Followers of the teachings of Jesus Christ are called Christians. Christian staff and students form a substantial part of the Curtin community. Australia operates within a dominant Christian framework. However, while many Christians accept Christian values, many are not church attendees. Therefore, acknowledging and respecting Christian identities at Curtin therefore requires, in part, a better understanding of what being a Christian is able. The intention of this General Information Folio is to explain some aspects of Christianity that may not be apparent.

**Christians in Australia**

- The history of Christianity in Australia began with the arrival of European settlers in the 1800s who brought their own faiths to Australia. Included were the Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Lutheran and Baptist churches.
- By 1901, approximately 40% of the population was Anglican, 23% Catholic and 34% other Christian. About 1% followed non-Christian religions.
- The profile of Australian religious affiliations has since diversified, largely due to waves of migration that have taken place in the following decades.
- Following World War Two, the impact of migration from Europe led to increases in followers of the Orthodox churches.
- The Greek, Macedonian, Serbian and Russian Orthodox Churches have significant numbers in Australia.
- Christianity remains the dominant religion in Australia. According to the 2001 Census, almost 12.8 million people said they were Christians, with Catholics making up 27%, Anglicans 23% and other Christians 21%. In the 2006 Census 64% of the total population identified as Christian.
- As the dominant religion in Australia, holiday periods usually follow significant Christian dates such as Easter and Christmas.

**About Christianity**

The major source of faith and practice for Christians is the Bible which is comprised of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and the Christian Scriptures (New Testament).

For Christians, the central message is that God loves the whole world and this love is demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of God’s Son, Jesus. Christians are commanded to love their fellow humans as themselves. Jesus was a Jew and early Christianity was a Jewish sect. The core message of Jesus was that the promised kingdom of God, to which the writings of the Jewish prophets had been pointing towards, was about to be inaugurated through Jesus’ death and resurrection. In his preaching ministry, the good news that Jesus proclaimed was that anyone could have the opportunity to enter the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus as God’s chosen Saviour of the world. Christianity separated from Judaism almost 2000 years ago.

**Roman Catholicism**

The primacy and authority of the Pope is a characteristic feature of the Roman Catholic Church. His authority is ascribed by unbroken apostolic succession from Saint Peter, one of the first apostles. (The Eastern Orthodox and some other churches also consider themselves “apostolic” in origin.) Until the Middle Ages, Catholicism dominated in Europe. Roman Catholic clergy are always male and are not permitted to marry.

**Eastern Orthodox Church**

In the fifth century, governance of the church split into western and eastern components, the Roman Catholic in the west and the Eastern Orthodox in the east. Originating from the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Orthodox Church is not a single church but rather a group of self-governing bodies each associated with a particular country. Common Orthodox nations include Russia, Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Ukraine and Armenia. Most Eastern Orthodox religions follow the teachings of Saint Basil. Three characteristic features of Eastern Orthodox religion are liturgical worship, fasting and the reverence of icons in both public and private worship. Parish priests are expected to be married. Bishops are not permitted to marry.

**Oriental Orthodox Churches**

Oriental Orthodox Churches are distinct from the Eastern Orthodox Church. During the fifth century, Oriental Orthodox Churches split from the Roman Catholic Church after ritual and doctrinal differences.
Examples of Oriental Orthodox Christianity include the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria in Egypt, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Indian Orthodox Church, the Eritrean Orthodox Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Protestantism
Challenging the authority of the Pope, the Protestant branch of Christianity split from Roman Catholicism during the Reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. Protestants eventually divided into many denominations as a result of disputes over doctrine, theology or religious practice. Some of the larger denominations include Anglican, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal and Baptist. In the 1970s, the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches in Australia united to form the Uniting Church in Australia.

Protestant clergy are permitted to marry. Women can act as clergy in some denominations.

Christian Churches distinguishing themselves from the Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)/Mormons
Founded in 1830 by an American called Joseph Smith, the LDS Church regards itself as restoring the Church of Christ to its true form, as it existed in the times of the Apostles. The LDS Church believes that Joseph Smith received an additional historical record, called the Book of Mormon, which records the history of the ancient inhabitants of North America and the ministry of Jesus Christ to them after his resurrection. Individual members of the church are often referred to as Mormons. Young men who are physically and mentally fit are required to serve as missionaries.

Jehovah’s Witness
Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the traditional Christian Churches have deviated from the true teachings of the Bible. In particular, Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that specific orthodox Christian beliefs, that Jesus is God and the Trinitarian nature of God, are a pagan corruption of Jesus’ message. While they see the Bible as the main way in which God communicates his will to human beings they have their own translation of the bible known as the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures which, they believe, corrects the theological deviations.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are also trained to work as part-time missionaries for the rest of their lives. Missionary work involves visiting people in their homes and discussing the scriptures in the hope of converting non-believers, and distributing magazines such as The Watchtower (the primary bible study aid) and Awake.

NOTE: These are just some of the Christian-based denominations. You may wish to visit ABC’s The Sacred Site for an overview of other Christian denominations: <http://www.abc.net.au/compass/explore/otherx.htm>.

Christian religious observance

Place and style of worship
The church is the place of Christian worship although Christians can worship God anywhere. Worship at church involves prayer, singing of hymns and listening to the priest or ministers cite and explain passages from the Bible. Holy Communion, characteristic of most Christian Churches, is a ceremony of remembrance of the self-giving death of Christ. Some Christian denominations require confession (reconciliation) and forgiveness from sin.

Christian church services in Australia are usually on Sunday, as the day that the Bible records that Jesus rose back to life after he was put on trial and crucified, but may take place on other days as well.

The Seventh Day Adventist church keeps the seventh-day Sabbath, from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday, as a day of rest and worship and views the Sabbath as a memorial of God’s creation of the universe and a symbol of the freedom from slavery to sin that Jesus provided for humanity through his death on the cross.

Christian symbols
Christian symbols include the crucifix which depicts an image of Jesus crucified on the cross, and a cross without the figure of Jesus symbolising his Resurrection. The fish symbol is also used to represent a personal or organisational allegiance with Christianity. However, it should be noted that these symbols are not officially used or recognised by all Christian churches in Australia.

Religious text
Most Christians follow the teachings of the Bible, which is also called the Holy Bible, Scriptures or Word of God. It is divided into two parts, the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). The Christian Scriptures consist of four Gospels (different accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) and various letters to early churches.

Christian dress code
Western and Orthodox Christianity do not prescribe a dress code for lay Christians. Traditional clerical dress within Western Christianity includes the wearing of black with a special white collar. These days, most clerics and nuns do not dress traditionally. Orthodox priests wear a black tunic and headdress or hat.

Dietary requirements and restrictions
Some Christian denominations require the abstinence from some or all foods for a period of time (fasting). Fasting is...
considered by some Christian denominations as a way of improving one’s self-discipline and appreciating the sufferings of the poor.

**Lent**

In Western Christianity, Lent is a period of 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter. Traditionally it is marked by fasting from food and festivities. It is a period of study and reflection in preparation for celebrating Easter.

**Great Lent**

The term ‘Great Lent’ is used to distinguish Orthodox Christian Lent from Western Christian Lent. During Great Lent, Orthodox Christians must abstain from consuming animal products, olive oil, spirits and wine.

**Other requirements**

Some Christian denominations are required to abstain from certain food types all the time. Examples include:

- Jehovah’s Witnesses avoid eating blood or blood products
- Mormons abstain from two consecutive meals on the first Sunday of each month. They also abstain from alcohol, tea and coffee and tobacco products.

**Significant religious dates and events**

While different Christian denominations celebrate and observe different holy days, most denominations observe the following feast or holy days:

**Christmas Day**

Christmas Day marks the birth of Jesus Christ and is celebrated with church ceremonies, carols and the exchange of gifts amongst family and friends, some of which are attributed to Father Christmas/Santa Claus.

Western Christian Churches follow the Gregorian calendar while Orthodox Churches follow the Julian calendar. Therefore, they celebrate Christmas (and Easter) at different times. For Western Christianity, Christmas falls on 25 December while for Orthodox Christianity, Christmas falls on 7 January.

**Epiphany**

The Epiphany celebrates the revelation of God to humankind, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It falls on 6 January each year. It is not usually recognised as a public holiday but some Christians may spend time in religious activities.

**Ash Wednesday**

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent and occurs 46 days before Easter. On Ash Wednesday, which always falls on a Wednesday, worshippers have a cross made of ash marked on their foreheads by a priest or minister, symbolising repentance and purification.

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**Maundy Thursday**

Maundy Thursday, also known as Holy or Great Thursday, is the Thursday before Easter Sunday. It commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus Christ with the Apostles.

**Easter**

Easter is the most important Christian festival. Good Friday (Easter Friday) commemorates Jesus’ suffering on the cross. In Australia, Good Friday is a public holiday and most shops are closed. Many Christians go to church on this day.

Easter Sunday commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus from the tomb. In Western Christianity, Easter falls sometime between 22 March and 25 April. In Orthodox Christianity, Easter falls between 4 April and 8 May.

In Australia, there is a public holiday on Easter Monday. This is not a religious holiday.

**Ascension**

The Ascension refers to the belief that Jesus ascended to heaven, in the presence of his disciples, 40 days following the Resurrection.

**Pentecost**

Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and women followers of Jesus 55 days after Easter. Some Christians may engage in religious activities on this day. Western Christianity and Orthodox Churches base their dates on different calendars.


**Some common misconceptions about Christianity**

The Easter Bunny is not a Christian concept. Father Christmas/Santa Claus is a mythical rather than a Christian figure.

**Multi-Faith Services**

Curtin recognises, respects and values the diversity of religious beliefs and convictions represented among its students and staff. Curtin supports these religious faiths through the Multi-Faith Services, which are appropriate and relevant services provided by a qualified team that is able to meet your spiritual needs in meaningful and practical ways. The Multi-Faith Services team are well-qualified in a wide-range of religious issues. In addition, the team understand both the religious domain and university life well, and are able to form a unique bridge between the two. They also understand the religious and cultural needs of international students.
The Multi-Faith Service team includes:

• The University Multi-Faith Officer (MFO) is the coordinating officer who has overall responsibility for the service. This is a multi-faith role fitting with the multi-cultural dynamics of university life. The University MFO provides a liaison between university life and a wide diversity of religious and spiritual groups.

For more information on our Multi-Faith Officer visit: <http://life.curtin.edu.au/diversity_and_faith/Staff.htm>.

• The Visiting Chaplains each represent their own religious tradition on campus, and offer interactions appropriate to that tradition.


To contact the Multi-Faith Service team, please visit: <http://multifaith.curtin.edu.au/team/mfo.cfm>.

Respecting religious and cultural diversity at Curtin

Curtin’s Equal Opportunity Policy and its procedures are provided to enable students and staff to comply with all relevant legislation on equal opportunity and enable the University to take all reasonable steps to ensure that students and staff are able to study and work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment.

The Equal Opportunity Policy and its procedures should be read in conjunction with the Diversity Policy and its procedures. The purpose of the Diversity Policy is to reflect that Curtin recognises, respects and values the diversity of its students and staff and the Curtin community.

The following information may assist in creating an environment that is considerate and respectful of the religious and cultural traditions of the staff and students at Curtin.

Conscientious Objections

Curtin University recognises that some students and staff may have a conscientious belief that is in conflict with teaching, assessment practices and/or fieldwork education. A student/staff member can request that the University accommodate conscientious objections by providing a suitable alternative. For more information on the policy and procedures for accommodating conscientious objections, refer to the Conscientious Objection Policy and Procedures: <http://policies.curtin.edu.au>.

Religious Equity Examinations

If you have an examination that is scheduled at the same time as one of your important religious event or festivals, Curtin University has religious equity policies that allow you to apply for an equity examination based on religious grounds.

This is an alternative examination that is scheduled at a different time that does not clash with your religious events or festivals.

Usually, this alternative examination is scheduled earlier on the same day or on another day during the examination period. Please note that Curtin University can only provide religious equity examinations for religious events or festivals that are obligatory, according to your religious faith, for you to observe. The university cannot schedule religious equity examinations for religious events that it is only optional for you to observe, according to your religious faith. The process of applying for an alternative examination is straightforward and you can successfully apply for a religious equity examination by following the guidelines on the Multi-Faith Services website: <http://multifaith.curtin.edu.au/religious-equity/examinations.cfm>.

Author: Anna Kalaitzidis, Flinders University, 2006.

Expert advice: Geoff Boyce, Uniting Church Chaplain, Religious Centre, Flinders University, 2006.

Additional advice: Dr Sven Östring, Multi-Faith Officer, Multi-Faith Services, Curtin University, 2010.