



Vive Spiritu Fidei
Live by the Spirit of Faith

**La Salle
Academy
Publications**

Number 13

**AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC
UNIVERSITY**

**Teachers
in Catholic
secondary
schools and
the New
Evangelisation**

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April 2023



ACU

LA SALLE ACADEMY



Contents

Foreword	1
Executive summary	2
Teachers in Catholic secondary schools and the New Evangelisation	3
The New Evangelisation	3
Teachers in Catholic secondary schools and the New Evangelisation ¹	3
Conclusions of the research	5
Recommendations	10
Conclusion	11
Spiritus Program	12
References	16

Foreword

In 2017, the La Salle Academy at ACU introduced a new program for leaders and teachers in Catholic education: *Leading the New Evangelisation*. It had a swift and strong uptake in some sectors of the Church but not in others. As we sought to promote the program more widely, we found the term 'New Evangelisation' was a stumbling block for many. For some, 'evangelisation' was understood as a particular type of Christianity – the happy-clappy style that exuded enthusiasm and spontaneity. "It's not our way of being Christian," many told us. For others, 'new' was problematic. Despite the future-focused nature of the word, they equated it with a restorationist approach with an overemphasis on practices of piety "that do not appeal".

When we had the opportunity to explain that the program was essentially about two things – understanding the Catholic school as an agent of the Church's mission of evangelisation, and how schools could be more effective centres of evangelisation – the uptake was enthusiastic.

We needed a new name. Several options were considered but none of them felt right. Archbishop Christopher Prowse, as a frequent presenter in the program, continually reminds us that while our skills and strategies are essential for effective evangelisation, we must never forget that the Holy Spirit is the protagonist. From this emerged the change of name: moving from *Leading the New Evangelisation* to 'Spiritus'. Our work in evangelisation is about bringing God's Spirit to life in

the world so as to build a new humanity characterised by justice, mercy, freedom and compassion.

What has become apparent to us through Spiritus is how effective a well-formed evangeliser can be in achieving this noble objective. Educators who are witnesses to the message of Jesus, fired by the love of God, transform the world for good and in so doing inspire the young people in their care to do the same. But we need more of such educators. We need more convincing witnesses working together in schools that are centres of evangelisation.

How do we do this and what should we do? Dr John Robinson is a Regional Director in Marist Schools Australia, and he focused his doctoral research on teachers as evangelisers. He addressed essential questions: What are the blocks and pitfalls? What are the opportunities? Where should we put our efforts and resources in supporting teachers to be evangelisers in our schools? In this edition of *La Salle Academy Publications*, John provides us with a synthesis of his research. I commend it to you as you seek to sharpen your efforts in developing schools that are centres of evangelisation.



Professor Br David Hall FMS
Dean, La Salle Academy

Executive summary²

Christianity, and specifically Roman Catholicism, is experiencing a period of global growth at the same time as declining affiliation, and practice of the Christian faith is evident in many developed nations³. This decline is evident in Australia⁴. The Roman Catholic Church has responded to the decline in affiliation and practice through an initiative called the 'New Evangelisation'. The emphasis on the New Evangelisation by the Catholic Church has contributed to the decision by Australian ecclesial and educational leaders to incorporate the New Evangelisation explicitly into the mission of Catholic schools⁵. Moreover, programs have been introduced into schools to engage school communities as 'centres of the New Evangelisation'. Consequently, teachers in Catholic schools are expected to be the primary conduits for New Evangelisation initiatives⁶.

The research problem underpinning the study concerned teachers' understanding of and engagement with the New Evangelisation in Catholic secondary schools. The purpose of the research was to explore how teachers in Catholic secondary schools experience the New Evangelisation. The major research question was: How do teachers in Catholic secondary schools experience the New Evangelisation? The following questions focus the conduct of the research:

1. How do teachers in Catholic secondary schools experience the contemporary expression of Catholicism?
2. How do teachers understand the New Evangelisation?
3. How do teachers respond to the New Evangelisation in Catholic secondary schools?

Findings of the research project generated eight conclusions relating to new knowledge, policy and practice.

First, teacher participants distinguish between the experience of contemporary Catholicism within the Catholic secondary school and the experience of Catholicism in parishes and the institutional Catholic Church.

Second, Catholic schools ensure appropriate expressions of Catholic practice for staff and students and, for many Catholics, the Catholic school is the only community in which they worship.

Third, the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (ARCIRCSA) has exacerbated the disinterest in, if not rejection of, Catholicism by many Catholic students, families and staff. Further, the study concludes that the ARCIRCSA has exacerbated the challenges which teachers experience concerning evangelising in a secular context.

Fourth, the concept of the New Evangelisation is problematic for some teachers who are charged with its implementation.

Fifth, teacher participants exhibit multiple, contestable and contrasting understandings of the concept of the New Evangelisation.

Sixth, the study concludes that there are five distinct issues which mitigate against Australian Catholic secondary schools' implementation of the New Evangelisation.

Seventh, teacher participants implement the New Evangelisation according to their individual understandings of what constitutes the New Evangelisation. Since teachers do not share an agreed purpose for the

New Evangelisation, they have multiple and at times conflicting responses to it.

Finally, this study concludes that a relatively small number of teachers are responsible for the implementation of the New Evangelisation in Australian Catholic secondary schools. This study is of significance because it may assist in appropriately preparing school leaders and teachers to implement the New Evangelisation by addressing the paucity of research regarding teachers' understanding and implementation of the New Evangelisation in Catholic schools.

The conclusions of this research emanate from teachers' experiences of contemporary Catholicism and their understanding of and responses to the concept of the New Evangelisation. While the five synthesised recommendations address both policy and practice specific to Catholic secondary schools, these may have broader application to other Church ministries. The recommendations are that Catholic educational and ecclesial authorities and school leaders:

- i. identify the positive experiences of Catholicism in Australian Catholic secondary schools
- ii. identify the characteristics of effective teacher evangelisers clarify the concept of contemporary evangelisation
- iii. identify and strategically address the impediments to contemporary evangelisation
- iv. ensure that evangelisation plans are developed for Australian Catholic secondary schools.

Teachers in Catholic secondary schools and the New Evangelisation

The Catholic school derives its purpose from the mission of the Catholic Church, which is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God⁷. Jesus used the metaphor of the Kingdom of God as the central tenet of his life and teaching. The Kingdom or Reign of God was Jesus's vision for how life should be lived⁸. This vision presented a radical challenge to social, political and religious institutions because it proclaimed a message of justice and compassion. In particular, it revealed God as loving of all people, especially the poor.

Beginning with the early followers of Jesus, the mission of the Christian Church has been to evangelise.

That is, to present Jesus Christ and articulate and enable the realisation of the Kingdom of God in the world⁹. Therefore, in simple terms, “evangelisation is to make the Kingdom of God present in our world”¹⁰ and,

“constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise.”¹¹

Catholic schools embrace the mission of Jesus and evangelise in a specific way within the Church. They do so by authentically nurturing the humanity¹²

of the school community “through a clear educational project of which Christ is the foundation, directed at creating a synthesis between faith, culture and life”¹³. In providing this education, the Catholic school endeavours to make the Kingdom of God a lived experience. Consequently, **evangelisation through education** is not simply another strategic priority for a Catholic school. Rather, this principle is the primary reason for the existence of Catholic schools and, in its many manifestations, evangelisation through education is how a school community expresses its “deepest identity” as disciples of Jesus.

The New Evangelisation

The concept of the New Evangelisation has its genesis in the historical, sociological and religious changes of the 20th century. In response to these circumstances, Pope Saint John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council in 1959, and across the period (1962–1965) it discerned the directions for the Church into the 20th century. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar documents of the Council indicate the urgency of the task of contemporary evangelisation in response “to the signs of the times”¹⁴. A decade after the Second Vatican Council, and in keeping with its theme of sharing the Gospel, Pope Paul VI issued a pioneering document on evangelisation in the modern world, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 1975a). It affirmed that “the Church exists to evangelise”, and that the purpose of contemporary evangelisation is to bring “the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new”¹⁵. Importantly, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* also identified the complexity of the concept of evangelisation, noting that:

...any partial and fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelisation in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it. It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelisation unless one tries to keep in view all its essential elements¹⁶.

Subsequently, Pope Saint John Paul II (1978–2005) amplified the concept of evangelisation and introduced the novel term ‘New Evangelisation’ when he addressed the Catholic Bishops of Latin America in 1983. In this context, the concept of the New Evangelisation:

...was more rooted in interpreting the implications of the Gospel for the lived reality of people, particularly marginalised people that the Church was neglecting. It was, in essence, the kind of recontextualising that has needed to happen time and again in the story of the Church, and the kind of process in which every ecclesial community has needed to enter if its relevance and vitality have continued.¹⁷

He challenged them to “a commitment not of re-evangelisation, but rather of a new evangelisation; new in its ardour, methods and expression”¹⁸.

The urgency of evangelisation in the context of the renewal of the entire Catholic Church characterises both the papacy of the late Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. During Pope Francis's papacy, mission and evangelisation have become interchangeable concepts confirming the centrality of mission to the identity of the Catholic Church¹⁹. For Pope Francis, the Church is constantly in a state of mission²⁰ and the baptised are missionary disciples enacting God's mission in the world:

I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for the Church's own self-preservation²¹.

Thus, in a papal sense, what “Paul VI foresaw, John Paul II initiated, Benedict XVI institutionalised and Francis embodies”²². Evangelisation, and subsequently, the concept of the New Evangelisation, has become the focus of a considerable quantum of ecclesial literature and has remained a constant since the Second Vatican Council²³. While the Catholic Church has continued to prioritise the New Evangelisation and its implementation in diverse cultural and religious contexts, unsurprisingly, the meaning of the New Evangelisation is contested and continues to be deliberated upon by Church personnel and Church agencies²⁴.

In 1998, the priority of the New Evangelisation in Australia was emphasised during the Synod of the Catholic Bishops of Oceania²⁵. Subsequently, John Paul II

identified the need in Oceania for “a representation of the Gospel (by) new ways and methods of evangelisation, inspired by deeper faith, hope and love of the Lord Jesus”²⁶. Within the overall call to the Church in Oceania, he emphasised the threefold importance of Catholic schools’ contributions to the New Evangelisation agenda. First, in partnership with the broader Catholic community, the Catholic school is an essential agency for evangelisation. Second, Catholic schools in Oceania are successful and contribute effectively to the evangelising mission of the Church. Finally, teachers in Catholic schools are integral to the New Evangelisation:

The identity and success of Catholic education is linked inseparably to the witness of life given by the teaching staff.... School staff who truly live their faith will be agents of a new evangelisation in creating

a positive climate for the Christian faith to grow and in spiritually nourishing the students entrusted to their care²⁷.

Subsequently, in 2007, the Catholic bishops of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory committed Catholic schools to being “centres of the New Evangelisation”²⁸. The implications of this commitment were that Catholic schools were encouraged to become centres of New Evangelisation and that teachers in Catholic schools were affirmed as agents of the New Evangelisation. In 2021, the Bicentenary of Catholic Education in Australia, this commitment was reinforced by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in their Pastoral Letter to the leaders, staff, students and families of Catholic education in Australia, *200 Years Young*²⁹.

Teachers’ experiences of the New Evangelisation

While acknowledging the considerable body of ecclesial and educational literature regarding the New Evangelisation, and the ecclesial aspirations that Catholic schools are centres of the New Evangelisation, there is a paucity of research regarding teachers’ experiences of the New Evangelisation. In response to this lacuna, 2020 case study research³⁰ identified how a group of educators in Australian Catholic secondary schools understood the concept of the New Evangelisation and how, as a result of their understanding, they sought to evangelise. This research presents insights into teachers’ perceptions of their role in the Church’s evangelising mission and the barriers they encounter as they seek to evangelise through education.

During the period in which the data gathering for the research was conducted (2014–2016), teachers in Catholic secondary schools comprised 53 per cent of all teachers in Australian Catholic schools.³¹ However, teachers in Australian Catholic schools do not exhibit a homogenous religious profile. Indeed, not all teachers employed in Catholic secondary schools are Catholics. In the Australian state in which the research was conducted (New South Wales), 27 per cent of teachers in Catholic secondary schools were other than Catholic.³² So, while teachers are understood to be integral to the essence of the Catholic school

and its evangelising imperative, many teachers in Australian Catholic schools have a tenuous or no formal relationship with the Church. In addition to those who are not Catholic, some teachers who identify as Catholic are argued to vary in knowledge and adherence to Catholic teaching and the authority of the Church to influence personal decision-making. Like their peers in other walks of life, many teachers disassociate from mainstream religious identification, adherence and practice, many seeking more personalised and privatised forms of spirituality.

Given this complexity, the imperative of capturing ‘teacher voices’ concerning the New Evangelisation influenced the research design and methodology and informed the research questions generated through a review of the literature. The questions comprised:

1. How do teachers in Catholic secondary schools experience the contemporary expression of Catholicism?
2. How do teachers understand the New Evangelisation?
3. How do teachers respond to the New Evangelisation in Catholic secondary schools?

The participants in the research were teachers in three Catholic diocese-governed secondary schools. Two of the schools were coeducational; the third a large all-boys college. Two of

the three schools were founded by religious congregations, one claiming a ‘dual charism’, while the third school was founded entirely by lay staff and without the influence of any specific charism. The three schools provided an extensive range of documentary evidence identifying each school’s evangelisation initiatives and programs. All staff in the three schools were invited to participate in the research and 27 teachers volunteered to be interviewed. These teachers participated in either semi-structured focus groups or in individual semi-structured interviews.

A case study approach was adopted for the research in which time, place and people bind the case that is explored. As such, the purpose of a case study is not to represent every instance of a phenomenon, but to represent a specific case, notwithstanding the fact that a single case study may have broader application³³. Thus, by illuminating the experiences in one context, case study research can assist in informing the experience in other situations. Consequently, the research provides insights into teachers’ experience of evangelisation through education within specific cases. However, the research conclusions and recommendations may also have broad applications for Catholic schools in general, Catholic school authorities, formators, parishes, youth ministry and other ministries within the Church.

Conclusions of the research

The research generated eight major conclusions.

i. Teachers' experiences of contemporary Catholicism are neutral or negative – disaffiliation, disconnection and decline

I think part of the reason that we've lost people... [is that] we lost a [Catholic] culture, and for us it's building up a culture, and a culture in a different way.³⁴

The first conclusion concerns teachers' general experiences of Catholicism. These teachers' experiences of Roman Catholicism are characterised by increasing disaffiliation, disconnection from the local Church, especially the local parish, and declining adherence to Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. This conclusion is consistent with international and Australian research in Roman Catholic affiliation and practice, especially in developed nations³⁵. The research confirms that the absence of traditional Catholic inculturation practices, the competing demands on the time of students, teachers and families, and the perceived irrelevancy and incredibility of many Catholic beliefs and teachings to some teachers and students contribute to the loose affiliation of many Australian Catholics with Catholic belief and practice. Consequently, nominal Catholicism, intermittent worship and a tenuous relationship with the institutional Catholic Church characterises much of the experience of contemporary Catholicism for teacher participants. As one school leader reflected,

...[Students] might have their licence in their wallet as I say, like their Sacraments of Initiation.... Sometimes basically that's even an entrée to Catholic schooling for some of them. But a lot of them ... don't see the necessity to be engaged with the Church while they consider themselves still part of the Church. So [they are] baptised, they're card-carrying Catholics and it's much the same with our teachers³⁶.

ii. Teachers' experiences of contemporary Catholicism in Catholic secondary schools are positive – invitation, inclusivity and innovation

The second conclusion generated in this research is that teachers distinguish between the experience of contemporary Catholicism within

the Catholic secondary school and the experience of Catholicism in parishes and the institutional Catholic Church. This study concludes that teacher participants experience positively the contemporary expressions of Catholicism in Australian Catholic secondary schools. In fact, many participants indicated that the Catholic secondary school in which they now worked was 'more Catholic' compared with their own schooling or what they experienced earlier in their teaching career. This positive experience is characterised by the invitation to all to engage with opportunities for Catholic worship and practice, inclusivity and innovation. Given the positive experience of Catholicism in these schools, most students and staff identify enthusiastically with Catholic schools and engage with the contemporary expression of Catholicism offered in these schools:

There are challenges, but I think the students [are] actually ... hungry for their faith. I think that's exactly what it is. They're part of the Catholic Community and they want to experience what it means to be a Catholic as often as they can, and the challenge is for the school to do that³⁷.

In contrast, many teacher participants perceive these positive experiences and expressions as lacking in Catholic parishes. Despite this phenomenon, considerable efforts occur in Catholic secondary schools – often in cooperation with local Catholic parishes and their priests – to connect staff, students and their families to Catholic parishes. However, regardless of these initiatives, many students, staff and families in Catholic schools rarely worship in parishes. Thus, the study concludes that the Catholic school is the only community in which many Catholics worship and that these Catholic schools ensure Catholic practice for many Australian Catholics. Further, this study concludes that Catholic schools deliberately offer to their constituencies selective, meaningful and often innovative expressions of spirituality and worship to their constituency³⁸. Consequently, it is teachers in these schools who are responsible for offering meaningful and engaging expressions of Catholicism which, while embraced by some teachers, is also experienced by other teachers as an additional expectation

on themselves as educators in Catholic schools.

iii. The influence of the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (ARCIRCSA)

The third conclusion generated in this research concerns the influence of the ARCIRCSA on teachers in Australian Catholic secondary schools. The ARCIRCSA occurred simultaneously with the conduct of this research. The credibility and relevance of the Australian Catholic Church has been challenged by the ARCIRCSA findings, which identify a history of child sexual abuse within Australian Catholic schools and failures in responding adequately when complaints occurred³⁹. The study concludes that the influence of the ARCIRCSA on teachers in Australian Catholic secondary schools is twofold.

First, the ARCIRCSA has exacerbated the disinterest in, if not rejection of, Catholicism by many Catholic students, families and staff. Moreover, the prevalence of child sexual abuse within Catholic institutions and the failures of the Church to respond adequately have undermined, for many, the credibility of Catholicism in Australia. Second, the study concludes that the ARCIRCSA has exacerbated the challenges which teachers experience concerning evangelising in a secular context:

[Catholicism is] a very hard message at times. It's heightened at times when the media's got a real focus on a negative aspect of the Church. Then, too, it feels at times [that] even to speak [about] anything that's connected with [the] Church ... is hard.... [Catholicism] has become an even harder story to sell, because in the forefront of people's minds are things like the Royal Commission and abuse claims, and it keeps bubbling away⁴⁰.

In addition to the challenges to the New Evangelisation posed by the ARCIRCSA, the study indicates that teacher and/or school leader participants have at times needed to communicate a cogent and faith-based explanation of a "global criminal phenomenon"⁴¹. Participants indicate that these experiences have had a deleterious influence on their motivation to promote the New Evangelisation.

iv. The absence of a common understanding of the New Evangelisation shared by teachers in Australian Catholic secondary schools

The fourth conclusion generated by the research is that teacher participants hold multiple understandings of the concept of the New Evangelisation.

Predictably, teachers’ perceptions of the New Evangelisation reflect the dynamic and contested ecclesial understandings of the concept of the New Evangelisation. Therefore, while ecclesial authorities may enunciate the rich and dynamic nature of evangelisation⁴², teacher participants adhere to individual and

at times conflicting interpretations of the concept. Further, the research concludes that many of these understandings are interrelated and are not mutually exclusive. The eight descriptors of teachers’ understandings of the concept of the New Evangelisation are illustrated in Table 1:

TABLE 1: TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES OF THE NEW EVANGELISATION

DESCRIPTOR	UNDERSTANDING
The rejecters	These teachers reject the concept of a New Evangelisation. They believe that evangelisation has been fundamental to the Christian community since the time of Jesus. For them, there is nothing new in evangelisation.
The converters	These teachers understand the New Evangelisation as contemporary Catholicism’s renewed approach to conversion.
The restorers	These teachers understand the New Evangelisation as the mission of the Catholic Church to restore its relevance in the contemporary world.
The connectors	These teachers believe the New Evangelisation’s primary focus is reconnecting non-practising Catholics with the Church.
The conduits	These teachers understand the New Evangelisation as the establishment of conduits to connect people to the contemporary Catholic community.
The witnesses	These teachers are personally committed Christians who try to live authentic lives which honour honesty, caring, service, respect and commitment, especially to those who are in need. The New Evangelisation for them is their Christian witness.
The invigorators	These teachers understand the New Evangelisation as a mission of the contemporary Catholic Church to invigorate the faith of baptised Catholics.
The inviters	These teachers understand the New Evangelisation as the invitation to all to encounter God, particularly through the Catholic community.

The absence of a universally agreed understanding of what constitutes the meaning and purpose of the New Evangelisation is concerning, particularly in light of the supposed centrality of the New Evangelisation to the very nature and purpose of Catholic schools as centres of the New Evangelisation. Further, the absence of a collective understanding of the concept of the New Evangelisation is an anomaly in the contemporary Australian educational context. This is because most Australian Catholic schools consistently generate successful, whole-of-school, agreed understandings of and approaches to other priorities, such as what would constitute quality contemporary pedagogy⁴³ and strategies which promote ongoing school improvement and quality assurance⁴⁴.

v. The New Evangelisation is problematic and rejected by some teachers

In every interview, teacher participants expressed some form of reticence and even rejection of the term New

Evangelisation, best articulated by one teacher,

I’ve got to be honest and say I don’t like the term ‘evangelisation’. I think people often call it ‘the E word’ and it scares people....⁴⁵

Thus, the research concludes that the concept of the New Evangelisation is problematic for teachers who are charged with its implementation. There are three reasons for this. First, for many participants, the term evangelisation is associated with a proselytising agenda, perceived to convert religiously uninvolved staff or students or disaffiliated Catholics to become practising Catholics. While this agenda is rejected by most teachers, the term New Evangelisation continues to have this negative connotation. Consequently, some teachers reject any responsibility for its promotion. Second, some teacher participants reject the New Evangelisation because they believe that there is no ‘new’ evangelisation, as evangelisation has been the fundamental responsibility of the Christian community since the

time of Jesus. Third, some teachers reject any engagement with the New Evangelisation agenda because they insist that their primary responsibility as teachers in Catholic schools is to teach their subject discipline while demonstrably addressing national curriculum obligations and providing a high duty of care for students. Consequently, the study concludes that, in each school, a proportion of teachers reject any responsibility for implementing the New Evangelisation.

vi. Responses to the New Evangelisation in Australian Catholic secondary schools

Given that participants exhibit contestable and contrasting understandings of the concept of the New Evangelisation, the study concludes that teachers respond to the New Evangelisation according to their personal understanding of it. *Further*, since teachers do not share an agreed purpose for the New Evangelisation, they have multiple and at times conflicting experiences and responses to it as illustrated in Table 2:

TABLE 2: TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO THE NEW EVANGELISATION

RESPONSES	EXPLANATION
Foundations	The purposeful integration of foundational Catholic traditions, values, practices and beliefs into the school..
Opportunities	The provision of evangelisation opportunities and experiences, additional to foundational practices, both within and beyond the school context (eg social justice outreach and immersions).
Relationships	The quality of the relationships and care of others as a response of teachers' personal faith and, by extension, the New Evangelisation.
Witness	The response to the New Evangelisation through Christian witness and role modelling.
Relational witnessing	The influence of Christian witness embedded in authentic relationships as a response to the New Evangelisation.
Inclusion	Ensuring the inclusion of all members of the College community in Catholic life and practice.
Utilising Church structures	Utilising Church structures that emanate from the parish and the broader Church to engage others with the Catholic community and institutional Church.
Creativity and disruption	The provision of creative and challenging opportunities to express contemporary Catholicism and disturb the inherent complacency of nominal Catholics.
Promotion	The promotion of Catholic Church teachings and practices within the school community.
Renewal	The renewal of faith-based and relevant expressions of the Catholic tradition.
Integration	The integration of Catholic practices, beliefs and structures into the schools.

The research identifies a clear relationship between teachers' understanding of the New Evangelisation and their responses to it. Indeed, the lack of consensus concerning how the concept of the New Evangelisation is defined is a reason for why there are multiple and at times conflicting categories of responses. Moreover, these responses are not mutually exclusive because teachers adopt multiple responses to the New Evangelisation. Further, the synthesised understanding of teachers' responses to the New Evangelisation identifies three distinct themes.

First, some teachers embrace the New Evangelisation as the intentional **integration** of Catholic beliefs and practices into the school culture. All teachers identify a vast array of Catholic beliefs and practices that are integrated into the daily life of these schools. These include sacramental opportunities especially the Eucharist, prayer, the prioritisation of Catholic beliefs and practices integrated in the curriculum, utilising the organisational structures that emanate from the local parishes, and the integration of the Church liturgical cycles and celebration into the activities of the school. This approach prioritises the development of cooperative relationships between the school and

parish by ensuring that the Eucharist is celebrated in the school. Moreover, by integrating the Catholic Church's liturgical calendar with the college calendar, this approach endeavours to 'anchor'⁴⁶ the Catholic school and its routines into traditional Catholic culture. Arguably this provision promotes "a synthesis between faith, culture and life"⁴⁷ resulting in an "undercurrent of understanding"⁴⁸ that permeates the life of the school. This integration provides a framework in which contemporary expressions of Catholicism are relevant and prioritised:

It's the framework.... I think the greatest thing about teaching in a Catholic school on a day-to-day basis is that you've always got that framework to refer back to and rely on. You know that you're not on your own as a teacher with your own rules. Like it's not just like you're standing there saying to the kids, 'This is what we do.' It's actually [saying], 'This is what our [Catholic] tradition is. This is what our values are.'⁴⁹

Second, some teachers respond to the New Evangelisation through the provision of innovative **opportunities** for all in the school to experience Catholic faith and spirituality. These initiatives originate from teachers'

assessment of needs, rather than from a prescribed Church program because many staff and students are "not ... connected to Church and to Church practice"⁵⁰. Consequently, these teachers realise it is necessary to "change their approach" to students⁵¹. Indeed, inclusivity and creativity characterise these initiatives. They are understood as expressing "the Gospel in a clever way"⁵². Arguably, these opportunities offer a meaningful alternative to the somewhat "widespread malaise and a perceived loss of institutional vitality and direction"⁵³ evident in the Australian Catholic Church. It seems that students and staff are positively receptive to these opportunities because they seem to generate a 'new enthusiasm' for the Gospel message. However, there are challenges with this approach because the implementation of the New Evangelisation depends on teachers' understanding of and commitment to mission, and many of these believe the New Evangelisation is an additional, unnecessary obligation expected of busy educators⁵⁴. As a result, evangelising opportunities are the responsibility of a small number of teachers who believe evangelisation is an expression of their personal faith, not simply part of their school duties.

Finally, evangelisation is understood as an initiative generated primarily through Christian witness in the context of relationships with others, or what might be termed ‘**relational witnessing**’. These teachers experience that “the Holy Spirit or [their] own faith is continually challenging [them] to be role models to young people so that they will then adopt [a Christian] type of lifestyle”⁵⁵. Thus, the New Evangelisation agenda concerns them authentically living the Christian faith. They seek to live according to their understanding of the Gospel, which influences others to explore spirituality seriously. Re-engagement with being a Catholic, conversion or proselytising is not on the agenda. For these educators, the New Evangelisation is understood and initiated through Christian witnesses⁵⁶. Further, relational witnessing as a response to the New Evangelisation agenda is characterised by the development of quality relationships, typified by inclusivity and dialogue. The agenda is to “cultivate mutually beneficial relationships”⁵⁷ which aim “to meet people where they are at on their faith journey and make it (faith) relevant to them”⁵⁸.

vii. Impediments to the implementation of the New Evangelisation

The study indicates that, despite the challenges outlined, many teachers are disposed positively towards the New Evangelisation as it is manifested in the religious dimension of Australian Catholic schools, supporting the faith integration, daily prayer, liturgies and Christian service typical of these schools. Further, in comparison to other Church agencies, Catholic schools are well resourced and staffed by many teachers and leaders who are well qualified and able to lead Catholic education professionally and personally as witnesses to the faith. However, the study concludes that there are significant challenges to the ecclesial aspiration for Catholic schools to be centres of the New Evangelisation. The study concludes that there are five distinct issues which mitigate against Australian Catholic secondary schools’ implementation of the New Evangelisation. These are:

1. Definition and purpose

First, the absence of a common, precise definition of, or purpose for, the New Evangelisation for teachers in Australian Catholic secondary schools mitigates against a unified approach to the implementation of the New Evangelisation in these schools. Teacher participants either reject the concept of the New Evangelisation or adhere to contrasting and conflicting individual understandings of the concept. The study concludes that the absence of a common, precise definition of the New Evangelisation generates multiple, disparate perceptions of the purpose of the New Evangelisation.

2. Relevance

Second, the study confirms that Catholicism is irrelevant to many teachers and students in Australian Catholic secondary schools. Teacher participants report that some teachers reject the moral and religious teachings of the Church because of their perceived irrelevancy in their lives. However, the Church and Catholic education authorities continue to reaffirm the faith-based purpose of Catholic schools. Consequently, the agenda of the New Evangelisation is impeded by the increasing irrelevance of Catholicism to many staff and students in Catholic schools.

3. Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (ARCIRCSA)

Third, the influence of the ARCIRCSA and its revelations of widespread incidences of historical child sexual abuse as well as the inadequate responses of the institutional Church are an impediment to the New Evangelisation agenda. While some participants distinguish between their current school context and the ongoing revelations of historical child sexual abuse, others contend that the experience of the ARCIRCSA has contributed to further disassociation of Catholics from their Church. Other teachers respond to the challenges of the ARCIRCSA theologically and contend that the influence of the

ARCIRCSA is not only a challenge to contemporary evangelisation, but also an impetus for a renewed approach to mission in Catholic schools.

4. Teachers

Fourth, despite the commitment of many teachers in Australian Catholic secondary schools, there are other teachers who have a tenuous relationship with Catholicism. Arguably these teachers’ spirituality and religious practice limit their ability to strengthen and articulate Catholic identity in Australian Catholic schools. Nevertheless, regardless of their religious affiliation, teachers are expected to support Catholic beliefs and practices. The paradox of this expectation is that the effectiveness of the implementation of the New Evangelisation depends on teachers and their commitment to and understanding of the mission of God and the role of the Catholic Church in this mission. Moreover, this study concludes that some teachers – non-practising Catholics, other than Catholics, and unchurched teachers – reject any responsibility for maintaining the Catholicity of Australian Catholic secondary schools. For these teachers, the faith-based purpose of the Catholic school is largely either irrelevant or not understood. It seems that some teachers, as with some students, are disinterested in Catholicism and are not engaged meaningfully and actively in the New Evangelisation.

5. The limited influence of Catholic education

Finally, an impediment to the New Evangelisation is the limited reach of Catholic education. Reflecting on the contrast between the Catholic secondary school and the broader Church, especially local parishes, a participant suggested:

I have an issue with the school becoming the new place of evangelisation because people aren’t going to the parish. Read the latest encyclical (*Evangelii Gaudium*). If the parishes are warm places of greeting instead of berating, or instead of a desert,

then maybe the kids will see that. Because they come to our school, we encourage participational liturgy; but the place of evangelisation is the home and it's the parish, because as soon as kids leave here, they're gone. I mean ... we cannot encourage something that they cannot graft onto. If the tree that they go to is dead, then it's a bit unfair of us to water the garden and then put them in the middle of a desert⁵⁹.

The Catholic school is not only the primary experience of contemporary Catholicism, but for many, the only experience. Moreover, most participants contend that, beyond the Catholic school, many Australian Catholics have little association with Roman Catholicism. Thus, many New Evangelisation initiatives are confined to those who teach and are educated in Catholic schools. Further, despite the range of experiences, efforts and resources directed to the New Evangelisation in Australian Catholic secondary schools, the study indicates that that many students and teachers do not engage with Catholicism in any regular or concerted fashion beyond the school context. Therefore, if the sole agenda of the New Evangelisation is to return non-practising Catholics to more regular practice, it has failed.

viii. Responsibility of a small group of teachers for the implementation of the New Evangelisation

Finally, this study concludes that a relatively small number of teachers are responsible for the implementation of the New Evangelisation. The "heavy and increasingly complex workloads"⁶⁰

identified in the Australian national educational reform agenda deter some teachers from active involvement in the religious dimension of Catholic schools:

I also think it has to do with the pressures of the job ... these days as well. So, some people might be connected with their faith, but they might be in a stage of their life where they just can't commit to that. And there's so much going on curriculum-wise and pedagogy-wise and all this [so that we have our] fingers in every pie. But you just don't have the time to devote yourself to [evangelisation] as well, as much as you want to⁶¹.

Second, some teachers are disinterested in Catholicism and the faith-based agenda of the Catholic school seems irrelevant to them. Other teachers may be somewhat religiously illiterate, lacking the knowledge, confidence, willingness and/or ability to integrate religion into their learning and teaching responsibilities⁶²:

There's [sic] a lot of cynical teachers and stuff that you have to compete with.... So, I found that one of my challenges in the role [of youth minister] is getting that support from a wide variety of people⁶³.

Consequently, the provision of meaningful experiences of Catholic faith and spirituality is the responsibility of a relatively small group of teachers. These teachers include school leaders, college religious education coordinators or youth ministers who promote the religious culture of the school. Many of these teachers have developed a personal faith commitment in which they "try to merge faith with life"⁶⁴ and respond by animating selective,

relevant and meaningful experiences of Catholic faith and spirituality for the school community. Regardless of the religious affiliation or practice of students or colleagues, they exercise the "fundamental Gospel imperative" of engaging with all people in the service of God's mission⁶⁵. Typically, for these teachers, the New Evangelisation is a call to service not an agenda for converting others to Catholicism. They adopt a characteristically "gentle and genuine"⁶⁶ approach to evangelisation initiatives, emulating a style of evangelisation encouraged by Pope Francis:

Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytising that the Church grows, but "by attraction"⁶⁷.

As a result, these teachers respond to the New Evangelisation agenda by "being with"⁶⁸ others, and providing an integrated, experiential and relational expression of faith and spirituality in the school context. It is significant that, despite the diminishing credibility of and affiliation with the institutional Catholic Church in Australia, they remain relatively committed to their service of others and their personal devotion to Christian discipleship. Further, they typically distinguish between the mission of Jesus and the Church as an agency for mission, recognising that "missionary outreach is paradigmatic for all the Church's activity"⁶⁹ and "from this flows an obligation to evangelise, not as an act of proselytisation but as one of service"⁷⁰.

Recommendations

The conclusions of this research emanate from teachers' experiences of contemporary Catholicism and their understanding of, and responses to, the concept of the New Evangelisation. There are five synthesised recommendations which address the conclusions generated in this study. The recommendations address both policy and practice specific to Catholic Secondary schools; however, these recommendations may have broader application to other Church ministries.

i. Identify the positive experiences of Catholicism in Australian Catholic secondary schools

The first recommendation is that Catholic ecclesial and education authorities identify the positive experiences of Catholicism in Australian Catholic secondary schools. The research indicates that considerable experiences of Catholic faith and spirituality exist in Catholic secondary schools. These experiences create the 'framework', or 'undercurrent of understanding' identified and affirmed by participants. These experiences are examples of the effective evangelisation strategies and practices that are integrated into the daily life of Catholic schools, providing inclusive, innovative and creative opportunities for all to authentically experience contemporary expressions of Catholicism. It is recommended that schools systematically identify these positive experiences and, further, that these experiences be promoted among Catholic schools and Catholic educational systems as well as in the broader Catholic community.

ii. Identify the characteristics of effective teacher evangelisers

The second recommendation is that Catholic ecclesial and education authorities identify the characteristics of effective teacher evangelisers in Australian Catholic secondary schools to assist in the formation of teachers as evangelisers. The research generated interrelated descriptors of teachers' understandings of the concept of the New Evangelisation and, by extension, identified teachers' responses to the New Evangelisation. It is recommended that the characteristics of effective teacher

evangelisers in Australian Catholic secondary schools be identified. Some of these characteristics, or perhaps the prioritisation of some qualities as opposed to others, may be determined by the context of individual schools. Moreover, given the dynamism of contemporary evangelisation and the competing demands of teachers and schools leaders, many schools have teams of staff who collaborate in evangelising in the school (eg Catholic life and mission teams; youth ministry teams). That these teams demonstrate a range of styles and responses is worthy of consideration. Further, the understandings and responses generated in the research might serve as a stimulus to this identification of the characteristics of effective teacher evangelisers and assist in the formation of teachers as evangelisers.

iii. Clarify the concept of contemporary evangelisation

The third recommendation is that Catholic ecclesial and education authorities collaboratively define the concept of contemporary evangelisation for teachers and school leaders. This would include, but not be limited to, the following recommendations for Catholic ecclesial and education authorities:

- Engage teachers and school leaders in developing a common and precise **definition** of the concept of the New Evangelisation applicable to Australian Catholic secondary schools.
- Engage teachers and school leaders in developing a clear definition of the **contextualised aims** of the New Evangelisation in Australian Catholic secondary schools.
- Develop **principles** of the New Evangelisation to assist teachers and school leaders in its implementation.
- Prioritise and provide opportunities for the initial and ongoing **formation** of teachers and school leaders as evangelisers.

iv. Identify and strategically address the impediments to contemporary evangelisation

The fourth recommendation is that Catholic ecclesial and education authorities identify and strategically

address the impediments to contemporary evangelisation that exist in Australian Catholic secondary schools. While the research identifies several impediments, it is noted that other impediments may now be more evident and in need of further exploration. Further, more localised impediments to contemporary evangelisation are realities in each Catholic community and addressing these may be of consideration in improving the effectiveness of evangelising initiatives.

v. Ensure that evangelisation plans are developed for Australian Catholic secondary schools

The final recommendation is that collaboratively developed, contextualised and clear evangelisation plans for contemporary evangelisation are developed for Australian Catholic secondary schools. Many school leaders are adept in developing such plans for a range of school priorities, and these same consultative and strategic skills need to be applied to Catholic schools' evangelising mandate. Further, it is recommended that such plans:

- **define** the school's agreed, contextualised understanding of the New Evangelisation
- define the school's agreed, contextualised **aims** for the evangelisation of students and staff
- identify the **responsibilities** of teachers in the implementation of the New Evangelisation
- identify the **professional development and formation** requirements of teachers and leaders
- identify the **resource allocation** requirements, including staffing requirements, for the implementation of evangelisation plans
- identify the various **constituencies** which are the focus of the evangelisation responses in Catholic schools (including but not limited to nominal Catholics, non-Catholics, disinterested Catholics and practising Catholics) and ensure evangelisation strategies appropriate to these constituencies are developed.

Conclusion

The major research question for the study asked: How do teachers in Australian Catholic secondary schools experience the New Evangelisation?

This study has generated insights and conclusions concerning teachers' experiences of the New Evangelisation in the context of the Australian Catholic secondary school. The complexity of teachers' understandings and responses to the imperative of the New Evangelisation has been identified. Recommendations have been generated which aim to enhance the provision and quality of contemporary evangelisation in Catholic schools. And so, a final word. Overwhelmingly, this research affirms the commitment of the many teachers in Australian Catholic schools who

endeavour authentically to "make the Kingdom of God present in this world"⁷¹. It is now, perhaps more than ever, that Catholic schools need teachers and leaders who are skilled in the art of teaching, whose lives are characterised by deep humanity and authenticity; women and men also imbued with the Spirit of Jesus. Their presence will ensure that evangelisation in the service of God's people, 'the grace, vocation and deepest identity' of contemporary Christian disciples, can be effectively realised in Catholic schools.

Spiritus Program

Leading Evangelisation in Catholic Education

Spiritus is a unique faith formation program for education and other Church ministry leaders, equipping them for evangelisation in our contemporary context.

The Spiritus Program is designed for Catholic school leaders and teachers, including religious education classroom teachers. It is also intended for youth ministers or others who work in Church organisations that collaborate with Catholic schools.

At the conclusion of the Spiritus Program, participants are invited to join the Catholic Leaders Formation Network – a professional network that provides activities and resources for their ongoing formation. Thus far, 90% of Spiritus participants have joined this vibrant network.

Over the last five years, Spiritus has been conducted across many dioceses in Australia, including Canberra-Goulburn, Melbourne, Hobart, Wagga Wagga, Bathurst and the dioceses of Queensland. This has included many participants from Religious Institute and Ministerial PJP school. Internationally, the program has been conducted in England, Scotland, Ireland, New Zealand and East Africa (Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda). Each year an Australian cohort of leaders travels to England to complete Spiritus in an international context with leaders from England, Scotland and Ireland. The group then travels to Rome and Assisi to continue the formation experience.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Spiritus Program can be completed as Professional Learning or as units of study within formal courses at ACU. The units are designed at Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Level 8 and have articulation into other courses, such as the Graduate Certificate Theology/ Religious Education, Master of Religious Education and Master of Educational Leadership. Spiritus includes the following:

Spiritus Part 1:

(EDNE600)

Faith Formation and the New Evangelisation

Spiritus Part 2:

(EDNE601)

Creating Centres of Evangelisation: Catholic Schools, Parishes and Other Church ministries.

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“Spiritus 2022 has not only given the participants the key to unlocking the New Evangelisation for our young people in schools and parishes, but the strength to push open the doors too. The Program was sensitively created to offer human, spiritual, pastoral and intellectual formation. The days were full of deep discussion, fraternal sharing, prayerful reflection and a profound sense of hope and joy. We look forward to the fruits of this work and growing the network of faith-full Catholic leaders in the coming years”.

Barbara Coupar,
Director Scottish Catholic Education Service



Spiritus

Spiritus

This painting was created to explain how we understand the term 'evangelisation' which is at the heart of the Spiritus program.



Dr Miriam Rose
Ungunmerr Baumann AM
Aboriginal activist, educator and artist
Senior Australian of the Year, 2021
Born 1950, Daly River,
Northern Territory,
Ngangiwumirr language Group

The artist, Miriam Rose explains the painting:

The Cross of Christ is the supporting framework of "Spiritus". Upon the Cross is superimposed the Dove, representing the Holy Spirit. Within the dove are tongues of fire signifying the Holy Spirit wanting to transform us to be witnesses. "Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim." (Acts 2:3-4). The white dots represent the smoke which to me is a source of purification or reconciliation.

As its name suggests, the Spiritus program is about being inspired, inSpirited, by the Good News of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. It was the Holy Spirit who led the disciples to become agents of evangelisation, with conviction overcoming fear. At the base of the Cross are signs of new growth, new beginnings, with green tendrils striking out. These evoke the younger people for whose benefit the Spiritus program ultimately exists.

The yam, my people's main source of nourishment, is placed upon the Cross

of the One who is Bread of Life for all who have heard the Good News. The brilliant blue river - the water of life, of baptism, of blessing - is central to the image, supported by webbing that represents the pupunyi, the water carrier. The pupunyi is catching the flow of blood from the Cross. The water flowing from the cross and the Spirit's outstretched wings represent the living waters flowing from Jesus and the Spirit. These waters renew us. Without water we die. With my people I live by the Daly River which gives me life.

The translucent rays from the Spirit enlighten the world and lead us to holiness. Three concentric circles represent the three days in the tomb and there is purple for mourning and death, but green and gold - the colours of life, growth, harvest - are superimposed over purple, because Christ is risen. The colours of the image are inviting and vibrant, mirroring the message of the gospels. Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life and his story continues to be told to every generation, always and everywhere.

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Images used in this publication

Image 1: Dove extract from "Spiritus". Artist Dr Miriam Rose
 Image 3: "Spiritus". Artist Dr Miriam Rose



Vive Spiritu Fidei
Live by the Spirit of Faith