

A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES REGARDING CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The task of the Catholic school

Its task is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all different aspects of human knowledge through the subject taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian.

(Congregation for Catholic Education, The Catholic School, 1977)

This same goal is expressed by the Victorian Catholic community which desires its schools to be communities of faith. This broad philosophical stance reveals a concern for an education that combines sound knowledge and skills with an overall personal development rooted in Christian values. Such an education involves a high level of interpersonal transaction between staff and pupils.

Pope John Paul II spelt out key implications of this for staff who work in Catholic Education and schools:

The Church looks upon you as co-workers with an important measure of shared responsibility ... To you it is given to create the future and give it direction by offering to your students a set of values with which to assess their newly discovered knowledge ... [The changing times] demand that educators be open to new cultural influences and interpret them for young pupils in the light of Christian faith. You are called to bring professional competence and a high standard of excellence to your teaching ... But your responsibilities make demands on you that go far beyond the need for professional skills and competence ... Through you, as through a clear window on a sunny day, students must come to see and know the richness and joy of a life lived in accordance with Christ's teaching, in response to his challenging demands. To teach means not only to impart what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe. It is this latter lesson which tends to last the longest.

(Pope John Paul II, Address to Catholic Educators, September 12, 1984)

Pope John Paul II clarified this further when he spoke on Catholic Education in Melbourne:

I welcome you into that chosen group called by the Church to educating young Catholics in the faith. In a very special way, you share in the Church's mission of proclaiming the good news of salvation. Not all of you may be teaching catechetics, but if you are on the staff of a Catholic school, it is expected, and it is of the utmost importance, that you should support the whole of the Church's teaching and bear witness to it in your daily lives ... Certainly your work demands professionalism, but it also demands something more. Your professionalism as teachers involves tasks that are linked to your Baptism and to your own commitment in faith ... No matter what subject you teach, it is part of your responsibility to lead your pupils more fully into the mystery of Christ and the living tradition of the Church ... The parish primary school, where younger children receive their early lessons in the faith, remains a cornerstone of the pastoral care of Australian Catholic people. Here the community of faith hands on the timely message of Jesus Christ to its youngest members ... More difficult challenges face the Catholic secondary school. Here students must be helped to achieve that integration of faith and authentic culture which is necessary for believers in today's world. But they must also be helped to recognise and reject false cultural values which are contrary to the Gospel.

(Pope John Paul II, Address to Catholic Education, November 28, 1986)

Pope Benedict stated when addressing Catholic educators in the United States of America in 2010:

Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. Spe Salvi, 4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterised by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord's disciples, the Church.

(Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Catholic Educators, April 17, 2008)

And in an address to Catholic teachers in England in 2010, His Holiness stated:

As you know, the task of a teacher is not simply to impart information or to provide training in skills intended to deliver some economic benefit to society; education is not and must never be considered as purely utilitarian. It is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom.

It means that the life of faith needs to be the driving force behind every activity in the school, so that the Church's mission may be served effectively, and the young people may discover the joy of entering into Christ's "being for others".

(Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Catholic Teachers, September 17, 2008)

This philosophy of Catholic education, expressed in a growing number of documents and policy statements, guides the Catholic school in its functioning. Whilst it is accountable to the general community for the provision of quality education to young citizens, it is also accountable to the Church community for providing this within the context of the Gospel and its values as expressed in Catholic doctrine. The Catholic school is more than an educative institution: it is a key part of the Church, and an essential element in the Church's mission. So too staff in Catholic Education and in the Catholic school are more than employees – they minister in the name of the Church and of the Gospel.

All staff in Catholic Education have an indispensable role to play. It is expected of all employed in Catholic Education that they:

- (a) accept the Catholic educational philosophy of the schools administered;
- (b) develop and maintain an adequate understanding of those aspects of Catholic teaching that touch upon their subject areas and other aspects of their work;
- (c) by their teaching and other work, and by personal example, strive to help students to understand, accept and appreciate Catholic teaching and values;
- (d) avoid, whether by word, action or public lifestyle, influence upon students that is contrary to the teaching and values of the Church community in whose name they act;
- (f) be committed to regular ongoing professional development;
- (g) be qualified as required by state authorities.