

## Aoraki No 15 June 2011

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## Editorial

*Aoraki* is designed to share and celebrate examples of leading Catholic schools in New Zealand, and to stimulate leadership. We now have access to much interesting and useful material on educational best practice, but material to stimulate the constant development and renewal of our Catholic Character, the reason for our existence, can sometimes be a little swamped in material that is not specific to Catholic schools.

We are delighted to share Paul Ferris's reflective piece on embedding Catholic Character during a period of change for Catholic schools by building specific knowledge, commitment and practices. We need to be sure we are fed by our roots in order to develop appropriate flowers and fruit into the future, or, in Paul's metaphor, to ensure that the richness of the autumn colour will mark us as different.

Most of this issue is taken up with information from three recent doctoral theses on different aspects of Catholic education. It is heartening that we have this Australasian research available to us, and what is printed here is designed to whet your appetite to read more of the writers' ideas and to make use of their conclusions. Catholic education in New Zealand needs leaders who are highly qualified in all that makes a school Catholic. Kevin Wanden's thesis will, perhaps, spur others to emulate him.

Simon Breakspear toured New Zealand for NZEALS presentations in April 2011. In an interview in NZEALS newsletter (edition 1, 2011) he spoke of inviting our talented future leaders into leadership. He spoke of the need to identify up-and-coming leadership (5 minutes thinking about anyone under 35 on the school staff, he says!) and then to ignite their leadership journey. He encourages us to tap them on the shoulder: "There is nothing quite as powerful as one leader recognising the leadership potential in another. We need talented emerging leaders across the country to be instilled with a vision." Our younger teachers, he says "are looking for a way to belong and identify with a 'tribe' of passionate and innovative educators that can help push them and develop them into more effective and bold practitioners." A culture of innovation in the school is vital for the retention and development of our talented emerging leaders. If this is true of general education, it is certainly true of Catholic schools.

If we are to be confident that our schools will have the excellent leadership they need now and in the years ahead, deepening teacher qualifications and commitment to Catholic education, research on best practice, and nurturing our emerging leaders are three vital elements. Every school leadership team has a role to play in preparing for our future.

Susan Apáthy

New Zealand Catholic Education Office  
PO Box 12307, Thorndon, Wellington 6144  
Ph (04) 496 1739, Fax (04) 496 1734

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### **Recent Doctoral Theses**

Three doctoral theses presented to the Australian Catholic University have recently been published in hard copy by the *Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Broken Bay, Australia*, under the series title *Australian Doctoral Research on Catholic Education*.

This initiative by the Director of the Office, Dr Tony Whelan, is very worthwhile. Dr Whelan, in his foreword to the series, identifies the value of publishing these studies as follows:

Firstly, wider reading of such studies by Catholic educators will help enhance their skills in reading and interpreting systematic research, as well as enhance their capacity to think through possible implications that could improve the relevance of Religious Education to young people.

Secondly, research is often provocative in terms of challenging educators to identify important issues and to consider options that might be taken to improve the quality and effectiveness of Religious Education.

Thirdly, publications that give readers access to all the original data, as well as to the particular interpretations of the authors, help with the discussion of controversial issues because some data may be interpreted differently by readers.

Fourthly a greater prominence given to contemporary research in Religious Education may inspire and prompt other educators to conduct systematic research themselves, and to contribute to the ongoing written debates about Religious Education.

By presenting in *Aoraki* the abstracts of these theses, with some comments on the conclusions the authors have drawn, we hope to highlight ideas worth further consideration by leadership within schools, and to stimulate some people to read the full theses. We believe that the situation in Australia is sufficiently similar to New Zealand to make the two Australian theses valuable. In the case of Dr Kevin Wanden's thesis the research has, of course, drawn on our own schools. Kevin's conclusions are of significant interest, and by reproducing them here we hope that they will become the basis of further discussion and debate. Dr Whelan's foreword mentions contributing to an ongoing critical dialogue, particularly on important questions where there are divergent views. We hope that this dialogue will be a rich one in our country.

We are grateful to Dr Whelan for giving permission to reproduce material from the theses, and to Dr Kevin Wanden.

Hard copies of these theses are held at the National Centre for Religious Studies (NCRS) and all New Zealand diocesan Catholic education offices. The Australian Catholic University has web-based downloadable copies.

As this edition was being completed a fourth thesis was received. It will be presented in the next edition of *Aoraki*.

***The secondary school live-in retreat: a study of the views of a sample of teachers from one metropolitan Catholic diocese about the purposes and practices of retreats.***

Rachele Tullio

The Abstract (following) indicates the richness and breadth of this study. Chapter 7, the Conclusions and Recommendations, provides much to think about. The recommendations highlight the need, in Australia, for policy development at the diocesan level, professional development programmes for retreat leaders, the building up of practical literature informing the conduct of retreats (in the diocesan Catholic education office), and the building up of an understanding of the nature and purposes of retreats by the whole school staff. New Zealand research might confirm these needs here, or might reveal that our needs are different. Appendix J of the document provides summaries of key content areas for professional development on the nature of retreats and their conduct. Appendix K provides an example of a retreat programme by Crawford and Rossiter. Appendix K sums up things that people may know, but its brevity and conciseness could make it very useful to reproduce in school documentation.

## ABSTRACT

Senior school live-in retreats, which could be described as intensive personal/spiritual development seminars, are a distinctive feature of the religious programs of Australian Catholic secondary schools. While research on the views of young people has confirmed the popularity of retreats with students (Flynn, 1993; Maroney, 2008), there has been no systematic study of how teachers understood the nature, purposes and conduct of retreats, and of what they regarded as 'successful' retreat work.

This thesis reports a two part research program on live-in retreats. The first, documentary/historical phase of the study examined the spirituality background to retreats within Catholicism which informed the conduct of school retreats. While not attempting an exhaustive or comprehensive analysis of spirituality, this section identified the roots of 'retreat spirituality' in developments within early Christianity such as 'desert spirituality', in the spirituality of mediaeval monasticism, and in the 'religious exercises' of the active religious orders that emerged since the founding of the Jesuits in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Elements such as 'going away' to an isolated place, solitude, silence, reflection and prayer, review of one's life, physical and mental renewal, and spiritual guidance became prominent in the development of retreats for religious personnel and clergy; and this served as the model that informed 'silent' retreats in Catholic schools up to and including the 1960s.

The documentary/historical study also explored the origins of live-in, communitarian retreats for senior Catholic school students in Australia which emerged as a grass-roots educational innovation by teachers in Adelaide in 1964. Eventually, the silent retreats in schools were replaced completely by the communitarian retreats where conversation/discussion, singing and fun activities provided a community-building matrix within which the religious parts of the retreats (Mass, Reconciliation, reflection and prayer) were embedded; this represented something of a revolutionary change in the format of school retreats, while retaining many of their traditional purposes.

The literature review examined the limited range of Australian and overseas writings about retreats. To fill in the sketchy picture of the historical development of communitarian retreats, a number of informants were identified and approached for information in the form of oral history. In addition, other areas relevant to the conduct of retreats were examined; prominent areas included the following:-

- The influence of the Second Vatican Council and of humanistic psychology on the spirituality of those who conducted the first communitarian retreats;
- Theory about the psychological dynamics of personal change through group methods;
- Understandings of youth spirituality that informed the work of retreat leaders.

*The secondary school live-in retreat: a study of the views of a sample of teachers from one metropolitan Catholic diocese about the purposes and practices of retreats.*

The second qualitative, empirical part of the research program collected data from a sample of teachers from four schools in one metropolitan Catholic diocese who were involved in the conduct of retreats. Semi-structured interviews were used to document teachers' understandings of the nature, purposes and conduct of retreats. The intention behind the choice of a limited sample was to make a small beginning on research on the views of teachers who were retreat leaders, and to identify issues that could be followed up more systematically through larger scale research across the country.

The data collection showed that the following (as well as other items) were regarded by participants as key elements in the successful conduct of retreats:-

- Time away from school and regular routine.
- Being with friends and friendship development.
- Community building and tangible sense of community.
- Group discussions that were more personal than was the case in classroom religious education.

In addition, the data identified key problems with the conduct of retreats which could affect their place in Catholic schools in the future. Among other issues these included:-

- Excessive reliance on the dynamic of self-disclosure and 'telling personal stories'.
- The place for religious experience within the retreat.
- The staffing of retreats and the professional development of teachers as retreat leaders.
- Potential conflict between staff on retreat and those who remained at school to cover classes.
- Potential problems related to duty of care and child protection policies for educators.

In discussing the meaning and significance of these findings, the thesis proposed ways of addressing the issues that could foster the future development of retreats and to secure their valuable place in Catholic school education. This included identifying and acknowledging the significant educational innovation represented by retreats, and their distinctive potential as a special experience within the school's overall religious education program for promoting the personal and spiritual development of young people. And it considered that professional development for present and future retreat leaders needed to address a range of relevant topics including the place for personalism and self-disclosure which could be both a valuable aspect of the psychological dynamics of retreats as well as a problem area if not handled sensitively and ethically. The specifically religious dimension of retreats remained a difficult question to interpret. The central concern of retreats is promoting the development of young people's spirituality.

The thesis concluded with a number of recommendations for Catholic education authorities for promoting the future development of school live-in retreats.

***Parents, Teachers and Religious Education: a study in a Catholic secondary school in rural Victoria.***

Anthony G. Finn

In the earlier part of this thesis Dr Finn provides a succinct summary of the different approaches to Religious Education in Australia, from the dogmatic or catechism approach of the 1950s and earlier, through Salvation History, Life Centred / Experiential, to Shared Christian Praxis. This section of ten or more pages would be useful summary material for all teachers, for discussion on the changes that have occurred in Religious Education, and could lead to further understanding of how parents and grandparents might see Religious Education, and what information they might need on the current approach to the subject.

Dr Finn discovered that the parent population is generally lacking in knowledge about Religious Education, and is uninformed about the contemporary approach to the subject, and the current curriculum. These findings may apply in New Zealand as well, especially in upper primary school and secondary school. He found that parents were supportive of Religious Education but did not want strong demands placed on them in relation to Religious Education. He concluded that the language used to discuss Religious Education with parents needs to be relevant to their life experiences, rather than highly influenced by ecclesial or theological constructs.

In the Conclusions chapter, points of interest include:

In Dr Finn's sample of interviewees, there is a major difference between the views of parents and teachers about the purposes and goals of Religious Education in the senior years of secondary school.

Parents prefer to leave Religious Education to the school, because they feel they lack expertise in the language and concepts of Religious Education and religion generally (comparable to their lack of expertise in other subject areas), but they strongly support the Religious Education and the RE curriculum.

A number of recommendations focus on the need for parents to receive more information about Religious Education.

A strong recommendation was made for training in teaching Religious Education, particularly for teachers new to Catholic schools.

There has been little comparable research in New Zealand, particularly in recent years. Meantime, parents, teachers and students have all been changing, so it may be time for a similar study in New Zealand. It would be valuable to study this rich document, and consider what learning it can provide for our schools.

***Parents, Teachers and Religious Education: a study in a Catholic secondary school in rural Victoria.***

## ABSTRACT

The research reported in this thesis investigated perceptions about the nature and purpose of religious education of parents and teachers in a study of one Catholic secondary school in regional Victoria, Australia. In the research project data were collected using questionnaires and interviews from parents and teachers of religious education associated with the particular secondary school.

These data were analysed and interpreted against a spectrum of purposes for religious education that were drawn from the literature. The literature reviewed included documents relevant to religious education from the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and also from theorists in the field of religious education both from Australia and beyond.

The theories about religious education generated by the literature review provided a framework within which to compare and contrast how the parents and the teachers understood religious education. While all of the religious education teachers took part in the research, the parents self-selected. This meant that those who responded were mostly Catholic from a school where there were 23% of families with no Catholic parent. A decision was made to focus this study on the new Catholic religious education guidelines, since this was seen to be essential because of the mandate by the bishop and Catholic Education Office of the Diocese of Ballarat. All parents were invited to respond, but mostly Catholic parent did.

It was discovered that the parents and the teachers were in agreement in relation to most areas of religious education, especially in areas associated with values, morality, individual spirituality and what might be termed 'religious literacy'. Parents and teachers were shown to have different attitudes towards religious education in the senior school. The data also highlighted the importance of the role of the teachers and school in providing religious education for families who have become distanced from traditional religious institutions. Many of the parents endorsed the school as the primary place for their children to receive information about religion, and chose to distance themselves from the religious education process in favour of allowing the 'experts' at the school to take on this role on behalf of the family. The thesis raised issues for the ways in which the school communicated with parents, both in terminology and technology. Overall, the findings affirmed the work of the teachers in religious education by parents who were 'time poor' and who wished to see the school take on the primary role of educating the children about religion, with expectations that the children would be fully exposed to the Catholic religious tradition in its teachings, ethics, liturgy and social justice practices.

## ***Teachers' Perception of the Purpose of Classroom Religious Education in New Zealand Catholic Secondary Schools***

Kevin Wanden

As Br Pat Lynch says in his preface to the thesis, "The publication of this research into teachers' perceptions of the purpose of Religious Education in New Zealand Catholic schools is timely and welcome. It represents a significant development in this vital aspect of the education provided by Catholic schools and is to be warmly welcomed by the Catholic community of the nation."

The research has a different focus and depth from Dr Finn's research on Religious Education, though there are some interesting comparisons possible.

While the focus is on secondary schools much of what is said is of interest to primary schools also. The concluding chapter, with its recommendations, is of such importance to Catholic schooling in New Zealand that it has been reproduced in full. Out of eleven recommendations, five are considered as key recommendations. They cover qualifications, professional development, research into effective pedagogies for Religious Education, negative perceptions of Religious Education and time allocation for Religious Education. All of these recommendations will be of interest to both primary and secondary school leadership, and of course to diocesan staff. The recommendations on qualifications, professional development and research will also be of interest to CIANZ, the Catholic Institute of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The value of this research is significant. The Catholic education community owes a debt of gratitude to Br Kevin. The work never happens in a vacuum however, and there is gratitude owed to all those whom Kevin thanked in his Statement of Appreciation: colleagues at the Catholic Institute of Theology, National Centre for Religious Studies, New Zealand Catholic Education Office, diocesan Religious Education Advisors, Directors of Religious Studies and Religious Education teachers. Our education community is enriched by this research, and it is to be hoped that others will be encouraged to undertake their own research, as a result of reading this thesis.

## ***Teachers' Perception of the Purpose of Classroom Religious Education in New Zealand Catholic Secondary Schools***

### **Abstract**

The nature of Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools has generated significant interest since the Second Vatican Council. A number of theoretical approaches to classroom Religious Education have been used in Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand since the mid 1960s (Crawford & Rossiter, 1985; Groome, 1980; van Caster, 1965). The debate regarding the most suitable approach for classroom Religious Education at this level has largely settled on a Subject-Oriented approach (Larkin, 2006).

In New Zealand there has been a considerable investment of resources in the development of curricula and textbooks (Finlay, 2000). However there has been little research about teacher beliefs concerning the purpose of the subject. This thesis reports research into teachers' beliefs about the purpose of classroom Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand. The literature was reviewed to identify the range of purposes in the normative Church documents and in the writings of theorists. In addition it examined a number of issues that could have some bearing on teachers' understanding of purposes. A survey that collected both quantitative and qualitative data was distributed to 37 of the 49 Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand that agreed to participate and resulted in 173 responses.

This study found that teachers worked out of a Subject-Oriented approach to the teaching of Religious Education that was consistent with the *Understanding Faith* curriculum. Teachers perceived Religious Education as a complex subject with multiple purposes. The primary purpose was to teach knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition. The subject also had subsidiary aspirational purposes of faith formation and personal development. The importance of appropriate qualifications and formation of teachers was identified as a challenge facing Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand. There was a high degree of consensus among respondents related to the purpose of classroom Religious Education.

This research contributes to the discourse concerning the purpose of Religious Education. It has implications for theoretical aspects of Religious Education, classroom practice and planning, school based curriculum planning, teacher professional development and curriculum policy.

***Teachers' Perception of the Purpose of Classroom Religious Education in New Zealand Catholic Secondary Schools***

**CHAPTER SEVEN**

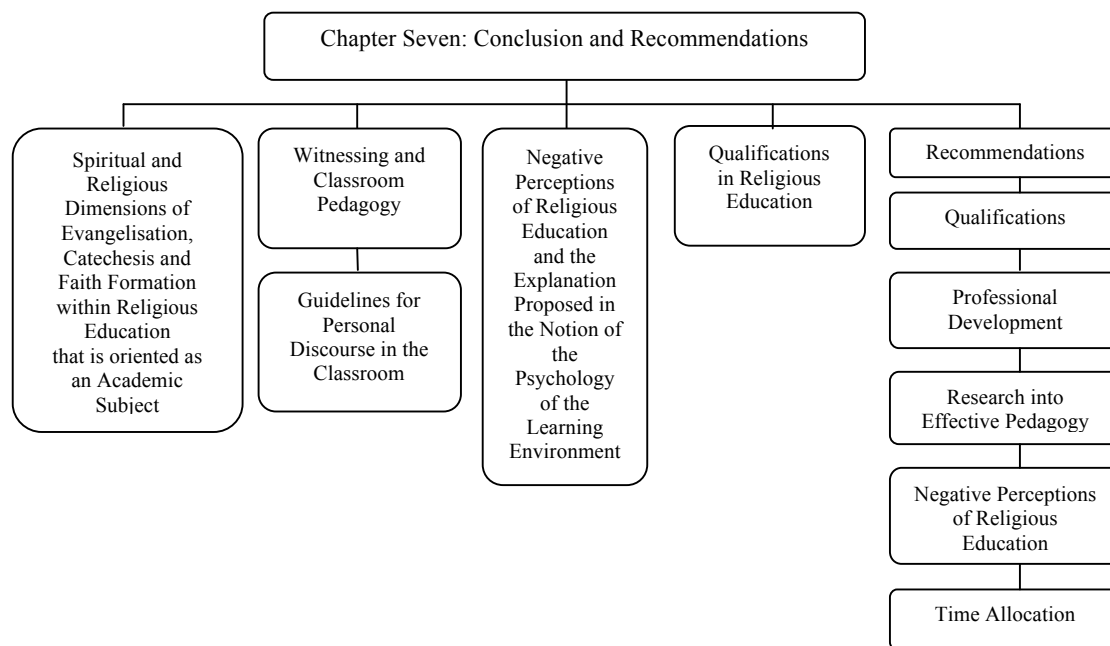
**Conclusion and Recommendations**

**7.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines a number of conclusions that emerged from this study into teachers' beliefs about the purposes of classroom Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand. The final section of this chapter includes a number of recommendations that might inform policy development with regard to pedagogy, qualifications, professional development programs and future research.

*Figure 7.1*

*Overview of chapter seven*



The interpretive scheme used to interpret teachers' purposes of classroom Religious Education (Figure 6.2) indicated that teachers conceptualised it primarily as an academic subject within the contemporary secondary school curriculum. The principal purpose of the subject was to increase students' knowledge of the Catholic faith. The subject also had subsidiary aspirational dimensions of faith formation and personal development. The interpretive scheme identified a cluster of factors related to teacher professionalism, appropriate degree level qualifications in the subject, professional development and the need to relate the curriculum to student experience can be understood as foundational to the subject.

The key conclusions of this study were:

1. The interpretive scheme of the purposes of classroom Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand consisted of three dimensions: knowledge, faith formation and personal development.

2. The interpretive scheme was consistent with the aims of the *Understanding Faith* curriculum statement.
3. There was a high level of consensus among Religious Education teachers about the purposes of the subject.
4. Classroom Religious Education assisted faith formation and personal development through cognitive development and increased knowledge and understanding.
5. The processes of evangelisation and catechesis were the responsibility of the school, parish and home.
6. Degree level qualifications in the subject, continuing professional development and relating the curriculum to students' experience were important.
7. Classroom Religious Education adopted a Subject-Orientated approach that was consistent with the *Understanding Faith* curriculum and was perceived as an academic subject in the context of the contemporary secondary school.
8. Teachers believed it was important to explain the teachings of the Catholic Church to students.
9. Liturgy and prayer were integral aspects of classroom Religious Education.
10. The allocation of teaching time needed to reflect the religious and educational purposes of Religious Education.
11. The status of Religious Education as a subject was a concern identified by teachers.

This study identified a need to assist teachers to clarify a number of ambiguities concerning classroom Religious Education. Four areas emerged that required further elaboration: 1) the place for spiritual and religious dimensions such as evangelisation, catechesis and faith formation within Religious Education that is oriented as an academic subject, 2) personal discourse and classroom pedagogy, 3) the negative perception of the subject among some students, parents and staff and 4) teacher qualifications in Religious Education.

## **7.2 The Place for Spiritual and Religious Dimensions such as Evangelisation, Catechesis and Faith Formation within Classroom Religious Education that is Oriented as an Academic Subject**

A key issue for Catholic schooling is ambiguity about the place for spiritual and religious dimensions such as evangelisation, catechesis and faith formation in Religious Education. The Church's missionary mandate is evangelisation, 'even to the ends of the earth'. One of the ways that the Church evangelises is through Catholic education. As Pope Benedict XVI has stated, "education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News" (2008).

The processes of evangelisation and catechesis are functions of the whole Church and are broader than the religion classroom. However, within each of these processes Religious Education has a role. The Church documents distinguish between catechesis and Religious Education, while both are dimensions of evangelisation; they are distinct, yet complementary. Religious Education primarily contributes to the process of evangelisation and catechesis by seeking to integrate faith, culture and life, through increased knowledge and understanding. It contributes to evangelisation by proclaiming Gospel values, through which an individual may come to faith and to catechesis by deepening knowledge and understanding of the believer's faith.

The Church documents present faith formation as the responsibility of the whole faith community, student, family, school and parish. Each group has particular responsibilities with regard to faith formation. It may be unrealistic to expect Religious Education to compensate for failings in other areas. The positive support of parents, teachers, management, Principals and Trustees towards the religious aims of the school may assist in providing an atmosphere where faith formation can occur.

The normative process of the classroom in a secondary school is the ongoing intellectual development of students, primarily centred on teaching and learning. Students' intellectual development occurs through the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills such as critical thinking, analysis and reflection. Because of its emphasis on the intellect, the classroom's primary contribution to faith formation and personal development is through the cognitive domain. And within this domain, as the primary educational matrix, lies the potential for healthy links to other domains such as the emotional, the attitudinal and the volitional. These more personal domains are safely 'contextualised' within the cognitive. In other words, the contribution of Religious Education towards faith formation and personal development is through increased knowledge and understanding. While it is possible to identify separate aspects of the subject, such as knowledge, faith formation and personal development to distinguish purposes, Religious Education is inherently holistic. Making a distinction between the 'cognitive domain' and 'faith formation' is an artificial dichotomy, as it seems to suggest they are alternative processes, whereas Catholic theology has traditionally taught that faith and reason are inseparable. The processes of faith formation and personal development are not something that can be structurally identified as different from the knowledge and understanding aspects of the classroom process as if the teacher could move on cue from knowledge to faith engagement modes of interaction with students. While education is about *changing* the student, this is achieved mainly through a process of intellectual development.

The research literature indicated that there were particular experiences that students indicated had made a special contribution to their faith formation, for example, retreats. In particular, this refers to the emotion and healthy personalism they experienced on retreats. When interpreting this popularity of retreats, some educators have created a problematic usage for both faith formation and faith development by identifying retreats as being more intensively 'faith forming' and 'faith developing' than the classroom. This trend to create a pejorative view of Religious Education as if it were less 'faith intensive' because it was considered to be 'just concerned with knowledge' Crawford and Rossiter (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006, pp. 414-419), identified this problem, proposing that more precision is needed to explain the complex relationship between educational experiences and faith formation. While the retreat has a special facility for promoting personal sharing and a tangible sense of community (Tullio, 2006, 2009), and while this can make a distinctive contribution towards personal and spiritual development, these conditions cannot be replicated in the classroom. But there is no need to make the classroom like a retreat for it to be successful in its Religious Education endeavours. While more personal environments can make more personal/emotional contributions towards personal development, the classroom has its own distinctive *channel* towards personal development which is cognitive, inquiring and student-research oriented.

The classroom is constrained by a number of organisational and structural variables such as, the school timetable, class size and the physical facilities, in addition to its overall academic orientation. The personal variables of students and teachers add further complexity to the process as regards its potential for promoting personal/spiritual development. Given the constraints of the classroom and also its distinctively educational potentialities for personal learning, it would be better to concentrate on quality teaching in the classroom and not to try to make it into a more personal context like the retreat or voluntary group. This view goes hand in hand with the need to provide additional, complementary religious/spiritual opportunities for students in different structures where there are voluntary, personal and informal qualities to the context, for example, Bible study groups, prayer groups, retreats, liturgy groups, or social justice groups. Teaching Religious Education as an academic subject does not mean that it would not attend to the affective or personal domains, just as is the case for other academic subjects, especially ones that have natural emotional and aesthetic dimensions such as literature, poetry, art and music. If those domains are being neglected this may indicate poor pedagogy rather than implying that as an academic subject it would not have the potential to prompt students to engage at a personal level.

Religious Education as an academic subject can assist faith formation and personal development in three ways. First, it can provide students with knowledge and assist students to gain understanding. Learning, critical analysis and reflection may encourage faith formation and personal development. One implication is that the curriculum needs to be adapted to the needs of the students. This will require, on the part of teachers, an awareness of what students need to know and understand for their faith journey. It also requires a capacity to assist students to make explicit the links between faith, culture and life.

Secondly, the classroom can create a safe environment in which students can verbalise their opinions and explore issues of importance to them. This environment would be characterised by respect for students' opinions and an expectation of voluntary participation. In the classroom context the sharing of opinions is mainly a cognitive activity that may affect a person's beliefs; but this can also have natural emotional overtones. Strategies such as questioning allow students to clarify their understanding. Students also need to acquire the skill of critiquing their own and others' opinions. Critique is important for two reasons. It provides intellectual rigour to the learning process. In addition, it avoids a relativistic position between respecting students' opinions and challenging and engaging them with the Gospel.

The third way that Religious Education as an academic subject may assist faith formation and personal development is through opportunities for reflection. This process allows students to internalise learning, to develop a different perspective on an issue and possibly to change their own opinions in their own time. However, given the constraints of the classroom, faith formation and personal development would be incremental. The integration of faith and life and culture is a long term process.

One of the sources of ambiguity about the religious purposes of Religious Education may result from language used to describe the subject. The *Understanding Faith* curriculum used the outcomes-based language of the *New Zealand Curriculum*. The use of outcome statements in planning, teaching and assessment assumes that teaching and learning can affect the desired outcomes and that these outcomes can be measured. While it is possible to have learning and achievement outcomes for the knowledge and skills dimensions of Religious Education, learning outcomes for faith formation or personal development are more problematic. Crawford and Rossiter (2006) have noted that in "promoting spiritual and moral development in students, there is not the same order of causality in relationships between intentions, processes and outcomes as there are for educating in knowledge and skills" (p. 418).

The distinction made by Crawford and Rossiter (2006, p. 418) "between educational *intentions*, *processes* and *outcomes*" provides a useful way in which to understand the purposes of Religious Education. Confusion about the purposes of the religion class may come from mixing educational and religious intentions, processes and outcomes. The primary purpose, both educational and religious of Religious Education is knowledge. The intention is the acquisition of knowledge of the faith tradition. The process consists of age appropriate pedagogical strategies that assist learning. The outcomes are assessable in terms of the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills. Religious Education in a Catholic secondary school also has additional religious and educational purposes. One religious purpose is faith formation. While it is possible to have an intention to promote and nourish faith, it is difficult to identify specific processes that are guaranteed to achieve the desired intention. Likewise, the outcome of such an intention is difficult to measure. The outcome of faith formation is a long-term aspiration or hope that teaching and learning will result in spiritual and moral growth.

The distinction between intentions, processes and outcomes may also be seen in the question of assessment in Religious Education. The purpose of assessment is to improve student learning and achievement. This occurs through formative and summative assessment of the knowledge and understanding of the curriculum content. While assessment in the religion class can assess cognitive outcomes, the task of assessing intentional outcomes such as faith, belongs to God. The desired changes in the faith or personal dimensions are authentic only if they come freely from within the individual. Hence, the faith intentions remain as aspirations or long-term hopes. Teachers could check through questioning or some other means whether they were 'heading in the right direction' but it is both problematical and unethical to define personal development and faith outcomes. From a Christian theological perspective faith is a divine gift that invites a free response. While the teacher may assist in some way the process of faith formation, the teacher must respect the student's free response. From a faith perspective, Religious Education will be received differently by students depending on their level of faith formation. For some students it will be received as catechesis. For others, it may be received as evangelisation, and for some, as an enhancement of their religious literacy.

The issue of using attendance at Mass as a criterion for successful Religious Education also poses a problem. Mass attendance is a complex issue. The research literature indicated that parental attitudes were a strong determining factor and the low priority for regular attendance at Mass mirrored the broader societal attitude to religion. The religion teacher is not in control of most of the variables that affect this issue. This study indicated that teachers saw their role to encourage rather than coerce students to attend Mass. While encouraging the possibility of being in a faith community and attending Mass regularly would be an intention and aspiration, it should not be proposed as something that could be measured as an indicator of the effectiveness of Religious Education, whose primary purpose is knowledge. The school, parish and more importantly families, also have distinct roles and responsibilities. Classroom Religious Education may be an easy target on which to focus concern that may be distracting from an analysis of other more important variables that influence Mass attendance.

### **7.3 'Witnessing' and Classroom Pedagogy**

A second key issue for Religious Education is the need for clarification of the place of *witnessing* in the classroom teaching and learning process. This study identified a series of ambiguities concerning the appropriate expectation for 'witnessing' in the religion classroom. The concept of 'witnessing' has an ancient tradition within the Church. In terms of the Catholic schools, Church documents identify 'witness' as one of the roles of the teacher. The documents envisage the teacher as a role-model of Gospel values, living an authentically Christian life. Witnessing has two distinct expressions, whereby the teacher is an explicit or implicit witness to faith. An example of explicit witnessing could be verbalised faith sharing, while implicit witnessing could be described as role-modelling.

To some extent every teacher of religion is a religious role-model. For a number of students, the teacher may be their most regular point of contact with the institutional Church. Students may also have expectations about how a teacher of religion should act and relate. The research by Bishop et al. (2003) on student achievement indicated that teaching had an inherently relational quality. How teachers related to their students affected how students engaged with their learning. Paul VI expressed this when he wrote that people listen "more willingly to witnesses than to teachers" and if they do "listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*Evangelisation in the Modern World*, par. 41).

There is a distinction to be drawn between *witnessing* to faith and *teaching*. While there is a place for explicit witnessing in the context of the religion class, witnessing as such is not a classroom pedagogy that could substitute for a rigorous approach to the subject. It should not be used as an escape from the demands of teaching Religious Education as a subject-oriented subject with the same status level as other academic subjects. It could be problematic if there

was any tendency to suggest that unqualified teachers may adopt a more informal and experiential approach that emphasised the importance of their personal witness rather than a challenging academic study.

Witness as an explicit pedagogy also implies that it is possible to directly bring about some element of personal change in the student. However, it would be difficult to differentiate whether it was the teacher's words or the teacher's behaviour that may have precipitated change. At the secondary school level, the research literature indicated that parents had a greater influence on student's faith formation and personal development than did teachers. This would suggest the need for schools to work closely with parents and to clearly articulate the nature and purpose of classroom Religious Education within the context of a New Zealand Catholic secondary school.

For many teachers being able to share their faith with students is a rewarding aspect of teaching the subject. But getting witnessing out of perspective could result in proselytising and become a rationale for 'pushing' the teacher's own personal views. This could lead to a distorted view of Religious Education as primarily about 'personal sharing'. The belief that Religious Education should be about just telling students 'what you believe' may be at the heart of an inappropriate emphasis on personalism that creates an expectation that personal disclosure is a key element in the religion classroom. This in turn may result in moral and psychological pressure on students to feel that they need to make self-revelations because these are required. The professional responsibility of the religion teacher is to teach the officially mandated curriculum rather than promote their own views. As John Paul II stated, teachers should not allow their own personal opinions to come across as the equivalent of the views of the Church or of the revelation of Jesus (*Catechesis in our Time*, par. 16). Personal sharing by the teacher could be particularly problematic where the faith perspective shared was distinctly idiosyncratic and other than that of the Church.

### ***7.3.1 Guidelines for Personal Discourse in the Classroom***

Religion teachers in Catholic secondary schools may require some guidelines with respect to how they may appropriately use personal discourse in the classroom teaching-learning process. Two guiding principles could include the freedom of the students and teacher to engage in personal discourse, and the pedagogical intention.

In any discussion of a topic with an ethical, personal or faith dimension, teachers and students must be free to participate rather than feel pressured into sharing and that they are under no pressure to make a personal contribution. Not every teacher or student may feel comfortable to share their personal views. The freedom to participate does not inhibit personalism in the religion classroom; rather it provides an environment in which personal discourse can occur in an appropriate way.

A second guiding principle is related to the intention of the activity. Hill (1994, 2004) has suggested that the validity of personal discourse as a pedagogy was a judgement by the teacher about whether or not it made a valuable educational contribution to the lesson. Hill's ethical guidelines called 'committed impartiality' provide a useful code of teaching ethics for teachers not only in Religious Education but in any curriculum area where personal views of value-related issues may be potentially aired.

## **7.4 Negative Perceptions of Religious Education and the Explanation Proposed in the Notion of the Psychology of the Learning Environment**

A third key issue related to the perceived negativity of Religious Education by some students, staff and parents. The research literature indicated that while a number of students enjoyed their education in a Catholic school they were less positive about classroom Religious Education. The reasons for negative attitudes towards Religious Education are complex.

Crawford and Rossiter (2006) have suggested that student negativity may be explained by the notion of ‘the psychology of the learning environment’.

In the period following Vatican II, there was a trend to emphasise that Religious Education was different from other subjects. An unfortunate consequence may have been a loss of subject credibility in some quarters. One reason for the shift to a more academic approach was to enhance subject credibility. The status of Religious Education may have been enhanced by access to tertiary entrance qualifications through unit and achievement standards.

At one level, at least for some students, their negative attitude may reflect the low value for religion in society, which would in turn result in low status for Religious Education as a subject. Subject status is derived from a combination of variables such as peer influence, school culture, societal and parental view of the value of religion, contribution to tertiary entry qualifications and perceived contribution to obtaining employment. Other factors also reinforce a negative perception of the status of the subject. These may include, the priority given to the subject in the school timetable, the use of classroom time for non-subject related activities, the comparative size of classes, and the lack of teacher qualifications in the subject.

The issue of relevance is a dimension of the psychology of the learning environment. To some extent there will be a percentage of students who find a particular subject to be of less personal relevance to them. However, given the religious aims of the Catholic school, negativity towards Religious Education will be viewed with concern. Negativity does not necessarily mean that students are irreligious. It may be that they find the subject to be of less importance for their immediate priorities. The relevance of a subject has to do with the content and whether or not it is perceived to have a direct and immediate connection with real life. Any academic subject can be irrelevant or relevant depending on the content, pedagogy and the perception of students. It would however be a mistake to think that academic study of its nature neglected value related content or the affective/personal domain.

A third factor that may impact on student negativity is teacher pedagogy. No curriculum, no matter how relevant, can compensate for poor pedagogy or for low levels of teacher knowledge. The research literature indicated that teachers with an insufficient conceptual understanding of the subject tend to adopt a less student oriented pedagogy. A pedagogical approach that ignores students’ life experience and seeks to impart uncontextualised content may well be perceived as irrelevant regardless of the importance of the content. In addition, teachers who lack appropriate qualifications may experience difficulty in engaging with students because they have an inadequate knowledge base from which to respond to their questions.

It would be a mistake to assume that adopting a less academic approach and spending more time in discussion will solve this issue. It may well exacerbate the situation because too much non-directed discussion could be interpreted by students as aimless and reinforce the low status of the subject. The results in this study indicated that most teachers believed that challenging academic study with appropriate content that contributed to tertiary entry qualifications, could lift the perceived relevance of the subject.

The negative perception of some parents towards Religious Education may well correlate with the general low regard of the importance of religion in ordinary life. For some parents, Religious Education may not be the primary reason for choosing a Catholic school. This study also identified a degree of negativity towards Religious Education from other staff as a challenge for teachers of religion. Staff negativity may also reflect general societal attitudes. The perception may be the result of an insufficient understanding of the complexity of the subject that characterises it as too experiential rather than subject-oriented. It could also be related to a perceived lack of academic rigour, due in part, to the lack of qualified teachers in the subject.

## 7.5 Qualifications in Religious Education

The level of teacher qualifications in Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand is a matter of concern. Well qualified teachers are essential if Catholic secondary schools are to achieve their religious and educational purposes. The research literature is reasonably conclusive that the level of teacher subject-matter knowledge is a factor in student achievement. While teachers will have an appropriate tertiary level qualification for their secular subjects, this is not the norm for religion teachers with fewer than 20% having a degree-based qualification in Religious Education or theology. The formation of teachers in the spiritual dimension is important for the religious purposes of the school.

Qualifications are important for the credibility of the subject as an academic subject. If Religious Education is to be taken seriously as an academic subject, it will have to meet the same standards of qualification, assessment and academic rigour as other subjects. With the introduction of achievement standards, schools using these for assessment will be required to teach Religious Education at the same academic standards as other subjects. The program resources provided for the teaching of *Understanding Faith* are comparable with those available in other subjects. What is significantly different from other subjects is the level of teacher qualification.

Appropriate qualifications in the subject allow teachers to develop a deep conceptual understanding of the subject. Teachers who lack a coherent understanding of the subject may have difficulty in integrating faith, culture and life. Part of the negativity of students may be the result of poor pedagogy due to an inadequate subject-matter and subject-specific pedagogical knowledge.

This study indicated a degree of cognitive dissonance among some respondents; they agreed that Religious Education was an academic subject, but disagreed that a degree level qualification was necessary to teach the subject. This may reflect the difficulty in obtaining qualifications rather than a belief that qualifications are not necessary for secondary school teachers.

There is a growing trend towards staffing Religious Education with specialist religion teachers rather than with teachers from other specialty areas who also teach one or two religion classes. This trend has advantages in that it allows schools to commit resources to support teachers to gain appropriate qualifications. It also provides an additional career path for assistant teachers who may form a potential pool for future DRSSs. Specialisation also allows for teachers to intentionally choose to teach Religious Education and to make a commitment to the subject rather than perceiving it as a secondary subject or timetable filler. This may result in improved planning and pedagogy in that teachers are more focused on their specialist subject. However, an increase in specialisation hopefully will not result in Religious Education being marginalised within the school. Principals need to articulate a vision that emphasises that Religious Education is at the core of the Catholic school and identify ways in which all staff can contribute to the religious purposes of the school.

## 7.6 Recommendations

Recommendations with implications for Religious Education at classroom, school, diocesan and national levels emerged from this study which are summarised below.

1. Identify and actively address the barriers to increasing the number of teachers with degree level qualifications in the subject.
2. School and diocesan authorities need to target teachers of Religious Education who are not currently accessing continuing professional development in the subject.

3. Undertake research into effective pedagogies for Religious Education at all Year levels.
4. Research is required into student, parent and staff perceptions of classroom Religious Education.
5. Whole school professional development is required to explain the Religious Education curriculum and to integrate Catholic Special Character across other subject areas.
6. Develop a resource to assist teachers to clarify the relationship between the processes of evangelization, catechesis, classroom Religious Education as they relate to Catholic secondary schools.
7. Develop guidelines for the use of personal discourse in classroom Religious Education.
8. Boards of Trustees need to ensure that the time allocation for classroom Religious Education specified by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference is adhered to, particularly related to the introduction of achievement standards.
9. Teachers of Religious Education need to be assisted in the development of differentiated teaching and learning resources.
10. A balance is required between teaching and assessment in the subject. This may be achieved through the allocation of sufficient teaching time.
11. Design a professional development program that promotes a formation of the heart.

Five key recommendations are expanded on below.

### ***7.6.1 Qualifications***

Having well qualified and formed religion teachers is important for the credibility of the subject. It is necessary to undertake further research into the barriers to obtaining qualifications and to vigorously address those that are identified. The solutions devised will need to have the unified support of teachers, DRSSs, Principals, Boards, diocesan and national Catholic education authorities. The interpretive scheme for religious purposes that emerged from this study may assist various groups to clarify their understanding of the purposes of classroom Religious Education. The failure to address this issue could have important consequences for the future of Religious Education as a subject in Catholic secondary schools.

### ***7.6.2 Professional Development***

The need for continuing professional development is of particular importance given the low level of subject qualifications among New Zealand Catholic religion teachers. The literature indicated that some teachers may not have the opportunity to participate in professional development. This would be of concern in the case of less well qualified teachers and could impact on student perceptions. Schools and diocesan advisory services need to identify the barriers to participation to reach those teachers who are not participating in professional development. Professional development is particularly necessary in areas such as assessment with the introduction of assessment standards in the senior school. Particular attention also needs to be given to the characteristics of youth spirituality and the impact of contemporary society on students. A third area of professional development is the spiritual formation of teachers.

### ***7.6.3 Research into Effective Pedagogies for Religious Education***

Religious Education is a complex subject that requires an extensive repertoire of strategies and pedagogical approaches. Research needs to be undertaken to identify effective pedagogies for Religious Education in the contemporary Catholic school. One aspect of this research could identify strategies that would allow differentiation of the content material within the lesson. Research is also required into developing effective pedagogical approaches that relate Religious Education to the emerging trends in youth spirituality and the

contemporary culture.

#### **7.6.4 Negative Perceptions of Religious Education**

The negative perceptions of students need to be addressed on a number of levels. Schools and teachers need to develop a curriculum that addresses the questions that students bring to the classroom environment. Teachers need to relate the content of their lessons to the life experience of their students. The units of work may need to give more attention to contemporary spiritual and moral issues, as well as attending to the issues raised by students. Teachers also need to attend to the characteristics of youth spirituality in their pedagogy and content selection. Research is required to identify the contributory factors for student negativity. Some may be classroom focused, for example, pedagogy, teacher-student relationship, curriculum content and curriculum resources. Others could be related to the perceived value of the subject by students and parents.

School leadership needs to address issues of staff negativity towards Religious Education. As part of the induction process, clear expectations about the nature and purpose of a Catholic school could be articulated by the leadership team. This may also involve an outline of the *Understanding Faith* curriculum. Whole school professional development that makes explicit links between the Special Character of the Catholic school and each curriculum area could be undertaken to assist planning and development.

Research also needs to be undertaken into what parents see as the nature and aims of a Catholic secondary school in the context of New Zealand. School leadership needs to effectively communicate the vision of the Catholic school and the importance placed on the religious and educational aims of the school.

#### **7.6.5 Time Allocation for Religious Education**

It was evident from this study that there was concern among teachers about the need to use assessment that gave the subject credibility but that insufficient time was allocated for the appropriate amount of teaching, learning and assessment to take place. Schools that treat Religious Education as a serious subject will allocate the same amount of time to it that is given to other subjects. Given that all the unit and achievement standards assessment is internal rather than external puts added pressure on teachers to complete assessment. Insufficient teaching time may result in frustrated teachers and students, and in a reduced curriculum or both. It is the expectation of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference that the curriculum is delivered in its entirety. Boards of Trustees, particularly Proprietor's Appointees, and Principals need to ensure that the correct time allocation is granted to fulfil both the NZQA credit hour requirements for a full subject and the expectations of the Bishops' Conference.

### **7.7 Conclusion**

This study explored teachers' beliefs about the purpose of classroom Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in New Zealand. The results indicated that teachers conceptualised it as an academic subject within the context of contemporary secondary schooling. This study proposed an interpretive scheme that comprised three dimensions, the primary purpose of which was knowledge and understanding of Catholicism. Two subsidiary aspirational purposes were identified: faith formation and personal development. A number of challenges were identified such as the place of personal discourse, the perceived relevance of the subject by some students, parents and staff and the level of teacher qualification in the subject. There was a high degree of consensus among the respondents about the purpose of the subject and this consensus was congruent with the Subject-Orientated approach that formed the basis of the *Understanding Faith* curriculum.

## ***Why Catholic Schools - What shines from within?***

Paul Ferris, former Principal of Catholic Schools, Catholic Character reviewer  
May 2011

If you ask a Catholic school what is it that separates them from the school down the road you often get a very quick , "well it's obvious!" and then a silence as they think of examples that define their reaction. The examples given describe actions and events that show a lived value. They are helpful but there is still a compelling need to be able to name what it is we are doing that makes our work different from the neighbouring state school. It should be obvious but it is often not so. Defining difference is complicated because so many of our characteristics are Gospel based and require definition. What challenges me as a Special Character reviewer is that you often have to look very closely to find what it is that distinguishes one school from another because many of the people in our schools cannot articulate it and for some their entry into the system has not been accompanied with professional development that helps them understand the difference.

As I travel down the road to Queenstown from Glenorchy where I live, I am always taken by the views. The sharp contrasts in colour and form of the mountains, bush and lake are breathtaking every day. For most of the year the bush is consistently green and strong and then suddenly in autumn you find trees that have been green all year are standing out in the forest with vibrant autumn colours that make them different and distinctive. It is not until you see the difference in the trees that you can name them as deciduous conifers. In the same way what we take for granted has to be pointed out and proclaimed so that everyone understands what it is that makes them different and distinctive.

For me a Catholic school is not what is on the surface but what is lived and celebrated in the life lived in the school. It is a life lived in Gospel values that make us who we are. "How is the God in me greeted by the God in you?" It is how the Gospels are lived in a real way that define the school as not merely an agent of the state. It is how the school takes children and empowers them to be fully human and responsive to their world.

A Catholic school is often compared with a state school as being the one with the better uniform, academia or discipline rather than the one that risks being truly different. Over the 19 years I was at Kavanagh some parents who came to enrol their child upset me when they responded to the question as to why they chose this particular school. Instead of observing what I thought were obvious signs of Special Character they would say things like, "It is close to where we live" or "It will do them no harm" or "Mary likes the kilt." So much for what I thought was transparent! Our goal of being a beacon of hope on the hill was clearly not the perception of many people from outside.

However, it is not as damning as one would think. As a father I can see a parallel for those defining our family from the outside and those from within. I think the two definitions rely on two different experiences. The first is an observation from outside and the second a lived experience.

Some people find it easier to define a Catholic school by what it is not. Saying it is not a state school doesn't tell you what its point of difference is. Being able to name that difference is critical for us to build and grow the system.

There is a wonderful story told by a Jesuit priest who spent time gleaning some of the wisdom of the orient where he tells of the way a monk was remembered by his people. This monk used to pray in a temple each day and his devotion was so pious and focused that people saw his goodness and came to watch him pray. Watching him pray was for them a prayerful moment. Over time a cat came and lay beside the monk in the temple because he could enjoy the sun and quiet. People came to think that the cat was part of the prayer and when the monk died they chained a cat in the temple in the same place as a way of trying to remember the monk and his piety.

Our schools risk this same mistake. Unless we know what it is that make them different and special we risk those who follow will find "new cats" that are not part of our difference. As I visit schools I find people defining the school history in ways that seem to be taking it in a new direction. In New Zealand we are quickly losing our sense of history and what gave our schools their energy and support. Only when you engage them in what the founding spirit of the school was and what gave it support in its early years can you redirect them away from chaining up new "cats" to represent the past. It was the piety of the monk that attracted people in the first instance. It needs to be the Gospel that attracts them now.

In the last few years state schools have tried to emulate some of the best of Catholic and other integrated Church schools. The state has required schools to define values that will be lived and used to influence the culture of the school. Schools choose a range of values such as responsibility, competitiveness, scholarship, respect, self control and inclusion. There is nothing wrong with these values as long as we see them as coming from the humanist world rather than emanating from Christian belief. It is therefore one of the great challenges that I have as I visit Catholic schools to see how their values separate and identify the difference between the systems and how these values are lived out in the life of the school. I have to say that there are sometimes tenuous links made to Christian thought and teaching.

On a recent review I had a healthy discussion with the Principal of an excellent school about how the school's chosen values did not go far enough in defining the school's difference. A few hours later I went down the street to buy lunch and came back behind a camper van with the following values written across the back - "Love, compassion, forgiveness, honesty and marijuana rules the lot." The school had chosen all but the last one. Unless we say what our value is and what it should look like we risk simply taking words and letting anyone develop a meaning. In this case the school's values were defining but they did not distinguish the school's Special Character. They were basically the same as those of the man promoting marijuana.

Pope Paul VI said that a Catholic school should first of all be a good school. I think he is right. If a school fails to teach and prepare students for the world they will enter it has seriously failed them. He went on to say that being a good school involved good academia and a life of faith lived. That would distinguish a school and I believe he continues to be right.

The great Lutheran Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was killed by the Nazis said, "The moral test of a nation is how it educates its young." For me his definition also seeks to embrace more than just scholarship, sport or culture. It is the way we package that success in the culture lived in the school.

Defining culture is hard. It is often observed and harder to describe. Unless we can name it we cannot know what makes us stand apart. Values in Catholic schools first need to be named and sourced from the scripture. What does the Gospel tell us? How does it describe how Christians will live this value and where can we see it lived in the school? When schools begin to have this conversation they begin to create something that is not formula driven but an individual response in faith. It is owned and understood and it can be described by students in the school as behaviour.

In a review of a small school, I attended an assembly that focused on forgiveness. Each teacher had a small certificate to give to the child or children who best lived that value in the class that week. They named the child and praised the particular actions they had taken to make a change exemplifying that value. Some talked about the child's capacity to forgive one another, others about the child's ability to forgive himself. Each teacher stood in front of the students and applauded the child and used the moment as a catechesis. Many staff related the behaviour back to a piece of scripture. The children understood the value because it was described and they could tell you what they saw as forgiveness. It was life giving to this community.

So what defines a strong Catholic Character? It is a community that evangelises every day. It is the life lived that becomes the teaching moment and the opportunity for evangelisation. It is this opportunity that gives us the hope to enrol people with more tenuous connections to the conditions of preference. We believe that living in the school will form belief which leads to students staying in the Church.

Special Character is founded in prayer and liturgy made meaningful to all involved. There is celebration that leads joyfulness where opportunities like sacraments or feast days are celebrated. Catholic schools are schools where pastoral care is more than a system that keeps children safe. The pastoral system walks with the child - it modifies and supports. It forgives and includes because of the hope embedded in the creation of each individual. It seeks to form a "Gospel relationship" with those in the community. Everyone has some kind of service to the community that builds the kingdom. Finally, it has scholarship in all areas and it celebrates that. It celebrates the giftedness of all in the school in whatever endeavour they succeed in because those are gifts we have been called to use.

A good Catholic school listens. It can hear what its community is saying and has strategies for seeking their views.

I suspect many Principals and staff believe that is what is already happening. For the most part you would be right. It is what people want to happen and many do their best to make happen, but there are constraints that need to be shared.

In the last forty years we have gone from being schools where parents enrolled their child to support the family's faith practice to where today many schools actually support the family to find faith. Schools in the past were often concerned with practice and training whereas today we are places of formation. Schools are not factories for producing the next generation of Catholics. They are places of opportunities for evangelising. It is the experience provided in many schools that opens the heart of those enrolled to the opportunity of full participation in the life of the Church.

Our Catholic schools have gone from having a large cohort of religious to staffing made up of lay people. The religious were formed in faith through their religious life. In contrast many of the lay staff have had only their experience of being in a Catholic school as the basis for their teaching. This lack of formation is one of the major barriers to making our schools different and distinctive. If all we do is all we know, we will only get what we have always had.

Many lay staff struggle with the expectation of being a catechist when they themselves are very much on the early part of the journey. They are good people, willing to help and often wonderful instruments of the Gospel but unaware of how their lack of formation can impede the development of the students. Their own life needs to be enriched even more by understanding the Church and its teachings beyond their own simple experience of schooling. This is the great challenge for schools. Finding the people, finding the funding and finding appropriate formation courses for staff.

Finding the right people is a challenge in its own right. Just getting a physics teacher is in itself a challenge for a Catholic secondary school but to find one who is also a practising Catholic is often impossible. Attracting and training staff to accept the role of catechist or Director of Religious Studies is a struggle but unless Boards accept a role in helping to build the next level of leadership in our schools and invest significant funding in the process all the uniforms, discipline and high academic results will bear little fruit.

Once we have found the people and then managed to get funding there is hope that the new Catholic Institute of New Zealand (CIANZ) will be able to help deliver some of the formation experiences required for staff. I also encourage schools to make links with the associations of their founding orders who frequently hold courses and conferences where the charism of the order is shared and developed. These are important opportunities for large numbers of staff, not just those in senior positions. There is an important role for the Religious Leaders of the Orders in New Zealand here.

Unless we can find a vehicle to support and enrich the formation of our teachers we will have schools that look like the green trees. They will be undistinguished from the tree beside them. We need to light the autumn in their being so they can shine out their difference and draw others to them.

The trees have the secret. We need to find what it is that makes us stand out, and celebrate what makes us different and compelling for our people. Then we will have schools with three special ingredients: Gospel values, with Gospel Relationships which abound with inclusion and forgiveness. Then we will see that the Justice Promised can distinguish us among the trees.

".... You call us to justice and holiness and integrity,  
To free those bound by oppression,  
To bring light where ignorance and darkness dwell....

Psalm 110