



CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION  
MELBOURNE

Horizons  
of Hope

FOUNDATION STATEMENT:

# Religious Dimension

of the Catholic School



## What is the Religious Dimension of the Catholic school?

The 'religious dimension of the Catholic school' is its identity and mission, always founded in the person of Jesus Christ as it comes to us through the Good News. In very explicit ways the religious dimension ensures a thorough integration of identity and mission into the whole of the educational experience of every learner.

*From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics. The (Second Vatican) Council summed this up by speaking of an environment permeated with the Gospel spirit of love and freedom. (Congregation for Catholic Education 1998)*

These 'unique characteristics' have their foundation in the way the school engages with the story of Jesus Christ: his life, death and resurrection. These events find new expression in the life of the school, bringing the love and joy of the Gospel to all it undertakes. This love and joy is demonstrated by:

- nurturing each person's development and relationship with God
- bearing witness to this love and joy through the quality of personal relationships

- ensuring that Catholic beliefs, teachings and values permeate learning experiences
- bearing witness to the possibility of a truly personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- building community permeated by freedom and love
- inviting learning that integrates the light of faith, the joy of discovery and the richness of diverse cultures

- guiding learners as they make meaning for life and form their identity
- supporting learners to imagine and work towards a world of justice, peace and flourishing for all of creation.

In this way the school lives out a Catholic worldview which sees the world as both holy and broken, finds the face of God in others, and makes love the foundation for action.



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### Our Catholic Identity

*The students reflected on the question, 'Which symbols of our faith do you most identify with?' In response, they explored paper skills and the elements of colour and shape to create a layered image of their individual symbol. (Year 6)*



## How is the Religious Dimension enacted in a Catholic school?

The Catholic school is commissioned by the Church to attend to the full flourishing of the person as created in the image and likeness of God. By its work of educating in openness to the mystery of God and in response to Jesus' commandment of love, the school becomes a presence of the Church in the local and wider society. The Catholic school therefore has a clear religious identity, operating in a context of Catholic faith and promoting the formation of students' identity in dialogue with that faith.

How the members of the Catholic school pray, learn, celebrate, belong in community and reach out beyond that community are all expressions of its religious dimension.

The religious dimension is intentionally developed and sustained by the religious leadership of the parish priest or canonical administrator together with the principal and leadership team, with specific attention to ongoing faith formation of staff and students.

### Christ the Redeemer

*Drawing using permanent Yoken black pen, dry chalk pastels, colour markers and pencil on cartridge paper. (Mia, Year 3)*

Through prayer, the sacred is acknowledged, assented to and celebrated.

### Praying

Prayer is key to a living faith, nourishing the soul and orienting each person to God. The Catholic school makes time to pray daily, keeping the presence of God at the forefront of each school day and connecting it to the church community and the wider world. In Melbourne's multi-faith and diverse cultural context the school community respectfully invites all to prayer, enabling deep encounters between faith and contemporary life, while encouraging a lived response. Drawing from rich prayer traditions, a variety of ways of praying are encouraged:

individual and communal, vocal and silent, informal and liturgical. Prayer engenders a way of being in the world and a perspective on life that, at times, can be challenging and counter-cultural. Through prayer, the sacred is acknowledged, assented to and celebrated. It marks the times when we affirm the presence of God and the sacredness of everyday life. Members of the Catholic school community embrace a prayerful attitude that is open to a personal encounter with God and nurturing of humility, reflection, and a rich inner life.



### Learning

True to the mission of the Church, learning in a Catholic school seeks out the good in every person. A sense of *who I am* and *how I can be in the world* is nurtured in an environment of trust and intellectual inquiry, inspired by points of contact with the Catholic faith as a way of clarifying the important questions and issues that arise for teachers and students. Teachers and leaders in a Catholic school acknowledge a sacred aspect to teaching and learning across all disciplines in the school curriculum, finding God at work in the forming and transforming power of dialogue that is essential

to learning. This approach opens moments of encounter where the human spirit is turned around or led out to meet a wider horizon or ultimate concern, moments of encounter with:

- the Word of God, whose Spirit moves and transforms
- a faith community that celebrates and lives out the ongoing presence of Christ in the world
- diverse views that shake and shift perspective
- creation that inspires awe and wonder

- culture in all its many life-giving and rich forms
- the other who calls for a response of love and compassion
- a sometimes unjust world wherein God's call to act for justice, love and joy may be heard.

Learning as encounter is a dialogical, relational and optimistic pedagogy, one that opens up horizons of hope for the future for the individual learner, their school, the Church and the wider community.

*Learning brings hope ... that is based on the certainty of God's promise of his love and care for us. This is the Good News of God's kingdom. Catholic schools proclaim this Good News in the compassion and love at the heart of every encounter in the school community. They proclaim this Good News when students learn to integrate their faith with their life and the world they live in. They proclaim this Good News with their Catholic vision that each human life is of unique value, loved by God, with his or her own gifts. They proclaim this Good News when they instil in students the desire to use their gifts to transform the world for the benefit of people everywhere and to take their part in shaping the future. (Archbishop Hart Statement about Catholic Education 2016)*

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Parents, students and staff work together as witnesses to the Good News in the way they shape the school community and enact a vision of the Kingdom of God. Here students are supported to grow, enlightened by faith, animated by love and leading to hope.

Religious Education as a particular curriculum area is critical to education in a Catholic school. It deliberately attends to the spiritual development of each person, acknowledging and celebrating the Holy Spirit at

work, inviting relationship with God and a Christ-like stance towards others. At the same time it is a disciplined process of 'faith seeking understanding', where the questions of God, beliefs and life are articulated and explored in dialogue with the Catholic Tradition to develop students' faith lives and stimulate a search for meaning and truth. It is interpretative by nature and deepens learning when students are invited to explore cross-curricular connections.

#### Blessing Bowls

*Each student wrote a word of inspiration on a pebble and placed it in the blessing bowl. The word chosen by the student was a reflection of their wish for others. (Whole school Foundation-Year 6)*



### Celebrating

The joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties, as well as daily moments big and small, provide rich opportunities for the school community to celebrate the mystery of Christ truly present in its midst. The liturgical seasons and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are woven through the school year, forming a pattern of celebrations where God is uniquely and richly encountered. Celebrations of liturgy and sacraments are part of the formal, public prayer and

worship of the Church. Liturgy calls us to pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. The community grows in virtue and works for the coming of the Kingdom when it finds a home in its heart for the Word of God that is proclaimed in liturgy and broken open in preaching. The liturgical life of the school enables students to encounter the Holy Spirit at work in their families, their parish community and in the life of the wider Church and the world. The richness of

the signs and symbols of Catholic faith celebrate in a unique way the community's sharing in the life of God. Celebrations that invite active participation in the sacraments or ritualise the everyday form members as a religious school community and nourish faith. These celebrations mark the school community as ecclesial and as a sacramental people who actively seek out the sacred every day.



Celebrations of liturgy and sacraments are part of the formal, public prayer and worship of the Church.

### Reminiscing

*Using pyrography, three family photographs composed of three distinctive cherished moments in my childhood were reconstructed on cross-sectioned wood displaying concentric circles or growth rings to imbue a sense of time upon the subject matter. [Chooli, Year 12]*



Belonging in a Catholic school community anchors the individual and collective identity in God through the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.



## Belonging

A sense of belonging is critical to forming a sense of self, connectedness and purpose. From a place of love and acceptance we can grow and expand our sense of who we are and how we can be in the world. Inspired by a God who reaches out to us in love, the Catholic school is called into community where interconnectedness and quality relationships shape and affirm the identity of each person. The community encourages belonging in diversity

by listening to and celebrating the narratives of each member, ensuring all voices are heard and engaging many perspectives in dialogue with Catholic beliefs and practices. The experience of belonging is promoted when the community searches for ways to strengthen, maintain and, where needed, rebuild right relationships with God and with others through reconciliation and forgiveness as well as through trust, inclusion and compassion. A focus on open invitation, table

fellowship and hospitality creates a sense of belonging that is extended to all. Belonging in a Catholic school community anchors the individual and collective identity in God through the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Ever-sensitive to personal freedom and the mystery of the gift of faith, the community invites deeper connection with God and others through prayer, commitment to the faith community and contribution to the Common Good.





### Reaching Out

The Catholic school community is grounded in the belief that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. The dignity of the human person is the starting point for a vision for a just society – the Kingdom of God. From this vision, the Catholic school responds to a call to service, not just as a moral duty or obligation, but in a spirit of joyful loving that responds to the presence of God in each person encountered.

In answering this call, the school reaches beyond itself to act for justice and the Common Good; standing in solidarity with the marginalised or as stewards of a beautiful, but at times beleaguered, earth. In reaching out, the school promotes participation, inclusion and equity by establishing policies and decision-making processes that respect the dignity of individuals and the principle of subsidiarity. Leadership engages all those

affected by the practices to help develop the processes and policies and reflect on them. In reaching out, the school participates with the parish and wider community to reflect on justice issues and respond through political, economic, social or ecological actions that contribute to the common good. In this way it proposes a just society, clearly demonstrating its Catholic identity through actions of love, compassion and peace.

In reaching out, the school promotes participation, inclusion and equity by establishing policies and decision-making processes that respect the dignity of individuals and the principle of subsidiarity.





## Why is the Religious Dimension in a Catholic school important given the Vision and Context?

Catholic schools are deeply connected to and empowered by the Catholic Church to illuminate education through the light of Christ. It is through the ecclesial nature of the school that the religious dimension has its life. All members of a school community have a role to play in strengthening the many ways the whole of school life is enlivened by Catholic faith.

*No matter how good its reputation for teaching in other areas, the Catholic school only deserves the title 'Catholic' when the school's Catholic identity and mission is continually nurtured and strengthened. The special character of the Catholic school and the underlying reason for its existence, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the identity and mission which is integrated into the overall education of the students.* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1998, n. 66)

The religious dimension supports students to grow in virtue and to embrace a sense of self and the world through the experience of a distinctively Catholic education.



All members of a school community have a role to play in strengthening the many ways the whole of school life is enlivened by Catholic faith.

### **Honour the sacred dignity of each person**

The religious dimension is built on this foundational belief. Through honouring the sacredness of each person, God's presence is realised and celebrated and relationships of respect and love are promoted. Through this honouring, the sacred in the everyday becomes a reality.

### **Engage with the deep questions of life**

The religious dimension acknowledges the sacred in the everyday, the mystery of God and the immeasurable possibilities of human destiny. It keeps the big questions of God, and the 'why' of life and living always to the forefront, as it encourages students to grapple with who God is and how God acts in my life. The Catholic Tradition and the life, death and resurrection of Christ guide students to navigate the deep questions. Across all curriculum areas, the religious dimension invites dialogue, challenges worldviews and promotes critical reflection and discernment.

### **Honour equitable access and opportunity for all**

Inspired by Christ and Catholic social teaching, Catholic schools demonstrate particular commitment to those in need. This is reflected in their policies and processes within the school community and in their outreach beyond the school.

### **Make a difference in the world**

The religious dimension of Catholic education focuses the members of the community outward, working for the common good. As an ecclesial community, the Catholic school is committed to promoting the Kingdom of God, bringing it to life through its action for justice and peace both locally and globally. Its educational project is impelled by the message of Christ to be hope-filled and future-oriented, drawing students into a vision for a just and compassionate world.



**Sun and Moon – The Creation Story**  
*The students worked collaboratively to create weavings that represent the sun and the moon of the Creation story. (Years 1 and 2)*

## Resources

### What resources are available to support the religious dimension in a Catholic school?

There are a variety of resources that could support further investigation into the Religious Dimension of the Catholic school. They include magisterial documents such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Chapman 1994), *Catholic Social Teaching* (O'Brien & Shannon (eds) 1992), *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (Second Vatican Council 1994), *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic school* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1998), *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Laghi & Martins 1997), and *Educating Today and Tomorrow* (Laboris 2008).

A number of local resources are available as primary resources not only for Religious Education in schools, but for the religious dimension more broadly:

- Religious Education Curriculum Framework – [www.resourcemelb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.resourcemelb.catholic.edu.au)
- RESource and liturgy help – [www.resourcemelb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.resourcemelb.catholic.edu.au)
- Daily Prayer resource – <https://cevn.cecv.catholic.edu.au/prayers.aspx>
- *To Know Worship and Love* student texts and online supplementary material – <http://dps.cam.org.au>

## References

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*Our Catholic Identity*  
**Year 6**  
St Bernadette's School,  
Sunshine North



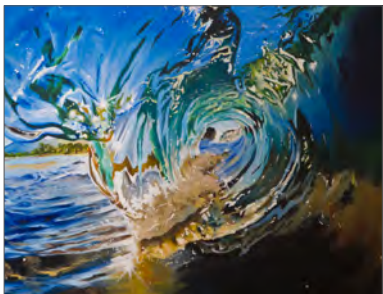
*Blessing Bowls*  
**Whole school Foundation-Year 6**  
Sacred Heart School, Oakleigh



*Christ the Redeemer*  
**Mia, Year 3**  
St Pius X School,  
Heidelberg West



*Eucharist Cross*  
**Ben, Year 3**  
St Augustine's School,  
Frankston South



*Breaking Glass*  
**Clarissa, Year 11**  
Siena College, Camberwell



*Sun and Moon - The Creation Story*  
**Years 1 and 2**  
St Joseph's School, Brunswick West



*Reminiscing*  
**Chooli, Year 12**  
St Monica's College, Epping

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