

VIRTUES AND VALUES IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

1.0 VIRTUES AND VALUES

Catholic schools see the development of Gospel-based values and virtues as central to their work in education. *The Catholic Education of School-Age Children* (NZCBC, 2014) has heightened the focus on this work, by referring to it in some detail (pp 15-17). NZCEO's original paper on virtues and values, *Taking the High Ground, Virtues and Values in Catholic Schools*, quoted from on page 16 of *The Catholic Education of School-Age Children (CESAC)*, is re-presented here, in an updated edition, to support what the Bishops have said.

The Catholic School says: "The school is "a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole person." It aims for "the acquisition of values and the discovery of truth,.. the bringing forth of the power of Christian virtue by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living."¹ The Bishops add "for a Catholic school the values it promotes must be sourced from the gospels, particularly the parables of Jesus." (CESAC para 66, p15).

Catholic schools need to be obviously Catholic

- knowing what they stand for
- living what they stand for

"within an atmosphere enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity."²

Virtues are qualities of moral goodness or excellence. Many virtues can be derived from universally accepted principles. To be effective, they need to be nurtured and practised so that individuals live by them, not merely believe in them. In Catholic schools work on virtues is central to the school's role of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. Catholic schools understand that virtues are needed for moral formation, and work to enable all in the school community to see that their ultimate purpose is to develop the divine potentialities within themselves. Our schools seek to develop persons of virtue, and further seek to transform each person of virtue into a person of Christ. See section 3 for examples of virtues embedded in the Catholic tradition.

Values are internalised sets of beliefs or principles of behaviour. Not all values are consonant with moral or ethical behaviour, even though they may be strongly upheld. Nor do people necessarily act in accordance with the values they hold.

In *The Catholic Education of School-Age Children (CESAC)* the Bishops say, on p 16 para 69, "Values are subjective; they are based on personal preference and choice, including in the way in which they are defined." (para 69, p 16.) They also say, "Many of the values [Catholic] schools define as being important are, in reality, the values of a "good person" rather than expressions of Catholic identity." (para 67, p15)

Gospel-based values are likely to stand in contradiction to the secular values of society. Catholic schools need to define and focus strongly on the core values of the Gospels, which are central to the work of education in Catholic schools, and to the development of the children in Catholic schools. When schools define the values they support it is expected that these will be sourced from the Gospels.

¹ *The Catholic School*, Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. 1977

² *The Documents of Vatican II*, Declaration on Christian Education, Geoffrey Chapman, London, Dublin 1966

While Catholic schools support the **educational values** arising from the *New Zealand Curriculum*, it is important to remember that educational values do not in themselves contribute to the recognisable Catholicity of the school.

Gospel Values are found particularly in the Parables; they are also revealed in the actions and teaching of Jesus, in the Beatitudes and in the Epistles. Values belonging to a defined charism are a specific/localised aspect of Gospel values. It is expected that schools define and publicise their Gospel values, and that charism-based values are defined as a subset of the core Gospel values.

Sharing the Gospel Today: The Catechetical Directory for Aotearoa New Zealand mentions specifically “the Christian qualities of reverence, peace, joy, gratitude, wonder, humility, holiness etc.” (p63) Significantly, it reminds us that the Good News of God brought to us by Jesus Christ must find its expression in a way that is suited to Aotearoa New Zealand. Catholic schools work to provide a bi-cultural approach in their religious programmes. The aim is to “help the Gospel permeate the very fabric of cultures and cultures (p17)... The process of inculturation of the Church in this land needs to give attention to indigenous culture, the culture of Pākehā, the cultural needs of immigrant groups, the bicultural foundation of our nation and the multicultural nature of many situations in parishes and dioceses.”³ This has relevance for the way Gospel values are defined and lived in each school.

2.0 SOME GOSPEL VALUES

tika, tikanga	truth, integrity, truthfulness, professionalism,
pono	honesty, sincerity, openness
aroa	love, empathy, understanding, equity, developing relationships, being open to other cultures and beliefs
hohou-rongo	making peace, reconciliation
manaaki, manaakitanga	respect, care for, hospitality
rangimarie	peace

NCRS, in its paper *Religious Education Te Whakaakoranga and the New Zealand Curriculum*, defined the following Gospel values – they include the theological and cardinal virtues:

Faith	Respect for all life
Hope	Integrity
Love	Self-control
Compassion	Courage
Stewardship	Truth
Wonder and Awe	Freedom
Dignity of the person	Joy
Solidarity with the poor	Fortitude
Community	Justice
Peace	Prudence.

- Faith: *Matt 6:22* “*Courage, my daughter, your faith has restored you to health.*”
- Hope: *John 8:12* “*I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; but will have the light of life.*”
- Love: *John 15:12* “*This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.*”

³ New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, *Sharing the Gospel Today: The Catechetical Directory for Aotearoa New Zealand*, National Centre for Religious Studies, Wellington, 2012

3.0 OUR CATHOLIC TRADITION – THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Part 3, pp 443-451) is an invaluable reference on virtues. It provides material for staff reflection or discussion.

The *Catechism* (Para 1803) defines a **virtue** as “an habitual and firm disposition to do good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. ... ‘The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.’ (St Gregory of Nyssa)”

- The **Three Theological Virtues** (which enable human beings to participate in the divine nature):
Faith, Hope, Charity. (2. Peter 1:4)
- The **Four Cardinal Virtues** (i.e. the pivotal human virtues):
Prudence (wisdom), justice, fortitude (courage) and temperance (self control).
(Wisdom 8:7)
- The **Twelve Fruits of the Spirit** (“perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory”)
Charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity. (Galatians 5:22-23)
- The **Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit** (which sustain the moral life of Christians)
Wisdom, understanding, counsel or right judgment, fortitude or courage, knowledge, piety or reverence, fear of the Lord or wonder and awe. (Isaiah 11:1-2)
- **The Beatitudes** (actions and attitudes that should characterise Christian living. Gospel values are at the base of these)
“Happy are the poor in spirit: theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy are the gentle: they shall have the earth for their heritage.
Happy are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.
Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right: they shall be satisfied.
Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them.
Happy are the pure in heart: they shall see God.
Happy are the peacemakers: they shall be called the children of God.
Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.” (Matthew 5, 3-12)⁴

4.0 PRACTICAL STEPS SCHOOLS CAN TAKE

- Analyse what Gospel values and virtues the school believes it operates by, and what it actually operates by– this might involve a questionnaire to staff, Board of Trustees, parents and students.
- Develop a programme to clarify, teach and support the values and virtues that the school intends the Board, staff and students to live by. Various curriculum areas will be appropriate for the deepening of particular values and virtues.
- Make use of the richness of the Biblical and Church tradition, so that the community can be inspired and sustained by the living heritage of Catholicism.

⁴ See the commentary on the Beatitudes in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 3, article 2, p 426 ff.

- Ensure that values, virtues and aspirations are on display, regularly mentioned in school newsletters, printed in the school's promotional material, referred to frequently in discussion, and that all staff, students, Board members and (as far as possible) parents can state what these values, virtues and aspirations are, and know what sort of behaviour is expected as a result.
- Tell stories that communicate Gospel values, and encourage listeners to wonder about the implications of these stories.
- Create practical learning experiences that support students to live these values and virtues in their daily lives.
- Design experiences that take up the moral questions encountered by students.
- Offer students of all ages programmes that centre on self-understanding, philosophical enquiry and personal challenge, as well as an exploration of the spiritual dimension of their lives.
- Provide students (and staff) with opportunities for solitude, silence and meditation.
- Find ways to remind teachers that students need to feel that their teachers care deeply about them, and that their teachers model a way of behaviour worth emulating. Students are seeking an inspiring vision of life mediated to them by loving individuals.
- Use words that promote and support the idealism of the young, and that challenge them to higher levels of commitment to virtues and to service. Talk about the value and meaning of human existence, illuminated in the person of Jesus Christ.

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