

A Policy Statement by the Catholic Bishops of British Columbia

I. THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL SHARES IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

At the beginning of the third millennium, all those involved in Catholic education are called to build communities of faith and holiness. In partnership with the family and the parish, the Catholic school participates in the saving mission of the Church. By evangelization, catechesis and works of service, the Catholic school builds up both the family of faith and human community.

The Catholic school provides religious and moral reference points to help students critically examine the culture around them and build a society enlightened by the values of the Gospel:

- in a world that ignores the human thirst for God, it shares the living waters of our faith;
- in a time when there is little reverence for the image of God in the human person, it gives an unequivocal witness to the dignity of human life;
- in an age marked by relativism and a crisis of meaning, it evangelizes our culture's ways of thinking, standards of judgment and norms of behaviour with the truth of the Gospel;
- in a culture in which communication and relationships are often reduced to utilitarian ends, it proclaims a life of communion with God and others;
- in a world disfigured by poverty, oppression and war, it promotes justice and peace;
- in a society marked by personality cults, it bears witness to Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, as the model for the fullest human life;
- in a time that often seems to be without goals and fearful of the future, it gives an account of the hope that is within us (cf. I Peter 3:15).

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school (*The Catholic School*, #34). His teaching and life inform the school's identity and characteristics, which include:

- a belief in the inviolable dignity of every human person;
- a sacramental sense that leads us to recognize God manifested by His creation;
- a recognition of God's sanctifying presence in Word and Sacrament;
- a love for encounter with God in prayer;
- a Gospel spirit of freedom and love;
- a spirituality of communion marked by mutual respect, accountability and caring;
- a concern for justice leading to a critical analysis of society;
- a sense of solidarity and commitment to the marginalized.

These core elements of Catholic faith provide a framework for Catholic Education.

A. Teaching the Whole Person

The Church “establishes her own schools because she considers them a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a center in which a specific concept of the world, of [humanity], and of history is developed and conveyed” (*The Catholic School*, #8).

Catholic education goes beyond the purely technical and practical aspects of schooling and aims at an integration of all knowledge within a vision of the world and the human person. It focuses on the physical, emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions of human development, leading to a personal synthesis of faith and life in each student. Growth in all areas prepares students for a meaningful life of service as committed Christians, building the Kingdom of God in a pluralistic society.

B. Faith Lived in Christian Community

The New Testament word for Christian community is “koinonia”, which means a communion or life-sharing relationship with Christ and others. Living Christian community means living in relationship with Jesus, the Head of the Church, and the members of His Mystical Body. Communion with Christ and others leads to relationships characterized by mutual love, honest communication and commitment to serve each other’s needs, to rejoice together, to mourn together, and to delight in each other. “A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling with us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us” (*At the Beginning of the Third Millennium*, #43).

Catholic education is committed to developing communities of faith. Those involved in Catholic education are called to create a faith community in the school and to link it to the wider Church community.

C. Commitment to Justice and Compassion

Catholic educators nourish in their students a relationship with Jesus that leads to awareness of those Christ loves, namely, all of humanity, and inspires a spirit of solidarity and service.

III. PARENTS AS EDUCATORS

“Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that the primary and natural responsibility for their children’s education belongs” (*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, #20). The school exists to complement the work of parents as the first teachers of their children. Parents should be involved with the life of the school by participating in school councils and committees and through regular collaboration with teachers.

IV. PASTORS

The priest is a necessary and integral member of the school community. He has a specific role and responsibility, particularly in the religious instruction given and in all matters that affect the Catholic character of the school. Pastors should promote Catholic education especially for those who are poor, those deprived of the benefits of family life and those weak in faith.

V. STAFF AS LIVING WITNESSES

Catholic educators are called to do much more than share religious knowledge. “Professionalism is marked by, and raised to, a supernatural Christian vocation” (*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, # 37). It is the personal witness and holiness of the teacher that will have the greatest impact on the students. Catholic educators should model collaboration, love of the faith, communion with the Church and concern for the poor and marginalized. They must be committed to leading their students to encounter Jesus and develop a relationship with Him that expresses itself in witness and service.

VI. RELIGIOUS FORMATION IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

“The special character of the Catholic school and the underlying reason for its existence, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the overall education of the students” (*The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School*, # 66) This catechesis should be spiritual, liturgical, moral, sacramental and apostolic (*The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School*, #69), so that the student may experience the transforming power of the Gospel in an integral way.

VII. THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND NEW EVANGELIZATION

As the Catholic Bishops of British Columbia, we emphasize the Catholic school's central role at the beginning of the third millennium in the Church's work of evangelization, which must be new in ardour, methods and expression (*Church in America*, # 6). In setting forth principles to direct the Catholic schools of our province, we call for the commitment of students and parents, teachers and administrators, pastors and religious, trustees and committee/council members, and the whole Catholic community to this great work.

VIII. REFERENCES

Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 1982.

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

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, 1997.

Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 1988.

Pope John Paul II, *At the Beginning of the Third Millennium*, 2001.

Pope John Paul II, *The Church in America*, 1999.

The Role of the Teacher Catechist

"The person of the catechist is the medium in which the message of the faith is incarnated" (*Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States. - Conclusion*). Through our entire being we are responsible for making Christ alive for our students.

"No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the catechist in every phase of the catechetical process. The charism given to him [her] by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life, constitutes the soul of every method. Only his [her] own human and Christian qualities guarantee a good use of texts and other work instruments.

The catechist is essentially a mediator. He [she] facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community. For this reason, his [her] cultural vision, social condition and lifestyle must not be obstacles to the journey of faith. Rather, these help to create the most advantageous conditions for seeking out, welcoming and deepening the Christian message. He [she] does not forget that belief is a fruit of grace and liberty. Thus, he [she] ensures that his [her] activities always draw support from faith in the Holy Spirit and from prayer. Finally, the personal relationship of the catechist with the subject is of crucial importance." (*General Directory For Catechesis #156*)

Our role as catechist is a holy and noble vocation. To take on such a role holds many challenges for us; thus, we need to:

1. have a faith that interpenetrates our life
2. pray
3. continue to actively seek growth as an adult Catholic
4. celebrate the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church
5. share in the life of our parish community
6. give witness to the Gospel
7. serve the community
8. be willing co-learners, in community with our students, their families and the Church
9. seek out relationships that will nurture us in this vocation
10. be committed to continual development of our skills and abilities as teachers.

When we are committed to accepting these challenges we will then be facilitating catechesis that "is the whole process by which a Christian community informs forms and ever transforms itself and every member in lived Christian faith." (*Thomas Groome*)

To be catechist means to echo Good News; it is a great, wonderful, mysterious challenge that God has graced us to accept.

Content

Following is a presentation of the four components of catechesis outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The Profession of Faith

"Who has encountered Christ desires to know him as much as possible, as well as to know the plan of the Father which he revealed. Knowledge of the faith (*fides quae*) is required by adherence to the faith (*fides qua*). 24 Even in the human order the love which one person has for another cause that person to wish to know the other all the more. Catechesis, must, therefore, lead to "the gradual grasping of the whole truth about the divine plan", 25 by introducing the disciples of Jesus to a knowledge of Tradition and of Scripture, which is "*the sublime science of Christ*". 26 By deepening knowledge of the faith, catechesis nourishes not only the life of faith but equips it to explain itself to the world. The meaning of the Creed, which is a compendium

1. The teachings of the Catholic Church
2. History and traditions
3. Catholic identity

The Celebration of the Christian Mystery

"Christ is always present in his Church, especially in "liturgical celebrations". 27 Communion with Jesus Christ leads to the celebration of his salvific presence in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. The Church ardently desires that all the Christian faithful be brought to that full, conscious and active participation which is required by the very nature of the liturgy 28 and the dignity of the baptismal priesthood. For this reason, catechesis, along with promoting a knowledge of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments, must also educate the disciples of Jesus Christ "for prayer, for thanksgiving, for repentance, for praying with confidence, for community spirit, for understanding correctly the meaning of the creeds....", 29 as all of this is necessary for a true liturgical life (*General Directory For Catechesis #85*).

1. Sacraments
2. Liturgical seasons and feasts

Life in Christ

"Conversion to Jesus Christ implies walking in his footsteps. Catechesis must, therefore, transmit to the disciples the attitudes of the Master himself. The disciples thus undertake a journey of interior transformation, in which, by participating in the paschal mystery of the Lord, "they pass from the old man to the new man who has been made perfect in Christ".³⁰ The Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus takes up the Decalogue, and impresses upon it the spirit of the beatitudes, ³¹ is an indispensable point of reference for the moral formation which is most necessary today. Evangelization which "involves the proclamation and presentation of morality", ³² displays all the force of its appeal where it offers not only the proclaimed word but the lived word too. This moral testimony, which is prepared for by catechesis, must always demonstrate the social consequences of the demands of the Gospel:

1. Baptismal call
2. Community
3. Morality
4. Charity and Social Justice

Christian Prayer

"Communion with Jesus Christ leads the disciples to assume the attitude of prayer and contemplation which the Master himself had. To learn to pray with Jesus is to pray with the same sentiments with which he turned to the Father: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, filial confidence, supplication and awe for his glory. All of these sentiments are reflected in the *Our Father*, the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples and which is the model of all Christian prayer. The "*handing on of the Our Father*" ³⁴ is a summary of the entire Gospel ³⁵ and is therefore a true act of catechesis. When catechesis is permeated by a climate of prayer, the assimilation of the entire Christian life reaches its summit. This climate is especially necessary when the catechumen and those to be catechized are confronted with the more demanding aspects of the Gospel and when they feel weak or when they discover the mysterious action of God in their lives. (*General Directory For Catechesis #85*)

1. Prayer traditions
2. Scripture
3. Worship
4. Discernment

Approach and Methods

Once we have identified *what* we are to teach, it is critical to take the time to develop our own understanding of the content and to plan *how* we will structure the learning experience in order to guide our students. Pope Paul VI succinctly stated that our "methods must be adapted to the age, culture and aptitude of the persons concerned, they must seek always to fix in the memory, intelligence and heart the essential truths that must impregnate all of life." (On Evangelization in the Modern World #44) As we face this task we must also remember that Jesus has promised to be with us in this process and that He plants the seed that we are called to water. We are instruments of the Spirit.

A Process for Planning (individually or as a team)

1. Personal study of content.
2. Establish an atmosphere of prayer
3. Be familiar with desired outcome(s)
4. Reflect on what meaning that outcome has in your own life
5. Assess where your students presently are vis-à-vis this outcome
6. Gather resources, including approved Archdiocesan program
7. Decide how you will assess whether the outcome has been achieved
8. Create a learning opportunity

Choosing the Experience

The possibilities are endless but there are factors to consider in order to keep our teaching rooted and balanced.

In *Catechesi tradendae*: on Catechesis in Our Time (John Paul II, October 16, 1979) four characteristics of catechesis are outlined:

1. Catechesis "must be *systematic*, not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal." (CT #21)
2. Catechesis and *life experience* cannot be separated. (CT #22)
3. "Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of *liturgical* and *sacramental* activity." (CT #23)
4. Catechesis needs to be nurtured within *community*. (CT #24)

Keeping these points and the mandate "to fix in the memory, intelligence and heart, the essential truths" before us we can develop activities that will foster a *living* faith in our students.

The following outline the ways and means of facilitating catechesis. All are important and should be incorporated into any unit of Religious Education.

Scripture Sharing

When we reflect and share on God's Word it becomes "living" for us. God's Word becomes a constant source of nourishment and challenge not a static, intellectual pursuit. It takes root and lives in both heart and mind. If our students are encouraged to ask, "What is God saying to *me* in this passage?" and "What am I called to be?", they will, we hope, begin a life long desire to be touched by God's message.

Lectionary based catechesis, Liturgy of the Word with Children, and Groome's Shared Praxis approach are wonderful ways to experience Scripture with our students. (See appendix for outlines of each approach)

Prayer

Children have a natural sense of God's presence in their lives and allowing them frequent opportunities to nurture that relationship through various forms of prayer is vital. Each prayer experience should be approached with a sense of awe, mystery and reverence. Prayer as "living with God" should be emphasized. So often talking and listening become the focus and we forget that "Prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice - holy God" (CCC#2565). This is the fundamental gift of prayer.

We need to guide the students to see that prayer should envelop our lives. On this foundation various forms of prayer can be explored: blessing and adoration, prayer of petition, intercession, repentance, thanksgiving and praise, as well as the expressions of prayer: vocal, meditation and contemplation. Children should be given opportunities to experience and respond to prayer through song, gesture, dance, art, drama, writing and spontaneous prayer.

Storytelling

Jesus is the consummate storyteller. Children have a wonderful sense of this art, also. We, as teachers, need to foster the ability to listen to another's story and, as importantly, to tell our own. We can then enter more deeply the mystery that is our life with Jesus. We can appreciate the turns, twists, lessons and surprises that are behind, in and before us as we journey with God.

Liturgy and Celebration

We know that we cannot teach an experience, it must be lived. The rich sacramental and liturgical tradition of our Catholic faith provides some of the most profound moments in our lives. The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life". (Lumen Gentium #11) therefore our catechesis should lead our students to desire to celebrate the Eucharist as well as the other sacraments.

Rituals such as an Advent wreath service, classroom prayer rituals, a retreat for confirmands, the Rosary are all opportunities for our students to understand that our faith interpenetrates our lives. Other experiences such as a tree planting ceremony, a class birthday, a school's anniversary can be designed to reflect the integration of our faith in daily life and celebration.

Art Forms

Creativity can give voice to God within us. Little children freely create and express themselves through music, song, dance, drama and art. Our students, in an environment of trust, care and respect, need to continue to be in touch with that creative expression. We need to encourage students to take risks and to experience various art forms simply because they are a way to celebrate one's relationship with God and not just because one has a particular creative talent. We need also to share our own artistic expression with our students as well as that of other more well-known artists, in order to spark that mysterious, God-like, creative process.

It is expected that planning and assessment follow the CISVA Toolbox for Teachers: Implementing Curriculum.