

Educating for Sustainable Futures in Queensland Catholic Schools

Position Statement



Introduction

Pope Francis released an Encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'* (2015) which calls on every person living on the planet to care for creation (our common home) and take collective action as the world faces global environmental degradation. As stewards of creation, the Encyclical offers a unique opportunity for the Catholic community to enter into dialogue on important spiritual, social and environmental issues.

In our Catholic context Pope Francis' 2015 Encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* highlights the need to learn and draw from the knowledge of Australia's First Nations peoples, who have espoused the interconnectedness of all creation. When we embrace the knowledge of Australia's First Nations peoples, we add to the richness of ancient perspectives that recognise the sacredness of the land and the deep connection to identity and culture.

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?”¹

Definition

“Education for sustainability develops the knowledge, skills, values and world views necessary for people to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable patterns of living. It enables individuals and communities to reflect on ways of interpreting and engaging with the world. Sustainability education is futures-oriented, focusing on protecting environments and creating a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action. Actions that support more sustainable patterns of living require consideration of environmental, social, cultural and economic systems and their interdependence.”²

Rationale

The duty of protecting the natural environment is shared by all and this challenge should be faced with renewed and concerted commitment to hand down to coming generations the prospect of a better future for all. This duty is a life-long learning process necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelatedness of all creation. When addressing Australia's First Nations people, Pope John Paul II highlighted that First Nation's people have always seen the land as a source of life³.

“There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us...”⁴

¹ *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 160, 2015.

² Australian Curriculum, *Cross-curriculum Priorities, Sustainability Overview*.

³ *Pope John Paul II to the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Blatherskite Park, Alice Springs Australia 1986*.

⁴ *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'*, 211, 2015.

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The Queensland Catholic Education Commission aspires to the creation of a sustainable future through the support of Catholic School Authorities who take responsibility to establish long-term goals and targets that build capability to create sustainable futures. Sustainable futures feature: sustainable patterns of living; shared efforts by individuals and systems to advance outcomes; and an overarching balanced approach to human interactions with others and with the environment (Australian Curriculum, Sustainability).

“Environmental Education ... needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care.”⁵

Implications

Catholic School Authorities and schools in Queensland may give consideration to:

- Developing an ethic of personal and social responsibility and stewardship which is expressed through caring for God’s creation.
- Understanding and cultivating a sense of spirituality which acknowledges the interconnectedness of all creation (spiritual, social, cultural, economic and ecological dimensions at local, national and global levels, with particular attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and cultures).
- Acknowledging that embedded within the Aboriginal world view is the concept of collective responsibility for tending the land and using only that which is needed for sustenance.
- Adopting a holistic approach to the implementation of sustainable practices which is reflected in curriculum and is embedded in practice, procedure and operations that promote a learners’ understanding, knowledge, values, skills, and competencies for sustainable living. This knowledge set incorporates an emphasis upon social justice, participation in society and the sustainability practices of Australia’s First Nations people.
- Developing responsible resource procurement, management and innovation, including utilities, facilities and environs.
- Establishing partnerships, alliances and networks with government, communities, Traditional Custodians and Community Elders, Church agencies, businesses and other school authorities which have as their goal the enhancement of ecologically sustainable practices.
- Reviewing, communicating and celebrating sustainable practices and achievements with the school community and system practices that are visible signs of people and communities caring for creation.
- Promoting an understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life forms - humankind, flora and fauna, and all that exists on the earth.

“Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth, which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters”⁶.

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⁵ *Encyclical letter Laudato Si’*, 210, 2015.

⁶ *Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father Francis on Fraternity and Social Friendship* 2020.