The climate of the educating community

"...the climate and role of the educating community is constituted by the interaction and collaboration of its various components; students, parents, teachers, directors and non-teaching staff. Attention is rightly given to the importance of the relations existing between all those who make up the educating community. During childhood and adolescence a student needs to experience relationships (sic) with outstanding educators, and what is taught has greater influence on the student’s formation when placed in context of personal involvement, genuine reciprocity, coherence of attitudes, life-styles and day to day behaviour. While respecting individual roles, the community dimension should be fostered, since it is one of the most enriching developments for the contemporary school."

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Rome 1999

"The teachers love their students, and they show this love in the way they interact with them. They take advantage of every opportunity to encourage and strengthen them in those areas which will help to achieve the goals of the educational process. Their words, their witness, their encouragement and help, their advice and friendly correction are all important in achieving these goals, which must always be understood to include academic achievement, moral behaviour and a religious dimension."

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, n110

Ministry of Teaching in a Catholic School in the Diocese of Townsville

Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of humankind’s most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirit of human beings. The personal relations between the teacher and the students, therefore, assume an enormous importance and are not limited simply to giving and taking. Moreover, we must remember that teachers and educators fulfil a specific Christian vocation and share an equally specific participation in the mission of the Church, to the extent that ‘it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose’.

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium Rome, 1999

“I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full”
John 10:10
A commitment to Jesus the teacher:

Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic School (The Catholic School, 1977). In particular, the ministry of education is formed and guided by Jesus. In his teaching, Jesus demonstrated empathy, forgiveness, care and respect for all. Jesus told stories, used images and examples, gave alternate visions and new possibilities for living life to fullest. The teacher in the Catholic school accepts this challenge to witness by:

Developing and deepening an understanding of the person and teachings of Jesus and by living out this understanding:

- Promoting the Good News of Jesus daily through teaching and in relationships with students and staff
- Promoting the values of justice and peace
- Challenging in an appropriate manner, those people or structures that work against the values of the Gospel
- Affirming all members of the school community
- Engaging in the pastoral care of all students

"The Catholic school loses its purpose without constant reference to the Gospel and a frequent encounter with Christ."
The Catholic School, Rome 1999

A Commitment to Students:

We have a special obligation to each student to draw them to their maximum potential by:

- Helping students to know and appreciate the richness and relevance of our Christian and Catholic heritage, the wonder of the human person and the beauty of all created reality.
- Showing concern about the joys and sorrows of the student.
- Creating a safe, caring and welcoming learning environment.
- Respecting confidential information concerning students and their homes.
- Speaking with charity and justice about students, even when called upon to discuss sensitive matters.
- Enabling students to grow in a sense of self-worth and accountability by selecting activities which promote a positive self concept.
- Integrating into each area of the curriculum a Christian values perspective.
- Creating a nurturing and ordered learning environment which is student-centred, challenging and cooperative.
- Leading students towards increased responsibility for personal decision making and action in accordance with Gospel values.
- Planning appropriate activities for students that will develop their sense of responsibility to the wider community.
- Encouraging students to be active in the life and mission of the Church.
- Ensuring that a high standard of care and responsibility is taken for students’ personal safety and well-being.
- Developing quality instructional programs and regularly evaluating their effectiveness.
- Carrying out the teaching and education of students.
- Carrying out the pastoral care of students.

"The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ’s teaching; that is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of Catholic schools."
The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Rome 1999

"Your responsibilities make demands on you that go far beyond the need for professional skills and competence...Through you, as through a clear window on a sunny day, students must be able to see to know the richness and the joy of a life lived in accordance with Christ’s teaching, in response to his challenges and demands. To teach means to have certain competencies and to put them into practice. But it means also to understand what we know, but also to reveal who we are by living what we believe."
-Pope John Paul II, Address to Catholic Educators, 17 September, 1984

"Splendid, therefore, and of the highest importance is the education of those who help parents in carrying out their duties and act in the name of the community by undertaking a teaching career. This vocation requires special qualities of mind and heart, most careful preparation and a constant readiness to accept new ideas and to adapt the old."
-The Declaration of Christian Education Gravitatis Educationum, 1985

A Commitment to Parents:

We recognise that parents are the most significant teachers of their child. We are called upon to assist parents in fulfilling their obligation for the Christian formation and education of their child. Therefore we will respect parents’ fundamental human right to know, to understand, to share in decisions that affect the education of their child by:

- Creating a warm and welcoming environment for parents at school and classroom levels.
- Valuing and promoting the role of parents as children’s first and foremost educators.
- Establishing appropriate communication channels with parents.
- Providing opportunities for parents to shape classroom and school policies.
- Respecting any confidential information which parents share.
- Reporting to parents their child's progress regularly and as needed with professional accuracy and honesty.
- Developing educational activities and activities that enhance family life as well as the home-school relationship.
- Assuring parents of a commitment to ongoing education as a professional educator.

"Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children’s education belongs."
The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Rome 1999

"Prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian climate rests with the teachers, as individuals as an community."
- The Religious Dimension in a Catholic School, n26
- The more the members of the educational community develop a real willingness to collaborate among themselves, the more fruitful their work will be.

"The life of teacher, as I know from personal experience, is very challenging and demanding, but it is also profoundly satisfying. It is more than a job, for it is rooted in our deepest convictions and values. To be intimately concerned in the development of a young person, of hundreds of young people, is a highly responsible task. As teachers, you kindle in your students a thirst for truth and wisdom. You spark off in them a desire for beauty. You introduce them to their cultural heritage. You help them to discover the treasures of other cultures and people. What an awesome responsibility and privilege is yours in the teaching profession."
-Pope John Paul II, Melbourne 1986

A Commitment to the Community:

The school community—a faith community in itself—and an integral part of the diocese and a vital force for preparing future civic and church leaders. We are called to:

- Promote the peace of Christ in the world by:
  - Promoting peaceful solutions to community conflicts.
  - Encouraging a spirit of cooperation, avoiding the extremes in competition.
  - Developing skills which will enable students to interact with society for a better world.
- Cooperate wholeheartedly in the continued building of parish life and mission by:
  - Emphasising the integral nature of the Catholic school within the parish and community.
  - Practising hospitality through a willingness to share our personal gifts, our classroom and school resources to meet parish and community needs beyond school.
  - Developing active participation in our chosen parish.
  - Welcoming the involvement of the pastor and pastoral assistants in the life of the school.

"Teachers must remember that it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose. They should therefore be prepared for their work with special care, having the appropriate qualifications and adequate learning, both religious and secular. They should also be skilled in the art of education in accordance with the discoveries of modern times. Above all they should work in close cooperation with the parents."
- Declaration on Christian Education, n8

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Rome 1999

Most Rev Michael E Putney
BISHOP
DIOCESE OF TOWNSVILLE

Introduction

Teaching in a Catholic school is not just a job, though it is that; it is not just a way of making a great contribution to the life of young Australians, though it is that; it is not just a very fulfilling and fruitful way of working for others, though it is that. Teaching in a Catholic school can also be, for those who wish to discover its most profound significance, a ministry within the Church. As such it is a work of the Holy Spirit as well as of the individual teacher.

Within the Church, alongside bishops, priests and deacons, there is a whole range of other ministries. Central to all of these in the Australian Church is that of the Catholic school teacher. When seen as such, teaching in a Catholic school can be understood as a vocation, something to which one is called by God. Having been so called, one is then continually graced by God to exercise the ministry and carry out one’s vocation with dedication and faithfulness.

I am very grateful that so many teachers in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Townsville see their work as such a ministry for which they have received a vocation or call from God. I hope that all teachers in Catholic schools in the Diocese of Townsville will be open to the possibility of discovering such a profound understanding of their work and their role.

The Catholic teacher then, becomes a collaborator with the bishops, priests and other ministers in the Church, to carry out its mission of transforming the world according to the mind and heart of Christ. Those who are engaged in this mission as teachers in Catholic schools are very precious members of the Church and their ministry cannot be valued highly enough.

I wish all teachers in Catholic schools the joy and excitement that comes from discovering this full understanding of their role.

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Rome 1999