

# *Fostering Hope*

## **POLICY FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

**August 2005<sup>1</sup>**

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### **FOREWORD**

Those committed to Catholic Schools believe that Religious Education (RE) lies at the heart of a school's curriculum which should reflect clearly the special character of the school and be part of the Church's evangelising mission. They would desire that this mission include the whole school community and go beyond the classroom by becoming the concern of all.

I would hope that this document will prove to be an important aid in advancing the Church's evangelising mission through RE in the school, especially in meeting the need created by the Revised National Curriculum Statement (C2005) which did not accommodate Religious Education as an integral part of the school curriculum.

The vision outlined in this document is in harmony with the National Curriculum and the Constitution. Religious Education is necessarily outcomes-based and it finds a natural place in Life Orientation. It is therefore hoped that this vision will do much to bring about the desired outcomes in this particular area of the curriculum, especially in the light of the religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution as a fundamental human right.

Work on a set of policy guidelines for Religious Education in Catholic schools in South Africa was begun in January 1995. Members of the Technical Support and Research Team for RE were commissioned by the National CENT (Catholic Education Negotiating Team) to develop a document that would be of use to those negotiating the Catholic School position with the national and provincial Education Ministries. In addition, the guidelines were to assist schools in the development of their own RE policies.

The first phase of *Fostering Hope* was completed in August 1995 and approved by CENT in August of that year. A series of 37 consultative workshops followed to introduce the guidelines document. All interested parties were invited by means of a questionnaire to offer criticism to help shape the document further. The final draft of the document, *Fostering Hope*, was tabled at the August plenary session, 1997, of the Southern African Bishops' Conference in Mariannhill for its adoption.

Now 10 years on, this policy document, *Fostering Hope*, is in need of revision in the light of recent developments, most notably the signing of Deeds of Agreement which guarantee a partnership between the Catholic Church and Education Departments in maintaining Catholic Public schools which comprise 72% of the Catholic school network.

This opportunity to provide for a fresh edition offers a renewed impetus in bringing Religious Education more clearly to the centre of the Catholic School's attention. It is hoped that this policy document will serve in developing our Religious Education practice so that the important role it plays in building the new South African nation and the Kingdom of God within it will be more clearly discernable.



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<sup>1</sup> This policy was endorsed by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference in August 1997, and reviewed in 2005.

# GLOSSARY

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In order to facilitate your reading of the document we supply a few words of clarification on some key terms.

## **POLICY**

A policy is a guideline for action based upon a particular vision or way of seeing. If, for example, Religious Education is seen as something of great importance in the school, then the school's policy will ensure that adequate time and resources are given to it.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

Religious Education is that part of the school curriculum which helps the learner to explore the religious dimension of human experience. It seeks to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, and the experience-base necessary for the learner to grow towards maturity in that dimension.

## **RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE**

Religious observance in the school refers to those activities which provide teachers and learners with opportunities for collective worship. The right of freedom of conscience applies more typically to such activities than to Religious Education classes.

## **CATECHESIS**

Catechesis is the task of fostering and deepening the faith of believers. Based as it is in the faith community, catechesis is primarily the responsibility of the parish. It does however find considerable scope in the Catholic School which has a distinctive religious character, and which gives Religious Education a central place in the curriculum.

## **RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS (RCIA)**

Initiation into Christian life and community is a process. The RCIA presents this process in terms of a spiritual journey 'which varies according to the many forms of God's grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the actions of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place.' (RCIA 5) Though RCIA contains the word 'adult', the Church regards this journey model as normative for all catechesis - of young and old alike.

## **INCULTURATION**

Inculturation is the process whereby the Gospel takes flesh in human culture. It does so in such a way that the experience of the gospel message and the response of Christian life are expressed through elements that belong to the culture in question. The process furthermore animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it into a new creation.

# PART I

## THE AIM OF RE IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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The Catholic School exists as an expression of the Catholic Church's mission to share the gospel of Jesus. But the Church does not exist for itself. The Catholic School therefore represents the Church in service of others, and not of self<sup>2</sup>. However, since the school's communication of the gospel is in terms of the Catholic tradition, it is best adapted to offer this service to students from Catholic families or else from families that are in reasonable harmony with a Catholic understanding of Jesus and his message.

The Catholic School does not assume that all students from Catholic families are committed to the Catholic faith, nor that all students classified 'Christian' have made a personal decision to follow Jesus. Nor does it assume that students of other faith-traditions would not be able to relate to the gospel of Jesus. But since sharing this gospel is integral to the Catholic School's reason for existing, what must be assumed in fairness is that anyone who joins the school community is open to the school's principles and practices, and therefore to the school's RE programme. However, 'to proclaim or to offer is not to impose; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the gospel and by Church law.'<sup>3</sup>

The aim of Religious Education then, in the Catholic School, is to nurture in its students their personal gifts of faith so as to bring awareness, growth, true freedom, and healing into their daily lives. It will equip them in every sphere to help in the building of responsible and life-giving communities that are signs of hope for the world<sup>4</sup>.

The gospel of Jesus both inspires this aim and provides its thrust. For some of the Catholic school community, the person and message of Jesus are the heart of Religious Education. However R.E. at the Catholic School involves all in the challenge of allowing gospel values to enrich their faith, philosophy, and lifestyle.

It follows that the school is open not only to Catholics, and that its RE programme strives to be respectful and sensitive to the diversity of chosen and inherited religious paths of individuals within the school community<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, Catholic School R.E. actively endeavours to promote mutual understanding and respect among people of different religious and other world-views, in response to the gospel vision of unity and love among all people.

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<sup>2</sup> See the current motto of the Catholic Church of South Africa: "A community serving humanity", and the Vatican Council's *Declaration On Christian Education* (1965), Article 9.

<sup>3</sup> *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, (1988) Article 6, from the Congregation for Catholic Education.

<sup>4</sup> See SACBC's Dept for Christian Education & Worship's 1995-7 *Vision/Mission Statement for Religious Education/Catechesis*.

<sup>5</sup> See the Catholic teaching on religious freedom in Vatican II's document *Dignitatis Humanae*: 2; 9; 10; 12.

## **PART 2**

# **PRACTICAL POLICIES FLOWING FROM THIS AIM**

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### **ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

- We check annually, through a review of the school's religious character<sup>6</sup>, whether our values and practices are in harmony with the Catholic school's role of integrating faith, life, and culture.<sup>7</sup>

### **VISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- We understand the particular nature of Religious Education in the school as an opportunity for learners to engage with the religious dimension of life in an educative way, so as to affirm them in their own religious identity, while coming to appreciate the religious diversity of the society in which they live.
- We ensure that the Staff - especially those involved in RE- realise that Religious Education is planned and evaluated within the school's context outlined above, and not merely in terms of outward organisation and efficiency.
- We ensure that the RE teachers regularly work at refining and renewing their common vision of the task, and actively refer to this developing formulation in order to evaluate their efforts.
- We identify means for keeping the school's RE programme in touch with the thinking, anxieties, and emphases of the local (South African) Church, of the Catholic School network, and of the national education curriculum.

### **SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT**

- We recognise that RE is not just a formal school subject, but that it also happens through a supportive educative environment - which needs careful shaping and constant evaluation.
- We regard the whole Staff as being in a position to contribute, at least in a broad way, and encourage as many as possible to be part of the RE team itself.
- We involve the whole Staff in developing the school's RE efforts by means of frequent reflection and planning exercises.
- We support the establishment of religious societies in the school, and encourage pupils, Staff, and even parents to participate in their activities.
- We develop a pastoral care programme in the school, and involve students, parents, Staff and Board in its formulation, implementation and regular evaluation.

### **PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND PARISH**

- We acknowledge the role of parents as first educators of their children<sup>8</sup>, and aim, through structures and programmes, to assist them in their task.
- We acknowledge the responsibility and interest of the parish community in the catechesis of its

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<sup>6</sup> Conducting an annual appraisal of the school's special religious character is a responsibility of the public school on private property in terms of the Deeds of Agreement allowed for in the South African Schools Act (1996), Articles 14 & 57. The 'Instrument for appraising the religious character of the Catholic School' has been developed for this purpose.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Catholic School*, Article 37ff, from the Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> See the Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, Article 48.

young members, realising that there is a limit to what the school can do, and that it does not replace the parish community.

- We liaise with parents and parishes to agree upon the role of the school in specific preparation for the Sacraments. Such agreement will be in accord with the policy operating in the particular diocese.
- As a community focused on personal growth, we resist cooperating with any approach that reduces Confirmation to an automatic procedure instead of treating it as an occasion celebrating a ripening of personal commitment.
- We reflect RE meaningfully in pupils' term-reports.
- We communicate periodically with parents, guardians and parishes about what their children are doing in their school RE programme, and consult with them about what they feel is needed.
- We find occasions to offer complementary workshops where parents and teachers can help one another grow in their own faith.

## **AN EXPLICIT UNDERSTANDING**

- We communicate clearly with prospective parents and pupils about the integral role of both the R.E. programme and religious observances in the school community's life. We devise an application form which asks searching questions to help in the screening process for the admission of new pupils.
- Before admission, we strive to reach an agreement about participation in R.E. classes, school prayer, liturgical worship, and other activities such as retreats in the light of
  - a recognition of the school's right to express its identity,
  - an awareness of the school's aim to make R.E. truly educational, and
  - a sensitivity to the areas where a student's freedom of conscience might apply.
- While we regard such participation as the norm, the need may arise for the provision of a more limited or an alternative participation where individual circumstances make this appropriate.

## **AN OUTWARD-LOOKING DIMENSION**

- We observe national days as a mark of concern for the well-being of the country, rather than out of blind patriotism or apathetic duty.
- We offer opportunities to engage pupils in outreach projects, and protect these involvements from the monopolising tendencies of other after-school activities.
- We encourage Staff - and even parents where possible - to participate in the school's outreach projects.

## **MULTI-FAITH DIMENSION**

- We ensure that the special place of R.E. in the Catholic School is clearly understood and accepted by all who wish to join the school community, and also work to make the school's R.E. sufficiently open to include everyone meaningfully.
- We keep class-groups together for R.E. as far as possible; we divide them only when it is important for Catholic pupils to be identified as Church (e.g. in preparation for sacramental initiation).
- We find opportunities for teachers to grow in knowledge of the major religions represented in the school community and in the wider society.
- We mark the major religious festivals of different faiths in Assembly and in preparatory or follow-up R.E. class-periods.
- We decide what practices and approaches to inter-denominational and inter-faith dialogue would be helpful, given the readiness of both Staff and pupils.

## **RE CO-ORDINATOR**

- We reserve and use one of the school's posts-of-responsibility for a Coordinator of RE who acts as the Principal's special deputy for animating and organising RE and for ensuring that it extends beyond a timetabled subject and designated teachers.

## **DEFINITE PROGRAMME**

- We ensure a well-rounded R.E. curriculum<sup>9</sup>, and check that neither the thinking nor the feeling sides of R.E. are neglected.
- We put the learners first, rather than any planned programme, but make sure the course that results is a wholesome blend of processes, and that it gives due attention to the different dimensions of learning.
- We keep the programme open to respond to the needs of the times, and to the local (South African) Church's current concerns about our country's and our world's needs. We link into suitable local, national, and international efforts. We take the trouble to raise awareness by observing days that are important to the world community, to the nation, and to various religious communities, as well as the seasons and feast days of the Church's year.
- We recognise that R.E. is a privileged opportunity for addressing the urgent need to develop values and moral sensitivity in our society.
- We agree on common basic reference-points for the planning of each school's R.E. programme so as to facilitate common support and practical co-operation between schools.
- We find creative ways of harmonising our Religious Education with the National Curriculum so that neither is compromised.

## **APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY**

- We encourage adventurous, creative, stimulating methods in R.E.
- We ensure that methods used in R.E. are educationally sound.
- We give emphasis to a life-centred approach that is in touch with contemporary experience and needs.
- We encourage efforts to root the expression of faith in our African soil, true to the Church's call for inculturation.
- We regard group-processes as vital in R.E. since shared learning is more appropriate here than narrowly individualistic learning.

## **ADEQUATE TIME**

- A meaningful and holistic R.E. programme requires at least two hours weekly.

## **ADEQUATE RESOURCES**

- We include R.E. as a priority in the school's budget.
- We build up, and regularly update, a resource-collection for R.E.
- We find a way to provide a special venue for R.E. - if not a Chapel or R.E. room, perhaps a pleasant spot outside.

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<sup>9</sup> An analysis of a well-rounded RE curriculum and its constituent processes and learning dimensions is offered in CORD, a curriculum design for R.E. by brother Michael Burke. CORD is recommended for use in Catholic Schools by the SACBC.'s Department of Christian Education and Liturgy. Although this programme is aimed at High Schools, CORD's analysis of what R.E. involves is equally useful as a reference-point for Primary Schools.

## **EVALUATION**

- We ensure that feedback, assessment, and evaluation form a routine and regular part of the R.E. process, with teachers checking on how effective and in-touch their efforts are.
- We find ways to draw into the programme-evaluation not only the whole Staff, but the Diocese, the parents, and the pupils themselves.
- We seek creative, appropriate, and sensitive methods for assessing individual pupils' growth and learning in the field of R.E. Teachers are helped to distinguish between those aspects of R.E. that can be evaluated and those which cannot.

## **TEACHER FORMATION**

- We make opportunities for in-service formation as accessible as possible so that teachers feel encouraged to avail of them. Special assistance is provided for teachers on the R.E. team who are not Catholic, or who are not familiar with the ethos and culture of the Catholic School.
- We recognise professional upgrading in R.E. in ways that will encourage teachers to select this valuable option.