described as eternal punishment

The fullness of God's life and love

Christ returns to claim his own

### Something to Discuss

**Pope John Paul II says that "the thought of hell and even less the improper use of biblical images must not create anxiety or despair, but is a necessary and healthy reminder of freedom ..." What is the connection between hell and human freedom?**

### Something to Do

**Over the centuries many famous Christian artists have produced paintings or other images of what they imagine God's judgement, heaven, purgatory or hell to be like.**

**Use the Internet or other resources to find examples of some of these images. Choose one image that you find interesting or thought-provoking.**

- Describe how the image presents God's judgement, heaven, purgatory or hell.**
- Why do you think the artist has chosen to present judgement, heaven, purgatory or hell in this way?**
- Do you identify with the way it has been presented? Why? Why not?**

## Summary

- **Through his death and resurrection Jesus Christ destroyed the power of sin and death, and brought new life to the world. Christians believe that, like Jesus, we will be raised from death to new life in God.**
- **All people experience loss which is expressed through a range of emotions. Although each person is unique and grieves in their own way, the grief process usually follows certain patterns and moves through various stages.**
- **Scripture gives us an insight into loss and grief, reminding us that prayer can be a great source of consolation in such times.**
- **Traditionally, Christians have described death in terms of the separation of body and soul.**
- **Through the sacraments of the Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum the Church continues the healing work of Jesus among the sick and the dying. By our attitudes and actions we are able to support people as they draw close to death.**
- **Since the earliest times, the world's religions and cultures have regarded death as a mystery and have sought to explain what happens after it. However, death is a reality that is avoided by many New Zealanders today.**
- **Legal requirements must be met before a body can be buried or cremated.**
- **Funeral directors assist with arranging the various aspects of a funeral, taking into account the cultural background and spiritual beliefs of the deceased and the wishes of the family.**
- **It is important to keep hope alive among those who mourn the death of a loved one and to offer appropriate support so that they don't become isolated.**
- **At *tangihanga* the living come together to greet, respect and farewell the dead, and to support each other in their grief.**
- **Catholic funeral rites entrust the dead to the care of God and comfort the living in their grief. The various signs and actions of the vigil, the funeral liturgy and the rite of committal speak of resurrection and of the new life that comes to us through Christ.**
- **"Last Things" is a term used to describe the final realities – death, judgement, heaven and hell. The Church encourages us to pray for those who are experiencing purification in purgatory as a preparation for heaven.**
- **At the end of time, our bodies will be raised from the dead and reunited with our souls. Those who have been faithful to Christ will live with him forever in glory.**

# GLOSSARY OF MĀORI TERMS

This glossary gives explanation of Māori terms which are italicised in the text. The first time a Māori term appears in the text, its English meaning appears in brackets after it.

Pronunciation – correct pronunciation of Māori comes only with practice in listening to and speaking the language. The English phonetic equivalents provided under each Māori word are intended to provide a reasonably accurate guide for students. If in doubt please seek assistance from someone practised in correct pronunciation of Te Reo Māori.

´ indicates stressed syllable

**Aroha** -  
úh-raw-huh  
In general, means love and/or compassion. Note that the word is used in two senses:  
1. a joyful relationship involving the expression of goodwill and the doing of good, empathy.  
2. sympathy, compassion towards those who are unhappy or suffering.

**Atua** -  
úh-too-uh  
The Māori word Atua has been used to describe God in the Christian sense since missionary times. Before the coming of Christianity, Māori used the word atua to describe many kinds of spiritual beings (in the way we now use the word “spirit”) and also unusual events. Only the priestly and aristocratic classes of Māori society (ariki, rangatira and tohunga) had access to knowledge of the Supreme Being, Io, also known as Io-matua, Io-matua-i-te-kore, Io-te-wananga, etc. It seems that many, but not all, tribes had this belief in Io before missionary times. Māori use several words to refer to God in the Christian sense:

Te Atua – God, the Supreme Being

Ihowa – Jehovah

Te Ariki – Lord, more correctly used of Jesus

Te Matua – the father (literally, parent)

Io – a term used for God in some, but not all Māori circles.  
(Te Atua is acceptable in all circles).

**Haka** -  
háh-kuh  
Posture dance usually performed by males.

**Hākari** -  
háh-kuh-ree  
Ritual feast.

**He Tangata** -  
heh túh-nguh-tuh  
Human beings, humankind.

**Hehu Karaiti** -  
héh-hoo kuh-rúh-ee-tee  
Jesus Christ.

**Hongi** -  
háw-ngee  
Touching of noses.

**Karanga** -  
kúh-ruh-nguh  
The call of welcome.

**Karakia** -  
kúh-ruh-kee-uh  
Prayer, ritual.

**Koha** -Gift, contribution.  
káw-huh

<b>Mana</b> - múh-nuh	Spiritual power and authority. Its sources are both divine and human, namely, God, one's ancestors and one's achievements in life. Mana comes to people in three ways: <b>mana tangata</b> from people, <b>mana whenua</b> , from the land, and <b>mana atua</b> , from the spiritual powers. Please note: when mana refers to Mana of God it is written as Mana.
<b>Manuhiri</b> - múh-noo-hee-ree	Visitors and guests.
<b>Marae</b> - múh-ruh-ee	Traditional meeting place, consisting of a meeting house (whare hui) and dining room (whare kai). Strictly speaking, the term refers to the marae atea, the courtyard in front of the meeting house.
<b>Mihi</b> - To greet; a greeting. mée-hee	
<b>Noa</b> - náu-uh	Free from tapu restrictions, which have been lifted by ceremony or ritual. This form of noa is positive, it is the freedom to go on with life after being released from restricting factors, e.g after a powhiri; on leaving a cemetery; after a reconciliation; etc. Noa can also be negative: a state of weakness and powerlessness which affects both people who have suffered violation or abuse and also those who have caused violation or abuse.
<b>Poroporoaki</b> - páw-raw-paw-raw-uh-kee	Leave taking, farewell.
<b>Pūriri</b> - póo-ree-ree	A tree, the greenery of which is commonly carried or worn at tangihanga.
<b>Rongopai</b> - ráw-ngaw-puh-ee	Gospel or Good News. Ngā Rongopai (plural). Te Rongopai (singular).
<b>Takahi Whare</b> - túh-kuh-hee fúh-reh	Part of the protocol for clearing a house of its deceased occupant. Literally, tramping the house.
<b>Tangi</b> - túh-gee	A word meaning 'cry' and in particular the wailing or keening for the dead expressed by Māori women. Very often it is used as an abbreviation for tangihanga, meaning the customary form of Māori funeral - a hui involving a process of grieving.
<b>Tapu</b> - túh-poo	This word is used in three senses: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) restrictions or prohibitions which safeguard the dignity and survival of people and things.</li> <li>2) the value, dignity, or worth of someone or something, eg the holiness of God, human dignity, the value of the environment.</li> <li>3) the intrinsic being or essence of someone or something, eg Tapu i Te Atua is the intrinsic being of God, the divine nature.</li> </ol> Please note: when tapu refers to the Tapu of God it is written as Tapu.
<b>Te Aranga</b> - teh úh-ruh-nguh	The Resurrection.
<b>Te Kupu a Te Ariki</b> - teh kóo-poo uh teh úh-ree-kee	The Word of God.
<b>Te Rangatiratanga</b> - teh ruh-nguh-tée-ruh-tuh-nguh	The Kingdom or Reign of God.
<b>Te Wairua Tapu</b> - teh wúh-ee-roo-uh túh-poo	The Holy Spirit.
<b>Tūmanako</b> - tóo-muh-nuh-kaw	Hope.



<b>Tūpāpaku</b> - tóo-pah-puh-koo	The body of the deceased. Literally, to stand shallow, rather than tall.
<b>Tūpuna</b> - tóo-poo-nuh	Ancestors. Some areas use the term tīpuna.
<b>Urupā</b> - oo-roo-páh	Cemetery.
<b>Wai</b> - wúh-ee	Water.
<b>Wairua</b> - wúh-ee-roo-uh	Spirit.
<b>Whakanoa</b> - fúh-kuh-naw-uh	To free from tapu restrictions.
<b>Whakapapa</b> - fúh-kuh-puh-puh	Genealogy or family tree.
<b>Whakapono</b> - fúh-kuh-paw-naw	Faith.
<b>Whānau</b> - fáh-nuh-oo	Extended Family.
<b>Wharekai</b> - fúh-reh kúh-ee	Dining hall or room.
<b>Whare mate</b> - fúh-reh múh-teh	Place where the dead lie in state. Literally, house of death.
<b>Wharenui</b> - fúh-reh nóo-ee	Meeting house. Literally, big house.

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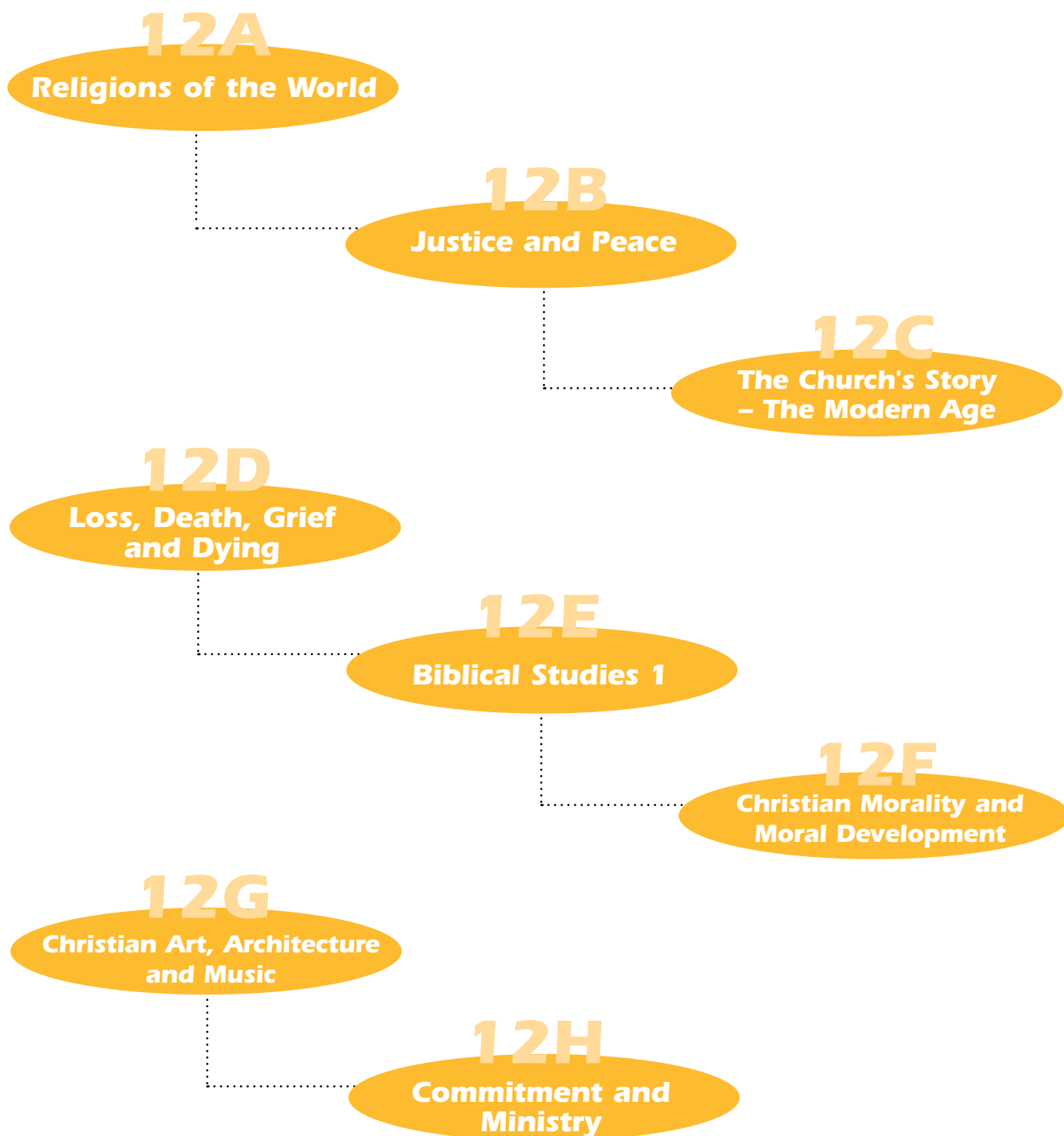
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