

RESTORING VENICE

A Call to New Evangelisation

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Introduction

In 2006 the Archdiocese of Hobart initiated an ongoing process of dialogue and critical reflection surrounding the evangelising mission of Catholic Schools in Tasmania. A *Day of Discernment* was conducted involving pastors, principals, representatives of various Governing Bodies and senior personnel from the Catholic Education Office. Flowing from the gathering, the Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission (TCEC) established a *Call to New Evangelisation* working party to follow up on the many challenges that were raised. The brief of the working party was to recommend to the TCEC a range of policy options and strategies that could address, in a practical manner, the issues that had been identified.

The purpose of this paper is initially to articulate a range of challenges discerned by the *Day of Discernment* associated with the evangelising mission of the Church within the context of the Archdiocese of Hobart. Secondly, it will reflect upon the necessity and capacity of Catholic schools to respond to a growing awareness that we have moved into a phase of 'new evangelisation' within many Catholic communities across Australia. Finally, the paper will explore, in a practical manner, some of the emerging policy initiatives and strategies being formulated in response to the challenges associated with the identity and mission of Catholic schools.

A Modern Parable

Visitors to the medieval city of Venice would be aware of the continuous struggle of Venetians to save and restore their culturally rich and beautiful city. The city has continually sought to maintain a delicate ecological

balance between the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants and the natural environment that surrounds it. The gracious waterways and canals are both aesthetically pleasing and the potential source of its destruction. The removal of artesian water and the decaying foundations have made the city increasingly vulnerable to high tides and rising sea levels. In essence, Venice is slowly but surely sinking into the mud.

During the original construction of Venice the wooden foundations for the buildings were driven through many layers of silt and set firmly on the underlying bedrock. The portions of timber that were inserted into the soft mud have, over time, become petrified and are now inextricably linked to the bedrock upon which they rest. However the sections of the timber underpinnings directly connected to the houses that sit in and above the waterline are progressively deteriorating and rotting from within. Gradually, but unmistakably, the upper strata of the foundations are sagging under the weight of the impressive structures they support.

The civic leaders of Venice are fighting a constant battle to maintain its viability and beauty for future generations. The solution lies not in attempting to demolish every unstable edifice or by replacing the entire foundations for every building that is slipping below the waterline. Rather, the leaders have focused primarily upon restoring the substrata scaffolding that lies in the 'gap' between the mud of the channel floor and surface level of the buildings. The restoration is a complex and delicate process whereby the original building is 'jacked up' and the foundations critically examined. As necessary a new network of supporting crossbeams and secondary posts are installed through the subterranean level of the building and only on the rare occasion is it a

necessity to ‘drive’ a totally new foundational pillar through the silt to the bedrock. Lowering and reattaching the restored infrastructure to the original ‘petrified’ pillars ensures that a ‘solid connection’ is once again restored to the underlying bedrock.

In many respects the ‘Venetian parable’ is a metaphor for what is occurring in Catholic Education in Tasmania. Like the entire system of Catholic Education in Australia, the thirty-seven Tasmanian Catholic schools have been seen as ‘one of the jewels in the crown’ of parish pastoral ministry for over 160 years. In 2008, the school system is a vibrant, growing reality serving the needs of over 15,000 students which has grown by over 10% over the past five years. On the surface, Catholic schools are highly valued learning communities with rich charisms and a deep commitment to nurturing the Catholic ethos.

The *Day of Discernment* process provided an opportunity for the ‘institution of Catholic Education’ to be gently lifted from its foundations and a critical examination undertaken of the underlying pillars and beams. As with Venice, the exercise was not a response to a ‘deficit model’, whereby Catholic schools were being perceived as failing institutions that should be dismantled and consigned to history. Equally, there was great confidence in the depth of their ‘petrified’ foundations and the ensuing connection with the ‘bedrock’ of faith in Christ within the Catholic tradition.

A central premise of the *Call to New Evangelisation* process is for schools in Tasmania to continue to be vibrant Catholic learning communities aware of and connected to their spiritual bedrock. The process of restoration will focus on identifying and preserving what is really worth keeping, reinforcing existing structures and, in some places, building new supporting crossbeams in response to a changed secular and pastoral environment. As noted by the Secretary for the Congregation of Catholic Education, Archbishop Miller,

The Holy See... recognises the priceless treasure of Catholic schools as an indispensable in-



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strument of evangelisation. Ensuring their genuinely Catholic identity is the Church’s greatest educational challenge. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007, p.61)

Connecting with the Bedrock: What does it mean to be Catholic?

Whilst appreciating that the majority of the restorative work would be focused ‘just below the surface’, as the *Call to New Evangelisation* process unfolded in a variety of consultative sessions it became apparent that all stakeholders were vitally interested in touching base with the very essence of their Catholic tradition. At the heart of many discussions (eg. enrolment policies, spiritual formation programs...) was the fundamental question: *What does it mean to be Catholic?*

In response, a theological reflection paper¹ has been developed by the Archdiocese with a view to stimulating prayerful discussion and rearticulating for the next generation of educators and stakeholders what it may mean to be Catholic in an increasingly pluralist, secular and consumerist society. In particular, it is envisaged the theological reflection will become a seminal document that will inform a range of formation programs for staff employed in Catholic schools.

The reflection paper resonates with two main beliefs. Firstly an emphasis on the nature of Catholicity being grounded in a broad theological context which incorporates and synthesises a diversity of sources and does not simplistically rely on a uni-dimensional theological perspective. In particular recognition

is given to Revelation and the lived experience of faith, hope and love; scripture; tradition; the magisterium; scholarship and reason; and prayer and spirituality. Secondly the nature of Catholicity is held together by the essential ‘marks of the Church’, especially as articulated in the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The reflection highlights connectedness with the ‘Body of Christ’ and the organic interaction of being ‘called’ and ‘sent’ particularly within the uniquely sacramental dimension of the Catholic experience. As noted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

The word ‘catholic’ means universal, in the sense of ‘according to the totality’ or ‘in keeping with the whole’. The Church is catholic in a double sense: First, the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. ‘Where there is Christ Jesus, there is the Catholic Church.’ (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Smyrn. 8,2). Secondly, the Church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race. (Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1997, #830 & #831)

Testing the ‘Petrieved Pillars’: A Shift in Focus—Evangelisation, Catechesis or New Evangelisation?

Over recent years there has been a growing awareness in the Australian Church of a need to reconnect with a growing number of Catholic families who, for a variety of reasons, have become disconnected from the active life of their parish community. Pope John-Paul II in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (#33) recognised that people need to be invited and socialised into situations of vibrant faith. Three challenges for the Church of today were identified: firstly, the importance of the primary proclamation of the Gospel and the establishment of new communities of faith; secondly, the pastoral care of those communities where faith is healthy, mature and fervent; and thirdly, to attend to those Christians who have lost a sense of faith or whose faith has never had the opportunity for faith formation. John Paul II therefore identified a new challenge for the

Church particularly in western, secular society: the call for a *re-evangelisation* or a *new evangelisation*.

The *Day of Discernment* process was unambiguous in recognising that many of the philosophical pillars upon which the system of Catholic schools has been built have served the test of time. The deeply grounded principles of faith transmission, equity and social justice, Catholic spirituality, worship and ritual, inclusiveness and welcome, pastoral care and stewardship are as relevant and significant for today’s generation of schools as they have been for the past 160 years. Notwithstanding the confidence in these enduring structures and foundations, a critical issue being faced by Tasmanian Catholic schools is a growing awareness that one of the corner stones of their mission has shifted markedly in recent years.

When the Sisters of Charity first accepted an invitation from Bishop Willson to serve the Tasmanian community their ministry with the women of the ‘Female Factory’ was one of evangelisation through service and love. Their work gave flesh to the mission of the Church, ‘to enable all people to experience the abundant goodness, justice and peace of an infinitely loving God by knowing the person of Christ’ (John Paul II, 2001a, #1). Inspired by the charisms of many religious communities Tasmanian Catholic schools have continued to embrace the inherent nature of the evangelising mission of the Church. In the words of Pope Paul VI:

For the Church, evangelisation means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and, through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new... The purpose of evangelisation is therefore precisely this interior change... the Church evangelises when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and the collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs (Pope Paul VI, 1976, #).

As the system of Catholic schools flour-

ished across the state in the service of a clearly identified community of Catholic families, the evangelising mission shifted in focus from the early stages of ‘primary proclamation’ to ‘initiatory’ and ‘ongoing’ catechesis to a relatively homogeneous Catholic community whereby the truth of Christian faith was proclaimed in a context ‘that called forth a faith response upon the part of the hearer’ (Holohan, 1999).

The pastoral climate within which Catholic schools operate has shifted significantly over the last generation. The assumption of a comparatively homogeneous Catholic student population, which allowed for a catechetical focus both in terms of religious education and pastoral formation can no longer be sustained. Consequently, Catholic schools in Tasmania at this time are being called to operate as agents of evangelisation at four distinct levels:

- Primary proclamation (especially to the 44% of non-Catholic enrolments);
- Initiatory catechesis (particularly in response to the lack of home-based formation prior to children entering school);
- On-going catechesis (to the much smaller group of approximately 10% of students, directly involved within their parish community, who need explicit support in their growing faith awareness); and
- New Evangelisation (reaching out to the 90% of Catholic families who are not directly connected to their parish Eucharistic community).

This shift in the nature and spiritual needs of the families enrolled in Catholic Education evokes a challenge to reconceptualise one of the central paradigms of ministry upon which Catholic schools have been premised. Whilst affirming the integral nature of evangelisation and catechesis, it is appropriate for schools to begin exploring and constructing a third philosophical ‘pillar’ in the form of a commitment to the process of ‘*new evangelisation*’.

Distinct from primary evangelisation and catechesis is the call for a renewal and enlivening of faith. New evangelisation is for all who have lost or those who have never developed a

living sense of faith. New evangelisation is a response to those who are hungering for Christ within a context and a time when the message of the Gospel is only one voice within our modern culture of secularisation and materialism. From the perspective of a Catholic school, *new evangelisation* recognises that many baptised children, in fact the majority of students, are drawn from families who have become disconnected from the practice of their faith.

Examining the Subterranean Scaffolding: Key Issues of Concern

The *Day of Discernment* and subsequent deliberations have shed critical light on a number of the crossbeams that underpin the nature and culture of Catholic schools in Tasmania. Some issues, such as enrolment trends, were readily visible and objectively measurable, whilst others were far more subtle and difficult to define. Initially, there was a tendency to focus on what was easily observable (*above the waterline*), such as the proportion of non-Catholic students within each school or the religious education qualifications of staff. However, as the process has unfolded all stakeholders have begun to probe deeper and test the strength and resilience of the structures that lie further below the surface. Amongst a myriad of issues the following four questions were specifically identified:

- What are some of the specific hallmarks of a Catholic school that should always be proclaimed and celebrated?
- What is the nature and balance of the enrolment profile of Catholic schools?
- How can Catholic schools more proactively reach out to all Catholic families who have lost contact with their faith community, with a particular emphasis on those who are marginalised and disadvantaged? (*The challenge of New Evangelisation*)
- What formation strategies will help ensure staff employed in Catholic schools continue to have a deep understanding and commitment to their changing ministry?

***Restoring the Scaffolding and Crossbeams:
A Practical Response to the Call
to New Evangelisation***

***Developing a Charter and Mandate for
Catholic Education***

All Catholic schools have developed appropriate Vision and Mission Statements that unambiguously place the evangelising mission of the Church at their central core. It was felt that now it was timely for the Archbishop to develop a Charter for Catholic Education that clearly articulated his vision for, and expectations of, Catholic schools. The Charter articulates eleven key 'foundational' principles that, amongst a range of issues highlight: the relationship with the parish community; the centrality of teaching a 'Catholic' curriculum; the recruitment and formation of staff; the review of enrolment policies; and the role of schools in responding to Catholic social teaching.

What is significant about the Charter is that it moves beyond broad philosophical statements and, for the first time in the Tasmanian context, spells out the specific expectations of the Archbishop with regards to the conduct of a Catholic school. For example, the expectations associated with the Charter places much greater emphasis on selecting teachers on the basis of commitment to the Catholic tradition and involvement in ongoing formation linked to a revised Accreditation policy. Similarly the imperative of working towards a system-wide target of enrolling at least 75% of the student cohort from Catholic families is especially highlighted.

In terms of Religious Education, schools will be challenged to introduce a triangulated model of assessment that replicates assessment processes being proposed in other Key Learning Areas. In essence, the Archdiocese is planning to adopt a model of moderated assessment against explicit standards that involves internal and external moderation in association with standardised Religious Literacy tests at Grades 4 and 8.

Schools will also be 'challenged' to reflect upon the signs and symbols that will distinguish them as uniquely Catholic. For example

with the growth in Tasmania of a number of Independent and Christian schools, local school communities will be asked as to whether the inclusion of the term Catholic (eg. St Aloysius *Catholic* College) should be explicitly included in their nomenclature and promotional material.

Following the promulgation of the Archbishop's Charter, as part of the newly introduced School Improvement process, each Catholic school in Tasmania will be requested to develop a detailed response to the charter. Over the next two years leadership teams will be afforded a two-day formation opportunity to both 'unpack' the charter and explore strategies for formulating a response to the Archbishop's 'expectations' in association with their local communities. It is anticipated the Archbishop will contribute in a substantive way to the input during the formation program.

Of special significance, each Catholic school in Tasmania will be expected to submit a detailed response to the charter in order to obtain, from the Archbishop, a '*Mandate*' under Canon Law² to function as a Catholic institute. The external validating component of the cyclic School Improvement process, once every six years, will be utilised to ensure that, over time, the Archbishop's mandate is progressively affirmed and refined in each school community.

Discerning an appropriate enrolment profile

In 2007, 56% of enrolments in Tasmanian Catholic schools came from Catholic families, the lowest proportion of any state or territory in Australia. Concurrently Census data indicated that approximately 50% of Catholic children are being educated in State (*lower income families*) or independent (*higher income families*) schools.

Reflecting upon this data at the *Day of Discernment* brought forth a number of key issues. First and foremost debate centred on the intrinsic purpose of Catholic schools. From one perspective the evangelising mission of the Church reaching out into the wider Tas-

manian community was counter-balanced by the theological imperative of supporting the catechetical formation of baptised Catholic children. At a more subtle level concern was expressed as to whether the absence of a 'critical mass' of Catholic children could potentially undermine the mission and potency of a Catholic school, especially in a secondary college context. Furthermore it was suggested that some families, whilst accepting enrolment in a Catholic school, might not fully appreciate its core purpose and potentially not encourage their children to participate fully in the spiritual life of the school community. Finally, anecdotal evidence was presented that, within the context of some Catholic schools, committed Catholic students felt the burden of peer pressure and were disinclined to admit to the witness and practice of their faith.

Addressing the issue of finding the appropriate enrolment mix between Catholic and non-Catholic students has sparked a rich and vibrant debate both within the Catholic education sector and the wider secular community. In terms of a policy response, the TCEC has adopted a measured and realistic approach. The major philosophical foundation of a revised enrolment policy is premised on the notion of actively encouraging and inviting a greater number of baptised Catholic families to consider enrolling in Catholic Education.

Overall the Catholic sector in Tasmania has committed itself to working towards a target of 75% Catholic student enrolment across the entire system of schools. Firstly, local communities are to discern an appropriate *Catholic enrolment target* for each individual school taking into account current demographics, economic viability and enrolment demands. Secondly, in high demand enrolment areas, schools will be encouraged to reserve enrolment places for Catholic families who transfer into the area after the traditional enrolment periods. Finally in 2008, the TCEC will introduce a pilot program specifically aimed at reaching out to Catholic families who may not be regularly attending Mass in the parish. Sim-

ply stated, the initiative involves the parish priest sending a '*baptismal anniversary*' card to each child who has been baptised in the parish over the past five years and including in the card a small symbolic gift, information about the parish and invitations to key liturgical and sacramental events.

Reaching out to Marginalised and Disadvantaged Families

In economic terms Tasmania is the most socially disadvantaged state or territory in Australia. Over two thirds of Catholic primary schools fall into the bottom quintile (20%) of the national socio-economic index. Whilst not subject to extreme poverty, average family incomes are relatively low and unemployment levels are significantly higher than the national average. The *Day of Discernment* questioned whether Catholic schools in the 21st Century are now more actively catering for 'aspirational' middle class families in contrast to authentically reaching out to marginalised or financially disadvantaged family units?

The assembly concluded that the Catholic system in Tasmania needed to revisit its founding purpose and renew its efforts to reach out more tangibly to families who live on the margins of society. Grappling with this complex question is one of the most vexed and difficult areas currently confronting the TCEC. At the time of writing, a response to this issue is very much work in progress. To date, two key strategic ideas have been piloted:

In partnership with the Archdiocese, an *Archdiocesan Catholic Education Foundation* has been established. Supported by bequests and some systemic funding, the Foundation will financially support low-income Catholic families in accessing Catholic schools, especially at the Kindergarten entry level. Managed by Archdiocesan trustees the Foundation proposes to provide 'establishment grants' of approximately \$400 to disadvantaged families to assist with the costs of starting school. Tasmanian research conducted by Anglicare identified the burden of the 'on-costs' (uniforms, bags, books, excursion levies...) was a major

concern for low-income parents. It is also proposed that the Foundation will pay a grant of up to 80% of the annual school fees for the first three years of a child's enrolment, after that point it is hoped the normal, pastorally-oriented school based fee relief protocols would be activated.

Following a detailed study into the needs of refugee families in Tasmania a range of educational and pastoral initiatives to help further support humanitarian entrants have been developed. Apart from financial assistance (via the Archdiocesan Foundation), recommendations have been acted upon that will see the establishment of an intensive language centre potentially operating on a 'summer' and 'winter' school model, improved trauma counselling services, cultural awareness professional development and the employment of a community liaison officer.

Enhancing the Spiritual Formation and Commitment of Staff

Of paramount concern to the assembled community at the *Day of Discernment* was an appreciation that the strength and maintenance of a vibrant Catholic culture and ethos in school communities were directly proportional to the quality of formation and commitment of the staff. A constant theme that emerged from the discernment process was a call to develop strategies that promoted a deep understanding of and an enduring commitment to the ongoing ministry of the Church in Tasmania. At every level from staff recruitment, to induction, to ongoing professional learning and spiritual formation and ultimately staff appraisal, questions were posed as to whether more could be done to ensure every staff member was adequately equipped to fulfil the mandate conferred on them by the Archbishop.

For a variety of reasons which include the historical (the lack of access to a campus of the Catholic University), cultural (the primacy of the Department of Education as an 'employer of choice') and resource (declining enrolments in the 1990's severely limited the

capacity to initiate formational programs), Catholic schools in Tasmania have not been able to offer a coherent, integrated programme of staff induction and ongoing spiritual formation. It was noted that a significant percentage (37%) of teachers were teaching Religious Education without the appropriate levels of Archdiocesan Accreditation. Additionally, the staff employment profile indicated 40% of teachers were affiliated with other Christian faith traditions and, in a number of cases, were being called upon to teach Religious Education. Whilst acknowledging the absolute sincerity and dedication of these teachers in supporting the Catholic ethos, uncertainty was expressed as to whether teachers from another faith tradition could effectively move beyond the instructional mode in Religious Education and, with authenticity, engage students in catechetically oriented formational and transformational experiences within the Catholic tradition.

In response, the Catholic Education Office has named spiritual formation as one of its major strategic and budgetary priorities for the next quadrennium and beyond. In this respect a detailed, integrated plan has been developed that will see funding for formation initiatives increase five fold over the next four years. Key aspects to the plan will see an expansion of personnel in the Mission & RE team so as to place even greater emphasis on adult spirituality. Key aspects of the emerging Archdiocesan plan include:

- The appointment of a *theologian in residence*.
- The introduction of two day *retreats* based on Parker Palmer's *Courage to Teach* program.
- The introduction of a four-day *spirituality of teaching* retreat program, broken into two, 2-day experiences for prospective beginning teachers.
- The provision of *spirituality grants* of approximately \$2,000 annually to each systemic school.
- Creating the opportunity for teachers to

become involved in an *immersion program* and attend the Tantar spirituality program in Jerusalem each year.

- Revising the current Accreditation program to introduce provisional accreditation for newly appointed RE teachers and leaders.
- The appointment of jointly funded and shared *School/Parish Pastoral Associates*.

Beyond 2011: Other Strategic Priorities

The Catholic Education system in Tasmania recognises that the *Call to New Evangelisation* project is simply work ‘in-progress’. Many other supporting beams need to be developed in order to strengthen and reaffirm the Catholic identity of the school communities. At the time of writing a variety of further issues are under consideration. Major initiatives include: investigating parish based child-care provision in disadvantaged areas; strengthening formation programs for School Boards particularly with respect to Catholic ethos; developing a Charter for Parents which focuses on the tripartite relationship between parish, school and families; and supporting action re-

search projects in direct response to the *new evangelisation* agenda.

Conclusion

Restoring the city of Venice is a never-ending story; the advances in technology and human ingenuity are being constantly pitted against the eroding influence of climate change and human indifference. Similarly Catholic schools in Tasmania need to be totally committed to an ongoing process of *School Improvement* that has at its centre the constant strengthening and revitalisation of the pillars and structures that underpin a vibrant Catholic ethos. The challenge of *new evangelisation* requires a heightened awareness on the part of Catholic schools that they now minister within a very different and rapidly changing social milieu. If the beauty and richness of Catholic Education is to be sustained it is simply not sufficient to ‘paint over the cracks’. Rather schools and system authorities need to periodically ‘lift up the building’, strengthen the enduring foundations and insert innovative scaffolding that is responsive to the mission of evangelisation in a contemporary world.

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NOTES

1 The theological reflections developed by Mrs Helen Healy (Head of Mission & RE) and Dr Drasko Dizdar (‘Theologian in Residence’) are particularly acknowledged and have been incorporated within this paper.

2 Canon 806: The diocesan Bishop has the right to watch over and inspect Catholic schools in his ter-

ritory, even those established or directed by members of religious institutes. He also has the right to issue directives concerning the general regulation of Catholic schools; those directives apply also to schools conducted by members of a religious institute, although they retain their autonomy in the internal management of their schools.

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