



# Church in the Workplace

A framework of vision and values for industrial relations between employers and employees in Catholic schools in Queensland.



# Context for employment in today's Catholic schools

The composition of staff of Catholic schools in Australia has evolved over three historical phases. In the first era, beginning with the first Catholic school in the 1820's, lay teachers constituted the teaching staff for many Catholic schools.



During the second phase (approximately 1860-1965) there was a transition in the composition of staff from lay teachers to religious sisters, brothers and priests. The withdrawal of government funding to Catholic schools between the 1860's and 1880's hastened this transition although a small number of lay teachers, almost all female, continued to work in Catholic schools, but on low levels of remuneration. For members of religious congregations, the Catholic school was perceived to be an expression of their commitment to Christ through the apostolate of teaching. In the third phase, from 1965 onwards, the character of staff changed from a Religious staffed school to schools staffed almost exclusively by lay personnel. In 1973 Government funding to non-government schools ensured that staff in these schools would receive more appropriate salaries and gradually the work conditions of the staff of Catholic schools were improved to be similar to that of staff in state schools. During the late 1960's Catholic Education Offices were constituted and expanded to provide comprehensive services for all facets of Catholic schools in the dioceses. Religious congregations initiated and developed similar services in their schools.

Independent teachers' unions also emerged in this third era to secure work place benefits for staff. The emergence of independent teachers' unions is to be understood within the wider context of an industrial relations system with its state sponsored arbitration and conciliation and the concept of a minimum wage standard based on an appropriate standard of living for workers and their families. Proper wages and wholesome work conditions contribute to the livelihood and wellbeing of staff. The quality of staff in Catholic schools is enhanced by promoting just and responsible work environments.

During the latter part of the 20th century, there were momentous changes in the world of employment relations. The globalisation of international economics, a rapid dissemination of consumerist and materialist ideologies and competitive global market forces eroded patterns



of employer/employee relationships and legal structures that upheld employment contracts. Government legislation sought to free up the labour market to enhance individual enterprise and further economic gain.

The annual national wage adjustment was complemented with a system of workplace or enterprise bargaining from which employees and employers in individual workplaces could benefit by improved pay and conditions for productivity related changes in work practice. More recently the offering of individual workplace agreements has further deregulated the workforce.

However a plethora of market forces and deregulation of work place agreements generated anxiety among many workers who often felt vulnerable in the vagaries of employment contracts, new industrial legislation and career possibilities. In more recent times, there has been a decline in traditional trade unionism and the rise of unionism in the public and private service industries.

The growing complexity of dynamics in the education landscape generally, and in particular, within the Catholic school sector, generated a host of issues such as workplace health and safety, a growing litigious climate, anti-discrimination legislation, job security, duty of care, class sizes, gender equity and career paths. Another challenge for Catholic schools relates to an expectation on staff that, while they receive just remuneration for their work, they are prepared to make a commitment to the mission of the Catholic school.

A growing secular climate in society generally, intrusive materialistic values, decreasing affiliation in active church membership among Catholics and a more multi-faith and multicultural composition of staff in Catholic school communities, are just some of the confronting issues that are relevant to the development of a common framework of vision and values shared by those employed in Catholic schools.

As an employing agency, the Catholic Church in Australia is the largest non-government group. Unlike other employers, the church as an employer is subject, not only to civil legislation, but to the church's social teaching and Canon Law.

Although there is now a formidable compendium of Catholic social teaching that developed since the ground-breaking encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), in the wider context of church organisations, the church is a relative latecomer to an active engagement in the field of industrial relations that is demanded by enterprise bargaining. Fifty years ago, the workforce in many church agencies was made up largely of religious and the ordained owing obedience to religious superiors or diocesan bishops. The composition of the workforce in church agencies is now almost exclusively lay personnel. During the last 50 years, the cultural shift in church agencies with regard to industrial relations has been a movement from one of being in accord with directives from religious and ecclesial authorities to a contemporary process of consultation, negotiation and collaboration within a framework of Catholic social teachings. Such a process necessitated church agencies to engage in a significant learning curve as to how industrial relations are now conducted in the workplace.

In more recent years, Pope John Paul II addressed many contemporary issues of Catholic teaching on work in his encyclicals *Laborem Exercens* (1981) and (1991). These encyclicals are to be comprehended within the context of contemporary critical social issues at the time of their proclamation.

The character and context of relationships between employers and employees are intricately linked with their understanding and appreciation of the ethos and purpose of Catholic schools.



# Purpose of Catholic Schools

Catholic schools aspire to provide the best possible teaching and learning that is shaped by a Catholic vision of life.

A Catholic vision of life is derived from beliefs and practices flowing from God's revelation in Jesus and through the Spirit. The basic purpose of a Catholic school is succinctly stated in the document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1998): *The person is at the heart of Christ's teaching. That is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school* (n 9).

Good Catholic schools seek to conduct teaching and learning infused with the core message of Jesus, *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly* (Jn.10:10) and in accordance with the teachings and practices of Catholic social teachings.

Catholic schools in Queensland offer the Catholic community and the people of Australia an educational service whose purpose is to enhance the full development of students, intellectually, spiritually, physically, emotionally and morally. Catholic schools offer choices to parents for schooling that is in accord with their own values and beliefs.

The mission of Catholic schools extends well beyond faith education within a Catholic tradition to a proactive contribution towards the common good for society and for the environment. Within a multicultural and increasingly multi-faith environment, Catholic schools intend to make a significant contribution to fostering a more inclusive and just society where the dignity of all people is respected. Catholic schools are proactive in furthering the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In 1998 a major research study, conducted by the Queensland Catholic Education Commission on behalf of the Queensland Catholic Bishop's Conference, focused on the question '*What are the defining features of Catholic schools in the context of the church's evolving mission in the world*' (QCEC, 2001;ii). Data was drawn from Queensland Catholic schools in five dioceses comprising 103,200 students, 280 schools and a teaching staff of around 7,200. The Catholic schools in the survey diocesan and Religious Institute schools. The report to the Queensland Bishops, '*Catholic Schools for the 21st Century*', identified five distinguishing features for Catholic schools in the future.

## The Catholic school of the future will:

- have a strong Catholic identity and give witness to Christian values;
- be open and accessible to those who seek its values;
- offer a holistic curriculum;
- be a community of care and right relationships;
- be staffed by qualified, competent people who give witness to gospel values (QCEC, 2001:7).

The Report to the Queensland Bishops strongly affirmed the value of Catholic schools and emphasised the esteem in which the schools were held by the great majority of all those people whose lives are touched by them. Also affirmed was the importance of the witness value of those employed in Catholic school communities to actively create and nurture the ethos and mission of Catholic schools. It should be noted that the statement, 'offer a holistic curriculum' implies excellence in teaching and learning. Staff are called not only to give witness to the gospel, but also to be quality educators.

People whose lives give witness to Christian values and who are committed to engage in the church's mission of evangelisation will staff Catholic schools.

*Catholic schools for the 21st century* p.6.

The Catholic school is at the heart of the church... It is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its "structure as a genuine instrument of the church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry.

*The Catholic school on the Threshold of the third Millennium*, 1998: 11

Since a true education must strive for the integral formation of the human person, a formation that looks towards the person's final end, and at the same time toward the common good of societies, children and young people are to be so reared that they develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual talents, that they acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility, a correct use of freedom, and that they be educated for active participation in social life.

*Code of Canon Law*, 1833: 795.



# What are core values for those who are employed in Catholic schools?

## Values and beliefs for those employed in Catholic schools

Catholic social teaching provides a foundational perspective for values and beliefs to guide the staff of Catholic schools. Catholic social teaching proposes precepts and principles to promote the common good and a just society that benefits its citizens within the integrity of creation. Some of these teachings are very relevant to industrial relations generally and enterprise bargaining in particular. The values that provide direction as to how relationships between employees and authorities in the workplace should be conducted are illuminated by the life and teachings of Jesus.

## Core Gospel values

The following values are specified as features of the teachings of Jesus and his dream of the Reign of God, a vision of seeing and acting in ways that enhance the dignity of each person and the community:

- **Faith, love and hope** (1 Corinthians 13: 1-3)
- **Promoting 'life in abundance'** (Jn. 10:10)
- **Inclusion** (Lk. 19: 1-10)
- **Reconciliation** (Lk. 15: 11-32)
- **Compassion** (Lk. 10: 30-37)
- **Justice** (Mt. 25: 31-46)
- **Liberation** (Lk. 13: 10-13)
- **Community** (Jn. 15)
- **The power of suffering and conflict to be transformed** (Jn. 21: 15-21)
- **Service** (Mk. 10:45)
- **Witness** (Jn. 17-19)
- **Stewardship** (Lk. 10:1-9).
- **Hope** (Mt. 28: 8-11)

Effective industrial relationships between employers and employees in the workplace involve acting in accordance with these values.

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## Key Catholic teachings about work

What are significant beliefs in a Catholic perspective about work?

The church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of man's (sic) existence on earth... the basis for determining the value of work is not primarily the work being done but the fact that the one doing it is a person... However true it may be that the human person is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is 'for persons' and not 'persons for work'

*Laborem Exercens*, 4, 6.

A foundational principle in church social teaching on labour and work is the right ordering of relationships between workers and organisations, a relationship that is firmly situated within the principle of the common good. The principle of the common good is characterised by such features as, promoting the wellbeing of all members of the school community, a spirit of co-operation rather than competition, effective communications between all parties, and individual responsibility.

The church teaches that employers and employees should be regarded as partners not adversaries in the school workplace and are urged to work together co-operatively for the wellbeing of the students. The church also teaches that employers and employees, together with the organisation that represents them, have rights and responsibilities.

The following themes about work focus on paid work. Obviously, there are many expressions of unpaid work in people's daily existence and also the evolving work of creation.

- Work is an essential dimension of human life and the ongoing evolution of creation. Through work, women and men co-operate with the Divine Spirit of creation which brings all things into being. Work is intended to allow people to experience God's presence in the world.
- A spirituality of work affirms workers as co-creators with God in creation. Through good work the quality of life in all its dimensions is enhanced.
- Work is an expression of human dignity. Meaningful work enriches people through giving them a sense of purpose and personal fulfilment.
- Through work, people, not only earn their livelihood for themselves and their families, but contribute to the wellbeing of society and to the common good.
- In the New Testament, the gospels record the work of Jesus, probably first as an artisan and then as a preacher. The title of 'Teacher' for Jesus was the most revered memory of Jesus in the four early gospel communities. The gospels refer to Jesus as 'Teacher' 49 times.
- Paul worked as a tentmaker and encouraged others to work for a living.
- Venerable Catholic traditions about work, exemplified by the Benedictine and Franciscan heritages, affirm the dignity of work. The Benedictine motto, 'To work is to pray' contrasted strongly with an earlier Greek perception of work as the province of slaves. Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the greatest theologian of Western Christianity, taught that every person is called upon to work and that if everyone fulfils her or his role in society then justice will prevail.
- Workers are not to be regarded as a resource or commodity in the market place but as people created in the image and likeness of God.
- There is always a priority of labour over capital. Capital must serve labour. *Laborem Exercens*, 12.

- Work environments should be congenial to harmony and creative relationships that share a common vision for excellence in production and service.
- Workers have an absolute right to just compensation for their work.
- A good workplace environment respects personal differences and avoids discrimination due to gender, ethnicity and disability.
- A good workplace environment honours and promotes diversity as well as prohibiting all forms of harassment.
- Each worker is valued for her/his contribution to the mission of the school.
- Within the church tradition, teaching is esteemed as a special vocation, co-operating with parents to nurture the students through holistic learning, including an engagement with God's revelation through Jesus and the Spirit.

While work in all its many senses, is an obligation, that is a duty, it is also a source of rights on the part of the worker.

*Laborem Exercens*, 16

Work, therefore, cannot be properly evaluated if its social nature is not taken into account.

*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* p.273

# Relationships between employers and employees

Relationships between employers and employees in Catholic schools will be enhanced if the following principles are accepted and implemented:

- All those involved in the mission of Catholic schools will be guided by gospel values and contribute to the ethos of the schools.
- A Catholic perspective on people employed in Catholic schools esteems a servant model of leadership. Such a perspective also affirms teaching as a ministry to promote the reign of God through quality teaching, learning, administration, and support services.
- The wellbeing of the students is the ultimate reference point for the quest for harmonious relationships in school communities.
- The principle of reciprocity highlights a greater sense of mutuality between employees and employers. Both employers and employees in Catholic schools have mutual rights and responsibilities.
- The employer, in determining the nature of the work to be done, has a moral obligation to provide just wages and a wholesome working environment. Salaries and work conditions must be in accordance with current Awards and conditions of employment.
- Employees accept a responsibility to fulfil their respective roles in the work of Catholic schools with integrity and professional competence.
- People have a right to participate in significant workplace consultations which directly impact on their lives, such as continuity of employment, hours of work, and leave arrangements. However, the right of participation in decision-making by employees is to be balanced with the right and responsibility of employers to effectively manage the enterprise of Catholic education.
- Employers and employees are called to work together in a collaborative partnership with parents, priests, community agencies, and government for the good of students.
- Due care by school authorities and individual schools is taken to nurture and promote a healthy balance between school commitments and home life of employers and employees.
- A wholesome integrated approach to home and work relations will avoid a home/work dichotomy.
- Both employers and employees have a fundamental freedom to take up membership in associations and unions that are constituted to protect their legitimate interests and concerns.
- An independent third party may be required to resolve major matters of differences between employers and employees.
- The process for employer/employee negotiations should be transparent and accountable to the respective parties involved in the negotiations and to the wider community.
- Negotiations between employers and employees will be conducted in the spirit of respect and fidelity to the values of justice and reconciliation.



It must be reiterated that the appropriate model for employee/employer relations is firmly grounded in the foundational principle of the common good. While supporting and upholding the dignity of each individual person in the school community, the pursuit of the common good calls on all involved in the mission of the school to promote a more just and harmonious society.

However, in the workplace reality of industrial relationships between employers and employees,

the ideals of common good are often in conflict with the process of adversarial bargaining. Nevertheless, wherever possible, an antagonistic approach to industrial negotiations is to be shunned. An adversarial model of industrial negotiations is both detrimental to the good of both parties in the negotiations and contrary to gospel values of community, justice, and reconciliation. Bargaining in good faith does not necessarily imply agreement at any cost.



# Conclusion

Catholic school communities are intended to be lifelong learning communities infused with the spirit of Jesus.

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Catholic schools are an integral feature of an esteemed Catholic tradition of 'birth-to-death' education. Schools are busy work places with daily realities of teaching a curriculum, providing administrative and support services, attending to the diverse needs of students, staff, and parents, and being accountable to the wider communities of church and society generally.

There are many challenges in everyday relationships including those between employers and employees. Workplaces that are characterised by justice, pastoral care, and professional integrity will generate a culture of mutual respect and shared commitment to the core provision of providing a service of quality holistic teaching and learning. Ultimately the focus and common ground of all relationships between employers and employees must be the wellbeing of the students.



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