[CHAPTER 2: THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS]

Awakenings RE Curriculum Core Document Revised Text Development
2.1 The Mission of Evangelisation

Although the Catholic Church is universal and united throughout the world in communion with the Bishop of Rome, it is made present in each place through real and particular communities. Dioceses, parishes, institutes of religious women and men, monastic communities, canonical associations, all exist as communities of faith in Jesus Christ in the Catholic tradition.

Within the community of faith, people come to share a common language, a knowledge of the narratives of the Scriptures, a set of deep symbols and patterns of liturgy and prayer, expected ways of acting, even a communal sense of humour! These shared understandings, symbols and practices, are all means of relating to Jesus Christ, and expressing faith in him in a communal way. For adults, initiation into the community of faith involves a gradual familiarisation with all these shared patterns of life. For those baptised as children, this process occurs as they grow and mature, usually under the influence of a significant elder, parent or grandparent.

However, religious communities also relate to other communities and the society in which they exist. The Australian Census 2016 provided a snapshot of a population that is increasingly diverse in religious and nonreligious identities. Due to socio-cultural factors such as economic and cultural globalization, new technologies and media, immigration and travel, as well as an increasing secularization of public institutions and policies, Australian society is becoming more multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-worldview. Regarding religious identity, whereas around 90% of Australians self-identified with one of the Christian denominations at the end of World War II, in 2016 about 52% were Christian; and where less than one-half percent of Australians belonged to other religious traditions in 1945, it was over 8% in 2016. The number of Australians who self-identify as ‘no religion’ has steadily increased to over 30% in 2016 (ABS, 2017; Bouma, 2017).

These dramatic cultural and religious changes in the Australian context can be described as a transition:

- from a Christian mono-culture to a pluralisation of religious and nonreligious worldviews. This results in a heightened self-awareness of personal and communal identity. The Christian worldview now exists as one ‘option’ (Joas, 2014) in relation with other worldviews.

- from institutional transmission to de-traditionalisation of religious identity. In a strong subcultural group, religious identity is ‘inherited’ along with other familial and cultural traits of the group. Globalising and secularising social practices weaken the socialisation of identity through subcultural groups.

- from cultural belonging within a religious group to individualisation of beliefs and practice. The cultural emphasis on personal meaning-making and authenticity promotes a highly individualised quest for identity construction and self-expression, including elements of religious worldviews and traditions.

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These cultural factors are at work in all dimensions of Australian society, including in religious communities. Religious identity, as all other civic, national, or cultural identities, is increasingly pluralised, de-traditionalised, and individualised. At the same time, people of various religious and nonreligious identities are drawn into ever-closer contact with each other through changes in the workplace, new social media and information technologies, more intercultural marriage and child-raising arrangements, among other factors.

Christian communities relate with other cultural and religious groups and with the state for a variety of reasons and at various levels of community organization. In all these engagements the Christian motivation and worldview is expressed and communicated, often implicitly rather than explicitly. Sometimes Christians engage with others to speak explicitly of their relationship with Christ and of the Gospel way of life in order to draw people’s attention to the transformative power and beauty of the Christian ‘option’. Evangelisation refers to all those activities where Christians intentionally relate with others in their context, with the aim of living out the insights, behaviours and commitments formed through their faith relationship with Jesus Christ and in the community of the church. It includes all the ways that Christians communicate and relate to the wider society in order to ‘give an account of the hope’ that is in them (1 Pet 3: 15). The goal of evangelisation is to enable the living Word of God to ‘take flesh’ in the existence of human persons and cultures, bringing about the transformation of creation according to the reign or kingdom of God.

‘Evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.’
(Paul VI, Evangelization in the Modern World, n.18)

This transformative power of the Word of God is also continually at work within the Christian church. Through gospel-based discernment in new or changing circumstances, Christians are awakened to new calls to respond to their times as faithful disciples of Christ. Recent examples of this ongoing discernment include:

- the growing awareness of human responsibility in stewardship of the earth and its environment, highlighted by recent popes and especially Pope Francis’ encyclical, Laudato Si (see Ballarat Diocesan Education Vision, Stewards of Creation: A Change of Heart);
- the urgent need to address the forms of ‘new slavery’ and human trafficking facilitated by more accessible travel across borders;
- the need to resist policies and procedures that de-humanise asylum-seekers and those forced to migrate from their homes;
- the role and participation of young Catholics in the life and mission of the church (Called to Fullness, 2017),
- and the confronting challenge for conversion and reconciliation on the part of the church in the light of the criminal behaviour by church personnel and ineffective response by church leadership detailed in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Catholic Professional Standards, 2018).

2 The Religious Dimension of Catholic Schools
In baptism, all Christians are called to this evangelizing encounter with both the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the concrete context in which they live and work. The mission is both personal and communal. It occurs when individual Christians speak and act in ways they have learned from the Gospel; when they involve themselves in projects, work, issues and lifestyles that allow them to live authentically as Christians; when they engage in public discussions and debates as well as private conversations in ways that help others to understand why Christians think and act the way they do.

Christians also relate corporately with society, acting as a community of Christian identity. This may be in the provision of services in their locality; in works of welfare and advocacy; in supporting groups and policies that promote social justice or help strengthen community; in drawing public attention to a particular need or benefit in society; in building solidarity between cultures and nations for development and peace; in entering respectful dialogue with people of other religious traditions; in sponsoring projects in the arts, in public discourse, or in the media that give expression to the Christian way of interpreting the world and human existence. Religious institutes give expression to their particular charism in works and lifestyles that flow from their founding vision.

Evangelisation occurs when Christian people express and communicate both who they are (witness of life) and what they do (ministries of word, worship and service) because of their conscious relationship with Jesus Christ in a community of faith.

The Catholic school as evangelising community

One of the ways by which Catholic dioceses, parishes and religious institutes seek both to provide community service and to draw people into gospel-motivated dialogue is through the work of Catholic schools. The Catholic school is an educating community sponsored by a canonically recognised Catholic body as an expression of its mission of evangelisation.

Since the Second Vatican Council, church documents dealing with Catholic education, such as The Catholic School (1977), The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1988), The General Directory for Catechesis (1997), The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (1997), The Church in Oceania (2001), Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools (2013), Educating Today and Tomorrow (2014), and Educating to Fraternal Humanism (2017), all locate the purpose and mission of Catholic schools within the broader evangelising mission of the church. The more recent of these documents emphasise the distinctive role of Catholic schools in fostering a respectful and fruitful encounter between people of different faith communities, spiritual traditions, and nonreligious worldviews, for the sake of enriching society and promoting peace and justice in the world.

The school evangelises through its particular culture (see 2.2 and 2.3), through the witness of life of members of the community (see 2.4 and 2.5), and through its curriculum, including Religious Education (see 2.6 and 2.7). These are means of engaging all members of the school community into a differentiated and multi-faceted dialogue motivated and inspired by the Gospel, and hosted within the tradition of the Catholic faith.

3 The Religious Dimension of Catholic Schools
The membership of Catholic school communities is diverse. Some are conscious and active members of their Catholic community, some belong actively to other Christian traditions or religious faiths. Some are not explicitly Christian, but nevertheless seek enrolment for their children in a Catholic school. Many students come from households in which the adults belong to different churches, or one partner is intentionally Christian and the other is not. A large number of children and parents are baptised Catholics who do not participate consciously in a faith community, and live day to day without reference to the religious dimension of life.

The mission of the school reaches beyond the RE classroom to include all aspects of school life, its culture, programs and relationships. Within the interplay of faith stances and worldviews, Christians discern and recognise the presence of Jesus Christ in the school community, and his voice is heard by engaging with the Gospel in prayer and service. There are evangelising and catechising dimensions to all aspects of school life, always made concrete in practices of rich interpersonal dialogue between persons. These dimensions are most explicit at those times the school articulates and celebrates its communal identity and purpose. School leaders have a distinct role in articulating and modelling the Christ-centred character of the Catholic school.

The practices of authentic dialogue invite and challenge students, teachers, parents and friends of the school to an ongoing encounter with each other in their particular faith or worldview, and with the presence of Christ who invites all people into the mystery of God's love. For some, the encounter of faith will be explicit and intentional, expressed in participation in church life and service to all. For others, the religious encounter will be explored in the search for personal and social identity and meaning; for some it will be unrecognised as a viable worldview option. These responses co-exist in respectful and responsible dialogue, enhancing the personhood of each and the common good of all.

‘The education offered by Catholic schools flows from their witness to the Gospel and their love for all that is free and open. An indispensable condition for cooperation is openness to plurality and differences. Experience shows that the Catholic religion knows how to encounter, respect and esteem different cultures. The love for men and women is necessarily a love for their culture.’

*(Educating to Intercultural Dialogue, n. 61)*

**Evangelisation and Catechesis**

Evangelisation describes the relationship of Christian people and communities with those who do not share the common understandings and life-patterns of Christians. But when a child or adult seeks to be initiated more deeply within community of faith and to share its experience of the Risen Lord in the midst of his people, the community assists that person to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours which enable them to share the life and identity of Catholic Christians. This gradual process is called *catechesis* (Greek: *katecheo*, to echo, to resound).

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Catechesis describes those ways a Christian community assists an adult, young person or child understand and actively participate in its shared language, symbols, liturgy, activities and ways of behaving towards each other. Developing friendships within the community, learning the meaning of ceremonies and practices (for example, what Catholics do in Lent or in November), knowing the Scriptures more deeply and using them to pray, developing a desire to imitate the attitudes and actions of Jesus, are all expected outcomes of catechesis. Catechesis is both initial (particularly through the processes of initiation of adults and children) and lifelong as Christians mature in their faith.

In catechetical activities the church hands on all that it is and has received in and through Jesus Christ, and calls Christians into deeper communion with Jesus and his community. The goal of catechesis is ‘to make people’s faith, enlightened by teaching, a living faith, explicit and active.’ (Vatican II, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, n. 14)

The Catholic school has an important catechetical role because many of its members are moving into or are already embedded in a faith community. For some parents, enrolling their child in a Catholic school is an expression of their own Christian identity, and they seek to lead their child into that same faith relationship. Providing opportunities for faith enrichment for these children, including in the religious education curriculum, is part of Catholic schools’ witness to their purpose.

However, not all students or their families are engaged in a journey of ‘explicit, active faith.’ Catholic beliefs and practices, that are taken for granted by some, will be perceived simply as curiosities (or oddities) by others. Indeed, these differences themselves may be invitations to meaningful interpersonal dialogue. While they are not the same thing, there is no exact point of distinction possible between catechesis and the evangelising mission of the Catholic school (General Directory for Catechesis, 1997, n. 73).

‘It is evident that religious learning cannot help but strengthen the faith of a believing student, just as catechesis cannot help but increase one’s knowledge of Christianity.’

(The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School, n. 69)

2.2 Bearers of the Mission

The mission of evangelisation is the right and responsibility of all baptised Christians, and takes many forms. In the public and legal sphere, an organisation may be titled ‘Catholic’ when it is sponsored and governed by a legally-recognised Catholic authority. Schools may bear the title ‘Catholic’ when they are governed by an publicly-constituted body representing a diocese, a parish or a religious institute. It is this relationship of governance that establishes a school’s role in the evangelising mission of a particular Catholic community.

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In ways particular to their role, leaders of Catholic communities ensure that schools maintain and pursue their distinctive mission and purpose.

The bishop is responsible for ensuring that the mission and tradition of the Church is expressed faithfully by all Catholic organizations in his diocese, including schools.

‘For the particular church entrusted to them, that office is exercised by individual bishops, who are the moderators of the entire ministry of the Word in their churches.’
(Code of Canon Law, n. 756 #2)

The parish priest/canonical administrator, who bears responsibility for the proclamation of the Word of God in a particular parish, ensures that the school culture, vision and mission are in keeping with the Catholic tradition, and that the Religious Education policy is implemented in conformity with the Religious Education guidelines established by the bishop.

‘The parish priest has the obligation of ensuring that the word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish...’
(Code of Canon Law, n. 528 #1)

Leaders of religious institutes ensure that schools owned and/or operated by them express and foster their mission in the church, recognising the special spirituality and charism proper to each institute. These schools also work in partnership with the bishop of the diocese in which they are located.

‘The charisms of the various religious communities express this common task (of Religious Education) but with their own proper emphases, often of great religious, social and pedagogical depth. History demonstrates the vitality which these charisms have brought to the church’s educational activity.’
(General Directory for Catechesis, n. 229)

Exercising particular leadership responsibilities in the school community, the principal ensures that the school staff develops an ethos and programs that are faithful to the religious identity of the school, to the Religious Education policy and to the needs, safety and development of all students.

It is the classroom teacher who cooperates with the bishop, priest, principal, parents, students, other teachers and staff, school policies and Religious Education curriculum to fulfil the evangelising mission of the Church within each classroom and for each student.

In the Catholic school, ‘prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community.’
(Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, n. 26)
2.3 The Culture of the Catholic School

The Catholic school responds to its mission by offering a specific cultural experience that is inspired by and directed toward the Gospel vision of the reign of God (cf. Mk 1:15). This calls for a Christ-centred ethos and Gospel-inspired worldview that permeates all aspects of school life, including relationships, structures and policies, pastoral care, liturgies, celebrations and routines, as well as the formal curriculum. These are all means of living the mission of evangelisation.

At the heart of the culture of the Catholic school is an explicit commitment to the integral and authentic development of each human person in all their dimensions, capacities and relationships (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, n. 9). It is through this commitment that the Catholic school offers its greatest service to the church and to Australian society. In the pluralising and individualising cultural currents of today’s context, the integral development of persons can be realised only through age-appropriate and respectful encounters with others of different, and sometimes conflicting, worldviews, enabled by experiences of respectful and well-facilitated dialogue.

In today’s context, the Catholic school is called to be:

*a community of encounter through dialogue*....

The Catholic school responds to its mission by offering a particular educational environment and experience, one that is grounded in the Christian view of the person, of society and of the cosmos. Through its leaders, the school gathers students, their families, teachers and other staff members into a community of shared interest and purpose. Within this community, children, young people and adults of different social, cultural, and religious worldviews are brought into friendly and respectful dialogue with one another, so that all members may grow in knowledge, self-identity, maturity and responsibility. It is by means of this rich dialogue, the intentional and structured engagement with the lives and worldviews of others, that each member of the community grows in self-awareness and identity. This encounter has its challenges as well as its joys and blessings.

*...inspired/motivated by Gospel of Jesus Christ who is present among us...*

Distinctive of the Catholic school is its explicit awareness and articulation of the presence of Jesus Christ, whom Christians recognise in faith to be risen from the bonds of death and alive in the midst of the church and the world. It is the presence of Christ, whose living voice continues to be heard in Word, Worship and Service, that summons and motivates the mission of the school and the style of educational environment that is nurtured in the school community. Christ calls all members of the school community into a life-giving encounter through the Gospel, and into a life-enhancing dialogue with each other, and with the wider community.
...for the good of each person, the church, and society

The Christian understanding is that each person is created through love in the image of God, and bears a unique and inalienable dignity, including a lifelong relationship with God. The school is committed to the personal, ethical and spiritual growth of all members of the community. In this way, the school contributes to the vitality and effectiveness of the Catholic community, as well as enhancing the students’ readiness for citizenship and democratic community engagement in society. The study of Religious Education will awaken students to the Judeo-Christian roots of Western culture, and the legacy of Christianity in the public, legal and social institutions of Australia.

In the 2013 document *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, the Congregation for Catholic Education reflected on three foundations on which a culture of dialogue is built (nn. 29-44):

- **a theological foundation** – the relational character of human persons and cultures is grounded in the Trinitarian mystery of divine Love from which all creation arises, as well as the universal scope of the history of salvation. In the Catholic worldview, a metaphysics of ‘communion’ upholds all created reality

- **an anthropological foundation** – as relational beings, humans are oriented toward and enriched by encounters with others. ‘To go out from oneself and consider the world from a different point of view is not a denial of oneself, but, on the contrary, is necessary for enhancing one’s own identity’ (n. 38). The capacity to love is the foundation of human solidarity, and of the hope for a united human family

- **a pedagogical foundation** – an understanding of the dynamics of relationship between persons formed in their own history and understandings is the pedagogical paradigm that nourishes a culture of real and dynamic encounter through dialogue, ‘marked by respect, understanding and mutual service’ (n. 42)

A culture of encounter through dialogue must confront serious challenges from time to time. A lack of openness due to fear and prejudice, the loss of awareness and attention that comes from busy schedules and workloads, the weariness and resistance that builds up when communication is difficult, all affect the quality of dialogue. Each of the relational virtues is required to build up a strong and resilient culture of dialogue in the Catholic school community: patience, self-control, truthfulness, courage, generosity, perseverance. For some, there is a fear that openness to different perspectives, faiths, and worldviews leads to a diminishment of one’s own commitments. However, as Pope Benedict has insisted, Christian faith in the inter-relational character of the Triune God teaches that ‘true openness does not mean loss of individual identity but profound interpenetration’ (*Caritas in veritate* n. 54).
**Distinctive features of the Catholic school**

Therefore, Catholic schools will display certain fundamental and distinguishing characteristics flowing from its culture of encounter through dialogue (Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, *Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School*, 2016). These will be expressed in the five key aspects of Catholic schooling: Catholic School Culture; Community Engagement; Leadership and Stewardship; Learning and Teaching; and Wellbeing. The distinctive mission and identity of the school will be expressed by:

- communicating a style and purpose grounded in the evangelising mission of the church; inspired by and witnessing to the presence of the Risen Lord and the Gospel vision of the reign of God

- articulating a Catholic worldview, as an open and invitational ‘host tradition’ to other worldviews, through the markers of school identity: Start and End of Year Celebrations, Graduations, Promotions and Marketing, Feast Day and Liturgical Year rituals

- expressing and modelling the particular charism and spirituality of the governing religious institute in order-owned and/or operated school

- fostering the integrated intellectual, ethical, relational and spiritual development of each student, and all members of the community

- making visible a culture of encounter and dialogue in the expectations, relationships, routines, curriculum and reporting of the school (Hattie, 2009)

- instilling practices of spiritual awareness, stillness and reflective response within the daily routines of the school

- assisting students to integrate their experiences of life, their cultural awareness and their academic learning, in dialogue with the Christian worldview

- practising a Gospel-based option for the poor and the disadvantaged, and promoting a critical social conscience for all members

- offering educational excellence for all students, in partnership with families, the local church and Australian society

- contributing to the present and future transformation of persons and society in anticipation of the Reign of God

- pursuing opportunities to promote justice, reconciliation and environmental responsibility locally and globally, explicitly linked to the Gospel-based mission of the school

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2.4 Teachers in a Catholic Dialogue School

Teaching is an activity involving relationships. Through their relationships with each other and with students, their families and community contexts, teachers communicate what they value, what they believe, and something of what they know. Teaching is an ancient and noble way of life, calling for professional standards of practice, generosity in commitment, and spiritual awareness.

**Professional Standards of Practice**

Like any profession, teaching contributes to the common good and quality of society. Society therefore expects high personal and professional standards from members of the teaching profession. The scope of the profound trust invested in teachers and their work by the community is reflected in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, 2011).

The standards cover three domains of professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement. Across these domains, seven interconnected standards are scoped over four professional career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead.

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<tr>
<th>Domains of teaching</th>
<th>Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Knowledge</td>
<td>1. Know students and how they learn</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Know the content and how to teach it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Practice</td>
<td>3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments</td>
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<td>5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning</td>
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<td>Professional Engagement</td>
<td>6. Engage in professional learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community</td>
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**Formation for Mission in Catholic Schools**

Teachers in Catholic schools exercise their professional knowledge, practice and engagement in service of the educational and evangelising mission of the school. The National Catholic Education Commission’s *Framework for Mission in Catholic Education* (2017) calls on school authorities and governors to engage teachers in the process of personal and professional formation for their role in this mission. To be effective, this process should be systematic, collaborative, graduated and ongoing. It aims to develop teachers’ capacity for (p. 16):

- deeper faith relationships with God, the church, self, others and creation

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• greater engagement between individuals’ lives marked by ‘accompaniment’ in the service of others
• a culture of dialogue
• stronger commitment to the ministry of teaching and parenting
• a deeper call into missionary discipleship

All teachers and other adults in Catholic schools are called to model the school’s commitment to a Gospel-inspired culture of encounter through dialogue. While respecting a teacher’s freedom of conscience and personal integrity, each member of the school staff is obliged by the terms of their employment to promote actively the religious culture, mission and aims of their school.

To enable the dialogical pedagogy called for by the documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education, and by the Enhancing Catholic School Identity frameworks, Pollefeyt & Bouwens (2010) identify three teacher roles that are distinct but interrelated: Witness, Specialist, Moderator. As witness, the teacher stands for the Catholic faith community and invites learners to extend and deepen their religious learning in relation to the ‘host tradition’ of Catholicism; as specialist, the teacher engages and facilitates progress in student learning in the knowledge, skills and dispositions of the Religious Education curriculum area; as moderator, the teacher invites and enables all learners to participate in rich learning experiences structured by dialogue and encounter. Since teacher capacity for these roles varies, partnerships within and beyond the school may be required to ensure the three roles are activated in student learning at each level of school.

A real and sometimes costly generosity is therefore involved in teachers’ commitment to their profession. The task of teaching summons all their personal and professional capacities to service of the integral development of their students, within an educational community centered on the Gospel. School authorities must be constantly aware of the demanding nature of teaching, and actively provide support to staff members through professional development opportunities, personal management skills and workplace conditions that promote wellbeing and excellence.

2.5 Community and Partnership

The Catholic school does not function in isolation. Its commitment to students and their life contexts establishes the school in a number of partnerships: with parents/guardians and families; with local service, cultural and sporting groups; with other education sectors and departments; and with business, industry and local government.

In attending to the religious dimension of Catholic schooling, the most fundamental partnerships of the school are those with parents/guardians and with local Catholic faith communities.

An appreciation of the total range of learning contexts of the student focuses attention on the primary learning environment of the parent/child relationship and the family. It is in this environment that the building blocks of learning and meaning-making are established more or less successfully: wonder,
trust, risk, play, interest, inquiry, autonomy, story, identity, and many others. As every teacher learns, knowing the student involves knowing the family.

‘The first and primary educators of children are their parents. The school is aware of this fact but, unfortunately, the same is not always true of the families themselves; it is the school’s responsibility to give them this awareness. Every school should initiate meetings and other programs which will make the parents more conscious of their role, and help to establish a partnership; it is impossible to do too much along these lines.’

(The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, n. 44)

The support and interest of parents/guardians are as vital to successful outcomes in the religious aims of schools as they are in literacy, numeracy or health. The role of grandparents and other regular caregivers is increasingly important in students religious experience and understanding. It is the case that many parents need the school’s partnership of guidance and encouragement to assist them in the religious awakening and nurturing of their child. It is also clear that what is identified as a successful outcome in religious learning will vary from one family to the next.

The other foundational partnership of the Catholic school is with the local Catholic community. The school community is called ‘Catholic’ by virtue of its relationship of governance with a particular Catholic diocese, parish or religious institute. Yet also for schools owned and/or operated by religious institutes, it is the local Catholic community that is the natural environment for whatever Catholic life and ministry is available. Local Catholic communities face both external and internal challenges: decreasing affiliation and participation by many Catholics; fewer ordained ministers and religious available for ministry in local communities; lack of financial and organizational resources in regional and remote dioceses; the ongoing effects of historic sexual and other forms of abuse in Catholic institutions and communities.

As in many areas of schooling, the staff of a school will need to reach beyond its own resources to provide students with learning experiences in the religious dimension of education. Within the wider Catholic community lie skills and knowledge that schools can access through productive partnerships. Lifelong learning goals in the religious dimension of the human person will point students to the life-patterns, rituals and services of the local faith community. The people of Catholic parishes must be ready to respond to this partnership with students and teachers.

Ideally, the tasks of awakening, structuring and enriching learning in the religious dimension of human life are shared by home, school and faith community, with each having its own distinctive contribution to make in a genuine partnership.

2.6 Classroom Religious Education

Classroom-based programs provide a systematic and structured form of religious learning. They emphasise what is often referred to as the instructional aspect of education; they have their own
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Religious Education teachers aim to awaken students to the religious dimension of reality, including one’s own existence, to foster an understanding of the narrative, insights and challenge of the Gospel, and to provide an experience of and reflection on the Christian worldview as it is expressed in the Catholic tradition.

Religious educators use a wide range of educational strategies to encourage the learner to reflect on self, the world and God in the light of personal experience, the texts of Scripture and the ideas, practices and values of Catholic tradition. In so doing they seek to cultivate reflection, discernment, decision-making and action, and to nurture the development of an informed conscience and moral character.

‘What confers on religious instruction in schools its proper evangelising character is the fact that it is called to penetrate a particular area of culture and to relate with other areas of knowledge. As an original form of the ministry of the word, it makes present the Gospel in a personal process of cultural, systematic and critical assimilation...religious instruction in schools should appear as a scholastic discipline with the same rigour as other disciplines.’

(General Directory for Catechesis n.73)

At its best, Religious Education sets out to inform, form and transform learners and teachers by engaging them with the intellectual, ethical and spiritual richness of the Catholic tradition. Religious Education invites and enables a life-long journey of awakening to the deep meaning of human life and community, of the world we inhabit and sustain, and of our cultural and religious heritage, against the horizon of the Reign of God enfleshed in the mission and person of Jesus Christ, and communicated in the Church.

Religious Education intends to awaken learners intellectually by
- encouraging critical thinking and inquiry
- firing imaginative capacity
- enlightening experiences with reason
- broadening perspectives through Scripture and Tradition

Religious Education intends to awaken learners ethically by
- forming moral character
- arousing a desire for wisdom
- attuning minds and hearts to the attitudes of Jesus
- promoting responsibility and integrity in living

Religious Education intends to awaken learners spiritually by
- relating human life to the mystery of God
- valuing the interior life and capacities
- developing prayerful and liturgical habits
- connecting compassion with justice

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2.7 Religious Education and Other Curriculum Areas

Because it intentionally articulates the connectedness of the human person with the whole of reality, human and divine, Religious Education awakens all disciplines of learning to their deep meaning and connectedness. Religious learning in all its dimensions lies at the heart of the curriculum of Catholic Schools, synthesizing, enriching and complementing the learning experiences of students.

Every curriculum area or subject that is taught within a Catholic school has a religious dimension, a capacity to assist students to examine the world of human culture and the world of religious meaning, providing knowledge and skills, and fostering attitudes and values that are life-giving and that assist young people to search for meaning and truth.

Religious Education ‘should have its own syllabus, approved by those in authority; it should also seek appropriate interdisciplinary links with other course material so that there is a coordination between human learning and religious awareness. Like other coursework, it should promote culture, and it should make use of the best educational methods available to schools today.’

(The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, n. 70)

Inter-disciplinary links between Religious Education and other curriculum areas are a vital means of engaging students with the Catholic world-view described earlier. They are also a means of making available the insights, understandings and values derived from the Gospel to the public discourse of society.

Individual curriculum areas find their place in the religious aims of the Catholic school when they foster:

- skills such as reflection, critical thinking, problem solving, analysis and discernment – all of which promote the search for truth and meaning
- a moral sensitivity and a heightened capacity to distinguish between what is life-promoting and what is dangerous to human and natural
- the gospel values of love, compassion, reconciliation, transformation, justice and hope
- a generosity of spirit that calls forth a commitment to the service of others and of creation generally
- the capacity to bring the perspective of the Gospel into conversation with the surrounding culture - to reflect, to judge and to choose and to act.

The Victorian Curriculum (2015) structures student learning by means of a range of learning disciplines and general capabilities. While Religious Education is a distinct learning area of the curriculum, there will be many points of intersection with other curriculum learning areas. It will also contribute to the development of the general capabilities that help students to become successful learners, confident and creative persons, and active and informed citizens (Melbourne Declaration, 2008). Catholic
Schools will bring a distinctive perspective to each of these goals, in line with their religious identity and mission.

The challenge to leaders and teachers in Catholic schools is to consider innovative approaches to curriculum delivery whereby teachers can be helped to explore the religious dimension of each area in relation to its own operation and to the curriculum as a whole.

**The Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12.**
1. The learning environment is supportive and productive
2. The learning environment promotes independence, interdependence and self-motivation
3. Students’ needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program
4. Students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application
5. Assessment practices are an integral part of teaching and learning
6. Learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom.