

Formation for staff members in Catholic schools in Queensland

Position Statement



Introduction

Catholic Schools are places where people learn how to live their lives, achieve cultural growth, receive vocational training and engage in the pursuit of the common good; they provide occasion and opportunity to understand the present time and imagine the future of society. Catholic schools seek to create communities enlivened by the Gospel message of love and mercy. At the root of Catholic education is our Christian spiritual heritage, which is part of a constant dialogue with the cultural heritage and the conquests of science. Catholic schools are educational communities where learning thrives on the integration between research, thinking and life experience.¹

Pope Francis says that Catholic schools have a responsibility for the evangelization of culture². This evangelizing mission is to involve a theology, not simply a pastoral theology, but a theology in dialogue with other sciences and human experiences.

Catholic educators need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others, so that their educational commitment becomes a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (*cf. Gal 5:6*) (*Educating Together in Catholic Schools, 25, cf. Deus Caritas Est, 31*)

Faith formation of Catholic school community members is Christ centred. It is an intentional, ongoing and reflective process that focuses on the growth of individuals and communities from their lived experiences, in spiritual awareness, theological understanding, vocational motivation and capabilities for mission and service in the Church and the world. (*A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education NCEC 2016*)

The document “Defining Features of Catholic Schools for the 21st Century” identifies the following desirable features of a Catholic school:

- A strong Catholic identity
- Openness and accessibility to those who seek its values
- A holistic curriculum
- Staff who are qualified, competent and give witness to Christian values
- A caring community based on right relationships³.

The report noted, in consequence, that in order to maintain the strong Catholic identity Catholic schools will have staff with appropriate professional qualifications and provide ongoing staff formation⁴.

Furthermore, Catholic schools must be run by individuals and teams who are inspired by the Gospel and have been formed in Christian pedagogy⁵.

In the position statement it is recognised that there is an ongoing challenge of ensuring that all members of staff are provided with opportunities for professional learning which includes both professional and religious formation.

The Congregation for Catholic Education reinforces this in several documents and asks that all staff

¹ *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion (Instrumentum laboris)*, 2021, p.5.

² *Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, 132 – 134.

³ Queensland Catholic Education Commission (2001). *Catholic Schools for the 21st Century: A Report to the Queensland Bishops*, p.7.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.9.

⁵ *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion (Instrumentum laboris)*, 2014, p.10.

receive adequate preparation to serve in coherence with the Catholic faith⁶ and increase their awareness of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ⁷.

Definition

Formation for mission in Catholic education⁸:

- Is “formation of the heart” that is characterised by prayerfulness and reflection.
- Is respectful, experiential and relevant, building on participants’ personal story and everyday reality.
- Is explicitly Christological, scripturally rich and ecclesially grounded.
- Has an affective focus on a person’s faith journey and discipleship.
- Has substantive theological content.
- Sets out to build communal Catholic religious identity and culture.
- Is differentiated according to individual and community needs.
- Promotes personal vocation, connection with the Catholic tradition and responsiveness to mission. It also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life, the person and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Rationale

The Second Vatican Council identified that Catholic schools depend upon teachers for the accomplishment of their goals and programs⁹. This is done in collaboration with parents¹⁰, respecting their role and responsibility as first and natural educators¹¹. The Commission acknowledges that staff members employed in Catholic schools are at many different stages in their personal spiritual journey but that all can benefit from formation for mission¹².

The Church will have to initiate everyone into an “art of accompaniment” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other. The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life. We need to encourage and accompany processes, without imposing our own roadmaps¹³.

Position Statement

Catholic School Authorities in Queensland will support and promote the provision of quality formation experiences to assist all staff members to grow in understanding of their ministry as part of the mission of the Catholic Church.

Implications

Catholic School Authorities in Queensland consider:

- a variety of opportunities for formation experiences for all staff employed in Catholic schools
- the needs of individuals and their roles in Catholic Education when planning formation experiences
- incorporating formation of staff into a broad strategy which contributes towards the requirements for professional learning of all staff in Catholic schools
- the importance of an invitational approach to a variety of options, but with an expectation that all will participate.

References

⁶ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007), nn. 34 – 37.

⁷ *ibid.*, n.27.

⁸ National Catholic Education Commission (2016). *A Framework for Mission in Catholic Education*, p.14.

⁹ Declaration on Christian Education, 8.

¹⁰ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, n.32; cf: also Code of Canon Law, can. 799.

¹¹ *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to the Faith* n.15.

¹² Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169.

¹³ Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, 297.

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