

## 1. Mission and Evangelisation

Since our God, the God of Christians is a missionary God, it's helpful to see mission not as an activity of the Church, but as an attribute of our God. Mission is the movement of God to the world and, as a Church, we are an instrument of that mission. There is a Church because there is a mission, not vice versa. To participate in the movement of God's love towards people is the work of the Church and its ultimate purpose.

For the church before the Second Vatican Council, the purpose of evangelisation was clear. The purpose was to bring people into the church and get conversions to *the* faith. Outside of the Church it was seen that there was little chance of salvation. The alternative was to leave people in their sins and eventually to torment in hell and given this situation, evangelisation was not just a nice thing to do - it was an overwhelming moral imperative. I think this helps us to understand the zeal of many of the early missionaries and their 'convert at all costs' attitude.

This model of mission was essentially concerned with conquest and displacement of beliefs and cultures. Christianity was understood to be an absolute, superior and definitive religion; the only religion which had a divine right to exist and extend itself. We know that evangelisation is clearly not the same as mere church extension. However during the period where the adage 'no salvation outside of the Church' was in vogue, this was the focus of the Church's mission.

With the Second Vatican Council's call for the Church re-examine its self-understanding, came a very different perspective on mission and evangelisation. The Council did not begin by seeing the Church as an organisation but rather as the Kingdom of Christ, present in mystery. It said that the Church was a mystery because it is a sign of the multi-faceted presence of God in our world. That the Church is a mystery because it reflects many and varied personal experiences of itself and may be experienced one way by one individual or group and another way by another group of people. The Council reminded us that no individual or group experience is the entirety of the Church. These were very challenging images for some; lots of grey, not so much black and white.

At the heart of the mystery of the Church is the Kingdom or the Reign of God; the divine dream, salvation for the whole of humankind, God's royal will and value system being lived out. This Kingdom is about the righting of humanity; about transformation, a new world order characterised by relationships of justice, love and peace. The Vatican II understanding of mission puts the emphasis not on expanding the Church, but rather on our call as Christians to be credible witnesses to the Reign of God by our life, our work our deeds. It is clear that there is a very special relationship between the Church and the Reign of God but they're not equivalents. God's reign is much broader than the Church. The Church strives to fulfil and reflect the Reign of God, but there is an incompleteness in the relationship.

Indeed Schneider draws the distinction between what he calls 'kingdom' people and those who are 'church' people. He writes that '... Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above the concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the Church, whereas kingdom people think about how to get the Church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the Church, whereas kingdom people work to see the Church change the world.'

Evangelisation is a dialogue whereby the evangeliser, who strives to understand the world of the people being evangelised; their fears, their dreams, their history, is also evangelised and undergoes conversion to a deeper sense to what the Gospel challenges us to become. Evangelisation means bringing the Gospel to bear on culture - all aspects of culture - whether it be in the world of industry, education, politics or government. It permeates every aspect of

human life and striving. Evangelisation can't be mere proselytism or propagandising or even convert making. Vincent Donovan reminds us that the essence of our evangelising endeavours must focus on the fundamental substance of the Christian message which should be free from many of the cultural trappings that, no matter how indispensable we might see them, are not part of that essential message. He goes on to say that as this stripped-down skeletal essence of the Gospel is presented and dialogue happens, it begins to take on the flesh and the blood of the culture being evangelised.

This stripping back by no means implies a watering down. It may lead the evangeliser to a heightened awareness of the cultural and ecclesial context in which the Gospel has been and is currently being embodied and preached; and this is surely good. In this process it is not so much a case of the Church being expanded, but the Church being born anew in different contexts and different cultures.

Essential to the evangelisation process is a clear articulation and grounding of the Gospel's potential to shed light on the deep human existential and spiritual questions faced by all cultures throughout history. The deep riddles of the human condition which stir the human heart; the basic questions being asked with increasing urgency amongst people in our culture, significantly for this context by our young people. We give priority to Christian insights into the quest for God and full humanity; we invite the hearer to spiritual growth, to *metanoia* or conversion to God and the priorities of the Gospel. Justice and liberation are central among these priorities. The fundamental question that all ministry undertaken in the name of Jesus must address is this: 'What does the liberation promised by our Gospel mean for the people to whom I minister?' Evangelisation is not conversion to the faith or expanding the Church, but an offer of liberation from oppression, whatever from oppression takes.

Abject material poverty is a fact of life for millions and this must never be forgotten. Poverty in these contexts can be described as the absence of the choice to be able to change one's material circumstances. It can also be argued that there are other interpretations of poverty which maybe particularly applicable to the circumstances of many in Western society. Kersten describes first world poverty as:

...the poverty of ignorance and apathy to the daily reality of de-humanizing oppression and exploitation, created by the first world idols of capitalism, materialism, consumerism and opportunism. By means of extensive advertising, persons in the world are constantly exploited into believing that material possessions, status and personal gratification are the ultimate goals of human existence. The secular gods of power, prestige and privilege are eagerly admired and covered, and blindly worshipped.

Many people in contemporary Western society are oppressed in that they have lost (or have never claimed) the ability to make meaning for themselves. These people are passive recipients of a version of reality that is not their own. This 'spiritual poverty', for want of a better term, is also characterised by absence of the ability to choose.

Michael Paul Gallagher suggests that one of the key tasks for education in response to this condition of cultural oppression is to provide a shield against the kidnapping of the spiritual imagination of youth. When this happens the dominant culture becomes the norm, beyond question and the way things are. Individuals and groups who take their core mission from the Christian Gospel, as well as witnessing to the power of this message of life and hope in individual and group experience, are also obliged to challenge what is not life-giving and what is dehumanising in our world.

Our society is so desperately devoid of heroes. The Greek roots of the word suggest that the hero is *one who can choose*. The hero interprets life through her/his own experience. The journey is

never easy since it constantly leads to questioning and interrogation of the culture in which one lives. Who am I? What is valuable? How do I find peace and happiness? These questions constantly disturb the hero who dares to ask and live those questions. The hero is healthily suspicious of easy answers to these questions that are readily on offer in the dominant culture. Education should be in the business of creating heroes who can choose meaning and not have it thrust upon them! An exciting thought!

I often make the point that any of the principals and norms for evangelisation that we apply to mission in the context of work in cultures outside of Australia, are equally applicable to our work with young people and their culture here at home. Teachers, trained and untrained, who daily enter both Catholic and State schools to bring 'Good News' in our name, make the Reign of God present to their students in ways which dialogue with and respect their culture. This task is particularly difficult in state schools where resources are limited and support from the Catholic community is less tangible. Just as the Reign of God is broader than the Church, Catholic education is broader than Catholic schools. Our hope is that we can all recognise this and explore ways of cooperation and support.

## **2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROVISION OF SPECIAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NSW STATE SCHOOLS.**

To appreciate the opportunity that we are presented with today, to enter State schools and teach "Special Religious Education", it is necessary to realise the historical perspective.

Allen Roberts (1989) identified three stages in the development of education during the first 100 years of Australia's history.

**First Stage:** the acceptance of the responsibility for education of the rising generation by the Churches.

**Second Stage:** denominational rivalry and compromise with the State.

**Third Stage:** secular State education with religious neutrality.

This Third Stage was characterised by the introduction of the NSW Public Instruction Act 1880. An Act which established a system of education in NSW that was to be free, secular, compulsory and centralised (and also remove state aid from all church schools).

Clause 7 of the Act reads

*"In all schools under the Act, the teachers shall be strictly non-sectarian but the words "secular education" shall be held to include the general religious teaching as distinguished from dogmatic or polemical theology.*

Clause 17, in part read

"A part of **each day**, not more than 1 hour, shall be set aside when the children of any religious persuasion may be instructed by the clergyman or other religious teachers of a religious persuasion; but, in all cases, the pupil receiving the religious instruction shall be separated from the other pupils of the school."

If one examines the NSW Education Act 1990, the Act in force today, Clause 30 reads almost word for word as Clause 7, although Clause 32 has reduced the time for teaching from one hour **per day** to one hour **per week**.

So in 2007, we enjoy a legislative right to provide religious education that has survived the passage of nearly 130 years. This does not mean attempts have not been made to remove SRE,

with a recurring push for parliamentary review of entitlements happening in most States from time to time.

More than 90 “approved religions” have access to State school premises and classes may be faith specific (e.g. all the Catholic children in a class) or faith generic (all Christian children taught by Catholic, Baptist, Uniting or Anglican religious educators). Cross authorisation by all Churches is necessary in joint denominational classes and the appointment of SRE teaching personnel, in keeping with government requirements, is the sole responsibility of the religious group.

Parents in State schools are asked, when first enrolling their child, to advise of the child’s religious denomination. They have the right to enroll their child in, or withdraw their child from, any SRE class without being required to state any reason. The Education Act also calls on parents to support and co-operate in SRE wherever possible.

Current statistics shows 48% of Catholic Children are attending non-Catholic schools (NCEC publication, June 2005). The reasons for changing trends are many and include

- No parental attachment to a parish faith community
- Questioning of Church authority and teachings
- Geographical distribution of schools
- Financial considerations
- Social issues, including changing family structures
- Perception of religious schools
- Educational attainment level of the parents

Robert Dixon (2005) details trends such as children from one-parent families being less likely to attend Catholic schools and the medium income of families of catholic children in catholic schools being 27% higher(primary) and 35%(secondary) than the medium income of Catholic children in government schools.

Such observations reinforce the vital role of SRE in State schools – how else are poorer and indigenous families to hear the Good News if not from volunteers responding to the opportunity offered, by both the State and the Holy Spirit, to go into State schools. This legislated access is a rarity in the worldwide picture and a challenging chance for evangelization!

Fr Frank Brennan sj,(2004) in a paper titled *What Do Our Students Rightly Ask Of Us, the Church Who Are Many Parts of One Body*, stated

“...all of us need to be taken beyond our comfort zone. That is where we find human growth and authenticity . That is where we find hope for ourselves and our world. This is where we find God. “

Reaching beyond their comfort zone is a big ask for our Catholic Diocesan communities and their SRE/CCD Directors, but an essential part of our mission to spread the Good News and expose **all** Catholic children to their gift of faith. These SRE Directors have the enormous task of ensuring that volunteer teachers are trained and in-serviced to provide effective Catholic education to Catholic Children outside the Catholic schools system. They do so with the constant support of CCRESS (Committee for Catholic religious education in State Schools) and the varying support of their Dioceses and Catholic communities.

These SRE Directors have taken the time to send you -their fellow Leaders of Catholic Education gathered at this Conference – a postcard message.

### **3.A MESSAGE FROM YOUR COLLEAGUES IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION:**

We have reflected on the Gospel's call to us all to act as missionaries, as well as our unique access to NSW State Schools. It is now time to hear from your **fellow** Catholic Educational Leaders whose mission, and Diocesan role it is, to prepare the way for the delivery of the "Good News" to Catholic children who are attending non-Catholic Schools – just over 444,000 students nationally at the time of the ABS 2001 Census. At the same time, the number of Catholic children in Catholic schools nationally numbered just over 477,000 (Robert Dixon 2005).

We know that the social and economic profile of catholic families attending catholic schools is changing. Add to this that the national growth in catholic school numbers is a result of the increase of **non-catholic** students, covering a fall in catholic numbers, and the role of SRE in State schools becomes an increasingly obvious and vital diocesan outreach.

In 2005, Bishop Michael Putney (Townsville) provided a summary of trends in Catholic Education to the Australian Bishops. In that document he affirmed the value and importance of SRE in State schools, saying

*"Articulating and promoting the mission of the Church to the 50% of Catholic students in government and non-government non-catholic schools **has also become a more pressing need as the profile of the Catholic school changes.**"*

When, in 1884, the dual system of general education began, it was not without parental qualms about the integrity of the National System's teachers. Therefore, the official stipulation required:

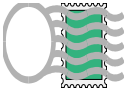
*A teacher should be a person of **Christian sentiment**, of calm temper and discretion, should be imbued with a spirit of peace, of obedience to the law, and loyalty to the Sovereign; and should not only possess the art of communicating knowledge, but be capable of moulding the mind of youth, and of giving the power which education confers, a useful direction. (report of Government Committee 1980, p9)*

Today, the 11 NSW Diocesan Directors of SRE, facilitate the visits of 5565 volunteer teachers of "**Christian sentiment**", to 1339 primary, secondary and special State schools across NSW. These Diocesan Leaders come well equipped, not only with a desire to give a "useful direction" to the lives of Catholic students, but with formal qualifications matching those of other Catholic Educational Leaders in more mainstream positions.

These 11 men and women, reflecting the opinions and experiences of their 5565 volunteer teachers, have availed themselves of the opportunity of this Catholic Leadership Conference to send you, their colleagues, a postcard message of greeting. When considering directions for "educational leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century", they are hoping (and praying) that State School SRE is a vital part of your total vision.

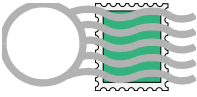
The SRE Director's postcard message to you addresses the title of the Conference from the perspective of SRE in NSW State Schools – it reflects **their** Reality, **their** Vision and **their** Challenges

TABLE 1.

<p><b>Dear Colleagues in Catholic Education,</b></p> <p><b>Please find attached to this postcard a summary of our experience of the REALITY of teaching SRE to the 50% of Catholic children who attend NSW non-Catholic schools.</b></p> <p><b>Signed:</b> <b>NSW SRE Directors/Co-ordinators.</b></p>	 <p>TO Conference Delegates Catholic Education Conference Wentworth Hotel Sydney NSW Australia 2000</p>
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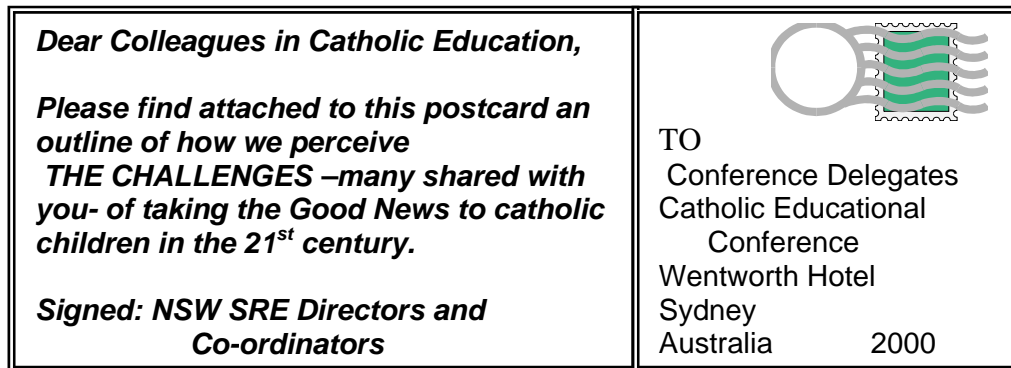
- There is an undermining movement within some educational/ community circles, with the aim to eliminate “Scripture” sessions in State schools
- Secondary SRE requires a massive upgrading and injection of support with a programme which really meets educational outcomes and rigor. This area requires the services of appropriately trained religious educators.
- Recruitment of volunteers is becoming a more difficult task with the reality of society demands and Increasingly complex Government requirements
- We have isolated parishes , small communities and an aging population of faith proclaimers – the job description is VERY daunting!
- Limited financial support from Dioceses or parishes to support SRE teachers
- Lack of Parish recognition of CCD Ministry and work of SRE Teachers
- SRE Teachers are generous, faith filled people who quietly go about their tasks, contributing financially to the ministry without complaint because they understand the Mission
- SRE Teachers are often marginalised because they work with the marginalised
- The changing role of volunteering today ;it is very different for the last two generations
- Many have limited professional development opportunities – attending conferences is limited by little acknowledgement of the need for financial support
- Catholic leadership is not always inclusive of SRE/CCD Leadership
- Catholic education does not always include/recognise the work of CCD
- Too few teachers/volunteers
- Difficult conditions for teachers
- Frequent disturbances to State school classes and routines
- Lack of support from other areas of “Catholic Education”
- There is a developing recognition of the equal importance of education in faith of catholic children in State Schools – it is an ongoing, and frustrating, journey towards equality.
- We are responding to needs by the development of a new program for years K-6.
- Increased involvement of ethic groups and younger groups at secondary schools
- The provision of a new program reaching out to parents through “Home Activities”
- Increased student and catechist involvement in the overall picture of catechesis
- Our ministry is valued by many schools and by many families. We provide an alternative viewpoint which is important. We are not likely to be appreciated by everyone but we do provide an essential service to children and their families and so to the world in which we live.
- Children who receive the Sacraments do not come to Mass before or after first reception of the Sacraments.

TABLE 2.

<p><b><i>Dear Colleagues in Catholic Education,</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Please find attached to this postcard an overview of how we see the directions and THE VISION for SRE in State Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Signed:</i></b></p> <p><b><i>NSW SRE Directors/Co-ordinators</i></b></p>	 <p>TO Conference Delegates Catholic Education Conference Wentworth Hotel Sydney Australia 2000</p>
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- That we express the evangelising mission of the Church through the ministry of Special Religious Education in State Schools.
- That the Catholic Church in Australia will better understand the importance of its evangelising mission to Catholic students who attend government schools.
- That Church leaders will provide the necessary resources (both financial and human) to continue and expand this most important work, seeing all Catholic students as viable members of Church.
- That one day all catholic children will be treated equally in every parish
- That SRE lessons will be competently taught by faith filled people
- That the families of children attending State schools will find a welcoming, caring parish community and to outreach to as many families of State school students as possible.
- To continue to serve the marginalized in our society
- To bring to life the teachings of Jesus Christ in the lives of the children and their families
- To bring children to the understanding of their own faith
- To contribute to the formation of the whole person through education towards and in faith
- To develop and foster good work practices and increase catechist recruitment.
- To develop a curriculum that is in touch with the individual, their community, parish and faith.
- That parents role as primary faith educators is supported by receiving the SRE at school
- That a real presence be nourished, in its many forms, in secondary schools.
- To assist children and their families to make sense of their lives through Christian values
- To provide and give witness to a religious dimension in State Schools
- To assist students to grow in their relationship with God and be formed in Catholic tradition.
- That Appropriate and stimulating lessons given by competent and well trained teachers.
- To bring children and youth to the knowledge of a God of love and forgiveness
- That the faith education of ALL catholic students become a top priority
- To be a positive influence in the faith journey of Catholic students we encounter
- To see “soon to retire” Catholic school teachers in the SRE Ministry with the encourage of hierarchy, clergy and NCEC members.
- That all involved in faith education understand SRE in State Schools is not in competition. We are all part of the teaching ministry of the Church and need support.
- TO make a difference in as many lives as possible by teaching students about God, about prayer, about Scripture, about the tradition and doctrine of the Catholic Church. This hopefully will lead to their living a Christian life, making informed decisions and a valuable contribution towards a peaceful and just society.

**TABLE 3.**



- Making CHURCH aware of the need to support all Catholic students in their parishes
- Working together with the various Churches/Faiths to show a “common purpose” as we combine to ensure the availability of “Scripture”
- Attracting volunteers to teach SRE
- Updating SRE programmes in a way that takes into account the development of students and that also presents a Christian message in a way relevant to students in a State school environment
- Out- reach to students in secondary schools, with material that gives a life message
- Facilitating parental involvement in the religious education of their children
- Encouraging and developing younger catechists to teach in secondary schools
- Financial constraints
- Resistance of a number of key stake holders from Parish Priests to School Principals and CSO Staff
- Lack of support from other Catholic bodies/ agencies/ministries
- Changing the mentality of “exclusivity” among members of the Church and Catholic system to one that is inclusive of Catholic children in Government schools
- An aging workforce
- Having to stand up for “the rights” of State School children
- The Ministry not being given the recognition it deserves
- More support needed from Church Leaders
- Over coming the stereotyping of children attending State Schools
- To see SRE Teachers recognised as providing a valuable contribution in evangelising and faith development of the Church.
- The narrow focus of Catholic tertiary education which is focused on “catholic schools” not “catholic education”
- To show all stake holders that a commitment to a belief system is a right and that all students should have a creed to which they can lay their life standards upon.
- Maintaining services to schools with an aging population and a decreasing number of volunteers
- TO support Catholic children of primary students in secondary years in rural towns where Catholic children have no access to a Catholic High School.
- A materialistic society with little understanding of personal responsibility/accountability
- How to introduce Jesus and the Gospel to disinterested children and adults
- Adult education and formation for SRE Teachers. How do adults learn?
- Raising awareness of the vital role of SRE Teachers

As you will have noticed, there is much common ground in Catholic Education, whether you are proclaiming the Good News in Catholic or non-Catholic schools.

**This postcard from SRE Directors** is to reassure you that you are not alone in your **VISION** of the spreading the Good News to Catholic Children. SRE in State Schools is **alive (sometimes just)**, and your colleagues are working very hard to ensure that the Government's invitation is accepted, and valued, just a St Paul did when his invitation arrived from Athens – ACTS 17:19-20.

Despite the **REALITY** of constantly changing agendas faced by SRE in State Schools, those leading this evangelising outreach of the Church are **fit and well (depending though, on when you ask!)**. They are faced daily with the same organizational issues of staffing, finances and curriculum as those in Catholic Schools, but are forced to go forward with few equivalent resources. They are buoyed though, by the hope that they too will have the results that St Peter did in Caesarea - ACTS 10: 44 .

We conclude the postcard message with a sentiment that often finishes correspondence from family members – **hoping to hear from you soon!** The **CHALLENGES** faced by SRE Directors would be greatly reduced if they felt included within the title of “Catholic Educational Leaders”. Currently, their perception is one of being marginalised by dated thinking that Catholic Schools are the only available (and true) “pasture” for Catholic children. Times of drought offer a reminder of the value of working together to review, and renew, our joint endeavours, all aimed towards the same missionary goals.

ACTS 4:32-34 best explains what SRE Directors are hoping, and praying, to experience!

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