



# FAITH FORMATION & RELIGIOUS EDUCATION WORK PLAN 2015 – 2017

## Introduction

This Work Plan outlines the strategies and processes by which the National Catholic Education Commission will achieve its strategic goal of national collaboration in the area of Faith Formation and Religious Education in 2015-2017 (cf, NCEC Strategic Plan 2015-2017, Goal 1.2). It has been developed collaboratively by and directs the work of the Faith Formation and Religious Education Standing Committee and the Senior Education Officer – Faith Formation and Religious Education (hereafter, SEO), who leads its implementation. The Standing Committee recommends this Work Plan to the National Catholic Education Commission and to the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education (BCCE) both of which endorse it. The Work Plan will be updated annually.

This Work Plan sets out areas for appropriate national collaboration respectful of the canonical responsibilities of diocesan bishops and in line with the principles of subsidiarity, solidarity and the common good. The success of collaborative ventures will require that bishops, diocesan directors of education, leaders of educational ministries in religious institutes and ministerial public juridic persons (PJPs), and leaders of religious education /mission /evangelisation see the value of collaboration and commit time and resources to it.

It should be noted that there are two additional projects not included in this Work Plan that touch upon issues of the Catholicity of schools. These are: the renewal of the NCEC statement of purpose and identity of Catholic schools, and the development of a profile for the graduate of the Catholic school. It is proposed that these be managed as whole of NCEC activities, rather than as specifically faith formation and religious education activities

The Work Plan has seven strategies. They will be guided by the following vision of the whole person as an essential foundation for Catholic education.

## A VISION FOR THE WORK PLAN: A CATHOLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

*I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.*

*Jn 10.10*

'The person of each individual human being is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school.'<sup>1</sup> The Vatican's documents on Catholic schooling repeatedly emphasise the need for an educational philosophy built on a solid foundation of sound Christian anthropology. Similarly the NCEC's Work Plan for faith formation and religious education is grounded in a Catholic understanding of the human person.

The desire for God is written in the human heart because the human person is created by God and for God<sup>2</sup>. The starting point for a Catholic theological anthropology is that every human being is a person made in the image and likeness of God<sup>3</sup>; hence human nature is essentially good. This is assured indisputably by the Incarnation, wherein the mystery of the Word made flesh the true meaning of the human person becomes clear.<sup>4</sup> 'The divine became human so that the human could become divine'.<sup>5</sup> The divine image is never lost, even by sin and the misuse of human freedom. Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ humanity is restored and the grace of salvation is offered to all men and women. As a result a Catholic anthropology is shaped by hope in the mercy of God. No human person is ever self-sufficient, but above all in relation to God, we are always in need of God's grace. The human person transformed by grace is animated by the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

In the Catholic understanding the human person is a moral agent, an 'acting subject'<sup>6</sup> initiating and responsible for one's own actions and capable of repentance for sin and ongoing conversion in response to God's mercy. A Catholic theological anthropology rejects any notion of the person as a mere victim of fate. At the same time, as a mirror of the Trinity, the human person is essentially relational, finds God in and through others, and has an obligation to work for justice for all in the human community and to 'care for our common home'<sup>7</sup>. In this it opposes excessive individualism. The Catholic understanding sees life as a gift from God that should be affirmed and defended for its essential dignity, and lived joyfully and hopefully in the promise of life with God for all eternity.

Catholic anthropology guides this work plan. It affirms that the Catholic school is committed to the education of the whole person since in Jesus Christ all human values find their fulfilment and unity: 'herein lies the specifically Catholic character of the school'<sup>8</sup>. Christ is 'the centre and fulcrum of the entire enterprise' and 'the standard and measure of a school's Catholicity'<sup>9</sup>.

This work plan recognises parents as the first educators and that Catholic schooling is a partnership with the home and the parish. It affirms the Christian vocation of educational leaders and teachers and their need for formation of the heart for it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose.<sup>10</sup> It recognises that school staff 'who truly live their faith will be agents of a new evangelization in creating a positive climate for the Christian faith to grow and in spiritually nourishing the students entrusted to their care'.<sup>11</sup>

The formation of the whole person recognises the innate dignity of the child and young person who is educated in the Catholic school. They 'are the ones most receptive to the gift of God' and in 'their openness and trust, they offer us a glimpse of what it is to be open to God'<sup>12</sup>. Catholic anthropology demands that the work plan supports all in the Catholic educating community in affirming the students' inherent goodness in the image of God, developing their gifts to the fullest, and forming them as missionary disciples<sup>13</sup> of Jesus. It calls on curriculum and pedagogies in which the learners are active participants who are engaging their whole person ('head, heart and hands') in a systematic and critical synthesis of culture and faith and of faith and life.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education (1997). *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, n. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Gen 1:27*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf, Second Vatican Council (1965), *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22.

<sup>5</sup> A dictum commonly repeated by the 'Church Fathers', originating with Irenaeus, *Against the Heretics*, IV, 28.1.

<sup>6</sup> Pope St John Paul II (1993), *Veritatis Splendor*, nn. 74-75.

<sup>7</sup> Cf, Pope Francis (2015), *Laudato Si'*

<sup>8</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977), *The Catholic School*, n. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, Archbishop M. J. (2006). *The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools*. St Pauls Publications, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Second Vatican Council (1965), *Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Pope St John Paul II (2001), *Ecclesia in Oceania*, n.33.

<sup>12</sup> Catholic Education South Australia (2015), *Children: Close to the Mystery of God*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Cf, Pope Francis (2013), *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.120.

<sup>14</sup> Cf, *The Catholic School*, n. 37.

For further reflection on the Catholic understanding of what it means to be a human person, refer to Gleeson G., for Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Committee for Doctrine and Morals (2003), *Being Human*. <https://www.catholic.org.au/shop/acbc-shop#!/Being-Human-a-reflection-paper/>

**Strategy 1: Faith Formation**

*Promote shared understandings of policies, strategies and resources for formation for mission of leaders and staff.*

[W]e must remember that teachers and educators fulfil a specific Christian vocation and share an equally specific participation in the mission of the Church, to the extent that "it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose".

*(Catholic Schools on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 19 and Gravissimum Educationis, 25)*

Catholic educators need a "formation of the heart": they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others, so that their educational commitment becomes a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. *Gal 5:6*)

*(Educating Together in Catholic Schools, 25, cf Deus Caritas Est, 31)*

The understanding of faith formation operative in this Work Plan is as follows:

Faith formation of Catholic school community members is Christ-centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the world.

Across Australia there are many committed well-formed Catholic leaders and teachers playing an essential role in the mission of Catholic schools. There has been increasing strategic activity in forming leaders and staff for the mission of Catholic education. The spiritual journeys of school and CEO staff are individual and diverse. Participation in church life outside the Catholic school is declining and this includes those working in Catholic schools at all levels. Some staff members have acquired theological and religious education qualifications, most meet accreditation requirements but the need for greater strategic focus on formation is increasingly apparent.

Bishops, CEOs, religious institutes and leaders at school level have identified ongoing development of systematic, developmental and well-resourced programs for the evangelisation and spiritual development of school and CEO community members as an urgent priority.

While some dioceses and religious institutes invest considerable resources in faith formation of staff, others lack the expertise and/or the resources to plan and implement comprehensive, systematic programs. Effective faith formation requires an organised and intentional approach, given the uneven levels of knowledge, experience and personal appropriation of the Church's spiritual traditions and religious practices.

This strategy, **the highest priority in the Work Plan**, will be addressed initially in two ways:

- The SEO will interact with faith formation stakeholders and carry out an 'audit' of formation programs for school leaders and school and CEO staff across Australia. The SEO and the Standing Committee will evaluate the data in order to refine the purposes and characteristics of quality staff formation and identify strategies that are highly valued and effective. This will be completed in 2015 and further faith formation strategies will be identified in the updated Work Plan for 2016.
- The NCEC will interact with Catholic Education Offices, religious institutes/ministerial PJPs and individuals, including the Formation for Australian Catholic Educators national network (FACE), to bring about greater collaboration, awareness and sharing of resources and expertise. This collaboration may lead to a position statement on principles, standards and a framework for faith formation.

This strategy relates to the faith formation of leaders and staff. The faith formation of students remains an important focus for the Standing Committee and will be one of the priorities in future work plans.

### **Strategy 2: Religious Education Framework**

#### *Develop a Religious Education Curriculum Framework for Australian Catholic Schools*

The NCEC RE Committee in recent years has canvassed support for greater national collaboration in classroom Religious Education (RE). Consultation indicates support for a national RE curriculum framework which would allow for the development of more specific and detailed RE curricula and resources at diocesan levels. The former NCEC RE Committee have already done substantial groundwork in this area including the publication of a significant monograph, *Religious Education in dialogue: curriculum in Australia* (2008), and 'A Position Paper on an Australian Framework for Religious Education' (2011). The Standing Committee acknowledges the quality and relevance of internal documentation on sample strands and standards developed by the former Standing Committee. In 2012 the Diocesan Directors generally were positive about this progress towards a RE framework and some commissions (eg, the QCEC) placed support for its development in their strategic priorities.

Reasons for pursuing this strategy include:

- support to dioceses – especially smaller, less resourced ones – in the development of their own more specific RE curricula;
- alignment of the framework with the Australian Curriculum format to increase the credibility of RE and ease of transference for teachers and students; and
- provision of an organiser for development of digital resources (see Strategy 3).

As there has been no significant conversation about strategy since 2012, there is a need to clarify the degree of commitment to it among bishops and stakeholders, as well as the agreed scale of the task (eg, a very broad or more elaborated framework). Standing Committee members and the SEO will gauge the level of support and preferred approaches at local commission level in order to give appropriate advice to the NCEC and BCCE.

If this strategy is to be advanced, the SEO would research existing diocesan RE syllabuses and guidelines and Australian Curriculum documentation. Depending on the agreed scale of the task a project officer may be appointed to work under the supervision of the SEO. A reference group would provide advice on the process, structure and content of the framework. The project officer may work with writing teams in a process similar to the development of the Australian Curriculum. Supported by the project officer, the SEO would coordinate the development of a draft document, manage a process of consultation and feedback and develop a final draft for Standing Committee, NCEC, BCCE and ACBC endorsement.

The purpose and scale of this strategy will be clarified in 2015 and the development of the framework would take place in 2016 and 2017.

### **Strategy 3: Digital Resourcing**

#### *Provide efficient and affordable access to a suite of quality digital resources to support RE and faith formation of students in Catholic schools.*

It is essential that there is a suite of quality digital resources to resource RE and faith formation. While some of the larger CEOs are producing digital resources, there is no nationally comprehensive or coordinated approach. They are expensive to produce and require high levels of expertise in pedagogical content knowledge and technical/ICT areas.

Students in all Australian schools can access Scootle, a growing repository of digital resources funded by the Australian Government and aligned with the subjects and format of the Australian Curriculum. Education Services Australia (ESA), managers of Scootle, have also approached NCEC expressing interest in working collaboratively. Catholic Network Australia (CNA) has a Contemporary Learning Working Group (CLWG) to assist with the development of general curriculum digital resourcing and some initial work has been done in resources for Church celebrations and liturgy.

The first part of the task is to map and curate existing resources against a curriculum organiser. There are two possibilities. One is the 'pinch points' for teachers, topics that they identify as difficult to teach, many of which have been documented in some dioceses. Dependent on decisions and progress relating to Strategy 2, the other organiser could be an emerging national RE Framework. Any mapping will require the cooperation of CEOs and other bodies that have produced resources and the management of any intellectual property and copyright issues. This task would be best achieved through the secondment of a project officer working in collaboration with Scootle for six months in 2016.

Once the existing resources are mapped against an organiser, the Standing Committee will review the project and scope the commissioning of any new digital content. One model is the production of the *Together at One Altar* resource, coordinated by NCEC using the skills and expertise of participating CEOs and Fraynetwork. (In 2014 this resource had over 10 million hits from 278 000 users.)

**Strategy 4: A Catholic perspective on the general curriculum**

*Develop and promote resources for the integration of the Catholic perspective across the curriculum.*

A Catholic school ideally integrates a Catholic perspective across the general curriculum. This requires leaders and teachers with theological insight and capacity to integrate appropriately within learning areas. This is challenging for many and requires appropriate professional development and resources. There have been a number of projects over the years to foster this integration and the Australian Curriculum has become an opportunity to revisit this venture. Several dioceses and commissions are doing online developmental work.

This strategy has a high priority. The Standing Committee and the SEO will map existing resources that could be made available online and will collaboratively develop a statement of principles for integration of a Catholic perspective. These principles for integration would be complemented by professional learning materials since enhanced teacher understanding and confidence is essential to the implementation of the resources. This would be completed by mid-2016. After this the Standing Committee will make recommendations about any further NCEC role, such as hosting a symposium or development of new resources.

**Strategy 5: Gatherings of Senior RE and faith formation staff**

*Convene biennial meetings of diocesan directors, leaders of school ministries in religious congregations/PJPs and Heads of RE/Mission/Faith Formation, as appropriate.*

Regular gatherings of these key stakeholders in Catholic education will promote a culture of national collaboration in the areas of Catholic identity, faith formation and RE, provide a forum for discussion of strategies in this Work Plan and provide advice to the bishops. It may be appropriate to link these gatherings with one of the regular meetings of diocesan directors and/or the Standing Committee.

The SEO will work with the Standing Committee and relevant planning committees to organise the agenda and format of these gatherings, generally once every second year.

**Strategy 6: Relationships and partnerships**

*Develop and promote key relationships, partnerships and communication mechanisms with relevant groups.*

Liaison with groups connected with the mission of Catholic schooling is essential. These include other agencies of the ACBC (e.g. commissions concerned with liturgy, pastoral life, disability and youth ministry, aid and social justice agencies). There are also parent leadership network, especially Catholic School Parents Australia. The SEO will interact with these groups appropriately.

The BCCE has requested that NCEC continue to 'retain a significant interest in, and contact with... those responsible for the ministry to Catholic students attending State and independent schools' and facilitate a biennial gathering of those involved in the leadership of this ministry. This ministry covers a wide range of educational activities including formation for catechists who teach in state schools and those who offer parish based after school catechesis. The SEO and other relevant NCEC representatives will meet and attend National Confraternity of Christian Doctrine conferences and consider any joint projects.

The BCCE has also requested that NCEC assist Catholic institutions of higher education that teach theology to collaborate and meet on a regular basis. A gathering of theologates was held in 2014 in Sydney, hosted by the University of Notre Dame Australia. The SEO will continue ongoing communication with the theologates. Many strategies of this Work Plan will be enhanced through purposeful interaction and collaboration with institutions of higher learning.

Strategy 6 is ongoing.

**Strategy 7 Communication**

*Implement a range of online communication, consultation and reporting of activities associated with the Work Plan*

Communication to the wider Australian Catholic educational community about the work of the Standing Committee and strategies of this Work Plan must be more substantial, meaningful and regular than in past practice. The NCEC Secretariat is now better equipped to support this through collaboration of the SEO and the Communications Manager. They will explore a range of forms for online communication, consultation and reporting of activities associated with the Work Plan. This strategy is ongoing.

